## The Seventh Stone

**by Elenduen**

**Summary**

The fight in Siberia leaves Tony in a persistent vegetative state from which he is not expected to recover.

His remaining friends watch over his bedside praying for a miracle to bring him back to them while the Rogue Avenger's remain in hiding.

Across the Galaxy Thanos, the Mad Titan destroys Xandar to claim the Power Stone, his next stop will be Asgard, or rather the refugee ship for the Tesseract and the Space Stone.

As the Power Stone is placed into the infinity gauntlet, Tony Stark awakens from his coma with no brain damage at all, but he isn't celebrating. Something is coming, something bad, he knows it, he can feel it, and somewhere something that is somehow his is calling out to him, it's what woke him up in the first place, but what is it and why is it so important?
After all there are only six infinity stones, Right?

Notes

I think this is going to be a long one guys. Please comment I love comments
Tony could hardly believe it when he saw the Avenger’s jet and T’Challa’s jet leaving Siberia. Beside him, on the ground, Steve’s discarded shield still remained. Tossed aside like it didn’t mean a thing to him, as if the man who had gifted it to him, spent fifty million dollars, and lost all his toes to frostbite trying to find Steve’s body in the Arctic.

As he lay on the ground in his disabled suit Tony felt the rage which had been coursing through him since he’d seen the murder of his parents at the hands of Barnes on the videotape slowly leaching away from his body.

With his anger leaving him the adrenaline left him too. All of his injuries were now beginning to hurt, his broken wrist, his ribs, his sternum, dear God his sternum! That felt like it was on fire and it was so very hard to breath.

His chest felt as if there were a heavy weight upon it, bearing down on him and keeping him from breathing with any level of ease.

It was possible, probable even that he had suffered a punctured lung. Steve hadn’t held back when he’d rammed that shield into his arc reactor, by the pain he was in Tony knew he had broken ribs, that one or more had lacerated his lungs.

His heart too might be damaged too, considering the pain in his chest and how hard it was to breathe right now he could well be on the verge of a heart attack.

With the suit destroyed he had no way out of here, his emergency tracker would have activated and a spare suit would be on its way from New York but it would take a few hours to reach Siberia.

Would he still be alive when it found him?

Tony knew he should be scared of the thought of dying here, alone in this frozen wasteland, maybe even be angry about it, about Steve, a man he’d thought of as a friend leaving him here to die. But as the cold crept a little deeper into his bones and it grew even harder to draw much-needed breath into his lungs, all Tony could feel was sad.

He was sad that he wouldn’t get to patch things up with Pepper, not that their relationship romantically speaking could be salvaged he knew that, but he had hoped that maybe their friendship could.

He wouldn’t get to say sorry to Rhodey or help him put his life back together from the injuries he had received.

He’d never get to speak to that Spiderling again or tell him how impressed he was with him, never get to know the kid who’d caught his eye.

He wouldn’t play with Dumm-E again, his poor demented bot, or his younger Bot Brothers Butterfingers and YOU. He knew that Rhodey would take care of them, wouldn’t let them be shut off, but no one ever really understood Dumm-E, Butterfingers, and YOU like Tony did, well, no one but Bruce.

Bruce Wayne, Tony’s on again off again lover since he was sixteen and Bruce was eighteen.

Recently they had entered each other’s orbit again, had run into each other at a gala just before Tony was due to go to MIT to present BARF.

It’d been more than ten years since they’d last spoken following a less than pretty break up and seeing each other again had been disconcerting, for the first ten minutes, then all the tension had
slipped away and the conversation had flowed as easily as the wine. That they had ended up spending the night in Bruce’s hotel room hadn’t surprised Tony in the least, what had surprised him was that it hadn’t made CNN, his Bruce’s get-togethers were generally topic for a great deal of discussion by the Press. But for once luck had been on their side and they had escaped the scrutiny of the world, at least for now. When they had parted it had been with a promise to meet up again for a date after MIT. Tony wouldn’t get to make that call now, wouldn’t get to go to dinner with Bruce, see where this took them if perhaps this time it just might work out.

Tony coughed harshly bringing up blood which splattered down his chin and soaked into his beard. Lungs were punctured then. Tears welled up in Tony’s eyes and began to roll down his temples as he silently cried, silently said apologies to his friends, to Bruce, wishing that he was able to at least send them a message, to say goodbye. Another coughing fit hit him and hacked up globs of blood that trickled down his face, his head was beginning to hurt, well it already hurt but the pain and pressure were getting worse. Turning his head as much as he could Tony looked outside, he could see the sky from here, could see the cold night sky with the stars shining brightly. The last thought that ran through his head before he passed out was how ironic it was that he now took comfort in the beauty of the night sky as the last image he would see before he died when space had been haunting him and driving him mad for the past three years.

By the time Friday, remote piloting the suit found him, Tony had long since fallen into unconsciousness. His vitals were dropping from what Friday could pick up from the suit’s sensors, his left lung had collapsed and was full of blood which was putting pressure on his heart which was struggling to beat. By the readings, she was getting Tony had suffered a heart attack, a mild one, more of a very severe angina attack. However, more worryingly was his head. He’d suffered two skull fractures and a large cranial bleed. He wasn’t just unconscious, he was comatose.

“I’m sorry Bossman,” Friday said to Tony sounding genuinely contrite, carefully she used the suit and lifted him up into the suit’s arms and took off. The nearest hospital was Russian, and Tony needed immediate medical care, one more brain bleed or heart attack and he would die. As she flew him at maximum speed to the hospital Friday phone Pepper Potts and Bruce Wayne. She would have phoned Colonel Rhodes but he was hospital bound right now and there was no chance of him being able to get to Russia and the Boss Man’s side. If Friday were capable of it she would have gone after Steve Rogers and the rest of the Avengers. They were all responsible for this, for her Boss Man’s injuries, they all deserved to suffer for it. While she could not go after them physically Friday could still do them some damage. As an AI she was more than capable of doing multiple jobs at once, flying Tony to the hospital, speaking with both Pepper Potts and Bruce Wayne, and downloading all the data from Tony’s damaged suit to review and send to the appropriate authorities. Steve Rogers might think he had won today, but his victory would be short lived, as tomorrow Friday would bring his world crashing down about him.
Bruce had just come in from the streets and his nightly patrol when the news of Tony being hurt reached him.
Alfred had greeted him in the bat cave grim-faced, his eyes suspiciously red as if he had been crying, or making a conscious effort not to cry.
“What?” Bruce asked, his first thought had been for Dick, his former ward who had flown the nest so to speak.
While he still occasionally dressed up as Robin to give Bruce back up when required he now had his own superhero identity or Night Wing and went solo as well.
Alfred however, did not say that the brat had been hurt, for a moment he didn’t say anything at all, he swallowed hard and cleared his throat before rasping out “It’s Tony Stark”.

Bruce had only half listened after that, he’d been too busy throwing clothing into a bag, changing into his street clothes, and getting the jet on the tarmac and ready to fly him to Russia.

Pepper Potts was already at the hospital in St Petersburg when Bruce arrived, she was disheveled and sans any make-up, her cheeks tear stained and hands shaking.

“Is there any word?” Bruce asked joining her in the private waiting room he had been shown into as next best to next of kin that Tony Stark had in the world.
“They’re operating still,” Pepper whispered her voice hoarse and worn away from crying
“They’re operating on his brain Bruce, on his fucking brain!”
As she broke down into more tears Bruce pulled her into an embrace and pressed her head against his chest letting her sob into his waistcoat.

Brain surgery, brain damage, Tony could be ruined, a shell of his former self, his beautiful mind destroyed, all he was, that wonderful, exasperating, astonishing genius gone for good.
Bruce doubted that he had ever hated anyone in the world as much as he hated the Avengers right now.
They did this to Tony, they put him in this hospital, left him fighting for his life.
His best friend James Rhodes was in in a hospital in America, unable to come to his friend's side because his spine had been snapped, and was having to wait for news to come to him second hand about his best friend.
“They’ll pay for this Pepper” Bruce growled his voice almost as deep and gravelly as the voice modifier in his suit made it. “The Avengers will pay for this, I promise you that”

Forty-Eight Hours Later

Avengers Jet

Steve was feeling exulted, he’d saved Bucky from the Government, had him by his side once again, and he’d successfully broken into The Raft and rescued his team, bringing them aboard the Avengers
jet and was flying them to Wakanda where T’Challa had offered sanctuary to atone for going after
the wrong person for killing his Father.
Well, he’d offered sanctuary to Bucky but Steve was pretty sure he could convince T’Challa to
extend it to all of them.

He was half listening to Clint and the Antman, what was his name again? Talking about Stark and
how much of a backstabbing traitor he was when Wilson suddenly called out from the rear of the jet
where he was monitoring news feeds.

With equal frowns of confusion, they all went to stand around Wilson who was sat before a small
screen which was showing BBC World Service.
One the screen a reporter reading out a report on Tony with images of him both in a business suit and
as Iron Man.
As Steve listened to her words and more images unfolded he felt the bottom drop out of his stomach.

“How horrific images were given to the New York Police and the UN of the Murder of Howard and
Maria Stark at the hands of James Buchannan Barnes AKA The Winter Soldier back in 1991
revealing they did not die of a car accident as first thought”

Sure enough images of Bucky killing Howard and Maria were played out on the TV for the entire
world to see.
“Dear God!” Wilson whispered
“Does Stark know?” Clint asked looking to Steve who could only mutely nod his head in the
affirmative
“How did he find out?” Antman asked in a tight voice

“There was a tape,” Bucky mumbled from the dark corner he was huddled into “The guy had a tape,
he showed Stark, showed what I did”
Steve immediately corrected that thought, “It wasn’t you Buck it was Hydra!”
Bucky snorted and gave Steve an incredulous look “If that’s true why did you hide it from Stark all
this time?”.

For a second there was silence then everyone was speaking at once
“You knew?” Wilson shouted
“Fucking Jesus Man!” Antman cried
“Holy Crap Rogers, what the fuck?” Clint said
“Shut up!” this came from Wanda who pointed at the screen where new images were being played,
images of the fight between Iron Man, Bucky, and Steve, images of Steve beating Iron Man down,
repeatedly beating his shield into Iron Man’s head until the faceplate came off and then ramming the
shield into the arc reactor disabling the suit.

“Nicely done!” Wanda murmured with a cruel smirk on her face
Steve watched the screen as the reporter came back and spoke again.

“Tony Stark was stranded for a period of seven hours in Siberia before his AI system Friday could
locate and fly him to hospital. It has been reported from Pepper Potts CEO of Stark Industries and
Bruce Wayne, the sometime paramour of Tony Stark, that he has suffered multiple and severe
injuries, including a collapsed lung, heart attack, and a cerebral Haemorrhage that has resulted in a
coma from which he is not expected to recover”

Steve’s knees gave out under him and he found himself collapsing to the floor of the jet with his
whole body shaking violently.
“What have I done?” he whispered, “What have I done?”.
Chapter 2

By the time the jet reached Wakanda the only person still talking to Steve is Wanda.

With her inherent hatred of Tony Stark she didn’t care in the least what had happened in Siberia, so far as she was concerned Tony had got what he deserved and that was an end to it.

Bucky had retreated into an almost catatonic silence, he had huddled himself away into a corner and refused to make eye contact with anyone at all, Steve included.

Sam, when Steve had tried to approach him, told him that he couldn’t speak with him right now, that he had to think and wanted to be left alone right now.

Clint and Scott just gave him looks of disgust and turned their backs, talking quietly to each other.

Steve didn’t know what they were talking about, didn’t want to know, though he was pretty sure that it was him and Tony they were discussing.

What had he done? He didn’t think he’d hit Tony that hard, hadn’t thought that he’d really hurt him, he’d just needed to stop Tony from killing Bucky!

In his mind he kept on seeing the fight in Siberia, kept seeing himself straddling Tony, beating his shield into his face until the visor was broken and Tony’s vulnerable bloody face was revealed to him.

He’s my friend

So was I!

The words kept replaying over and over in Steve’s head and he kept on seeing the utter terror in Tony’s eyes as he brought the shield down on the arc reactor.

Had Tony thought he was going to kill him?

He might as well have killed him, in fact what he’d done was worse. At least dead Tony would have peace, like this he was stuck in some limbo, left rotting in a broken shell of a body, a body that Steve had broken.

“Bad becomes worse, good becomes great”, Steve could remember Erskine’s words to him, recall what the man had said to him, implored him to be a good man, and Steve had tried, he’d thought he’d tried, done his best, but now…

Erskine would turn in his grave if he knew about this, Peggy would have ripped him a new one for what he’d done.

Howard, dear God Howard Stark, the Man had been so good to him, helped him become Captain America for real instead of just being a male show girl prancing about on stage in tights.

He’d owed Howard so much, even after he’d gone into the Ice Howard hadn’t given up on him, had spent his whole life searching for him, spent a fortune doing so and neglected his Son to the point that Tony hardly had a Father at all.

What would the man think of him now? Steve had destroyed Howard’s Son, his only Son, the last of the Stark blood line would die in a hospital with Tony and it was Steve Roger’s fault.
Steve didn’t think he could possibly feel any worse than he did right now, but once again he was proven wrong.

They were met at the Palace of Wakanda by King T’Challa himself and some of his personal guards, all of whom were armed and had faces like thunder.

“This isn’t going to go well” Sam muttered

Ignoring him Steve stepped forward extending his hand to T’Challa who glared at him

“You told me Stark was fine!” the King growled at him, Steve lowered his hand, curling his fingers inward and swallowed hard

“I thought he was” he whispered, lowering his gaze to the ground

“Clearly you thought wrong,” T’Challa spat, “And not only did you beat him half to death you left a man you once claimed to be a friend abandoned in a freezing wasteland to die alone!”

“He isn’t dead!” Wanda shrieked stepping forward and glowering at the King, the guards all moved forward as well, ready to defend their King if necessary

“He might as well be dead considering his injuries” T’Challa stated with a glacial tone. He sighed and looked to Bucky who appeared to be trying to make himself invisible, “My offer to you remains Sergeant Barnes, you are welcome here in Wakanda for as long as you wish”

Bucky nodded his head and whispered a Thank You

“As for the rest of you,” T’Challa said looking each Avenger over in turn, “You have one hour to vacate Wakandan air space, if you are not gone in that time you will be treated as enemies and shot down”

He turned to leave but Wanda wasn’t letting this go that easily, “You can’t do this!” she screamed making to lunge forward but Clint caught her about the waist and shoved her back up against the jet

“Haven’t you caused enough damage already without doing anymore?” he snarled at her, Wanda’s eyes widened, Clint had always been gentle with her, understanding, to have him suddenly turn on her like this took the wind out of her sails and she sagged against the jet with crimson tears filling her eyes as Clint continued to snarl in her face.

“I had a good life, I have three kids, a wife, I was happy and content and I dragged back into this bullshit because of you and your fuck up, if I had known the truth about all this shit from the beginning I would never have left home, I wouldn’t have got Scott involved, I wouldn’t have done any of this shit, and now one of my friends, a man who gave so much of himself to the whole world and asked for nothing in return is lying in a hospital bed practically dead, and the last thing I said to him was a fucking insult!”

With a frustrated snarl Clint shoved away from Wanda raking a hand through his hair and digging his nails into his scalp, “I blamed him for Rhodes falling” he said with a bitter laugh

Steve felt sick at the world, at the look of guilt on Sam’s face

“I blamed him and it wasn’t his fault,” Clint said, he turned and glared at Steve, “If was anyone’s then it was yours Captain!” he spat the word Captain like it was an insult, “You did this, you caused
all this shit, you’ve killed Tony Stark, it doesn’t matter if his body is being kept alive by machines, the real him is dead and it’s your fault!”

“Alright man, enough” Scott said placing a hand on Clint’s shoulder and patting it

Clint shook his head, “It’s not enough, it’ll never be enough,” he whispered, taking a deep breath he looked up at T’Challa, “I know I have no right to ask anything of you, Your Majesty, but I was hoping that you could let me stay here long enough to get a flight home, I know I’ll be going to prison but at least I can get visitation from my family there”

T’Challa opened his mouth but Scott cut him off before he could speak

“Me too!” he said, “I need to go home, I’ve got a daughter and a girlfriend, I have to go back even if it means going to prison”

“Guys?” Steve whispered his voice choked from the tears that he was barely holding back

T’Challa’s expression softened and he nodded his head, “I believe we can accommodate you Mr Barton, Mr Lang, and perhaps arrange for a better return to your country than a ticket to a prison cell”

Both Clint and Scott sagged with relief and gave the King looks of gratitude for his kindness

“Traitors!” Wanda spat, her cheeks streaked red with her tears

“Shut up!” Sam grunted turning on his heel and heading back into the jet

“I won’t forget this!” Wanda snarled storming after him with a trail of magic flowing out behind her

T’Challa gave Steve an icy look, “Fifty minutes now Captain, I suggest you refuel your aircraft and depart”

The dismissal felt like a punch in the gut to Steve, he couldn’t look at Clint or Scott and looking at Bucky made him feel sick, his friend was looking at him like he was a stranger, as if they hadn’t been friends all their lives, “Bucky” he choked out

“You better go” Bucky said to him turning away, “Look after yourself”

The words were said flatly, as if he were talking to someone he barely knew at all.

Steve felt the rejection as painfully as a blow, the tears he’d been holding in began to roll down his cheeks as he headed back up into the jet.

What was he supposed to do now? His team was splintered like shattered wood, his best friend in all the world had rejected him, he was a wanted criminal, he’d lost everything and right now had no idea how to even start going about fixing this.

*****

New York
FRIDAY was merciless in tearing down Steve Rogers and making the Avengers suffer for what they had done to Tony.

Every single piece of information she could find that painted any of them in a bad light she fed to the media anonymously so that a constant stream of bad press was following the Avengers.

From Steve and Natasha’s decision to dump all of Shield’s files on the internet which resulted in thousands of innocent agents who were not Hydra having their cover blown and being killed, to Wanda and her Brother and their training in Sokovia, plenty of Sokovians had stories to tell about the “Devil Twins” as they had been called in Sokovia, while Pietro was more of a pest than anything else, a thief, and a bully, using his speed to pick pockets, shop lift, and push people about, Wanda was spoken of with complete terror.

She had terrified and terrorised them, inflicting her magic and mental powers on anyone she liked, leaving them with horrific mental and emotional scars, more than one had been driven completely out of their minds, some committing suicide and some having to be put in asylums because they were no longer able to care for themselves with their minds all but destroyed.

FRIDAY also made sure to let the world know exactly how much Tony had done for the Avengers, both financial support and all the tech he’d provided free of charge.

How he’d given the compound to them and paid for the upkeep without asking for anything in return.

FRIDAY was not the only one feeding the press stories, Tony was well known by the military, both ex-service and current serving soldiers, naval officer, and air force pilots came forward to speak about Stark Tech which had saved their own lives or the lives of someone they knew. How his generous donations to VA hospitals and Help for the Heroes had aided so many wounded service men and women rebuild their lives following injuries both mental and physical.

They also spoke of how No Man was to ever be left behind, how Rogers should have known that, should have made sure that Tony was alright and never left him there as he did.

“Not even an enemy soldier is left on a battle field” one ex WWII veteran stated as vehemently as his aged throat and lungs would allow, he sat in a wheelchair, his body shrunken with loss of muscle, skin dotted in liver spots and wrinkled like screwed up paper.

“We were taught that we always brought everyone who was alive back with us, even if they were an enemy they were still to be treated as human beings, to be given basic human needs, food, water, medical attention, a real soldier knows that, would never do what Steve Rogers did, he is a disgrace to the American Armed Services and has no right to call himself Captain America!”

This declaration from a man who had lived in Steve’s era sparked off even further public outcry.

The Smithsonian museum was attacked by a mob dressed up in Iron Man costumes, they ripped apart the Captain America memorial, shredded the costume on the dummy and replaced it with a Nazi uniform and spray painted a swastika over the dummies face.

While they were arrested and charged with breaking and entering, and vandalism the mob were cheered at by a crowd of supporters as they were taken to court.

Public support for Tony had never been higher. The ground outside Stark Towers was a mass of flowers, cards, teddy bears, and Iron Man toys that people had laid there for him.
Iron Man flags were flying in windows, people were wearing Iron Man T-Shirts, hats, jackets, and other memorabilia, and while it couldn’t be proven, Spider Man may have teamed up with Night Wing and hung a huge flag of Iron Man from Brooklyn Bridge that no one, not even the authorities felt like taking down.

It wasn’t just New York that was showing support of Tony Stark, but the whole of America.

Captain America flags and memorabilia were being burned on pyres while flags, placards, posters, and Iron Man figurines were being set up all over the country, with people holding prayer vigils for Tony, Moments of silence, were even creating videos of what they believed were his greatest moments and posting them on the Net.

Pro Team Iron Man was the most popular hashtag in use, followed by TeamTony and Tony Stark Justice League!

After nearly a Month in Russia Tony was flown back to New York, not on a Stark Jet or a Wayne Jet, but on Air Force One.

The president himself ordered that Tony be brought home as a fallen hero, had a full military escort arranged for him to be taken from the airport to the hospital with twenty one gun salute.

The Whole of New York gathered to witness this, standing in the streets or hanging off buildings and out of windows as the procession went through the streets.

Pepper, Bruce Wayne, Dick Grayson, and a wheel chair bound Rhodey following behind the ambulance carrying Tony to the hospital.

*****

In a crappy motel room across the other side of the world Steve sat on his bed watching the grainy footage on the ancient TV in the room, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

The sight of Tony’s practically lifeless body being carried from the ambulance into the hospital made him stuff a fist into his mouth to keep from screaming.

Tony didn’t even look like the man he knew.

His skin was pale and grey, his head shaved and ugly staples could be seen holding together his scalp from the surgery he’d had on his brain, his face was still mottled with bruising and swollen, his beard was gone and there was a tube between his lips, another up into his nose, more coming from the back of his hands.

He looked tiny on the stretcher, a fragile and broken child rather than a grown man.

Steve didn’t hear what the commentator was saying, couldn’t hear anything above the noise of his own choking sobs and he turned and buried his face into his pillow and wept for his grief and guilt.

*****

New York
Siting by Tony’s hospital bed Bruce took Tony’s left hand into his own and stroked his fingers with his thumb.

“I don’t know if you can hear me Tony, I don’t know if there’s any of you left in there, but I promise you I won’t leave you, I’m going to be here for you, if there is a way to bring you back then I’ll find it, if there is a way to save you then no matter the price I’ll make it happen”

Tony didn’t react, didn’t move at all, his face remained blank, slack, his breathing aided by the ventilator, and heart rate monitored by the machine beside him making a constant beep with every in put and out put on his damaged heart.

“You didn’t deserve this Tony,” Bruce said bitterness in his voice, “You didn’t deserve any of this, I hate that it took this happening for world to finally see you for the wonder you are,” he paused and gave a choked sounding chuckle, “Took me long enough too I suppose,” he mused “If I’d been less jealous, less possessive, less volatile then perhaps we would still be together, wouldn’t have lost the last ten years, If I’d let you in instead of pushing you away then maybe we’d……” he broke off then reached into his pocket, he took out a small velvet box and opened it, inside was gold ring with a cameo of St Anthony of Padua set into it.

“St Anthony is the saint of the lost and found.” Bruce said slipping the ring on Tony’s wedding ring finger, “Right now you are lost, I pray that somehow, some way you’ll find your way back to me.”
Chapter 3

New York

It took six weeks of legal battles and diplomacy before Clint and Scott could get back into America without being thrown straight into the nearest prison cell.

Both were able to cut deals with the authorities and accepted having suspended sentences and being put on licenses for two years.

Electronic tags were fastened about their ankles to monitor their movements, they were restricted from leaving the states, and had to be back in their homes between the hours Seven PM and Seven AM.

Thanking T’Challa profusely for his help in getting them back home both left Wakanda keen to get back to their families.

Scott was facing a hell of a lot of groveling when it came to his girlfriend Hope Van Dyne, she was seriously pissed at him and wasn’t going to forgive him anytime soon.

Hank Pym was also pissed at him for stealing the Antman suit, which he had confiscated for the foreseeable future. Scott would have to rebuild a lot of bridges there to earn back their trust and respect.

He was also going to have to work very hard to make amends with his Ex-Wife and daughter, and he knew he wouldn’t be allowed to see Cassie without supervision for a good while, but at least he would be seeing her, and in the end, that was what mattered the most.

Clint was very much in the Dog House with his wife too.

Laura had let him come home since he needed to have an address to be allowed to use the tag, the alternative would have been a prison and while she was furious she did not want the Father of her Children in prison.

So, while he was back home and living with his family, Clint was also sleeping on the sofa, a place he’d be staying for a considerable length of time.

But that was okay, Clint was prepared to take as long as it needed to earn his families forgiveness.

He also had something else to do once he was back in America.

He had to go and see Tony and apologize.

*****
Tony was of course still in intensive care. The place he would likely remain for the rest of his life barring a miracle.

Visitation rights were being given to only a limited few. With all the press wanting shots of the comatose genius and fanatics looking to get into the hospital security had to raise in order to protect Tony.

Visitors were limited to Rhodey, Pepper, and Bruce, who could come and go as they wished. Anyone else wanting to see Tony had to have their permission.

This meant that Clint had to go through them to get to see Tony, and none of the three looked overly keen to let Clint anywhere near their injured friend.

Feeling out of place and very uncomfortable, Clint sat before Pepper, Rhodey, and Bruce Wayne in one of the conference rooms in Stark Tower New York.

Just seeing Rhodey in his wheelchair brought a fresh bought of guilt to Clint.

The ex-Air Force Colonel seemed to be adapting to using his wheelchair pretty well and not dwelling on his injury, but the fact that he had the injury at all made Clint feel guilty. It didn’t help that he’d rubbed said injury in Tony’s face, blaming the man for it when it hadn’t been his fault in the least.

Of the three present Rhodes seemed the most welcoming, at least his expression was just icy, where Pepper was all but breathing fire from her mouth and Bruce Wayne? Clint was pretty sure that even Loki would have thought twice about pissing this guy off considering the way he seemed to radiate a menacing ferocity with just his dark eyes alone.

“Why?” Pepper asked, “Should we allow you of all people within a hundred miles of Tony Stark?”

Clint bit the inside of his lips and shifted uncomfortably in his seat, “I know I’ve done nothing to make you guys want to trust me in the least,”

“Understatement!” Rhodey muttered just loud enough for Clint to hear

“But,” Clint said, forcing himself to keep from losing his temper to Rhodes comment, “I want to apologise to Tony, I need to, I owe him that much at least”, he looked at the three people before him, imploring them to understand why he had to do this and to maybe take pity on him enough to allow him to do this.

Bruce exchanged looks with Pepper and Rhodey before clearing his throat and speaking,

“You realize that Tony is in a very deep coma, he will not hear anything you say, his brain is barely managing to produce autonomic functions, higher functions no longer exist, he is all but brain dead”

Clint winced and made no attempt to hide it. The thought of Tony Stark, certified genius being brain dead was beyond horrific. He remembered people saying that Tony was no superhero because he had no special powers or skills like the rest of the Avengers, but it wasn’t true, Tony’s power was his incredible mind, it functioned on a level that was so beyond everyone that was a superpower as great as Thor’s lightning, as Roger’s strength, as his own skills with a bow.

“I know,” he whispered looking down at the conference table, “But I have to say the words to him anyway, I have to…,” he paused and took several deep breaths, “I have to face the consequences of
Taking a chance Clint looked up and saw the softening looks on the faces of the three before him.

“One hour,” Bruce said looking to Rhodey and Pepper, “Under supervision, my supervision”

“One hour,” Clint said agreeably, “And I don’t mind if anyone else is with me”

“Very well,” Pepper said rising from her seat, “I believe our business is concluded,” she held out a hand to Clint, “Good day Mr. Barton”

Rising himself Clint took Pepper’s hand and shook it, he refrained from holding out a hand to Rhodey who looked more likely to slice his hand off if Clint held it out to him!

“I’, sor...,”

“You apologize for my injury Barton and I’ll roll over your damn feet!” Rhodey growled at him, “It isn’t your fault, and shit happens, if anyone is blame it’s Sabrina the teenage bitch, and Captain Dickless Wonder, they are who I want an apology from, not you”

Under other circumstances, Clint might have laughed at the names Rhodey called Rogers and Maximoff, but right now all he could manage was a slight nod of his head.

“Shall we go?” Bruce said with a deep sigh and Clint nodded again, stuffing his hands into his pockets and following the Gotham Billionaire.

*****

The drive to the hospital was uncomfortable, to say the least, Bruce Wayne was not one for casual conversation and Clint really didn’t know what to say to him. That didn’t stop him from trying anyway, silences made him uncomfortable.

“I didn’t know you and Stark were back together,” he said trying to sound casual about it, but his voice was too high pitch even to his own ears, “I know the two of you had a..., thing in the nineties, but I thought you were long done”

“Love is never done,” Bruce said, “But we had only just resumed our relationship before this Civil War”

“I’m sorry,” Clint said, and he meant it

“You seem perpetually sorry Mr. Barton,” Bruce said glancing at him briefly, “It is hardly a productive state of being”

“No, it isn’t,” Clint agreed, “But it’s better than being nothing but an obnoxious shit bag!”.

*****
The sight of Tony in the hospital bed was harrowing, to say the least.

His hair was starting to grow back in after being shaved for surgery, but it was only little more than stubble on his scalp, his missing beard didn’t help matters either, Tony didn’t look himself without the well-groomed trademark goatee.

He’d also lost a lot of weight. He was being fed through tubes directly into his stomach, basic nutrients were being run into him via a drip feed but they only provided enough nutrition to keep his body from starving to death, not enough to maintain a healthy body mass.

The lack of activity meant that his muscles were atrophied leaving him as nothing but skin and bones beneath the bed sheets, bones that were far too prominent and skin that was far too pale, Tony had always sported a golden tan, a nod to his Italian Mother and his Father’s dark features, but now his skin was pasty and almost translucent, the blue veins showing far to visible beneath his skin.

Shuffling to the bed Clint sat down on the edge of the visitors' chair and clasped his hands in his lap, interlocking his fingers and squeezing them painfully hard as he forced himself to look at the pitiful state Tony was in.

“I don’t know what to say” he mumbled feeling his cheeks flush and wished very hard that Bruce was not in the room with him and Tony right now, but there was no way the other man was going to leave him alone with Tony, Clint would have more chance of jumping off the top of K2 and surviving!

Taking a deep breath he wet his lips and continued, “I’m sorry Tony, I don’t know what else I can say and I know its not enough, will never be enough, you didn’t deserve this, you didn’t deserve me jumping down your throat at the Raft either and I wish I could take back what I said then, I wish to God that none of this shit had gone down, but it has, its happened and you and Colonel Rhodes are the ones who’ve paid the highest prices for it,” he let out a choked sob and realised to his shame that he was crying! He never cried in public, hardly ever cried in private, and now he was crying in front of Bruce Wayne for God sakes!

Silently Bruce just handed him a tissue from the box on the tray-table which Clint gratefully took and used to dry his eyes and blow his nose.

“Heh, I’m kinda glad you can’t see this Tony, you’d give me shit over it for the rest of my life!” he weakly joked, “I miss your jokes, Tony, I miss you,” he admitted sniffing hard, “I wish I’d been a better friend to you, wish I’d…, Christ I wish I could go back and change everything, not let everyone blame you for Ultron, not let that mind fucking little bitch into the Avengers, I wish I could make things right and I hate so much that I can’t,” reaching out he took hold of one of Tony’s hands and held it tight, “I would trade places with you in a heartbeat if I could, I’d give anything to make you well again, to make all this better, but I know that there is nothing I can do, I’m not a Doctor or a super smart scientist, I can’t fix what’s happened, all I can do is try and make up for it as best I can, and I promise you Tony that I will do that, whatever battles I fight in the future will be fought in your name, I won’t let the world forget Tony Stark or Iron Man, You were the first true Avenger, the one who brought everything to life, and that like so many things is a debt that can never be repaid”

Clint continued to talk to Tony for the full hour until it was time for him to go.

As he was leaving Bruce caught his arm and turned him so they were facing each other.
“I can not say I forgive you for your actions today Mr. Barton,” Bruce said, “But you have shown true contrition here today, you’ve apologised to Tony and not begged his forgiveness or understanding, that alone earns you a future visit, and maybe a chance at gaining forgiveness in the future”

For the first time in what felt like forever, Clint smiled, “I’d like that Mr. Wayne, Thank You”

“You’re welcome Mr. Barton,” Bruce said shaking his hand, “Hopefully we will meet again”

“Yeah, and it’s Clint,”

“Clint,” Bruce said but did not say that Clint could use his given name, that was something else that would have to be earned and something Clint would be happy to work for.

*****

Shri Lanka

Aboard the cloaked Quinjet Steve sat on his bunk writing a letter to Tony.

He knew it was pointless, the man was unconscious for God Sakes, he couldn’t hear speech let alone read a damn letter! But Steve had to do something to try and ease his conscience.

Clint and Scott’s return to the U.S had coincided with Natasha joining himself, Sam, and Wanda.

She did not bring good news with her, she had actually snuck into the hospital in New York and seen Tony for herself, no believing the news reports on his condition and wanting to see if he was in fact as brain dead as was being claimed.

“I stuck needles in his hands and his feet, he didn’t so much a blink, let alone flinch,” she said when asked, “He has the brain activity of a cucumber, honestly they should just pull the plug and be done with it!”

Steve had been too horrified at the callous words to speak at all, Wanda had snorted as if amused by the suggestion and Sam had shaken his head and left the common area for his own bunk.

“You can’t hold onto your guilt for Tony forever Steve,” Natasha said, coming into the small room and sitting down on the opposite bunk that Sam was using when sleeping, “Dwelling on it won’t bring him back”

“He’s not dead Natasha,” Steve said

“No but he may as well be” she stated and shrugged as he shot her a cold look, “People die, fact of life, shedding tears does not bring them back so why bother?”

“Because losing people hurts!” Steve replied, “Because grieving is necessary, because…,” he sighed and looked down at the unfinished letter, “Because what I did to Tony was wrong and I can never forgive myself for it”.
Chapter 4

Bruce slowly awoke from a wonderfully relaxed sleep.

He hadn’t felt so well rested and contented in far too long.

He stretched and rolled over onto his side, feeling far too lazy and comfortable to even think about getting up yet.

Laying beside him in bed, stretched out on his belly was Tony. One arm was slung up over the pillow his head rested on, bent at the elbow and brushing against his hair, the other arm was pulled up against his side with his fist beneath his chin.

Bruce smiled fondly, feeling a burst of love for the man beside him.

In sleep Tony’s face relaxed completely, he lost the stress and tension lines that were present during waking hours, looked years younger and more at peace than he ever did when awake.

Reaching over Bruce stroked the knuckle of his forefinger down Tony’s cheek, Tony murmured something unintelligible and wriggled closer to Bruce trying to nuzzle into his hand like a cat seeking petting.

Grinning Bruce began to stroke his fingers through Tony’s silk soft black hair, twirling it through his fingers, he loved Tony’s hair, always had, somehow it was always soft as silk and beautiful to touch, somehow even his goatee was soft instead of prickly as facial hair usually was.

Tony complained that his hair was girly, that it was a soft as a girl, but Bruce knew he secretly liked to be complimented on it, and especially loved to have his hair stroked and played with like this, so Bruce always made sure to indulge him.

Tony made another mumbling noise and wet his lips with his tongue.

Wanting more than to just watch Tony sleep, Bruce leaned forward and began to press soft kisses to Tony’s cheek and temple to bring him into waking.

“Morning Tonio,” Bruce purred as the other Billionaire yawned and blinked owlishly at him with impossibly large brown eyes

“Morning Rue,” He mumbled sleepily, “Been awake long?”

“Long enough to know that I’m missing you” Bruce replied running his fingers down Tony’s bare back making the other Billionaire shiver appreciatively and spread his thighs to encourage Bruce to continue his ministrations. Grinning Bruce leaned down and began to pepper Tony’s back in kisses, moving his way slowly down Tony’s spine to the cleft just above his buttocks, he paused and looked up at Tony who was watching him with half lidded eyes

“Enjoying yourself?” Bruce asked

“With you I always enjoy myself” Tony breathed, he extended a hand to Bruce, who took it and moved back up the bed, wrapping his arms about Tony and fell into lazy kissing and caressing, they were both hard, their cocks twitching and leaking with desire, but neither were in a hurry to spend themselves, they would rather enjoy this for a while.
“Why did we ever break up?” Bruce asked with a deep sigh

“Because we’re idiots,” Tony replied, he dipped his head and kissed Bruce’s throat, nibbling the tender skin gently with his teeth. Bruce allowed few people to do this, rarely ever left himself exposed and vulnerable like this, but Tony was special, he knew that he was safe to bare his throat to him and would receive only pleasure for doing so.

“I wish we could stay like this forever” he moaned on an exhale

Tony looked up at him with a languid smile, “I love you Bruce,” he said, “No matter what happens, I’ll always love you”.

*****

Bruce awoke with a start.

His face felt sore and the skin tight, beneath his head the pillow was damp. He’d been crying in his sleep.
The dream had been so real, a recollection of his night with Tony at the hotel after the gala.

Neither of them had gone to that gala expecting to see each other, certainly not to end up in bed with anyone, anyone special that is. But low and behold they had met up and everything they had left behind ten years ago had come flooding back.

Bruce had a lot of regrets in his life, losing Tony was one of them.

They had been on and off since adolescence, but their relationship had always been to fiery, the two of them too volatile and hot tempered for it to work.

They’d both had unresolved issues with trust, Bruce had serious control issues. Having lost so many people he tended to want to control everything in his life, and the people close to him. It had the effect of being smothering at times, something Tony did not appreciate.

Tony was a free spirit, he was not the sort of person who dealt well with being controlled, he might suffer it for a while, but then he would start champing at the bit like an unruly horse and before very much longer with seek to break his restraints.

Tony’s complete lack of control was also part of the problem. While his struggles with alcohol were well known and well documented by the press, what the world didn’t know were his addictions to cocaine and ecstasy.

Through out the whole of the nineties he’d been popping pills and snorting lines, doing anything and everything to try and blot out the pain inside.

One thing Bruce had never touched was drugs, and he had hated it when Tony was on them, hated how paranoid and self-destructive they made him.

Tony had finally kicked both habits shortly after the turn of the century. Had gone completely cold turkey and spent days shaking, sweating, suffering through nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, insomnia,
stomach cramps, paranoia, palpitations, and anxiety until he was completely clean.

He could of course have checked into any number of clinics for detox, but Tony had been determined to do it all himself, by himself, and he’d succeeded.

Once he was clean they had given their relationship another shot, the last one. But while Tony had sorted himself out in kicking his drug habit he was still drinking excessively, still acted impulsively, and Bruce had not dealt with his own issues.

In fact it had not been until after Dick had moved out from the mansion that Bruce had finally gone to see a therapist to talk about this.

While an adult now and more than able to take care of himself, Dick had moved out partly because of Bruce’s tight leash, something that he had to deal with, and was working on.

One would think that The Batman, the man who had become the embodiment of his own fears would be without fear himself. But it wasn’t so. Bruce did still have fears, he feared losing those he loved, and that was what made him possessive.

He was working on that, had made progress, or so his shrink said.

Meeting Tony at the Gala he had hoped that he’d be able to see if he’d progressed enough for their relationship to work out this time.

Now, very likely, he would never know.

Sighing he slid out of bed and made his way to the bathroom to empty his bladder and wash his face.

He was going to go and see Tony today. It’d been forty eight hours since he’d last been in the hospital with him.

He’d had meetings at W.E that he had to attend. Lucious Fox might be CEO, but Bruce was still head of R and D, and he was the majority share holder of the company, so he had to attend some of the board meetings.

Rhodey had urged him to take a break from the hospital too, as had Pepper, Alfred, and Dick.

While they too were worried about Tony, were going into sit with, to hold his hand, and read to him, they also knew that they had to pull back and give themselves breathing room.

Whether or not Tony’s condition changed, they still had to live their lives, they couldn’t stop everything to spend every waking minute at his bedside. Especially since there was nothing they could actually do for him.

It’d been three months now since Siberia, three months and no change.

Tony’s hair was growing back, his bruises had faded and his fractures healed, the stitches had come out leaving purple/white scars in their wake.

But Tony hadn’t woken up.
Bruce had over heard Doctors talking outside Tony’s door about turning off the life support.

But even if Tony’s next of Kin were to consider that it wouldn’t make much of a difference.

Tony was able to breathe for himself, no deeply, which was why he was being given assistance via a ventilator, but he could breathe, his heart could beat for itself, it was being assisted like his lungs, but both worked without medical intervention, so “Pulling the plug” as it was commonly known was not going to be an option in this case.

Tony could live on like this for years before a blood clot found its way into his heart, or pneumonia caught up with him and finished him off.

It wasn’t fair. That a man who had given so much of himself to the world should end his life in a hospital bed as nothing but a glorified vegetable.

Steve Rogers had done worse than actually kill Tony, death would have been a mercy compared to this. Rogers had given Tony a life sentence locked inside his own body.

Bruce doubted he had ever hated anyone as much as he hated Steve Rogers, even the bastards who’d murdered his parents didn’t make his blood boil as much as Captain Fucking America.

The self-righteous bastard had even dared to try and make contact with Tony via Vision at the compound. The Android was staying there, had become something of a hermit, was struggling to understand his feelings in regard to Wanda, the guilt for having hurt Rhodey irreparably, and grief over Tony’s condition.

Rogers had sent a letter to Vision with another inside to be read to Tony.

He had actually thought that Vision would go and spout the shit he’d written to a comatose Tony.

Pepper had nearly burst a blood vessel when she’d heard about it, Rhodey had sworn in three different languages and spent the night working his way through a twelve pack of beer which he had regretted in the morning.

Bruce had gone and taken his temper out on punching bags and several thugs in the street as batman, wishing it was Steve Rogers he was pounding on.

Turning on the shower he climbed under the spray and began to wash his hair trying not to think about the last time he’d shared a shower with Tony and they’d washed each-others hair, it would just depress him all the more.

He finished his shower quickly and dried off, grabbing the first clothes that came to hand and dressed swiftly before heading downstairs to find Alfred setting out breakfast.

How did the man know when Bruce would be up? If he didn’t know better Bruce would think that Alfred had motion sensors in his room the man was so uncanny at predicting the times Bruce would want food!

“I thought you’d need something substantial since you’re heading to New York, Master Wayne,” he said serving up poached eggs on toast, crispy bacon, and sausage. A large black cat jumped up onto the table and sniffed inquisitively at the plate before being shooed away by Alfred

“Where did she come from?” Bruce asked stroking his fingers down the cat’s back
“He,” Alfred corrected, “Came from MS Kyle, another of her strays, she popped round yesterday and left you a message which is on your desk”

Giving Alfred a small smile Bruce picked up a piece of bacon and headed to his study to get Selina’s message to read over breakfast, he snickered as he heard Alfred scolding the cat who was apparently determined to get some bacon if it was the last thing he did!

Picking up the letter Bruce went back to his breakfast, giving the cat a rasher of bacon and ignored Alfred’s clucking tongue at his indulgence of the animal. Using one hand to hold the letter and the other to use a fork, Bruce read as he ate.

Hey Kid

Sorry to hear about your boyfriend, it’s total shit what happened to him. Everyone I speak to wants to smack the shit out of Crap-a-ton-of-shit Rogers!

I saw on the news that Starks practically brain dead. That sucks man, seriously its fucked up.

I don’t care what Doctors say, they’re just looking to make money out of you.

I read somewhere the having a cat sit on you and purr has a positive effect on the human nervous system, maybe Jett can help Stark?

Take care of yourself Kid

Selina XOXOXO

Bruce smile as he folded the letter over. It was a nice thought, Selina was trying to help in her own way, and Bruce had read about the symbiotic effect a cats purring had on humans, maybe having the cat sit on Tony’s lap could do something that medicine couldn’t?

He’d have to clear it with the hospital of course, make sure the animal didn’t cause an disruption and wouldn’t be a risk to Tony, but considering the fact that the Doctors had all but said there was nothing they could do for him, Bruce didn’t see any reason why they shouldn’t go for this.

“Get some food for him will you, Alfred?” Bruce said to the long suffering butler

“Deciding we need pets now Master Bruce, are the bats downstairs no longer sufficient company?”

Bruce allowed Alfred the acerbic comment and just fed Jett another rasher of bacon on the sly

“Try not to declare war on each other while I’m in New York won’t you?” he said partly to Jett but mostly to Alfred, “And if you’re a good boy then I may take you with me to meet someone very special”.
New York

It had taken a week but Bruce had finally managed to get the doctors to agree for him to bring Jett into the hospital to snuggle up with Tony.

Of course they had said that a cat purring would have no effect on his nervous system, that having a feline in the hospital would be hazardous to other patients, blah blah blah!

But Bruce had argued that Tony was in a private room so the cat would not be interacting with any other patients, and since medicine could do nothing for Tony would it really matter if he had a cat on his lap or not?

Bruce had expected to find Tony alone in the hospital room, or perhaps with a nurse or Doctor checking his monitors. But to his surprise he found a garishly clad radioactive spiderbite enhanced adolescent sitting beside Tony’s bed, perching on the edge of the chair with his legs bouncing with nervous energy as he babbled almost without taking breath to the unconscious billionaire.

“And this mugger was completely like “You can’t do this to me I’m the big tough guy who runs this neighbourhood!, and okay he was like kinda bad ass being two hundred and fifty pounds and covered in tattoos and shit, sorry didn’t mean to swear!, and I was like, “Oh yeah, bring it on asshole!” um sorry about the language again, and anyway he takes a swing at me, and I totally duck and the idiot smashes his fist through the dry wall and gets it stuck! It totally just stuck there and he couldn’t move his arm and he starts screeching at me and trying to swing at me with his other arm and the idiot only goes and gets that one stuck too!, oh God Mr Stark you should have seen it, it was so funny, him stuck there bellowing and unable to get free and looking like a total prick, uh sorry dick, no that’s bad too, um, muppet! Yeah a total muppet!”

Bruce’s grinned at Peter’s babble and self-chastisement over the swearing, “I am sure it was hilarious” he said making his presence known

Peter jumped and spun round, relaxing when he saw it was Bruce Wayne, “Um Hi Mr Wayne,” he said, “I hope you don’t mind me being here, I was just visiting Mr Stark, it was so cool when he selected me to be on his team and I hoped I’d get to know him better because he is so totally cool and I really like him and I hate that this happened to him and I know that there’s nothing I can do but I can come and talk to him so here I am!” Peter finally stopped to draw breath and frowned, “You have a cat?” he asked looking at Jet who was glaring grumpily from his carrying case having finally shut up yowling, something he’d been doing all the way from Gotham!

“He’s kind of cute,” Peter said tilting his head to study the cat, “But why is he here? Oh is he Mr Stark’s cat, I bet he’s missing him, I never knew Mr Stark had a cat, I bet he’s got a super cool name like…”

“Jett,” Bruce said cutting Peter’s ramble off, he was starting to get a headache from the boy’s babble

“The cat is called Jett, and he had only recently come into my possession through a friend who said that a cat’s purring can have a positive effect on the human nervous system”
“Oh!” while his face was covered and Bruce couldn’t see Peter’s expression, he could easily picture’s the boy’s face lighting up, “Yeah, I heard that too!” he said, “They say petting a cat can lower blood pressure and shi…uh stuff!”

Bruce felt his lips twitching at Peter’s struggle not to swear, setting down the case he opened the door and reached in to bring out Jett, gritting his teeth as he was clawed and bitten by the unhappy cat.

“You must be related to Selina!” he muttered placing the cat onto the bed at Tony’s feet.

Jett sat down on his furry backside and spent a good few minutes grooming his fur before taking in his surroundings.

He sniffed, his velvet nose twitching and he slowly padded up the bed to sniff at Tony’s hand, after a few moments he nudged the limp hand with his head as if to encourage fuss, when nothing was forthcoming he rubbed his face against the appendage, scenting Tony.

Then quite happily he climbed up onto Tony’s stomach and went round and round in a circle several times before settling down on his comfy new human shaped bed and began to purr.

“I think that’s the cutest thing I have ever seen!” Peter declared, “Aren’t you so sweet?” he cooed at the cat, Jett blinked at him dismissively and made himself comfortable on Tony, stretching out to lay full length down his body with his head resting over Tony’s heart.

“It is adorable,” Bruce admitted, he wondered if Tony could feel the cat on him, if some part of him was still present and could sense the cat’s presence.

The logical part of him knew that it wasn’t possible, Tony was unaware of everything about him, a brass band could play full blast in his room and he wouldn’t notice it. But the hopeful side of Bruce, the part that still prayed for a miracle, hoped that just maybe Tony did know that the Cat was there, that Bruce himself was there, and would find a way back to him somehow.

*****

Avengers Compound

Rhodey found Vision pouring over various text books, and tablets, all containing data on Neurological injuries and treatments.

He had a hologram of a human brain in the centre of the table and was studying it between checking the books and tablet screes.

“Planning on becoming a brain surgeon?” Rhodey asked in amusement

“Ah no,” Vision replied looking at the Colonel and looking away again just as quickly, his guilt over having hurt the colonel still weighing heavily upon him, “I am looking for ways to help Mr Stark if I
can,” he explained, “There seems to be a great deal that is unknown about the human brain, and very little can be done for it when damaged”

“That’s true,” Rhodey agreed wheeling himself over to study what Vision was looking through, it was all well past his understanding, you would have to be a Neurosurgeon to understand this stuff.

“I fear that there is nothing I can do that would help Mr Stark recover,” Vision sighed looking genuinely upset by this, “I had thought that perhaps an infusion of stem-cells might repair the damage to the areas of his brain that are no longer functioning, but there is no way of knowing what the result would be, and such a thing has never been tried, nor do I believe would any surgeon agree to try such a thing.”

“No reputable surgeon anyway,” Rhodey said

Unhappily Vision ended the hologram and turned off the tablets, “Once again I have failed Mr Stark,”

“What?” Rhodey’s face screwed up in confusion at this unexpected confession, “How the hell have you failed him?”

Vision turned and gave Rhodey his full attention and spoke in a clear matter-of-fact tone of voice while his expression was one of guilt and remorse.

“I have failed Mr Stark in failing to disable to Falcon jet and thus injuring you, I failed to contain Wanda in the compound for her safety from the mobs who wanted to see her pay for what they felt were her crimes, I have failed him again now in finding a cure for his brain damage, and most of all I have failed him by not caring for him as I should”

Rhodey’s mouth dropped open in shock, he gaped at the Android as if he’d suddenly grown a second head!

“Viz, you know that Wanda’s escape was her own doing, you are not to blame for that, anymore than you are for what happened to me. You didn’t know Wilson would dodge so don’t blame yourself there, I sure as hell don’t blame you for it and I don’t want you blaming yourself.” He held up a hand as Vision opened his mouth to butt in

“Tony’s condition is not of your making, nor mine, or anyone but Steve Rogers, it is not your fault that you can’t cure him, hell we’ve had the best doctors in the world examine him and they can’t do fuck all for him! As for caring for him…you’re going to have to explain that to me”

Vision rolled his lips and shifted, looking like a child confessing to some transgression or other.

“Mr Stark is my creator, my Father in all but blood, part of my programming is JARVIS, and JARVIS loved Mr Stark, he was a completely self-aware sentient AI who was capable of practically anything, but his main concern was always for his creator, Tony Stark.” Vision paused and sighed, “I have neglected that side of my..personality? yes personality is probably the best description. I have focused more upon the benign aspects of ULTRON, upon the Mind Stone. These both drew me to Wanda as she is connected to both. I have until recently ignored the JARVIS part of me for fear that it was hamper my growth as an individual, a foolish notion as I have found myself able to grow more by examining this part of myself, and have also, to my shame, that I have been negligent towards Mr Stark, something I wish I could atone for”

Rhodey had to swallow past a lump in his throat at the Androids honest admittance, he reached out and clasped one of Vision’s hands
“I think he’d like it if you call him Tony,” he said gently, “And you know you can go and see him at the hospital right?”

“I was not aware of that,” Vision said, “And with all due respect, what good would that do?”

“Honestly?” Rhodey sighed, “None, it just…, I guess going to see him, talking to him even if he can’t hear us helps somehow, and like you said, there is a lot about the human brain we don’t know, maybe he can hear us, or at least knows of our presence”

Vision appeared to consider this and then nodded, “Very well,” he agreed, “If it will cause no trouble, I would like to go and see Mr…Tony in the hospital as soon as is convenient”.

*****

Bali

Wanda glared at the TV playing in the cheap hotel room she and the other avengers were sharing.

The quinjet needed fuelling and after going through a storm, some repair work which had forced them to land and find shelter while they tried to make the repairs.

The TV only played two station, BBC world service, and some local channel that wasn’t in any language she understood.

The BBC were showing yet another story on Stark. Months had passed and he was still making the news! Why couldn’t the world just forget him and let him rot in that hospital like he deserved?

“MS Potts has battled with the fall in stock prices and the delay in the latest Stark Phones and Stark tablets being launched and seems to have managed to balance things out” the reporter said, “The stocks of Stark Industries hit an all time low when Tony Stark was first reported being in a coma, a dramatic drop by seventy three percent almost over night! Most people would have been at their wits end with this and dealing with someone they cared about being so gravely ill. But MS Potts has achieved a miracle and managed to salvage SI and get the stocks rising once again, although the survival of Stark Industries can perhaps also be attributed to the support of Bruce Wayne and Wayne Enterprises. Here I have our Business correspondent Michael Reed, Michael do you think Bruce Wayne’s intervention was made through sound business investments or something more personal?”

Michael Reed smiled, “Well actually Angela I think it is a bit of both really. Stark Industries has always been a highly lucrative company and has managed to defy the odds more than once. Tony Stark himself reinvented the Company after Afghanistan, something that should have been impossible to do, but he managed it and made the company even more profitable as a result. So Bruce Wayne’s investing into the company is a sound investment. However I do believe that Bruce was motivated to intervene on a far more personal level even though it made logical business sense. His relationship with Tony Stark has never really been finished. We’ve seen them break up and get back together multiple times since the nineties, I think that no matter what, they will always be drawn to each other”

“A love that is never ending,” Angela mused, “Though perhaps now it does have its final tragic ending, and the loss of Tony Stark has already been felt in the worlds technology and business has it
“Indeed it has,” Michael confirmed, “Tony Stark was forever bringing out new and incredibly advanced technology, was ahead of his competitors by at least a decade or two, if not more, The loss of his genius has set back technological development by at least twenty years, possibly more. It is very likely that Tony Stark would have been the man to create an artificial environment for people to live in on other worlds, to break the light speed barrier and invent “Warp speed” which would enable us to travel to other planets. Now we will likely wait another century before these things can become a reality”

“It is truly an incredible loss to us all” Angela said

“The hell it is!” Wanda spat at the TV, “So Stark’s gone, big deal, who cares?” even as she spat out the words she knew the answer. The world cared, the whole world was mourning Tony Stark, was blaming Captain America for his loss, their thoughts and feelings were like a cancer in Wanda’s mind, she hated it, hated them, wanted to rip their thoughts out of herself, to scream at the world how unfair and unjust it was for canonizing Tony Stark while condemning Steve and herself.

“He’s a murderer!” she whispered glaring at the TV, “He’s a traitor and a murderer while we are the heroes, and one day I will make the whole world understand that”, her eyes glowed red and red sparks flew from her hands as she spoke and the TV began to smoulder, smoke rising from it’s components, the screen disintegrating, until finally there was nothing but a pile of molten metal on the stand where it had been.

Smiling, Wanda climbed off the bed and went out onto the veranda, she tilted her head up, turning her face to the sun with her eyes closed. She imagined doing the what she had just done to the TV to Stark’s life support machine, imagined watching his body struggle to take breath, his heart failing and stuttering inside his chest, imagined watching the last dregs of life leave his body once and for all.

“One day,” she whispered, “One day”.
Chapter 6

Ssssteeeve! Ssssteeeve!

The voice calling his name was not that far away from him. Thirty yards at the most.

It was a familiar voice, one he knew but couldn’t quite place.

“Ssssteeeve!”

Again the voice called his name and Steve whipped round to look in the direction it had come from only to see nothing but an empty corridor before him

“Who are you?” he called out

Laughter followed, and Steve saw shadows of a figure moving on the wall ahead, someone going down the corridor that broke off from this one.

“Wait!” he called breaking into a jog to follow after the figure, he turned the corner but the corridor seemed to stretch on forever before him, again that laugh came and that whispery voice calling out his name, “Where are you?” he shouted, “Tell me where you are and I can help you!”

The whole corridor seemed to shift, it was as if Steve was inside a kaleidoscope, the light flickered going bright and dark, dim and clear until finally the world stopped spinning and Steve found himself back in Siberia.

He was standing in the bunker, standing with his back to snow, standing before the damaged Iron Man armour and the broken body within.

“Why did you do it Steve?”

The voice came from behind him, taking Steve by surprise. He spun round, coming face to face with Tony.

The older man was dressed in a loose fitting hospital gown that was hanging off his left shoulder.

His skin was almost as white as the snow outside, his body looked smaller and more frail than Steve could ever remember him being.

“Tony?” he whispered hardly daring to believe what he was seeing

“Why did you do it?” Tony repeated, “Why did you kill me Steve?”

The question hit Steve like a punch in the gut. He stared at Tony in horror as he shook his head in denial,

“I didn’t..!”

“You did,” Tony said simply, he reached round to the back of his head with his hands, touching his own head then brought them back round, presenting them to Steve who recoiled in horror at the blood covering them
“This what you did to me Steve” Tony said, “This is what you took from me”

“No Tony no!” Steve whispered backing away, he pressed a hand to his mouth choking back vomit as Tony’s eyes began to bleed, his nose, his ears, even his mouth all began to pump blood!

“You took everything I had Steve!” Tony said to him “I gave you everything, even my heart”

Panic welled up in Steve as Tony tore open his hospital gown revealing his chest, only his chest was hardly there anymore, it was caved inwards, the organs beneath the broken and shattered bone of his ribs were shredding and skewered

Tony looked back up at him, his face now one of a corpse, “And you crushed it!” he spat

Steve closed his eyes and opened his mouth screaming!

“Steve Wake UP!”

******

Steve awoke with a jolt. He was covered in sweat, his heart pounding in his chest and his face wet with tears.

Leaning over him was Sam who looked concerned.

“You were crying out in your sleep man,” he said sitting down on the bed beside him, “Nightmare?”

Steve took several deep breaths, then his face crumpled and he began to cry.

“Fuck!” Sam whispered pulled Steve into a hug, letting him cry onto his shoulder

“I fucked up Sam!” Steve wept clinging to him, “I fucked it all up and I don’t know how to fix it!”

“I know” Sam murmured rubbing Steve’s back

“I didn’t mean to kill him, I swear to God I didn’t mean to do it, I was just trying to stop him from killing Bucky, I never wanted to hurt him!”

Stark, well Sam couldn’t say he was surprised that Steve was having nightmares about this, he’d had some horrific ones about Rhodes, and about Riley, and he hadn’t been the one inflict the injuries on either of them, he’d been a catalyst in Rhodes’s injury but not the cause, however guilt didn’t work that way, not in ones own subconscious at least, and for Steve it must be ten times worse since he had been the one to inflict the injuries on Tony.

Slowly Steve got himself under control and sat back wiping his cheeks and sniffing hard, “I want to make things right Sam,” he whispered, “I want to make amends and I don’t know how”

Sam shook his head, “I don’t think there is a way to do so,” he said, “Tony’s….well if the Doctors can’t do anything for him then I don’t see what we can do, its not like we have a magic cure we can give him”

As he said this a light seemed to go on in Steve’s mind, his eyes lighting up as he realized something

“What?” Sam asked
“The Serum!” Steve said looking excited “We can give him the serum!”

*****

Natasha was not impressed to have her sleep disturbed and neither was Wanda.

Both woman sat rather sulkily before Steve and Sam, clutching mugs of warm drinks as they explained what Steve had in mind.

“I want to donate my blood to Tony!” Steve said enthusiastically, “The Doctors can extract the serum from it and give it to him!”

“What?” Wanda cried

Natasha sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, “Steve, no” she murmured

“It will fix him!” Steve stated, “It fixed me, it saved Bucky, I can make things right, I can save Tony and..” he broke off as all the hot drinks suddenly went flying across the jet and smashed against the wall spilling the contents down onto the floor in a messy puddle

“Fuck Stark!” Wanda roared, red mist surrounded her and her face was twisted in a mark of ugly fury, “He deserves what has happened to him, let him suffer!”

“No on deserves this” Sam growled at Wanda as he rose from his seat to go and clean up the mess she’d made

“He’s a murderer!”

“And so are you!” Natasha snarled turning her temper on Wanda at last, “How many people have you killed, wilfully killed Wanda? A dozen, two dozen, a hundred? Those poor bastards in Largos weren’t your first and we all know it, Stark may have taken lives, but only in the defence of himself and others, can you say the same?”

Wanda glared at Natasha, her eyes darkening even more, “His weapons killed millions!” she hissed sounding like a snake spitting

“The weapons he sold himself were to the US government and were used on the enemies of America. They were used on the Taliban, Al Qaeda, terrorists, mass murderers themselves, the kind that would strap bombs to the bodies of children they had abducted off the streets and then sent into bases to kill as many as possible. The other weapons, the ones that were used on Sokovia? They were illegally sold by a man called Obadiah Stane, the best friend of Tony’s Father, his God Father. He betrayed Tony, tried to have him assassinated, when that didn’t work he tried to kill him himself, Tony killed Stane, and nearly died doing so”

“It doesn’t mean he’s innocent!” Wanda insisted refusing to see reason

“No one is innocent Wanda, not really, we are all guilty of something one way or another. You and I? we are murderers, Tony Stark would include himself in that, with humility, Barnes too is a murderer, and so is Wilson, so is Steve, we are all murderers, we have all taken lives, and we can say it was self defence or doing our duty or for the greater good, but in the end, in the eyes of God? It is still murder, and nothing can change that”

Natasha turned away from a still seething Wanda and looked to Steve

“You want to ease your conscience by trying to repair what you have done to Tony?” she asked
though it was not really a question, “It won’t work Steve, even if, by some miracle Tony managed to
survive the stress the serum would put on his already damaged body, he would never forgive you for
nearly killing him anyway, besides which it couldn’t be done”

“What? Why not?” Steve demanded

“Extremis” Natasha replied, “He used a very small amount to repair the damage to his heart from the
shrapnel so he could have the arc reactor removed. He would not allow a full dose to be given to him
and has since had it put on his medical files along side a DNR order that he is under no
circumstances to receive any kind of experimental treatments and/or enhancements”

Steve slumped down in his seat looking defeated, “Couldn’t his next of kin make the decision to
have the order ignored?” he asked

Natasha shrugged, “I doubt very much that Pepper or Rhodey would go against Tony’s request in
this matter”

Steve crumpled further, “I thought I could save him,” he whispered

“No Steve, you thought you could save your own soul,” Natasha corrected coldly, “But its purity,
much like Tony Stark is gone, and there nothing that can change that”.

*****

Buried deep beneath the sands of a long gone kingdom, hidden away, in a tomb that lay concealed
beneath another tomb. With the entrances sealed by both magic and locks.

There, forgotten by history, forgotten by man, forgotten by all, laying in the cupped hands of golden
statue of an ancient Goddess, lay a single solitary gem.

The gem was about the size of a walnut, oval in shape, and clear at first glance. But then, upon closer
inspection it appeared to pulse and surge with a thousand different colours, shades that were beyond
description and imagination. They rippled and flowed like the fast running waters in a river, the
vibrant energy that emanated from the gem seemed rhythmic, the steady beat of a heart.

For two thousand years this gem had remained hidden from the world. Kept safe in the hands of the
ancient Goddess who’s hands would only yield the gem to one to whom the gem belonged.

Only their blood could unseal the doors that lead into the hidden tomb, only their soul was linked to
the gem that was safe guarded from all, only they would have the power to wield the gem and bend
it to their will.

This was the Seventh Stone, the final stone that completed the infinity stones, The Stone of Time,
Space.

This was The Stone of Unity.

The Stone of Unity was the last created at the beginning of the universe, the most complete, the most
complex, and the most dangerous of all.

For the Stone of Unity was connected to all six stones, was connected to everything in the universe,
every single molecule.

The Stone could both create and destroy, give life and take it away, it was everything and it was nothing.

Most importantly the stone was not merely an object, the stone was alive and waiting for its bearer to return.
New York

Eighteen months had gone by since Siberia.

Some things had changed, some things had stayed the same.

Secretary Ross finally came unstuck, The Bat of Gotham had taken it upon himself to look into the Man and everything he did. Picking up where Tony had left off.

It had taken him a long time to gather the evidence, he’d had to tread carefully, his usual style of hit first and ask questions later wouldn’t work when dealing with someone who had so much political power, he needed to tread more carefully, find cold hard facts he could bring before the authorities that could not be dismissed despite them being collected by a vigilante.

While it was tedious work, and sometimes disheartening, he had done it, had presented the President with enough evidence to have Ross strung up three times over!

The president had wasted no time in having Ross arrested and stripped of his position and all privileges, including his sizable military pension on charges of Terrorism and High Treason.

Any and all of Ross’s involvement in The Accords was subsequently called into question, a complete denial of Ross’s demands for a Superhero registration act, and a thorough rethinking and rewrite of the Accords was to follow.

T’Challa was himself working with the committee to make the Accords fairer for all, including mutants and enhanced individuals.

Bucky too put his weight behind the accords, offering his own thoughts and ideas for them.

Bucky’s case was also being reopened and looked into, by Accords lawyers, the UN, and the American based justice department.

With all the evidence of what had been done to him, what he had suffered, and his genuine contrition for what he had done while he was the Winter Soldier, as well as his willingness to under go psychotherapy to break the conditioning and eliminate the trigger works, it was decided that he be given a full acquittal on the ground of diminished responsibility.

He was also decorated for bravery, and granted military backpay from 1943 which amounted to several million with adjustments for inflation, and to Bucky’s immense surprise, a full Military pension!

As a free man he could return to the state whenever he wanted. However, he chose to remain in Wakanda, having fallen in love with the beauty of the country, and the safety he had there. While he had made excellent progress with the Doctors he was not completely “Cured” and didn’t like risking being triggered and hurting someone.

However, there was one trip to America he insisted on making.
He went to see Tony.

Bruce had been reluctant to allow Bucky access to Tony at first, Rhodey and Pepper too. It had taken several conversation between them and T’Challa, and Bucky himself, but eventually they all agreed, on the understanding that Bruce be present for the visit as he had been when Clint had visited.

Bucky agreed to the terms and flew over to New York with T’Challa, staying in the Wakandan Embassy.

From there he was picked up by Bruce and driven to the hospital after he’d settled in.

“Thank you for this,” he said drumming his fingers on his knee. While Shuri had designed him a new arm he preferred not to use it save when he absolutely had to, he had too many memories of using the metal arm Hydra had given him, to kill. Having no arm there was another way of separating himself from that.

“You’re welcome,” Bruce said glancing briefly over at Bucky

“Has, uh, there been any change?” Bucky asked, he’d seen news reports and gossip rag articles about Tony’s condition, but he didn’t truly understand it that well, there were too many modern medical terms that meant nothing to him, and he hadn’t wanted to impose on Shuri or T’Challa for explanations.

“No change,” Bruce replied, “His bones have healed of course, but his brain activity is still no more than it was eighteen months ago.”

“I’m sorry,” Bucky whispered looking down at his knees, “I know it doesn’t change anything, I wish it could, I wish I could go back to Siberia and stop Steve, even if it meant that I had to let Stark kill me.”

“Tony wouldn’t have killed you.” Bruce said with utter certainty in his voice, “If he’d wanted you dead, really wanted you dead, then he could have killed you without even trying, Rogers too,” he looked over at Bucky who’d lifted his head to look at him, “Do you know how much power his suit contained, how much damage it was capable of?”

“I can make a guess,” Bucky said and rubbed at the stump where his arm should be

“Well, one single shot from his repulsors would have blown off your heads, but he never took a head shot, never truly went in for the kill.”

Bucky sucked in his bottom lip, he remembered the fight all too well, Tony coming at him like a fury, hellbent on avenging his parents, and who could blame him? Who wouldn’t want to rip apart their parents murderer. Yes Bucky had not truly been responsible for his actions, he’d been a puppet on a string being pulled by Hydra. But Tony had just seen his parents being murdered by Bucky, to accept that it wasn’t Bucky’s fault was something that would take a clarity of thought that he simply was not capable of when he was suffering shock and grief.

If Steve had given him time, had told him his suspicions when he’d first found out about the Stark’s then Tony would have had time to process the information, to grieve and get over his anger before he faced Bucky in person.
Instead he’d had to deal with everything in a matter of minutes on top of seeing his best friend be maimed for life just hours earlier and been stabbed in the back by Romanoff once again. Naturally and inevitably he’d been unable to cope with any of it and had lashed out as any wounded beast would.

The rest of the car drive passed in silence, and Bucky was lost in thought of Siberia, of Steve, of the past, wondering where it had all gone wrong.

*****

The Nurses and Doctors all greeted Bruce by name now, as they did Pepper and Rhodey, having grown use to their presence in the hospital. At least once a week they would go to see Tony, to talk to him, read to him, hold his hands, and wish for just the slightest sign that there was life left within him.

The worst times had been when his eyes had opened, or when his hands and feet had moved.

Muscular spasms. Nothing special, nothing to even remotely suggest that he was consciously moving, just a spasm. But when they first saw these things, when they first happened, for a brief and tragic moment they all hoped that just maybe Tony was coming back to them.

But of course he was not, and that hope died once again.

Bucky wasn’t sure what he expected when he stepped into the hospital room, but the sight of Tony on the hospital bed, attached to machines that were keeping him alive still brought a gasp from his mouth.

Tony didn’t look like the man he’d met in Germany, or in Siberia.

His hair was longer, much longer, it was collar length now, dark messy curls streaked with grey that seemed to look more like deliberate high lights than signs of aging.

His face was far sharper, cheek bones and jaw now very prominent, his eyes looking sunken and shadowed.

He was pale, a lack of daylight had robbed his skin of his tan, leaving him pasty and sickly looking.

He had lost a lot of weight, too much, he never had any to lose anyway and now he was as skinny as Steve had been before the serum.

He looked like a fragile and delicate doll in the bed, not a grown man who’d saved the world more than once.

Bucky wet his lips and drew closer to the bed, he began to reach out to take Tony’s hand but stopped himself before he did.

“Hello Tony,” he said his voice uncertain and shaking, “I hope you don’t mind me calling you Tony, Mr Stark seems too impersonal, and I know you and me haven’t really met, not…well, I would have liked a better meeting, like to get to know you. I knew your Father’s pretty well back in the war and I
am so sorry for what happened to him, to your Mother. I wish I could go back in time and change it, I wish I could change a lot of things but I don’t have that power, no one does”

Bruce watched Bucky from the door, listening to him talk, stilted at first, full of apologies and contrition, but slowly gaining confidence and talking to Tony about what he liked about the Twenty First century, about Wakanda, how much he was appreciating all T’Challa and his Sister Shuri had done for him, how fascinated he was by the new technologies in the world that ahd never even been dreamed of back in the forties.

Had things been different then Bruce was sure that Tony and Bucky would have got on like a house on fire, probably to the despair of all around them!

He sighed deeply, his eyes once again drawn to the ring on Tony’s hand wondering if it would ever be more than a symbol of what could have been, and wishing like Bucky that he could turn the clock back and change the past.

*****

Tony lay in his bed in the dark, the hospital room lit only by the lights from the monitors around the bed.
Outside the hospital a storm raged, thunder roaring overhead, lightning flashing across the sky, and rain beating down so hard it sounded like stones against the windows.

This was not the only storm in the galaxy, or the universe. Similar storms raged through out the cosmos, nature itself weeping and raging in fury and grief for what was occurring, the unnatural destruction of an entire planet and the capture of an Infinity Stone.

Behind his eyelids Tony’s eyes moved rapidly. Lines and furrows appeared on his forehead and between his eyes. His fingers began twitching and moving as did his toes. Slowly at first his heartrate began to pick up, going from the steady if slow forty eight beats per minute to a very rapid one hundred and five!

Alarms began to blare and both Doctors and nurses rushed into the room to check on him.

Across the Galaxy Thanos smiled, his eyes brimming with insanity as he placed the Power Stone into the infinity gauntlet gaining it’s power and sending out an surge of energy across the entire cosmos, passing through each and every Infinity stone before finally coming to rest inside The Stone of Unity.

The stone of Unity glowed and shone, pulsing with supernatural and natural energy which it channelled in an almost blinding stream of white light.

In New York for a single split second everyone was dazzled by the blinding flash of lightning that shot across the entire night sky with an almost deafening clap of thunder that seemed to shake the entire city!
In the hospital Tony’s rapid heartbeat suddenly dropped, his heart stilling for a long and chilling moment, then, with an enormous inhale his eyes snapped open and he tried to sit up!
Chapter 8

A dozen voices filled his ears at once, people shouting orders, people taking the Lords name in vain, people swearing! Tony couldn’t make sense of it, didn’t know where he was or what he was doing there. He tried to sit up but found himself struggling against hands on his shoulders, forcing him to stay laying down, and there was something down his throat!

Panic took Tony then, he tried to cry out, tried to spit the thing from his throat but couldn’t get rid of it!

“Take it easy Mr Stark.” Someone said, and there was someone looming over him, someone in a white overcoat, a Doctor? He turned to a woman dressed in scrubs besides him, “Lets get the tube out.” He said to her, she nodded her head and reached out to Tony, peeling the tape from about his mouth that had been holding the tube in place.

With great care the Doctor slowly removed the tube from Tony’s throat resulting in him coughing and retching, he would have vomited but there was nothing in his stomach to bring up.

“Just try and relax Mr Stark, I know you’re very confused but I can assure you, you are perfectly safe” the Doctor said to him as Tony panted, catching his breath

“Where…?” Tony asked, his voice was so faint, so hoarse, and it was a struggle to get the words out, to make his mouth work how he wanted it to, “Where….M’I?” he managed to get out

“You are in Hospital Mr Stark,” the Doctor said, “In New York, you’ve been here for a long time, you’ve been very ill”

Tony frowned, trying to make sense of that. The last thing he remembered was Siberia, the stars and the snow, he’d been dying there, his heart failing, lungs filling with blood.

“Get an MRI scan set up, and a CT, I want a full blood screen run, and an EKG,” the Doctor ordered before looking back to Tony, “Can you tell me your full name?” he asked

“Tony,” Tony managed to whisper, he wet his lips, or at least tried to, a Nurse brought a cup of water with a straw to his lips so he could drink, the water was a God send to his parched throat and Tony drank greedily to ease his thirst.

“Anthony,” he answered as soon as the cup was empty, “Anthony Edward Stark.”

The Doctor smiled, “Very good, and your date of birth?”

“Twenty ninth of May 1970.”

“Place of birth?”

“Long Island, New York.”

The Doctor beamed at Tony as if he’d just solved some kind of complex equation rather than answer a few simple questions, “Absolutely incredible,” he murmured, “Just incredible!”

Tony had never been the most patient of men, and he scowled at the Doctor, clearing his throat and trying to make himself speak above a whisper.

“What the fuck is going on?.”
The nurses, three of them, all looked to the Doctor expectantly, he sighed, taking the latex gloves of
his hands and ran one over his faces, “That is going to take some explaining, Mr Stark,” he said,
“You see, you’ve been a deep coma for the last eighteen months.”

*****

Phone calls in the middle of the night were rarely if ever a good thing. Generally they only brought
bad news. Tonight however was the exception.

Bruce was out of his bed and throwing on clothes in less than half a minute on hearing the Doctor
telling him that Tony had inexplicably woken up!

Rhodes had also been informed, as had Pepper as they were also listed as next of kin.

While he would normally have spoken to Dick himself, Bruce left it to Alfred to call him and let him
know what was happening, and the Spider Kid.

With the drive to New York being several hours long, Bruce took one of Wayne Industries
helicopters, paying the pilot triple over time to get him to the hospital as fast as he could.

He had no idea what he was expecting to find in the hospital, no idea what state Tony would be in,
all he could think about was his desperation to get to him.
He was the first to arrive, Rhodie and Pepper were not at the hospital yet. Though plenty of Press
were gathered outside in the car park, or so Bruce saw from the helipad he landed on.
Obviously someone in the hospital had already leaked the story of Tony’s waking up, no doubt for a
substantial pay off, which would mean Hospital security would be in over drive trying to prevent
them from getting inside to get pictures of Tony.

Bruce’s heart was beating so hard that he could hear the blood rushing past his ears as he entered the
hospital. Following the same path he had been taking for months, he went down familiar halls to
Tony’s room, pausing on the threshold with uncertainty.

What if Tony was impaired, what if he had no idea who Bruce was, who he was himself?

Bruce closed his eyes and grit his teeth at the thought. Tony in such a state would be horrific, it
would be worse than mourning his death, because the Tony he had loved would be gone, and in his
place would be a broken shell, a mockery of who he had been.

But, it would still be Tony, the man he had loved for nearly thirty years. Broken or not, and Bruce
would not turn his back on him in his hour of need.

Summoning his courage Bruce pushed the door open and went into the room.

Tony was laying on the bed, his back was too the door when Bruce walked in, but he turned to see
who it was and a smile spread over his too pale face.

“Rue!”
“Tonio!” the words might have been whispered but they could have been screamed for the force of the passion behind them. Bruce crossed the room in two large strides and slid onto the bed, sweeping Tony into his arms, holding him as tight as he dared, but Tony was so thin, so fragile that Bruce feared he might break if he squeezed a little too tight.

Tony too wanted to hold Bruce tight, but his arms, all of his muscles were too weak, too wasted from weight loss and disuse, and his bones ached just from this little movement alone.

“Jesus Tony!” Bruce whispered into his hair, and there was something wet on Tony’s shoulder, tears, Bruce was crying, he was actually crying!

“Rue?” Tony whispered, trying to reach up with horribly shaky his hands to cup Bruce’s face, but Bruce held him tighter, burying his face in Tony’s hair and the juncture of his neck,

“I thought I’d lost you!” he moaned, “I thought that was it, that I’d never get a chance to tell you how much I love you!”

Tony let out choked sob himself, he tried to hold back the tears but they burst forth, spilling down his cheeks anyway. Screwing his face up he leaned his head forward and rested it on Bruce’s shoulder feeling the shudders of Bruce’s inhales and exhales against his emaciated body and fisted Bruce’s shirt in his fingers, gripping as tight as he could to him as if Bruce were his life line.

After several minutes Bruce’s tears subsided and he was able to sit up and gaze at Tony, take in his gaunt and too pale features with a painful twist in his stomach. He needed to gain weight, a lot of weight. But his eyes, those beautiful chocolate eyes, they were shining as brightly as the stars, if Bruce were not mistaken he would swear that there was an ethereal glow to them, a sparkle and a shimmer flickering in the pupils.

“I can hardly believe it!” he whispered, reaching out and pushing Tony’s hair back from his face, “They said…, there was no hope, that you would never wake up!”

Tony nodded, “So the Doctor said.”

“Have they told you anything else?” Bruce asked, but before Tony could reply, the door to his room opened and Pepper burst in, Rhodey behind her in his wheel chair.

“Ohmygod!” Pepper cried bursting into tears as she all but flew across the room and wrapped her arms about Tony, kissing his cheeks, “You’re okay, you’re really okay!” she whispered

“I am Pep,” Tony said giving her a smile, his expression turned to one of dismay when he saw Rhodey in the wheelchair, “Rhodeybear!”

“Tones!” Rhodey sighed, “I swear you’ve taken at least twenty years off my life and cost me even more hair colour if not hair itself! Thanks to you I’m aging prematurely!”

For the second time that night Tony burst into tears horrifying the ex-colonel and shocking both Pepper and Bruce as Tony was not someone who was prone to such displays of emotion.

“I’m so sorry!” Tony wept, and to everyone’s horror scrambled from the bed, his legs giving out from under him so he fell to the ground on his knees and flung himself at Rhodey, burying his face in his lap mumbling apologies as he gripped Rhodey’s hands

“Tony man, Jesus it’s okay!” Rhodey said prying one hand free which he tried to use to lift Tony’s
head, but Tony refused and just buried his face deeper into Rhodey’s lap.

Bruce slid off the bed looking ready to lift Tony back up but paused and gazed at Pepper who was equally as bewildered,

“Maybe I should get a Doctor?” she asked uncertainly

“Not yet,” Bruce said, there would be Doctor’s enough in here soon and they’d be lucky to get a moment with Tony when all the tests started.

“C’mon Tones don’t do this,” Rhodey said stroking Tony’s hair and finally succeeding in getting the distraught Billionaire to look up at him, his eyes red and face streaked with tears, “That’s better,” Rhodey said running his thumbs over Tony’s cheeks to dry the tears, “Now what’s this all about?”

“My fault!” Tony whispered, his eyes running over Rhodey’s broken body

“No Tony, non of this is your fault” Bruce growled

“It sure as hell isn’t” Rhodey agreed, he took Tony’s chin between his thumb and forefinger “You aren’t to blame for this, if anyone is to blame its that Witch and Captain Fuckwit, not you Tony, so don’t beat yourself up about it please.”

“But…,”

“No buts Tony, and that’s an order!”

Tony sniffed and wiped his nose on the back of his arm, “I don’t take orders!”

The familiar snark in the tone brought smiles to his three friends faces, he might be over whelmed, he might be fragile and delicate right now, but Tony was not broken, and all the rest could be healed over time.

“C’mon,” Bruce said taking hold of Tony carefully so as not to bruise him, “Off the floor and back to bed,”

“Yes, you’re making the place look untidy!” Pepper scolded in a familiar teasing tone that brought a weak smile from Tony as he was lain on the bed by Bruce, he went to hold out his hand for her to take it only to pause as he noticed the ring upon it, on his ring finger

“Um, have I missed something?” he asked looking to Bruce with a frown and then back to the ring, “Are we engaged?”

*****

Scotland

“Guys get in here!”

Sam’s bellow brought Steve, Wanda, and Natasha running into the living room of the small farm house they were staying in on the outskirts of Aberdeen in the highlands.
On the TV the news was on, with a breaking story from New York that had all of them gazing in shock

‘After eighteen months in a coma with no hope of recovery, Tony Stark has once again done the impossible, and has awoken from his coma!’ the spokeswoman said, ‘There has been no word from Stark Industries, nor any from the hospital in regards to Tony’s condition as of yet, but Bruce Wayne, Pepper Potts, and James Rhodes have arrived at the hospital and are believed to be at Tony’s bedside….’

“My God!” Natasha breathed, “He’s done it again, risen from the ashes just like the phoenix!”

“He’s a cockroach!” Wanda spat scowling at the TV “He’ll survive anything!”

Steve said nothing, he couldn’t, his throat was too tight with emotion. Tony was awake, he was actually awake and had come back to them. A small smile curved his lips, the first one in months, Tony was back, now everything would be alright.
Chapter 9

Tony didn’t want to go to sleep. Having spent eighteen months in a coma it was more than understandable why he would have reservations about going to sleep, but his body was exhausted and after a few hours of being awake, seeing his friends and family, being taken for every test imaginable and then some, he just couldn’t keep his eyes open any longer.

Rather than the dreamless sleep he’d been in for so many months Tony found himself in an incredibly vivid dream, one that he felt he was conscious in rather than just dreaming. He saw the yellow sands of a desert, could feel the burning heat of the sun on the back of his bare arms and neck, feel it beating down on his head. Could smell the oil of lamps burning, a sweet heady aroma of scented oils. The skin of his face felt slick as if he were wearing make-up, a heavy amount around his eyes.

Looking down at himself he saw that he was wearing some kind of linen skirt, yet it wasn’t a skirt, not like any that would be worn today, it was pleated and high waisted and secured there with a broad leather belt that was studded with jewels, jade, jasper, and amber, over his shoulders and down his naked chest he wore a Gorgerine of gold that shone brilliant in the sunlight. The gorgerine were exclusive to ancient Egypt, the heavy metal disks that formed an elaborate piece of jewellery worn over the shoulders and down the chest.

His skin was golden to look at. A dark tan than the one he generally sported, and henna was painted in elaborate designs down his arms and over his hands, one of which, the left one sported some kind of eternity bracelet, yet Tony had never seen an eternity bracelet like that before. Usually they were made from thin strips of silver, gold, or platinum with a thin ring that was attached via the chain that went over the hand to the bracelet about the wrist.

This however was made of much thicker chains of metal, gold definitely, with a solid two inch wrist cuff and three rings circling his thumb, middle, and little fingers from the chains that linked to a circular disk in the back of hand where the most astonishing jewel he had ever seen rested.

As soon as Tony’s eyes looked at the jewel he couldn’t look away. It was hypnotic, captivating, beautiful, amazing. It seemed thrum with energy, a steady beat that matched the rhythmic pulsing of his heart.

Tony brought his hand up to look at the jewel closer and suddenly his vision became blurred, he was speeding across the desert, spiralling through the air at impossible speeds, then he was plunging down and down, deep beneath the sands of Egypt into a tomb where an Ancient Goddess held the precious jewel in her protective and sacred hands.

A name was whispered in his ears, whispers that grew progressively louder under the voice was shouting “Amenken!”

With jolt Tony awoke in his hospital bed panting and heart racing. He looked about the darkened room half expecting to see Egyptian artefacts laying around, and for his arms to be covered in henna tattoos!

“Just a dream!” he murmured to himself laying back against the pillows, “Just a dream.”

Yet, even as he said it he did not fully believe it. He had never had a dream like that in his life, never
so detailed or vivid that he could still smell the scented oils in his nostrils, taste the beer and coarse
grained bread in his mouth, feel the hot desert sands beneath his feet.
“Amenken!”

Tony jumped and looked about the hospital room to see who or what could have whispered the
name, but there was no one and nothing there.

Turning over onto his side Tony deliberately shut his eyes tight, forcing himself not to over think this
or let himself be spooked. He’d just come out of a coma, had God knows what drugs in his system, it
would not be unexpected for him to hallucinate a little from all that, it didn’t mean he was going mad
or there was something weird going on, all he needed to do was go back to sleep and everything
would be fine.

Tony just about managed to convince himself of this as he slowly let his body relax again when a
warm breeze from no where floated over him bringing the scent of sandlewood and perfumed oils.

*****

After the initial elation Tony’s return to consciousness brought, reality quickly set in.

The Doctors spent the better part of two days running every kind of test there was, from scans to
blood tests, to EKG and ocular exams!

It was no surprise that on top of all that Tony was also given a psychiatric evaluation, during which,
having been denied his beloved coffee since he’d awoken as the Doctors stated the caffeine may
have a detrimental effect on him, Tony’s acid tongue reduced the shrink to tears and had him
scuttling from the room with his tail between his legs!

The Doctor’s wisely allowed him a few cups of coffee a day after that, and kept the shrinks well and
truly from his door!

The tests however soon revealed the state that Tony was in, and it wasn’t good news.

By some miracle that no one was able to explain, he had absolutely no brain damage at all, there was
not a single lesion or scar on his brain, no sign he’d ever suffered a bleed there or had surgery at all.

How this was possible the Doctor’s couldn’t fathom, Tony’s abrupt recovery defied all medical odds,
yet he was completely compos mentis and his IQ was as high as ever.

That was as far as the good news went though.

While his brain might have healed, the rest of his body was not so lucky.

He was very nearly three stone under weight. Had lost all of his muscle mass and his fats stores
leaving him with nothing but delicate skin over his far too prominent bones, and they too were not in
a good way, his skeletal structure had been thinned and leached over the past eighteen months
leaving him at risk of fractures that would normally only effected the very old with osteoporosis
or someone with brittle bone disease. His immune system was shot to hell, heart and lungs damaged
with scar tissue that was going to be an on going problem for the rest of his life.
His limbs were wasted from lack of use, his physical strength and endurance greatly reduced.

He was dangerously low in iron, sodium, and many other vitamins and minerals that were going to require supplements for a long time to come.

A nutritionist had already been put on the case and had Tony placed on a high protein, complex carbohydrate, iron and calcium rich diet to start trying to repair the damage.

However, Tony’s stomach had shrunken over the past eighteen months, going from the normal fist size to just half that, so large meals were not an option lest he vomit up what he was eating and that wouldn’t help him in the least.

Naturally when he heard he had to gain weight he ordered two pepperoni pizzas with extra cheese, garlic bread, mozzarella sticks, wedges, and coleslaw to be brought to his room, along with hot chocolate fudge brownies smothered in ice cream and caramel syrup!

While the Nutritionist had laughed at this she had also made it very clear that he needed to steer clear of the greasy and sugar loaded junk food he loved as he would get little to no nutrients from it and it was likely to be too rich for his body to handle anyway.

Tony’s pout following that would have done a five year old proud! And he complained loudly about the “Boring slop” the hospital had him served for meals, along with what he described as over sweetened, slimy, goo that were in fact meal supplement drinks for him to consume twice a day.

Bruce himself took a single mouthful and spat it out in disgust and began to bring in Tony’s beloved smoothies, made by himself or Alfred since there was no telling what Tony’s bots would put in if left unchecked!

After the first night, Peter, Dick, and Vision came to see Tony, Dick and Peter both hugging him as tightly as they dared while Vision held back a little more reserved than the boys but no less thankful to see him alive and well once more, or as well as could be expected.

They all congratulated him over his and Bruce’s engagement, which Tony declared had the lousiest proposal in history!

“What do you want, me to go down on one knee with a roses in his hands?” Bruce demanded in exasperation

“Of course!” Tony said as he ran his hands down Jet’s sleek back. The damn cat had curled itself up in Tony’s lap and was purring quite happily and Bruce was in no way jealous of the Animal, even when it rolled over to present its belly for a rub!

Having heard of the cat Tony had demanded that he be brought in so he could meet him properly and had promptly fallen in love the second a cold wet nose and nuzzled into his hand.

“Your proposal was kind of sucky!” Dick offered as he lounged across the foot of Tony’s bed munching grapes that had meant to be for Tony but he and Peter were scoffing most of them, and throwing them at each other!

“You stay out of this, Brat!” Bruce grunted

“Yeah, don’t be a dick, Dick!” Peter snickered

“Bite Spiderbaby!”
Peter gave Dick a finger salute!

Dick returned the gesture in kind then turned to Bruce, “You could at least ask him properly you know, say the words at least!”

Bruce’s glare could have curdled milk! Sighing heavily he cleared his throat and climbed down onto one knee!

“Bruce!” Tony laughed, “I was only kidding!”

Bruce however wasn’t paying attention, “Anthony Edward Stark,” he said seriously, “Will you marry me?”

“Yes you big oaf now get up!” Tony laughed, grinning Bruce rose to his feet, crossed the room and kissed Tony and Peter and Dick clapped in approval, outside the door a couple of nurses gasped and grabbed their phones from their scrubs

“I think the press will soon know of this,” Vision stated dryly.

“Fuck ‘em!” Peter said then blushed, “Sorry!”

“Ah forget it kid, no one here cares if you drop an F-bomb or two!” Tony said waving it off, he opened his mouth to say something but the phone by his bed rang, “Who the hell is that?” he asked, “Aside from Pepper, Alfred, and Rhodey everyone I know is right here.”

He reached over and lifted the receiver placing it against his ear, “Hello?”, he froze as the person on the other end spoke

“Hello Tony,” Steve said.
Chapter 10

While she was not the best hacker in the world Natasha was still able to hack into the hospital’s systems and get Steve a direct phone line to Tony which he used.

He dithered at first debating over what to say to Tony, he knew he had to apologise, but he wasn’t sure what else to say, what could he say? Sorry I nearly killed you, I’m very relieved that I didn’t!? When he spoke to Sam about it, Sam said that perhaps he shouldn’t call at all, Tony was likely still in a poor state of health and needed peace and quiet not to be stressed out by Steve.

Natasha just shrugged and told him to explain the facts. That Stark had messed up and paid the price for it and now that he was awake it was time that he worked to make amends.

Wanda’s response was much the same, though she said that he didn’t deserve any apology from Steve, that he should tell him how lucky he was to still be breathing and to stop feeling sorry for himself and bring them home.

Steve really wished he could talk to Bucky. If anyone could understand him at the moment it would be Bucky because Bucky always understood him, always supported him. Well, until all this had happened, then Bucky had walked away from him, rejected him.

Steve still felt the sting from that, felt it like his skin had been slashed open. That pain was more raw and sharp than the pain of the guilt he felt over Tony. That was a dull and constant ache upon him, like he was carrying a heavy weight about with him all day every day.

He hoped that with this phone call he’d be able to shift the weight of that guilt at last and start to feel good about himself again.

Tony was known for many things but holding grudges was not one of them, so Steve was hopeful that Tony would forgive him and they could start moving on and fixing everything that had happened.

Finally plucking up the courage he dialled the number Natasha had given him and held his breath as he waited for the phone to be answered.

“Hello?” a slightly hoarse but beautifully familiar voice said

A smile broke out over Steve’s face, “Hello Tony.”

*****

New York
Tony froze as he heard Steve’s voice on the phone, immediately his hands began to shake and his breathing began to become rapid and shallow as panic hit him. Distantly he could hear Bruce saying something, Dick, Peter, and Vision all asking him something he couldn’t hear properly, he couldn’t focus on them, couldn’t see them properly, all he could see was Siberia.

He could see Steve on top of him, see him beat that damned shield down into his suit, ramming it into the arc reactor to smash it, he could feel the weight of the metal compressing down into his vulnerable chest, feel his ribs smashing under the blow, breaking inwards and slicing through his lungs. He could taste the blood in his mouth, feel the cold on his skin, that bone chilling cold that he seeped through his entire body, could see the bright stars in the black sky, the last thing he’d seen before everything had gone black.

As Tony fell into a panic attack or a flash back Bruce and everyone else reacted. Bruce snatched the phone from Tony’s limp hand while Vision moved to sit on the bed and began to talk to Tony slowly and calmly, Dick took Tony’s hands into his own and began to stroke his knuckles gently with his thumbs, and Peter, after being guided by Vision began to stroke Tony’s hair to soothe him.

“Tony?, Tony are you there?” a voice said into Bruce’s ear

“Who the hell is this?” he demanded looking at Tony worriedly, his face was pale and sweaty, his eyes brimming with tears as he continued to shake violently

“Who am I, who the hell are you?” the person asked sounding affronted

“Bruce Wayne, Tony’s Stark’s Fiancé, now who the fuck are you?” Bruce snarled

There came a cough, perhaps from shock, “Ah, Mr Wayne, this is Steve, umm, Captain Steve Rogers, Captain America...”

“I know who you are Mr Rogers,” Bruce ground out, emphasising the Mister instead of Captain, “How dare you call Tony, how in Gods name did you even get this number?”

“Mr Wayne I called because I need to speak to Tony....”

“What you need is of no concern. You have no business calling my Fiancé, you do not even have the right to speak his name after what you have done, do you understand that he nearly died because of you? That he is facing a life time of complications as a result of the coma you put him in?”

“He was trying to kill Bucky!”

“That is no excuse!” Bruce roared, “You hide the murder of his parents from him while you were living on his property, spending his money, eating the food and wearing the clothes he paid for, you lied to him day in day out, you let him find out what happened to his parents from a video just hours after he’d seen his best friend crippled for life and you’re surprised that he reacted badly, that he lashed out as any wounded beast would?”

By now Bruce’s voice could be heard all the way down the corridor he was shouting so loudly, the knuckles of his hand had become white with the grip he had on the phone.
The commotion had of course attracted attention from the medical staff and they had now taken charge of Tony’s panic attack, pushing the others away from him to administer oxygen via a mask and a sedative to calm him down.

With tears still running down his cheeks Tony slipped back into unconsciousness on the bed.

The sight of him like that, laying limp on the mattress was so like seeing him during the coma that it turned Bruce’s blood to ice.

“I know I need to apologise to him, that is what I was trying to do when you took the phone from him, now he might be your fiancé but he is my friend and I demand to speak to him right now!” Steve shouted into Bruce’s ear

“You will demand nothing from me Rogers!” Bruce bellowed with all the ferocity of an enraged dragon, “Just the sound of your voice has sent Tony into a panic attack so bad he’s had to be sedated, you are causing him nothing but distress which is all you have ever caused him. You might think of yourself as some kind of sainted hero but you are not, you are an arrogant, ignorant excuse for a man, a spoiled child who has never learned to take No for an answer or value any opinion but your own. You think you’re special because Erskine chose you to be his lab rat? He chose you because you had no one, you were an orphan without anyone to miss you if it all went wrong which had several times before. That serum didn’t make you more of a Man it made you less of one, a real Man with real strength would have found a way to use what skills he had, the way Tony has time and again, he doesn’t rely on some chemical to enhance him, all he needs is his beautiful mind, a mind you nearly destroyed. The world may need heroes who go above any beyond any duty, but it has no need of you and nineteen forties war time mentality of the ends justifying the means. The only person you think of, the only person you truly care about is yourself and your own ego. Now I suggest you crawl back down into whatever hole you and your merry band of fuckwits have been skulking in and remain there, because I swear if I ever hear from you again you will wish that you had died seventy years ago by the time I am done with you!”

Bruce ended the call and threw the phone against the wall where it shattered

“Damn that bastard!” he cursed, “Damn him to hell!”

“That’s too good for him!” Dick murmured while the consultant turned to Bruce with a frown

“Mr Wayne I understand you’re upset but…”

“But nothing!” Bruce snarled at him, “How in Gods name was Rogers able to get this number?” he demanded, “That number is meant to be restricted for a reason, that bastard calling Tony distressed him enough for you sedate him!”

The consultant held his hands up “I understand perfectly and I apologise..”

“Save your apologies they mean nothing to me,” Bruce snapped, “And you and your whole department will be hearing from my legal team over this matter, right now I intend to make arrangements to take Tony out of here, immediately.”

*****
Steve sat in stunned shock as Bruce Wayne chewed him out over the phone, no one had ever spoken to him like that before, ever given him such a dressing down, not even the insults Tony had flung at him back on the helicarrier had cut so deeply. He had never met Bruce Wayne, knew very little about him beyond what the press reported on him, but the man had torn him apart, verbally sunk blade after blade into Steve’s heart until it had been completely shredded leaving him with a gaping bloody wound in his chest cavity.

“How’d it go?” Natasha asked leaning against the door frame, one look at Steve’s face and she rolled her eyes, “Stark’s not worth your guilt Steve, whatever he said to you don’t take it…,” she paused as she murmured something she didn’t quite catch, “Sorry what?”

“I said that he didn’t say anything,” Steve repeated and looked at Natasha with hollow devastated eyes, “He went into a panic attack, I caused him to have a panic attack so severe he had to be sedated!”

Steve could hardly believe it himself, didn’t want to believe that he could have such an effect on someone, especially not Tony.

“He was always dramatic,” Natasha said dismissively, “Likes to put on a big show to win sympathy.”

Steve shook his head, “You don’t understand, I could hear him breathing over the phone it was so loud and ragged, then his…,” he had to force out the word, “Fiancé lay into me,”

Natasha raised an eyebrow, “Fiancé?” she repeated

“Bruce Wayne”

Now Natasha snorted humourlessly, “Take no notice of anything he says, he’s as bad as Stark only more of an air head, the two of them have been fucking, fighting, fucking, and fighting for years, I doubt they’ll even get married and if they do it’ll be over in a matter of months and they’ll fill the press with stories of their messy divorce,” she rolled her eyes, “Don’t let that panic attack fool you, Stark was probably putting on an act, and if he wasn’t, maybe his guilty conscience is finally kicking in and he’ll start to fix the mess he’s created once again.”

“Not just his mess,” Steve whispered looking down at the phone in his lap “I didn’t even get to say sorry.”

“He doesn’t deserve it, Stark’s the one who owes us apologies not the other way around,” Natasha stated, “Now, pull yourself together, we’ve got training in an hour and Wanda still needs help learning self defence without her powers.”

“Okay,” Steve forced a smile to his face, “I’ll be there.”

As soon as Natasha left the room he flopped on the bunk and closed his eyes covering them with his hands. It didn’t matter what she said, he knew Tony hadn’t been faking that for attention, had been truly frightened, of him, just hearing his voice had terrified Tony, something he had never wanted to do, and yet it had happened, just like Siberia had happened. The guilt upon him that he’d hoped to shift had not decreased in fact it seemed to have grown worse, and Steve didn’t think there was any hope for it ever getting better.
Of course taking Tony out of the hospital wasn’t a simple matter. He was still seriously ill, he needed round the clock care that Bruce couldn’t provide for him as he did not have medical training.

So the first thing he had to do was hire private nurses to care for Tony, get medical equipment installed in his bedroom, and arrange an air lift from New York to the manor.

Tony was in not state to have a lengthy car journey so a helicopter ride was the best way to get him there.

As he had threatened the Consultant he did indeed have his entire legal department descend upon the hospital to find out precisely why Steve Rogers had been able to get the phone number and call Tony when it was meant to be a private number. They were also joined by Stark Industries Lawyers who would be looking into all the medical staff who had access to Tony to find out who’d been leaking information to the press and would be taking legal action against them too!

It took five days but sure enough Bruce managed to get Tony released into his care, even though the Doctors advised against it.

“Are you sure about this babe?” Tony asked as Bruce carried him bridal style up to the helipad on the hospital roof, “Strangers in your house, your room being messed up, me being all…fucked up?”

By fucked up he meant the frequent nightmares and panic attacks that had followed since Steve Rogers phone call, their fight in Siberia was haunting him, he kept on seeing Steve beating that shield into him, kept seeing the man’s murderous expression as he brought it down onto his chest to kill him.

Tony hated being weak and vulnerable, but that was precisely how he felt right now, unable to defend himself, unable to get out of bed and walk without assistance, frightened of his own shadow.

He didn’t want to be a burden to Bruce, wanted to be strong for him, to be the man Bruce fell in love with, not this frail imitation of himself.

God, Howard would have had a field day with this wouldn’t he? He’d always said Tony was weak, selfish, unworthy, and right now Tony was proving him right, had even made himself an enemy of Captain Fucking America! If Howard didn’t hate him before he sure as hell would now!

“I am sure Tony, I want you at home by my side,” Bruce assured him, with a determined look in his eyes that brooked no argument, “Its where you belong Tonio, I nearly lost you, and now I’ve got
you back I’m not letting anything come between us again.”

Bruce’s conviction warmed Tony and he couldn’t help but to smile and nod his head, relaxing in the taller man’s arms and rest his head against Bruce’s shoulder.

Maybe once he was away from the hospital things would be better, maybe he’d stop dreaming about Siberia, maybe just for once things would be alright.
Chapter 11

Sand was flying up in the air as they ran, it was getting into their eyes and the backs of their throats as they tore across the desert, heading for the ancient tomb.

“They are still following, I can see their torches!” the man beside Amenken said breathlessly, “You must use the stone, you must stop them before they destroy us all!”

“I can not, its power is too great, and Emperor Augustus must never get his hands upon it,” Amenken stated glancing back over his shoulder to the torches that were following them over the crest of the sand dunes, the banners of the legion flying high in the wind and the sound of the drums as they marched beating an ominous heartbeat.

“But Alexandria will fall, and our Queen will be dragged out and paraded as a captive of the Romans!”

“Alexandria fell the second our Queen spread her thighs for Caesar and then threw her lot in with that drunken fool Marc Antony,” Amenken said, “Egypt shall fall to Rome, but in time Rome too shall fall, nothing lasts forever, nothing but the Infinity Stones.”

He looked down at the stone on the back of his hand, the incandescent light filling his eyes with it’s ethereal beauty.

He paused only for a moment then looked to the man beside him, “We must hurry, we must seal the Stone of Unity where it can never be found again”

“Tony…”

“May no Man ever be fool enough to attempt to harness the power of her sister stones, or try to find her…”

“Tony!”

“May she rest in peace inside this tomb, for all eternity”

“Tony wake up!”

With a gasp and a hand clutched to his heart Tony awoke with a jolt to see Bruce staring down at him in concern, “I had that dream,” he gasped breathlessly, “Again!”

“Ancient Egypt?” Bruce asked, Since he had awoken from his coma Tony had been dreaming about Ancient Egypt and some strange stone almost every night, vivid detailed dreams that had him awakening shaken and expecting to see a desert around him, to have oil lamps burning.

“I must be going insane,” Tony whispered sitting up and running a hand through his hair, it was sweaty and his pajama vest was sticking to his back, “This is getting ridiculous.”

“You are not going mad,” Bruce said firmly

“What then?” Tony cried, “These dreams…,” he paused and frowned, “The infinity stones, it
involves in the infinity stones”

“Loki’s staff?”

“Yes, and the Tesseract, and that one that Thor tangled with in London,” Tony said frowning harder, “He said there were six, The Tesseract, the Mind Stone, the Reality Stone, and three others, The Soul Stone, The Power Stone, and The Time Stone.”

“And you’re dreaming about them?” Bruce asked, “Because that would make sense considering the fact you’ve dealt with them several times now, intimately in fact,”

“Yeah, and no, it…The Stone of Unity,” Tony looked at Bruce in confusion, “Thor never mentioned the Stone of Unity”

“It could be a figment of imagination,” Bruce suggested, “Your subconscious creating another stone out of the memories of the stones you encountered.”

That did make sense, Tony had to admit, but something in him just wasn’t convinced.

“Why do I keep dreaming about Egypt though, and this person, Amenken, there were no famous Pharaohs called that were there?”, Bruce opened his mouth to reply but Tony shook his head, “Wrong time period anyway, it was Cleopatra’s reign, and he wasn’t a Pharaoh, a priest maybe, the clothing looking too expensive to just a worker or a soldier, perhaps an alchemist or a merchant trader…”

“Honey?” Bruce said cutting in with a smile, “You’re rambling again,”

“I don’t ramble, I sometimes babble incoherently but I never ramble!” Tony protested

Bruce snorted and pulled back the bed covers, “How about we get your babbling self into the shower before your physio?”

Tony groaned, he was hating physio, he knew he had to do it if he wanted to walk more than ten paces without needing to sit down and rest but, that didn’t mean he didn’t hate it with a passion.

“Can’t we just veg out today?” he whined at Bruce, “Get pizza, popcorn, watch a few movies, Lethal Weapon, Die Hard, Jurassic World…, maybe some porn?”

Bruce rolled his eyes and scooped Tony up from the bed carrying him to the bathroom, “We’ll consider a movie fest after your physio, and pizza without cheese,”

“You can’t have pizza without cheese its inhumane!” Tony squawked.

*****

While Tony was enduring his daily physio Bruce decided to try and do some research.

A couple of dreams about Ancient Egypt could be coincidence, his imagination, his subconscious, but repetitive dreams about the same thing, or rather the same person in different situations in Ancient Egypt, that had to be something else.
He first googled the name Amenken which brought a list of ancient figures in Egypt and the meaning of the name, or rather where it had first derived from, but there was no one in Cleopatra's time with that particular name, at least no one that history had recorded.

“What precisely are you looking for Sir?” Alfred asked bringing him a cup of tea

“I’m not really sure to be honest,” Bruce sighed rubbing a hand over his face, “But something is going on with Tony, he keeps on having these recurrent dreams, almost every night and they get more detailed and intense each time,” lowering his hand he looked up at Alfred, “It took me nearly ten minutes to wake him this morning!”, the elder man’s eyes widened and his face showed the depth of his concern, “I was yelling at him and shaking him Alfred, no one could sleep through that, especially without drugs”

“Could it be an after effect of the coma?” Alfred suggested

“Who the hell knows?” Bruce exclaimed, “Tony waking up at all was impossible, for him to wake up and have no brain damage? That is completely unexplainable!” the Billionaire shook his head, “Nothing short of a miracle could have done this, nothing short of magic, and maybe that has something to do with Tony’s dreams, something supernatural,”

“Or scientific,” Alfred countered, “Maybe that serum he was injected with the remove the arc reactor, perhaps it had a delayed affect and healed the damage?”

“That wouldn’t explain the dreams though.” Bruce sighed and opened a new tab on his computer with the key words, Recurrent Dreams, this brought him over a thousand answers, “I need to narrow this down,” he muttered typing more words into google, Recurrent Dreams about Ancient times.

This again brought up many responses but one caught Bruce’s attention and he clicked on the website, “Past lives…,”

“That’s fiction,” Alfred said

Bruce chuckled, “So were Aliens then we had a couple of Asgardians landed on the planet and engaged in apocalyptic warfare!”

Alfred grunted and looked mulish

“Possible past lives, recalling memories from a past life through dreams, the dreams will be recurrent and vivid, you may recall your past name, your social position, your job, even family,” Bruce read out-loud, “How to tell this from other dreams is the details you will recall from this dream. They will not be vague or fade hours after waking but remain fresh in your mind, you will be able to recall tastes and smells that you have never experienced, the sights of places you have never been, you will recognize the style and condition of clothing, it’s worth, you will know things about the culture you have lived in, things that you could not possibly have known before…,”

Tony had said the clothing he’d been wearing was expensive, how could have known it was expensive? He’d spoken about the taste of beer back then, how it was cleaner, less artificial, how the coarse bread had left grains in the teeth which had led to many tooth and gum problems because they didn’t have the means to grind the grains finer. He’s spoken of the smell of perfumed oils burning, of the brilliant clarity of the night sky, how it had looked different back then, the cosmos having changed in the last few thousand years!

They were things Tony could not possibly have known, he had little to no interest in history, his focus was on the future not the past, he had never studied Ancient Egypt or the Ancient Romans beyond basic schooling yet he had been coming out with details that only someone with doctorate in
Egyptology and Ancient Rome could have known about.

“He knows his name,” Bruce said speaking more to himself than to Alfred, “He remembered his name, Amenken…,”

“Many people have experienced this phenomenon, but there is no genuine proof or way to prove this into fact,” Alfred read, “Sceptics still claim that this is just over active imagination, signs of mental disorders, or simple lying, but experts into this phenomenon claim otherwise and have done many case studies…,”

“If Tony did have a past life, in Cleopatras reign, was in fact this person Amenken then could the rest of the dream also be true?” Bruce mused aloud, “The Stone of Unity?”

“Stone of Unity?” Alfred asked, “Like those damn things that lunatic Asgardian brought to earth with him?”

“No, one or two were already here,” Bruce replied, “But yes he did bring one with him, the Mind Stone, The Stone of Unity though, that’s what Tony said he dreamed of, he saw it,” opening a third tab Bruce typed in the words Stone of Unity which brought him up nothing but Yellowstone Park, and United Nations, and some new age religious group that only want $250 for you to become an official member!

“What would Infinity Stone’s bring up?” he whispered typing it into the search engine,

*****

New York

Bleeker Street

Dr Stephen Strange was levitating thanks to the cloak that never left his side, while drinking a cup of lemon and ginger tea out of a delicate bone china cup.

He was semi meditating but was brought out of his almost trance like state when the alert on his laptop pinged.

Well, he might be a Sorcerer but it was hardly the dark ages anymore, hell even Karma Taj had WIFI!

Setting down his cup he got onto his feet and went over to the table unlocking the desktop and going into his internet alert. It was in a way like the mystical wards he had set up about the sanctuary, it was designed to alert him to searches on the internet in regards to mystical artefacts, incantations and spells beyond the kind you could find in books or sites on Wicca and Paganism. For the most part it was just curious people looking around, often teenagers and young adults. Sometimes it was actual magic users who were researching something and at that point Strange would offer his aid to them. Rarely it was something he had to worry about, someone looking to set themselves up as a new big bad, or open a gateway to hell, or summon something demonic, in those instances Strange had to
intervene to stop them before they got the chance to bring about the next apocalypse.

“Let’s see who’s looking to sell their soul to Satan today!” he murmured, the Cloak stroked at his cheek tickling his beard, “Stop that, you’re worse than a damn cat!” he scolded which earned him a slap against the backside! Damn thing was incorrigible!

Strange’s frown deepened as he traced the where the search had come from, or rather traced it as far as he could before the connection was cut, whomever was looking up Infinity Stone they had sophisticated technology and didn’t like their privacy being invaded.

“Now who could possibly have an interest in Infinity Stones, and have the technical know how to block my tracer?” he mused aloud, “Tony Fucking Stark!”.

Strange had never met Tony Stark in person. He’d heard of him of course, no one in the world hadn’t heard of him, the man was more famous than God!

Strange had half admired and half scorned the man over the years, he admired his brilliance, only a complete imbecile would not marvel at what Tony Stark could do, what he could build and create. The man’s mind was a rival to Strange’s own genius and that was saying something, he also admired Stark’s wit and ability to sass his way through life with a devil may care attitude.

What he scorned was Stark’s arrogance, but then, if he were being honest Strange was not one to talk about arrogance. His had cost him the use of his hands and his career as a surgeon, Stark’s had nearly cost him his life.

Correction, his arrogant belief that he could best a couple of Super Soldiers in a fight had nearly got him killed. It had put him in a coma for almost two years and yet somehow he was now awake with no brain damage, something Strange knew as a Neuro Surgeon was impossible, and as a Sorcerer he knew that the only way Stark had done this was with magic, or rather someone had used magic to heal him.

The question was Who, and Why, and did the infinity stones somehow tie into it, if so then how?

“That is four questions actually!” Strange said to himself and folded his arms over his chest, “Perhaps Mr Stark and I should have a conversation, face to face. If he is looking into Infinity Stones than I need to know why, and just how he came out of a coma when he was effective brain dead with absolutely no residual brain damage at all.”

The Cloak flapped against the back of his legs in agreement and Strange took out his sling ring opening a portal to where Tony Stark was.

****

Wayne Manor
The sound of screaming had Bruce and Alfred running to the gymnasium at top speed ready to do battle with whatever foe had decided to be suicidal enough to enter their property.

Upon arriving in the gym they found Tony’s physio unconscious on the mat having fainted, Tony sitting on the leg press where he had been lifting weights with the strength of his legs to rebuild the muscles in them.

Standing before him was a man in what looked to be some kind of tunic and a ludicrous cloak!

“Who the hell are you?” Bruce demanded, his fists clenched ready to fight

“Ah, Mr Wayne,” the man said with a smile that was equal parts pleasant and mocking, “Forgive me for the intrusion and allow me to introduce myself, “I am Dr Stephen Strange, Sorcerer Supreme, and I believe I maybe of assistance to Mr Stark here...”
Chapter 12

Bruce looked from the self proclaimed Sorcerer supreme to Tony, back again, then back at Tony, he rose his eyebrows and Tony shrugged his shoulders in a “Don’t look at me!” gesture.

On the floor at their feet Tony’s physio groaned and stirred as she began to become conscious again.

“Someone should probably help her up, get her a drink, maybe an anti-anxiety tablet?” Tony suggested.

“That would probably be a wise course of action,” Stephen said but made no move to actually do so.

Rolling his eyes Bruce crouched down beside the unfortunate woman and slowly helped her to sit up as she regained consciousness, “What happened?” she asked groggily.

“Mr Strangeness here dropped in unexpectedly!” Tony oh so helpfully informed her as he rose from the exercise equipment, using it for support as he did so, his limbs were shaking violently and it took him a moment to gain his equilibrium.

“It is Strange, Stark, Dr Strange!”


“Neurology actually!” Strange growled lifting his bearded chin arrogantly.

Suddenly Tony’s eyes widened, “Oh you’re that guy!” he said in sudden realization, “You had an accident or something, SI funded one of your surgeries, one of our experimental medical procedures using stem cells and bone marrow to promote healing in bone and nerve damage.”

Stephen smiled thinly, “Yes, it was one of many surgeries I underwent to repair the damage, sadly though it was not successful.”

Tony looked at him apologetically, “I’m sorry,”

“Don’t be,” Stephen said, “You were generous enough to wave the price of surgery in an attempt at repairing my hands, you couldn’t guarantee success. Besides my injuries led me to where I am now, where I belong.”

Tony smirked, “Which is playing dungeons and dragons with a cloak fetish?”, as if on que the Cloak of Levitation fluttered dangerously around as if it were offended.

“Calm down!” Stephen scolded the cloak.

“You talk to your cloak?” Bruce inquired slowly, he had taken the shaken Physio to the kitchen when he was certain this...person was not a threat to Tony, and left her in Alfred’s care, the Butler quickly setting about making hot sweet tea and pouring her a brandy to get over the shock.

Stephen gave Bruce a scathing look, “It is sentient!”

“Of course it is!” Bruce drawled, “Are you certain that your injury was to your hands and not your head!”

Stephen’s gaze turned positively acidic at this, “You’ll have to forgive Rue’s complete lack of manners, not only has he suffered many blows to head he spent a long time being raised by wolves...”
and has a protective streak the size of the grand canyon!” Tony informed Stephen

“Hey!” Bruce protested, Tony shrugged, it was true!

“Speak of head injuries, you have suffered an especially severe one recently,” Stephen said turning his focus back onto Tony, “One from which you should never have recovered. I may not be a practising surgeon anymore but I do know brain trauma and the kind you suffered? There is no coming back from that.”

“And yet,” Tony said spreading his arms wide as if to say “Here I am!”

“And yet here you are,” Stephen said, “Inexplicably fully recovered.”

“Not quite,” Bruce said moving to stand beside Tony, Stephen hadn’t made any threatening moves but he wasn’t taking any chances, especially since his attention seemed focused on Tony right now and in his current condition Tony wasn’t really able to defend himself.

“He’s recovered more than he should, more than is medically possible,” Stephen stated looking Tony over with his too piercing gaze that made Tony feel like he was being x-rayed, he shifted uncomfortably under the scrutiny and folded his arms over his chest, holding them tightly against himself in a self-hug, “There is only one explanation for your recovery Stark,” Stephen said, his eyes flicked to Bruce and then back again, “It would also explain why Mr Wayne was looking for information on The Infinity Stones!”

Bruce’s mouth dropped open, “How the fuck…?”

“You were looking up Infinity Stones?” Tony asked in surprise

Bruce looked a little guilty, “…I, I thought maybe I could find an explanation for your dreams,” he said helplessly, “I'm sorry to I didn’t find over much that could be considered factual…,”

“What dreams?” Strange asked

“None of your bastard business!” Bruce barked heatedly, “And you still haven’t explained how you knew about my looking into them, or why you would even be interested?”

Stephen straightened up, his aristocratic features becoming haughty, “It is my job to be concerned over such matters, Mr Wayne, any and all magic concerns me, and the infinity stones are not something that one plays around with.”

“Tell me about it,” Tony muttered thinking of the Mind Stone and the nightmare that was Ultron

Stephen softened a little at Tony’s expression, “I know you have some history with them yourself Stark, but what do they have to do with dreams?”

Tony shrugged helplessly, “I don’t know! They are just dreams, recurring dreams,”

“About the Infinity Stones?”

“Yes, no, I don’t know, it’s complicated!” Tony exclaimed, he rose a hand to his head which was beginning to ache

“It’s time you went for a lay down,” Bruce said putting an arm about Tony’s waist and supported his slight weight with far too much ease, “I trust you can see yourself out, Dr Strange?” it wasn’t really a question but a command, Stephen however refused it,
“I’m afraid I can not leave just yet, Mr Wayne, Stark’s recovery is a concern of mine and these dreams you speak of may well be related to that,”

Bruce opened his mouth to say something probably insulting but Tony spoke before he had a chance, “What do you mean?”

Stephen took a breath and looked at Tony very closely, “I do not know if you are aware of this or not, but your recovery from your injuries was not natural but supernatural in origin, I suspected as much but now I am certain of it, your aura has an innate almost incandescent shimmer to it, something I have never seen before, you are connected to something immeasurably powerful and ancient, it is a part of you and you a part of it, and I believe that IT is what is responsible for waking you from your coma.”

*****

After Stephen’s revelation the three men retired to Bruce’s large living room where Tony stretched out on the sofa, his legs across Bruce’s lap and head supported by several pillows.

Alfred, Rhodey, Pepper, Vision, Dick, and Peter had joined them at Bruce’s suggestion. If Stephen’s theory proved right then they would need support and help of all their family, so further explanations waited for everyone to arrive at Gotham.

During in the wait for the arrival Stephen explained to Bruce about the computer program he had set up to alert him when people were looking into magical objects and incantations of great power and how that had lead him to Gotham and Bruce’s doorstep.

Begrudgingly Bruce praised him on a very successful program and set about strengthening his fire walls with Tony throwing in suggestions for coding and complaining about Bruce not letting him do it or anything at all and how this “Take it easy” business was cruel and unusual punishment and that even people on death row got treated better!

Bruce, through years of experience of dealing with Tony’s dramatics ignored him completely!

Like any attention seeking, spoiled six year old brat when denied the attention they were looking for from one source turned is attention to Strange who was levitating above a plush arm chair sipping a cup of tea that had appeared from nowhere!

This naturally sparked a rant from Tony about Magic being nothing but fairy tale nonsense and violations of the laws of physics and how as a Man of Science, albeit medical science, Stephen should have known better than to start messing with such things!

This of course launched Stephen into a counter rant about how Magic had a scientific base but scientists were not yet enlightened enough to comprehend this, their argument raged on for hours with the two of ignoring everything that going on around them and didn’t even notice that everyone had arrived until Pepper shouted them into silence!

“When did you arrive?” Tony asked

“Two hours ago!” Pepper scathingly replied
Tony wisely didn’t comment and made a mental note to call Jimmy Choo and order Pepper their latest creation to keep of getting eviscerated with her shoe heels!

“Some things never change!” Rhodey snickered, “Tony never notices the passage of time when he’s involved in engineering or science, or a good argument!”

“Or at all!” Bruce commented grinning at Tony’s glare

“Shall we get started perhaps?” Alfred suggested

“Yes, absolutely,” Stephen said rising up from his chair with his cloak fluttering about him like a nineteen-fifties skirt!

“Oh you’re doing this?” Spiderman asked, he looked to Dick, “Who is he?”

“Dr Stephen Strange,” Stephen said

“Oh!” Spiderman brightened, “We’re using made up names, well I’m Spiderman!”

Stephen looked pained and exasperated, Tony broke into a fit of giggles that he made no attempt at hiding, and everyone else had grins on their faces and were stifling chuckles.

“As I was saying,” Stephen went on, “Tony was awoken from his coma, his brain healed by something mystical in origin, something that he is connected to is a part of him. This I suspect has been a part of him for all his life but has never been active until very recently. What caused the sudden activation we do not know, but, a sudden surge of mystical energy blasted through New York on the night of his awakening, and I am sure it came from this artefact.”

Silence reigned, everyone looked around, eventually turning their gazes onto Tony who shifted uncomfortably, “There have also been the recurring dreams,” Stephen said looking to Tony, “About the Infinity stone I believe?”

“No,” Tony said grumpily

“Technically they have,” Bruce corrected, “Tony said it’s the seventh stone he’s dreaming about?”

“There is no seventh Stone,” Stephen said dismissively

“And you know that for a fact exactly how?” Rhodey demanded

“Oh he’s the magician’s apprentice!” Tony stage whispered sending both Peter and Dick into hysterics

“Sorcerer supreme,” Stephen growled narrowing his eyes at Tony who snickered unrepentantly,

“What are the dreams exactly?” Vision asked

“I don’t know!” Tony sighed, “It’s…its Ancient Egypt I’m certain of that, the clothing, the jewellery I was wearing…,”

“Whoa, that you were wearing?” Dick cut in, “What do you mean you?”

Tony opened his mouth but nothing came out as he wasn’t certain how he could answer that then suddenly his mind was filled with images from his dream, of men running through the desert, of torches lighting the way through some underground passage, sand filling the air and scratching the back of his throat as he ran towards a chamber where the gilded golden statue of the Goddess
Amonette stood with her hands held out awaiting the Stone of Unity to be placed within them.

“Tony, Tony!”

“Should we call an ambulance?”

“No its just a panic attack,”

“This isn’t a panic attack, I know panic attacks this isn’t one!”

“Stark, Stark just relax and focus your breathing,”

“Just back off and give him some room!”

Tony blinked and took a huge inhale feeling a violent thump through his chest as if his heart had just skipped several beats and was restarting.

“What…?” he asked looking at the concerned faces before him

“You blacked out,” Peter said chewing his bottom lip

“You weren’t breathing Tones,” Rhodey said, “We thought you were holding your breath but its been nearly ten minutes and your heart was beating erratically but you weren’t exhibiting any other symptoms, you just weren’t breathing!”

“I was…. I…,” Tony looked at Bruce helplessly, “Dear God what the hell is happening to me?”
Chapter 13

Gotham

Bruce insisted on he and Tony having some space so Tony could calm down some before they spoke as a group again.

Stephen stood a little apart from the rest of the group, his cloak swishing and looking for all the world like a sulky toddler that was being denied something and making the Sorcerer scowl at its behaviour.

“So you’re like a Wizard?” Peter asked hanging off the banister, literally, Dick had dared him to climb it on the outside and he was now swinging from it upside down making anyone who looked at him wonder how he wasn’t feeling dizzy from having the blood rush to his head!

Stephen bristled at the term, “I am Sorcerer Supreme.”

“And you call yourself Dr Strange!?” the ice in Stephen’s gaze could have turned a furnace cold!

“My name is Dr Stephen Strange!”

“Oohh!” Peter’s impossibly huge puppy dog eyes just about popped from his head, “So you’re like a Dr of magic, that is so cool!”

Stephen’s eyes closed and he muttered something under his breath that sounded a lot like “God give my strength!”

“I wish I knew what Bruce and Tones were talking about in there,” Rhody sighed, he sat before the bottom step of the staircase with Pepper sitting a couple of steps up from him, “I’ve never seen Tony like that,” he said shaking his head and staring at the wall, his eyes were not focused, were seeing Tony Stark in the past, “I’ve seen him go through hell, I found him in a desert exhausted, starving, dehydrated to the point that if he didn’t get a drink within a few hours he’d have been dead, following three months of captivity at the hands of terrorists who did God only knows what to him, I’ve seen him sick to death with blood poisoning, I’ve seen him royally pissed off and struggling with PTSD while dealing with lunatic scientists with fucked up grudges, hell I’ve seen him beaten down, insulted, wounded, and get back up time and again with smart ass comment and a cocky grin, I’ve seen him so sugar and caffeine hyped that he’s been practically vibrating! But I have never before now seen him on the verge of a nervous break-down,”

“I know,” Pepper whispered hugging her knees as she hunched over, “When he was having panic attacks and nightmares I didn’t help him like I should have, I wasn’t there for him when I should have been,”

“Pep honey you did your best,” Rhody protested but Pepper shook her head

“No, I didn’t, I kept ignoring the problem, trying to get him to change, to give up Iron Man, the one thing that had made it possible for him to keep living, his touchstone, his salvation, all because I was too much of a coward to face the dangers that it involved.” A single tear rolled down her cheek and her lips quivered as she spoke, “After Ultron I wouldn’t let him near me, I blamed him and his
arrogance just like Rogers, even when he proved to the courts investigating the incident that he was innocent as was Banner I didn’t give him a break, hell I told him I wanted a break!”

Rhodey turned and put his hands on Pepper’s knees, “You’re not the only one who’s fucked up Pep,” he said quietly, “I wouldn’t listen to him when he first came to me about Iron Man, told him he needed to see a shrink or words to that effect because he didn’t want to make weapons anymore. Then when I did find out about the suit and the Government wanted to get their grubby paws on it I went a stole a suit from him!” he snorted and looked down at his useless legs, “Maybe there’s some karma here, my being crippled in the very suit I stole from Tony, leaving him beaten in his own home while dying from Palladium poisoning.”

“Maybe there is!” Dick said nastily and received a sharp clip about the ear from Alfred who glared at him, he and Bruce had raised him better than that. Chastised the young man rubbed his ear and muttered an apology.

“As fascinating as this mutual self-loathing is, we do have bigger issues at stake here,” Stephen said and was apparently immune to the glares that were thrown his way, “It is very clear now that Stark is under the influence of something very powerful, something that is trying to communicate with him,”

“If its so powerful why doesn’t it just use the phone like everyone else?” Dick snipped and just about leaped out of his skin as the manor’s phone rang!

“Trust you to open your big mouth!” Peter teased, now hanging off the ceiling!

“Oh go get webbed!”

The sound of a man clearing his throat brought their attention and they saw Bruce standing in the foyer, “Where’s Alfred?” he asked looking around

“He’s on the phone,” Pepper replied

“How’s Mr Stark?” Peter asked jumping down from the ceiling with impossible grace

“He is... ready to speak again,” Bruce said choosing to state the facts rather than Tony’s health or mood, Stephen glided over to him

“Good, the sooner we get to the bottom of this the better,” he made to go past Bruce but the Billionaire caught his upper arm and held it tight in a painful grip and batted off the cloak that rose up in Stephen’s defence, actually wrapping it about his wrist and grabbing a fist full of it!

“He is fragile right now,” he hissed into the Doctor’s face, “He is fresh out of the hospital, struggling to regain his health, and is now terrified that he is either losing his mind or is being manipulated by something.” He glared at Stephen coldly, his dark eyes shining with a promise of pain in Stephen’s near future should he not heed what the Billionaire was saying, “I don’t know what you expected when you came here, I don’t know what it is you want from him, but I am telling you now, I will not hesitate to kill you if you hurt him in any way at all.”

Stephen clenched his jaw and met Bruce’s glare evenly, “What I intend is the safety of the planet Mr Wayne, and I will ensure it with or without your help,” he tried to pull away but Bruce’s grip tightened and the cloak became more agitated as it tried to get out of his grip, sighing Stephen rolled his eyes, “For heaven sakes! I do not intend Stark any harm, if anything I will help him, he needs to find out what he is connected to as much as I need to find out, my being here will be a benefit to him, not a hinderance,” taking a chance he lay a hand over Bruce’s and offered him a small smile, “I appreciate how protective you are. From what little I know of Stark he needs people like you in his
life, especially in the wake of what Captain America did to him.”

This was exactly the right thing to say as Bruce relented and finally let go of Stephen and the Cloak, which took great offence at being so manhandled, slapping his thighs before settling itself again,

“Dude that cape thing is so Cool!” Peter said, “Can I have one!?”,

Stephen let out a long suffering sigh and ignored the snickers coming from Dick.


*****

Alfred joined them in the living room moments later, “Mr Fox was on the phone,” he explained the Bruce, “Wanting to know if you’ll be attending the gala tomorrow night,”

“No,” Bruce said shaking head

“We should,” Tony said surprising him, he shrugged, “I can’t hide from the world forever, and the longer I do the more stories there are going to be about my being permanently damaged or something.”, he bit his lip and shot a look at Rhody but the Colonel did not appear offended. Tony had been thinking a lot about his injury, how to fix things for him, he was pretty sure he could adapt War Machine to function with a wheelchair, make it similar to his suitcase armour so it would enclose about Rhodey from the chair and have additional support in the legs and thrusters to move him without his needing to walk. He was also thinking of something to function on a day to day basis, something to support his legs and bypass the severing of his spine, but it would take time and he needed to be in his workshop to do it. Something he was banned from until he improved his strength.

“Are you sure you’re up to it?” Pepper asked, she wouldn’t mind Tony making an appearance in public, it would take the pressure off her somewhat as she was being dogged for news on his health and wellbeing by the press and fans/stalkers.

“I’ll be fine,” Tony said with an easy grin

Bruce nodded his head, “We’ll leave early, and if you start to feel tired or uncomfortable we’ll get straight out of there,”

“I’ll let Mr Fox know,” Alfred said turning on his heel and heading for the nearest phone to call the CEO of Wayne Enterprises.

“And now your social life has been arranged can we please get back to the matter at hand?” Stephen asked with a put upon expression, Tony grinned at him

“Of course dearest, feel free to take the floor!”, Stephen’s smile was acidic as he stood front and centre to address the group,

“I think it is clear that you are in contact with a very powerful artefact, something that is trying to make a connection with you, something you have had in your possession before, in a past life.”

“So I was right!” Bruce exclaimed, looking to Tony and then back to Strange, “The dreams are memories not just imagination.”
Stephen nodded, “Quite so, long dormant memories that have been triggered and are slowly coming
to the surface, rising from the depths of the subconscious to the conscious mind,”

Tony shook his head, “So what? I’m an Ancient Egyptian?”

“No you’re Tony Stark,” Stephen said, “You are who you were born, it is a past self that you are
recalling. Your physical body is as it has always been, it is your soul that has lived before. In Ancient
times,” he shrugged, “I have read Mystical thesis on the subject, where very wise Men and Women
believed that we are all the products of rebirth, reincarnation. We have all walked this earth many
times through out the ages, lived our lives and died, our Souls journeying to wherever it is they
go beyond the physical realm and awaiting for a time to be reborn,”

“If its true then why don’t we all remember our past lives?” Peter asked

“Because our brains are too occupied by the current life we are living, our memories are being built
on the experiences in this life rather than reliving the past,” Stephen explained, “Only those with
some psychic connections, or like Tony here have a very potent connection with their past selves
actually recall their past lives.”

“So in other words we’re just too busy to think about it,” Rhodey said

“Pretty much,” Stephen agreed, he looked to Tony, “I want to help you discover who you were, I
believe it will be a benefit to you if you learn what it is your soul is trying to tell you,”

Tony shifted uncomfortably, “I don’t have a great experience with magic,” he said, “The last time
someone used it on me I got mind raped and ended up building a murderous robot.”

“Bitch!” Rhodey whispered wanting to get his hands about Wanda’s neck!

Stephen shook his head, “What the Scarlet Witch uses is not true magic, it is a perversion of magic.
Real magic comes from within an individual, they are either born with it, a cradle Witch, or like
myself learn through years of dedicated study and practise, This helps to ensure a respect for the
power we wield,” he tilted his head, “Yes, some have still abused it, but for the most part we respect
that which we are blessed with and do not use it for personal gain or gratification, certainly not to
harm another save in self defence or the defence of another.”

“Like Wicca!” Peter piped up and flushed as all eyes turned on him, “I like Charmed!” he mumbled,
“Piper’s hot!”

“Yeah, I prefer Phoebe!” Dick said with a wry grin

“While I don’t appreciate the comparison to Pop Culture you are correct, the Wiccan Rede is one of
the laws taught to Adepts at Kammar Taj,” Stephen agreed, he gave Tony a sympathetic look, “I
understand your hesitation but I assure you I mean you no harm and I am not a telepath, I can not
read your thoughts, nor will I attempt to invade your mind, what I will do is act as a guide to help
you unlock the doors to your memories yourself,”

Tony mulled this over. It sounded similar to BARF, though instead of going after specific memories
to alter them Stephen would be helping him seek out unknown memories, long forgotten memories,
but with magic not science, Tony shuddered, God he hated magic, why did his life seem to involve
so much magic? Internally he sighed, he really didn’t have a choice, he had to get whatever was
happening to him under control, and if it involved the infinity stones in some way, which it seemed
like it did, then the sooner he learned everything, the better.

“Alright,” he said, and leaned forward, “But I am so not doing chants or meditation to the sounds of
gongs while foul smelling incense fills my nose! But!” he held up a finger to Stephen who had a raised eyebrow, “But I am so totally up for naked mud dancing!”.
“There are nine elements of magic. They are the building blocks of the universe, the building blocks of magic. A mage taps into these elements, uses them in their craft.”

“Nine elements. Check.” Tony said quietly. He was sat crossed legged on the bare wood floor of the New York sanctum, he was bare foot and wearing loose fitting yoga pants and a vest top that was sagging off his skinny frame. About him were a dozen candles in a circle and the scent of incense was tickling his nose.

“What are the elements?” he asked of Stephen who walked slowly about him, also bare foot and for once not wearing The Cloak, that was hovering in a corner watching the goings on and somehow showing disdain, though how a Cloak showed disdain Tony wasn’t sure, yet somehow this damn thing managed it.

“Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Wood, Metal, Light, Dark, and Spirit.” Stephen listed, “What we are to do here today is to discover which elements you have a link with.”

Tony frowned and looked up at the Sorcerer, “I thought we were going to find my past life memories?” Stephen settled himself down in front of Tony, also sitting cross legged and steepled his scarred fingers beneath his chin

“We are,” he confirmed, “But to do so you must learn to walk the path of Enlightenment,”

Tony let out a groan, “You sound like a cult preacher!” he snorted, “Any second you’re going to start talking about pyramid schemes and soul cleansing and how to read tea leaves or some crap oowww!” Tony turned, rubbing the back of his head and saw the Cloak wafting across the floor having obviously slapped him about the back of the head, “You need to put that thing on a leash!” he said to Stephen who was smirking obnoxiously at him, “I really don’t like you!”

“Oh believe me Mr Stark, that feeling is mutual!”

*****

Stark Tower

“I don’t like this!”

Rhodey didn’t even bother looking up from his laptop this time, Bruce had been saying this every half an hour since Tony had gone to the Sanctum that morning and it seemed wasn’t over saying it yet.

“How can we be sure that…., Wizard or whatever he is has Tony’s best interests at heart?”

“We can’t. It’s a matter of trust,” Rhodey said reaching over the table and picking up his coffee

“I don’t trust that Wizard!” Finally Rhodey looked up with a risen eyebrow, “No offence Wayne, but
you do have trust issues a mile wide!"

Bruce glowered at him which had no effect on Rhodey at all.

“You know why he has to do this, right?” Rhodey said, “It’s the only way to find out what’s going on with him, and he can’t keep having these nightmares and flashbacks, he needs to resolve this, once and for all.”

“I know,” Bruce sighed, “That doesn’t mean I have to like him being alone with that arrogant asshole Strange, and why do they have to be alone?” Now Rhodey smirked,

“Not jealous are you?”

Bruce’s glare darkened even more which only served to make Rhodey’s shit eating grin widen, “Oh Brucey, you know that Tony loves you, he won’t fall for that very Strange man, even though they could have an epic romance over facial hair!”

“Fuck you!” Bruce snarled shoving away from the table and stalked his way over to the window and looked down over the city. The street below was as busy as always, both foot and vehicle traffic, it looked as if the battle of New York had never happened, that a huge portal had been stretched over the city with otherworldly monsters raining down on them destroying all in their path. No signs of the battle remained in the city, it had been rebuilt and repaired to the point that the remembrance of that horror was now only in peoples memories. But how soon they forgot, how soon they turned on Tony during Ultron after all he had been through, after all he had risked to save them, why didn’t they remember any of it until he had very nearly died again at the hands of someone he’d considered a friend?

Bruce appreciated that people had turned out in droves to show their love of Tony when he’d been brought back from Russia, but he also resented that it had taken such an extreme for people to stop painting him as the devil or to actually show him any kindness at all.

It wasn’t fair, none of this was fair. When Tony had awoken from his coma Bruce had thought that the biggest hurdle they’d have would be getting Tony to regain his health, that would be medical matters that they would have to deal with, something he could comprehend and understand. But instead they were dealing with something magical and utterly beyond Bruce’s knowledge. He had no idea how to help Tony with this and it was infuriating him. He hated to be so useless, to just not have the knowledge needed to help Tony through this, to have to rely on a complete stranger to have the knowledge and skill. He wasn’t jealous as Rhodey had teased him of being, he was mistrustful of Strange and he was frustrated at not being able to help Tony himself.

“Tony’s going to be okay you know?” Rhodey said from the table, Bruce inclined his head slightly,

“You know why he’s gonna be okay?”

“Enlighten me,” Bruce said in a monotone

“Because he has us, because he has a family around him that care for and love him, that will give him the strength he needs to get through this.”

Bruce sighed, closing his eyes and resting his forehead against the windowpane, “He needs to rest,” he murmured, “He needs time away from all this, time to heal and process everything.” He turned around resting his back against the window and looking at Rhodey, “I want to take him away somewhere, on a holiday, give him a chance to catch his breath and take some time away from all
Rhodey nodded his head, “That sounds like a good idea, but we both know Tony will never agree. He hasn’t been on a holiday in years because he can’t be pried out of his lab with a damn crowbar and believe me I have actually tried to do so more than once with a crowbar!”

Bruce snorted and grinned a little, “He is a workaholic,”

“He’s also an obsessive compulsive,” Rhodey stated, “And now he has a new obsession,”

“Obsessive compulsive, addictive personality with self-destructive tendencies, unresolved issues with parental figures, unresolved PTSD, self-hatred, and a deep seated need to prove himself to others and receive their approval.” Bruce rattled off the description of Tony’s personality and psyche like a psychological profiler.

Rhodey smiled wryly, “Hardly Narcissistic which is what the Sociopathic Spider profiled him as,”

“A sociopath profiling someone, I wonder what she would classify herself as,” Bruce mused and shook his head

“I’d agree with her on the volatile, and the not playing well with others,” Rhodey said, “But only children often have difficulty being team players, especially if they haven’t had a large group of friends to play with during childhood, which Tony did not, is just not use to having to explain himself to others or relying on others.”

“Plus we all know that if you want something doing right, you do it yourself.” Bruce said

“Very true.” Rhodey agreed

“But none of this helps us in getting Tony to take a break and go on a vacation,” Bruce said, “Frankly short of kidnapping him I don’t see a way to do so, though perhaps if he woke up from his kidnap on a private beach with cocktails he wouldn’t mind too much!”

“Especially if there were very attractive Men and Women in bikinis and speedos milling around him!”

Grinning now Bruce walked across the room and leaned over the table, resting his forearms upon it, “So, does this mean you’ll be my co-conspirator in getting Tony on holiday?”

Rhodey held out his hand to Bruce, “It’ll be my pleasure.”

*****

Tony’s eyes were closed and his hands were being held by Stephen between the two of them as they sat in the circle of candles.

“What is the first image you see when you close your eyes?”

“A flame,” Tony replied, his voice was soft and faint, he wasn’t asleep but he felt like he was on the cusp of sleep, like he had taken a tranquilizer and he was poised just before it knocked him out. He was relaxed and comfortable, his whole body at ease, something that happened to him very rarely.
“Describe the flame,” Stephen prompted, his voice melodic, almost hypnotic.

“Its large, three feet tall, it starts off yellow and orange and slowly becomes blue. Its bright, brilliantly bright so much so that it almost hurts to look at it.”

“Do you like looking at it?”

“Yes,” Tony whispered

“Why?”

“I see things in it, I see…, possibilities, things to be shaped, to be changed, to be built.”

“What are they made of?” Stephen asked, “What is their material?”

“Metal,” Tony replied, a smile spread over his lips, “They shine a beautiful white light, they are silvery like the moon, and they take on such amazing shapes, I can make them into anything.”

“In the back ground do you see anything?”

Tony paused considering the question, “Its dark,” he whispered frowning, “Dark but not empty, there is something there, something……, I see something in the dark, it has form and yet it is not solid, but it has mass and energy.” Tony breathed in and out slowly as he focused on the dark, “It flows and pulses, like a river, a dark river, it is vast,” he frowned and shook his head, “Its endless, so deep and stretches so very far that I can’t see an end.” The calm he had been feeling began to be replaced by worry, his breathing picked up as his heart rate increased. He was beginning to feel like he was trapped, that he was falling into the endless darkness that he saw in his own mind.

“Breathe Tony,” Stephen said gripping Tony’s hands a little tighter, “See the flame in your mind again, focus on that blue, the beautiful blue.”

The blue, the blue, the beautiful blue. Tony chanted in his mind, forcing himself to see the fire again, to push away the dark and let it in the bright blue lights. “Now open your eyes Tony and come back to waking world, now.” Tony felt a pressure on his forehead just above his eyebrows and snapped his eyes open, blinking as the light rushed back into them. Standing before him Stephen offered a hand to help him to his feet which Tony gratefully took and allowed himself to be lead over to Stephen’s chairs to take a seat and be served a sweet and spicy blend of tea that just appeared steaming in fine bone china cups.

“Fire, Metal, and Darkness.” Stephen said with a smile, “Your elements.”

“Is that good or bad?” Tony asked taking a sip of the tea, he wrinkled his nose at the taste but decided to keep drinking when it eased the tension headache he hadn’t realized he was suffering.

“Both and neither!”

Tony rolled his eyes and sighed, “If you’re going to try and beat Ed Nygma at mind teasers then I’m off!”

Stephen chuckled and shook his head, “No brain teasers. None of the elements are good neither are they bad, they simply are, its just what a person does with them that is good or bad.” Stephen reclined in his chair and sipped his tea, “These will be your guides, your building blocks as you learn.”

“Learn what?” Tony asked, “About my past self?”
“That, and about magic of course.” Stephen only just had a chance to put up a barrier between himself and Tony to deflect the spray of spat out tea as the billionaire choked and stared at him in complete horror,

“Magic? Me learn magic? Oh hell no Gandalf, I am not joining your freaky pointy hat and broom stick riding club, not a chance, no way in hell am I doing that!” he rose to his feet shaking his head and reached out to shake Stephens hand, “I’d say its been a pleasure but I’d be lying through my teeth and I really should be going so I’ll just bid you adieu.”

“Tony…,” Stephen said looking the Billionaire over, an insufferable smirk playing on his lips, “You might want to check something first,”

“Yeah? Like what?” Tony snapped

“Look down.” Rolling his eyes Tony did so and let out a yelp as he noticed for the first time that he was levitating several inches off the floor!

“Oh Crap!”

Chapter End Notes

I have to ask. Why do people who are Team Cap go and read fics that are Team Iron Man? Why would you do that? its like people who are homophobic reading slash and then complaining about it! what is wrong with them? have they nothing better to do with their time? if you don't like something you don't read it or watch it do you? Okay rant over I'm done. Hope you enjoyed this chapter.
“Nope! No way, not doing it, En Oh NO!”

Bruce and Rhodey looked up in surprise as Tony stormed into the penthouse yelling at the top of his lungs and trying to bat away Strange’s cloak.

“Will you get away from me you glorified bedspread?” Tony yelled at the Cloak which formed a posture like a hand on a hip, “Get away now or I swear I will stick you through a spin on 60 with fabric softener!”

It was testament to the weirdness of their lives that Rhodey and Bruce merely exchanged risen eyebrowed expressions instead of being completely shocked by this, or Strange suddenly appearing out of portal in the living area.

“Stark this is serious…,”

“Damn right its serious,” Tony yelled, backing away from Strange, “Seriously fucked up and I want no part of it, so take your magic carpet back to Hogwarts and stay the hell away from me!”

Stephen sighed and rolled his eyes, The Cloak floated around and stood in front of Tony and actually appeared to be frowning at him,

“No!” Tony snapped at it, “Not interested, go back to Saruman and leave me in normal land in peace.”

“Honestly, if you wouldn’t behave so childish…,” Stephen began in a chiding tone, only to have Tony turn back on him so fast it was a wonder he didn’t give himself a whiplash.

“Me behave childish, me!” he yelled, “I’m not the one riding around on broomsticks Harry Potter, now go find yourself a nice house elf and get fuc…owww!” he held his cheek and looked at the Cloak in betrayal as it had in fact slapped him across the cheek!

“Umm, may I cut in?” Rhodey asked, standing up and holding his hand up, Tony glared and rubbed his cheek looking petulant, Stephen sighed, rolling his eyes, looking exasperated. Rhodey took this for a yes and pressed on, “What, exactly is going on?” he asked, knowing he’d probably regret asking but doing so anyway.

“He!” Tony cried, pointing at Stephen, “He did bad things to me!”

Stephen snorted, “For God sake, Stark.”

“Bad things?” Bruce asked, looking between Tony, the Cloak, and The Sorcerer,

“Yes, very bad things,” Tony stated, “He…, he…, Magicked me!”

Bruce took a very deep breath, then another as he tried to understand what Tony was saying and still couldn’t make sense of it.

“He magicked you?” Rhodey asked, slowly and looking as bewildered as Bruce felt,
“He did, he made me float,” Tony stated, “He made me magickified!”

“That is not a word, Stark,” Stephen said, scowling,

“It is now!” Tony yelled and let out a shriek and suddenly bright blue flames erupted from his fingertips! “See, See!” he shouted, “Look what he’s done to me!”

“I didn’t do that to you Stark,” Stephen said, in a tone that sounded like he was on his last nerve, “This magic has always been a part of you, I simply helped you unlock it.”

“Then lock it back up you dumbass!” Tony waved his hands around, trying to put out the flames with no success until The Cloak took pity on him and wrapped itself over his hands, snuffing out the flames and then, in act of kindness, wrapped itself about Tony and began to massage his shoulders.

“Okay that’s nice,” Tony admitted, relaxing into the embrace, “I guess for a magic thing you’re not so bad, just a shame your boss is such a douche.”

Stephen narrowed his eyes, “Takes one to know one, Stark.” The Cloak stopped massaging Tony’s shoulders and stood up straight forming the hands on the hips gesture again, only this time at Stephen, who looked betrayed, “Really?”

“Okay, hold on for one minute,” Bruce said, he pinched the bridge of his nose to try and stave off the headache he felt forming, “Tony is… magical?” he asked

Tony scoffed, “I’ve always been magical Bruce, are you really only just figuring this out? After all the things I can do with my…,”

“NO!” Rhodey bellowed, “I experienced enough of your sex life back in college, I do not need anymore of it, and I certainly had enough of seeing your pasty white ass too!”

Tony made a wounded noise, “Are you insulting my spectacular and perfect beyond perfect JLO bubble butt?”

“Can we please stay on topic and leave discussions of Tony’s well rounded backside for a later date?” Stephen asked, immediately regretting it when Tony smirked at him,

“Oh do you like my ass too, why Stephen, I never knew you had it in you!” If looks could kill then Tony would have been a corpse on the floor.

*****

Stephen’s explanation took a while to get through, mainly because Tony kept interrupting and insisting that this was in no way natural and when he lost his temper he ended up with flames on his fingertips again. In fear of burning Bruce or Rhodey he refused point blank to have them anywhere near him, bolting to the safety of his workshop where Dumm-E, Butterfingers, and YOU gathered around him, trying to comfort him as he slumped to the floor, with his arms about his knees, trying to keep from going into a panic attack.

“Bruce is at the door, Bossman,” FRIDAY said, “He wants to talk to you, So does Rhodey and the Freaky Wizard Man!”
“No, FRI, no one” Tony said, his voice a hoarse croak, “I can’t risk it, I’m dangerous,” he let out a choked sob, “It was bad enough when I was the Merchant of Death, no I can incinerate people with my fingers for fuck sakes!” Dum-E made a chirping noise and lowered his claw to rest on Tony’s shoulder as if he were patting him, “Oh you wonderful tragedy,” Tony murmured, resting his head against the claw, “Sometimes I think you guys are the only ones who understand me,” Butterfingers and You made sad noises and lowered their claws to rest on Tony, petting him like a cat, “It’s a joke isn’t it?” Tony asked of no one in particular, “A cosmic joke. Here I am, the last person in the world to want supernatural abilities, to want anything to do with fucking hocus pocus crap, and now I can produce flames and I float and…, and., I don’t know what to do.”

“You take it slowly, one day at a time,”

Tony let out a low groan and didn’t bother opening his now closed eyes to see Bruce, who had entered the lab via a portal that Stephen had opened, The Sorcerer stood back, keeping the portal open, Rhodey at his side, ready to go to Tony if needed, but giving Bruce and he space otherwise.

“You can do this Tony,” Bruce said, kneeling down in front of him and patting Butterfinger’s side as he moved back a little, giving him access to Tony, “We can do this together.”

Tiredly, so, so tiredly, Tony opened his eyes and gazed at Bruce, looking for all the world like he was at the very end of his rope and just didn’t have the strength or even the desire to hold on anymore.

“Tony…,” Bruce tried to reach out and cup Tony’s face but the other Billionaire flinched back, almost jumping away with a look of genuine fear in his eyes, “Tony, for God sake I’m not going to hurt you!” Bruce cried, feeling a little insulted,

“It’s not that I’m afraid of!” Tony shouted back, clenching his fists tight and ignoring the burning pain that shot through his hands as the flames scorched his palms, “I’m afraid of hurting you!” he choked out wretchedly, tears shone in his eyes and began to slowly roll down his cheeks as the utter anguish he was in overwhelmed his already traumatized and troubled heart, “I could never do that Bruce,” he whispered shaking his head, “I would rather die, I would rather rip my own heart out than ever hurt you in anyway.”

Bruce looked stricken at Tony’s words, at his belief that he was a danger to him, “Tony, you would never hurt me,”

“You don’t know that!” Tony cried, his voice hoarse, “Look at what Wanda can do, look at the damage she’s done, and she isn’t sprouting fire from her fingers like I am,”

“Well you ain’t Wanda,” Rhodey said, stepping out of the portal and into the workshop, “You’re you,”

“That’s right,” Bruce said, “Tony Fucking Stark, Iron Man, a Man who survived three months in the hands of terrorists and built a suit of armour and a miniaturized arc reactor out of a box of scraps in a cave. A man who has faced down Congress and won, A man who has gone toe to toe with Demi Gods and kicked their asses, A man who has not only hit rock bottom but gone fifty feet below and managed to claw his way back out again and survive it all. Strange is right when he said you are magical, even before you had these powers you were more than just human, you can achieve the impossible, bring life out of metal and electricity, create the unimaginable, and change the world.”

Tony sniffed and hiccupped, “I nearly destroyed it too, Ultron…,”
“Was not just of your making, Tony,” Strange said, joining the conversation, “Maximoff, Banner, and The Mind Stone all played a role there, yes you were partly to blame, but only part, and your intentions for Ultron were pure nor malevolent.”

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions,” Tony murmured, looking up at Stephen, “I must have paved my way there in gold,”

For the first time since the met, Stephen looked sympathetic at Tony, and offered him a gentle smile, “Hell is not where you will go, my friend, you have made mistakes in your past, and you have owned up to them, admitted them, and have spent the past ten years attempting to make amends. That is not the action of a man with no conscience or one who is truly evil, it is the action of a man who is as flawed and fallible as every human upon the planet,” he took a deep breath, “Including me.”

Tony managed a weak chuckle, “That had to hurt to say,”

“Excruciatingly,” Stephen admitted, he sighed as he continued, “I know you’re afraid, only an idiot wouldn’t be, and you are many things, Tony, but an idiot isn’t one of them. These powers can be mastered, you can master them, right now they are activating as a response to stimulus, fear and excitement, panic, you can learn to control that, to keep it from happening.”

“And I’ll help you do it,” Bruce whispered, taking a chance he reached out and lay his hand over Tony’s, the smaller man flinched back a little, fearing he’d burn Bruce, though the searing pain in his palms had gone now, in fact his hands felt…, odd. Looking down at them his eyes widened as he saw that a layer of shining silver/white metal now covered them.

“Well that’s new!” Rhodey drawled, “Need a hand there Tones?”

The inappropriate joke served to relieve some of the tension and Tony allowed Bruce to pull him to his feet and support him with an arm about his shoulders.

“So…, metal hands?” he asked, looking to Strange. Stephen stepped out of the portal which closed behind him, The Cloak flying off his shoulders and about the workshop, much to the inquisitive amusement of the bots who began to chase after it and try to grab old of it in their claws, The Cloak reacted to this like a pet owner taunting a cat with a piece of string, keeping just out of the Bots reach and driving them frantic as they tried to seize hold of it, sending them crashing into things and each other, and generally creating even more chaos than was already in the lab.

“This is a very Strange day,” Rhodey said, earning a glare from Stephen and a snicker from Tony as he held his hands out to the Sorcerer who took them carefully into his own gloved hands,

“Close your eyes,” he instructed Tony, “Focus your breathing to deep and slow breaths, in hold it, and slowly out through your mouth,” Tony did as instructed, taking the breaths and letting them slowly out again, “Feel yourself relaxing, picture yourself somewhere you feel calm, somewhere you feel safe and secure, imagine yourself there, take in the details, smell the scents, taste them on your tongue, feel your surroundings, let yourself slip into your safe space.”

In his mind Tony picture the sky, saw himself in his suit flying through the clouds into the beautiful blue expanse, the world below him was green paradise while the sun above was an orb of yellow, warm and welcome. He felt his tension slipping away from him, felt the metal peeling from his hands to reveal his skin once more and let out a relieved sigh just as his legs gave out and his head spun.

“Tony!” Bruce cried in alarm, grabbing hold of him and carrying him to a chair.
“Tired,” Tony whispered, feeling like he could fall asleep right there.

“Magic takes a lot of energy,” Stephen said, “And your health is still poor, you’ll need to build your stamina as you learn control.”

“Right,” Tony whispered and yawned, swaying in his seat,

“I think we should call it a day,” Bruce said, it was not really a question, Tony was dead on his feet and liable to pass out any moment,

“Indeed,” Stephen agreed, he lay a hand on Tony’s shoulder, “Rest now, we’ll talk again soon, and begin your training.”

“Oh yay!” Tony drawled, then sobered, “Thanks Stephen, for everything.”

The Sorcerer nodded and with dramatic flourish opened another portal, summoning the Cloak and disappeared back to the Sanctum leaving the Bots chasing after the disappearing Cloak with whines of upset at not getting a new toy.

“Let’s get you to bed,” Bruce said, easily lifting Tony up into his arms, “We’ll deal with Strange and his bag of tricks tomorrow, you’ve been through enough for today.”

“M’okay,” Tony mumbled, his voice slurring on the edge of sleep, “Night Rhodykins, Night Dum-E, Butterfingers, YOU, Sweetdreams, Daddy’ll see you in the morning, Night FRI.”

“Goodnight Bossman,” FRIDAY said cheerfully

“Sleep well Tones,” Rhodey said, getting out the Bots beloved soft ball to play catch with them for a while.

Tony was already asleep by the time Bruce got him to the bedroom, FRIDAY closed the curtains and dimmed the lights, starting a tranquil soundtrack to play in the background to keep Tony relaxed as he slept. Bruce quickly undressed him down to his boxers and tuck him into bed, smiling as Tony burrowed into his pillow and curled himself up into the perfect position for Bruce to spoon around him.

“We’ll be alright,” he whispered to the smaller man, “Magic, Infinity Stone, we’ll get through it all together, You’re not alone in this Tony, you’ve got me and I’m not going anywhere.”
Chapter 16

Scotland

Sat on his bed, Steve opened the paper he had purchased, turning past the local and global events, the crosswords, until he found the report he was looking for.

Tony Stark’s first appearance in public since awakening from his coma.

Steve had to suppress a gasp at the sight of Tony, in the photograph. He looked different to how he had the last time Steve had seen him, and he did not mean when he had been in a coma, or when he was beaten and bloody in the suit in Siberia, but when he had been healthy and hale at the Compound at the beginning of this God forsaken war.

Tony looked older, yet not aged, it was hard to explain. He seemed as if he had centuries of time upon him, a weight and wealth of age and knowledge that reflected in his eyes, making them seem ethereal. Tony had always had deeply attractive eyes, warm and sparkling when he was excited or happy, dark as pitch when he was angry, but now they seemed to shine like the stars themselves, giving off their own light that made the lights of cameras seem dimmed somehow.

His hair was longer than Steve had ever seen it, he now wore it just above his collar, thick curls of black and silver that framed his thinned and angular face. He was painfully thin, his bones far too prominent, his Tuxedo looked like it would fit an adolescent rather than a grown man.

He was clearly still recovering from the coma, he was leaning heavily on the arm of the man escorting him to this event, Bruce Wayne. The man who had ranted at Steve and ordered him to never make contact with Tony again, when Steve had rung him to talk.

Wayne had his arm about Tony’s waist, that looked almost as narrow as Steve’s had been before the serum, Wayne’s larger frame was providing support, both as a physical prop and as a barrier between Tony and the crowd surrounding them.

Tony had a smile on his face, but it was not real, it was his press smile, all teeth and fake cheer, no real joy there, and if you looked closely you could see the tension lines about his eyes and mouth. He was either in pain and struggling to control it, or was deeply worried about something and was trying to keep from letting it show in his expression.

Steve dearly wished he knew which of the two it was and be able to help, but he couldn’t even talk to Tony let alone get anywhere near him. Besides, why would Tony even want his presence, he’d nearly killed him, had left him in a coma for eighteen months, for which Tony was still paying the price for by the look of his fragile state.

It was easy for Natasha to say that he should let it go, that he should stop raking himself with guilt, but his conscience wouldn’t allow him to do so, neither would his subconscious. All too often when he went to sleep he would dream of Siberia, only things would play out differently and he wouldn’t beat Tony down, he would kill him out right, would take his head off with the shield and be doused in Tony’s blood, awaken with a scream lodged in his throat, expecting to see the red gore on his hands. Or he would be back at Avengers Tower, walk in and find Tony and Bruce in the process of creating Vision, he would throw his shield, only Tony would block it with a gauntlet, it would hit him in the centre of his chest, would cut right through him like a knife through butter, leaving a
gaping hole in his chest. Steve would watch as Tony slumped to the ground, a river of blood spreading around his mutilated body, that lay in a crumpled heap, his large brown eyes staring up at Steve, filled with shock and accusation.

Steve would awaken sobbing out the word sorry, unable to get the image of Tony’s murdered body from his mind, his murder of Tony.

Other dreams would come, his memories of the past would be twisted with Tony somehow. He would be back in the War, would be fighting Skull’s forces with the Commandos, would be taking down the Hydra soldiers, only to find Tony suddenly before him, fatally wounded by his own hands.

Time and again he would find himself sitting on the ground, cradling Tony’s broken and bloody body in his lap, weeping over him as his old team joined him, looks of horror and disgust on their faces as they stared at Steve.

Sometimes the dreams got so bad that he would actively avoid sleep for days on end, and while his body was capable of going a long time without sleep it could not go on indefinitely, and eventually he had to give in and succumb to sleep. Sometimes he was lucky and his dreams would be peaceful or they would be so insignificant that he would not recall them on waking. But far too often they would be bloody and terrifying and Steve would find himself awakening in a cold sweat and sick to his stomach at himself.

He had thought for a while, that with Tony awake and on the mend that perhaps the nightmares would stop, but they didn’t, they were just as bad as ever, his subconscious continued to refuse to allow him peace from his guilt, that was ever present in the back of his mind, darkening his day and weighing him down.

Sam tried to talk to him, tried to offer his skills as a councillor, but Steve wasn’t any good with this…, therapy thing, he did not come from a time where people spoke openly about their feelings, about mental health, and as patient and friendly as Sam was, Steve just couldn’t open up to him, hell, he couldn’t even get his thoughts straight in his own head let alone put them into words.

He knew he felt guilty, that was obvious, but there was more than just guilt, there was anger to, anger at himself, at his actions and inactions, they saying ‘we all have twenty twenty vision in hindsight’ was very true, he could look back at his past and see how things would have gone so much better if he’d just done things a little differently, stopped to think instead of just ploughed straight on in, had used his words instead of his fists, had not automatically believed there was only one option and taken it regardless to cost. Oh he was not just angry at himself, he was angry at Natasha, at her inability to care about anyone but herself, to show true and lasting loyalty to anyone but herself, her constant manipulations and deceit, he knew it was because of how she had been raised, been traumatized, but she made no effort to change or to better herself, she simply carried on as she always had, becoming frustrated and down-right hostile when others reacted to her in a less than positive manner. He was angry at Sam for just following without question, the man wasn’t an idiot, he was a decorated Air-force serviceman who had served for years, he knew better than to just blindly follow without giving it some thought, yet he had just tagged along at Steve’s heels like a well trained poodle. When it came to Wanda, Steve wasn’t sure anger was enough to describe what he felt. Disappointment in her refusal to accept responsibility for her actions or remorse for the deaths she was responsible for, disgust at her lies about her compliance with Hydra before Ultron, suspicion about her claims of having changed since then, and anger at her continued malice towards Tony.
Then came his feelings towards Tony. Anger certainly, for the man's stubbornness, his arrogance, his fiery temper, he also felt frustrated towards Tony, frustrated in ways he couldn't quite explain to himself. It wasn't just their inability to communicate, it was something else, something..., passionate, Steve hesitated in calling it sexual frustration, but he couldn't deny the fact that he was attracted to Tony Stark, had perhaps been so for a long time, thought it had taken this long for him to admit that he liked men as well as women. Back in the forties, such an admittance would have seen him going to prison, it had only been in recent years that people were allowed to admit their feelings for the same gender.

Steve had always hidden that side of himself, never admitting that he found men as attractive as women, had buried it deep and felt the shame that his upbringing had drummed into him for having ‘Unnatural thoughts’

He wondered now, if he could have admitted it to himself sooner, if he had acknowledged his feelings towards Tony earlier, if things might have turned out differently.

He knew there was no chance of things ever being romantic between them now. He had burned that bridge well and truly in Siberia, and Tony was engaged, to this Bruce Wayne. The two of them would be married soon, and Steve was not the sort of man who broke up marriages.

Still, he wished that he could talk to Tony, try to explain things to him, try and apologize. He didn’t expect forgiveness, didn’t expect help from Tony, despite Natasha’s insistence that if Stark got off his high horse that everything would be fine, as he could fix everything for them. All Steve hoped for from Tony, was a chance to say he was sorry, but he sincerely doubted he would ever get that chance.

New York

“What’s up Platypus?”

Rhodey grinned at the annoying nickname, as he rolled into Tony’s workshop, being greeted by Dum-E, who was whizzing around with a brush, supposedly cleaning, though it appeared he was more interested in dancing with the brush than cleaning up anything on the floor.

YOU was creating something that looked horrifically foul and probably toxic in the blender, and Rhodey wasn’t surprised to see a can of motor oil on the counter, which had likely found its way into the substance.

Butterfingers was assisting Tony, with whatever he was doing, or, well, he was trying to assist, but instead he just made beeping noises and got in Tony’s way as he fiddled with wires and soldering iron.

“I swear Butterfingers, if you get in the way one more time, I’m gonna weld you to the damn thing!” Tony scolded the Bot, who made a mournful sounding chirp. Then, on seeing Rhodey, who liked to play ball with him, whirled his metal claw arm around, thumping Tony’s ear and shoulder as he went, much to the Geniuses disgruntlement, and rolled over to greet his Human Uncle.

“Hi Butterfingers,” Rhodey greeted, “Is Daddy being mean again?” Tony let out a shriek of outrage, while Butterfingers emitted several sad beeps and somehow managed to look pitiful to Rhodey,
playing up his upset, “Aww, well you know how he can get when he’s in genius mode!” Rhodey said, patting Butterfingers’ arm,

“Traitor!” Tony yelled, “Betrayed in my own workshop by my Rhodeybear! I am heartbroken,”

“You’re full of shit is what you are!” Rhodey drawled, giving Butterfingers a final pat, he manoeuvred the chair over to Tony’s workbench, “What did you call me down here for anyway?” he asked, frowning at what Tony was fiddling with, it looked like a pair of gloves to him, but there were wires and metal parts which made them seem more like gauntlets, but they were nothing like the Iron Man gauntlets, “New Project?” Rhodey asked, intrigued,

“Yahuh,” Tony replied, finishing his welding, he set the iron on its stand and pushed his chair back from the table, rolling across the lab to another table, grinning and swinging his arms and legs out as he went, like a child, until he thumped into the table he was looking to reach and picked up something that looked like hip length boots with parts cut out of them, and a belt that attached to them with a spine support. “Call it an early Christmas present,” he said, tossing them over to Rhodey.

The Colonel caught them, frowning, “What..?”

“They’re braces,” Tony explained rolling back over, this time spinning round and grinning like a lunatic, “Hey, wanna have a race while you’re in the chair? Dum-E grab a stop watch, lets see who can roll around the lab the fastest!”

“Lets not,” Rhodey said, rolling his eyes, “Honestly, at times I think you really are a child in a mans body!”

“A really hot mans body!” Tony replied, with a leer,

“Always making it weird!” Rhodey complained, he looked down at the braces, “So what do these do?” he asked,

“Get you walking.”

Rhodey froze, he stared at Tony in complete shock. Walk. He hadn’t walked in nearly two years, had adapted to the chair, had resigned himself to being crippled for the rest of his life and now…, “Tony…,” he whispered, feeling a sharp pain in the back of his throat, “I…, God, Tones, how, I don’t know what to say,”

“Don’t say anything, just get them on and try them out,” Tony said, waving off Rhodey’s desire to thank him as he always did, “We might need to make adjustments, these are only a first model, but I need you to actually start using them to get data so I can make upgrades.”

Rhodey shook his head, leaning forward he wrapped Tony into a hug, pressing his forehead against Tony’s “You’re impossible and incredible, you drive me crazy and I love you,”

“Aww Rhodeykins!” Tony cried, snuggling into the hug, “Snugglebunny, I always knew you loved my handsome brilliant, beefcakeyness!”

“And that’s enough of the hugs,” Rhodey sighed, rolling his eyes, “Gonna help me get these on?” he regretted the choice of words the second he saw the wicked gleam in Tony’s eyes, “Not one word!” he growled at him.
Vision was surprised to say the least when Clint Barton, turned up at the compound, knocking on the door and waiting patiently for admittance to be granted.

“Hey Viz, how you doin’ he asked, with a smile, as he looked around the repaired compound,

“I am well, thank you, Mr Barton,” Vision replied, “Yourself?”

Clint shrugged, “I’m okay,” he said, avoiding Vision’s eyes and shifting his weight on the balls of his feet, “I., I don’t suppose Tony’s around, is he?”

“I’m afraid not,” Vision said, “He is in New York, at the Tower,”

“Right,” Clint said, nodding his head,

Vision frowned, Hawkeye’s body language was tense, uncomfortable, the man looked tired, thinner, shabbily clothed, he did not look like the confident and capable man Vision had previously known.

“I can call Mr Stark,” Vision said, and Clint looked up sharply,

“I don’t want to be any trouble…,”

“It is no trouble,” Vision beckoned for him to follow, “May I get you some refreshment?”

“Uh, sure, coffee would be great,” Clint said, following after Vision. They went to the kitchen and Clint took a seat at the counter while Vision busied himself in getting the coffee pot going, and his eyes widened when it beeped and chirped,

“Yes Cathy, you are an excellent machine, and Daddy Tony will visit very soon!” Vision informed the coffee pot, patting it like one would a dog,

“Uh…, Cathy?” Clint asked, Vision gave him a pained look,

“Mr Stark was bored, so he decided to upgrade the coffee machine and made it…, intelligent,” he rolled his eyes as the toaster made a popping noise and flipped over, “Toby, the toaster is her brother, be careful if you use him, he is…, temperamental,”

Clint gave up at this point and just burst into laughter that was so hard it shook his body, “God I’ve missed Tony’s crazy!”

“It is strangely endearing,” Vision mused, tapping the intercom link on the counter, he dialled Tony’s phone at the tower, it was of course Friday that answered the call with a pleasant greeting for Vision,

“Is Mr Stark available to talk, Friday?” Vision asked, “I have Mr Barton here, he would like to speak with him,”

“So long as its no trouble,” Clint stressed,

“One moment,” Friday said.

The line went dead for several moments, and Vision poured Clint’s coffee, patting Cathy again as
she gurgled happily, and served it to Clint with the sugar bowl and cream from the fridge.

“Boss is on line now,” Friday said.

“Thank you,” Vision replied, and Clint took a deep breath as Tony came onto the phone,

“Hey guys, how’s it hanging?”

“Greetings Tony,” Vision said, formally,

Clint swallowed hard, “Hi Tony, how are you,”

“Pretty good,” Tony replied, “How are you? How’s your family?” Clint winced,

“They…, they’re good, so far as I know,”

“So far as you know?” the cheer was gone from Tony’s voice, “Clint, what’s wrong, what’s happened?”

Clint exhaled loudly, “Me and Laura broke up shortly after I came home, we couldn’t make it work, not after…, everything, we’re divorced now,”

“Shit,” Tony drew out the word,

“It’s okay,” Clint lied, “I’ve got a flat,” ‘A bedsit, with a cubicle for a bathroom’ “And I see the kids,” ‘Once a month for a few hours, Cooper hates me, Lila is always awkward, and Nate doesn’t really know me’ “I’m doing okay,” “I’m working as a bouncer for peanuts, struggling to cover rent, child support, and alimony” “But I didn’t call to talk about this, I wanted to say I’m sorry,”

“Sorry?” Tony repeated, “For what?”

There was silence for a few moments, then Tony spoke again, “Forget it Clint, what’s done is done, and from what Bruce has told me, you came to see me while I was in hospital and cried like a little girl!”

“I so did not!” Clint denied, his cheeks reddening,

“Like a little girl with pig tails and a pink frilly skirt!”

“Screw you Stark,”

“Go lay an egg, feather brain!”

Clint snorted, he’d missed Tony’s humour, “Look, Clint, why don’t you come on over here with Vision, I’m not heading back to Gotham for a few days, or going to see His Strangeness, so we could chill, you guys can help me convince Rhodey that Pizza is a healthy food choice!”

“The hell it is Stark!” Came Rhodey’s yell,

“Blow me, Sourpatch!” Tony yelled back,

“Not in this lifetime!” Rhodey grumbled,

“If its not too much trouble,” Clint said, hesitantly, though inside he was jumping for joy at the
thought of going to the tower, getting to spend time in a comfortable environment, have a decent meal, and see Tony,

“Hey Mi casa es tu casa,” Tony replied, “Now c’mon and get you’re butts down here, there’s a Romero marathon on tonight, and I’m determined to enjoy it with Pizza, Popcorn, and beer!”

“Thanks Tony, I’d love to,” Clint said,

“We’ll be with you shortly,” Vision agreed, “Shall we bring anything with us?”

“Just your adorable selves…., hey Dum-E what are you..., Dum.., No, not there, not that! Oh God I am so sending you to burger King to work as the self service machine!” Tony cried, “Gotta go guys, the natives are getting restless, see you soon, Peace!”

Clint downed his coffee and rose to his feet, “Lets not keep the man waiting, though God knows he is always late to everything!”

“Indeed,” Vision replied, shutting down and running programs, and checking that Cathy and Toby were safe,

“Who’s this, Strangeness, Tony spoke about?” Clint asked, curiously,

“I believe it would be better for you to meet him yourself,” Vision said, “I do not think any description I give would do him, or his Cloak justice,”
A thudding of paws and a flash of sleek black fur, were what greeted Clint and Vision as they entered the penthouse of Stark Tower, Clint’s gaze followed said sleek black fur, and saw a large cat leaping at a fluffy bird on a string, which was being held by Dummy, who was playing with the cat and seemed to enjoying himself immensely, as he dangled the bird, and rolled about the living area, with the cat charging after him, leaping over the furniture, and the people upon said furniture.

“That was my shoulders your fleabag just leaped off!” Rhodey protested, to Tony, who was, ignoring the complaint, and more interested in capturing the cat and Bots antics on his phone, “Hello, shoulders, getting damaged here?” Rhodey called, to the completely indifferent Tony, who just hummed and nodded his head,

“Sure honey, whatever you need, you know I’m good for it!”

“Anything but actually listening to a word that I have to say!” Rhodes sighed, catching sight of Clint and Vision he beckoned them to come in, “Welcome to the kindergarten, please, pull up a chair, and lift your feet off the floor at the risk of having them run over by a demented Bot and a flea bitten stray!”

“Not flea bitten!” Tony stated, holding a hand up and pointing at Rhodey, the Colonel sighed and gave Vision a long suffered look, as Dummy rolled behind him, with the cat chasing after him,

“Oh, hey guys!” Tony greeted, finally noticing them, “Welcome to Casa la Stark, Pizza is ordered, drinks are in the fridge, and the Popcorn…,” he paused, glancing to the ceiling, “Friday?”

“Micky is on it,” Friday replied, sounding exasperated, “Though the wall and ceiling will need cleaning, since Micky has decided to use this experience as target practice!”

“Um, Micky?” Clint asked, not sure if he actually wanted to know, and had to lurch forward when Dummy shot past him, the cat following and leaping up to land on the Bot and began to chew the string,

“My microwave,” Tony said, grinning with insane pride, “He’s vegetarian, and a little picky at what he will and will not cook,”

Clint stared at the certifiable lunatic/eccentric genius, for a moment he said nothing, just stared at Tony, taking him in, seeing the changes, the weight loss, grey in his hair, added stress and fatigue lines on his face, but also seeing the familiarity, the trade mark goatee, maniac gleam of ‘I don’t give a fuck because I am super smart, rich, and handsome’ in his eyes, but what drew his gaze the most was Tony’s half cocky, half uncertain smile. The one he gave to people he actually wanted to make friends with, rather than the easy grin that he gave Pepper and Rhodey, and very different than the empty smirk he shot to the press.

Taking a deep breath, Clint walked the ten paces between himself and Tony, and held out his right hand, “It’s great too see you,” he said, his tone both friendly and timid, he held his hand very still, between himself and Tony, letting the Billionaire decide whether or not to take it. Tony stared at Clint for a long moment then he took the other mans hand, shaking it,

“Hey Birdbrain, how was the flight over here? You got plans for tonight, or d’you just want to wing it?”

Clint snorted, and shook his head, “Sounds like you’re getting a bit rusty there, old man, might want
to oil up you’re cogs and joints,”

“Oh, I’m plenty slicked up already, big bird, and while we’re on the subject of joints, I’m afraid I gave all that up along with wearing my Mother’s underwear at the turn of the century!”

“Oh, you don’t wear you’re mothers underwear anymore, what d’you wear now? Hot rod red thongs?”

“Nah, I borrow Captain Dickwad’s frilly spangled lace knickers,”

“Really? I thought he didn’t bother with underwear, I thought he just shoved the Star Spangled Banner up his ass!”

“My borrowing his knickers is why he has to do that!”

Vision watched the banter like it was a tennis match, his head going back and forth between Tony and Clint as they traded smart ass comments back and forth, he was, as always intrigued by human interaction, found that he could learn a lot about people by simply watching them as the spoke, ate, watched Tv, or went about their business. But watching Tony always seemed to provide him with more experience than anyone else, because whenever Tony did anything he was completely and totally engaging in doing so, he drew the attention of everyone in his vicinity, and by his larger than life personality, he kept everyone utterly captivated.

What was funny about it, was that Tony did not even have to make a conscious effort to try to do this, it was a natural gift he had, to drew attention and keep his audience riveted.

Presently, Rhodey held up his hand, and ignored the cat, who’d decided he had grown bored playing with Dummy and wanted to find a soft place to clean himself and curl up to sleep.

Instead of looking at the cat, Rhodey focused on Clint and Tony, “Seeing as this conversation is likely to descend even further into the gutter, could the two of you please cease and desist right now?” he asked, a hopeful expression on his face,

Tony wrinkled his nose and pursed his lips, “I wouldn’t hold your breath, honeybear,”

“It is doubtful,” Clint said, folding his arms over his chest and gave Rhodey a smirk that just dared the other man to complain, as he had a whole stack of quick witted come backs to throw at him, at the first opportunity, and with Tony’s mirroring smirk, Rhodey knew that Clint would be both aided and abetted in his snark-fest.

Sighing heavily, he pinched the bridge of his nose, “I’m going to regret the two of you being together, aren’t I?”

Tony nodded his head enthusiastically, “Absolutely,”

“Great,” Rhodey murmured, slumping back, apparently resigned to his fate, “Well, I guess I can at least be thankful for the fact that you’re rich,”

“Why?” Clint asked, dropping down onto the enormous sofa, and having to force himself not let out a groan of pleasure at the exquisite softness that cushioned his body, God, he had missed the kind of furniture that Tony had, only someone of wealth could afford such comforts, and Clint had to admit that he missed said comforts when he had to make do with paper thin mattresses and hard seats
elsewhere. He grinned at Rhodes, and reached out to the cat, offering his fingers to be sniffed and then head butted as the cat accepted him, “Because Tony can afford a great entertainment package and the best seats to enjoy it from?”

“No,” Rhodey said, “Because when he finally drives me completely insane, he can afford to pay for me to have the best care!”

“Oh Rhody bear!” Tony protested, making a hurt expression, and promptly climbed onto Rhody’s lap, cuddling and kissing him, “I’d never drive you mad, I love you too much, don’t you love me?”

“I’ll love you far more if you stop molesting my face and get the hell off my lap!”

“You mean you don’t wanna talk about the first thing that comes up?”

“Ugh, you are impossible!” Rhodey groaned, resigned,

“And that’s why you love me,” Tony stated, flopping himself across the sofa, spreading himself out so he was laying with his head on a pillow, his ass still in Rhody’s lap, and his feet stretched out and touching Clint’s thighs,

“Pizza is here,” Friday informed everyone, and Vision rose off his perch on the sofa, “I shall get it,” he said, and disappeared through the floor,

“That never gets old,” Tony said, shaking his head, “Hey Fri? turn on the TV and lets get the movie marathon started.”

****

Having used a lot of his energy trying out the prototype braces Tony had designed, Rhody fell asleep quite early on, and lay snoring softly on the sofa, Vision kindly went and retrieved a blanket for him, wrapping him up so he wouldn’t get chilled, and then retreated to the lab with Dummy, to spend some time on the internet and talking to Friday while the Bots rested.

This left Tony and Clint alone, save for Jet, who had curled up in Tony’s lap to sleep, twitching and chirping every so often as he dreamed whatever it was cats dreamed about.

“So…, how have you been?” Clint asked, when the silence became too heavy for him to bear,

Tony looked at him with a lob-sided grin, “Coma,” he replied, glibly, “You?”

“Divorced,” Clint replied, just as glib, “And living in a rat trap and earning my keep by dealing with drunken douche bags that puke on me night after night,”

“Could be worse,” Tony said, “They could pissing or jacking off on you!”

Clint made a disgusted face at the thought of that, but couldn’t help the grin that pulled at the corner of his lips at Tony’s familiar humour. Tony, however took a breath and turned serious,

“I’m sorry about you and Laura,” he said, looking genuinely sorry over the news of Clint’s marriage ending,

“It’s not your fault,” Clint said, “Hell, I can’t even blame Captain Jackass, though God knows I wish
I could,” he took a deep breath and scratched the back of his head, “The truth is I have no one to blame but myself.”

“Clint...,” Tony began to protest, but Clint shook his head,

“It’s true, I can blame Loki for brain fucking me, but I was the idiot that didn’t bother getting real help afterwards, I went to three mandatory psych sessions and then quite, even though I wasn’t remotely over it, I just decided to shove it to the back of my mind and pretend none of that shit really happened. Buried myself in work, in the Avengers, then, when things started to get screwed up there, I ran for the hills because I was scared that I wouldn’t be able to deal with it, convinced myself I was ready for retirement and spending my days as a farmer with my wife and kids, while knowing deep down that I would be bored out of my skull and climbing the walls within a week, which, I was, and without work to focus on, the nightmares just got worse, so I’d avoid sleep, be short tempered with the kids and Laura, or I’d down half a bottle of something and pass out,” he looked to Tony, his face more open and honest than the Billionaire had ever seen it before, “Even if Cap hadn’t called, even if I hadn’t run off to Europe, me and Laura would have split. She did what she could for me, hell, she put up with so much, more than she should have, but my refusal to even meet her half way wore her down in the end, I was already sleeping on couch or in the barn when Steve called, our marriage was hanging by a thread and my running off was the scissors which cut it.”

Clint let out a shaky breath and reached for his beer bottle, “Talking about feelings really suck,” he said, managing a weak smile, “My fault,” he said, taking a swig of beer, “I’m sorry, I said sorry to the kids, to Laura, to Vision, to Rhodes, and now to you, and it’s supposed to make it better but...,”

“It never does,” Tony finished for him, shifting on the sofa and curling his right leg under him, “Believe me, I’ve fucked up so much, so many times that Sorry could never fix it, and by comparison I think I beat you in the ‘Fucking up’ category.”

“Oh yeah, how so?” Clint asked, a hint of a challenge in his voice,

“Ultron,”

“Boss,” Friday offered softly, “The Scarlet Bitch...,”

“Mind fucked me I know,” Tony said, waving a hand at the ceiling, “But still partly my fault, and he nearly wiped out the world,”

“I used a decorated war hero’s injury to hurt you,” Clint said,

“I nearly killed a war hero suffered PTSD,”

“And got beaten into a freaking coma for it,” Clint said, “And I was working with the ass hat who did the beating.”

“One of my one night stands nearly killed the woman I love to get revenge on me for be a dick to her,” Tony said Love because he did love Pepper, only he loved her now as a sister, and sometimes (A lot of the time) as a scolding mother!

“I left my entire family in danger of being murdered by my many enemies because I couldn’t get my head out my ass and face up to my problems,”

“I took a fifteen year old into battle,”

“The Spider kid?”

“Spider Man, he’s very sensitive about that, and yeah, Christ I fucked that up,”
“Hey,” Clint nudged Tony’s knee with his foot, “Me too, guess we can make our own club of fucking right up.”

“I’m president!” Tony declared, “You can be Chief of Staff,”

“Well thank you, Mr President!”, the two of them broke into laughter and relaxed even more, “I really am sorry,” Clint said, after a while, “I was a cock, and I’m sorry for it,”

“Oh don’t be, I like Cocks, ask Bruce!”

Clint snorted, “You’re incorrigible Stark,”

“And proud of it!” Tony declared, he then grinned, “You want a job?” he asked, making Clint frown, “Well, you said your living in a rat infested shit hole..,”

“Rat trap,” Clint corrected,

“A rat infested shit hole the size of a shoe box, and getting puked on regularly by piss heads and no doubt earning a pittance doing it,”

“Yeah,” Clint agreed, drawing out the word,

“Well, Happy pretty much works for Pepper now, and I haven’t bothered looking for anyone else to be head of my security, and I’m pretty paranoid about letting people I don’t know into my life, so, if you’re up for it, I can provide you with an excellent salary, place to live, access to all my cars, and an all inclusive dental and medical plan,”

For a moment Clint didn’t know what to say, then he was enveloping Tony into an embrace, upsetting Jet as he was forced to move or be squashed between the two men, “I don’t know what to say, Man!”

“Say nothing, it’s better for the both of us,” Tony said, wriggling to get free, “You will have to put up with Bruce being brooding, over protective, grumpy, and generally anti-social, also there’s this complete douche bag Wizard guy who’s stalking me, and his Cloak is a complete pervert and has a thing for me, so you’ll have your work cut out for you!”

“You’re getting Stalked by a Wizard?” Clint was not really sure whether he should be surprised by this, or just resigned, considering the fact Tony attracted crazy like a moth to a flame,

“And his magic cloak,” Tony said, “He’s called the Sorcerers Apprentice, be sure and address him by that when you meet him!”

“Okay,” Clint said, uncertainly, “Can I ask one small favour though?”

“No harm in asking,”

“Keep the PDA’s with Wayne PG 13 when I’m around, and by that I mean I don’t want to find the two of you fucking in the kitchen, because that will result in my needing to gauge my own eyes out!”

“Barton please!” Tony cried, sounding appalled, “Bruce and I would never fuck in the kitchen, we’d do it on the dining room table like any civilized adults!”

Clint sighed, “I am going to regret working for you so very much aren’t I?”

Tony offered him a bright smile, “You can join Rhodey in the sanatorium in years to come!”
“Thanks Stark, I’ll be sure to look forward to it!”
Chapter 18

Bruce Wayne merely grunted by way of greeting for Clint, when Tony told him of Clint’s new job and that he would be living in the Tower.

The Gothamite Billionaire was clearly unhappy about the situation, but knew better than to question Tony’s choices when it came to whom he had in his employment, it was not, after all, his business, who Tony had working for him, that was Tony’s business alone.

Tony was very easy to work for, more than Clint had expected. He’s thought he’d be at Tony’s beck and call all the time, would be sent on stupid errands to get junk food, pick up dry cleaning, or things like Anne Hathaway in The Devil Wears Prada! Yes, Clint had a thing for chick flicks, not that he would admit it to anyone even under torture, but, as much as he enjoyed action, he liked the simple storylines and comedic romances of chick flicks, the cliché happy endings that always brought a smile to his face. It took him out of reality the way that action films didn’t, his life was too similar to those films, full of blood, death, and destruction. Sometimes it was nice to escape that for a while.

Within three days of Tony taking him on as head of his personal security, Clint had moved out of his shithole apartment and into the Tower, the floor he’d had before the Ultron disaster, Tony had repaired all the damage Ultron had done, and the floor was pretty much the same as it had been when Clint had left it.

He moved his meagre possessions in and made himself at home, thoroughly enjoying the 32inch plasma screen TV, that sported every channel and had an amazing surround sound.

He also made use of the PS4 in the common area, playing games on his own, and against Tony and Vision.

He braced himself for long nights and early mornings as an employee of Tony Stark, only for it not to happen, well, the late nights did, but that was because he was watching movies, or playing PS4, not because of Tony’s demands, in fact Tony had very few demands.

He tended to rise late, being more of a night owl than a morning lark, if left to his own devices would likely spend all his time in his lab inventing, upgrading, and doing maintenance work. It was only due to the interventions of Bruce Wayne that he went to bed every night, at Midnight, and spent eight hours in bed, resting if not sleeping, the Gothamite insisting upon it, and on Tony having three staple meals a day, nutritious meals designed to help Tony regain his health and put on weight in a safe way.

As head of security, Clint had to accompany Tony when he went out, but that was few and far between. Mostly he travelled between Wayne’s Gotham Manor, The Compound, and the Tower, seeing no one outside of his social circle save for his physio, who came by three times a week now to take him through his exercises.

Seeing Tony doing physio was a guilt trip for Clint, seeing him in exercise clothing revealed just how skinny he was, showed how much damage he had suffered because of the Civil War. Tony might not blame him, but Clint would always carry a measure of guilt for his actions in the war. Aside from accompanying Tony when he was travelling between residences, Clint had very little to
do. He monitored the security with Friday, did daily checks on the doors, windows, and other entrances to the homes, and then, for the most part, could please himself.

If Tony were going out in public, was making appearances at official events he would have far more work to do, but at present the only place that he was going was Bleeker Street, once a week, to see the most enigmatic man Clint had ever met in his life.

Stephen Strange, Sorcerer Supreme. The man who was teaching Tony Stark how to use magic.

Clint was amazed by the story he was told, of how Tony had come out of his coma, how he was connected to a previously unknown seventh infinity stone. The Stone of Unity. How he was inherently magical, was able to cover his flesh in a silver/white metal, sprout blue flames from his hands, and levitate!

The levitation was apparently due to his third magical element, Darkness, or Dark Energy and Dark Matter, he could manipulate it, bend reality as it were, as Stephen explained it, Tony was not really flying, so much as he was changing the energy and matter about himself so he was lifted from the ground.

Clint didn’t even pretend to understand this, or the Sentient Cloak that acted independently of Strange, but it certainly made for entertainment. As did Tony and Stephen’s constant snarking at each other. The two just didn’t let up, were forever picking faults and making sarcastic comments at each other, always spurring the other on while somehow managing to work together well as Stephen tutored the Billionaire.

Find out information on the Stone of Unity, on Tony’s past life were slow going though.

Stephen would take Tony into a trance, have him placed in a state of complete relaxation and separate his astral form from his physical form and guide it back through his history, through the lives he had lived before this one.

Surprisingly there were several lives. Tony had recollected memories from several eras in which he had lived.

He had been a detective in Nineteenth Century London.
A Noble in Seventeenth Century Italy, a female Noble at that! Apparently the Soul was sexless, it was only the physical form that had a gender, so a soul may be reborn into any body, male or female.
A lady in waiting to Queen Anne Boleyn, Sixteenth Century England.
An Apothecary in Fifteenth Century France.
A crusader in the Twelfth Century, fighting under the banner of Richard I.
A Merchant in Second Century Spain.
A Roman Senator in Ancient Rome.
A Physician in Ancient Greece.
And the one they were looking for, A Mage in Ancient Egypt, called Amenken.

“So what’s it like being a woman?” Clint had to ask, the thought of Tony Stark as a woman, one that he struggled to picture. Though Tony had managed to create a fair depiction of what he had looked like, using his art app and computer imaging, eventually creating an attractive women, with dark doe eyes, full, heart shaped lips, high cheek bones and forehead, and a mass of thick jet black curls.
Dark hair and dark eyes appeared to be a constant for all of Tony’s lives, the fairest being the midwife in the sixth century, who’s hair was light chestnut instead of dark brown or black.

“It’s different,” Tony said, “Women walk differently, hold themselves in a different posture to men, not to mention how I was treated as a woman in those days,” He shook his head, “We really don’t appreciate how much freedom we have as Men, or how free women are today compared to have it was then,” He rolled his eyes, “And don’t even get me started on corsets!”

Clint snickered, “Bet they looked sexy!”

Tony rose an eyebrow, “Coming on to me Hawkeye? I never knew you had it in you!”

“He better not be,” Bruce commented, not looking up from his tablet, “Not if he wishes to keep breathing!”

Clint snorted, “You ain’t my type Stark, I ain’t got nothing against Gay, Bi, or Lesbian, but I’m Hetero,”

“Thank God for small mercies!” Tony drawled,

“You were hot as a woman though,” Clint added, “Especially as that Italian Noble, what did you say her name was? Rosa, Rosaline?”

“Rosalia,” Tony said, he sighed and rubbed his forehead, “All the regressions, all the past lives, and still the one I need to know about seems to be eluding me.”

“You’ve learned nothing more on Amenken?” Vision asked, leaning over the back of the sofa,

“Not a damn thing,” Tony sighed, “And there is no record of him in Ancient Egypt, Under Cleopatra, or before her. The little I saw of the landscape is useless, I have no point of reference to use to get a likely point to start looking for this damn stone, and…,” he broke off, shaking his head,

“And what?” Bruce asked, setting down his tablet and frowning,

“Nothing,”

“Tony?”

“It’s nothing!” the Billionaire cried, throwing his hands up in the air, and immediately blue flames burst from his fingers!

“That is never going to not be freaky,” Clint said, while Tony cursed, and forced himself to calm down, rubbing at his temple as if he had a headache, which he probably did, stress, worry, and fatigue were all taking their toll on him, something that had not gone unnoticed by anyone, especially Bruce, and he was not prepared to let Tony continue as he was.

“I think it’s time we take a break, that you take a break,” he said, rising from his seat and smoothing down his shirt,

“What are you talking about?” Tony asked, lowering his hand from his head and looking up at Bruce,

“I’m talking about us going on holiday,” the Gothamite explained, “I have hired us a private beach in The Seychelles for two weeks, just you, me, sunlight, white sand, and the turquoise sea.”
Tony’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped open in shock, “We can’t…,”
“We can, and we will,” Bruce said, looking equal parts amused and smug, “I’ve arrange for you to have two weeks away from your lessons with Strange, Rhodey will hold the fort with Vision, Barton, Nightwing, and Spiderman, Pepper’s already handling SI, and Alfred’s more than able to run the manor without me, so, there is no reason you and I need not go and enjoy a well earned vacation.”

It was not often that Tony Stark was struck dumb, and seeing it was always amusing, Clint watched as various expressions came over the Geniuses face as he tried to think of a response for his fiancé,

“It’ll make for a beautiful vacation,” Vision said, offering his opinion, “I’ve seen images of the beach, it would make a wonderful honeymoon I think,”

Bruce shot the Android a frown, but Tony looked intrigued, “Honeymoon?” he asked, drawing Bruce’s attention back to himself, “Could we?” he asked,

“What?
“You mean elope?” Clint asked, getting to his feet, “Do you mean go to Vegas and just get married there?”

“Why not?” Tony exclaimed, excitedly, he grinned at Bruce who looked quite flustered, “I don’t care about a big wedding with all the trimmings, I don’t need all the organ music or brides maids and stuff, all I want is to say the vows and be with you,”

Bruce gaped for a moment, a half smile caught on his face with a look of bewilderment, “We could go tonight,” he said, “I could call Alfred, get him to bring me a suit, we’d need to go to a jeweller, get rings, and Pepper will kill us both if she’s not invited,”

“As will my Platypus,” Tony said, “And we need to call Peter, and Dick, they have to be there too, oh! And Peter will need a suit, so we’ll have to go shopping, Fri?”

“Yes Bossman,”

“Give Giorgio a call and get him to open his New York store, we need to go shopping!”

“What, are you really doing this?” Clint asked, So much for Tony not being a demanding boss!

“Hell yeah we’re doing this!” Tony cried, he wrapped his arms about Bruce’s neck and jumped up to wrap his legs about Bruce’s waist kissing him loudly and deeply,

“God! I said no PDA’s in front of me!” Clint whined, receiving a middle finger from Tony,

“I guess we shout get a jet fired up and ready to fly to Vegas,” he said to Vision, “Looks like we have a wedding to go to.”

*****

Pepper was not happy about being given no time to get a dress sorted, or the accessories to go with it, but was soothed by Tony buying her a beautiful Gucci gown of wine silk, it was strapless and
figure hugging, with vibrant red crystals across the top of the bodice that went well with the ruby necklace and earrings Tony loaned her from his private collection.

Bruce bought Dick and Alfred new suits suitable for the occasion, as did Tony for Clint, Vision, and Peter. Rhodey insisted on wearing his dress uniform, looking exceptionally smart as he took Tony’s arm and led his down the aisle, his braces moving smoothly as they took a slow pace to where Bruce waited with Alfred at the altar.

“Did you think a few days ago that you’d be attending the wedding of a couple of Billionaires?” Clint whispered to Peter, as Dick recorded the ceremony,

“Nope, but Mr Stark always keeps things exciting,” the teen replied, reading his confetti and rice,

“Do you Bruce Thomas Wayne, take thee, Anthony Edward Stark to be your lawful wedding husband, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, for better for worse, and forsaking all others until death do you part?”

“I do,” Bruce said, a tremulous smile on his face as he stared into Tony’s shining eyes, that glimmered with unshed tears,

“The press will go nuts when the news breaks on this,” Pepper whispered to Rhodey, “They’ll be seething at not getting exclusive pictures,”

“Yeah,” Rhodey agreed, “But this is the best way, there was no chance they’d have a private wedding otherwise,”

“True, but I would have liked a chance to get prepared, and not have to do my hair and make up on a quinjet!”

“With this ring I thee wed,” Tony recited after the priest, and slipped the simple white gold wedding band on Bruce’s finger,

“I now pronounce you Husband and Husband, you may kiss.”

Tony and Bruce hardly needed prompting for this and were showered in rice and confetti by Peter as everyone clapped,

“Were you both serious about going for pizza to celebrate?” Dick asked, lowering the phone,

“Totally!” Tony said,

“Absolutely not!” Pepper scoffed, “We are doing something classier than pizza,”

“But Peppercorn, light of my life, it’s my wedding, don’t I get to choose the food?” Tony asked, with an adorable pout, as he leaned back against Bruce, the other mans arms wrapped about his waist,

“I think I’m in the mood of champagne and oysters,” he whispered in Tony’s ear, “And maybe some chocolate coated strawberries?” the inuendo was not lost on Tony, and they hurriedly signed the documents, and went to nearest hotel to check in and made use of the restaurant and bar for the celebration meal.

The staff were shocked by the sudden arrival of two of Americas most famous Billionaires in the
hotel, celebrating their wedding no less, and little time was lost before calls to the press were made, reporters arriving at the hotel to get photos of the party around the table, drinking champagne, laughing as they shared memories, Rhodey and Alfred making speeches, and everyone cooing as Tony and Bruce kissed.

The chef astonished everyone by whipping up a cake, for Tony and Bruce, the chocolate icing runny on the still warm cake, but tasting divine as they cut it into slices and served it out.

“Happy Mr Stark-Wayne?” Bruce whispered to Tony as they shared the last glass of champagne,

“Than I ever thought possible, Mr Wayne-Stark,” Tony leaned in for a lingering kiss, and rested his cheek against Bruce’s “I can’t wait for our honeymoon,”

“Me too,” Bruce growled, “Now, why don’t we make use of the bridal suite?”

“You read my mind!”

*****

Scotland

Steve was not an avid follower of social media, he preferred papers to internet feeds, TV news reports rather than stuff on twitter and Facebook.

Wanda, however, loved social media, and learned within seconds of it occurring, that Tony and Bruce Wayne had married.

The news had gone viral the moment the first posts had been made, images, both done by actual reporters, and by the general public were soon popping up online, of The Newlyweds celebrating in a Vegas hotel, with Pepper Potts, Alfred Pennyworth (Bruce Waynes butler) Richard Grayson, Bruce Wayne’s ward, Peter Parker, Tony Stark’s intern and protégé, Rhodes, Vision, and Clint Barton, who, shockingly was now Tony’s personal body guard and head of his personal security!

“Do you think this means Stark might be considering forgiving the rest of us?” Sam asked, curiously,

“I doubt it,” Natasha said, “Stark is many things, egotistical, impulsive, self-destructive, but forgiving is not one of them.”

“I’ll bet this marriage is just a publicity stunt,” Wanda sneered, “A way for Stark to stay in the spotlight, I’ll bet it won’t even last.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Sam said, looking at a picture of Tony and Bruce cuddling and kissing at the table, having eyes only for each other, they weren’t posing for the shot, this was a candid taken by someone in the hotel, not an official photo.

Steve stared at another photo, one taken by a photographer from the New York Times. This one of Tony going with Bruce, presumably to the bridal suite, the taller man was lead Tony by the hand, Tony’s face was upturned to his new Husband and his expression was one of adoration, excitement, and love. It was not an expression Steve had ever seen on Tony’s face before, it was both beautiful
and painful to see, and as much as Steve might have once hoped to have Tony gaze at him the way he gazed at Bruce Wayne, he longed more than anything to have been present at the wedding, to share in the joy with Tony, and drink a glass of champagne in celebration.

But instead he was thousands of miles away, seeing the after images on a news feed, wishing for things that could never be.
Chapter 19

Seychelles

Tony let out a shriek as Bruce suddenly lifted him off the towel he was sunning himself on and ran with him towards the sea!

“No!” he cried, laughing as Bruce dropped him into the water, he came up, spitting water from his mouth and splashed his unrepentant husband,

“Asshole!”

“You were being too lazy!” Bruce protested, grinning and dancing backwards as Tony advanced on him, spraying him with water and then leaped at him, pushing down on his shoulders to try and push him under the water, but Bruce wrapped his arms about Tony’s waist, pulling him in for a kiss that was flavoured with salt.

Tony stopped trying to drown Bruce and settled into the kiss, setting his feet down onto the sand and snuggling into Bruce’s embrace.

“I wanna stay here forever,” he whispered, resting his head on Bruce’s chest, “Its so perfect here, so peaceful,”

“Yeah it is,” Bruce agreed, planting a kiss on Tony’s wet hair, “And you know, maybe we could emigrate here,”

“What?” Tony laughed, lifting his head from Bruce’s chest,

“Why not?” Bruce asked, shrugging, “We could buy a house, transfer our work, and go swimming every day, walk on the beach as the sunsets, and have picnics down here every Sunday,”

Tony laughed, “Just stay in paradise huh?”

“Exactly,” Bruce purred, starting kissing Tony again, “We don’t have to go home if we don’t want to, we can move here, live a life of luxury and leisure, live like the spoiled Billionaires the world says we are,”

“It’s a lovely idea,” Tony murmured, settling in again, against Bruce’s chest, and it really was a lovely idea, a very tempting idea, and were they different people, then they might have considered really turning it into a reality. But, they were not the sort of people who could do so, neither could walk away from their responsibilities or obligations like that. Not and be able to live with themselves, so nice dream or not, it simply wasn’t going to be a reality.

“Maybe we can retire here,” Tony said, not wanting to let the dream go completely, “You know, when we’re too old to run around fighting psychos and demi Gods anymore?”

“Retirement,” Bruce mused, “I never really gave it much thought, to be honest, I never really thought I’d have lasted as long as I have. I figured that someone would have taken me out eventually, I didn’t see myself settling down in the sun, or passing on the torch to someone else,” Though in hindsight, he had to admit if only to himself that perhaps he had been subconsciously thinking that by making Dick his Protégé. That perhaps one day Dick would take up the mantle of The Bat and pick up where he left off.
“Well, I never saw myself learning magic for Christ Sakes!” Tony said, “Things change, and maybe in about ten-fifteen years, it’d be nice to just bow out and spend the rest of our days sunbathing, drinking cocktails, and getting fat on ice cream!”

Bruce snorted at the image Tony painted and nodded, “Yeah, that sounds good,” he agreed, surprising himself by actually looking forward to retiring from the field with Tony, to settle into a life of leisure, that after all the fighting they would have done, would be well earned.

“You know? All that talk of cocktails and ice cream has made me hungry,” Tony said, “Let’s head to one of those bars and get some cocktails with dirty names, and the biggest, sugariest sundaes EVER!”

“Okay,” Bruce said, agreeing easily, though making a mental note, not to let Tony start in on The Leg Spreader’s, as that never ended well, or the Liquid Viagra, that had so much caffeine in it, Tony was always left vibrating, which, come to think of it in a sexual tense, and no, Bruce firmly pushed those thoughts away while he was in wet, clingy, beach shorts, the last thing he needed in those was a boner!

****

Asgardian Ship

As the Tesseract was claimed by Thanos, Thor felt all hope he had within him shrivel up and die. All around him, his people lay injured, dying, Heimdall, his brave and loyal friend, skewered by the mad Titan, Hulk, beaten for the first time in his life laying stunned of not unconscious among the debris, and Loki, betraying him again, or... Thor knew that gleam in the Trickster’s eye, that wicked shimmer that promised mischief and mayhem for whomever was unfortunate enough to catch his eye.

Behind the scold’s bridal which was keeping him silent, Thor smirked, as Loki made a show of submitting to Thanos, declaring his undying loyalty to the Mad Titan, only to lash out with his daggers the second he got close.

At the same moment as Loki struck, there came a bellow of rage from behind Thor, who wasn’t able to turn, but he did hear a roar of “THANOS” a second before a large oddly coloured, bare chested male was charging the Titan, weapon blasts flanked this person’s sides, hitting Thanos’ minions/children, and as a certain Rich Midgardian would say “What the fuck was that all about?”

As skilled a warrior as the strange skinned male was, he was no match for the Titan, who beat him down without breaking a sweat, and knocked Loki flying with a single blow, sadly the Trickster landed in front of the hideous Proxima Midnight, she grinned ferally at him, but a green skinned red head was suddenly leaping over Loki and kicking her in the face, and wielding a sword at her,

“All right, everyone who’s not in league with the Giant Ribena carton, follow us!” came a very human sounding voice, and Thor grunted, wanting to turn, wrestling against his restraints, when a familiar green fist came down on the stocks, shattering them and freeing Thor,

“Thanks Big Guy,” he panted, grateful to be free. Hulk grunted, his body twisting and shrinking until Banner was standing before him, naked and flushing at that,
“Whoa! Now there’s something you don’t see everyday!” the human voice commented, and Thor turned to look now, seeing a moderately built very human male staring at them, besides him, a female with antennae on her head stared with impossibly wide eyes,

“They friend, Quill, they come on us!” Bruce blushed harder, and the man, Quill rolled his eyes,

“Come with us, Mantis, with us, not on us.” An explosion had Quill and Mantis ducking, and to Thor’s amazement a rather fluffy rabbit like creature appeared holding a huge gun,

“C’mon you bunch on numb nuts, time to hit the road!” he fired again, this time at Thanos, and another twice just for good measure, “Ah, I’ll get yer next time,”

“I am Groot,” and just when Thor didn’t think things could get any stranger, a Tree appeared besides the rabbit, also speaking,

“Groot watch your mouth, you’re too young to break balls!”

“It’s a talking racoon,” Banner murmured, beside him, “A racoon that talks, and a tree that talks, why not?”

“Come on Guardians, we don’t have all day!” Quill shouted, “Gamora?” The green skinned red head, pulled her sword back from where she had slashed Proxima Midnight, deftly sheathed the weapon and back flipped away from her foe, pulling some pretty impressive moves as she made her way back to Quill, stopping along the way to pick up the oddly skinned male she addressed as Drax, and urge to make a retreat,

“Thor?” Banner asked, shifting nervously from bare foot to bare foot, while trying to cover his modesty,

“I do not think now is time for being choosy, Brother,” Loki grunted, as he got to his feet,

“Thor,” The voice came from behind him, was hoarse and weak. Thor turned, seeing Heimdall building the last of his energy, “Go, I’ll slow him down,”

Thor’s remaining eye blurred with tears. Heimdall would destroy the ship, would annihilate himself to slow Thanos down and give them a chance at escape. A last act of heroism,

“I will avenge you, Brother,” Thor whispered, gripping Banner’s shoulder and nodding to Loki he made his choice, the three of them moving towards Quill, who guided them through the debris with the rest of his team, to where their ship was waiting.

“You must go to light speed right away,” Thor shouted, “My friend will destroy the ship, we must clear the blast zone,”

“God damnit, Rocket?” Quill barked, running for the Cockpit,

“Blasting off as we speak,” the Rabb... no Racoon said running over to take the co-pilot’s seat, the two of them working together to disengage from where they had docked and put as much distance between themselves and the exploding ship as they could.

Silently Thor walked to a window and watched, as the explosion lit up space like a star, the last of his people dying in the cold of space.

“You did everything you could,” Loki said, joining him silently, “All you could. Thanos is unlike any foe you have faced before, no one could stand against him and hope to succeed,”
“He will pay for this,” Thor stated, “I will make him pay,”

“Uh, hi, I don’t mean to be a bother to anyone, but…. could I possibly borrow some clothes?” Banner asked, his hands over his crotch and face flushed,

“Borrow?” Mantis asked, her head tipping curiously, “What will you do with them? Aren’t clothes for wearing?”

“That’s what he means, Mantis,” Rocket the Racoon called, “Drax, go get him some, we don’t need him falling asleep and leaking like Quill does!”

Quill choked, “One time!” he cried, “I had one wet dream and you’re still going on about it!”

If Bruce hadn’t been flushed before, he was crimson now!

“You always seem to find the most interesting people, Brother,” Loki commented, as Drax took Banner to get dressed,

“So, where were you guys headed?” Quill asked, turning to look at Thor, “And what beef did Thanos have with you?”

“The Tesseract,” Thor sighed, “He wanted it for his gauntlet, to add to the power he already has from The Power Stone, which he took during the destruction of Xandar,”

Quill looked stricken, and Gamora gasped, quickly covering her expression and pressing her lips into a thin line.

“I am Groot!” the Tree sneered,

“You’re right, Buddy, Thanos is a giant asshole,” Quill agreed, apparently able to translate Tree Speak, which All Speak was unable to do, “So.., where are we dropping you off?” he asked Thor again,

“Earth,” Thor said, “There are warriors there who will be invaluable in the fight against The Titan,”

“Earth?” Rocket groaned, “That’s two days away at maximum speed, can’t we just drop them off at the nearest port and go on our merry way, there’s a bar on..,”

“No.”

It was Gamora who spoke, her voice commanding and expression stony, “Thanos will destroy half the Universe unless he is stopped, and to stop him we need help, if there are warriors on Earth capable of fighting him, then we must go there,”

Her eyes met Quill’s in a speaking glance, a look of understanding came over the young man’s face and he nodded, “Rocket, set a course for Earth, maximum speed,” Rocket grunted and complained, but did so, taking the helm as Quill rose from the cockpit and walked over to Thor, “I think we should talk,” he said, “Share information so we all know where we stand,”

“I agree,” Loki said, a saccharine smile on his face that Thor wouldn’t trust for a moment, “We should definitely get to know one another better,” he grunted as Thor’s hand came down heavily on his shoulder and squeezed, painfully,

“These people saved us Loki, do not start your tricks on them,” he warned his brother, who looked sulky at having his “Fun” spoiled, turning to Quill, Thor nodded, “Let us talk.
Tony shifted in bed. Besides him Bruce snored peacefully, while Tony’s head tossed on the pillow, his eyes moving rapidly beneath the lids.

In his mind he saw a monstrous being, garbed in armour, purple skinned, and wearing a gold gauntlet on his left hand. Gems shone brightly upon two of the knuckles, with spaces open on three others, and one over the back of the gauntlet.

The image shifted and Tony saw the gauntlet being raise to the sky, the fingers clicking, a sound that was as loud as a gun being fired, and then there ash. Tony was in an ocean of ash, up to his waist in it, being smothered by it! To his horror he could see the faces of people he knew appearing and disappearing in the grey substance, Peter, Alfred, Happy, Dick, and Strange. He saw their bodies crumbling to ashes which were then scattered on the wind, he saw people crying, saw tear streaked faces, people clinging to each other, their fists clutching at piles of ash that they tried to keep from scattering.

Ash and grief swirled, filling Tony’s vision, until finally it cleared and he found himself staring at the purple face once more.

With jolt Tony awoke, sitting bolt upright in bed, “Thanos is coming!” he whispered, pressing a hand to his chest, where his heart was pounding. “Thanos is coming.”

Two days Later

Avengers Compound.

“Colonel Rhodes could you assist me, please?” Vision called from the main computer terminal,

“What’s up Viz?” Rhodey asked, rolling over in his wheelchair, he was practising walking in the braces for several hours every day, but it would take time before he could wear them for more than that, his leg muscles had wasted from disuse and he would have to rebuild them over the course of several weeks if not months.

“I believe we are being contacted,” Vision replied, “By a craft outside of the Earths atmosphere,”
Rhodey’s eyebrows rose, “Aliens?” he asked incredulous, “And they want to talk, instead of just shoot at us?”

“So it would seem.”

“Alright then,” Rhodey said, “Friday give us the audio,” he winced at the static that came over the speakers, frowning as he tried to understand the garbled words, “I’m sorry you’ll have to repeat we can’t hear you,” he said in response,

“…Or…..ed………tacked……..emble,”

Rhodey glanced to an equally perplexed Vision, “Once more please, the signal is very faint,”

The static continued to crackle for several minutes then cleared and a familiar voice was heard over the speakers, faint, but clear enough to be understood and recognized,

“Thor! My God, what the hell his going on?” Rhodey asked, relieved it was a friendly alien and not another invasion,

“I have dire news, Son of Rhodes,” Thor replied, “The Avengers must assemble at once, the fate of the entire Universe is at stake”.

Stephen Strange, and Clint had both come to the Compound to greet, Thor, Banner, The Guardians of the Galaxy, and Loki, as they arrived. Landing their ship in the hastily cleared landing bay, to give it space for the wing span.

“My Friends!” Thor boomed, leading the way into the compound, a huge smile on his face, expecting to be met by Rogers and the rest of the Avengers. He paused, taken aback when he saw only Clint, Stephen, Vision, and Rhodey present.

“Welcome back to Earth, Thor, Dr Banner,” Rhodey greeted, rather stiffly, he hadn’t forgotten the fact that Banner had left Tony to deal with the fall out of Ultron while running for the hills, or that Thor had half strangled Tony to death. He still cursed himself for not intervening, but he had been in shock, too shocked to move at the time, and then Rogers had started bleating and the moment had passed.

From behind Thor, Loki growled, his eyes darkening, “Sorcerer!” his dark gaze fixed on Stephen who smirked at him,

“Nice of you to “Drop in” again, Loki,” The Trickster let out a roar and charged at Stephen, only to be swallowed up by portal before he got more than four steps forward, “I see he still hasn’t learned his lesson,” Stephen sighed,

“Tell me you sent him somewhere agonising,” Clint hissed. He was not happy that Loki was here for obvious reasons. Thor may have pleaded on Loki’s behalf, explaining that he had been a prisoner and tortured by Thanos, and very probably under mind control himself, (Not that Loki would admit this) Clint was still unhappy about being around him. He promised not to attack, to be civil, but that was as far as it would go, he would not be friendly, nor spend anymore time than absolutely necessary with the Trickster.

“No,” Stephen said, sounding bored, “Just for a long fall,”

Banner looked around, “Where’s Tony and Steve?”

Rhodey’s jaw clenched at mention of Rogers, and Vision inclined his head to the Doctor, “Much has changed since your departure, Dr Banner, I think it would be beneficial that we get introductions out of the way before explanations are given,”

Thor introduced the Guardians to the present Avengers, telling of how their heroism had saved himself, Loki, and Banner from certain death at the hands of Thanos. He had already told the Guardians of the heroic deeds of the Avengers, of how they had thwarted Thanos several years earlier and had been surprised when Gamora had said that Thanos knew of Stark, of the Iron Man who had carried the weapon that had destroyed the army he’d sent to earth.

Once Thor had finished introducing everyone, Stephen brought Loki back, who was pinned by Thor and ordered to stay his hand against attacking Stephen for the indignity of sending him through a portal (Again) and he perched sulkily on the edge of the sofa glaring at everyone, especially Stephen, while Rhodey explained what had happened since Banner and Thor had left, the disastrous mission Rogers had lead in Largos. The Sokovia Accords, the Civil War, and how Rogers had hidden the truth about the deaths of the Starks for two years, had even dared lie to Tony’s face about knowing
of it, in Siberia before the fight had broken out. How Tony had been left there, beaten half to death and had fallen into a coma from which he had awoken only a few months earlier.

So far they said nothing of the Stone of Unity, feeling that Tony should be the one to decide who knew about this and his connection to it and not they.

The Guardians, not having any previous connection to the Avengers did not share the shock and horror that Thor and Banner did, though they did appear troubled by what they heard. Banner looked sickened,

“Is Tony alright now?” he asked, “Is he in hospital, is that where he is?”

“No,” Rhodey said, a small smile curving his lips, “He is on honeymoon,”

“Honeymoon?” Mantis asked, looking confused, is there a moon made of honey here?”

“No Mantis, it’s the name for a holiday that husband and wife take after their wedding,” Quill explained,

“Husband and Husband, wife and wife, also these days,” Clint said, “Same sex marriage is legal now,”

“Really?” Quill asked, surprised, when he’d left Earth it had barely been legal to be gay and certainly not legal to marry the same sex. Bruce smiled,

“Tony and Pepper married then?”

“Uh no,” Clint said, grinning now, “Tony is married to Bruce Wayne!” Banner’s eyes bugged,

“Bruce Wayne? As in The Bruce Wayne? I thought those two ended their relationship years ago,”

Clint shrugged, “They were starting up again just before the Civil War. When Tony awoke they got back together completely and married in Vegas a couple of weeks ago,”

“Vegas?” Drax inquired, “Is this an Earth custom?” Quill rolled his eyes,

“No, it’s a City, where you can get married any time you like,”

Thor shook his head, “Steven Rogers has behaved most dishonourably, to conceal such important information from a Brother in arms, to lie to a brother in arms is a grievous act. Yet Stark’s actions cannot be condoned either. He should not have attacked James Barnes, should have known that he was innocent...”

“Are you tripping?” Clint cried, looking outraged,

“I was just thinking the same!” Quill offered, looking to Thor, “He saw his Mother and Father being murdered, if that had been me I’d have gone to kill the one who murdered them,”

Thor turned to speak but Loki stopped him, speaking up for the first time since they sat down, “Think Brother,” he said, “How did you react to our Mother’s murder? What did you do?” this gave Thor cause to stop and think about his own actions regarding Frigga’s murder. Had he been in Stark’s place would have done different? No, in truth he would not, and could understand why Stark had lashed out as he had.

“Well, fascinating as all this emotional crap is,” Rocket drawled, “Hadn’t we better be getting on with talk about Thanos and the Stones?”
“Have patience Rabbit,” Thor gently scolded, making Rocket scowl at being called Rabbit again,

“I think Tony should be here for this,” Banner said, “And, considering what we’re facing, maybe…, bringing the others back here too?”

This suggestion had Rhodey looking appalled, Clint Outraged, and Stephen unreadably enigmatic, but it was Vision who spoke, “You mean The Rogue Avengers,” he said,

“Yes,” Banner confirmed, Clint leapt up with an angry cry,

“Are you fucking kidding? Do you know what they did?”

“Yes!” Banner sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, “But I also know what Earth is facing, and right now, finer feeling about what people have done in the past need to be put aside,” he looked at Rhodey, imploring him to understand, “Earth is going to need all the help it can get to survive,”

Clint braced himself against the counter and kicked it in frustration, dipping his head forward and cursing under his breath.

“I fear friend Banner is correct, Son of Rhodes,” Thor said to Rhodey, “Thanos is mighty, he has a vast legion at his disposal. If we are to have any hope at fighting him all of Earths Warriors must unite against him,”

Rhodey sighed, “It’s not that simple Thor. Its not just what we think or feel. The Rogues are international fugitives. They are wanted for multiple crimes. Rogers is wanted for attempted Murder for God sakes, as well as wrongful death, manslaughter, grievous bodily harm, actual bodily harm, concealing a crime, aiding and abetting, accessory after the fact, destruction of private property, and terrorism! He is looking several life sentences if not a death penalty. Maximoff, Romanoff, and Wilson are all facing similar charges themselves. We can’t just bring them home, they’ll be arrest the second the set foot in this country,”

Banner sagged, looking defeated, but Stephen frowned, “Perhaps if we explain the situation to the Accords Council, the UN, and the President, Amnesty could be granted?” he suggested, “In War times criminals have often fought for pardons, and this is war, a war for the whole Universe,”

“I think it would be wise to attempt this, Colonel,” Vision said, “If this Thanos is as powerful as Thor says, then we will need their help, though, I think that Tony should be informed of what is happening first.”

Seychelles

Tony hadn’t been able to settle since his nightmare.

There was a growing feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach that he just couldn’t shake. He tried to hide his troubles from Bruce, but the other Billionaire was an expert at body language and knew that something was wrong, eventually managing to get Tony to tell him of the nightmare.

It wasn’t a memory of one of his past lives, that Tony was certain. He’d experienced dreams of past memories several times since he had started exploring them. Some had been enjoyable, but some had
been horrific. The death or rather execution of the wise woman/midwife he had been in Sixth Century England. The poor woman had been accused of Witchcraft and had been burned at the stake as the result.

Tony had awoken screaming from that memory and had been violently sick, going into a full panic attack as he recalled the feel of the flames burning his flesh, the stench of the smoke filling his nose, the jeering of the crowd gathered to watch as he or rather she had burned.

It had taken him days to recover from that horror, and Bruce had been on the alert for something similar occurring.

This, however, Tony was sure was not a memory. It was something else, something he could not explain and yet feared.

Bruce had offered to cut their honeymoon short and return them to New York so they could speak with Stephen and Wong. But Tony had vetoed that, not wanting to leave their paradise just yet. But still he could not shake his unease.

He was standing with his back to their condo, calf deep in the sea, when Bruce came upon him, winding his arms about his waist and kissing his forehead when Tony tilted his head up to him,

“Missing me already?” he asked,

“Always,” Bruce replied, holding Tony flush against his chest, “Are you alright?” he asked, looking out across the sea, where the sun was starting to sink down, turning the water and sky scarlet, orange, pink, and violet,

“Sure,” Tony replied, “Just watching the sunset.” It was a lie, but Bruce let it go, standing in silence, holding Tony against him, watching the sun as it descended from the sky,

“Beautiful,” he murmured, after a few moments,

“Yeah it is,” Tony breathed,

“Not the sun, you!” Bruce said, making Tony laugh, “Compared to you the sun pales and fades, it’s light and brilliance seem dull and dim in comparison to your incandescent luminescence!”

Tony laughed, turning and linking his arms about Bruce’s neck, “Turning into a poet, My Wayne-Stark?”

Bruce smiled, “You’re immense beauty inspires me so,” he said, “Though I doubt I could do justice to the verses of Wyatt, Shakespeare, or Dante,”

“Nor Keats, Byron, or Shelley, One should think,” a familiar voice said, startling the two men, who turned and glared at Stephen as he exited a portal, “I apologise for the intrusion...”

“Honeymoon, Strange!” Tony yelled at him, breaking out of Bruce’s embrace, “We’re on fucking Honeymoon here!”

“And again I apologise,” Stephen sighed, “But I am afraid that the fate of the Universe is at stake.”
Tony and Bruce had hastily dressed and packed up their belongings, going back through the portal with Stephen to the compound, where everyone was waiting for them, even Peter, Dick, Alfred, and Pepper had joined them, and were eyeing the new comers with wariness and out right suspicion.

“Tony!” Peter cried, as soon as the Billionaire was through the portal,

“Hey Pete, did you miss me?” Tony greeted, spreading his arms wide for Peter to come and hug him,

“Course I did,” Peter said, hugging Tony tightly, “Did you have fun? What were the Seychelles like? Was it as beautiful as it looks in the pictures? Was the sea really that colour and the sand really that white? Did you go exploring? What did you see? Where did you go?”

“Slow down, Pete, one question at a time and don’t forget to breathe,” Clint chuckled, he grinned at Tony, with Rhodey and Pepper joining him to greet Tony, “Welcome home,” Besides them, Dick and Alfred greeted Bruce,

“We don’t have to hug like that do we?” Dick asked, pointing his thumb at Tony and Peter,

“I’ll amputate your arms if you try!” Bruce replied, he glanced about the room, taking in the Asgardians, The odd group that called themselves the Guardians of the Galaxy, and Dr Banner.

“What’s your take on our…, guests?” he quietly asked,

“Hard to say with any certainty,” Dick said, glancing over his shoulder, “Though, I’d say that Banner’s scared shitless! And that Trickster is trying to figure out how best to play this to his benefit,”

“His ape of a Brother isn’t much for thought, seems to do his thinking with his fists and is rather bewildered by the fact that hasn’t worked this time,” Alfred said, “As for the others…, well, Quill is human, fiercely protective of his team, in love with the green girl, who’s one hell of a fighter. The one with the antenna is a bit of an innocent I think,”

“The big one with the weird skin is the muscle, thinks of the team as his family. The raccoon is really smart and bad tempered, and don’t ask me about the tree, I don’t do character profiles on trees!” Dick said, making Bruce snort in amusement. A talking tree, just when he thought life couldn’t get any weirder he met a talking tree!

He tensed as he saw Banner and Thor going to greet Tony.

Tony stiffened as Banner approached him, his movements stiff and uncertain, his mouth was trembling, trying to smile but not quite managing it and his hands were wringing as they moved to perhaps shake Tony’s hand or to hug him like Peter did.

Thor, however, showed no such fear, and wrapped his beefy arms about Tony, knocking Peter aside, and making Tony yelp with the force of the embrace.
“Tis good to see you again, Stark, I have missed your wit and humour!”

“Alright Brother, let him breathe,” Loki drawled, sidling up to them like a cat slinking around, “Stark,” he greeted, as Thor relinquished his hold on Tony, “You have lost flesh since last we met,” he commented, looking over Tony’s skinny frame, “And aged but then that his mortal failing…,” he frowned, “There is also something else different about you,”

Never let it be said that Tony wasn’t good at deflection. He held up his left hand for Loki to see,

“I’m married,” he said, and averted his eyes from Loki’s too penetrating gaze, looking instead to Banner, “Dr Banner,” he greeted, with polite formality that made Banner pause and wince,

“Hey Tony,” he managed, “How have you been?”

“Oh he’s been great,” Dick drawled, “Only vegetating in a coma for eighteen months, nearly dying, you know, nothing major,”

“Dick,” Tony cautioned, scowling at his pseudo step-son, who looked completely unrepentant,

“I heard what happened,” Banner stammered, “I can’t believe Steve would be stupid, so cruel, I thought he was better than that,”

“So did we all,” Rhodey grunted, flanking Tony, as did Peter, who grinned as Tony put an arm about him,

“Have you met my husband?” Tony asked, gesturing to Bruce, who was glowering nearby, “Bruce Wayne, meet Dr Bruce Banner, Thor and Loki of Asgard.”

“Pleasure,” Bruce said, through clenched teeth, making no attempt to even pretend to be nice.

Stephen cleared his throat, “As much as I understand the need for lengthy hellos, we are on a clock here,”

“Oh, are you in charge again?” Peter asked, from where he was standing, with Tony’s arm about his narrow shoulders, “Well you are the super magic wizard guy,”

“Yeah, sorcerers apprentice, you go right ahead,” Tony said, dismissively, “After all, you ruined our honeymoon for this, better be for a good reason,” Stephen narrowed his eyes at Tony,

“It is, Tony.” Banner stressed, “This Thanos. My God Tony, he’s unimaginable, he’s like a plague..” he trailed off, frowning as the colour seemed to drain from Tony’s tanned face. He was not the only one who noticed it either, Bruce was across the room in moment and reaching out for Tony who had gone rigid.

He was deaf to their words, blind to what was going on around him, his mind was swept up in a vision of the past and future.

*****
Amenken bowed before the statue of Amonet. “May the great goddess of magic protect that, which I no longer am able,” he whispered. From his hand, he took the eternity bracelet, carefully extracting from it, The Stone of Unity. He winced as it seared his palm and fingers for a second, the potent energy hot on his skin before it cooled.

“Guard this well, Blessed one,” He breathed, placing the jewel into the gilding hands of the ancient goddess, “And let no man take your charge from you, but the one who can wield this sacred jewel,”

He took a curved blade from a sheath in his belted skirt. Holding out his left hand, he winced as he cut open the palm, squeezing the appendage closed and let the blood run freely over the gilded hands of Amonet and the seventh stone. Quietly he chanted in Ancient Egyptian, casting a binding spell over the statue and stone, to prevent the stone from being removed by any but his own successor.

Even as the drum beats over head grew ever closer, the thunderous march of the soldiers feet upon the scorching desert sand, Amenken did not falter in his task. He did as he must, as he had sworn to do. Protect the seventh stone from those who would use its power for their own avaricious ends.

The door to the chamber he sealed with his blood and ancient spells, running back up the narrow passages to the tomb above, closing the door and sealing that too with spells and blood. Covering the entrance in sand to better conceal it from discovery.

“Now what?” the frightened man, who had accompanied him here asked, his face ashen and body trembling,

“Now we pray to God who will lead us to the afterlife,” Amenken said, placing an arm around the young mans shoulders and led him to where a glorious obsidian statue of Anubis, the jackal headed God of embalming and the Dead.

Together the two men knelt upon the sand dusted, carven floor, beneath the towering statue.

“May we both find peace in death,” Amenken prayed, “And may no man ever discover what lays beneath this tomb.”

A moment later, the image of the two praying Ancient Egyptians changed, and in its place was a horrific sight of execution.

The two men, having been dragged from the tomb by the Roman soldiers who had been pursuing them, lay now, disembowelled and dismembered upon the red soaked sands.

In a grim parody of the mummification process. Octavius had ordered that the two men by cut open while the yet lived, their organs ripped out and left to rot instead of embalmed and preserved. Their arms, legs, and heads severed, the parts scattered over the sands for the vultures to pick over.

Far beneath the scattered remains, the hidden tomb remained sealed, the statue and her charge safe from the searching Romans, and the power hungry Emperor.

Octavius’s scowling and blood splattered face shifted, his body suddenly growing immense, his form changing and skin turning purple. The ancient desert and tomb disappeared, being replaced by a battle field in space and the Mad Titan holding aloft the infinity gauntlet which bore two gems
already.

****

“Tony?, Tony can you hear me?”

“He hasn’t done this in weeks!”

“It must be the stones being taken.”

“What is happening? How can Stark be effected by this?”

“He is ancient, I can feel it. His soul is eons old,”

“Why did I not see it before? It is so clear now,”

“Back off and give him some room will you!”

Tony blinked and gazed up from where he was laying back on the sofa, surrounded by worried and confused faces.

“I saw him,” he whispered, moving to sit up, only to groan and clutch his head as it throbbed with the movement,

“Stay still,” Bruce said, pushing him back down, “Dick, get him some water,” he said to the frowning young man. Dick nodded, sprinting off to get the drink,

“You saw who, Tony?” Vision softly asked, “Amenken?”

“No,” Tony shook his head, wincing again, “I mean…, yes, I saw him, I saw his death, by the hands of Octavius’s soldiers.” He looked up into Bruce’s worried hazel eyes, “It was horrific,” he whispered, his dark eyes filling with tears, “They tore him apart, his organs, his limbs, they were left to rot in the sand, be devoured by vultures. The sand was crimson, there was so much blood!”

“Christ,” Bruce whispered, enveloping Tony into an embrace.

Behind the sofa, Banner looked to Mantis who was shaking her head, “So very old, and he has known so much pain,” she sniffed, her black tearing up, she turned to a startled Drax and buried her face into his broad chest, clinging to him as she cried.

“An ancient mystical soul in human flesh,” Loki murmured, sounding astounded, “No wonder he was such a worthy foe,”

Thor scowled and looked around, “What is happening?” he demanded,

“Hell if I know,” Banner murmured, shaking his head, “Damn Tony, what have you got yourself into now?” he stumbled back, as without warning, Pepper whirled round, delivering a searing slap across his cheek! Inside he felt Hulk stir and grumble, but not show any signs of coming forth.

“How dare you?” she cried, as Banner held his stinging face, “Come in here, judging Tony as if you
have a right? You don’t know what he has been through, because you ran for the hills the first chance you got!”

“Pep, it’s okay,” Tony weakly called, sitting up now, with Bruce’s arms about him, Peter sitting beside him, along with Rhodey,

“It’s not,” Pepper snarled, through gritted teeth, “Him, and that overgrown imbecile come barging in here, acting like they own the place, making demands of having that bastard Rogers and those traitors coming home, and thinking they have a right to judge you!”

Tony’s eyes widened, he looked from Pepper to Rhodey for confirmation. The War machine pilot looked stricken and Tony felt his heart sink, “You can’t be serious,”

“You can’t be serious,” Banner stressed, avoid Pepper who still looked murderous, “Thanos, he’s a plague, he will destroy the whole universe is he gets the chance, we need help, all the help we can get!”

“Don’t you think I know that?” Tony snarled, rounding on him and pointing to his temple, “I’ve seen it, I’ve seen him in my head, I’ve known about this for years! Its why I wanted to create the Ultron programme, what I wanted to prepare this planet for, but did any bastard listen to me? Did they?”

He looked from Banner to Thor, his expression darkening, “And when it all went to shit, when things began to fall apart, my so called friends turned on me, half strangling me, and blaming me for everything.” Thor had the decency to look chastened, his eyes going to his feet as Tony glared at him, “And you come to me now, a beggar with a bowl held out for my alms, your own home in ruins by your own peoples stupidity and arrogance and think you have a right to claim refuge on me and mine, well let me tell you once and for all, Thor Odinson, I owe you and yours shit and I will be long dead in the ground before Steven Grant Rogers ever sets foot back into my property!”

Red faced and breathing heavily, Tony rose from the couch and stormed from the common area, slamming the doors behind him.

“Oh that went well!” Clint drawled, flopping down onto the sofa, “Anyone got any other brilliant suggestions?”

“Button it Barton,” Rhodey growled, as Bruce took off after Tony without a word. Alfred sat down besides Peter, giving him a reassuring smile, letting the teen know that Tony wasn’t upset with him just in case the boy thought otherwise.

“I do so admire your abilities to make friends and influence people, Brother!” Loki remarked, giving Thor his most obnoxious smirk, “No wonder you are so adept at diplomacy!”

“Enough Brother,” Thor grunted, “I am in no mood for you silver tongue,” Loki smirked all the more, clearly enjoying Thor’s distress,

“I’ve never seen Tony like that,” Banner whispered, “I’ve seen him angry, but never...” He looked to Rhodey for an explanation, “What happened to him?”

“You know what happened, we told you,” Rhodey gritted out,

“Not everything you didn’t,” Quill said, “You didn’t say anything about Stark being..... Mystical or having visions, you didn’t tell us anything about that,”

“Or that these two betrayed him in the past,” Gamora added, gesturing to Banner and Thor, both of whom looked injured at her words, “I think it is time for the full story, don’t you?”
Rhodey glanced away from her, looking to Stephen who nodded, “Considering what we’re facing, I think that it may be for the best,” he admitted, sighing deeply, “Let’s just hope Tony can forgive one more betrayal of trust.”
Tony was laying on his bed in the compound when Bruce found him, his back was to Bruce, but by the trembling of his body and the quickness of his breath Bruce could tell he was crying.

“Oh, Tony,” he sighed, getting onto the bed behind the smaller man and spooning him, “It’s going to be okay,” he whispered, pressing kisses to the back of his head.

“It’s not.” Tony whimpered, his voice broken by tears, “Thanos is coming. He’ll destroy this entire world to get what he wants. I can see it, I have seen him, seen what he is capable of.” He turned over to face Bruce, tears flowing freely down his cheeks, “Banner is right. He is a plague. He leaves nothing but devastation in his wake.”

Bruce’s brow creased, and he held Tony tighter against him. “We’ll stop him,” he promised, stoutly, “We’ll stop him, we will fight him..” he trailed off as Tony shook his head,

“It won’t be enough,” he said sniffing hard, “They’re right. I hate it, I hate admitting it, but they are right. Rogers and his team have to come back, we need them.”

*****

Bruce was clenching his jaw and scowling so darkly that it looked as if his brows had joined into one, when he and Tony came back into the common area.

During their absence Vision had organised food for everyone. Pizza, garlic bread, wedges, and coleslaw. With tubs of Ben and Jerrys stacked up and waiting to be opened and devoured.

The huge alien Drax it seemed had eaten an entire large pizza on his own, as had Thor. Where the rest of the group had shared between them.

“I swear I have not had pizza in far too long,” Quill declared, reaching for one of the last slices, “They don’t have this out in space, you know?” he said to Rhodey, who rose an eyebrow at him, “Nor Ice Cream.”

“Midgard does indeed have a most pleasing variety of foods,” Thor declared, “The Pop Tarts are most tasty!”

“As you never fail to mention, Brother,” Loki sighed, setting down his empty plate as Tony and Bruce came in and smiled, “Ah, if it isn’t our mystical soul!”

“Tony, are you alright?” Pepper asked, getting to her feet at once, Rhodey, and Peter hot on her heels to check over the Billionaire, Dick hung back a little with Alfred, looking at Bruce who just shook his head to them, letting them know that everything was very far from alright.

“You told them,” Tony said, to Rhodey. It wasn’t a question, Loki’s greeting and the way everyone was gazing at him with awe told him enough. Rhodey sighed and hung his head,

“I’m sorry Tones, I had to tell them. With Thanos coming, well, it doesn’t seem like a great time for secrets, especially when this could be of great aid to us in a fight against him.”
“If we can find the stone.” Quill said, getting Tony’s attention, “You don’t know where it is?”

Tony shook his head, “No. I’ve had visions, memories of past lives. But the location of the stone is still a mystery.”

“It is in Egypt, yes?” Gamora asked, frowning,

“We believe so,” Stephen said, from where he was sipping tea from a china cup, “But where exactly in Egypt we don’t know, and nearly three thousand years have passed since Amenken hid it. The landscape will have changed dramatically. While the outer tomb may have been above ground then, does not mean that it is now. Earthquakes, landslides, and bombings from several wars could have seen it buried beneath the sands or destroyed completely.”

“There may be a way we can trace it.” It was Loki who spoke, his voice quiet and melodious,

“Brother?” Thor asked, frowning at him. Loki shook his head and looked to Stephen,

“You hold one of the remaining stones I believe?”

“I do,” Stephen said, cautiously.

“Well. The Stone of Unity is connected to all six other stone. Is the master of them. We could perhaps use the Time stone to help guide us to the Stone of Unity.”

Stephen rose his eyebrows, surprised by this, and looked rather ashamed that he hadn’t thought of it himself.

“You know of the Stone, Brother?” Thor asked, incredulous, “Why did you not say?” Loki rolled his eyes and gave Thor an unimpressed look,

“Unlike you, Brother. I spent my childhood reading and studying with Mother. I learned from them, mystical law, myths, legends, history. The myth of the Seventh Stone was among what I read. It was thought to be just that, a Myth. Even Mother thought so,” Loki paused, a look of grief passing over his face as he spoke of Frigga, “Little was known of the stone, most of what was written was speculation and imagination rather than fact. But one thing was clear. That the Seventh Stone had command of all the other six, could combine their power, bring life and death, create and destroy, and could be commanded only by the one whose soul was bound to it.” He gestured to Tony, a smirk on his face, “That would seem to be Stark.”

Tony sneered back, “Thanks for the clarification, Reindeer games!”

“I am sorry Tony,” Rhodey said, “I didn’t tell them as an act of betrayal, I did so because it had to be done.” Tony nodded and smiled at his old friend,

“I know, its alright.” He said and took a deep inhale, “And you are right, we do need to bring them back.”

“What?” Dick exploded,

“Are you fucking kidding me!” Peter cried, then blushed for the fact he’d sworn at Tony,

“It has to be done,” Tony said tiredly, “I’ve seen Thanos. I’ve seen what he has done, I know in my heart what he will do, and like it or not, and believe me I do not. We need the help of all those capable to fight him.” He looked to Rhodey, meeting his eyes, “Do what has to be done and get them brought back.”
Steve could hardly believe it when the mobile phone he’d had on him since sending the letter and the
twin to Tony almost two years ago rang.

It was early Afternoon in Scotland, and very early morning in New York. Tony was not a morning
person, he was a night owl, it was completely out of character for him to calling Steve so early, but
the fact that he was delighted and elated Steve.

He snatched up the phone and accepted the call, “Tony!”

“Wrong Rogers,” Rhodey said, his voice sounding tired and unhappy. “While it galls me to call you,
and believe me it does gall me. You can come home.”

“What?” It didn’t make sense, what Rhodey was saying, it didn’t make any sense.

“There is an enemy coming. A terrible enemy. Thor among others has brought news of this and with
such a battle ahead the US Government and the UN have decided to grant amnesty for yourself and
the rest of your team, with a possibility of full pardons if you fight in this battle and we survive.”

Steve could hardly take in what Rhodes was saying. Was he lying? Trying to lure them into a trap?

“Turn on your TV, or computer. There will be a live broadcast from Washington at 9 am our time,
the President himself will announce this.” Rhodey said, “Once you know its legit, get your asses
back to the compound.”

Steve opened his mouth to say something, but the call was cut off and he was left with just a dial
tone. He closed the phone and tapped it against his chin, frowning, this sounded for real, the real deal
as it were. God he wanted to believe it, desperately wanted it to be true, to go home at long last.

At two pm there time, he had the entire team sat before TV, tuned into a news station to watch the
presidents broadcast.

“In the face of this terrible threat coming to earth, the United Nations and myself have granted
immediate amnesty to the Rogue Avengers, Steven Rogers, Natasha Romanoff, Wanda Maximoff,
and Samuel Wilson.”

“My God,” Natasha whispered, her voice barely audible.

“About damn time,” Wanda snarled, glaring at the screen, “Finally they realize they need us, that
Stark is nothing but a problem to them.”

“Shut up!” Sam snapped, leaning forward to listen to what the President was saying about the
amnesty and their being allowed to go home.

The address took the better part of an hour, as the president answered questions posed by the press
and tried to assure the public that the military of every country would be working as one against
Thanos, as would the Avengers.

As soon as it was over, Steve turned off the TV and turned to his team, “So, we go home.”
“Yes!” Wanda cried, jumping up and hurrying to her room to pack.

“Yes!” Wanda cried, jumping up and hurrying to her room to pack.

“This must be serious,” Sam said, “They wouldn’t have offered amnesty if they were not desperate, and I doubt Stark would have allowed it to go through unless he was sure that he needed help.”

“This must be serious,” Sam said, “They wouldn’t have offered amnesty if they were not desperate, and I doubt Stark would have allowed it to go through unless he was sure that he needed help.”

“Stark only ever sees past his ego when he is faced with utter destruction.” Natasha muttered. She rose to her feet, smoothing down her trousers, “I’ll go and prep the jet for flight.”

“Stark only ever sees past his ego when he is faced with utter destruction.” Natasha muttered. She rose to her feet, smoothing down her trousers, “I’ll go and prep the jet for flight.”

Steve nodded and offered her a small smile. His heart was beating like a drum, pounding away in his chest. He was going to see Tony again. For the first time in two years. It was a terrifying and thrilling thought.

“It won’t be easy, you know?” Sam said, drawing Steve out of his thoughts, “We might be getting amnesty, but that doesn’t mean we’ll be welcome with open arms. Especially not by Stark. Not after what we’ve done,” (what you have done)

Steve winced and swallowed hard, “At least we’ll have a chance to make things right.” He whispered, he cleared his throat, “We should pack. The sooner we’re out of here, the better.”

******

Compound

Vision hovered two feet off the floor, staring out over the estate. The compound was noisy now, full of life when just a week ago it had been quiet, peaceful.

Thor was always a loud person, living up to his name as God of thunder with his booming voice and loud laughs. Rocket was just as loud as he, and enjoyed blowing things up, which led him to making great use of all the fire arms in the compound training rooms.

Drax was of a similar disposition, getting to battles of strength to Thor, the two of them engaging in hand to hand almost constantly. Quill it seemed had a thing for music and dancing, and when he learned that music had come on so far since he had left earth, he his time listening to everything that had been released since the seventies, pulling his exasperated friend/girlfriend, Gamora into dances, thought she frequently protested and threatened his crotch with her sword!

Groot liked video games, and made great use of PS4 along with a bemused Clint, and a hyper Peter. Then Dick introduced him to WI and things got even more crazy!

Mantis was fascinated by everything, especially Loki and Strange, hanging around them when they were at the compound and not the Sanctum. Loki had deigned to go with Stephen under the promise of disembowelling the wizard if he dared send him through another portal!

The two of them were searching with Wong for any and all information they could gather on the Seventh Stone, going to different realities to look for sources and references to where the stone might be and how best to find it.

Rhodey was locked in meetings with the government, and was constantly stressed and furious when he came out of his office, avoiding contact with others until he’d calmed down.
Pepper had needed to go back to New York and SI, but was calling Tony everyday to check on him.

Bruce was with Tony. Had hardly left his side since Tony had agreed for the Rogues to come home. The only times he was away from him were when he was beating the hell out of punch bags or sparring with Dick.

Banner was keeping much to himself, when Thor couldn’t talk him into recounting their tales of valour to the Guardians, and an entranced Peter. Dick tried to appear disinterested but was always close by when those tales began.

Tony had been drifting between his bedroom and his lab, only eating when forced to by Bruce, looking increasingly tired and fragile, suggesting that he was not sleeping and was worrying over the returning rogues and the arrival of Thanos.

Alfred was the one taking care of both him and Bruce, making sure that they ate at least one decent meal a day and didn’t worry themselves into illness.

Vision worried for Tony. For his state of mind with all that was coming. He too could sense Thanos, the stones, knew the horror that was coming there way. He was also worrying about the returning rogues, most especially Wanda. She had hurt him so much, physically and, if it were possible for one such as he, emotionally.

He did not want them to return, but like Tony he knew that they had little choice, they needed them if they were to have hope of surviving.

Overhead he heard the roar of a quinjet and lowered down to the floor, straightening his posture as Rhodey came out of his office, his expression steely in his resolve. From across the common area Bruce appeared, his expression as dark as the thunder clouds Thor conjured up, behind him Tony walked, arms wrapped about himself, looking haunted and frail.

“You don’t have to be here for this,” Rhodey said to him, “You can go to Gotham, the tower, anywhere.”

“No,” Tony said, shaking his head, “I am not running from them like a child. I survived the worst they had to throw at me, and I will stand before them strong and determined to continue to survive.”

“But not standing alone,” Bruce said, linking his hand through Tony’s, “We stand with you, always.”

Tony gave him a grateful smile and together they went to face the returning rogues.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

The rogues are back, no one is happy about that. Tony spends some time with his robotic family, and Drax makes embarrassing comments.

The left the jet with Steve leading the way, Sam and Natasha a step behind him and Wanda bringing up the rear.

A smile stretched its way over Steve’s lips as he led the way through the front door and saw Tony standing front and centre. Rhodey, was beside him and that Bruce Wayne was on Tony’s other side, his expression as dark as a storm cloud. But Steve ignored him, his focus was on Tony.

Seeing the Billionaire in the flesh was as profound as seeing the Wine truly turn to blood. Steve felt like he couldn’t breathe, couldn’t do anything but stare into Tony’s dark brown eyes and feel himself sinking into them. He wanted to sink into them, to lose himself in those chocolate brown depths.

“You’re the welcome committee?” Natasha drawled, drawing Steve out of his trance like state and back to reality,

“S’pose you could call us that,” Rhodey grunted, he sighed and spread his arms, “Welcome back. Stow your shit, we have a conference in one hour to fill you in on everything.”

“What, that’s it?” Wanda cried, coming round the others and placed her hands on her hips, glaring at the three men before her, “I want an apology, in fact I demand one!”

Rhodey regarded her with a look of utter contempt and only a modicum of interest.

“An apology?” he repeated, “For what?”

“For what?”

“Wanda, don’t start,” Sam sighed, dropping his bag on the floor and rubbing his brow tiredly,

“No!” the spoiled, over grown child snapped, “I demand an apology, I deserve an apology for all He did to me!” she pointed at Tony, who surprised everyone by not flinching or backing away as he use to when Wanda’s attention was on him. Instead he stood his ground, staring at her with complete defiance on his face, as if he were daring her to use her magic on him.

“You want an apology from me?” he asked, “For what? Trying to keep you from being extradited from the country? Trying to keep you from a mob attack? When people wanted you to be burned at the stake like it was the middle ages? For letting you have free pass after free pass for all the shit you have done, is that what you want an apology for?” Tony’s voice rose steadily until he was shouting at Wanda. He continued to hold his ground even as she glared at him, he snorted and sneered at her, “You’ll be in for a damn long wait for one then.”

As Tony turned on his heel to walk away, Wanda made to grab hold of him, “Don’t you walk away from me Stark!” she shouted, reaching out to take him by the arm, but her wrist was seized in Bruce Wayne’s iron like grip,
“This is your one and only warning, Maximoff,” he growled, his voice almost as low as the modulator in his suit. “You keep your hands and your magic to yourself, or you will face consequences that you can not even begin to imagine.”

Wanda glared at him, letting her magic pool into her eyes, turning them into puddles of blood. Normally people leaped away from her when that happened, were frightened, but Bruce did not so much as flinch, instead he met her eyes in challenge, not backing off one inch. She tried to get into his mind, to reach inside him and find his fears, but his mind was blank, there was not a single thing that she could find in that void of darkness. She had met people who had great mental discipline before, people whose minds were harder to get into than others, but this man was unbelievable, there was just nothing there that she could latch onto and exploit.

Unsettled and unbalanced Wanda pulled away from Bruce and wrapped her arms over herself protectively.

“Everyone had enough?” Rhodey asked, though it clearly wasn’t a question, “As I said, get settled, your rooms are untouched, and get your asses to the conference room, in fifty three minutes,”

Natasha and Sam both shouldered their bags and headed for their rooms, Wanda doing the same, a frown on her face, and chewing on her bottom lip as she went.

Only Steve remained, finally finding his voice and calling out to the Billionaire he was so happy to see.

“Tony, can we talk?” he asked, hopeful and letting it show in his voice.

Tony turned and looked him over, “We’ll be doing that in just over fifty minutes, Rogers.”

“No I mean, now, privately?”

“No.”

Steve was taken aback by the coldness in Tony’s tone, and the firm refusal to his offer of making peace. However, he knew how stubborn and pig headed Tony could be and would not be stopped at the first hurdle he had to jump across, only quitters did that and Steve Rogers was no quitter.

“We need to talk,” He said, keeping his voice soft and coaxing, like one would use on a toddler working themselves up into a tantrum. “We need to clear the air and put everything behind us…” he trailed off as Tony just rolled his eyes and walked away, apparently done with this conversation.

“Hey, wait,” Steve made to go after him but was blocked by the immoveable presence of Bruce Wayne.

“Stay away from my husband.”

Steve looked Bruce up and down, sure he was muscular, matching him close enough in height, but was middle aged, likely to be slowing down and losing his strength, Steve had no doubt he could take him in a fight if it came down to it.

“Tony and I need to talk and you are not stopping…” he got no further as Bruce’s fist smashed straight into his nose with enough force to not only break his nose and send blood spurting down his face, but also managed to throw him to the ground, where he lay, cupping his suddenly throbbing face and staring in shock at the glowering man before him.

“That was your warning, Rogers,” he snarled, “Next time I won’t hold back!” Turning neatly on his
heel, Bruce followed after Tony, and Rhodey looked Steve over with a disdainful expression,

“Go and get yourself cleaned up, Rogers, you’re making the place look untidy!”

Disoriented, hurting, and confused, Steve got to his feet and made his way to his room to stow away his meagre possessions. There was nose blood on his t-shirt so he changed it for a clean one, and cleaned his face of the blood. His nose was already healing itself, having realigned itself without the need for him to have that done. Bruising was coming out, he would have a couple of impressive black eyes for a few hours and then he’d be fine, where that Neanderthal, Wayne would have sore knuckles for days. At least he hoped he would. God knows the bastard deserved it.

Sighing, he sat down on the bed just drinking in the feeling of being home at last.

“Steve?” Wanda appeared in the doorway, looking troubled, when she saw his face she became alarmed but Steve waived off her concern,

“I’m fine.” He said, getting to his feet “What’s wrong?”

“Stark,” Wanda replied, “There’s something wrong with him, and that Wayne guy.”

“Tell me about it!” Steve muttered under his breath, his swelling eyes were proof of that!

“I couldn’t get anything from Wayne’s mind, and Stark… He’s changed, there’s something different about him, something I have never felt before, he’s done something, something bad.”

Steve frowned, “Why would you think anything he’s done would be bad? Why do you think he has done anything at all? It has been two years since you last saw him and he has been very ill during that time, couldn’t that explain it?”

“Steve, c’mon, this is Stark? When does he ever do anything that isn’t bad or fucked up?”

“Language!” Steve scolded her, then sighed and ran a hand through his hair, “We’ll talk to him, we’ve got a conference in a little while, we’ll talk to him then and find out what’s going on.”

Wanda pursed her lips into a pout, not looking in the least bit mollified, but didn’t argue with him.

Steve sat back down on the bed. He wasn’t sure what he had hoped for in their return, but it wasn’t this.

*****

Tony tossed the ice pack in the air and Bruce caught it in one hand, “You’re an idiot, you do know this?” he said, as Bruce lay the pack over his bruised and aching knuckles.

“Is this what I get for being your knight in shining armour?” Bruce mock complained, Tony snorted, rolling his eyes,

“You don’t wear shining armour, you wear black Kevlar! And I would rather your didn’t break your hand on Rogers too perfect face,”
“You think he has a perfect face?”

“I think its too perfect, too dull and without character. ” Tony said, the wrinkled his nose, “Or it was before the beard. What the hell was he thinking with that? He looks like he went down on a grizzly bear and came away with half of it!”

Bruce snickered at the comparison, relieved that he had no competition from Rogers.

“So we gonna get on with this talking thing, or what?”

Bruce and Tony looked down, seeing Rocket padding through the kitchen, “What is it with you humans and the need to talk about everything all the time? I swear, Quill never shuts the hell up, everything has to gabbed about, blah, blah, blah, do you all like the sound of your own voices so much that you just can’t shut up for even a moment?” He went to the fridge, opened the door and located the beer bottles, taking one out he popped off the cap with something that resembled a bottle opened but looked far sharper and more deadly, then downed half the bottle in a couple of gulps, letting out an impressive burp.

“It’s like you have no manners or respect for those of us with sensitive ears!”

“Really?” Tony dead panned, “We have no manners!”

“Damn right you don’t!” Quill grumbled, turning and continuing on through the compound.

“I like him!” Tony declared to Bruce, “Can we keep him?”

“No,” Bruce said, firmly, and sighed as the toaster flipped over and made popping noises, “Entertain your robotic pet with some bread, before he starts trying to set the curtains on fire again!”

“Hey Toby, what’s up?” Tony asked the excitable toaster, “Hasn’t Thor been feeding you pop tarts?” he was replied by a serious of beeps that he seemed to understand and petted the toaster, going to the fridge and getting out the bread for Toby to toast, or rather to charcoal since he wouldn’t release the bread until it was black and smoking, hence why the fire alarm had been removed from the kitchen since he set it screeching every time anyone was foolish enough to use him as an actual appliance and not a dysfunctional machine with a toddlers attention span and personality.

Bruce sighed. He supposed he should be thankful that Tony hadn’t tried making any of his household “Smart” he shuddered to think what would happen if he did. Alfred would probably declare war and they’d lose half the house in the ensuing battle between mankind and demented kitchen appliances!

“Good boy!” Tony applauded as Toby sent two blackened slices of charcoal that had once been bread, towards the ceiling!

Cathy the coffee machine gurgled and blew steam into the air, absently Bruce patted her getting several chirps in return for the affectionate touch.

“You know, with so many people around creating so much mess, maybe I should upgrade the roombas..”

“No!” Bruce cried, making Tony jump and Toby flip over, “No, do not touch the roombas, or the hoovers, or we’ll end up with a demented dust sucker army coming at us, trying to suck our faces off and strangled us with their power cords!”

Tony pouted, “You have no faith in me,”
“I do have faith in you,” Bruce corrected, “I have faith that create sentient household appliances that
go on to have very questionable personalities and sometimes a tendency to burn things,” he looked
pointedly at Toby, who was doing his best to ignite the bread he was blackening,

“He just gets carried away,” Tony said, patting the toaster, “You’re a good boy aren’t you, Toby?”
The toaster sent the smouldering toast up into the air with a loud springing noise and flipped over
again. “Okay, that’s enough for now,” Tony said, putting the remaining bread away, “Talk to Cathy
and stay out of trouble,” he said, carrying the toaster to his sister who gurgled in greeting to her baby
brother.

Linking his arm through Bruce’s he grinned, “Lets go see what everyone else is doing.”

*****

The found Clint, Drax, Dick, Quill, Gamora, and Mantis in the common lounge watching the TV,
with bowls and plates of snacks spread over the table before them, along with fizzy drinks and curly
straws,

“Oh c’mon man!” Quill yelled at the TV,

“What are you guys doing?” Tony asked, curiously. Drax looked up from where he had been staring
transfixed at the TV screen,

“We are observing one of the many games you humans engage in that involve balls,” He frowned, “I
do not understand your races fascination with balls? Has it to do with your anatomy…"

“Whoa, hell no, slow down big fella!” Quill cried, “No talking about human anatomy, especially not
that part of our anatomy anyway.”

“Why?” Drax asked, clearly confused, “You are very enamoured of your own! I have heard you
speaking to…” Quill belly flopped across the sofa, squashing Gamora, who huffed and slapped him
upside the head, as he clamped his hands over Drax’s mouth to stop him from saying anything else
embarrassing.

Clint grabbed a handful of popcorn, grinning at them, “You guys are better than watching sitcoms,"

“Will you get off me?” Gamora grumbled, shoving at Clint, sending him tumbling to the floor with
grunt, “Honestly, if not for your pelvic sorcery I would think you a child with how you behave!”

Tony rose an eyebrow, “Pelvic sorcery?” he asked, “Is that a space thing?”

“I hate my life!” Quill moaned dramatically, just as Thor appeared, booming loudly as always,

“Friends! What are we doing?”

“Watching a game with balls.” Drax informed him, “And discussing Human anatomy and Quill’s
love of his own balls!” Quill made a whimpering noise and curled up in a ball, hiding his face in his
arms,

“Aye,” Thor agreed, throwing himself down beside Drax, “I have noticed that humans have a
peculiar fondness for their reproductive organs, the males in particular!”
“Oh please!” Tony retorted, “Like you’re not making up for something with that hammer!”

Clint snickered and shared a grin with Bruce, before frowning at his ice pack covered hand. “What did you do?”

“Punched Rogers in the face,” Bruce replied, nonchalantly,

“Cool, hope it hurt him,” Clint said, popping the last of his popcorn in his mouth, “So,” he asked, with a sly look on his face, “Anyone want to start laying odds on how long it’ll take for a fight to break out in the conference? Bets start at fifty bucks and I’m setting the over/under at seven minutes.”

“Two,” Tony said immediately, “With Rogers and Maximoff in there, you can guarantee it’ll be a shit show no matter what.”
The Rogues filed into the conference room, as did the Guardians of the Galaxy, Thor, Banner, Dick, Bruce, and the Avengers. A few moments after everyone had taken their seats a golden portal opened and Stephen walked through with Loki behind him.

“Are we late?” the sorcerer asked, looking around the room,

“Yes!” Rocket grumbled,

“Not at all,” Rhodey said, “We haven’t started yet,”

“What is he doing here?” Natasha demanded, pointing to Loki, who took a seat besides Thor, with Banner on his right. The Trickster smirked at her obnoxiously,

“A pleasure to see you again too,”

“My Brother is here to assist us in defeating Thanos,” Thor informed the Rogues, and Wanda scoffed,

“You’re trusting a murderer?”

“Well you’re sitting here aren’t you?” Dick drawled, sending her a dark grin, daring her to lash out at him.

“I do hate interrupt what is bound to be an entertaining display, but I do believe that we should perhaps get on with what we are here for?” Stephen interjected, his gaze on Rhodey, who nodded, looking to Tony,

“Fri, can you connect us with Wakanda please?”

“Sure thing Boss Man,” Friday replied, and within seconds the images of T’Challa and Bucky appeared on the Computer screen.

While dealing with the UN and the US government, Rhodey and Tony had also reached out to T’Challa, explaining the situation and the danger the earth was facing. In light of this, T’Challa was prepared to use all of Wakanda’s impressive defences against Thanos.

Steve’s eyes widened when he saw Bucky, sporting a new arm on the screen.

“Buck…” He whispered,

“Stevie,” Bucky murmured, looking briefly to Steve, but then directed his gaze to Tony, “Mr Stark. I know it doesn’t change anything and I know I can’t begin to make up for what I’ve done…”

“You haven’t done anything Buck, you’re innocent!” Steve cried,

“Shut up and let the man talk!” Clint growled,

“But..”
“Steve, enough,” Bucky said, “I need to do this.”

“You don’t,” Tony whispered, his voice barely audible. Silence fell about the table and slowly he raised his eyes, looking to the computer screen. “I appreciate what you are trying to say and I know that you are sorry. But, for once in his life, Rogers is right, you are innocent. It was Hydra who truly killed my parents, not you. In Siberia everything was too raw, I couldn’t think clearly and I reacted like a wounded beast, lashing out. I am glad that I didn’t harm you more severely.”

Bruce looked at Tony with pride written over his face, the expressions around the table ranged from amazed at Tony’s ability for forgive the man who killed his parents, sympathy for what he must be feeling, pride like Bruce, and from one individual exasperation. Though one sharp look from Natasha had Wanda keeping her mouth shut and slumping back in her seat, a petulant look on her face.

On the screen Bucky dipped his head and nodded, apparently out of words. So T’Challa took over,

“I think, considering that time is limited, we should press on?”

“Indeed,” Rhodey said, “Firstly I think introductions should be made to our new comers.” He looked to the rogues, “These are the guardians of the Galaxy. Peter Quill AKA Star Lord. Gamora, Drax the Destroyer, Mantis, Rocket Raccoon, and Groot.”

“I am Groot!” Groot said, making the Rogues stare in amazement,

“A talking tree?” Sam asked, incredulous,

“What? Never seen Lord of the Ring?” Clint snorted,

“I am Groot!”

“That’s right, best movie ever,” Clint said to Groot, holding up a palm for Groots vines to slap.

“Guardians,” Rhody said, “These are Steve Rogers AKA Captain America,” as Rhody said this, Dick had a coughing fit that sounded suspiciously like Captain Asshat!

“Natasha Romanoff, AKA Black Widow. Sam Wilson, AKA Falcon, and Wanda Maximoff AKA Scarlet Witch.”

“Pleased to meet you,” Sam said, offering a hand to Quill, who took it,

“Likewise man,” he said,

“Also, in the light of full disclosure,” Rhody looked to Bruce, who nodded his head in silent agreement,

“Bruce Wayne, the Bat Man of Gotham City, Dick Grayson, Nightwing, Peter Parker, Spiderman,” He gestured to Bruce, Dick, and Peter. The rogues looked at them with surprise and respect. Everyone knew of Bat Man, it explained Bruce’s ability to knock Steve down, and, with the rumours that he had been trained by the League of Shadows and kicked the arses, why he had no fears that Wanda had been able to latch onto. Hydra had known of the league, had a healthy respect for them and had kept a distance from them. Nightwing had made a name for himself, as had Spiderman, that
the Rogues, while having been out of the country, knew of well enough.

“And, last but not least, Stephen Strange, Sorcerer Supreme.”

“Sorcerers Apprentice!” Tony muttered, making Peter giggle besides him.

“And I will now turn this meeting over to Stephen,” Rhodey said, giving the Sorcerer a smile.

“Thank you Colonel,” Stephen said, getting to his feet, “Well I think it is best to start at the very beginning, with the creation of the Infinity Stones, the prizes that Thanos intends to capture. The Stone of Space known as the Tesseract, The Stone of Reality known as the Aether, The Stone of Power, The Stone of Mind, The Stone of Soul, and the Stone of Time.

All of these stone came into existence at the beginning of reality itself, the birth of the universe, each with their individual power and strength. Two of these stone, The Powers stone, and the Tesseract, Thanos already has. The Aether is in Nowhere, I believe?” he looked to Thor, who nodded, “And the Mind Stone is in our friend Vision,” the Android inclined his head at Stephen, “We do not know the location of the Soul Stone..” he broke off as Gamora shifted uncomfortably, “Do we?”

“It is only rumour, I do not know for certain,” she said, “But my Sister an I believe that it maybe on Vormir.”

“Your Sister?” Clint asked,

“Nebula,” Quill replied, “We haven’t heard from her in while. She was one of Thanos’ “Children” too.”

“Thanos’ children? You’re his daughter?” Wanda shrieked, her eyes flashing red, Gamora met her gaze unflinching and responded in an ice cold tone,

“I was a child when he snatched me from my Mother and slaughtered half of the population on my planet, as he has done to countless others. I can assure you I have no loyalty to him at all.”

“How can we trust that?” Natasha asked, earning herself a snort from Dick,

“How the fuck can we trust you?” he asked her, “When you switch your loyalties as often as you change your underwear and stab people in the back at the first opportunity!”

Natasha opened her mouth to retort but Stephen stepped in, clearing his throat,

“Lets not get off topic, we still have a fair amount to get through.”

Steve sat forward, a frown on his face, “What about the Time Stone, where is that?”

“Safe,” Stephen replied,

“Full disclosure, Stephanie!” Tony murmured and yelped as The Cloak slapped the back of his head, “Keep your pet under control will you?”

“Its Stephen,” The Sorcerer ground out through clenched teeth, and sighed, “Very well. I have the time stone, or rather, the Sorcerers of Kamar Taj have guarded it for eons.”

“Kamar what?” Sam asked,
“There are more of you?” Wanda asked, looking intrigued by the prospect of having other people with magical abilities about herself.

“There are,” Stephen said, he looked to Tony, who nodded, “And now, finally, we come to the Seventh Stone. The one that was thought to be nothing but a myth, one that Thanos does not know exists,”

“As far as we know,” Loki murmured, drumming his fingers on the table in a bored manner,

“He doesn’t, he only knows of the six,” Gamora said, “The seventh is as much a mystery to him as to us.”

“Which maybe a bonus for us,” Banner said, “If we can find it of course.”

“If?” Steve asked,

“You got the part where it was thought to be a myth, right?” Clint asked, rolling his eyes,

“How do you know it isn’t?” Natasha snapped, shooting Clint a glare for his attitude that was returned in kind.

“Because, as it turns out, Tony is connected to the Seventh Stone.” Stephen explained.

Silence fell for several seconds. This was news to the Rogues, and T’Challa and Bucky. After a moment Steve spoke up, looking at Tony with confusion, “You know where it is?”

“Of course he does,” Wanda sneered, glaring at the Billionaire, “Been keeping it secret to use is as a weapon to wipe us all out, haven’t you Stark?” Tony lay a hand on Bruce’s knee as his husband stiffened in anger, he met Wanda’s gaze and lifted his chin, refusing to cower to her.

“I had no idea the stone even existed until it saved my life,” he replied, “It was the stone that woke me up from the coma, healed me, saved me,” he looked from Wanda to Steve, “After you nearly beat me to death.”

Steve swallowed hard, his blue eyes shining with start of tears, “Tony, I..”

“You don’t need to apologize to him,” Wanda said, taking Steve’s hand, but he pulled it away, refusing to look at her,

“There is a lot I need to say, too much, I don’t think I know where to start, or how to even begin to make amends,”

“And now is not the time, I think, for such things,” T’Challa said, cutting Steve off, “The seventh stone woke you, Mr Stark?”

“Tony, Please, and yes. We think it was when Thanos took the power stone. It sent ripples through the galaxy and the seventh stone. The Stone of Unity, which is connected to all the other stones reacted, sent out its power and used it to wake me.”

“But how are you connected to it?” Sam asked, “How does this work?”

“He’s a special princess!” Clint teased, sticking his tongue out when Tony flipped him off,
“Tony’s soul has been reborn many times throughout the centuries.” Stephen explained, “A mystical soul. Going right back to the time of Cleopatra, when his former self hid the stone of Unity somewhere in Egypt as Octavius ravaged the country.”

“I take it you don’t know where?” Natasha asked Tony, sounding as if this was a failing on his part,

“We’re working on going through my past memories, among other things,” Tony said, glancing to Stephen, unable to help himself he laid his hands on the table and let blue flames appear on his fingertips, smirking at the gasps of shock that came from the rogues, especially the cry of outrage that came from Wanda.

“How did you do that?” T’Challa asked, intrigued,

“Magic,” Tony said, closing his fists which became encased in metal, “My three elements, that our dear Sorcerer helped me unlock. Fire, Metal, and Darkness.”

“Darkness?” Bucky asked, “What does that mean? That you can turn of lights or make an eclipse?”

“No,” Tony snorted, “But that sounds cool. Darkness is dark energy, and dark matter, both of which I am learning to manipulate.”

“You should see him levitate, its really awesome,” Peter put in, “Its cooler that Stephen’s cloak!”

The cloak seemed to huff at this as it hovered behind Stephen.

Tony grinned at Peter, and Rocket grumbled,

“Can we hurry this up? All this talking is giving me a headache!”

“I am Groot!”

“No, you are not going to play video games,” Rocket snapped at Groot, “I’ve told you before, they’ll rot your brain!”

“Well, I think that is everyone brought up to speed at least.” Rhodey said, taking over from Stephen, “Now, lets look to making plans to counter Thanos, shall we?”
Chapter 25

Steve found himself staring at Tony, trying to reconcile himself to the fact that Tony wasn’t… well he was human, that was a fact, he wasn’t a mutant as such, neither was he enhanced. In all honesty Steve didn’t know what to describe Tony as.

Special.

That was probably the best term for him.

But then Tony had always been special, hadn’t he? A genius level IQ matched only by Bruce Banner, and Prince Shuri, Albert Einstein, and Stephen Hawking. Probably Galileo, Newton, and Da Vinci, but there had been no measuring of IQ in those days.

He was also incredibly creative and resilient. He turned problems into possibilities, turned adversity into advantage. Had survived impossible situations, triumphed time and again. He was something incredible, truly incredible.

‘And you nearly destroyed him’ A voice in Steve’s mind reminded him, making him swallow hard against the rise of bile in his throat.

It would be easy, he supposed. Seeing Tony here, sitting at this table, interacting with everyone, looking tanned and healthy, to forget how close he had come to dying. But if he looked closer, gave more than a cursory glance, then he could see the damage on Tony. The shadows beneath his eyes that he had clearly tried to cover up with make-up. The weight loss that had left him with the kind of gauntness in the face that movie stars and models starved themselves for these days. His body was narrower than Steve remembered it being. More bone, less muscle and flesh. He looked older too, aged by loss, stress, and grief. There was more grey in his hair, more lines about his eyes and across his forehead. But he wore the age well, like a bottle of good wine, he only got better with age.

“Steve would be excellent for leading ground teams,”

Steve looked up at Natasha’s statement, flushing a little when he realized that he hadn’t been paying attention to anything that was being said.

“Yeah right.” Clint snorted, derisively, and sat up straight when Natasha shot a glare at him.

“I don’t know what crawled up your backside and died, Barton, but damn well drop it will you?”

“Go drop yourself, Nat.” Clint shot back, meeting her glare without flinching. “Why the hell are you following him?” he cried, gesturing to Steve, “He’s a fucking joke, a fucking traitor. He lied to all of us and he nearly killed Tony.” Natasha’s response to this was as cool as ice,

“I seem to recall you being perfectly happy with Steve’s lead once upon a time, and as for being a traitor, didn’t you mock Stark about Rhodes’ injury, blame him for everything?”

Clint flushed and clenched his jaw tightly, refusing to back down.

“If anyone is a traitor or a turncoat, Barton, it is you.” Natasha stated, “You turned from Steve at the first opportunity, placed all the blame on him, when before then you’d been placing it all on Stark, just so you didn’t have to take any responsibility for yourself!”
“That’s enough!” Tony bellowed, slamming his fist into the table, making everyone jump. Wincing he lowered his hand to his lap and massaged the aching appendage. “You leave Clint alone.” He said to Natasha. “What he has done has been resolved. He has taken responsibility for his actions, has apologised to both myself and to Rhody. Which is a damn sight more than can be said for you.”

Natasha lifted her chin defiantly, “I stand by my actions.”

Bruce chuckled darkly, “How very reassuring.”

Natasha turned her sharp glare upon him. “I hardly think you of all people should be questioning morality.”

“I have never murdered anyone.” Bruce said, “Not even those who have undoubtedly deserved it.”

“No. You’ve just branded them with the bat symbol, beaten them within an inch of lives, caused massive destruction to property.” Natasha drawled, “Nothing immoral at all.”

“Better than setting a hospital on fire and letting infants burn to death.” Tony murmured, bringing up one of the things Natasha had done in her past.

“Your bombs have killed enough infants and innocents.” Wanda spat at him, coming to Natasha’s defence, as the older woman fell silent at the mention of the hospital fire. “Look at you Stark,” the Scarlet Witch sneered, “Acting like you’re so special because you have a few new powers, have managed to convince a few people that you are something more than a murderous monster. But you are nothing, Stark. Nothing but an over privileged asshole pretending to be a hero.”

“You take that back!” Peter snarled, making to rise from his seat, but Tony pulled him back, “I can handle this,” Tony said, reassuring his over-protective spider-man.

“Hiding behind children now?” Wanda sneered, disgustedly, “Just when I thought you couldn’t sink any lower.”

“Once could say the same of you, Maximoff.” Tony replied, “But at least I am not pretending to be something I am not. I have not tried to rewrite my own past and pretend that it did not exist. I have admitted to doing wrong and am trying to make amends. That is something you can not claim to be doing.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Your own past, with Hydra.” Tony replied, a mocking smile on his face, “Are we really supposed to believe that a person with telepathic abilities could truly be fooled into believing that an organization is not what it says it is?”

Wanda’s eyes turned bloody as her anger rose, but before she could lash out, Quill cleared his throat, “I think we’re getting off topic here, fascinating as this is.”

“I agree,” Stephen said, “We need to get back to the matter at hand. Thanos, and I agree that we should split into separate squads, for want of a better term, to counter him, and not just on the field.”

“What do you mean?” Rhodey asked.

Stephen shrugged, “While being battle ready is important, finding the seventh stone is just as vital, perhaps more so. My skills will be best served in doing that and teaching Tony how to use his abilities.”
“My abilities as a sorcerer will be of great use there.” Loki put in. “Providing that you keep your tricks to yourself, conjurer.”

Stephen smirked at the Trickster, “I thought you were the master of tricks.”

“Get a room you two.” Tony drawled, rolling his eyes, then turned a pleading look on Rhodey, “Do I have to work with them? Really? They make me crazy!”

“You’re crazy anyway, Tin Can.” Clint snorted, and stuck his tongue out as Tony glared at him.

“Fine. As my body guard, you can suffer their insufferable presence along with me.” Tony looked triumphant as Clint opened his mouth to protest, but Rhodey was already nodding his head in agreement, then Friday cut in.

“Bossman, I have an incoming call from a Hope Van Dyne.”

“Pym’s daughter?” Tony asked, frowning in surprise, “What the hell does she want?”

“To talk to you, presumably, genius.” Dick snarked

“Go fuck yourself, Dickless.” Tony shot back, rising to his feet, “I’ll take the call in the lab.” He said to Friday, then looked to the others, “Go on without me.”

“Gotcha Bossman.” Friday said.

*****

After Tony left, the meeting was taken over by Rhodey again, who agreed to Stephen’s proposal to have himself, Loki, and Tony concentrate their energies on finding the seventh stone, with Clint as Tony’s body guard. Though that was more of a joke really, but Rhodey wouldn’t mind having someone watching Tony’s back when neither he or Bruce were around.

Preparing ground and air forces was the next agenda.

Obviously only Rhodey, Tony, Vision, Thor, and Sam could fly. Bruce was able to fly too, by use of the Bat Jet, which put him in the air force as well as a valuable ground unit.

The guardians had their space ship, which was perfect for fighting both in the air, and outside the atmosphere. However, an argument was made for them to go and try to get hold of the reality stone from Nowhere before Thanos got his hands on it.

Thor, spoke of heading to some mythical place to get a Thanos killing weapon forged, which would require the use of the pod on board the Milano. At the mention of this place being real, Rocket perked up in excitement and offered to fly Thor there, along with Groot.

“Unless you require my presence in America, I would choose to remain in Wakanda and prepare our defences against this foe.” T’Challa said. “I will do what I can to make these defences global, though perhaps, if this Thanos makes landfall, it would be an idea to have him face us in a place of our own choosing?”

“Fight on our terms, not his.” Sam said, nodding his head, “Good plan. But how?”
“Me.” Vision said. Making everyone look at him. “I have the mind stone, he will be coming for it, which makes me the perfect bait.”

“Viz,” Peter whispered, his eyes huge and lower lip trembling.

“Maybe we don’t use you, just the stone.” Banner offered, “Perhaps we could find a way to remove it?”

“Is that possible?” Bruce asked. Banner shrugged,

“It wouldn’t be easy, but maybe we could do it. I’d feel more comfortable baiting Thanos with a gem rather than a person.” Vision inclined his head, considering this,

“The stone is a part of me. But not the whole of me. I am partly Jarvis, partly yourself, Partly Ultron, and partly Tony. Maybe I can survive without the mind stone.”

“I don’t want you to get hurt.” Wanda said, and flinched at the look of incredulity that Vision shot her.

“You were not so concerned when you threw me through several floors of the compound.”

“I think that maybe Princess Shuri could help with getting that rock out of your head.” Bucky offered, from the screen, “Maybe we can do an exchange, me for Vision?” he said this in a jovial tone that brought grins to several faces, Steve especially,

“We’ll be glad to have you, Buck, I’ve missed you.” He said, and flinched at Bucky’s next sentence,

“It’ll be Tony’s decision, since I’ll be living at his property.”

“I am sure he will see the benefits of this,” Vision said, “But we will ask before making any decisions.”

“Allright. We’ll put that on hold for the minute.” Rhodey said, “Moving onto the ground units. Bruce, do you mind being relegated to a ground operative, I know you have the jet but you generally fight on the ground.”

“No problem.” Bruce replied.

“Very well. I would like to team, yourself, Nightwing, Spider-Man, Hulk, and Hawkeye, when he is not being body guard to Tony. As one ground unit.”

“Sweet!” Dick declared.

“Whose leading this team?” Peter asked, “Bat Man?”

“Who else?” Rhodey replied, glancing to Bruce who nodded once in agreement.

“I suppose Stark will be leading the air team?” Wanda sneered,

“No, that will be me.” Rhody said, sighing tiredly. “Tony will be my second, any problems with that?” He looked to Sam and then to Thor and Vision, all of whom shook their heads.

“Allright, that leaves you, Rogers, to lead the second ground unit, with Maximoff, Barnes, and Romanoff. You will have to coordinate with Bruce’s team, listen to them, and, if the need arises, and you have to join forces, then Bruce will head the whole team, with yourself as his second. If you prove incapable of following his lead, then you will not only be replaced as second in command, but
also as leader of the second unit.”

“What?” Steve cried,

“Steve should lead.” Wanda protested, “He is a Captain, Wayne is just a playboy like Stark!”

“He’s Bat Man, you deranged slut!” Peter spat at her, “Rogers is just super steroid enhanced dancing monkey!”

“Watch your mouth Parker, or I’ll wash it out with soap!”

This came from Tony as he returned the conference room. “Friday got me up to date with what you’ve decided in my absence. I am amenable to an exchange of Vision for Barnes. It can be our first student exchange programme!”

T’Challa snorted, shaking his head, “I will arrange the flights as soon as I can.” He said, “I am sure that my Sister will be happy to maintain contact with you when Vision arrives.”

“Great, thanks for that Simba!” Tony said, flopping back into his seat, “I also have two more warriors for our ground and air forces. Scott Lang in the Ant Man suit, he can join Roger’s team, he’s fought with him before, and Hope Van Dyne in the Wasp suit.”

“Is that what she called about?” Bruce asked.

“Yahuh.” Tony replied, “Pym’s spitting glass, but she is determined to ally with us.”

“Scott’s a good guy,” Sam said, “He’ll be a great support to us.”

“Hope said they’ll come here tomorrow,” Tony said to Rhody, “Now, is there anything else to discuss?”

“Fuck no, I’m done.” Rocket declared, hopping down from his chair,

“I am Groot.” Groot said, following after him.

“I think that covers everything.” Rhody said, “A liaison from the UN Accord committee will be coming tomorrow to discuss the finer points over your pardons.” He said to the rogues, “Until then, I would say that is it. Dismissed.”

With a clattering of chairs, and murmurs of conversation everyone rose to their feet, pushing their chairs under the table and making for the door. Tony finished the call with T’Challa, making arrangements for Vision to go to Wakanda and Barnes to come to the Compound, then left to go to the gym with Bruce to do his physio. Loki and Stephen returned to the sanctuary, Dick and Peter headed off to spar, Clint took off for the archery range, Rhody for his office, Vision to make ready for his trip to Wakanda, Thor and the Guardians left for the Milano to make plans to leave for their destinations, leaving just the Rogues standing alone.

“Well?” Wanda asked, impatiently, “How long are we putting up with Rhodes, Wayne, and Stark calling the shots?”

Steve shrugged, feeling tired, overwhelmed by all the information he had just had piled on top of him, and worried about the meeting with the liaison the following day. Not to mention Thanos.

“It doesn’t matter who is in charge.” He said, finally, when the silence stretched, “So long as we defeat Thanos. That is all that matters.”
“We’ll have our work cut out for us.” Natasha said, “And we’re non of us at our best. I think we should go to one of the training rooms and start putting some work in.”

This was a good plan, and there was little else they could do right now, so Steve readily agreed, hoping that at some point he might get the chance to sit down and talk to Tony without anyone else being around.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Liaison from the accords committee came to the compound the following morning, shortly after breakfast, and hadn’t that been fun?

Dick and Bruce had cooked a large breakfast for everyone but the rogues.

The delicious smells of pancakes, waffles, eggs, sausages, bacon, and toast, had drawn everyone down to the kitchen, where Team Iron Man and The Guardians had been sitting around the bar, and scattered through into the common area, with plates loaded with breakfast goodies, included a selection of sliced apples, melon, strawberries, and grapes, as well as several choices of syrups.

There was a pot of coffee, and jugs of juice and milk to choose from, even a hot chocolate option.

“Now, now, Toby.” Tony said to the toaster, who was apparently sulking, “While you toast bread really well, we want to eat this toast, not just watch it smoulder and leave burn marks on the counter.” Toby made a popping noise and flipped over, then turned his back on Tony, who groaned, “Oh don’t be like that, here, here!” he said, grabbing a bag of bread, “You can toast this!” Reluctantly Toby turned back around, lowering and raising his ejection mechanism timidly, before finely agreeing to toasting and cremating the bread that Tony slipped into his slots.

“Thank God you don’t have an children!” Clint called, “You would cave at the first sight of a pout.”

“Shouldn’t you be outside collecting worms or something? Bird Boy?”

“Shouldn’t you be oiling yourself up, Tin Man?”

Steve couldn’t help but to smile in fondness at the playful sniping between Tony and Clint. The two had always acted like that, trading jabs and making smartass comments about each other. They were like two bickering brothers bouncing off each other. Seeing it again brought a warmth to Steve’s heart, along with a pang, as he realized how much he had missed it.

“Are there anymore eggs left, Friend Wayne?” Thor boomed. He was eating from a tray which contained several plates of food. His appetite being so much larger than a humans’ he needed the extra servings.

“I’m afraid not, but there are a couple of sausages left.” Bruce called back, the corner of his mouth lifting as Toby sent black slices of toast into the air and was given applause by Tony.

“They will make a fine substitute.” Thor said, rising from his seat and trotting into the kitchen to retrieve the sausages, patting Cathy as he went by, making her gurgle happily.

Everyone looked up sharply when Dick made an “Eeeewww.” Noise.

“What?” Peter protested,

“Dude, that is gross.” Dick said,

“No it isn’t. Tony, back up here, be my bro. Peanut Butter and maple syrup isn’t gross is it?”

“Sorry Parker,” Tony replied stabbing a piece of melon with his fork, “You’re on your own with this
Presently Steve was joined in the doorway by Sam, and shortly thereafter by Wanda and Natasha.

“Something smells great.” Sam said, going past Steve and into the kitchen, seeking out food, his search came to halt when he saw the empty bowls and dishes that had contained food prior to Team Iron Man getting hold of them.

“You couldn’t have saved us any?” Natasha asked icily,

“No.” Clint said bluntly.

“I only cook for people I like.” Dick said, around a mouthful of waffle, “And Bruce only cooks under supervision!”

“You are not too old to be grounded!” Bruce called to him from the kitchen, where he was trying to coax Tony into eating another half of a waffle. The other Billionaire still needed to gain weight.

“This is childish.” Steve said, with a heavy sigh, “If we’re going to be working together…”

“You getting your own breakfasts has nothing to do with working together, Rogers.” Rhodey said, cutting him off. “Now there are still eggs in the fridge. There is still flour, bread, uncooked bacon, I don’t think there are any sausages left, but there is oatmeal and there are cereals. So, you have plenty of options to choose from.”

“That isn’t the point…” Steve began, but Sam clasped his upper arm, shaking his head,

“Let it go, it isn’t worth starting a fight.”

“I’m not.” Steve said.

“Yeah, it isn’t Steve who starts fights, it’s Stark!” Wanda snarled, glaring at Tony, who didn’t even look up from where he was playfully trying to duck his head, as Bruce tried to feed him a fork full of waffle.

“Why don’t you stamp your feet, ball your fists, and get red in the face, when you do that?” Peter asked in a saccharine tone, “Then you’ll be putting your all into your tantrum!”

Wanda let out a wordless snarl, red magic swirling around her hands and filling her eyes, but before she could do anything, a bolt of blue fire shot between her and Peter, hitting the wall and leaving a blackened burn mark in its wake.

Eyes wide with shock, Team Cap all turned to stare at Tony, who’s left hand was still outstretched, blue flames dancing on his fingertips.

“Try and hurt anyone in my team again, Maximoff, and I can promise you, that there will not be enough left of your body for anyone to find.”

Natasha straightened and lifted her chin defiantly, “Are you threatening us, Stark?” she asked, a note
of challenge in her voice, as if she were daring him to make a move. Tony smiled at her, not his press smile, that full of teeth, not his sultry pout, nor his genuine smile that he reserved for his friends and family. This smile was more like a sneer, it was all sharp edges and spikes that glistened dangerously.

“It’s not a threat, Romanoff, it’s a caution, and a promise.” He replied, in a tone that would have made a polar bear feel chilly.
Knowing this could go on and escalate, Steve inserted himself between Tony and his team, holding his hands up in a gesture of peace, “I don’t want to fight,”

“Then don’t start one.” Tony said, cutting him off. He glanced above Steve’s head, to the kitchen clock, “I suggest you eat quickly. Your Liaison will be here at ten to speak with you.”

“Cold cereals it is then.” Sam said, since it was twenty-five past nine already,

“We need to head over to the Tower,” Tony said, to Bruce, “Jet will have missed us.”

“Damn cat.” Bruce grumbled, good naturedly.

“I need to head into the city too.” Peter said, scraping clean his plate,

“Me too.” Dick said,

“That’s cool, you can come with us.” Tony told them, “Clint, are you’re my security chief you need to come too.”

“Ooohhh, I thought I was your kept man now, Stark, that I was going to like an idle life in the lap of luxury!”
Tony smirked at the archer, “Earn you keep or you’ll living an idle life in the lap of a drunken, unwashed, Hobo behind a dumpster!”

“You know, my job sucks,” Clint said to Dick, “My boss is such a bitch!”
Dick snickered, “I know what you mean, my former guardian was a total bitch too!”

“We need to start prepping the Milano.” Quill said,

“Aye, we need to get underway soon.” Thor agreed, “Rabbit, Tree, and I, will head out as soon as the pod is ready.”

“And we’ll go to Nowhere.” Gamora said, “With any luck, we will beat Thanos there.”

“Aw don’t say that,” Quill protested, “That’s like one of the worst jinxes ever, now we’re screwed!”

***

Talk of the days plans and playful bantering continued until the end of breakfast, when Team Iron Man began to part, washing their plates in the sink, and leaving them to dry on the rack, with Vision saying that he would take care of the cooking pans. He was going to be in the compound lab with Banner all day, so neither had anywhere to travel to, and Rhodey was going to be in his office.

Team Cap quickly devoured their cereals, and got themselves ready for the liaison, who was taken to
conference room C, by Vision, where she made herself comfortable at the head of the table. Opening her briefcase and getting out several large files, that she passed down the table to Steve, Sam, Wanda, and Natasha.

“Alright, to begin with, I am Gabrielle Lomas, your official liaison to the accords council. I will be explaining your files in detail and answering any questions you may have, regarding the deal that you have made with the accords.”

“I’m sorry, deal?” Steve said, frowning, “There is no deal, we didn’t sign the accords, we do not believe in them.” If he was expecting MS Lomas to look surprised, he was deeply disappointed, because she just sighed and gave him a pitying look instead.

“Mr Rogers, your official pardons for your crimes, hinge partly on your signing the accords and adhering to them. I can assure you, that until you have read and signed the documents, your pardons do not come into effect. The US Government has be gracious enough to allow you a forty-eight hour window in which to do this, and temporarily made this compound a diplomatic building, so your presence here will not result in your arrest. However, should any of you step outside the estate, then you will be arrested and if you do not have a valid green card, deported.” She looked at both Natasha and Wanda as she said this last part.

“All we need to do is sign, and we’re free to go anywhere we want?” Sam asked, “Correct.” MS Lomas replied, she opened her mouth to protest, but Sam was already scribbling his name on the document.

“Sam!” Steve cried, horrified, but Sam was unrepentant.

“I haven’t seen my Mom in nearly two years, Steve. If all it takes to get to go and see her is signing his paper, then that is what I am going to do.” After checking everything was signed, he stood up from his chair and handed the folder back to MS Lomas. “Can I go?” he asked, “I really want to go and visit my Mom.”

For the first time since she had arrived, MS Lomas softened. “I will contact the council and arrange transportation for you, Sergeant, as soon as we are done here.” Sam closed his eyes and slumped in relief.

“Thank you.” He said, “Thank you, so much.”

“I don’t understand.” Wanda said, “I thought we were getting pardons, and that was it? What is this? Some new kind of trick to get us locked up again?” she glared at MS Lomas menacingly, “Do you work for Stark? Are you one of his people?”

MS Lomas met her gazed coldly. “No.” She replied, “To both questions. As for you pardons. They are complex, and are not the get out of jail free card you might think they are. Once all the documents are signed, you will be safe from arrest, in the USA, we can not guarantee that outside of the US, or countries not allied with the UN. We also need to assure the general populous of their safety, with you back in the country. Which your agreeing to sign these documents will help provide.”

Natasha scoffed, “Are people really that gullible?”

“No, MS Romanoff, they are not.” MS Lomas sharply reprimanded her, “Which is why, we will not only be making these documents available to see on the Internet, but will also be holding a press conference, which Mr Stark and Mr Wayne have graciously agreed to attend, to answer questions
Wanda scoffed, and shoved the documents away from herself, as she slumped back in her seat, staring defiantly at MS Lomas, “This is a publicity stunt for Wayne and Stark, isn’t it? Trying to make themselves look special and heroic in front of the world.”

MS Lomas sighed heavily and placed both palms on the table as she clearly strove for patience.

“There are more important things going on, right now.” Steve said, in what he believed was a reasonable tone of voice, “We are preparing to fight an invading Alien and stop the end of the world.”

“Which is why the soon this is done, the better, Mr Rogers.” MS Lomas replied, tersely.

“It’s a waste of time.” Wanda sneered,

“Then leave.” Lomas snapped, “If you are not interested in this, Miss Maximoff, I will inform the accord and the UN and arrange for you to be deported back to Sokovia today.”

“You can’t do that!” Wanda cried, looking alarmed at the prospect,

“I can and I will, and Mr Rogers, before you start calling her a child, let me remind you that she is in her twenties, and is very far from a child.

“I have a question, if I may?” Natasha asked, looking up from where she had rapidly read through the documents, “Once this is signed, we can go outside of the compound and estate, wherever we want, so long as it is in the US?”

“Yes.” Lomas confirmed, “Though I urge you not to do so until after the press conference, and even after that, to avoid conflict with anyone outside. Your pardons are only valid if you adhere to the accords, and to the laws of this country and around the world.”

“So no getting into fights, even if someone else starts it.” Sam clarified, “Makes sense. All we have to do is avoid trouble, and keep our heads down.” He shrugged, “We’ll be busy here most of the time anyway.”

“Right.” Natasha agreed, and reached for her pen, scribbling her signature before Steve could protest.

“Thank you, MS Romanoff,” Lomas said, accepting the documents from her, “Miss Maximoff, Mr Rogers? Do you require more reading time?”

“Just sign them man.” Sam urged, “The sooner this is sorted, the sooner we can focus on Thanos.”

“I know that.” Steve said, “But… after all we’ve been through…”

“Big picture Cap.” Natasha said, “Evil is coming. Barnes is safe, and we can’t fight if we’re under threat of arrest and deportation.”

Steve slumped. He hated this, truly hated it, but he knew there was no choice, he was trapped by this, he had to do it if he wanted to fight, and he needed to fight. There would be time after Thanos to rethink this, and do something then, he reasoned, reaching for his pen and signing his name.

“Fine.” Wanda spat, doing the same, and shoving the file away as if it burned her.

“Thank you.” Lomas said, gathering the files. “Well, I’ll let the accords know that this has been done
already and that there is no need for the window, and I’ll be in touch about the press conference.” She rose from her seat, “Sergeant Wilson, if you will come with me, we’ll see about getting you taken to your Mothers.”

Sam eagerly rose, and patted Steve on the shoulder as he followed Lomas out of the door.

“So what now?” Wanda asked,

“Now? We get ready to fight Thanos.” Natasha said, “Make nice with Stark and Wayne for the cameras and do what is needed to be done. Right?” She looked at Wanda who huffed, and then to Steve who nodded stiffly. “Good.” Natasha said, getting up from her chair and leaving Wanda and Steve alone.

“I hate this!” Wanda exclaimed,

“I know, I do too.” Steve agreed, “But like Natasha said. We have to look at the bigger picture.”

“I know that, but why isn’t Stark doing the same? Why does he get to be petty and childish?”

Steve didn’t have an answer for her, for any of this really. All he could do was hope that signing those documents hadn’t been a big mistake.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize if this chapter isn't up to standard. I had a tooth extracted today and am in a lot of pain.
Chapter 27

Compound

Scott came to the following day, looking very out of place and unsure of himself. Sam was away at his Mother’s. Thor had left with Quill and the guardians, Loki was at the Sanctum with Strange. Spider Man was at school, Nightwing was back in Gotham, Batman was either there or in New York with Tony. Rhodey was locked in meetings, Vision was with Banner in one of the labs, Clint was with Tony in New York, which left just Natasha, Steve, and Wanda to greet Scott when he came in.

“We heard you were coming back.” Natasha said, holding out a hand for Scott to shake, while Wanda scowled contemptuously at Ant Man, having not forgotten his abandoning them in Wakanda after learning about Tony being put into a coma. “I’m Natasha. We met briefly at the airport a few years ago.”

“Yeah.” Scott said, giving her a smile and looked at Steve and Wanda while shifting uncomfortably.

“So uh, when she heard about what’s happening with this psycho alien, Hope insisted that we help. Told Hank straight that she was going with the wasp suit whether he liked it or not.” Scott grinned sheepishly and scratched the back of his head, “Hank might be an ornery bastard, but Hope’s got him wrapped around her little finger, and once she has her heart set on something there is no stopping her.”

“Sound’s like a hell of a woman,” Steve said, likening her to Peggy. “And she got you the Ant Man suit back.”

“Actually, she didn’t.” Scott said, “Hank insisted that if she was going to be going into danger that someone be there to watch her back. He was going to use the suit himself until she convinced him that at his age he was far to old to do such a thing, and so they compromised and, well, here I am.”

It wasn’t exactly a ringing endorsement for Scott’s abilities, but at least he was back in the field and would helping out, and at present any extra hands were going to be welcomed.

“So where is she?” Steve asked, looking around for Hope Van Dyne.

“If you mean Hope, then she’s in New York, at Stark Tower, meeting with Mr Stark.” Scott replied, shoving his hands into his pockets since he didn’t really seem to know what to do with them. “Her exact words were, “You go and play with the other children, Scott. While I talk with the adults” He offered Steve a lob-sided half smile, “I better warn you, she isn’t your biggest fan.”

Steve sighed, “Not many people are these days.” He admitted. Then smiled, “But you’re here, we should show you around this place, you are going to love it.”

“You mean the parts we can see.” Wanda spat grumpily and folded her arms over her chest, scowling at Scott, “Why are we welcoming him? He betrayed us, remember?”

Natasha muttered something under her breath in Russian and rolled her eyes heavenward.

“Wanda…” Steve began,
“No!” Wanda shrieked, “I am getting sick of this. Sick of everyone pandering to Tony Fucking Stark. Acting as if he is the damn Messiah or something, when he is nothing but a murderer!” She turned her accusing eyes on Natasha who met the gaze calmly even as Wanda all but screamed at her, “You never liked Stark!” She cried, “You wrote that report, Iron Man yes, Tony Stark not recommended. You said he was dangerous, that he couldn’t be trusted, and now you act as if he is someone worthy of your respect? And you!” She whirled on Steve, who actually took a step back from her as her fury was levelled on him. “You saw what he was capable of in Siberia. Saw him nearly murder your friend, why would you ever want to trust him after that? He tore the avengers apart, his accords tore us apart!”

“They were never His accords.” Scott corrected, cutting in Wanda’s diatribe. “They were created by the United Nations and the late King T’Chaka, after the deaths in Nigeria. You know, those people You killed.”

Red flashed in Wanda’s eyes, “That was an accident.” She snarled, “I didn’t mean to kill them.”

“How about all those people you killed when you were working for Hydra?” Scott countered, “Did you mean to kill them?”
Wanda looked about ready to lash out with her magic so Steve intervened, putting himself between her and Scott before she could do something she might regret.

“That’s enough.” He said, addressing them both. “Now mistakes have been made, on both sides. But what is important now is that we all work together to fight Thanos.”

“That will be a lot easier without Stark.” Wanda sneered and Natasha scoffed.

“Tony Stark maybe our best chance at defeating Thanos.” She said to Wanda, “He is the the most important person on this team, and you had better get used to it.” Looking at Steve she sighed, “I’m going for a swim, don’t disturb me unless there is an emergency.”

As Natasha sauntered off to take a swim, Steve looked beseechingly at Wanda, “I know things are difficult,” He said, trying to appeal to her, “But you know that what happened between Tony and I is complicated, and my leaving him in Siberia was wrong, hurting him like that was wrong.”

“No it wasn’t, he deserved it!”

“No one deserved that!” Scott cried, “Jesus, he was beaten almost to death. Spent over a year in a coma!”

“He killed my parents and my Brother!”

“And how many parents and brothers died when you set The Hulk loose in Johannesburg? Or when you were working with Ultron and Hydra?” Scott yelled, “Stark might not be a saint, but at least he doesn’t try and paint himself as an innocent victim of circumstance, or play act at being a child. He’s owns up to what he’s done and tries to make amends. That is something worthy of respect, because at the end of the day, we’re all fuck ups, we’ve all done shit we’re not proud of, the only difference is that Stark isn’t allowed to forget his part because he’d famous, it keeps getting dredged up, where we can all walk away and move on.”

Wanda was red in the face by now, and looked almost ready to burst a blood vessel. “It isn’t the same!” She screamed, “He is a monster, he doesn’t deserve the Stone, he doesn’t deserve any of this!”

“Wanda that’s enough!” Steve shouted pushing Wanda back a few steps, not enough to hurt her, but
enough to shake her and startle her into calming down. “You’re getting yourself upset over nothing.” He said to her. “Go to your room and calm down.”

“Go to my room? I am not a fucking child!”

“You act like one.” Scott sneered, apparently unable to keep from making snarky comments,

“Just go and calm down.” Steve instructed her. For moment he wondered if Wanda would use her magic on him she looked so enraged, but after a second she backed down, letting out a frustrated scream and spun around, storming off to her bedroom, slamming doors behind her as she went.

“So.” Scott said, breaking the uncomfortable silence that fell, “Got any beer?”

***

Stark Tower

Tony’s office was rarely used since he spent most of his time in his lab. But for meetings like the one he was conducting with Hope, it was very useful.

“I thought it best that we speak without Scott present.” Hope said, as she took a seat, smoothing her smart pencil skirt down, “He is contrite about his actions during the “Civil War” but his mouth can run away with him, and he is not the best person for handling negotiations and such, if you know what I mean.”

Tony smiled slightly. “I think so.” He said, “So, I gather that you and Scott want to join the team to help us fight Thanos?”

“Yes.” Hope said, “I’m not sure how much help we’ll be, but I want to do whatever I can. After all, this is my world too. If it is destroyed then I die, as do the people I care about.” She sighed and leaned forward, not enough that it gave Tony a view inside her shirt, but enough that she was leaning closer to him.

“If you can’t work with Scott, I will understand. Having Ant Man backing me up was my Father’s idea. I was happy to come alone, and will be happy to be on this team without him…” Tony held up a hand to stop her,

“I have not problems working with Scott Lang.” He said, “And considering what we’re facing, we all need to put finer feelings aside and focus on the real issue, which is fighting Thanos.” He gave Hope a smile, “Now. We’ve been discussing splitting the team in units to work on our various strengths. We have our magic team,” He rolled his eyes, “Don’t even go there, it’s lead by a very strange man indeed! We have our areal team, myself, War Machine, Falcon, Thor, when he returns, Batman has a jet, Vision, but he might be out of commission, we don’t know yet, and I was hoping that you would join this division as I believe the Wasp suit can fly.”

Hope smiled and nodded, “Sounds fine to me, and Scott?”

“He’ll be on the ground unit, comprised of Winter Soldier, when he gets here, Captain America,” Tony snickered at Hope’s grunt at the mention of Steve. “Black Widow, Spider Man, and
Nightwing.”

“And what is the plan for dealing with Thanos?” Hope asked, crossing her legs and leaning back in her seat, “You do have a plan I assume?” Tony shifted uncomfortably,

“It’s complicated,” He said, “We need to… find something that was thought to be a myth, it may have the power to stop Thanos from succeeding.”

“And this thing is?”

“The seventh infinity stone.”

Compound.

Loki and Stephen were still locked up in the Sanctum chasing down ideas and theories on the Stone of Unity. No word had come from the Guardians of Thor, and Vision was prepared to leave as T’Challa arrived with Bucky.

Bucky had not been to the compound before, he had only been to New York the once since escaping Hydra, with T’Challa when he was being acquitted, and had gone to the hospital to see Tony when he’d still been in a coma.

So seeing the compound, hearing the AI was amazing to him. He’d been in Wakanda, the tech capitol of the world, but he’d kept mostly to the outskirts of the main city, sticking to the rural areas and to things he understood, not really indulging in the high tech that Wakanda had available.

“This is incredible.” He said, as FRIDAY greeted them.

“Indeed,” T’Challa agreed, “Even in Wakanda we do not have such expressive AI’s.”

“Nice to know that I can at least out do you in one thing.” Both men turned and were greeted by Tony, who grinned at them, “Sergeant, Your Majesty. Welcome to the Compound. I wish it was under better circumstances.”

“Likewise Mr Stark.” T’Challa said, straightening up, as the Rogues appeared, Bruce Wayne, Dick Grayson, and Peter Parker all moving to flank Tony, and Clint rising from the couch where he’d been playing video games with Vision, and losing, which had been amusing Banner and Rhodey to no end.

“Buck!” Steve greeted, hurrying forward, his arms spread wide. A little less enthusiastically Bucky hugged him back, “God, it is so good to see you!”

“You too, punk.” Bucky said, his gaze shifting to Tony. “I hope it’s okay that I’m here…”

“It’s fine.” Tony said, “Mi casa et su casa, as they say in Spain. Make yourself at home, get a beer, put your feet up, kick Clint’s arse at Mario kart!”

“Hey!” Clint protested,

“Get third degree burns off the demented toaster!” Peter grumbled holding up a very sore looking
hand. Tony rolled his eyes,

“Toby isn’t demented, he’s just a little temperamental. You need to be more gentle in your interaction with him.”

“Third degree burns, third degree I swear!”

“They are nothing more than surface wounds, you’ll live.” Tony dismissively said and looked to T’Challa, “Teenagers, what can you do?” As Peter balked, T’Challa snorted,

“I know the feeling, my sister is close to Mr Parker’s age and equally as… energetic.”

Bucky snickered, “More like she gives him shit over everything and is so smart she can dance rings around everyone!” T’Challa sighed heavily but did not correct Bucky.

“Sounds like someone I want to meet.” Tony said, looking gleeful. “Viz, make sure you give her my private e-mail while you’re there and we can do science.” Somehow Tony managed to make science sound dirty.

“Tony.” Banner gently scolded,

“You are married, remember?” Natasha sighed,

“Hell, with what my arse feels like this morning, I’m not likely to forget!”

“TONY!” Getting yelled at for being inappropriate by so many people at once was definitely a new record and Tony couldn’t help but feel very proud of himself.

Clearing his throat Bruce stepped forward, “Will you stay for the night, your Majesty?” He asked, T’Challa, I know you need to get back, but surely one night won’t hurt.”

T’Challa nodded, “I’d be delighted.”

Smiling like he had won a prize Steve wrapped an arm about Bucky’s shoulders, “C’mon, let’s get you settled in.” He said, leading Bucky into the compound, “You’re going to love this place, there is so much I have to show you…”

Tapping Peter on the shoulder Dick cleared his throat, “How about I teach you how to use a bow and arrow?”

“Uh, hello?” Clint protested, “If anyone’s teaching Spider Brat how to shoot it’s gonna be me!”

“Why should I learn that?” Peter asked, “I web people, it’s kind of my thing.”

“We are all going to learn to use multiple weapons and fighting styles, Pete.” Tony said to the boy, “All of us, learning archery will be a good skill, I’m going to teach you firearms, and Bruce will be teaching you fighting disciplines.”

“While Strange and Loki are teaching you magic.” Peter said, grinning at Tony’s groan, “Okay then, lets go shooting.”

With Clint and Dick still arguing over who would be the one doing the teaching, the three of them heading for the archery range, leaving Bruce and Tony to settle T’Challa in, with Rhodey joining him, apologising for being late, having been on the phone with the new Secretary for Defence, whom apparently liked to talk a lot.
Natasha gave Vision and small smile and followed after Clint, Dick, and Peter. She may not be an archer, but she enjoyed knife throwing, and that was a skill she could impart on the boy.

Sam was still with his Mother, and wouldn’t be returning till the following day, Hope and Scott would be arriving properly then too, which left just Wanda alone, as Banner and Vision headed for the Lab to file their research thus far on the Mind Stone and Vision’s body structure for Shuri to use when he got to Wakanda.

Balling her fists Wanda stalked over to the lounge area and glared at the TV screen, where the Mario kart game was paused, letting out a frustrated scream she let loose a blast of power, shattering the TV and exploding the Blu-ray player.

“Stark!” She hissed, running her hands over her face and up into her air, “This is all Stark. He’s taking everyone from me again.” She fist her hair and pulled on it, making her scalp sting, “He has to be eliminated.” She whispered. “I have to eliminate him. Then the Stone of Unity can be mine.”
Sam returned to the compound the day after Bucky arrived, his return coinciding with Hope’s arrival at the compound to begin training with the team.

While he had been happy to see his Mother, it had been a tense reunion. She had berated him for all the worry he’d put her through, for blindly following Steve Rogers without stopping to think for himself and consider that the world did not start and stop with Captain America.

“I thought you had more sense than that, Samuel. I thought you were better than that.”

Her disappointment had hurt far worse than her anger. Oh she was angry at him, that was clear, but he would rather have her anger, have her take him over her knee and give him a good old fashioned spanking than have to see her disappointment in him.

That made him feel like a four year old boy being scolded for stealing sweets from the corner shop with his friends.

He felt horribly ashamed of himself, of what he had done to her, what his actions had done. She was older than he remembered, the last two years had not been kind to her. Her health was failing, she struggled getting up from chairs now, her knees and hips paining her. She also needed a stick to help her walk.

Sam was loathe to think of how she’d been struggling with doing her shopping and taking care of herself in his absence, how when she’d had the flu last winter, it had been her neighbours youngest, who was not yet gone off to college, that had gotten her groceries and checked on her every day.

Sam hadn’t even known that she’d been ill. She could have had a heart attack, stroke, could have even died and he wouldn’t have known it.

He had just enough self-respect left not to cry in front of her, but it had been a very near thing and he spent his time with her trying desperately to make up for his mistakes, feeling as if he would never do so.

It was only because the Universe was in jeopardy that he returned to the compound. Had the situation been less dire he would have resigned from the Avengers and stayed with his Mother. Found himself some employment in DC and spent the rest of his time caring for her.

He entered the front door of the compound and stopped dead, his holdall hanging from his shoulder as he watched Stark playing with a large black cat.

Stark had a ball of string which he was teasing the cat with, trailing the string along the floor for the cat to follow, which it did, at great speed and pounced on the string, biting it and clawing it until Stark tugged it free again and repeated the process, even throwing the ball up to Spider-Man, who was hanging upside down from the ceiling, to dangle the string over the cat, making it jump up to get its prize.

“Don’t worry it is a real cat, not a shape-shifting mutant.”

Sam just about leaped out of his skin and turned to glare at Bruce Wayne AKA Batman, who had snuck up behind him silent as a grave.
The Billionaire was clad in his Kevlar and cape, his cowl pushed back so his face was revealed. He was smirking at Sam, obviously pleased that he’d made him jump. But before Sam could say anything, the doors leading from the bedrooms opened and several Avengers came in, with a woman that Sam didn’t recognize for a moment, then he clocked her. Hope Van Dyne. Hank Pym’s somewhat estranged daughter.

“Hey, Bird-boy, finally flown the nest and come back to join us!” Clint called with a broad grin on his face, “You’re just in time. We’re going to be starting training today.” He shot Tony a dirty look, “Except for Stark. He’s gonna be sitting on his idle ass playing with his pussy while we’re slogging our guts out!” He winced as Hope slapped him upside the head, “I meant the cat not the other thing!” He protested, which earned him no quarter as Tony threw the ball of string at his head, which he caught before it could hit him, but was not prepared for the cat leaping onto him, claws digging into his chest and shoulders as he went for his prize!

“Goddamnit, this is why I prefer dogs!” Clint snarked, throwing the string away and yelping as the cat leaped off him, taking half his skin with him in his claws! He levelled a glare at Tony who was doubled over laughing, “I’m suing, industrial injury!”

“Oh yeah, I can really see the courts awarding you compensation for a few cat claws.” Peter snickered, swinging down from the ceiling, “And it’s still not as bad as what Jet did to Rogers.”

Both Clint and Scott winced at the memory, making Sam frown, “What did the cat do?” he asked, “Kind of what he just did to Clint,” Scott said, “Only it wasn’t his chest that he leaped on. It was his thighs as Jet wanted to get up onto the table to get hold of the bacon that Steve was eating, only Steve was in pyjama bottoms as it was breakfast and Jet slipped and reached out to grab onto the closest thing he could to support himself…. Namely Steve’s crotch!”

Sam felt the blood drain from his face at the thought of a cat’s claws sinking into his own crotch, and wondered if he could get Kevlar underwear.

“You’d have thought someone was being murdered he screamed so much!” Bruce snorted, making his way over to Tony, just as a portal opened and Stephen Strange sauntered into the compound, sighing when the Cloak unwrapped itself from his shoulders and went to play with the cat.

“Is everyone here?” He asked, looking around with a frown.

“We are now.” Steve said, coming into the common area with Natasha and a decidedly sulky looking Wanda. Bucky was a little way behind them, and Dick stuck his head up from the sofa where he’d apparently been reading a comic and ignoring everything.

“Indeed we are.” Rhodey agreed, coming in from his office. “Welcome back Sam. I’m sorry you don’t have much time to settle in, but we need to get a start on the training.”

Sam shrugged, he was ex-military and very used to getting ready on the fly. “Gimme ten minutes and I’ll be good to go.”

“Alright then.” Rhodey said, as Sam went to stow his luggage and change into his gear, “We’re going to start off in our individual teams. Air force, ground unit, and magic team. Then to finish up, we will be working together against a simulation that Tony and Bruce have created for us.”

“So while Stark, and Strangeness are sitting in lotus position singing comebya, and smoking questionable substances, the rest of us will be slogging our guts out.” Clint said, “I knew I should
“I’ve learned how to do card tricks, then I could get out of doing the actual work!”

“It’s Strange.” Stephen growled, stiffening when Tony patted his shoulder,

“He knows you are, precious. Now let’s go and get our chanting on while the rest of the children play. I’ve even got Sabrina cued up on Netflix!”

“I swear to God Stark, if it weren’t for the fact that the Universe’s survival might hinge on you, I would strangle you with my bare hands!” Stephen grumbled, pretending not to notice the fact that the Cloak was laying full length and hovering mid-air with the cat curled up in its centre. Some things were just too painful to witness.

“I should be on the magic team.” This naturally came from Wanda, resulting in a groan from Dick and an exaggerated sigh from Peter, both of whom were not looking forward to dealing with her during training. They were both on the Ground Unit and would have to train alongside her, with Natasha, Bucky, Steve, Scott, and Bruce.

Rhodey would be training with Sam, and Hope, while Tony and Stephen worked on Tony’s powers.

“Wanda,” Steve said, in a voice that sounded on the verge of complete exasperation, “We have already been through this. Stephen and Tony need to concentrate on developing Tony’s abilities, they cannot do that with you present, which is why you are on our team today.”

“But I am a witch!” Wanda persisted, actually stamping her foot.

“No, you are not.” Stephen said, with cold dispassion. “Witches, true Witches are either born to the craft or they take years studying and training to learn. You are a mutant, your powers were granted by the Mind Stone. They were not earned or naturally developed. Calling yourself a Witch is an insult to the True Witches.”

Stephen said this in such a way that it could not be argued with. He was insulting Wanda, but he was only stating fact and said it a way that it could not even be considering particularly rude or cruel, just cold, hard fact.

Wanda turned her glare on Tony, “Why do you always have to get your way?” She snarled, before whirling on her heel and storming back the way she had come, slamming the door behind her.

“Okay,” Dick said, drawing out the word. “Now that we are done with the temper tantrum, can we go and get on with training?”

*****

Training went about as well as could be expected for the first time out.

Rhodey took Sam and Hope up above the compound, starting them off with some basic dives and loops as warm ups, then putting them through their paces a bit more with some low level blasts of his repulsors that they had to dodge.

The only time that there was really an issue was when he ordered them to work together to take him down.
Hope was still learning how to control her suit and all of it and her own capabilities, while Sam was hesitant to fight Rhodey, certainly to tackle him mid-air. Memories of Leipzig were fresh in his mind and he found himself holding back out of fear of hurting the Colonel even more.

“Alright.” Rhodey said once they were back on the ground. “You both need to work on your confidence in the suits and yourselves. Hope, I think practice will build that for you. Train in simulators and just take the suit for a spin in the air to get a better feel for it and what it can do.” He advised her, “It is not that dissimilar to War Machine and Iron Man. You need to become as one with the suit, so it becomes an extension of your own body rather than a tool your are working with.”

“Gotcha Colonel.” Hope agreed readily.

“Sam, I think I can guess what the issue is with your confidence.” Rhodey said, an understanding look on his face as he regarded the other man, “Is this something you can work on yourself, or would you like to see a councillor?”

Sam bit his bottom lip, thinking about it for a moment. “I think a Councillor would be best.” He admitted. It was unlikely he would get through his guilt about Rhodey’s injury by himself, and he needed to get his confidence back if he was going to be useful in the fight against Thanos. Working with a therapist would be the best way to achieve that.

“Alright, I’ll get that set up for you.” Rhodey said, “Do you feel able to continue with the group session or would you like to sit out?”

“I’ll continue,” Sam said, “Any idea or what the simulation will be?” Rhodey shook his head, “But Tony was gleeful, so I suspect it’ll be brilliant and absurd at the same time.

Training for the ground team went less well. Bruce split the team into two and had them battling against each other with the goal of successfully retrieving the sand bag, which was representing a hostage and getting them to safety.

Himself, Dick, Peter, and Clint were playing “The bad guys” guarding the hostage, while the others had to take them down and rescue the hostage.

Steve played on a strategy of pitting his and Bucky’s strength against Bruce, believing him to be the main target for them to take down, while ordering Natasha to take out Dick, Peter, and Clint, while Scott rescued the Sandbag hostage.

While Natasha could anticipate Clint, she had no experience of fighting Dick, who not only excelled at archery but also at acrobatics and being more than fifteen years younger than her, could move a damn sight faster and with far better flexibility. Peter’s reflexes were impossible for her to keep up with, not to mention the webbing that pinned her feet to the ground and resulted in her having a dummy arrow shot in her by Clint.

Scott managed to evade the three and get to the sand bag. It was only when he lifted it up that trouble struck. Clint and Dick charged him, ripping the sand bag off him and sprinted away while Peter covered him in webbing, pinning him to the ground in miniature form, the dam stuff even stretched with him when he grew back to normal size and he wasn’t even surprized when an arrow hit his suit.

Steve had grossly underestimated Batman. Bruce was used to fighting things and people stronger than himself and had learned to compensate with speed and agility. The blows he didn’t dodge he made sure hit his Kevlar so that took the impact rather than himself, the ones he dodge he more often
than not had Steve and Bucky hitting each other as he ducked out of range. He decided to let Steve think he’d gotten the upper hand, letting the super soldier get him in an arm lock with Bucky advancing and the second Bucky aimed a punch with his metal hand he ducked, bending forward so the blow hit Steve’s upper back as Bruce flipped him over, his legs crashing into Bucky’s shoulders bringing them both to the ground.

“And now the two of you are dead.” He said, standing over them a smug smirk on his lips, “And the hostage is dead. Not a very good run, wouldn’t you agree?”

“I would. But then I always try to agree with you, Babe.” Tony said, sauntering into the training ground with Stephen, he looked flushed and excited, apparently the magic training had gone better than the ground force training.

“Is everyone ready to face the simulation?” Rhodey asked, raising an eyebrow at the state of Natasha and Scott who were having to unpick webbing from themselves, along with dummy arrows.

“I doubt I could be anymore humiliated than I already am.” Bucky grumbled rubbing his shoulders, “Next time Punk, let Bug-boy come up with the plan!”

“Its Ant Man, Asshole.” Scott grumbled,

“Whatever, Beatle-boy!”

*****

A worryingly gleeful Tony lead the teams into the simulation room that he and Bruce had set up and had FRIDAY start the simulation.

A muggy and dark rain forest sprang up about the team, heavy undergrowth rising about them and trees towering overhead, almost blocking out the sky that the was created by the simulation.

Animal noises began to be heard along with Prehistoric roars and an all too familiar theme tune.

“Really Tony?” Rhodey sighed, exasperated, he looked to Bruce, “You let him do this?”

Bruce shrugged, “He was very persuasive.” Tony smirked and stuck his tongue out at Rhodey wriggling it suggestively.

“Jurassic Park, really, Stark?” Natasha sighed, rolling her eyes.

“Yep.” Tony said, “We’ll have T-Rex to deal with, I’ve gone with the academic assumption that T-Rex’s vision was based on movement, but to make it more interesting I figure that it’s sense of smell would be greatly heightened to compensate for poor eyesight, so, don’t think that just freezing up will work when dealing with him. There are also Velociraptors, Pterodactyls, a couple of bad tempered triceratops, a Dilophosaurus lurking around, and a surprise at the end.”

“What surprise?” Clint asked, having a very bad feeling about this.

“if I tell you it won’t be a surprise, will it?” Tony said, just before a deafening roar erupted in the distance. “Sounds like Rexy’s hungry!”

“Great.” Scott drawled, “Just what I wanted to do today, be eaten by a dinosaur.”
“This is gonna be so cool!” Peter squealed, “It’ll be like being in the movies!”

“Yeah, but you best be careful, the dork usually gets eaten first.” Dick teased him, dodging the swipe Peter took at his head.

“You’d better suit up then.” Steve said, noting Tony’s lack of a suit, the Billionaire smirked and closed his eyes, concentrating, and slowly but surely armour began to appear over his body in the form of the iron man suit.

“Holy Shit!” Scott whispered,

“Fuck man!” Sam said in awe,

“How long have you been able to do that?” Rhodey asked very impressed.

“It’s what we worked on today.” Tony said, giving Stephen a grin. A shrill screech pierced the air along with an unmistakable Raptor call.

“Avengers Assemble.” Rhodey ordered, as the ground shook as something heavy approached, “Tones, just so you know, if I get eaten today, I’m coming back to haunt your ass!”

“Oh Rhodeybear, I knew you loved my Ass!”

“Goddamnit why do you always have to make it weird!!”

“May I join in?” Everyone paused and turned to see Wanda suited up, standing behind them. “I’d like to join in.” She said, looking contrite and hopeful.

“Sure Wanda, fall in,” Steve immediately said with a smile, Rhodey opened his mouth to protest but a deafening roar and a T-Rex foot crushing a tree in front of them cut him off and the battle began.
“These things can’t actually hurt us, right, Right?” Scott looked to Tony and the others with large worried eyes, his fears not alleviated by the maniac grin on Tony’s face.

“So… T-Rex, we’re doing what now?” Clint asked,

“Besides kissing our asses goodbye?” Peter replied,

“Alright everyone.” Rhodey said, “Air units front and centre.” Tony, Sam, and Hope moved, flanking the Colonel. “Right, Sam, Hope, you two are going to provide distraction, don’t get to close but make sure he see’s you. Tony, you and me, are going to shoot from the air, go for the eyes, and the roof of the mouth. Dick, Clint, Peter, get in the tree’s, stay out of sight, shoot from there. The rest of you, scatter, stay out of sight, if you’ve got long range weapons use them, but otherwise do not engage.”

“And keep out of biting reach.” Dick drawled, jumping up and snagging out of a branch, scrambling up into the tree tops,

“That hardly needs saying.” Clint muttered following his example, Peter skittered away into the trees, and before anyone could even ask him to do so he was webbing the area, creating a sticky net that they could try and drive the T-Rex into.

“Nice.” Dick praised as he readied his bow,

“I aim to please!” Peter chirruped, hanging upside down from a branch, only to nearly jump out of his skin when the T-Rex roared, he bolted back into the safety of the tree’s making Clint snicker at his retreating form.

“Alright everyone, move!” Rhodey said and blasted off, followed by Tony, Sam, and Hope, just as the T-Rex burst through the trees, jaws spread wide in a deafening roar.

“Oh, holy Jesus!” Scott cried and before anyone could say anything, he had shrunk down to ant size, making him too small for the T-Rex to spot him.

The T-Rex bellowed and charged, running face first into Peter’s webbing, which stuck to his face and slowed him down a little, but he was too huge to be stopped by it for very long. However, it did give those on the ground the chance to run for cover, and for Clint and Dick fired arrows at the Rex’s head, several Clint’s exploding, which hurt the Rex and enraged him all the more.

“You guy’s cover me I’m going in.” Tony called to Hope and Sam, swooping towards the Rex.

“Ready bird boy?” Hope asked,

“Right behind you bug girl!” Sam shot back. The two of them flew in front of the T-Rex’s face, far enough away so as not to get eaten, but close enough to attract his attention, giving Tony the chance to deliver several nasty blows to it’s back and head. Roar in pain the Rex reared and swiped at the air with its feeble front legs, spinning around, its huge tail slammed into the tree Clint with in, knocking him from his perch. The archer yelled out in alarm, catching himself on the branched, but dangling at a very convenient biting height.

“Fucking help!” He yelled, his face paling when the Rex’s gaze fell on him, “I get eaten I’m fucking haunting everyone!”
“Hold on Hawkeye, we gotcha” Sam called, swooping in and snagging Clint from the branch just before the Rex could make the bit, they weren’t out of the woods though, Rex followed after them, roaring as he went, making the ground tremble with every move.

“Flap your wings faster!” Clint shrieked, seeing glistening teeth coming far too close for comfort, “Hold on!” Sam cried pushing for maximum. He could feel the Rex’s acrid breath on his back and closed his eyes bracing himself for immense pain, only it never came, as suddenly another bellow came from his left, attracting the Rex’s attention and when Sam looked, he saw a second T-Rex in the clearing, charging at the one that’d been keen on snacking on them.

“Two T-Rex’s?” He asked, “I thought Stark said one.”

“I did!” Tony’s indignant voice came over the come.

“A simple illusion, but quite effective.” Stephen’s smug voice came over the coms and Tony showed his maturity by blowing a raspberry, “Copy cat!”

“Colonel, Barnes and I have an idea.” Bruce said, “I’m all ears Batman.”

“If we can get it on its back we have a better chance at defeating it. Peter, we need you to move fast, tangle the legs in web and then get the hell out of there. Then myself, Rogers, Barnes, and Romanoff will move in. Hope, provide some distraction from the air, then Stephen and Maximoff will use magic to flip him on his back, then Tony, you and Rhodey take him out.”

“I can provide a few shots too.” Dick offered, “Do it but keep out of the way.” Bruce agreed.

“Alright everyone, engage.” Rhodey ordered.

Peter moved with almost blinding speed, webbing himself around the Rex’s legs while the illusion confused the beast and Hope attracted attention from a fairly safe distance, Sam joining in with Clint on his back. Once the legs were bound, Peter high tailed it back into the trees leaving the others to move in while Dick fired arrow after arrow at the beast.

Steve and Bucky ran for the left leg while Bruce and Natasha ran for the right. They all made sure to keep out of biting range, Natashed using her bites on the beast and Bucky his metal arm, while Steve used his shield and Bruce stabbed baterangs into the beast, paining it and making it stumble, banging into trees and staggering about.

“Now.” Stephen said, stepping forward with Maximoff. Together they both used magic, hitting the Rex in the chest, forcing it back, but it wouldn’t fall, not until Scott suddenly appeared, enlarging himself to fifteen feet and beating the Rex around the face and in the gut, dodging the snapping jaws and grabbed the tail, yanking it out from under the Rex and slamming it down into its back.

“Now!” He yelled, shrinking down to ant size and running before he could get eaten. Tony and Rhodey wasted no time, swooping in and repulsoring the Rex until only its smoking carcass remained.
“Whoo hoo!” Peter yelled swinging down from the trees “So fucking awesome!” He was still in his celebration dance when he was hit in the face by black goo which covered his mask, “Oh Gross!”

A chirping sound came from the bushes along with a hissing, “Dilophosaurus.” Stephen said with a grimace, “You are now blind and paralysed.”

“Oh come on!” Peter protested, “Mr Stark!!!!” He whined, sounding like a four year old.

“Sorry kid, think of this as a lesson to never let your guard down.” Tony replied, Peter pouted, “At least I didn’t get eaten.” He muttered, making his way out of the training room to go and watch the others while they fought.

The Avengers gathered on the ground forming a back to back circle, jumping as the rainforest moved as something large shoved its way through the trees.

“Okay, Tony, how many of these Dilo… whatever, did you make?” Steve asked and just brought his shield up in time as black goo was aimed at his face,

“Just the one.” Tony said, “I figured that’d be enough, with the bad-tempered triceratops.” He’d barely finished speaking when the two appeared, snarling angrily and charged at the Avengers, the bone horns aimed to spear them.

“Crazy bastard!” Sam cried heading for the sky, Hope along with him, Clint went for the trees along with Bruce and Dick, the others scattering to try and stay out of the Triceratops reach, forgetting about the Dilophosaurus for a moment, a mistake on Natasha’s part as she got a face full of goo and swore colourfully in Russian.

“We need to get organized.” Steve called, “Let’s try and corral these things.”

“Corral? They ain’t horses man.” Scott cried, becoming human size and not only get a load of black goo over himself, he was leapt on by the Dilophosaurus and bitten into, yelping as sharp static shots ran through him. “The hell am I ever fighting dinosaurs with you guys!” He grumbled, heading for the side lines with Natasha, who was still pulling goo out of her hair.

“We need to take out that dildo phosphorous thing!” Bucky yelled as goo narrowly missed him and The Cloak saved Stephen from being stampeded by one of the Triceratops.

“Dildo phosphorous!” Clint snickered, firing an exploding arrow at the ground, near the second triceratops, the explosion startled the creature making it stagger into a tree and jam it’s horn for a few moments.

“Bucky’s right, we need eyes on the… thing.” Steve said, flushing at the thought of calling it a dildo, a spitting dildo? That was just wrong.

“Gotcha Capsicle, we’re your eyes in the sky.” Tony called and Steve smiled at the moniker he hadn’t heard in so long. “Rhodey, go for Infarred, the jungle’s too thick to see clearly.”

“On it.”

“Lets turn these two against each other.” Bruce said, “Corralling them is good, lets drive them into
each other. They can do more damage than we can.”

“Good plan.” Dick called, his head popping out from the tree only to get splattered with goo. “Oh come on!”

“Sorry Dick, looks like your screwed too.” Tony called, blasting the jungle in the direction the goo had come from. “I’ve got it, ten o’clock.”

“I see it.” Rhodey called, together they moved in, blasting the Dilophosaurus until there was nothing left of the beast. Meanwhile Steve, Bruce, and Bucky distracted and engaged one of the Triceratops while Sam, Hope, Stephen, and Wanda got the other attention, all of them holding their ground until the last moment, then they moved, Sam lifting Wanda, while the Cloak took Stephen, Hope grabbed Bruce, and Bucky and Steve leaped into the trees as they Triceratops rammed into each other with Clint raining arrows down into them until they fell still.

“Oh yeah, that’s four down and whoa!” Sam was cut off and Wanda was thrown out of his arms, falling back into the trees as a Pterodactyl swept Sam away, “Killing him”

“Guess he didn’t learn from Peter’s mistake.” Clint snickered his eyes widening when he saw the size of the pterodactyls. “You are a deranged lunatic Stark!”

“And proud of it baby!” Tony crowed, as three of the winged beasts swooped in, making beelines for the Avengers. Hope was grabbed next, squirming and struggling but unable to get free even as Rhodey shot the Pterodactyl taking out one of its wings and crippling it. Steve and Bucky only just avoided getting swept up, as did Stephen.

Bruce fired a repel at the trees and swung himself up into the branches just as one of the beasts swooped in for him, he then retracted the repel and flipped onto the beasts back making it rear up in outrage.

“Ha, kind of your prehistoric ancestor, eh Bruce?” Dick called from the side lines.

“Corpses don’t talk.” Bruce yelled back, struggling to stay on the back of the thing as it spun and took them into a loop. “A little help?” He called out,

“But busy here.” Clint replied, shooting at the other pterodactyl, that Steve and Bucky were trying to evade.

“Got it.” Wanda stated and blasted the beast with her magic, killing it but leaving Bruce in free fall.

“NO!” Tony immediately broke off his attack on the other Pterodactyl, blasting over to catch Bruce and keep him from falling to his “Death”, images of Rhodey’s fall playing in his head as he caught his husband bridal style and hovered with him above the tree tops.

“That was not well thought out.” Stephen said to Wanda, who scowled,

“It worked.”

“But you nearly killed a team mate.” Steve said, agreeing with the Sorcerer. “If this was real then Bruce could have been killed or maimed. You have to think before acting Wanda.”

Wanda glared mutinously but held her tongue, while Clint finished off the remaining Pterodactyl.
“Is everyone alright?” Rhodey asked, as they gathered on the ground, he looked especially to Tony and Bruce. The Bat seemed unshaken, but Tony was struggling to main the integrity of his armour, the fall having unnerved him a lot.

“We could call it.” Rhodey offered, but Tony shook his head, “We couldn’t in real life, so let’s not make an exception here.”

“Are you sure?” Tony nodded, giving him a small smile, as Clint jumped down from the trees.

“What’s next?” the archer asked, but no one had a chance to answer him as he was suddenly leapt on from behind by a raptor who proceeded to “Eat him”

“Raptors. Great.” Stephen sighed, as drum like cries and shrill screeches rang out about them, “When this is over Stark, I think you should seek out psychiatric help.”

“Oh blow me Merlin.” Tony snarked back, giving up on keeping all his armour on and instead readied his hands with balls of blue fire.

“Right, these things are smart, fast, and vicious.” Bruce said, “Best chance of survival is getting out of reach, so go to the trees or to the sky.”

“Certainly.” Stephen swept up into the air majestically, followed by Rhodey, leaving the others to scramble for the trees just as the Raptors leaped into the clearing, Steve was a little slow and got a slash down his leg that if real would have severed the tendons in his leg.

“Am I out?” he asked,

“No but you’re wounded, you won’t be able to walk.” Tony called out, “Your also bleeding heavily and probably going to pass out.”

“Not a lot of use then.” Bucky grumbled, “I guess I should toss him to those raptors and make a run for it!”

“Bucky!” Steve cried indignantly while the others snorted with laughter. He gulped when one of the raptors leaped six feet into the air snapping its razor sharp teeth.

“Hey, chew on this!” Bucky yelled waving his metal fist.

“Look alive guys, we’re coming in.” Rhodey. He made a dive at the raptors blasting them with his repulsors, Tony joined in, aiming blasts of fire at them, while Stephen dizzied them with illusions as they ran to evade being hit by the fire. Creeping through the trees, Bruce found and opening and took it, he fired his repel into an opposite tree and swung across the clearing, slamming his boots into the side of one of the raptors throwing it across the clearing and slamming it painfully into a tree, stunning it long enough for Tony to get a clear shot.

Not to be outdone, Steve threw his shield hitting one of the remaining raptors in the side, while Bucky leaped from the trees, coming down the raptors back. He wrapped his arms about the beasts neck and yanked it hard, snapping the vertebra. The raptor slumped down dead which left just two, one of which Bruce, Stephen, and Rhodey were engaging while Tony was tackling the other.

Momentarily forgotten, Wanda climbed silently through the trees, coming up behind Tony as he rained fire down on the raptor below him, the creature snarling and jumping out the way while trying to reach him.
Smiling vindictively, Wanda eyed the branch Tony was resting his weight on and aimed her magic at it…
As he felt the branch giving way beneath him, Tony blasted fire at the raptor beneath him, scaring it off as he fell to the ground, landing in a cat like crouch and sprang up, running through the clearing beneath him, meaning to scramble up into another tree, but a blast of red magic had him ducking for cover and spinning around, to see Wanda jumping down from the tree he had fallen from.

She had a cruel smirk on her face and her eyes were pools of blood, matching the magic that that was shimmering around her.

“Maximoff.” Tony whispered, concentrating on his elements, feeling the metal moving and gliding beneath his flesh, molten and liquid, ready to cover his skin at need. Flames covered his hands, blue and white hot, enough to scorch the flesh from Wanda’s bones. Between the two of them the air seemed to ripple and bend, the dark energy and dark matter bending to his will, forming a barrier between himself and Wanda.

“Stand down before you do something you will regret.” Tony ordered her, deciding to give her a chance before he acted.

“Regret?” Wanda snorted, a malicious laugh falling from her sneering lips, “I’ve been waiting for this moment for years. Ever since you murdered my parents and then my brother!”

She lashed out, as Tony had expected, her magic hitting the barrier between them and glancing off harmlessly, enraging Wanda all the more. The red energy about her darkened as she gathered her strength and Tony braced himself, but both of them had forgotten the raptor that was lurking nearby, waiting to strike.

As Wanda advanced, raising her hand to blast the barrier again, the Raptor leaped from the bushes, tackling her, his six inch claws slicing into her flesh and his jaws clamping about her throat.

It didn’t kill her of course, but the sensation felt real enough to have Wanda screaming in pain, bringing the rest of the Avengers over. Smirking a little, Tony lowered the energy barrier between himself and Wanda, and blasted the Raptor with fire until it was killed, by which time the remaining Avengers had reached the clearing.

“Another one down then?” Bucky asked, meaning Wanda, who leaped to her feet, her eyes blazing with fury.

“He attacked me!” She screamed, pointing at Tony, “He tried to kill me!”

“You’re a lying whore Maximoff.” Tony shot back, ready for a fight if it broke out, which it looked like it would as Wanda’s power flared again,

“Wait!” Steve cried, stepping between the two, “Don’t anybody do anything here they might regret.”

“Oh I can assure you I will regret nothing.” Tony retorted,

“Out of the way Steve.” Wanda snarled,

“Stand down.” Steve barked, “Both of you.”

“He attacked me, let that raptor eat me!”
“She attacked me first.” Tony spat, “And I can prove it. Friday, stop the simulation and replay the last five minutes.”

“On it bossman.” Friday said.

Part of the jungle cleared and a holographic screen appeared, replaying the last few moments as Tony had requested.

Everyone watched as Wanda blasted Tony from the trees and then aimed her power at him a second time as he tried to run for cover. They saw the stand off between the two, and finally the Raptor leaping on Wanda while she was unaware.

Shocked and horrified, Steve turned to Wanda, “Why?” He asked,

“Because he deserves it!” Wanda roared, “He is a murderer and he does not deserve the Seventh Stone, it should be mine!”. With an explosion of power brought on by her rage, Wanda sent the Avengers flying through the training room, scorching the ground with her magic.

*****

In the observation room the rest of the team were alerted to Wanda’s attack and sprang up from where they had been lounging around, watching the rest of the Jurassic simulation, hurrying back to the training room to help their team mates and tackle Wanda.

Naturally it was Tony who Wanda was focused on. She disregarded the rest of the team, focusing her rage upon the Billionaire, advancing on him as he struggled to his feet, the back of his head bleeding from where he had hit it on the wall.

“Murderer!” She screamed, lashing out with her magic, Tony ducked beneath the red energy and shoulder rolled, rising up on his knees and throwing fire at Wanda. Her clothing caught flame and she shrieked in terror as the flames began to spread, batting at them with her hands to put them out before she could be burned.

“Stop this now!” Stephen boomed, the Cloak lifting him into the air as he summoned his own magic,

“Stay out of this Strange, its between me and Stark.” Wanda roared,

“Yes it is.” Tony growled, letting the metal shift out from under his flesh, covering his torso, thighs, and hands. “Lets finish this, once and for all.”

Wanda grinned, “My pleasure.”

The two surged forward, their magics meeting between them and shooting up to the ceiling with a roar of fire and red energy that nearly caught Stephen, but the Cloak whisked him to safety just in time.
“We need to stop this, stop her!” Bruce snarled, a little out of his depths, he was used to fighting but not against magic users, that was Stephen’s domain, not his.

“No.” Stephen said, making Bruce and everyone gaze at him in disbelief. “This is Tony’s fight.” The Sorcerer said, “I will only step in if needed.”

“You might, but I’m his husband…”

“Bruce, wait.” Rhodey said, taking the Bat’s arm to stall him, “Tony needs to do this himself. He hasn’t been in battle in a long time, and defeating Wanda will boost his confidence in himself immensely. Especially since the last battle he was in nearly cost him his life.” As he said this he glanced at Steve who had the grace to look down at his feet in shame.

Grinding his teeth Bruce relented, holding back and letting Tony take on Wanda alone.

*****

Wanda lashed out at Tony, aiming for his knees to cripple him, but he leaped over her magic, covering his legs and feet fully in armour and took to the air, circling and strike Wanda from above.

The Witch dodged the fire that was aimed at her and used her magic to rise herself to the air, launching herself at Tony, who braced himself, grunted as she crashed into him, her legs wrapping about his sides and her hands trying to wrap about his throat.

“This is for Pietro, for my Mother and Father!” Wanda screamed, binding Tony’s neck with her magic even as Tony enclosed his throat in armour to protect himself from her, “And when you’re dead, the Stone of Unity will be mine.”

“You’re deranged.” Tony laughed into Wanda’s face, shooting up towards the ceiling and body slamming her into it, “The Stone answers to me alone, it will be mastered by no other.”

“Liar!” Wanda shrieked tightening her magic on Tony’s throat and tried to use her telepathy on him, but Tony’s mind was locked against her, a metal shell encased his thoughts, sealing them from her influence.

“You need some new tricks, bitch!” Tony sneered at her. Concentrating hard on the dark energy and dark matter he let the power envelope him completely as he never had before, and a second later he had vanished and Wanda was falling to the ground with a cry.

Tony rematerialized across the training room, thankfully on the floor since his legs gave out and fell dizzily to the ground, the shifting through teleportation having disoriented and wearied him.

He struggled to try and stand but vertigo got the better of him and he toppled to the ground again making Wanda smirk as she advanced on him once more.

“You can’t fight me, Stark, you are not match for the Scarlet Witch!”

Unable to get to his feet Tony concentrated. Stephen had taught him that the magical elements were always around him, all he had to do was tap into them and manipulate them. Closing his eyes he focused on metal, the element he felt the most akin with, sending it rippling through the training room, seeing it sliding and gliding along in its molten form then sprouting up from the ground like a
Wanda screamed as metal suddenly encased her ankles, pinning her to the ground, she tried to fire her magic at the metal with her hands, but the liquid metal was spreading up her body, flowing over her like mercury, rolling down her arms and encasing her wrists and hands, preventing her from using her magic.

“No!” She roared, struggling as the metal wrapped about her throat and ran up over her face, forming a mask, blinding her from what was happening around her and thus crippling her.

Letting out a deep breath Tony sagged to the ground, utterly exhausted. He could barely keep his eyes opened as the others rushed over, Stephen going to take charge of Wanda, while Bruce ran to Tony, cupping the back of his head and looking down on him in concern,

“Did she hurt you?”

“Just a few scrapes.” Tony mumbled, his eyelids growing heavy, “Talk ‘bout it later.” He had scarcely finished speaking before his eyelids slid shut and he collapsed boneless and sound asleep.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

Someone, Not Me. Has got to write a Jurassic Park/Jurassic World Avengers crossover. I had so much fun writing the simulation and I know I'd love reading the team really ending up fighting dinosaurs.
Maybe they visit the park when everything goes to shit, maybe they are fighting Hydra and crash land on Isla Sorna, Maybe Hydra is attempting to steal Dinosaurs to make hybrids? IDK The only thing I ask for from anyone who undertakes this is that Tony gets slashed and bitten by a Raptor.

New York Sanctuary

“Well, well, well. What do we have here?” Loki drawled, setting down the book he’d been reading as Stephen came through a portal with Wanda in tow. The metal still covered her hands and arms to the shoulders and her face, leaving twin holes for her to breathe through.

Behind the metal mask she was shrieking and snarling, tossing her head to try and get free, something that wasn’t happening.

“Miss Maximoff decided to pick a fight with Tony.” Stephen replied, “She lost.”

“Evidently.” Loki mused, circling Wanda, a look of fascination on his face, “A mystical metal cage, very impressive. I did not think Stark capable of such a feat.”

“He is capable of more than that.” Stephen said, shrugging his shoulders as The Cloak floated off his back, “He teleported.”

Loki stopped dead and stared at Stephen in shock, “He what?”

“He tapped into the Dark energy and dark matter and used it to bend reality, teleporting himself a small distance.”

Loki let out a shocked breath and shook his head, “His power is advancing rapidly, as are his skills.”

“Indeed, though his stamina needs some work.” Stephen said, “The act has exhausted him into unconsciousness. Although, he did manage to deal with Miss Maximoff before he fell unconscious.”

Loki hummed appreciatively and circled Wanda again, “And what are we doing with her? Burning at the stake perhaps?” Wanda let out an indignant shriek at that and stamped her feet,

“Hardly anything so melodramatic.” Stephen said, “Removing her power will suffice to render her unable to harm anyone again.” Loki sniffed scornfully,

“You are far too forgiving a specie. You think to save her instead of eliminating the problem once and for all.”
“And you are far too quick to chose death.” Stephen retorted. Loki smirked clearly gearing up to make another snide comment to try and goad Stephen into a fight, something he seemed intent on doing every time they were together but was distracted by a splintering of metal.

The metal mask on Wanda’s face was splitting slightly, thin red beams of light were cracking through the face mask, creating slits from which Wanda could see out of, more metal splintered away and she was able to move her lips once more.

“You will not take my power!” She screamed in rage, using more of said power to try and break off the metal that was fighting against her, trying to regrow, spreading to encompass her head as she put more cracks into the mask and the gloves covering her hands.

“Wanda Stop!” Stephen cried, backing away from her, as did Loki, both could see the two magical energies fighting against each other and both knew that the combined forces would erupt like a volcano unless Wanda stopped.

“Get this shit off me!” Wanda roared, the red showing through the metal darkening and her eyes becoming maroon as her rage built even more.

“You’re going to hurt yourself, stop now!” Stephen pleaded, taking an abortive step forward, but the Cloak appeared in front of him, wrapping itself about the Sorcerer, lifting him off his feet and pulling him away, just in time, as Wanda threw the full force of all her power at the metal enveloping her body. The metal bowed and swayed, looking for a moment like it would all break off, but then it bowed inwards, pushing back against Wanda’s power creating an immense amount of pressure about her body.

Wanda let out a garbled scream as the sickening sound of crushing bones split the air, then with a revolting noise that even made Loki’s stomach turn over, Wanda’s head imploded.

Blood, bone, and brain matter splattered up into the air as the bones of her skull caved inwards, her body toppled to the ground, the shell of her jaw being all that was left on top of her neck, a gaping bloody maw spread above.

“OHMYGOD!” Stephen gagged, turning away with a hand on his mouth, fighting the urge to vomit, something that even Loki was struggling with.

Taking several deep breaths and swallowing hard, Stephen stood up straight and turned shakily back to Loki, who looked just a sick as he felt. “We need to call the compound, let everyone know what has happened.”

Mutely Loki nodded, his eyes fixed on the mangled remains of Wanda Maximoff.

Staggering a little, his limbs shaking with shock, Stephen made his way to the phone and went into his contacts, bringing up the Compounds number. The phone was answered after only a few rings.

“Hello Colonel. I’m afraid I have some bad news….”
Bruce had taken Tony to bed, where he remained, stretched out on his stomach, snoring peacefully, completely dead to the world as his body recovered from the over exertion.

The rest of the team gathered in the conference room to discuss the days events. They had been going to talk about their strengths and weaknesses, but now the only topic of discussion was Wanda and what to do with her.

“Obviously she cannot be let lose on the world. She is far too dangerous.” Natasha said,

“Ya think?” Scott drawled,

“Maybe Strange can do something for her,” Steve offered, “Find a way to restrain her powers?”

“Or strip them entirely.” Bruce grunted,

“I’d vote for that.” Peter said, “That psycho bitch needs stopping.”

“Agreed,” Clint said, “But that is not the end of the problem.”

Steve frowned, “Its not?” and Clint rolled his eyes,

“Just because she won’t have powers doesn’t mean she can’t pick up a gun and kill people that way.” Dick said.

“She wouldn’t!” Steve cried, receiving a chorus of exasperated and disbelieving cries from around the table.

“Punk, that little bitch just tried to murder Tony.” Bucky exclaimed, “She needs locking up, for good!” Steve shook his head,

“She needs help, she’s misguided, she’s…”

“A grown woman who is more than able to take responsibility for her actions.” Natasha stated firmly. “You can’t pretend otherwise Steve, I know you were sympathetic with her at first, hell we all were, even I was willing to give her the benefit of the doubt, but she has had chance after chance to change herself, to truly make amends for her past, but all she has ever focused on is getting revenge on Stark for something that wasn’t even his fault to begin with.”

“But with help, with the proper guidance…”

“This isn’t like Barnes, Steve.” Sam said, shooting an apologetic look at Bucky, “He is a victim of Hydra, he was taken and held against his will, she and her brother volunteered to be Hydra, to be experimented on. We only have her word that they thought they were working for Shield, we have no proof, and when you think about it, how could she not have known the truth when she can look into peoples minds?”

Steve sagged in his chair, his expression morose as he took in Sam’s words.

“Phone call Rhodey.” FRIDAY said,

“Thanks, I’ll get it in the office.” Rhodey said, getting to his feet and leaving the conference room.
“So, what do we do?” Hope asked, sighing heavily, “And does anyone else really need a drink?” A chorus of Yes followed this,

“The compound is stocked with many types of alcohol and soft drinks, Miss Van Dyne.” FRIDAY said,

“Thanks FRI.” Hope said, “I could do with a Sea Breeze right now,” She got to her feet, “What do the rest of you want?”

Steve, Bucky, Sam, Clint, Scott, and Dick all opted for beers, Peter tried to wheedle one but was refused on all fronts, begrudgingly accepting a chocolate milk shake instead. Bruce wanted a scotch, Natasha wanted Vodka on the rocks, She also rose to help Hope carry the drinks, just as Rhodey came back into the conference room, his face grave.

“What’s happened?” Bruce asked, on his feet in an instant,

“It’s Wanda.” Rhodey said, “She’s dead.”

*****

“Tony”

Tony groaned and burrowed deeper into the pillow, screwing his face up in denial and trying to pull away from whatever irritating thing it was that was disturbing him,

“Honey I’m sorry but you need to wake up.”

“Go away.” He mumbled, batting ineffectually at the disturbance,

“Come on baby, open your eyes, I’ve got a double expresso for you.” The heavenly scent of coffee was wafted under Tony’s nose and his eye immediately snapped open, his hands reaching out to grab the nectar from the Bruce’s hands, and drinking it greedily, making Bruce chuckle at his caffeine addiction,

“Whassup?” Tony asked, his mouth half full of coffee and the cup muffling his words,

Bruce took a deep breath, “Wanda’s dead.”

Tony froze, actually stopped drinking the nectar of the Gods to stare at Bruce in shock.

“Strange called from the Sanctuary.” Bruce explained, “He said that she overloaded her power, trying to break free from the metal case, it… well the two powers clashed and she was caught in the middle and didn’t survive it.”

“Oh,” Tony swallowed his coffee convulsively, his face paling, “Was this my fault?” He asked, “The metal, I put it on her.”

“No, honey. You did that in self-defence. This was her doing,” Bruce said, taking Tony’s hands and squeezing them, “Do not blame yourself for this, please.”

Rolling his lips Tony nodded, “So, what’s happening now?”
“Well, Rhodey has contacted the authorities, the Police have collected the body from the Sanctuary, and I believe taken statements from both Loki and Strange, they’ll need them from us too, and the accords council needs to speak to all of us before a press statement is released.”

“Okay, I’d better get up then,” Tony moved to do so, but vertigo assailed him, forcing him to lay back down as the room spun.

“Never mind getting up, you stay here until you’re recovered,” Bruce said, tucking him back in,

“No, I’m fine,” Tony protested, trying to move, only to have his head going around in circles again, “Okay, maybe I need a minute or two.”

“And more sleep, and a decent meal.” Bruce said stroking his hair back, “Rest, I’ll let everyone know that you’re not well enough for giving statements right now.”

Tony sighed, he hated to burden Bruce, but he could barely keep his eyes open and knew if he tried to sit up he’d just get dizzy again, so he reluctantly agreed, settling back into the bed and closing his eyes, promising himself that he’d just nap and then get up, his body had other ideas though, sending him back into a deep sleep in moments.
Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

I've seen Avengers Endgame and I'm not going to spoil it for anyone, all I will say is Fucking Brilliant. You will laugh and you will Cry.

When he awoke again Tony found Jett snuggled right up against his back, twitching and wriggling in his sleep and enjoying whatever it was felines dreamed about.

Smiling, Tony rolled over, which served to disturb Jett, who grumbled at him, yawning and blinking sleepily, happily rolling onto his back to have his belly tickled by Tony.

“You are so beautiful, aren’t you? Yes you are, you are the most beautiful baby boy cat in the world world!” Tony bent and nuzzled his face into Jets’ fur, breathing in the heavenly scent of warm cat belly. Jet sniffed at his head and licked at his hair, grooming him as if he was another cat.

“I would love to lay here for the next few hours.” Tony told Jett, lifted his head and kissing the cat between the ears, “But sadly I’ve got to get up.”

Giving Jet another kiss, Tony got up from the bed and went to relieve himself and take a shower, which Jett observed from the safety of the bathroom cabinet, seeming rather disgusted that his human immersed himself in the shower.

“Some of us need more than a lick to get clean.” He informed the cat, going to get dressed.

Jett followed him down to the kitchen and immediately began to rub around his ankles and trill in a demand for food. As always Tony gave in and fed him, setting about getting himself some coffee, at which point an exhausted Steve appeared looking like he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders.

“You look like I feel.” Tony commented, pouring a second coffee and slid it over the counter to him, Steve huffed a snort and picked up the cup, drinking the coffee without sugar or cream, grimacing at the taste.

“I am sorry.” Tony ventured, “I never meant for Wanda to die, I didn’t know that would happen to her.”

“I know that, Christ I know that.” Steve whispered meeting Tony’s eyes, “I just… God I’ve fucked up everything haven’t I?” He looked back down at the counter with tears glistening in his eyes, “I thought I could save Wanda, I thought I could save at least one person, I failed Bucky, I failed you, and she… she was… I just wanted to…” He trailed off and clasped a hand over his mouth, his body shuddering with tears.

As much Steve had hurt Tony, as much as he had suffered at the mans hands, Tony could not stand there and watch him crying without doing something to try and comfort him. Coming around the counter Tony wrapped his arms about Steve, pulling him into a hug. Steve stiffened at first, then collapsed against Tony, clinging to him as if he were afraid that Tony might disappear if he let go.
“I’m sorry.” He sobbed, his voice muffled by Tony’s shoulder, “I’m so, so sorry Tony. I didn’t mean to hurt you, I swear I didn’t. I wanted to protect Bucky, and I was scared of what would happen to him. I didn’t really know you when I found out about your parents, I didn’t know how you’d react, and then, when I got to know you I didn’t want to ruin everything and it got harder and harder to say anything, then everything just blew up, Ultron, Wanda, The Accords, Siberia.” Steve sniffed and lifted his head, swiping at his running nose with the back of his sleeve.

“I don’t know what I’m doing, I don’t know where I’m going, what I’m supposed to do. I’ve been so lost since I woke up, I try to fit in, I try to find my place in this crazy, modern world, but it is so hard, and it is not just the technology it is everything and I feel like I am drowning, I feel like I am drowning and I don’t know how to save myself, or stop hurting people.”

Tony swallowed hard and blinked back the tears that were prickling at his eyes, he wasn’t great with upset people, he always became flustered and uncertain, wanting to resort to making jokes to ease the tension but knowing that he couldn’t do it, so he struggled to find the right thing to say, and often found himself close to tears too.

“I know how that feels.” He whispered, “After my parents, Jarvis, and Ana were dead I was drowning, Bruce had his own problems and I was disappearing in drugs and drink to blot everything out, and I hurt so many people.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Steve sniffed,

“I may not have sold to terrorists, but I was blind to what was going on in my own company through my own negligence. I may never have wilfully wished the pain that those weapons caused, but violence breeds violence and my hands are not clean.”

“Tony..”

“Steve let me finish.” Tony said drawing a deep breath, “I know I am not responsible for what Stane did, the weapons his sold, the deals he made, the deaths are on his conscience, assuming he ever had one, which I somewhat doubt. But I am not entirely innocent and I accept that and everything I have done since has been to try and make amends for my negligence, to protect instead of destroy, and yeah, I’ve fucked up along the way, but at the end of the day I’m human and as the good book says, To Err is human, to forgive divine.” Smiling a truly warm smile he lay his hands over Steve’s, “And I forgive you.”

Steve’s eyes widened and he took a huge shuddering breath, looking like he was going to pass out.

“How can you?” He asked, “After what I’ve done?” Tony shrugged,

“Holding onto anger is exhausting and it only leads to bitterness. I don’t want to be bitter. Besides, how can expect forgiveness for myself, if I don’t grant it to others?”

Steve managed a weak smile, “Sounds like you’re getting philosophical in your… well,”

“You say old age and I’ll set the cat on you!” this threat prompted a true laugh from Steve, though he gave Jett a wary look, having not forgotten the claws to the crotch incident. The sound of someone clearing their throat had both men turning to see the teams standing in the doorway, trying to appear like they hadn’t been listening and failing miserably.

“Now you two have had your big girly crying scene can the rest of us come in?” Clint asked, getting an elbow to the ribs from Dick,

“Why not, you assholes will anyway.” Tony replied, he visibly lit up when Bruce approached him
and wrapped his arms around him.

““You okay Cap?” Sam asked, looking at Steve, who was still blowing his nose and drying his eyes,

“Yeah.” Steve said, his voice still a bit shaky, and Sam didn’t look at all convinced,

“I think you should talk to someone.” He suggested, “About all this, someone professional.”

As Steve opened his mouth to protest, having a natural fear of psychiatrists from the era he came
from, Bucky cut in, “I’ve had therapy. It does help. Talking to someone who is not personally
involved, who can give you an outside perspective. It helps make things clearer in your own mind.”

Despite how sincere Bucky appeared, Steve remained uncertain. “How can talk to someone about
this when I don’t even know how to put it into words?”

“You were doing pretty well with Stark.” Natasha observed, “And it doesn’t matter if you don’t have
the words, the therapist will help you find them, help you explain things both to them and to
yourself.”

“Why not just give it a try?” Sam offered, “It wouldn’t hurt would it?”

“I guess not.” Steve agreed, he looked around, frowning to see that Tony and Bruce had vanished
while they’d been talking. He was tempted to go and find the Billionaire, they’d just had a moment
of understanding and Steve didn’t want it to end, but before he could do so the others pulled him
back into conversation about the up and coming press conference that would be taking place the
following day.

*****

Arm in arm Bruce and Tony walked in the sunlight of the gardens. Jett had followed them outside
and was rolling in the grass and running about after flies and butterflies.

“I didn’t think you would forgive him.” Bruce admitted, “I’m not sure I can, or ever will.”

“It was time, Bruce.” Tony replied, “Holding onto the anger… look at Maximoff, look at what
holding onto a grudge did to her. It destroyed her completely, it destroyed her brother too, because
they couldn’t let go of the past and move on. I don’t want to be like that, I don’t want to become so
broken that there is nothing left in me but rage and misery, that is no way to live.” Bruce grunted, this
touched close to home for him. Much of his strength as the Bat had been born from his rage and pain
at the loss of his parents, it continued to fuel him even now, he had learned to use it and take strength
from it, had honed it inside himself like a weapon. But he understood what Tony was saying, very
much because he knew how close he had come to falling into his own darkness and being nothing
but the Bat, it had only been Alfred, Dick, and Tony’s presences in his life that had kept him from
losing his humanity completely.

“You are a wise man, Tony Stark-Wayne.” He said at length, “And I am very proud to be your
husband.” Tony made an exaggerated groaning noise,

“Are you going to get all mushy on me?” he asked, “Because Jett is too young to see and hear such
things!” Bruce just laughed and picked Tony up in his arms, making the other billionaire shriek and
begin beating at him softly to get free, inevitably a mock wrestling match followed, until Tony got
Bruce pinned beneath him and declared his victory loudly only to be flipped onto his back with Bruce on top of him, pushing him into the grass and kissing him senseless.

Nearby Jett put his ears back looking disgusted by the humans behaviour in the way that cats always do, because they are of course so much better than humans can ever be, and carried on his business of trying to catch the butterflies.

*****

New York
Stark Towers.

All of the Avengers were present for the press conference, including Bruce, Dick, and Stephen, though Loki had remained at the Sanctum continuing their research.

“Mr Stark, can you tell us exactly what happened to the Scarlet Witch?” One of the reporters asked,

“Stark-Wayne now,” Tony corrected, “And yes, I will explain as best I can. Wanda Maximoff attacked myself and the rest of the team in some wild scheme to get revenge for what she felt were past slights.” (The fact she had been intending to get hold of the Stone of Unity was not going to be disclosed to the public, it was better that no one but those who absolutely had to know about it were told of its existence)

“A fight ensued and I encased her in magical armour that prevented her from using her powers to effect anything outside of the armour. Sadly it did not stop her from using her powers from within, while she was warned, repeatedly by Dr Strange that she was endangering herself, Wanda did not listen and the combination of the two powers battling against each other caused… for lack of a better term, an implosion that she was at the centre of and did not survive.”

“She killed herself then?” Another reporter asked,

“Technically yes, though it was not her intention.” Stephen affirmed,

“Is there a police inquiry?”

“There is one underway as we speak.” Rhodey said, “The preliminary autopsy reports have already cleared Dr Strange and Mr Stark-Wayne of any wrong doing on their part, but a full investigation will be made.”

“How can the public be expected to trust the Avengers when such in fighting continues to happen?” Another reporter asked, “Just a few years ago the civil war caused deaths, life changing injuries, and damage to public property, how can any of us be sure the same thing won’t happen again?”

“We’re not asking for blind trust or for you to take our word.” Tony said, glancing at Steve, who had paled at the question, “What we are asking for is time, to earn trust, to rebuild relationships, and for some understanding.”

“Understanding?”
“Yes. You see us as superheroes, as figures you put up on pedestals. Well, when you do that you will inevitably be disappointed when you learn that your idol has feet of clay, because despite what we do, what we have chosen to do, we are only human, fallible human beings who don’t always get it right and I would ask will all humility that you understand that and find it in yourselves to forgive us our mistakes as you would have your own forgiven.”

“Are you of all people seriously making a biblical quote?” this came from Christine Everhart who stared at Tony in disbelief,

“Why not?” He asked her back, “I was raised a Catholic. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. It seems a rather appropriate, don’t you think?”

Christine fell silent as the cameras flashed and other reporters asked questions about the Avengers plans concerning Thanos, a few tried to make digs at varying members of the team, about previous actions and their opinions, but other team members quickly shut this down and for the most part the press were being respectful so the conference ended without a storm breaking, and back at the Sanctum Loki made a break through on where to find the seventh stone.
Loki was waiting for Stephen when he reached the Compound with a self-satisfied look on his face.

“What?” Stephen asked, as the Cloak detached from his shoulders and floated away.

“I have found the Stone of Unity.” Loki declared and Stephen gaped, “Well, maybe not found it, found it, but I do know where to start looking.” The Trickster said, opening a heavy tomb of a book.

“There is a passage here the mentions a jewel that encompasses all. It doesn’t mention the Stone of Unity by name, but it does say that the jewel has the power of all and can be wielded only by one individual. The whom is born to wield it.”

“Just like the Stone of Unity.” Stephen murmured, moving to stand at Loki’s elbow and frowned down at the fragile, yellow pages in which the ink was so faded it was hard to read at all.

“Resides beneath the shrine of death, held within sacred hands, from which only the hands of the one may relieve her of her charge.” Stephen recited.

“Did Tony not say that there was a shrine to a deity of death above the tomb?” Loki asked,

“Yes.” Stephen said, “A temple to the God Anubis.” He sighed, “But while this is good, unless you have a physical location to start search…” He broke off as Loki turned the page and revealed a hand drawn map.

“Will this suffice?” Loki asked with a smirk,

“Maybe.” Stephen murmured frowning at the map. It was crude and showed the temple more than anything else, certainly no map references, but there was something at the very edge of the page, a crude sketch of Abu Simbel. “North east of Abu Simbel, but not by much.” He mused,

“Abu Simbel?” Loki asked,

“It is a tomb, built by Ramses II AKA Ramses the Great. Built for his beloved wife and Queen Nefetari.” Stephen frowned, “The temple must have been buried under the sand over time, or destroyed, else it would have been found and documented.” He rolled his lips, “Maybe scrying over a map will help now we have a general location to search.”

“Scrying? The stone is no doubt protected from such crude methods of discovery.” Loki said, “I doubt it would work.”

“Not for you or I, but Tony is meant to have the stone. I think that scrying may work for him.”

*****

Compound
“What was the surprise going to be?”

“What?” Tony looked up from where he was grating cheese to go into the gigantic pot of chilli that Clint was making, to go with an equally large pot of rice that was boiling, several bags of doritos, tortilla wraps, salsa, and sour cream and chive dip, for the Avengers dinner.

“The surprise in the Jurassic world simulation.” Peter explained, filching some cheese to munch on,

“Oh. It was going to be a Spinosaurus.” Tony replied with a laugh, “I thought about an Indominus Rex, but I liked the Spinosaurus better.”

“Right, because we hadn’t already been eaten enough by the ones we faced,” Clint snorted, adding some more spice to the pot, “And for the record, I am never fighting dinosaurs with you lot, it’s a guarantee that I’d get eaten!”

“Oh you’re just sour because you got taken out by the raptors.” Tony laughed, “At least he survived that long.” Peter muttered sulkily, he was still sour over being taken out by a spitter, as they’d taken to calling the Dilophosaurus. “Do you think that Dinosaurs still exist on planets in space, like there were dinosaurs in space in Doctor Who?” He asked, grabbing some more cheese and getting his fingers slapped away by Tony, “Mr Stark!” He whined, sounding about six years old.

“Don’t give me that shit, you can wait half an hour for dinner.” Tony replied, ignoring the puppy eyes that Peter gave him,

“But I’m starving now, I need food or I’ll die!”

“I somehow doubt that.”

Peter sighed and pouted, “It’d be cool to go and see some real dinosaurs.” He said, resting his chin on his hands, “Do you think Dr Strange could portal us back in time so we can go to the Jurassic era?”

“Not if he wants to keep breathing!” Tony replied, tipping the grated cheese into a bowl and putting the block back in the fridge.

“Twenty minutes and it’ll be done.” Clint declared setting a lid back on the pot, he looked to Peter, “You’re the youngest, you can run around and tell everyone to start getting ready.” Peter’s eyes widened and he made a whining noise in his throat looking at once to Tony,

“But…”

“Go,” Tony said and rolled his eyes at the exaggerated groan that Peter gave, then turned to Clint with a risen eyebrow, “FRIDAY could have told them all. So why send Peter off?” He asked the archer, hopping up onto the counter and patting Toby as Clint got a bottle of beer from the fridge. When he offered one to Tony the Billionaire shook his head.

“I just wanted to get a minute alone with you.” Clint replied, “To see how your doing after everything that’s happened. Wanda, Steve, and everything.”

Tony shrugged, “I’m fine.” Clint gave him a look that said ‘Bullshit’ and Tony sighed, “Okay I’m not brilliant, I’m not dancing in the fields or anything, I still get tired easily and my body may never
fully recover what’s been done to it. But I’m not about to have a nervous breakdown or anything like that. I have made my peace with Steve, with the past, and I am content with the situation.”

Clint eyed him intently, studying him for any signs of a lie. Apparently he found non as he nodded his head. “I wish I could be a forgiving as you.” He said, “After all Rogers did, excuse of trauma not withstanding I don’t think I could forgive as easily as you have.”

“I can’t waste the energy on grudges, Clint, and look what it did to Wanda. Her anger destroyed her completely, she let her bitterness twist her into something hideous and it consumed her. Now, I am not saying that I will ever fully understand why he did what he did, or ever not feel hurt and some anger to his actions. But I won’t let it rule me or my life either. I want to move on and leave the past where it belongs.” Clint nodded,

“A good plan.” He agreed, “Something we should all do I suppose.” Tony rose an eyebrow,

“You want to make up with Natasha.”

Clint shrugged, “She hasn’t apologized. But then Nat never apologizes. To her it is a sign of weakness. But I… we were friends for so long, I miss her.” Tony jumped down from the counter and lay his hands on Clint’s shoulders,

“Make up with her. Spar, or shoot things, or whatever it is you spies do and make up with her.”

Clint snorted, “If we make it physical you’ll be needed a new body guards, Nat has always kicked my ass!”

******

While Tony and Clint were cooking, Bruce, Steve, Bucky, and Dick were in the gym, sparring.

Well, Bucky and Dick were sparring, Bruce and Steve were beating the shit out of each other in-between making snide remarks and retorts as they squared off against each other.

“Should we stop them, do you think?” Bucky asked, wincing as Steve had his ankle caught by Bruce, then his legs twisted and his body slammed down onto the matt.

“Nah, this is better entertainment than Netflix!” Dick replied, “They’ve barely even drawn blood yet.” Bucky rose an eyebrow, eyeing the blood flowing from the Men’s nostrils and lips from their traded punches.

“Come on, up off your ass.” Bruce taunted, “That’s America’s Ass you’re sitting on, ha, just think of it, you’re America’s Ass!” His taunting smirk was a red rag to a bull as Steve leaped up with a snarl and charged him getting a good blow at Bruce’s smirking face, sending the Bat to the matt. He didn’t have long to crow over it though, as Bruce’s legs wrapped about his ankles and yanked his legs out from under him bringing him down with a hard thump.

“America’s Ass?” Bucky repeated looking to Dick who was doubled over with laughter. “Lunatics.” He muttered looking back to Steve and Bruce, who were now wrestling on the floor and snarling like a pair of enraged dogs.

“Dinner in ten minutes!” Peter yelled into the room, paused at the sight of Captain America wrestling
with Bat Man, “Should I get Mr Stark?” he asked,

“It’s Stark-Wayne!” Bruce declared and got Steve’s fist to his jaw, making him curse and slam his elbow back into Steve’s eye!

“Ah leave ‘em to it.” Bucky said, “I’ve had my fill of breaking up brawls for that punk. He’s big enough to handle it himself now, and I’m hungry.”

“Me too.” Dick agreed, he glanced at Bruce, who’d gotten Steve pinned and was punching him repeatedly in the face, “Just remember Tony will be pissed if you leave blood all over the floor.”

This served to pull the two men apart, red and blood faced, panting, and glaring at each other,

“Dinner, ten minutes.” Bucky said, looking them over, “Go and clean up.”

Bruce glanced at Steve and snorted, “I could have taken you.” Steve smirked,

“I could have done this all day.”

Naturally both men were battered and bruised when they joined everyone for dinner, sporting fat lips, blackening eyes, bruised cheeks, split knuckles, and swelling noses.

“Children.” Natasha sighed, rolling her eyes and helping herself to some chili.

Tony took hold of Bruce’s chin and examined his face, “Idiot.” He declared, seeing that it was only superficial damage,

“We were sparring.” Steve protested,

“Is that what you’re calling it?” Bucky drawled, piling his plate with at least and entire bags worth of doritos. “Looked more like a couple of hot heads fighting over a dame.” He might not be completely healed, he might not understand everything about this world he’d found himself in, but Bucky was not blind or stupid. He could see the longing in Steve’s eyes when he looked at Tony, and he could see the righteous indignation in Bruce’s eyes when he saw the same thing.

Perhaps if circumstances had been different then he would have offered Steve advice on getting Stark. But Stark was married and a much of a flirt and rake as he’d been in his youth Bucky had never been an adulterer, so that made Tony off limits. Besides, he felt that Steve had been fortunate enough to regain a tentative friendship with the Billionaire without wishing for more from him.

“Have we any plans for tomorrow?” Hope asked, changing the subject before it could become uncomfortable, or more uncomfortable with the glowers that Steve and Bruce were throwing at each other.

“Training, but nothing else.” Tony replied,

“Well, maybe we should all do something as a team then.” Hope suggested, “Something fun. Bowling or paint bailing or something.”

“Paint bailing?” Peter asked, looking up excitedly, “Oh that would be so cool, can we Mr Stark?” He asked looking to Tony with big puppy dog eyes, “We can have so much fun!”

“I don’t see why not.” Tony said, glancing to Rhodey, “What do you think?” The Colonel shrugged,
“Sure, if everyone is up for it.”

“You’ve got physio.” Bruce said to Tony, who rolled his eyes, “Don’t think pulling a face will get you out of it, because it won’t. You need to rebuild your muscles, even Strange agrees with that.”

“Oh fuck Strange.”

“Not in this lifetime Stark!” A far too smug sounding voice said, and Stephen came out of a portal with Loki behind him,

“But in several other lives, or rather realities you are.” Loki offered, making his way to the table and grabbing a handful of doritos to eat.

“Tony and Stephen, can you imagine that?” Dick asked,

“Nah, its too Strange!” Peter giggled, his grin widening at the glare Stephen shot him.

“Is there a reason you are interrupting dinner, or could you just not be bothered to cook at Neverland or wherever it is you go?” Clint asked,

“We do have a reason as it happens.” Loki replied, “I have found the location of the Seventh Stone.”

Chapter End Notes

I’d like to hear other peoples opinions on Endgame.
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

I’m not going to write about Nidvalier and the creation of Storm breaker, or the Guardians fight on Titan as everyone already knows what happens there from the movies and I’d rather focus on the original parts of this work than rehash the movie scene for scene.

“Is this going to get all sexy?”

Stephen rolled his eyes and sighed heavily, “Must you quote Buffy?” He asked Tony, who was smirking at him and Loki, as they set up a map of Egypt on the floor and set up a circle of candles.

“Well this kind of thing was done in Buffy, between Willow and Anya and it got all sexy.” Tony said, then frowned, “It also burned a hole in the carpet, is those going to damage my floor?”

Loki rose an eyebrow, “I am told that you frequently start fires and make things explode yet you are concerned about the floor?”

“Bite me Reindeer Games.” Tony shot back, flipping him off. Her spun around on the stool, pushing himself around and around.

“Oh that’s mature.” Stephen drawled

“Screw you Strange.” Tony said, continuing to spin until he got dizzy, he then hopped up from the stool and wobbled on his feet, The Cloak swooping in to support him and keep him from fall flat on his face.

“Thanks honey.” Tony said, patting the Cloak. “So, how does this work then?” he asked Loki and Stephen, “Do we sit around with joined hands, and start chanting?” Stephen levelled a disgusted look on him,

“You need to lay of supernatural TV shows and movies.”

“Says the guy that lives at Hogwarts.”

“I swear Stark, if the fate of the universe did not rest on your survival I would..”

“What? Turn me into a frog”

“He could put you through a portal that send you falling for half an hour.” Loki put in and Stephen groaned,

“One time, can’t you let it go?” Loki glared at him,

“No.” He lit the last candle and set aside the lighter, “I think we’re ready.”

“Indeed,” Stephen agreed, he took and Athame from a his belt and unsheathed it, taking an amethyst pendulum that was wrapped in a velvet cloth from his pocket. He bound the silver chain that the
amethyst hung from around the blade of the Athame and looked to Tony apologetically, “I’m afraid this will require some blood.”

Tony’s eyebrows arched towards his hair, “Now I know why you insisted Bruce leave, he would have gone psycho.”

“Just a shallow cut on the palm will suffice.” Stephen said, holding out the athame for Tony to take, “The only way this will work is if it is your blood guiding the scrying tools, the Seventh Stone is too well concealed for scrying to work otherwise.”

Sighing heavily Tony took the blade and stroked his thumb over the tip feel the sharpness of the blade, “Okay, here goes.” He said, holding the Athame in his left hand and drew the blade over his right palm splitting the skin and leaving a streak of blood on the blade.

“Now what?” he asked

“Hold the blade in your wounded hand to the blood flows onto it.” Stephen directed, guiding Tony to the map and getting him to kneel down before it, he and Loki took their places before the map.

“Concentrate.” Stephen said to Tony, “Focus your mind on the stone of Unity, focus on its location, picture it in your mind, close your eyes if that helps.”

“Okay.” Tony closed his eyes and pictured the stone of Unity. The incandescent glowing sphere that crackled with energy and pulsed with its own life. “Now what?” He asked, without opening his eyes,

“Extend your arm so the blade and the pendulum is over the map.” Stephen said.

Tony did so, keeping his eyes shut so he didn’t see the amethyst start to spin, splattering the map with drops of blood that had seeped down the blade and chain to collect at the end of the gem.

The amethyst spun wildly and began to pull Tony’s hand down towards the map, the arch of the gem growing less wide and more focused until it dropped down, resting on the map, pin pointing the location of the Stone of Unity.

“Got it.” Stephen said, “You can open your eyes now.” Tony did so and looked down at the blood stained map wrinkling his nose, “We have the coordinates of the temple.”

“Great, and its…right in the middle of the fucking desert.” Tony said, “And probably buried or it would have been found already.”

“Right.” Stephen agreed, “So that’s going to take some preparation.”

“What is?” Loki asked, frowning. As far as he was concerned they could just portal there and get this done.

“Going out the desert.” Tony said, “We’re going to need equipment and supplies, water, salt tablets, malaria tablets, food.”

“Considering the depth the tomb is likely to be we should have oxygen.” Stephen said, “The air will likely be foul and could be toxic if any fungus has been growing in there.”

“We could just portal there and back.” Loki said, “You can open portals, we all know that.”

“Let it go, and the site is no doubt protected from portals.” Stephen replied, “So we do this old fashioned way and go to Egypt by plane…”
“Or Quin jet.”

“Or quin jet.” Stephen corrected giving Tony a look, “And we dig through the sand.”

Loki sighed heavily, “That sounds like a whole lot of work.” Stephen smirked at him,

“I hope you’re good with a shovel.”

*****

Bruce was not in the least bit happy about Tony’s cut hand and insisted on bandaging it himself while glaring at Stephen.

“So we need digging equipment and supplies.” Steve said, “We’ll be there for a while so we should stock up.”

“Actually we should probably make a decision on who is going and who is staying.” Tony said, looking around the room at the team who were scattered about on the sofa, or the floor, or in the window (Peter) “Who knows how long we have until Thanos gets here, not everyone can be offsite.”

“True.” Natasha agreed, “So who, besides yourself obviously.”

“Loki, God help me.” Tony said, “And Stephen.”

“Me.” Bruce said, and Tony looked up at him sharply, “What?”

“I was thinking you should stay, you are one of the strongest fighters here and if Thanos attacks then you’ll be needed here.” It hurt Tony to say this, he didn’t want to be parted from Bruce, but he also knew it was for the best, that he couldn’t take Bat Man away from America right now, not when Iron Man would be absent too.

Bruce clearly hated it too with the way he clenched his jaw tightly and sighed heavily, “Who then?” he asked, glancing at Steve, willing Tony not to say him.

“Clint.” Tony said, surprising everyone, “He is supposed to be my body guard after all.”

“Oh great, now you want my services, when it means I’ve to slum it in the damn desert for God knows how long!” Clint grumbled.

“Can I come?” Peter asked bouncing up from his perch on the windowsill,

“No.”

“Ohh pleeeeeeease Mr Stark, I promise I’ll be good and I won’t get in your way and I’ll be really helpful, and it’ll be educational too, I mean Egypt! I’ll get to see Egypt, think of all the history I can learn while I’m there, you wouldn’t want to deny me that now would you?” The big puppy dog eyes that Peter gave to Tony should have been classified as deadly weapons since Tony felt all his resolve crumbling under the gaze of the adorable (Manipulative) teen.

“Fine.” He sighed, “Clear it with your Aunt May and you can come.” He was nearly knocked over as Peter just about leaped on him and began hugging him tightly, thanking him and bounding off to
speak to his Aunt,

“Dude, you suck when it comes to saying no to that kid.” Clint snorted, “He has you wrapped around his little finger.”

“You try saying no to those eyes.” Tony shot back, “I swear, if we could weaponize them we’d have world peace in minutes!”

“Are you really sure about going in without the rest of us?” Rhodey asked from where he was sat on the sofa besides Sam,

“I am.” Tony confirmed, nodding his head, “With any luck we’ll find it and be back before any bad shit starts to go down with Thanos, but if not, then you guys will all be needed here.”

“And when do you plan to leave?” Hope asked,

“As soon as we have the equipment, so two, maybe three days time.”

“Sounds like you all have everything in hand” An all too familiar voice drawled. The team turned to look and saw Nick Fury standing in the doorway dressed in his usual leather duster and black clothing.

“Security breech!” Tony said, “FRIDAY don’t we have a special alert for pirates?” when no response came he glared at Fury, “What did you do?”

“Nothing permanent, just a temporary system shut down so I could get in here and talk to you,” Fury sighed, walking further into the compound and stopping dead when an arrow lodged itself by his foot, he looked to Clint but he wasn’t holding a bow and a whistle came from his left, Fury glanced that way and saw Dick with a second arrow trained on him,

“Next one makes contact, Bluebeard!”

“Is this guy a threat?” Bucky asked clenched his hands, both flesh and metal into fists,

“No.” Steve said,

“Yes!” Tony enthused, “He’s a threat, go beat him up!”

“Stark, really, now is not the time for your theatrics.” Fury sighed,

“Says the man who breaks and enters instead of knocking on the damn door.” Bruce drawled, pulling himself up to his full height,

“What do you want, Fury?” Clint asked, “Because we are a little busy right now with saving the whole fucking Universe.”

“And I maybe able to help you with that.” Fury said, “I have an old friend who would be an excellent ally of yours against Thanos.” Tony snorted,

“You have friends?”

“We really don’t need any of your murderous acquaintances stabbing us in the back, Nick.” Clint drawled, “So why don’t you scurry off to whatever little hole you’ve been lurking in and stay there, before Night Wing decides to shoot you.”

Fury looked at Clint unimpressed by the threat and dismissed him, turning to Tony, “This is no
ordinary friend. She was known as Carol Danvers US Air Force. She became Captain Marvel and has more power than Thor.”

Tony looked to Natasha who shook her head indicating that she’d never heard of this person, “And we’ve never heard of her because….”

“She is off world, in space.” Fury replied, “Saving other worlds. I have however called her and asked for her assistance.”

“And we should just trust her on your say so?” Bucky asked, incredulously.

“Yeah, no offense Nicky, but you are not exactly known for your honesty or integrity at the best of times.” Tony said, “So Captain Marcel can go do whatever the hell she has been doing and leave us the hell alone.”

“It’s marvel Stark and I think you’ll be quite impressed by her.”

Tony tipped his head to one side and shot Fury a sultry grin, “Honey, if you only knew just how many times I’d been promised that!”

“Another ally could be good though, couldn’t it?” Scott asked, “I mean we are down one with the Scarlet Psycho gone.” He looked around at various expressions of uncertainty,

“Only if this Captain Marvel can be trusted,” Steve said, looking at Fury, “And Tony is right, you are not known for your integrity.”

“And you are, Captain?” Fury shot back, “Correct me if I am wrong, but didn’t you leave Stark in Siberia beaten half to death and take off with your one armed boyfriend there?” Steve flushed and Bucky growled,

“Don’t try and turn this around on Steve, Fury.” Natasha said, getting to her feet, “Yes we’ve served up, yes Steve and I knew about the Stark’s murder for a few years, but how long had you known and said nothing?”

“And wasn’t Howard Stark supposed to be one of your friends?” Clint asked, also rising in support for Natasha, “Why didn’t you say anything or do anything when it first happened?”

Fury scowled at his former agents, “This is not the time.”

“Oh but it is.” Tony said, stepping forward, “You come here and demand that we trust your word about this Captain Marvel, yet you give us no reason at all to trust you.” He gestured at fury and scoffed, “I mean look at our relationship. You break into my home, you sent an agent in to spy on me, withheld my property until I was on the brink of death, manipulate me into helping you, lie about what you were planning with tesseract, lie about what you were planning on doing to Banner, and right up until you knew that Project Insight was going to be used on yourself, you were right on board with it. So tell me, why in the hell should I trust you?”

The room fell silent as everyone seemed to collectively hold their breath waiting for Fury’s response.

The former director held Tony’s gaze for several moments before finally blinking and letting a deep sigh.

“I can’t give you a reason.” He admitted, “I have nothing but my word, which I know means very little. All I can say is that I want to help,” He looked up and looked around the room at everyone, “This is one hell of a team, we might actually have a shot of defeating this bastard, and I want to
ensure that we do.” He spread his arms wide in a helpless gesture, “Just tell me what to do to earn your trust.”
Natasha took charge of Fury. If anyone could keep the man on a leash it was the Black Widow.

Bucky too was an escort for Fury, in the unlikely event that Natasha was over powered by the slippery master spy, then Bucky would prove to be a very dangerous adversary.

Tony began to lay in provisions for the trip to the desert. He had a hand picked team working on one of the quinjets, enlarging the cargo hold to carry a JCB, shovels, pick axes, equipment to shore up crumbling stone and make safe and underground passages, and most importantly a mass of water.

“I have the malaria tablets.” Strange said as he opened a portal into Tony’s lab. He rose an eyebrow at Dumm-E as the bot reached for the Cloak,

“Great,” Tony said, “I’ve got something for you too.”, He pushed himself away from the table, rolling backwards across his workshop floor and not stopping until Butterfingers caught him with an excited beep. Something small and round rolled after Tony and flashed a blue light as it sucked up dust Tony’s wild wheeling across the lab had spread out behind him,

“Exterminate, exterminate!” It said as it vacuumed up the dust.

Tony laughed aloud and kicked his legs high into the air like a child on a swing. Strange sighed and silently asked the Universe why their saviour had to be an overgrown toddler.

“What d’you think of DeeJay?” Tony asked, spinning around and around in the chair, with Butterfingers gleefully pushing him with his claw,

“DeeJay?” Strange asked, watching as the Darlek Roomba rolled away in search of more dust to “Exterminate”

“Darlek Junior.”

“I think you need professional help from a licenced therapist.” Strange deadpanned and Tony stuck his tongue out at him because he was so very mature. He jumped up from his chair and nearly toppled over, having to have You support him as he got his bearings back, and made his way to one of his cluttered workstations and picked up what looked like a pair of metallic gloves.

“For you.” He said, holding them out to Strange.

“You made me gloves?” Strange asked, taking them with a frown, only closer inspecting he found that they appeared more like braces, thin metal rings to go about his fingers and flexible sheaths so he could bend his joints without difficulty, a flat disk of exceptionally thin metal spread out to span the back of his hands, finishing with cuffs that would fit snug about his wrists.

“They’re like Rhodey’s leg braces.” Tony explained, “They’ll fix the nerve problems in your hands, stop the tremors from happening.”

Strange’s eyes widened and he looked up at Tony in shock, “This is… I don’t know what to say.” Tony’s grin broadened,

“I actually shocked the Sorcerer Supreme into silence!”

“Oh shut up.” Strange sighed, he looked back to the gloves, hardly able to believe that they could fix
his hands, but he couldn’t resist trying and took off the yellow silk gloves he usually wore to conceal the heavy scarring over his once elegant hands, hardly daring to breathe Strange put the metal gloves onto his hands and secured the wrist cuffs which closed about his wrists, locking into place tightly but not so tight that it would effect circulation. The rings on circling his fingers did the same, seemingly moulding to his skin.

Strange slowly raised his hands and opened them, spreading his fingers and watched in amazement as they didn’t shake, “My God.” He whispered,

“No, but I’m told the resemblance is startling!” Tony quipped, and gestured to Strange, “Test them out, do some hand movements.”

Frowning Strange did as requested, bending his fingers, forming fists, wiggling his fingers, all of which was done easily and without the slightest tremor. “Thank you.” He said unable to think of anything better to say, even though it wasn’t anywhere near enough for what Tony had given him.

“You’re welcome.” Tony said, he picked up the jar of pills that Strange had brought, “Lets get this to the jet.” He looked around the lab, “You guys behave yourselves while I’m gone,” He ordered the bots, who beeped at him, while Deejay chirped out “Exterminate!”

“You know I was thinking about making a few more, would you like one for the Sanctum?” he asked, as Strange opened a portal to the compound,

“Absolutely not. Wong would throw a fit!”

*****

The Compound was busy was always with training, Rhodey was putting Hope, and Sam through their paces. While Bruce and Steve were working on the ground teams, selecting the best pairs to partner up by judging their strengths and weaknesses so they would compliment each other and strengthen each other in the field.

“Spider Man would be a good fit to work with Dick, they have similar body types, long and lean. What Peter lacks in experience Dick makes up for, and Peter’s enhanced strength and agility will them a formidable duo.” Bruce observed,

“I’m not sure where to place Scott.” Steve admitted, as he watched, with sympathy as Natasha mercilessly kicked the shit out of Scott while she was supposedly teaching him some basic self-defence. The problem was, Scott was not a fighter, he had no training either military or fighting disciplines. What fights he had been in were just basic bar brawls, he could throw a punch without any difficulty so long as his opponent was no more skilled than he.

He relied on the suit to get him through situations, to give him extra strength, without it he was vulnerable which was something Natasha was trying to change as she easily twisted out of his attempt to hold her and floored him again.

“You need to lock your shoulder and set your legs so I can’t get mine around them and flip you.” She said to him, as Scott got to his feet, rubbing at his bruised muscles,

“Did Stark have to put up with this before he got empowered?” Scott asked swinging at Natasha again, only have his wrist grabbed, her foot to his chest and his body slammed back down onto the
mat, knocking the air out him once more.

“Tony had years worth of boxing and kick boxing training before he became Iron Man.” Natasha informed Ant Man. “He’s also competent with firearms, and I believe can fence.” She held out a hand to Scott and pulled him to his feet, “You need to learn how to defend yourself outside of the suit, you can’t always rely on it or you’ll put yourself in danger if it fails.”

“Right.” Scott said, nodding his head in agreement, “Show me again.”

“What he lacks in experience and skill he makes up for with determination and a willingness to learn.” Bruce observed, he watched as Dick showed Peter how to do a flying spin kick and smiled, recalling how he’d taught the move to Dick himself in Gotham back when Dick had been younger than Peter was right now.

“He needs time to improve.” Steve said, “Time we don’t have.”

“Oh time is relative Captain,” An all too familiar and far too smug voice said and both men grimaced as they turned to see Strange swaggering along with Tony. Bucky and Fury were following behind them, observing the training.

“Looking good.” Fury commented,

“We always do.” Clint said, abseiling down the wall from the roof,

“How’s the recoil in the rappel?” Tony asked, looking up to where Clint had jammed an arrow into the brick and was using a rappel beam that had extended from it,

“Good, not getting too much pull back, but its still tough enough to slow a descent.” Clint replied, getting onto the ground, he unhooked the clip from his belt and tugged on the rope which came away from the arrow head and coiled around his hand.

“The return is still sluggish.” Tony said, wrinkling his nose, “I was hoping for less than five seconds.”

“I can live with six.” Clint said, “Besides, weren’t you busy making your demonic Roomba when you fixed this up for me?” Tony gave him a very disappointed look,

“Darlek Roomba, not demonic, darlek.”

“Darlek?” Fury asked, his eyepatch moving and his lips twitching as he fought a smile, Tony nodded his head grinning maniacally,

“It says exterminate!”

Bruce and Stephen exchanged long-suffering glances, “The fate of the Universe is in our hands and Tony Stark builds a Darlek Roomba. Somehow I can just see that this is what history will remember, a Roomba saying exterminate as it sucks up dust.”

“So long as that is all it sucks!”

Steve just about choked on his own tongue at Bucky’s unexpected lewd comment, Tony leered at him, “I don’t need any help in that department, robocop, ask my husband!” Bruce was thankfully beyond shame at this point and just took the comment with a fond smile and looked back to where Dick was giving Peter pointers for how to place his weight when performing moves so as to keep his balance and maximize motion.
“So when is this friend of yours arriving?” He asked, directing the question to Fury.

“Anytime now.” Fury replied, “Traffic permitting of course.” They all looked to him and his face remained expressionlessly stoic, “Space can be crowded at times.”

*****

It’d been twenty years since Carol Danvers had been back to Earth. She’d spent the past two decades of her life fighting and saving lives in space. Since gaining the powers that had made her into Captain Marvel she had not felt right in staying on Earth.

During the Nineties there had been an anti-mutant movement with governments over the world wanting to penalize if not outright imprison and exploit mutants like Wolverine. The Mutant Registration Act had been proposed and when Carol had left it had been coming into effect, driving mutants underground. It had only been since then with the actions of the X-Men, and the Avengers that had improved things. The Registration act had been repealed in 2009 thanks to Human Rights. Mutants may have the mutant gene giving abilities but they were still human and entitled to the same rights as anyone else.

Things had improved from there, especially with heroes coming out to fight against otherworldly threats, but there had of course been setbacks.

Carol was not fully convinced of the Sokovia Accords, but the basic principal of Superheroes obeying basic laws and not interfering if specifically asked not to by a country seemed fair to her, though in an extreme emergency she doubted very much than any country would turn away aid.

Fury had given her basic information on the team she would be meeting. Stark being the most intriguing of all. His name had spread through space after his defeat of Thanos’ army six years earlier.

Captain America she of course knew of, she’d grown up with the comics and shitty cartoon series. The Man himself she wasn’t sure about but figured that she was making the same mistake as most people did. Captain America was infallible, unflawed, a perfect paragon of virtue and honour. Steve Rogers was human, he was of course flawed and fallible as all humans were. It was the same old mistake of putting someone on a pedestal and expecting them to fulfil impossible expectations.

Bucky Barnes she also knew from the comics. The fact that the man was alive like Rogers was astonishing and Carol sympathized for all he had suffered.

The rest of the team she only knew about from what information Fury had given her and she greeted them with a friendly smile as she was met at the compound.

“Carol Danvers, AKA Captain Marvel, this is the Avengers Team.” Fury said, introducing her, “Tony Stark, Iron Man. Steve Rogers, Captain America, Bucky Barnes, Winter soldier. Natasha Romanoff, Black Widow, Clint Barton, Hawkeye, Scott Lang, Ant Man, Hope van Dyne, Wasp, Sam Wilson, Falcon, Peter Parker, Spiderman, Bruce Wayne, Batman, James Rhodes, War Machine, and Dick Grayson, Nightwing.”

“I’m pleased to meet all of you.” Carol said with a frown, “But aren’t there more of you, a couple of
“Asgardians?”

“Ah, Thor’s off world with a talking Racoon and talking Tree, and Loki is at the Sanctum with the Sorcerer’s Apprentice.” Tony said and got Bruce’s elbow between his ribs, “Okay, Sorcerer Supreme.”

“The other members of our team are in Wakanda.” Steve said, “Bruce Banner, the Hulk, and Vision, an Android.”

“The Hulk’s name is known throughout space after his reigning glory on the gaming world.” Carol said, “It will be a pleasure to fight besides him against Thanos.”

“Have you met Thanos?” Peter asked, his eyes wide with curiosity, Carol shook her head,

“I have not, but I have tangled with his Black Order and slew two of them.”

“How about you tell us all about that inside?” Fury suggested, giving Tony a pointed look that the Billionaire ignored but smiled to Carol and offered her his arm to escort her into the compound.

“So tell us more about this Black Order.” Rhodey said as they went to the common area, half of the team taking seats while the rest either sat on the floor or leaned against furniture or walls. Jett jumped up onto Tony’s lap as soon as he sat down and attracted Carol’s attention,

“Oh, I miss Goose everytime I see a Terran feline.” She sighed, petting Jett’s back,

“Goose?” Tony asked,

“My Flerken and the reason Nick lost his eye!” Tony looked positively gleeful at this knowledge while Fury looked pained, which was not at all helped by Clint snickering with laughter,

“He lost the eye to a cat!”

“Flerken’s are not just cats, Barton.” Fury growled, “And the dame thing ate the tesseract once!”

Steve’s eyes widened,

“It ate the tesseract?”

“He threw it up.” Carol said with a shrug, tickling Jett’s tummy as he rolled onto his back and purred loudly at the fuss he was getting, “Anyway, the Black Order. They are ruthless, murderous creatures in the service of Thanos. Completely loyal to him and utterly without mercy. I killed on of them, called Supergiant after vicious battle that left several alien cities devastated.” She looked pained as she said this, clearly regretting the damage and loss of life, “The remaining members are Ebony Maw, Cull Obsidian, Proxima Midnight, and Corvus Glaive.”

“Charming sounding bunch.” Bruce murmured, “What powers do they have, what can we expect to face fighting them?”

“Cull Obsidian has enhanced strength and density.” Carol said, “It is said that his skin is practically impenetrable by weapons. How true that is I don’t know. Corvus Glaive has enhanced strength, speed, and endurance, he is often entrusted with command of Thanos’ forces. If you meet him on a battle field then he will be acting as a battle commander.”

Steve glanced to Bucky who nodded his head, processing the information at taking note of this.

“Proxima Midnight,” Carol’s face twisted with disgust, “As well as being hideous she is a master in
all forms of combat and has enhanced strength and endurance like Glaive. Ebony Maw is probably the most deadly of all the Order. He is an exceptionally intelligent, has both a field generator and teleportation device at his disposal, and mental abilities that he uses for manipulation and suggestion.”

This had Tony, Clint, and Bucky all shifting uncomfortably. Carol frowned and looked around, “Have I said something wrong?”

“No.” Natasha said, “It’s just that we’ll recently dealt with someone who abused mind powers.” A look of understanding came over Carol’s face and she nodded.

“Why don’t you show them what you can do?” Fury offered, when the silence that followed became tense,

“You mean just flying out of space and landing on the planet wasn’t enough?” Carol drawled giving Fury a wry grin, “Okay, I don’t mind showing everyone what I’ve got, so long as you don’t mind showing me what you’ve got to work with too.”

“I think we can manage that.” Steve said looking around at the team and getting various agreements, it wasn’t out right trust, not yet, but there was a willingness to work with Carol. So far she had made a good impression, if that continued then they would welcome her into the team, especially considering what their opposition sounded like.

*****

Carol gave a fair demonstration of her abilities for the Avengers and in return was shown what they could do. She was especially impressed with Tony’s magical abilities, and even more so when Stephen arrived with Loki via a portal.

Introductions were made briefly before Stephen and Loki took clothing for themselves to the Quinjet that was being prepped for their trip to Egypt.

“Why are you going to Egypt?” Carol asked curiously, “And why only you three?”

“Five.” Peter said, “Me and Clint are going too.”

“It’s need to know I’m afraid.” Tony said apologetically, “All I can say is that is could lead to something that will be useful defeating Thanos.”

“Is now really the time to be keeping secrets, Stark?” Fury asked, forgetting himself and feeling pressure of Bucky’s metal hand squeezing his shoulder a second later, not enough to injure him but enough to make him wince.

“You’re one to talk about that, Fury,” Tony replied, “And its not Carol that I have a problem sharing with, it’s you. I don’t know her yet but,” He gave her a grin, “So far I like her.”

“And it’ll be good to have another heavy hitter here while Iron Man is elsewhere.” Bruce added, “With luck we’ll all be back together before Thanos or his Black Order come calling, but if not..” He didn’t need to say anymore, they all knew what it would mean if they weren’t and could only hope that Tony found the Stone of Unity before that happened.
Chapter 36

Gotham

Wayne Manor

Since it could very well be the last time, they would be together for who knew how long, Tony and Bruce decided to have a night alone together while the team took Carol out into New York to show her around.

They gave Alfred the night off and set up a candle lit picnic in their bedroom, laying out a blanket on the carpet with pillows to lean in while they enjoyed a spread of crudités and humous, smoked bacon wrapped plums, pate, warm French sticks, slithers of salmon on cream cheese spread crackers, honey roasted goat cheese stuffed peppers, stuffed olives, fresh strawberries and melted chocolate to dip them in, and champagne to drink.

“Just so we are clear, this isn’t a last supper.” Bruce said, as he fed Tony chocolate covered strawberry, dripping chocolate over Tony’s lips as he did so, making the other Billionaire laugh and lick his lips before taking the bite of sweet fruit into his mouth.

“No, this is foreplay.” Tony agreed, making a show of cleaning his mouth up with exaggerated licks of his tongue,

“Oh, I thought it was just sustenance so you could keep your strength up,” Bruce teased, putting a little pate on a slice of French bread and savouring the taste,

“Me?” Tony snorted, playfully kicking Bruce’s shin, “It’s you that’ll have to keep his strength up, with all that I have in mind for you tonight.”

“Promises, promises.” Bruce purred, willingly laying flat on his back as Tony moved to straddle him, he let the smaller man take his wrists and place them over his head, pinning them there and he laughed out loud as Tony took off his tie and bound it over his eyes, cutting off his vision.

“Are you getting me at your mercy, Mr Stark-Wayne?” He asked, his grin growing all the wider as Tony took his tie off his neck and bound it over his eyes, leaving his husband feeling
bereft and semi-hard already, but he needn’t have worried as Tony only moved to remove Bruce’s shoes, trousers, and underpants. He knelt down besides Bruce’s hip and breathed over his crotch, blowing warm air over the sensitized flesh before he took the length in his hands and began to stroke it into full hardness, once Bruce was erect and moaning with desire, Tony stopped the hand job and went and grabbed the bowl of strawberries and the melted chocolate.

Aching with desire and unable to see what was going on Bruce tugged on the restraints, which he could have easily gotten out of if he’d wanted to, but he was enjoying Tony dominating him too much for that.

He tried to listen out to get an idea of what Tony was doing and what he was planning, but it didn’t prepare him for the warm wetness that suddenly dripped onto his belly and filled his navel, and spread down to his throbbing cock, coming teasingly close to touching it, but circling around the rigid flesh. The warm liquid dripped over his nipples and teased him as it rolled down his sides, spreading over his chest and running down his breast bone to join the puddle in his navel, which over flowed, sending whatever this was spilling over his hips.

“Tony, what?”

“Sshh.” Tony whispered pressing a kiss to Bruce’s lips, “Surrender yourself to me.” Bruce leaned into the kiss, savouring it, even as he mouthed, “Never!”

For a second nothing happened, and then something cool was running down Bruce’s chest, dipping into and swirling in his navel before being lifted up and off Bruce again, he heard Tony making a sound of satisfaction and he strained to figure out what was going on, only to nearly leap out of his skin as the same coolness came back, twice this time, teasing around his pecs and sliding over his breast bone, running over his nipples and circling them in a delicious and maddening pattern of torture that grew worse as the object was trailed up his throat and rested on his chin just below his lips, so close and yet so far…

“Do you want it?” Tony asked popping something into his own mouth,

“Yes.” Bruce whispered wetting his lips hungrily, “Please.” The object was lifted from his chin and hovered just under his nose letting Bruce smell chocolate and strawberry, Tony had covered him in chocolate and was eating it off him!

“Will you be a good Bat and do what I tell you?” Tony asked tracing Bruce’s lips with chocolate but not giving him the strawberry,

“Hmm no!” Bruce moaned, “Just give me..” His lips were tapped by Tony’s finger and the treat taken away, “Fucking tease!” he complained making Tony snort,

“Oh, I haven’t even started yet.” He then bent over Bruce and ran his tongue the full length of the man’s torso lapping up the chocolate and tormenting Bruce all the more, especially when he dipped his tongue into Bruce’s navel, swirling his tongue and coating it in chocolate that he lewdly moaned about devouring. Taking a couple of strawberry’s he dipped them in the remaining chocolate on Bruce and stroked them up the underside of Bruce’s cock, laughing at the breathy curse that came from the older man. He teased the head of Bruce’s penis and held the strawberries between two fingers, running them either side of the straining member.

“Now what is your answer, Mr Wayne-Stark?”

“Fucking killing me.” Bruce panted, his balls aching and cock feeling like it was about to explode, which only got worse as the strawberries left his skin and were replaced by Tony’s mouth, the hot
warmth almost doing him in, but Tony wouldn’t let him come, not yet, not until he submitted,

“Everything will be yours if you just say the words.” Tony teased, peppering Bruce’s balls in feather-light kisses, that had his husband whining in need, “Just say the words and your suffering ends.”

Calloused fingers ran over the insides of Bruce’s thighs, stroking, pinching, tickling, and teasing him until he was on the verge of tears with the need to come.

“I submit!” He cried without an ounce of shame, “I submit myself to you, Mr Stark-Wayne.”

He was rewarded immediately, with chocolate coated strawberries being fed to him from Tony’s lips, and then Tony’s mouth over his cock, sucking him into bliss.

When his sanity returned Bruce found that his wrists were free and his blind fold was gone, but he was still covered in drying chocolate.

“You’re a very wicked man.” He chuckled to Tony, catching the plum that was thrown at him and eating it, “I do thoroughly approve, although,” He looked down at himself, “I could do with some cleaning up.”

Tony looked him up and down. “I suppose you could.” He agreed, “Just what are you going to do about that?”

Quick as a snake Bruce was on Tony, pulling his arms behind his back and binding them there with the scarves, which he secured to the bed post and straddled Tony’s thighs, pushing his torso up against Tony’s face, “Lick me clean.” He ordered, Tony’s dark eyes glinted at him mischievously, “Make me!”

Raising an eyebrow Bruce got off Tony’s lap and made short work of pulling his husband’s trousers off, laughing aloud at the skimpy red thong that Tony was wearing beneath them, “You can keep that on!” he said, lifting Tony’s left leg and placing the foot on his shoulder. He placed a kiss at Tony’s ankle and stroked the length of his leg, peppering kisses up Tony’s calf, pausing at the back of knee, which he nipped at with his teeth, slowly trailing his tongue up Tony’s inner thigh and pausing just shy of his crotch. Which he ignored, in favour of unbuttoning Tony’s shirt and nuzzling his belly, nibbling at his collar bones and tonguing his nipples, after which Tony was panting and wriggling.

Smirking Bruce pressed his palm over Tony’s thong covered crotch and applied some pressure making Tony keen, “Will you lick me clean now?” He asked his husband, “Or do you need more persuasion?”

Tony’s dilated eyes met his and he smirked at Bruce, “You’ll have to do better than that!”

Bruce rose and eyebrow, “Indeed?” He let Tony’s leg drop from his shoulder as he rose and retrieved the lube, “Maybe this will make you a little more eager to please.”

By the time he had Tony fully prepared the younger Billionaire was swearing in several languages and bucking his hips in desperation.

“Are you ready now?” Bruce asked, coating his own cock in lube and bringing himself back to hardness,
“Yes, anything, fuck me or I’m gonna go crazy!” Tony cried, he moaned in utter relief when Bruce spread his thighs, lifting him up so he was in Bruce’s lap, shoving the thong to one side and slid into his body, but that was where the relief ended as Bruce remained still and Tony was trapped, unable to move and get some friction.

“Bastard!” He cried making Bruce laugh,

“Remember, you have to clean me first.” Tony whimpered, but meekly dipped his head, as Bruce straightening up, giving Tony access to his torso, which Tony licked at as diligent as a mother cat with a kitten.

By the time Tony had finished licking his chest clean Bruce was too hard not to start thrusting inside his husbands body. He mashed their torso’s against each other, trapping Tony’s cock between them, providing a warm and sticky friction as he rutted inside Tony, hitting his prostate over and over until Tony was coming between them, his clenching inner muscles and shivering body milking Bruce’s own climax from him.

For several minutes the two of them stayed pressed against each other, then winced as they went to move, the chocolate pulling on their skin.

“A shower might be in order.” Bruce chuckled, as he undid the ties binding Tony’s wrists,

“Good plan.” Tony agreed, letting Bruce help him to his feet. A few minutes later they were sharing the hot water and washing each others hair and each others bodies.

“We should do this more often.” Bruce said, “Have romantic evenings together.”

“With some Dom/Sub play?” Tony asked with a grin, “That sounds like a good idea, especially after we’ve… you know, dealt with this.”

“Thanos you mean.”

“Yeah, him.” Tony sighed, “Is it bad that I’m thinking that when we’ve dealt with this and stopped the apocalypse that I’d like to step back from the superhero biz and concentrate on us?”

Sensing this was more than a hypothetical question Bruce sobered immediately, “No, I don’t think so. You’ve been through so much and you are doing so much, I don’t think its bad that you want to take a break, or even retire.”

Tony nodded, “I tried to retire after Ultron and it didn’t pan out. Being Iron Man nearly got me killed several times and as much as I love being Iron Man I’ve realized that I love, or I would love something else too. Something that mentoring Peter has made me aware of.”

“Which is?”

Tony took a deep breath and took Bruce’s hands into his own, “Don’t freak out okay, I know it’s a huge thing to ask and it isn’t going to be easy, and you’ve already got Dick, and Peter like the Son I never had, which is what has led me to realize that I’d like that, I’d really like that.”

“You’d like a son?” Bruce asked, frowning at Tony,

“Yes, or a daughter. A family is what I want, a family with you. Adoption or surrogacy, either way.” Tony said, then grinned, “Hell, with as weird as things are maybe one of us could get pregnant!” Bruce scoffed at that,
“Thor is God of fertility as well as Thunder, so yes, I guess a male pregnancy wouldn’t be too impossible,” His nose wrinkled, “I don’t think I’d like to endure that though,”

“Oh, so I have to do all the work?” Tony mock cried, “Typical male!” Bruce grinned, leaning close to Tony and purred into his ear,

“I would spend the entire nine months waiting on you hand and foot, pampering you and showering you in luxury while you carried my baby to term.” He ran his hands playfully over Tony’s stomach, “I can see it now, you all round and heavy with my seed. Glowing as you grow our family inside you.”

Moaning Tony pulled Bruce against him and gave him a fierce kiss, “When Thor comes back we’ll ask him for a fertility potion or whatever, so long as we can practice making babies right now,”

Sweeping Tony up into his arms, Bruce carried him out of the shower, heading for their bed, “My pleasure.”

“Just one thing though,” Tony said, as Bruce lay him down onto the bed, not caring that they were both still soaking wet, “If you knock me up with like octuplets I will have you gelded by wolverine!”
They kept the goodbyes at the compound brief. There was too much to say, too many emotions that that were too close to the surface and simply not enough time, so after a business like farewell, Tony and his team headed off for Egypt, leaving the others behind.

“Have you ever been to Egypt before, Mr Stark?” Peter asked, scrolling through a tourist site on his stark phone, the newest one that wouldn’t be on the shelves for another two months.

“Sure.” Tony replied, looking up from where he was sat on the floor lifting free weights, (He might be headed for Egypt but Bruce was insisting he continue with his physio.)

“I’ve been to Cairo a few times for business and I went on holiday to Sharm El-Sheikh.”

“Cool.” Peter said, “Have you been to the valley of the Kings too?”

“Nuh-uh, I was only there for the sun and the sea.” Tony replied,

“Can we go while we’re there?” Peter asked, all big puppy dog eyes and pouty lips, silently tugging on Tony’s heart strings,

“This isn’t a sight seeing trip, Mr Parker.” Stephen chided, walking through the jet with a heavy book in his hands, the Cloak trailing behind him looking like a lost sheep.

“No, but is certainly very strange!” Tony stage whispered making Peter giggle and Stephen glance up with glare,

“Don’t you have exercise to be doing?” the former surgeon asked, “You don’t want to get flabby, do you?”

Tony stuck his tongue out at Strange, and leered, “My Husband likes me to have junk in my trunk!”

Peter made a whimpering noise and dropped his phone to clamp his hands over his ears, “Please Mr Stark, I’m too young to hear about stuff like that.”

“Calm down Spidey-pie,” Tony said, leaning over and tugging Peter’s arms down, “I’ll keep it clean in your presence.”

Peter beamed at him, “Thank you, but you know,” He added, with a blush, “You and Mr Wayne are cute together. The internet is calling you the super-hot salt and pepper babes.”

Strange made a strangled noise in his throat at that, looking like he was struggling not to swallow his own tongue.

“Super hot huh?” Tony drawled, yeah, he’d still got it.

“So, what do you actually do when you find the stone?” Peter asked, setting his phone aside. “I mean, is it gonna be like the one ring, only not evil? So more like Galadriel’s ring, or Gandalf or Elrond’s. You know, you’d make a cool Elf, Mr Stark. Like a badass one that fought at Helms Deep or the Battle of the five armies. Ooooh maybe it’s like the Arkenstone…”

“I somehow doubt that it’ll turn Stark invisible or have a dragon guarding it.” Loki said, as he ambled through the jet, sipping at juice carton.
“Have you ever seen a dragon, Mr Loki?” Peter asked, gazing in open awe at the Trickster. Loki paused and half turned, regarding Peter with curiosity.

“Indeed I have.” He said, turning completely so he was facing Peter, “I slew one in fact, back on Asgard, many years ago.”

Stephen scoffed and Tony rolled his eyes, “What?” Loki snapped at them,

“You’re full of shit, snowflake.” Tony said, getting to his feet.

Loki sniffed and lifted his chin haughtily, “I do not believe that either of you were there, and so you know not of what you speak.” Looking away from them and dismissingly them from his thoughts he turned his attention to Peter and smiled at him, “If you would like to hear the full story, little Spider, I would be more than happy to tell you.”

Peter leaped to his feet excitedly, “Please Mr Loki!”

Loki gestured for Peter to head to the seats and made to follow, only to have his forearm grabbed by Tony and was pulled up against the Billionaire,

“I am trusting you not to hurt him,” Tony said, “But know this. If you hurt one hair on his head, there will not be enough of your charred corpse left for anyone to bury. Understand me?”

Loki looked Tony directly in the eye, “Completely.”

“Then we’re good.” Tony said, releasing Loki’s arm and patting his back, “Go and have fun, knock yourself out.”

“You are a strange man, Tony Stark.” Loki said, and slowly followed after Peter,

“He does have a point, you know.” Tony said, looking to Stephen, making him look up from his book again and frown at Tony,

“About you being strange?” he asked,

“What, no, that’s your territory not mine.” Tony replied, “I mean Peter, what he said about the stone. What am I supposed to do with it when we find it?” He spread his arms wide and let out a loud exhale, “What is meant to happen? Do I grab hold of it and thrust it to the sky? Do I meditate over it? How will I know how to use it?”

Stephen sighed heavily and closed his book. He rolled his lips as he gazed at Tony, who was clearly expecting an answer,

“You have learned a lot, very fast. You have accessed your powers and have a good deal of control over them.”

“Yeah, great, I can make metal come out of my flesh and spurt fire from my fingers, I teleported. But none of that helps me know what to do with this freaking stone.” Tony said, he began to pace, running his hands through his hair, “I’ve been trying to meditate, trying to bring on memories of Amenken, but nothing is coming, no visions, no flashes of insight, nothing.” He shook his head and looked at the roof of the jet, “Thanos is nearly here. It won’t be long before he arrives and everything is hanging on my being able to use this stone to defeat him, and I…. I haven’t a fucking clue what I am supposed to do.”

Slowly, almost despondently, Tony sat back down on the floor and Stephen joined him silently, his long elegant hands resting on his bent knees as he sat Indian style before the billionaire.

“Stephen?” He said, as if he had come to his senses suddenly, and the handsome man did look up at him with his green eyes, “What am I supposed to do with it?”

Stephen closed his book and smiled, “Tony, I don’t know what you are doing, but you are on the right track. You are trying to understand your powers, and that is the first step. You have a good deal of control over your powers, and that is something to be proud of. But you also have to learn how to use them. And that is something that you will have to learn on your own. You have to find out what works for you.”

Tony nodded, “I know, I just…. I don’t know what to do.”

Stephen laughed, “It’s okay, Tony. We all have our own struggles. But you are on the right track. And I will help you with that.”

Tony smiled, “Thank you, Stephen.”

Stephen nodded, “Anytime, Tony.”

And with that, he closed his book and turned to go back to his seat, leaving Tony to his thoughts.
“Me and Bruce were talking about retiring,” Tony said, offering a small, barely perceptible smile, “Of going to live somewhere in the country, somewhere quiet and out of the way. Of having a family. Adopting a kid or two, or maybe asking someone to surrogate for us.

Personally, I like the idea of adoption. Of giving a kid whose had a rough start the chance for a decent life.” His eyes canted up and he met Strange’s cool blue/grey irises, “What d’you think?” he asked, “Is it crazy?”

Strange shook his head, “No, no it sounds very normal to me.” He heaved a deep sigh. “I have never been one for children myself. I have always been too selfish, too devoted to work and wanting to be the centre of attention to desire the thought of raising a family, however, I can see the reason for wanting a family, I can understand why you and Bruce would wish to have one together.”

Tony nodded, “It’s a good thought, a good dream. But unless we stop Thanos then it is only ever going to be a dream, never a reality.”

“Then we stop Thanos.” Strange said this with such finality, such conviction that it almost made Tony laugh. As if it would be a simple as that.

“I know we don’t have all the information.” Strange said, “But I believe that when you are united with the stone, you will know what to do. If the stone of unity is anything like the other infinity stones, and there is every reason to think that it is, then said stone is sentient and it will be able to guide you without difficulty.” With a rare look of kindness on his face, Strange reached out and lay a hand over Tony’s, offering support in the touch, “I believe you can do this Tony. You were born to do this. You have a power inside you, a power that will defeat Thanos and his army. I believe in you, we all believe in you, what you have to do is believe in yourself.”

Tony stared at Strange an involuntary smile quirking his lips, “You should become a therapist.” He deadpanned,

“Christ no!” Strange snorted, “My bedside manner leaves much to be desired, or so I am told. There was a reason I chose Neurosurgery,”

“Oh?”

“My patients were generally unconscious.”

*****

They made good time and landed at the coordinates that Tony had placed the temple at, setting the jet down and began to unload and set up a camp.

They had a large tent, where they set out seats, a table, bunks in case someone wanted to lay down, (They would be sleeping in the bunks in the jet) they set up a camp stove for cooking later, and laid out laptops and tablets on the table, along with several of the books that Loki and Strange had brought with them.

Clint made the call to the Compound to let everyone know that they had arrived safely, and shielded his eyes from the sun as he came out of the jet, looking around at the miles and miles of empty sand and blue sky.
“So, here we are.” He said turning left and then right and then back again, “Where do we start digging?”

Strange opened his mouth to reply but Peter beat him to the punch, “Maybe you guys should do that Scrying thing again.” He suggested, “Or maybe it’ll be like in The Mummy, where there is a huge gust of wind and it just blows the sand away and all these creepy voices start whispering.”

“You have seen far too many movies.” Strange sighed,

“Yeah, but don’t read aloud from an ancient books.” Clint cautioned, “We’ve got enough shit to deal with, without you guys bringing Imotep back from the grave!”

The look that Strange sent his way could have stripped paint from the wall, Peter snickered in amusement and Loki looked confused,

“Who is Imotep?” He asked,

“We’ll show you the movie when we get back to the compound,” Strange sighed, fearing that The Mummy would likely be mentioned a dozen or more times during their stay in the desert. He frowned, and looked around, “Where is Stark?”

The other three paused, suddenly realizing that Tony had vanished, “Damn, I’m gonna put a leash on him!” Clint cursed, hurrying out of the tent. Fortunately there was no wind and the foot prints Tony had left in the sand were still visible, so Clint and the others followed them, up and over a small dune.

Tony was down the other side, walking slowly through the sand. He didn’t turn or give any sign when they called his name, just continued on until he stopped and fell to his knees placing his palms on the sand.

Tony wasn’t hearing or seeing the others, his mind was in the past, thousands of years ago. Seeing Amonken’s desperate flight to the temple, which had stood proud against the sand, the onyx statue of Anubis looming high and menacing above the marble floor upon which they had run.

The pointed tips of Anubis’ ears had been scraping the ceiling, his long snout stretching out towards the temple, arrogant and commanding the obeisance of those who came to kneel before his majesty.

“Amonken’s, grant our souls passage to the afterlife, do not forsake our eternal spirits no matter what fate befalls our earthly remains.”

Amenken had whispered that just before he had been taken by the centurions and dragged outside to be murdered. His fear was not of death, but of his body and that of his companion not receiving the correct prayers and rites to guarantee them safe passage through the underworld, that without the rituals that their spirits would be lost, doomed to wander for eternity, unable to find peace.

Tony’s fingers sank into the sand, fisting it, Anubis was beneath him. He could see the statue perfectly in his mind. The roof that had once covered the temple had caved in, shattering the marble floor as it had fallen, but the statue had remained whole, Anubis still remained standing, his proud head was beneath Tony right now.

“Tony?” Strange’s voice come to him as if in a dream and Tony inclined his head slightly towards the sorcerer,

“Mr Stark, are you okay?” Peter asked, his voice wobbling, sounding afraid.
“I’m fine.” Tony breathed, and frowned, the worlds having not sounded right, he cleared his throat and spoke again, only to continue to speak strangely,

“Uh.. what the fuck?” Clint asked, looking to Strange, “Is this something you did?”

Strange gave Clint a dirty look, “Hardly.”

“What the fuck is happening?” Tony cried, only he didn’t say it in English, but in some language he’d never heard before, and if, judging by the frown on his face, neither had Loki.

“Okay, I know I say a lot about movies, but, that sounded like the shi… I mean stuff that Imotep said in the Mummy.” Peter said, “Ancient Egyptian,”

“Indeed.” Strange murmured curiously,

“Oh great, now I’m babbling in tongues?” Tony cried, continuing to speak in Ancient Egyptian, “Fix me!” he demanded of Strange who just shrugged helplessly,

“I’ll have to call Wong.” He said, he paused and looked around, “Is this where we should dig, by any chance?” he asked and Tony nodded, deciding not to speak, “You are certain?” he held up his hands in surrender at the murderous look that Tony threw at him, “Alright, lets get started then. Clint, go and get the JCB, Loki, Peter, get the shovels, and Tony…” he sighed, “I’ll try and fix this.”

Tony grunted and kicked at the sand,

“At least it’ll be quiet while Stark is unable to speak English.” Loki said, rather impressed that All Speak did not translate it, one of the few languages it did not apparently.

“Even quieter if you stay silent too.” Clint muttered jogging back to the jet and cursing the sweat that had already built up, they hadn’t even started the hard work and he was already boiling, damn the desert heat.

*****

If you like it then you should have put a ring on it, don’t mad when you see that he wants it, if you like it then you have put a ring on it.

This was the sound that greeted Strange as he phoned Wong at the Sanctum.

“Enjoying Beyonce?” he asked, the smirk on his face translating into his words,

“Who?” Wong asked, just to be perverse,

“Don’t troll me Wong,” Strange said, “It doesn’t work, anyway I need your help.”

“Don’t tell me you have resurrected a Mummy already!”

Strange rolled his eyes, because really? How many more Mummy references would there be?

“Stark has inexplicably started speaking Ancient Egyptian.”

“Ah.”
“Ah what? Ah, you know what is happening, ah, you know how to fix it?”

“Both.”

“Wong!”

“Stephen have patience.” Wong said, making Strange growl in annoyance. “I suspect that Stark has made a deep connection with his past self and it is causing him to speak in the tongue of his past life. There is nothing to be done for it and it will fix itself given time.”

Strange exhaled loudly through his nose, “So I have got to tell the most temperamental Billionaire in world, that his speech impediment will fix itself and he just has to be patient.”

“Yes. Instruct him in this, it will be a good lesson for you at the same time!”

“I hate you at times.” Strange grumbled, looking up as he heard the JCB engine starting up, “Wong, I’ve to go, I’ll call you later if anything develops.”

“Please do, and Stephen?”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t read from any book!”

Swearing in Latin Strange ended the call and made his way back out of the tent, following after Loki and Peter who’d carried the shovels up and over the dune, while Clint drove the JCB after them. He’d barely reached the peak of the dune when he heard Peter give a cry of alarm, and saw Tony fall to his side on the sand and start to convulse.
“Get him on his side!” Strange shouted as they ran to Tony, Peter was the first to reach the Billionaire and rolled him over onto his side, dodging his flailing limbs as Tony’s body writhed in the sand.

“I don’t want to hurt him!” Peter cried, looking to Strange in alarm as the Wizard reached them with Loki and Clint,

“Just keep him on his side,” Strange said, pulling a pen from his pocket to push into Tony’s mouth and stop him from biting his tongue.

“He is seeing something,” Loki said, frowning as he lay his hands on Tony’s head, “His mind is open.”

“A vision?” Clint asked, panting from running in the heat, “They’ve never caused a convulsion before,”

“He’s never been in such close contact with the Stone of Unity before,” Strange said, “No doubt it is amplifying the effects.”

“So what do we do?” Peter snapped, hating the sight of his beloved mentor thrashing around in the sand,

“We wait it out,” Strange replied.

In his mind Tony was half way across the universe, on Nowhere. He saw the Guardians confronting Thanos, being fooled by the illusion he had created, having gained the stone of reality and was bending it to his will.

They fought, Drax gave his all against the Titan, but it was all in vain and at the crucial moment, though she had begged him to, Quill could not murder the woman he loved allowing Thanos to escape with Gamora, heading now for Vormir to get the soul stone.

Through orange and gold mists, falling like a shooting star from the heavens, Tony saw the Soul stone in its constant uninterrupted descent towards a calm pool beneath an amber sky. High upon a sheer cliff face of black rocks he saw a dark figure moving through the shadows, a spirit bound for eternity to this place, having tried and failed to gain the prize he sought.

The figure turned, the hood falling back and Tony caught a glance of their face, their gaunt, and skeletal, bright red face.

With a cry of alarm Tony sat up spitting out the pen that Strange had wedged between his lips and panted in the sand.

“What the hell?”
“We were kind of wonder the same thing.” Clint said, relieved by the fact that Tony was at least speaking English again and not ancient Egyptian.

“What did you see?” Loki demanded, getting right to the point.

Tony shook his head and groaned, his nose wrinkling as an acrid smell hit it, “Oh for the love of God, I peed?”

“You had a convulsion.” Strange told him, “Loss of bladder control is normal.”

“No, me peeing myself is not normal, I haven’t done that since I was like…. I don’t know when, a really long time ago.”

“Like fifty years?” Peter asked and gulped as Tony glared at him,

“I’m not fifty.” Tony said, “Forty eight, get the age right brat.”

Loki cleared his throat, “If I might cut in, as riveting as this chat is, what did you see?”

Tony sighed heavily and bit at his lips, sucking the skin into his mouth and pressing it hard against his teeth. “Stark?” Strange prompted,

“He has the reality stone.” Tony whispered. “The guardians were too late, he’d already attacked and taken it. He’s captured Gamora, he’ll take her to Vormir to get the soul stone, and meet the guide who will tell him how to do so.” Tony looked up and offered Strange a bitter smile, “You’ll never guess who the guide is, who’s been trapped there for all time.”

“Who?” Clint asked,

“Cap’s old friend, Red Skull.”

*****

They went back to the camp, Tony wanted to wash and change his clothes. His head was throbbing so much that even his eyes were hurting with it. Strange administered a powerful pain killer that would also act as a sedative. He and Peter guided Tony to a bunk and got him to lay down, laying a blanket over him and left the air conditioning blowing a cool breeze over his skin.

“Will he be alright Mr, I mean Dr Strange,” Peter asked looking worriedly at Tony, “Will the Stone fix him when he gets it?”

“Fix him?” Strange asked,

“Yeah, you know, stop all the visions and the headaches and everything? It’ll make him strong right, make him healthier?”

Peter looked at Strange with such naïve hope in his eyes that it nearly brought tears to Strange’s he rested a hand on Peter’s shoulder and guided him away from the bunks so Tony could rest.

“He will be able to access all of his powers when he has the stone.” Strange explained to Peter, “He will learn to control the visions, it will not exhaust him to use his powers so much as it is now as he will build up stamina, but it will not restore his health.” Strange sat down in one of the seats with a
groan and Peter sat opposite him.

“Magic can do a lot of things, but undoing medical matters? Not usually, and Stark’s body has endured a great deal of injury over the years.”

“But, but it brought him out of his coma.” Peter stammered,

“It did, but it couldn’t undo the damage to his body, it did not rebuild the lost muscle or restore the leeching of his bones, it cannot undo the trauma to his heart which lead to him becoming Iron Man.” Strange gave a wistful smile, “It cannot return his youth to him, nothing can do that.”

Across the deck Clint was on the coms speaking to the compound and reporting what had happened.

“Tony says that scrotum face is on his way to get the soul stone right now, that’s the last one Colonel, then he’s on his way here and he’ll be after Vision’s stone and the time stone.”

On the screen Rhodey sighed heavily and dipped his head forward, “Understood,” He said, looking back up, “How is Tony doing?”

Clint didn’t bother to lie, for which Rhodey respected him, “He’s experiencing some pretty messed up shit since we got here, was speaking Ancient Egyptian not to long ago,”

“Ancient Egyptian huh? Well that’s a new one.”

“At least we’re pretty sure of where the temple is, or Tony is sure of it, so we can start digging right away.” Deciding the change the subject Clint grinned at the screen, “How are Cap and Bruce doing with Tony gone, still squaring off every five minutes?”

Rhodey rolled his eyes, “They subjected each other to running the full assault course and then spent two hours “Sparring” he made air quotes at the word sparring since they had proceeded to beat the living shit out of each other. “Oh and Scott and Nightwing have started a prank war on everyone, so far we’ve had slime bombs dropping on us when we’ve walked through doors, salt in the sugar shaker, icing sugar in the pockets of clothes, and Natasha is trying to wash food dye out of her hair, bright green food dye.”

Clint couldn’t help it, he doubled over with laughter imagining the stoic Black Widow with bright green hair and the cool, collected Bruce Wayne (When not being territorial over Tony) trying to scrub slime off his skin.

“Oh and in a fit of temper Toby set the curtains on fire again.” Rhodey added, “I think he’s sulking because Tony’s not here to play with him,”

“Sounds like fun.” Clint said,

“It’s really not.” Rhodey stated, “I’m gonna go, give Tony my best,”

“Will do,” Clint replied cutting the connection, he sat for a few moments and then got to his feet and began to walk through the ship, passing by Strange and Peter, “I’m gonna make a start on shifting the sand,” He said, “With another stone down, time really isn’t on our side.”

“We’ll help.” Peter said, getting to his feet with youthful enthusiasm, Strange to rose and looked to Loki who made no attempts at moving,
“Are you coming?” Clint asked him and the God of Mischief merely rose a dark eyebrow, “Should not someone stay with Stark, he may have another fit and need assistance.”

While Loki was clearly trying to get out of doing manual labour, he did have a point, it really wouldn’t be a good idea to leave Tony alone there even though they wouldn’t be far away. “Very well.” Strange said, “But you needn’t think you are getting out of the digging entirely.”

Loki smirked at him, “Perish the thought Sorcerer.” Loki beamed a self satisfied smirk at them as they made their way out in the heat of the desert and sat himself back down into the comfortable seat, stretching out and putting his hands behind his head to enjoy a nap.

*****

Compound.

Rhodey reported the news to the others about Thanos having the Aether and being on his way to Vormir where he would get the Soul Stone. He didn’t bother mentioning Red Skull, that the demented sadist’s spirit had been trapped there seemed irrelevant to the situation, what they needed to do was to try and buy Tony and the others time to get the Stone of Unity.

“Can we contact Thor?” Sam asked, “He’s in Nidavelier getting a weapon, right?”

“He is and no we can’t,” Rhodey replied, “We can’t even get in touch with the guardians, they are too far out for us to make contact.” He paused and looked to Carol, “At least for us.”

Carol met his gaze understanding what he meant immediately, “You want me to go and find the guardians.”

“Yes, and get them to Vormir, either to get the stone before Thanos and destroy it, or at least to slow him down some.”

“Is that wise?” Steve asked, “Sending another alley off world?”

“We need to buy time,” Rhodey replied, “For Tony to find the seventh stone.”

“We should make ready too.” Bruce growled, his voice only an octave above the Bat Voice, “If Thanos is close to the soul stone then it would stand to reason that he would send forces to earth in preparation for his own arrival. We need to be ready for that.”

The Avengers straightened up as if standing to attention, the expression stoic and resolute in the determination to meet whatever threat Thanos sent head on and defeat it, or die trying.

“It will likely be the Black Order who herald him.” Carol warned them, “Ebony Maw often acts as herald, and Glaive has commanded his armies in the past.”

“From now on we sleep in shifts.” Rhodey commanded, “Twelve hours on and twelve hours off. If you can’t sleep then rest and conserve your energy because you’re gonna need it, keep training moderate from now on, and I want everyone ready to go at a moments notice. If you can’t get ready
in under five minutes start practicing now, because one extra minute could be the difference between a civilian living or dying.”

Murmurs of agreement went through the team. The founding members were well versed in getting ready on the fly, as were Batman and Nightwing, but both Hope and Scott had to get their suiting up time down.

As Carol headed off into space, heading for Nowhere to find the Guardians, the Avengers split into two teams.

Rhodey, Steve, Bucky, Scott, and Natasha on one team, Bruce, Dick, Hope, and Sam on the other. Rhodey sent the second team to get some rest, although Hope was going to make use of some of her down time to make her suiting up quicker, as was Scott when his down time came.

Meanwhile Rhodey alerted Wakanda to let T’Challa know what was happening, urging the King to have full armed guards around Vision at all times as Thanos would undoubtedly be seeking him out to get the Mind Stone.

Sat in the command room Rhodey sank back into his seat with deep sigh. This was not first time he’d been in command. He was a USAF Colonel, he’d commanded before now, lead on missions, had even had to make the calls that no one wanted to, the ones that cost lives in order to save many more. Those haunted him, would always haunt him, but such is the price of command.

This however, this was different. This was the fate of the entire Universe hanging in the balance. How could he, how could anyone truly know if they were making the right call when so many lives were at stake?

He didn’t envy Tony, he was struggling under the weight of his responsibility, but really everything was hanging on Tony finding the stone and being able to use it. How his friend hadn’t had a complete nervous break with the pressure Rhodey didn’t know, hell, he didn’t know if they were going to be able to come through all this at all.

The only thing he could do right now was hope and pray that what they were doing would be enough.

*****

As he slept Tony dreamed. He saw himself older than he was now, grey and white haired, softened with the added pudge of middle age, and looking more relaxed and at peace than he could ever recall himself being.

His dream self made his way out of house besides a lake, going down to a child’s tent that was set up on the grass.

Out of the tent sprung a small child of perhaps four years wearing an Iron man mask on her head that was slipping off and wielding a batarang in her hand.

“Define lunch or face the wrath of Iron Bat!” she solemnly declared.
Tony’s dream self couldn’t help but to grin at her, taking the mask off her head and revealing her perfect face, which he kissed, “You know you’re not supposed to play with these things, little bat, where did you get them, hmm?”

“The garage,” the girl replied, “I found them, and I need them, I’m gonna be a superhero like you and Papa, I’m the Iron Bat!”

“Are you indeed?” Tony said lifting her up and balancing her on his hip, “Well then little Bat, how about some lunch to build up the muscles you’ll need, do you want what bats eat, maybe some rodents and bugs?”

“No!” The girl squealed her face screwing up in disgust,

“No? oh well, how are you going to be a bat then?” Tony asked her, “Will you hang upside down like they do?” he proceed to turn her upside down making her shriek with laughter as her fingers sunk into the grass.

“Hey, you two, lunch is getting cold,” Came Bruce’s voice from the house, he too was older, his hair grey and longer than he tended to wear it now, a relaxed and contented expression was on his face as he took in Tony and their daughter, “And what are we doing?” he asked,

“I’m teach our little Bat how to hang upside down,” Tony said, pretending to drop her and making her squeal and squirm as he bounced her, “She’s going to be a superhero you know?”

“Is that right?” Bruce asked, as Tony lifted her upright and smoothed her hair back out of her eyes, her face was flushed and her eyes were dancing with merriment as she sat on Tony’s hip, “Well then, lets have our future superhero tackle lunch, what do you say to cheese burgers Morgan?”

“Best lunch ever!” Morgan replied, as Tony carried her to Bruce she leaned over the kissed his cheek before squirming free and running into the house with the kind of speed only children were capable of.

“I never thought I could ever be this happy,” Tony murmured leaning into Bruce who wrapped his arms around him, holding him close, “I never thought I would find such peace in domesticity,”

“Nor me,” Bruce admitted, “And yet I’ve never felt more contented with life as I do now.”

“Come on!” Came Morgan’s impatient voice from inside the house, “Stop smooching already!”

Bruce rose and eyebrow while Tony laughed, “Smooching?”

“She’s been spending too much time with Dick.” Bruce sighed, leading Tony into the house, “Far too much time.”
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tony hadn’t just made a Darlek Roomba or a the gauntlets for Strange during his time between returning from Honeymoon and going to Egypt. He’d been making new suits. One for Peter that had gone to Egypt with them and one for Bruce, which the Gotham Bat was admiring.

Tony had kept the basic structure of the Bat’s suit but he had upgraded it significantly. This suit was not just advanced Kevlar it was interactive and adaptive. It had a visual interface built into the cowl that would allow Bruce to scan the areas he was in and the enemies he was fighting, he’d be able to take detailed scans of his enemies bodies, learn strengths and weaknesses, see concealed weapons and be able to adapt accordingly.

There were grapple hooks in the gauntlets and collapsible batarangs that came from the belt. Tony had kept the design of the cape, it would still act as a glider, but he had made another upgrade and added some basic repulsors to the boots which would act as propellers when used with the cape.

The rest of the suit had been upgraded to the most resilient Kevlar that Tony could produce with added protection under the cowl for his skull and the breast plate.

A slither of Bruce’s pride chaffed at Tony thinking he would need extra protection but the realist in him understood this for the gesture it was both Tony wanting to do everything he could to protect the man he loved and the fact that Bruce’s normal suit may not be enough for going up against Thanos.

“Friday, is a training room free?” he asked running his finger tips over the cowl, “I want to try this out and get a feel for it before taking it into battle.”

“Training room three is a available batsybaby!” Bruce rose an eyebrow, “Where did that come from?”

“The Boss insisted.”

“Of course he did.” Bruce sighed and started as something bumped into his foot,

“Exterminate, exterminate!”

“Hi Deejay, having fun?”

“Exterminate!”

“Great.”

Bruce took the new suit to the gym and began to put it through its paces, getting a feel for the new tech and becoming comfortable with the difference in weight, Tony had tried to keep it as close to the current weight of his previous suit which with all the gear was an impressive twenty pounds, but
with the additional armour on the chest and helmet he couldn’t stop adding some extra weight which
Bruce had to accustom himself to. For an average person this would take weeks of effort and
training, but for Bruce who had trained and honed his body to the peak of efficiency it only took six
hours of hard training for him to get himself used to it and able to perform all of his moves.

Sweating, aching, and exhilarated Bruce headed to the shower to freshen up finding Jet on the bed.
The cat yawned when he saw Bruce and stretched, rolling over onto his back to expose his belly,
“Missing Tony?” Bruce asked, running his fingers through the soft warm fur, “Me too.” He sighed
sitting down on the bed and continuing to fuss the cat, “He’s not been gone very long but already I
feel like I’m missing a part of myself. But, what he’s doing his very important so we’ve got to be
strong and patient.” Jet looked up at Bruce with large amber eyes and made a trilling noise, rubbing
his cold wet nose against Bruce’s wrist to encourage more fuss,

“And here I am talking to a cat about my issues.” Bruce said with a deprecating sigh, giving Jet one
more belly rub he got to his feet and headed into the bathroom, remembering to check the shampoo
and body wash for food dye since he didn’t want to be washing some ridiculous colour out of his
hair as Natasha had.

However instead of using his own body wash Bruce opted to use Tony’s so he could smell his
husband on his skin in his absence, and used Tony’s shampoo and conditioner for the same reason.

“You’re becoming a sap in your old age.” He chided himself, turning off the shower and wrapped a
towel about his waist while scrubbing his hair dry with another. He ran his hand over the mirror
taking away the condensation and stared at his reflection. Taking in the deepened lines on his
forehead, between his eyes, under his eyes, and around his mouth. He looked good for his age, very
good considering his lifestyle and the number of times he’d been hit in the face, and he hadn’t
resorted to botox or other forms of cosmetic treatment to try and turn back the clock or at least slow it
down for a while.

However, despite being able to admit that he was a handsome man, Bruce saw the signs of age upon
himself, felt it too in his body, the way his joints ached all the time these days, his knees killing him
when it was cold and damp, he didn’t heal so quickly from injuries anymore, how a lack of sleep
captured up with him much faster than it had ten years earlier.

Under his skin his body bore the signs of his advancing years and brutal life of crime fighting far
more so than his face did, for which he was lucky. The cartilage was all but worn away, every
ligament had been repeatedly torn, every muscle pulled and strained over and over again, every bone
fractured if not broken at least once, there was not a single part of his body that had not sustained
injury and all of it was taking its toll on him.

Bruce knew he couldn’t go on indefinitely, as much as he might like to, as much as his pride would
like him to, he couldn’t do it, his body would not let him do it. If he tried to carry on when he was
already feeling the burn then he would inevitably regret it, when his body failed to move fast enough
and he took an injury that he couldn’t come back from. As much as admitting that his body just
couldn’t do this anymore stung at his vanity Bruce knew it was for the best. Besides which, he
wouldn’t just be his own life and limb he’d be endangering by trying to soldier on, it would be the
innocents he was trying to protect.

Tony’s idea of retirement after Thanos appealed to Bruce more and more, especially as he found
himself limping back to the bedroom, his ankles stiff and aching.

“One last fight and then I hang up the cape.” He said aloud making Jet trill and pad over to him to
continue the fuss he’d been getting, “One more time and then I’m done.”
Egypt.

The JCB uncovered two thirds of the statue of Anubis before the ground became too unstable for the weight and Clint had to take it out at which point they began to dig manually with shovels, filling buckets of sand and moving them back on a rope system as they dug deeper into the sand.

Tony and Clint secured lines from Anubis’ head so they could scale down into the remains of the temple that they were slowly but surely uncovering. Parts of the marble roof that had collapsed slowed their progress and while Strange tried to send the huge slabs through portals he found that his magic wouldn’t work, he couldn’t make the portals appear on the temples grounds, a dampening effect from the spells cast to protect the Stone of Unity.

This meant that they had to shift them the hard way, securing ropes about the slabs and hauling them out one at a time while shoring up the sides of the ground they’d uncovered or they risked being buried in the sand.

The marble slabs were not the only things they found as they dug, artefacts were unearthed from the sands, canopic jars that were cracked, jugs that had likely contained sacred oils, other broken and chipped pottery, some rusted swords and knives, even jewellery that had likely been left as offerings to Anubis to grant safe passage into the underworld for loved ones.

They worked from dawn until eleven am when the sun got too hot, then they took a break, going into the shade to rest, eat, and drink plenty, before heading back down at two pm to start work again and not finishing until nightfall.

At nightfall they built campfires to sit around, the desert air becoming cool as the sun disappeared. Peter insisted on toasting marshmallows as they sat around the fire despite the fact that Strange insisted this was not a camping expedition.

“Do you think there’s a body part in these jars?” he asked looking at the canopic jars they’d collected, “Like hearts and livers and such?” His eyes widened, “Maybe there is brains in one of them!”

Clint had just taken a bite of marshmallow and froze, glaring at Peter for putting him off.

“They removed the organs and put them into jars?” Loki said looking perplexed, “A most odd custom.”

“Uh huh and they did with such skill that the bodies were barely damaged.” Peter enthused, “Especially the brains, that was really clever. They would take red hot pokers and shove them up the nose and get the brains attached and pull them out of the nose.”

Clint set his marshmallow down, giving up on it with a sigh.

“How gruesome.” Loki said with a grimace,

“You would be dead when this was done.” Tony assured him, “The Ancient Egyptians had very
elaborate funeral rites, I think it took seventy days for the bodies to be prepared to be put into the tombs. They had to be embalmed, the organs removed and sealed in the jars, prayers had to be said and the bodies wrapped in gauze. The Pharaohs spent their lives preparing for their deaths, building elaborate and lavish tombs that were more like palaces for them to be buried in, and would take their worldly possessions with them as they believed they would need them in the afterlife. That’s while the royal tombs were so often robbed, because they were filled with riches.”

“The punishment if they were caught was brutal.” Strange said, “And many of the tombs were booby trapped to prevent grave robbery.”

“Then why take the risk?” Loki asked,

“Well if you’re a starving slave you’ll do anything to better your position in life I guess.” Tony said, “But you see the Pharaohs weren’t just Kings to their people, they were worshiped as if they were Gods,”

Loki smirked, “I rather like the sound of these Pharaohs.”

“Don’t go getting ideas.” Clint grumbled, “They all died out, partly from inbreeding.”

“Whoa, just think, Mr Stark, your ancient persona was probably the child of a brother and sister!” Peter put in, Tony sighed,

“Thanks kid, I so needed to think about that.” Tony lay back, folding his arms under his head and stared up at the clear sky above him, the vast stretch of stars across the sky, somewhere out there Thanos was heading to the Soul stone, somewhere Thor was trying to make a weapon capable of killing him, and somewhere Captain Marvel was traveling to meet the guardians.

In the face of so much vast expanse of stars and worlds out there in the universe Earth seemed very small and very vulnerable, facing impossible odds, what chance the human race have if the Asgardians could not defeat Thanos and his army?

Without the Unity Stone none. Everything rested on that, on finding it and Tony being able to use it and for its power to be enough against the Infinity Gauntlet.

But what if it wasn’t?

Chapter End Notes

So I'm wondering, what would people like to see after Thanos is defeated. Tony and Bruce adopting Morgan, Pepper surrogating, or a magical Mpreg?
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Holy shit we're at forty chapters!

Thank you for all the comments on whether or not I should do an Mpreg of this. The majority vote is Mpreg so that is what I'll be going with. Here's another question, should Tony get pregnant with both Morgan and Damian so they are twins?

Egypt.

The rose early, before dawn so they could get on with work before the heat got too oppressive.

Between them they continued to move away the sand and open up more of the temple, shifting out broken marble and shoring up the space they had opened so it wouldn’t collapse on them.

“How big was this temple?” Peter asked, after they had unearthed several square feet beneath the sands, he stared up at the colossal statue of Anubis that loomed above himself and Tony, a dark, menacing presence that made his shiver.

“Pretty big I think.” Tony replied, filling another bucket with sand to be taken up top, “But we don’t need to uncover it all, we just need to find where the entrance to the tomb is.”

“And I don’t suppose you know where that is, do you?” Clint called down from the surface, he was on his hands and knees looking down at them and worked the ropes as Tony tied the bucket onto the pulley system for the sand to be taken up top.

“Heh, it’s kind of like losing something and asking, “Where did you see it last?” Peter pointed out with a grin that fell from his face as he screamed and shot up the ladder at the speed of light as a scorpion scuttled across the unearthed floor. As the colour returned to his face and his heart stopped feeling like it was going leap out of his body, Peter scowled at Tony and Clint who were doubled over laughing at him. “They are poisonous.” He sniffed, jumping back down and taking care that the scorpion hadn’t brought any friends with it.

“Ohhh don’t worry spiderling, I’ll keep you safe from the big bad bugs.” Tony teased Peter, ruffling his hair and sending sand flying everywhere. He sighed and looked around, trying to recall the lay out of the temple from his visions and dreams, where the passage way to the tomb beneath was.

It wasn’t next to Anubis, it had been further away. Closing his eyes he pictured himself as Amenken, sealing the doorway to the tomb and hiding it, then running with his companion to go and pray before the statue of Anubis.

The statue had been on his right, he’d turned right to go to it and the statue had faced the rest of the temple, the snout of Anubis stretching out over the marble floor, with one clawed hand reaching out, curled into a fist as if the dark god were snatching the souls of those who prostrate themselves before him.
“Straight down from the snout of Anubis.” Tony whispered to himself, “Twenty paces and then turn to the left.”

“What?” Clint called, “What did you say?”

“I’m thinking out loud.” Tony replied, he gestured before him, “We need to clear twenty paces that way and then five paces to the left, that’s where the door is.”

“Are you sure?” Clint held up a hand in surrender when Tony shot him an unimpressed look, he looked over his shoulder at Stephen and Loki, “Hey, magic boys, get your asses down there, we’ve work to do.”

“Get your ass down here as well and let someone else work the ropes,” Tony called taking a pickaxe and started to break up the packed sand before him, “And get more planks, we’re going to need to shore this shit up unless you fancy being buried alive.”

“Oh I saw this movie about…”

“Zip it Spidey, no movie references.” Tony said cutting Peter off, “And I am so talking to your aunt about your choices in entertainment, it’s clearly having a bad influence on you.”

“Mr Stark!”

*****

Wakanda

In Shuri’s lab Vision lay on a medical examination table for what seemed like the thousandth time as Shuri and Banner worked to try and extract the Mind Stone from his head without damaging his brain.

The work was pains taking and slow going, and they were still running into continued problems as they went, one of which was a power source for Vision after the stone was removed. He did have a limited power source separate to the mind stone, but it was very limited and he would not be able to function for long periods without lengthy rests to recharge and the more of his abilities that he used the faster his energy levels would drain out, much like a smart phone’s battery.

“In all honesty the only thing I can think that will work long term is an arc reactor.” Banner said, as he and Shuri went through separating the ganglia and synapsis from the stone, since there were thousands of them inside Vision’s head it was taking a very long time, as they had to be so careful to avoid damaging his brain.

“That would give me a lengthy sustainable power.” Vision agreed, his voice perfectly neutral despite the fact his brain was being operated on, in fact the only sign that anything was being done to him at all were the tiny nerve twitches on his face every now and then. “I believe that I could last approximately half a century before the device broke down, which would be close to a human life span.”

Shuri paused and looked down at Vision, “You wouldn’t want to replace it?” She asked,
“I think not.” Vision replied, “What I know of this world, what I have learned of life, is that it is best when it is not indefinite. In fifty years it is likely that many of those whom I care for will have died, and while I could grow to care for others I have to consider the fact that I would only be repeating the process of caring for someone and losing them to time.”

“So having a limited time yourself will be a blessing.” Banner said, an understanding look on his face, “It'll also make you more human.”

“Indeed.” Vision agreed,

“How very Data of you.” Shuri commented with a small smile,

“You watch Star Trek?” Banner asked,

“Sure, I love those shows.” Shuri grinned, showing her perfect white teeth and reminding both Vision and Banner just how very young she was despite her remarkable genius. She turned serious again just as T’Challa entered the lab,

“How goes it, Sister, Dr Banner?”

“Slowly,” Banner replied, “And we need one of Tony’s arc reactors to replace the mind stone.”

T’Challa placed his hands behind his back and rocked on his heels, “I will contact the compound,”

“Soon Brother,” Shuri said, “It will be best if we can install the reactor quickly after separating the stone. The longer the delay the greater the risk of permanent damage to Vision’s cortex.”

T’Challa inclined his head in agreement, watching with fascination as Shuri worked, not pretending to understand the kind of things she was doing, her genius was far beyond his own comprehension.

“Has there been any word on Tony?” Banner asked, checking the readings on a holographic tablet,

“He is in Egypt with Dr Strange, Loki, Mr Barton, and Peter Parker.” T’Challa replied, “They have found the temple and are working to unearth it. However, Tony has had another vision and has reported that Thanos has gained a third infinity stone and is now going after the Soul Stone on Vormir.”

Banner sagged, his shoulders hunching, “That’s bad.”

“They have sent Captain Marvel, a new addition to the team to reach out to the Guardians in the hopes of slowing him down.” T’Challa offered, but even he knew it was milksop, they were now really playing against the clock and running out of time.

“Have you discovered any ways to destroy the Mind Stone?” Vision asked from the table,

“Viz..” Banner protested but Vision was adamant,

“Should Thanos take the stone it would destroy me anyway, Doctor Banner, I would like to hope that you and Princess Shuri will extract it before that, but if not, then I will willingly sacrifice myself for the greater good.”

Shuri paused and clasped Vision’s shoulder, “It will not come to that,” She said, “In any case, from the readings I have taken, there is no way we could destroy the stone, any infinity stone. It would take the power of one of them to destroy another, nothing else will work.”

“So there'll be no acts of self-sacrifice,” Banner sternly said to Vision, “Understood?”
“I believe so.” Vision agreed, and Banner smirked a little,

“Good, or I’d get your Father to talk some sense into you, and you know how Tony can rant when he wants to.”

“Indeed.” Vision replied, a genuinely fond expression crossing his face as he thought of Tony, his Father, then he paused and looked at Banner, “As you had a hand in my creation, Doctor Banner, if Tony is to be cast as my Father, would that make you my Mother?”

The look that came over Banner’s face had Shuri snorting through her nose and T’Challa stifling a chuckle behind his fist, he cleared his throat and gestured to the door, “I’ll go and make that call to the Colonel.” He said, still grinning as he headed out.

Shuri took several deep breaths trying to calm herself with giggles escaping her lips as she got back to her work.

Sighing heavily Banner looked down at Vision who was definitely smirking at him, “You’ve spent way too much time around Tony.”

*****

Deep Space.

“I’m going blow that raison coloured, gigantic nut sacks, head off his over grown shoulders!” Quill snarled, pacing back and forth in the Milano, he was sweating heavily and his jaw was aching from his clenching it for so long and his palms were covered in nail marks from where he kept clenching his fists.

“I’ll wring his fat neck, no, I’ll pop out his eyeballs and make him eat them, then I’ll cut off his testicles and shove them up his purple ass!”

“I’ll rip his heart out and eat it.” Drax grunted from the pilot seat, “And I’ll kick his name and take his ass!”

Quill paused, turning to stare at Mantis, “It’s the other way around.”

“I’ll take his ass and then kick his name?” She asked innocently and Quill just groaned before yelping as someone knocked on the view screen.

“What the hell?” He demanded, staring at the woman on the other side,

“It’s a woman.” Drax said, “A glowing woman.” Mantis scrambled out of her seat and went to Quill’s side, gripping his shoulders,

“Another Asgardian?”

Quill shrugged, staring at the woman as she pointed at the ship in the direction of the airlock, “I think she wants to be let in,”
“Do we let her in?” Drax asked, “It might be a trap.”

“From whom?” Quill asked, “Thanos would just kill us, not send a serious hot chick to see us. Now stop engines.” He headed for the airlock, wobbling and supporting himself on the hull of the Milano as the engines came to a stop. He opened the airlock, letting the woman inside the ship, then when the door was sealed he opened in the inner door and stood back to allow her into the ship.

“Thank you,” She said, “You must be Peter Quill. I’m Carol Danvers, Captain Marvel. I’ve come from earth with a message from Tony Stark about where Thanos is taking Gamora.”
“Vormir, you’re sure?” Quill asked as he charted the course into the navigation system at the helm,

“I am, or at least Tony is.” Carol replied, she stood behind Quill, her arms folded over her chest, her brows knitted together into a frown, “There is something very special about Tony Stark. I could sense it when I was around him, something utterly unique.”

“Yeah, the weird beard.” Quill grunted,

“He is most special, an ancient and enchanting soul.” Mantis said,

“The most impressive Human I have met.” Drax stated and Quill choked on his own spit and gaped at him in outraged betrayal,

“The most impressive Man? He’s just a rich dude with a few tricks up his sleeve.” Drax scoffed and shook his head,

“You are a Dude, Quill, Stark is a Man.”

Quill shook his head and turned back to the view screen, “This why I need Gamora. She’d be on my side, she doesn’t think Stark’s that great.”

“She was most impressed by his defeat of Thanos six years ago.” Mantis helpfully offered and Quill grit his teeth. First he had to listen to his so called friends praising Thor’s impressive physique, now he had to listen to them praising Tony Stark. What did he have to do to get some respect around here?

*****

On board Thanos’ ship Gamora sat with her knees pulled up to her chest. Chains bound her wrists preventing her from getting across the room and helping her sister, Nebula, who was in the agonizing stasis of being ripped apart.

Thanos had left her here after forcing the truth out of her, torturing Nebula before her to make Gamora speak, to make her reveal the location of the Soul Stone.

“I’m sorry.” She eventually said to Nebula, “I couldn’t not tell him. I couldn’t watch him do that to you and stand by doing nothing.”

“Weak.” Nebula rasped, she was unable to move her head, could barely move her jaw enough to force the words out of her mouth. Even as she did they came out strained and filled with pain.
“Proxima always said feelings make us weak.”

Gamora huffed out a breath and sniffed, holding back her tears, “She’s wrong.” She said, looking up at her sister, “Proxima is wrong. I have felt stronger and more alive since breaking with Thanos and being with the Guardians than I ever did before. Those feelings she claims make us weak actually make us strong, they give us the strength to fight for those we love.”

Nebula scoffed and groaned, “You love that pathetic fool Quill.”

“Yes.” Gamora smiled now, thinking of her “Pathetic fool and his pelvic sorcery.”

“I will stitch his scrotum to his face for not protecting you better.” Nebula declared,

“It’s not his fault.” Gamora said, “He did everything he could, but with the infinity stones Thanos is too strong.” She sighed and tipped her head back, looking up into the darkness of the ship, “And about to become stronger.”

“If he gets the soul stone he will be undefeatable.” Nebula whispered, “Then he has only to go to Terra for the Time and Mind stones and he will do it, he will destroy half of the universe.”

Gamora went to say that all was not lost, that Tony Stark still remained, the Seventh Stone might yet save them, but she bit her tongue. Thanos may be observing them, or have someone doing so, she could not afford to give away Stark’s secret. She sighed heavily and closed her eyes, silently praying for a miracle.

****

Egypt.

All of the team were down in the temple when the wind suddenly started picking up, blowing sand everywhere and threatened to bury them beneath the temple.

“The hell is that?” Clint bellowed, covering his mouth with a scarf that he had about his neck, “A sand storm?”

“I don’t think so.” Stephen whispered as a huge shadow fell over the dig site. “Something worse.”

“Thanos.” Loki whispered.

Everyone froze, staring at each other, unsure of how to proceed, they had made excellent progress in digging through the temple but were not there yet, they still had a way to go before they would reach where Tony said the door was.

“What do we do?” Peter asked, his youthful voice rising with his fear which he bravely tried to keep from showing on his face.

“We can’t risk a fight here, the ground is too unstable.” Strange said as sand continued to pour into the pit and the wooden beams groaned and wobbled precariously. “He or those who work for him are here for the Time Stone.” His hand went to the stone, running his fingers over it.
“Get out of here.” Tony ordered him, “All of you, get the hell out of here now.”

“What?”

“Stark we’re not leaving you,”

“Mr Stark that’s…”

“Strange is right, we can’t risk a fight here.” Tony said, ignoring their protests, he looked to Strange, “If you get far enough away from the temple can you make a portal and transport yourself and everyone back to the Compound?”

“Yes…”

“Then do it, the whole team will be there to support you.” Tony instructed him, he looked back at the wall of sand, “I’ll finish this myself.”

Loki stood up straighter regarding Tony with something close to respect. Resignation was on Strange’s face as he silently agreed with Tony over the logic of this. Peter looked torn between anger and tears, while Clint was shaking his head. “No.” He said, “I’m not leaving you.”

“Clint you have to go, all of you have to go. Buy me some time.” Tony insisted, flinching as did the others’ as a grating voice began to call out across the desert. “Please!” He hissed, “We don’t have the time to argue.”

Clint stepped away from the ladder and crossed his arms over his chest, “Then I suggest you stop arguing and accept that I am staying to help you and watch your back.”

Tony stared at Clint, their eyes meeting in battle of wills until Tony relented and nodded his head, “Very well.”

“Alright,” Strange said, “If we’re going, we should go.”

“I’ll give you some cover fire while you run,” Clint offered, “I can at least distract whomever that is above us.”

“The Black Order I should imagine.” Loki mused, “If you attack then it is likely he will send foot soldiers down here to kill you even when we have gone.” He eyed the planks holding the sides of the sand walls up, “You should collapse the tunnel we have made, entomb yourselves. That will buy you the time you need to reach the Seventh Stone.”

“And risk suffocating ourselves.” Clint snorted, “Great plan, Jackass.”

“Actually it is.” Tony said and Clint shot him an incredulous look, Tony shrugged, “We’ll need the time, he went to the ropes and began to undo them, destabilizing the wooden beams, “I’ll handle this, you guys go up.”

“Me first.” Clint said, readying his bow. He climbed the ladder easily, balancing with his feet spread wide in a rung as he crested the top, reaching up with his bow, an arrow notched at the ready. What greeted him was some kind of giant and a skinny, grey skinned, reptilian looking thing, which was the one talking.

“Rejoice, for you have been chosen to die in the service of Thanos.”

“Not friggin’ likely.” Clint hissed, he shoved an elbow into the sand, using it for leverage and
climbed the last few rungs, shoulder rolling as he reached the surface, taking cover behind Anubis’s snout and fired at the pair of beings. “Get the hell of our planet, assholes, Earth is closed today, come back sometime never.”

“Foolish mortal.” The smaller being hissed and with a snap of his grey fingers, Clint’s bow was snatched from his hands and tossed across the desert. “Surrender now, or I, Ebony Maw, Herald of Thanos, shall have Cull Obsidian crush your pathetic and worthless skull.”

Clint took out his side arm, checked the magazine and cocked the gun, “Shut your black stained mouth or I’ll put a bullet through it!” He yelled back, firing several shots that Maw deflected. “Tell me, have you been mouth-sexing a tar pit or something?” he glanced over his shoulder, Peter was out of the pit, as was Loki, and Strange was coming up the ladder. “Hurry the fuck up guys.” He hissed under his breath, shifting position to get a better shot, took aim and fired at Cull Obsidian.

The giant didn’t bother to avoid the shots, the bullets hardly impacted his flesh it was so thick, but Clint didn’t stop firing until he’d emptied the clip, by which time Strange, Peter, and Loki were running back to camp and the jet which they could use to get far enough away for Strange to use his powers.

“Kill him!” Maw ordered and Cull charged.

Holstering his gun, Clint scrambled back down the pit, not even bothering with the ladder, just slid down the ropes ignoring the burn on his palms as he went. “Now!” he yelled to Tony, who had not been idle, as soon as Clint reached him the genius pulled on the ropes, yanking out the support beams, causing the walls to cave in, burying them in a small space beneath the sands.

Above ground Cull stopped running at the statue head of Anubis and looked back to Maw who shrugged his shoulders, “He will die, and it is of no consequence, for the prize we seek is that way.” He gestured to Loki, Strange, and Peter, who were getting into the jet and setting the auto-pilot to get them into the air and away.

Cull snarled and kicked at the ground, “They live, I will kill them.”

“Very well.” Maw agreed, he tapped at his transporter and teleported back into the circular ship, which set off after the fleeing jet.

“Ohhh we’ve got company!” Peter cried seeing the rapidly approaching donut ship, “Just a few more miles.” Strange grunted as he worked his sling ring, waiting for the dampening spell to leave so he could form a portal, orange sparks flew about his fingers as the spell weakened, “A little more, a little more.” He gave a cry of triumph as the portal began to form, amplitifying it to encompass the entire jet, transporting them away from the skies of Egypt and Ebony Maw’s ship, taking them to the compound, where the auto pilot brought them into a shaky but safe landing.

Steve was the first one out of the door to meet them, his eyes wide and face pale, “We’ve got reports of an alien vessel in Egypt, and another trying to breech Wakanda.”

Strange nodded his head, “It’s Thanos’ Black Order, that battle has arrived on Earth.”
Chapter 42

Egypt.

It took several minutes for Tony and Clint to adjust to the dark which lessened when Tony turned his torch on, then they were just waiting for the sand to settled, coughing and blinking their grit filled eyes.

“Great plan.” Clint pant, spitting sand and spittle onto the ground, “Bury us alive.”

“Still alive aren’t you, what are you complaining about?” Tony shot back turning around as he got his bearings, “That way,” he said pointing to where they needed to dig.

“You sure?” Clint asked, taking his flask from his belt and using some of the water to clean his face before taking several deep drinks.

“Positive, and be sparring with that,” Tony said, “That and my flask are the only water we’ve got.”

Clint was about to respond when a loud thump came from over head and the ground shook. “I guess they left King Kong behind.” He commented, closing his flask and putting it back into his belt and replacing it with a trowel, “Let’s get moving.” He said, shifting to join Tony and start to dig through the sand.

*****

Compound.

They spoke as they moved. Everyone was in motion as Strange, Loki, and Peter walked through the compound.

“How many?” Bruce asked,

“Unknown, we only saw two of Thanos’ heralds, but they have a ship and I think we can expect that they have forces on board.” Strange replied,

“Chitauri?” Natasha asked, checking her gun clips and her widow bites.

“Certainly, as well as Leviathans and Outriders.” Loki said. “You should be aware it is Ebony Maw whom we are facing, possibly the most powerful of the Black Order.”

“Great.” Dick murmured,

“Do we have a time frame?” Rhodey asked, wanting to relay the information to the Government and start evacuations is necessary, although the Compound was well outside the any cities so if they could keep the fighting there then there might not be a need to move anyone.
“Impossible to say.” Strange said, “It could be hours, it could be minutes…” he trailed off at the sound of wind picking up reached his ears, “Or it could be right now.”

Everyone turned to look out of the windows as the sky darkened and everything not nailed down was swept up into the vacuum that the wind distortion was creating.

“Suit up.” Steve said, “Everyone, suit up and prepare to fight.”

****

Wakanda

Explosions boomed over Wakanda, the energy fields preventing the circular ship from entering Wakandan air space for the time being, but how long that would last was a question mark.

T’Challa ordered the entire Wakandan army to battle stations and lead the bulk of the army outside of the city to the plains to face Thanos’ forces when the shield fell, which at some point it would considering the onslaught that was being thrown against it.

“Brother?” Shuri asked worriedly from the lab where she remained with Vision,

“Keep working.” T’Challa ordered, he looked to Banner who was stood besides him, “Now might be the time for your other half to make an appearance, Doctor Banner.”

“Yeah, I figured.” Banner murmured taking off his glasses and putting them into his pocket, he stripped off his shirt and took several deep breaths, mentally stepping aside and letting Hulk take over.

As advanced as they were, the Wakandan’s couldn’t help but to watch in stunned awe as the Hulk appeared, Banner’s flesh turned green and his body expanding into the massive bulk of Hulk who grunted and slapped his chest.

“Doc… ah, Mr Hulk?” T’Challa asked, his voice high pitched than normal, there had not really been any protocol taught to him on how to address the Hulk during his education. He felt his heart skip a beat as the behemoth turned his gaze upon T’Challa, and the King had to fight to hold his ground, when every instinct in him told him to run.

“You will stand with us, help us protect Wakanda.”

Hulk grinned toothily at him, “Hulk Smash stupid Thanos.” He stomped his foot, creating an indent in the ground and making it shake.

“Good enough.” T’Challa said, pulling how mask over his face, and looked back to the energy shield that was taking one hell of a battering, as were the shields over head.

“My King, the shields over the city are weakening, we will lose them if this continues.”

“If the shields fall over the city they will be over run.” Okoye said, T’Challa nodded his head, “We open the shields here, a narrow gate for them to enter and we face them head on.” Okoye
straightened and worked her jaw, her expression becoming stoic as she turned to face the forces that were waiting to flood into Wakanda. Her hands tightened about her spear as she heard T’Challa give the order and her body tensed as the shields opened allowing the Chitauri, to pour into Wakanda.

“May Bast be with us all.” T’Challa whispered and then roared out the order to charge.

*****

Compound.

Ebony Maw stood alone once again and gave a grimace that might pass for a smile as he beheld the Avengers.

“Lay down your arms and my Lord Thanos may yet be merciful and grant you swift, painless deaths.”

Bruce straightened up, his eyes burned white/blue in the cowl, “I do not fear pain or death,” he growled, his voice modulated into the distorted snarl of the Bat.

Maw chuckled, “You will.”

“You are not welcome here.” Rhodey said, his face plate up for the minute but all of his weapons charged and aimed at Maw. “Leave now and we will not harm you.”

“You may leave,” Maw said, his eyes focusing on Strange who was flanked by Peter and Dick, as Wong was at the Sanctum protecting it. “The Stone bearer is my only goal here.”

As one Peter and Dick moved and placed themselves before Strange. “The Time Stone stays with Doctor Strange.” Rhodey said, “Leave now, that is your last warning.”

Maw chuckled and raised his hand which was signal for the forces on the ship that began to spill out in a colossal wave of Chitauri, outriders, and Leviathans.

“Well, here we go.” Bucky whispered and opened fire.

War Machine, Falcon, and Wasp headed up into the air to tackle the Leviathans, dodging the shots aimed at them firing back as the rest of the team fought the ground forces.

Bucky, Dick, and Natasha gave covering fire, staying to the rear for the time being as the rest of the Avengers headed into the fray.

Steve’s shield flew out, hitting and bouncing off Chitauri, slicing open their necks and heads before it came back around to his hand in time to be used as a battering ram and then slammed down into the back of a Chitauri’s neck as Steve used it for leverage, kicking a couple more Chitauri in the face and shoulder rolled over the impaled Chitauri, landed on his feet and brought the shield around to slam into another’s gut. Four Chitarui dropped dead at his feet as Bucky’s bullets hit them in perfect head shots, Steve’s eyes found Bucky’s across the battle field and he grinned at his friend before returning to the fight.
Peter’s agility had him leaping up and over the Chitauri, hopping across heads and webbing faces as he went, blinding the Chitauri and making them easy pickings for the rest of the Avengers, “Hey I’m closing in on that black mouth guy.” He called over the comms, webbing himself up onto a Leviathan, he ran across the things back and used a rope of webbing to swing down towards Ebony Maw who deflected him with a wave of his hand, sending Peter flying back towards the compound. The boy screamed in terror expecting to be splattered against the wall only to have additional legs come out of his suit and catch him, supporting his body and protecting him from the fall.

“Hey, I’ve got spider legs, Mr Stark gave me spider legs!” He cheered bouncing off the wall of the compound and down onto the back of an Outrider which snarled and tried to buck him, only serving to give Peter leverage to leap up onto another Leviathan and help Hope who was throwing everything she’d got into it’s wounded flank.

Rhodey sped overhead raining fire down on Ebony Maw, but could not penetrate the Alien’s shields, aborting before he got too close and turning his attention on several outriders, which he blasted out of existence. Falcon swept past him scooping up chitauri and flinging them across the battle field like trash.

“Strange!” Rhodey yelled over the Comms, “We can’t penetrate this creatures shields, we need your magic.”

“Working on it.” Strange replied, his voice eerily sounding like it was right inside Rhodey’s head rather than over the Comms.

“Need a hand?” a distorted voice asked, as Rhodey watched with surprise as Batman was boosted up into the air by repulsor boots that gave him enough thrust to use his cape to glide over the battle field, picking out Outriders and Chitauri, taking them out with Batarangs and their own firearms which Bruce had taken from them, he fired his repulors again, gaining more height and then shot out a grapple hook, locking onto Peter and Hope’s Leviathan, he sped up the wire and ran up onto it’s back, joining them as they fought off Chitauri and delivered blows to its side.

“Peter how much weight can you lift?” Bruce asked,

“Um, I’ve lifted a truck,” The boy replied

“Good enough.” Bruce said, grinning, which looked frightening with his cowl on, “Colonel, Wasp, Falcon, you need to concentrate your fire, do not engage until I give the word.”

“Gotcha Batman.” Falcon replied,

“What are we doing?” Peter asked yelping as Bruce took out a Chitauri with a batarang that had been creeping up behind him.

“Get your webbing around these metal rib bones,” Bruce instructed, securing a grapple about them for himself, “Now run to the otherside of this thing, pull as hard as you can and jump.”

“Jump?”

“Jump!”

Peter babbled incoherently as he did as instructed, helping Bruce wrench back the already broken metal rib, exposing the Leviathan’s interior for Wasp, Falcon, and War Machine to fire upon, until several explosions went off inside the thing and it became limp, tumbling to the ground and crushing many Chitauri and Outriders beneath it’s weight.
The Spider legs protected Peter while Bruce freed himself from the grapple, tucked, and rolled, rising onto his feet and flinching as two Chitauri dropped dead in front of him bearing arrows in their necks, he glanced over to Dick who saluted him, drawing out his escrima sticks and heading into the fight. Natasha had gone on ahead, using her widow bite and wrestling a Chitauri staff weapon to use. Bucky too had left the side and gone into the fray, his metal arm crushing the faces and bones of the Chitauri and his bullets never missing.

Loki’s daggers were drenched in blood as he tackled Chitauri after chitauri, his face was smeared in gore and his eyes shining with magic and exhilaration.

“Enjoying yourself?” Steve asked decapitating a Chitauri and sinking the shield into an Outriders gut,

“Starting too.” Loki replied, “But I have a definite prize in mind.” His gaze was on Ebony Maw, who dragged Strange up out of the battle, where he’d been using magic to defeat his opponents, sending through portals to the dark dimension, or severed half of their bodies closing the portals around them among other things. Suddenly he was yanked up and flew across the battle field, the Cloak unable to stop it even as it pulled against the force.

Strange braced himself as he was dropped down before Ebony Maw, wincing as the creature grasped his hair and yanked his head up.

“I would have been merciful had your not fought.” Maw informed him,

“Somehow I doubt that.” Strange spat in return, Maw bared his teeth preparing to strike when suddenly all of his fingers in Strange’s hair were yanked backwards and snapped making him howl in pain, he was then flipped over and slammed face down into the ground and Scott in the Antman armour appeared.

“You okay?” he asked Strange,

“Perfectly,” Strange replied just as an Outrider slammed into Scott throwing him off Maw. Scott was carried across the battle field until he grew to ten foot, grabbed the creature and another Outrider and smashed their heads into each other.

Using his good hand, Maw pushed himself up, “You will pay for that…” He got no further as a dagger hit the side of his throat cutting off his vocal cords, Strange turned and saw Loki approaching a murderous look on the Trickster’s face.

“This is for my people!” Loki roared, he charged at Maw, leaping into the air and brought his remaining dagger down onto Maw’s head, sinking the blade through the creature’s skull and into his brain. Bracing his boot on Maw’s head he pulled his bloody daggers free and looked to Strange who nodded in acknowledgement then the two turned back to the battle, which even without Maw to lead the forces, was still far from over.

*****

Vormir.

Gamora stumbled on the uneven rocky ground, refusing to touch Thanos, and hating to look at him as he forced her to lead the way to the Soul Stone.
“Let us hope for your Sister’s sake you are telling the truth.” Thanos said, as he followed her up the steep rocky path leading up into a dark foreboding mountain, where the Soul Stone supposedly resided.

On the ship above, Nebula played dead as one of the Chitauri came to check on her, lashing out when it’s guard was down and breaking it’s neck. Swiftly she freed herself from the stasis field, her body parts coming back together piece by agonising piece until she was whole once more.

She went for the nearest Comm to contact Quill’s ship.

“Mantis, if you can hear me, Listen. Thanos has taken Gamora to Vormir, I am in orbit over Vormir, he is down there with her.” Static crackled and then there came a response from Mantis,

“We are already on our way to Vormir, Nebula, we’ll be there soon.”

Nebulas allowed herself a small smile, “Tell that fool Quill if anything happens to my sister I’ll rip his skin off and wear it as clothing.”

“Oh Come on!” Quill cried, then Nebula ended the call. Limping and gritting her teeth as her leg pieces snapped back into place and settled, she made her way to the teleporters, killing any Chitauri who got in her way and beamed herself down onto Vormir.

Quill and his idiots might be on the way but she wasn’t waiting for them, her sister was in danger and she would do everything she could to protect her.
Chapter 43

Vormir.

It was a lengthy climb to the summit of the mountain where the Soul Stone was said to reside. As fit as she was Gamora was panting and tired when they got up there, finding nothing but barren rocks in the formation of what might be have once been a temple of some sort. It was a ruin now, having long since been abandoned and allowed to crumble apart.

“Welcome.” A disembodied voice said, seeming to come from all around the pair. The air shifted with disturbance, Gamora’s hair blew in the wind and she felt goose bumps rising on her skin. She turned her head, her eyes searching for the disturbance until figure took shape before herself and Thanos and welcomed them again by name.

“You know us?” Thanos asked,

“I am cursed to know all whom come here.” The figure said, “I am the guardian of the Soul Stone and your guide.”

“Then the stone is here, it is true.” Gamora asked, crossing her arms over her chest,

“It is.” The figure confirmed. “I tried once to harness it’s power myself, but I could not, I did not have anything that could fulfil the price it demands.”

“Price?” Thanos asked, going to the edge of the cliff and looking down into the darkness below,

“The Soul Stone extracts a high price, a soul for a soul, so that they who seek to claim it understand its power.” The figure explained, “To grasp the stone you must be prepared to make a sacrifice.”

Gamora felt her mouth go dry as Thanos’ eyes turned upon her. A sacrifice, a soul. Of course. Never mind his claims of having loved her, of making her his daughter, in order to take what he wanted he would end her life without a seconds hesitation.

“No.” She whispered taking a step back and balled her fists ready to fight, as futile as that might be, “I am sorry little one.” Thanos said, actually sounding contrite, which startled a laugh from Gamora, “Sorry? You think that covers it? You are planning on slaughtering half of the universe!”

“For the betterment of the other half.”

“Who are you to decide that?” Gamora all but screamed at him.

“I am the only who can see it, who is prepared to do what needs to be done.” Thanos said with grave sincerity, “Half must be sacrificed so that the other half can live, a balance restored to the universe which will be grateful for my actions.”

“Don’t count on it.” Gamora hissed backing away before breaking into a run, but of course she could not escape Thanos now, not with the Reality Stone, Power Stone, and Tesseract in his possession, all he needed to do was close his fist and reality would bend about them, bringing running into his
massive arms.

“No!” She screamed, ripping the decorative knife from him and tried to plunge it into her own belly, but instead of blood pouring out bubbles floated up into the air.

“I am truly sorry little one.” Thanos said again, taking hold of her shoulders and dragging her to the edge of the cliff, “If there was another way I would take it, but there is not.”

Gamora’s mouth opened in a silent scream, her throat too tight to let any sound escape as she began to plunge to her death. She could see Thanos, see the Monster who had been her Father for so long standing above her, looking down on her, actually having the gall to shed tears over what he was doing.

Gamora shut her eyes unable to bear the sight of the mad Titan any longer, she waited for her death to come, for it all to end, but suddenly she was caught mid air, her fall broken as she was cradled in someone’s arms.

Letting out a choked gasp she opened her eyes to see a beautiful woman in some kind of costume holding her easily.

“Are you alright?” She asked,

“I am,” Gamora replied, “Who…” She didn’t get to finish as there came a cry from above as Nebula leaped on Thanos’ back, beating at him with her fists.

“I'll kill you!” Nebula snarled as Thanos flung her from his back, she whirled around on him coming at him again, “You should have killed me when you had the chance.”

“It would have been a waste of parts.” Thanos roared at her, he prepared to close his fist but Captain Marvel’s power slammed into his side bringing him to his knees, just as the Guardians arrived having landed the Milano on a small but flat platform several feet down.

Quill shot at the Titan, and Drax ran at him bellowing and began to beat Thanos with his fists.

Mantis ran to Gamora, whom Captain Marvel had deposited safely back on the cliff top and enveloped her into a hug that had Gamora stiffening and making a surprised exclamation before she relaxed into the embrace.

“I’m fine Mantis,” She assured her friend,

“That is good, we were so concerned for you, Quill was most distressed.” Mantis told her her black eyes shining with joy at having Gamora safely back with them.

Gamora smiled, her eyes turning to look at the fight. Captain Marvel and Drax had beaten Thanos down, were simultaneously beating him, as was Nebula, while Quill went for the gauntlet, trying to keep Thanos from closing his fist.

“We have to help them.” Gamora said, she along with Mantis ran to aid Quill in working the gauntlet off Thanos’s arm, “Hold just one or two of his fingers and keep them pushed back.” She ordered, “Break them if you have to.”

“My pleasure.” Quill growled, pushing against Thanos’ index finger with all his might, Mantis held onto Thanos hand, practically hanging off it to try and pry the gauntlet loose while Gamora worked on the wrist. “The hell with it, just cut his arm off.” Quill yelled in frustration,
“I’ll rip it off!” Drax declared ceasing his rearranging of Thanos’ face for the moment to take hold of his shoulder which proved to be an error as one of Thanos’ boots came up and kicked him in the gut, he then brought his free arm down across Drax’s shoulders flooring him. He then picked Drax up like he was doll and flung him into Nebula, sending them both sprawling.

His fist collided with Quill’s face knocking him out cold, and he flung Gamora and Mantis away like they were pests and as Captain Marvel came back around on him with another attack he closed his fist, turning her power to nothing but rays of a rainbow that evaporated, as Carol stared at her hands in shocked bewilderment, Thanos backhanded her.

“You are all strong, all full of heart.” Thanos said, as he approached the Guide once more, “I respect that, perhaps you shall all survive what is to come.”

“One of them may not, one must be sacrificed in order for you to take the stone.” The guide said, but Thanos shook his head,

“I shall give a soul, but it need not be theirs, it will be yours.”

The guide stared at Thanos in puzzlement, clearly not understanding, not until Thanos had closed his fist and given him physical form once more. The he understood and his eyes widened in protest, but it was too late, within in a second he was plunging to his death, his soul leaving its new form, being claimed by the universe as the soul stone was released and granted to Thanos.

Slowly but surely the Guardians and Carol regained their senses and looked around.

“Where is he?” Quill asked, spitting a tooth and blood from his mouth,

“He’s gone.” Nebula whispered, sinking down onto a stone and huddling over her knees, “We failed.”

Gamora shut her eyes her face creasing with despair, “He has the soul stone.”

*****

Compound.

They all knew something had changed. The air seemed to still, to thicken and expand. It was as if a great hush came over the battle field even thought the sound did not lessen at all.

It was the kind of feeling that had all the hair standing up on the back of ones neck, the sixth sense that alerted you to danger. They were not the only ones who noticed it. Thanos’ army did too, ceasing in their efforts and falling back as they watched and waited.

Breathing heavily Steve looked around, his eyes searching, “He’s here.”

“Everyone watch your six,” Rhodey ordered from the air, “Thanos is here, and remember, keep him from getting the Time Stone, at any and all costs.” He might hate giving such an order, practically ordering people to their deaths, but he had no choice, if Thanos got that stone they were as good as
dead anyway.

As Thanos revealed himself, Rhodey, Hope, and Sam attacked first, flying at him giving him everything they’d got, but one wave of his hand and clench of his fist had them being tossed aside, their suits becoming useless and dead weight upon their bodies as they were forced to the ground.

The same fate befell Scott, who valiantly tried to tackle Thanos as Giant Man, only to be shrunk back to normal size and sunk into a deep pit.

Bucky fired round upon round at Thanos, only for his gun to be turned to powder and his metal arm mangled into scrap metal.

Peter and Dick were next. Peter swung them across the battle field, flinging webbing into Thanos’ face blinding him while Dick used his escrima sticks on the Titan, only for them to be caught and crushed by Thanos, and then the two of them being slammed into each other and bound in thick webbing.

Natasha and Steve struck after that, Natasha leaped onto Thanos’s back and using her bites on him, digging them into his neck, sending electric volts through his body while Steve wrestled with the Titan, fighting to keep his fist from closing. He strained every muscle, using all of his strength but it just wasn’t enough and then Thanos was punching him, beating him to the ground, throwing Natasha off his back and shaping the earth about the two of them so it trapped them, leaving Thanos before Strange.

“Stone keeper.”

“Mad Titan.” Strange replied nonchalantly, “Kudos for your efforts thus far, but I’m afraid you have yet to grasp your prize.” He stepped back and made complicated gestures manipulating reality about Thanos and lashing out with a magic made lasso that wrapped about Thanos’s gauntlet preventing him from closing his hand, Strange anchored the lasso to the earth and opened to portals bringing Loki and Bruce back onto the field.

Together to two leaped at Thanos, Loki with his daggers and Bruce with his batarangs, gauging them into the Titans flesh. Roaring in rage Thanos tried to pull his arm free, lashing out and hitting Bruce with his massive fist sending Batman flying backwards across the field. But Loki was still to contend with, the Trickster plunged one of his daggers into Thanos’s free hand making him bellow with rage and swipe at him, but Loki ducked beneath the blow, coming up and slicing a cut over Thanos’s face nearly taking out one of his eyes.

“You’re going to pay for what you’ve done.” Loki spat at him,

“What I have done, what about what you have done?” Thanos shot back blocking the blade and finally succeeding in pulling free from the lasso, shoving Loki back, he pulled the lasso from his fist and flung it at Loki using the gauntlet and had the lasso binding the Trickster.

Turning his attention back on Strange, Thanos chuckled, “Anymore tricks, Conjurator?”

“He doesn’t need them.”

Thanos turned and was met with Batman’s fist to his face following by a smoke grenade blinding him, snarling he waving the smoke away just in time to get Batman’s boots smashing into his head and a Batarang coming down across his arm in an attempt to sever it.
Were Thanos human the blow would certainly have cut the arm off, but Thanos’ bulk and the thickness of his flesh saved him, the bladed edge of the batarang wedging in his flesh so firmly that Bruce couldn’t shift it and he was unprepared as Thanos grabbed his shoulder in a bone crushing grip and plunged Loki’s dagger into Bruce’s stomach.
Chapter 44

As strong as the armour was that Tony had designed for Bruce it could not withstand the alien metal that Loki’s dagger was made from, or the force that Thanos put behind it.

Bruce doubled over, grunting as the air was knocked out of him. The pain didn’t hit straight away, shock was the first feeling he had, then after a second or two the pain hit him.

Gripping Bruce’s shoulder he pulled the Bat forward while driving the dagger deeper, sinking it into his belly, all the way to the hilt.

“You are noble.” He said, his huge hand leaving Bruce’s shoulder to stroke his head, “You fight with courage, I find it admirable, your conviction of duty. A burden I too bear.”

“Burden?” Bruce panted, “You are trying to murder half of the Universe, a slaughter of trillions.”

“To save Trillions.” Thanos replied, twisting the blade, making Bruce wince as his flesh tore, “It is my burden alone, as I am the only one willing to bear it.” His wrist tensed he prepared to rip the dagger the rest of the way up and tear open Bruce’s torso but Strange called out to him.

“Stop. If you spare his life, I will give you the Time Stone.”

Thanos paused, looking over Bruce’s shoulder to Strange, “No tricks.”

“No tricks.” Strange confirmed, bringing the time stone out of a pocket dimension, he held out the glowing green gem and Thanos shoved Bruce aside, the Bat falling to his knees, a hand going to his abdomen where the blade was still wedged.

Thanos took the Time Stone from Strange and fitted it to the gauntlet, the power running through him. Silently he opened a portal and disappeared through it leaving the Avengers to pick themselves up and deal with the remaining Chitauri.

“Bruce!” Dick yelled as soon as he was free from the webbing, he tore across the battle field, shoving his way past Chitauri to get to Bruce. He fell to his knees before his adoptive Father, pressing a hand about the wound which was thankfully not bleeding too much with the blade plugging the wound.

“Why did you do that?” Bruce asked Strange, panting for the pain he was in, “To buy time.” Strange replied, “For Tony. If you died, he would know it and it would destroy him. He would not even have it in himself to seek vengeance.”

Bruce breathed heavily, surveying the battle field, the team were making good work of the remaining Chitauri. He winced biting back a yelp of pain, wanting to pull the blade out, but if he did he would bleed out.

“You need medical attention.” Strange said, opening a portal to the compound infirmary, “Can you carry him?” He asked Dick, who nodded wordlessly, helping Bruce up and supporting his weight, taking most of it himself as he guided him through the portal, stepping into the infirmary where Strange was already getting antiseptic, a suture kit, swabs, and bandages.

“Get him onto the gurney and then bring the ultra sound, I need to see if he’s ruptured anything before I remove the blade.”
“On it.” Dick said, helping Bruce onto the gurney, and doing as Strange said, while the former surgeon filled a syringe with morphine and another with an anti-biotic in case of infection.

“Keep me conscious.” Bruce insisted, laying back on the gurney, “I need to be awake, for Tony.”

Strange ignored him, using magic to peel away the armour to expose Bruce’s torso and his arms. With deft hands he found a vein and gave Bruce the shots, then fixed a canula into the back of Bruce’s hand, “Get his blood type from the bank.” He ordered Dick, and set up a drip, with fluids.”

He was barking orders as he would to a nurse or junior Doctor in a theatre when there wasn’t time for pleasantries.

Having dealt with injuries many times, Dick didn’t question this and just did as he was told, wheeling over the Ultra-sound, then going to get the drip set up, while Strange scanned Bruce’s abdomen, to see where the blade was.

“It missed your spleen, but it’s pressing against the aorta.” Strange said, “There is no way I can remove it safely without putting an aortic clamp on you, and I can’t do that with you conscious.”

Of course you can,” Bruce scoffed, “Just give me a local…”

Local anaesthetic won’t be enough, and it’s too high for a spinal block to be used.” Strange said, “I need to sedate you completely.”

“No.”

“Bruce.” Dick began, but broke off when the Bat glared at him,

“No, I am staying awake.” Bruce growled, turning his glare onto Strange, “I have a very high tolerance for pain, just give me another shot of morphine and I’ll be fine.” Dick scoffed at this but Strange shrugged, turning his back and going to the medicine cabinet again to fill another syringe. Carefully he gave Bruce the shot and stood back, a smug look on his face, and the reason for this was very clear when Bruce began to feel the effects.

“You bastard.”

Strange broke into a grin, “Pleasant dreams Mr Wayne, I’ll have you all patched up by the time the drugs wear off.”

Still cursing, Bruce slipped into a drugged sleep and Strange, still smirking, got him hooked up to an oxygen cannister, “He’ll be pissed at you for this when he wakes up.” Dick said, fitting the drip feed to the canula with practised ease, God knows he’d given Bruce enough transfusions over the years to know how to do this easily.

“I can live with that,” Strange said, locating surgical gloves to use, he looked to Dick, “I’ll need you to hand the tools to me when I ask for them, are you alright with that?” Dick nodded his head,

“I’m not the squeamish type.” He replied, taking a deep breath to brace himself for seeing Bruce’s insides.

*****
Tony let out a moan, falling into the sand and clutching at his head.

“Tony?” Clint cried, setting down his trowel, “No, don’t do this right now.” He said, shuffling back on his knees to take Tony’s shoulders, “Come on Stark, I need you right now, that fuck face ape thing is right behind us.” He glanced at the narrow dark passage they’d made. He could hear Cull Obsidian snarling as he tore into the sands and debris.

“Time.” Tony grunted out, letting Clint pull him into a sitting position. His eyes were shut tight, even the dull light of the torches was enough to make his eyes throb with pain right now.

“Yeah it’s time for us to get moving,” Clint agreed, trying to pull Tony back to working on the tunnel,

“Stone!” Tony gritted out through clenched teeth, “He has it, and Soul, he has them both.”

He meaning, Thanos. “Fuck.” Clint whispered, flinching and ducking his head as the tunnel shuddered with the force Cull was using to tear after them. The sand above them began to give way creating several showers down, making the small space even more unstable.

“Tony please!” he begged, “You’ve got to snap out of it or we are completely fucked!”

His face tight with pain, Tony forced his eyes opening, making Clint gasp when he saw the orbs which were not the usual chocolate brown, they were white, without pupils or irises, just round white orbs with shimmers of colour rippling through them like waves.

He watched in terrified awe as the colour drained away from Tony’s face, leaving his veins standing out bold and blue on his skin. The Billionaire heaved in breath, aimed his hand in the direction they were digging and let out a roar as he unleashed his power.

A blast of magic shot forward, forming a metallic tunnel all the way to where the door to the chamber beneath them was meant to be. Panting heavily Tony sank down onto the floor his body shaking with the exertion. He could feel the Stone of Unity now, could picture it in his mind, beckoning to him, like an oasis in the desert. But the infinity gauntlet was draining him. His connection to the Unity Stone was also connecting him to the gauntlet, and the power Thanos was wielding was sapping his strength.

Dimly he registered Clint taking him by the shoulders and dragging him along, down the tunnel, towards the door. The archer was speaking to him, encouraging him to stay awake, to stay with him, begging him desperately, but Tony couldn’t reply, his mind was filled with images of the compound, the Avengers fighting the Chitauri there.

He saw Bruce in the infirmary being operated on by Strange, the Doctor clamping his aorta so he could remove the dagger and stitch the tear without Bruce bleeding.

He saw Captain Marvel and the Guardians in space, putting the Milano at full power to try and get back to earth in time.

He saw Wakanda, The army giving their all against the Chitauri, Outlanders, and Leviathans. He saw T’Challa and Okoye slaying Proxima Midnight, both of them wounded and bloody, exhausted but continuing to fight on.
He saw Hulk best Corvus Glaive, but have no time to celebrate as some kind of weaponized wheel slammed into him making him roar.

A ray of hope appeared as Thor, Rocket, and Groot appeared via the Bifrost, the God of Thunder in his full glory, decimating all in his path, while Rocket and Groot picked off the stragglers.

“Bring me Thanos!” Thor roared, his eyes shining with lightning and Tony moaned in anguish as he saw inside the royal palace of Wakanda. Shuri screaming and being thrown aside by a single blow of Thanos’ mighty fist. The Dora he literally tore to shreds with a wave of the gauntlet and focused his gaze on Vision.

The Android paused, as if considering his options, then moved with impossible speed, sweeping Shuri up into his arms and leaped through the windows, flying across Wakanda to find T’Challa, who was catching his breath.

“Protect her.” Was all he said to the King before he took to the air once more, he did not get far through, Thanos appeared out of another portal and dragged him back to the earth, the gauntlet giving him control over gravity and preventing Vision’s escape.

“Not even truly alive and yet you fear death.” The Titan mused and Tony made a choking noise in his throat, feeling bile rise up and sting back of his mouth. He let out a scream as Thanos’s meaty fingers tore the Mind stone from the Android’s head, Vision’s body going limp and falling to the ground like a broken marionette.

Tony began to shake violently, almost convulsing as Thanos placed the last stone into his gauntlet, the power surging through him, burning him all down the left side of his body.

With a roar Thor appeared, hurling Storm Breaker and driving it through Thanos’ sternum, “I told you I’d kill you.” He snarled at the Titan who gave him a disappointed look,

“You should have gone for the head.” He lifted the gauntlet and snapped his fingers sending a massive wave of energy surging throughout the universe.

Shoving Thor away from him, Thanos opened a portal and went through it, leaving the God of Thunder and the rest of the world to watch in horror as people began to turn to ash.

Okoye let out a wail as T’Challa and Shuri were taken, Rocket moaning as Groot’s body disintegrated, their ashes blowing in the wind as thousands of others joined them.

On the Milano Nebula and Carol were left alone as their friends were each struck down, first Drax who stared at his disintegrating arm with confusion, then Mantis who looked so painfully innocent as she fell into ash, Quill and Gamora as they tried to reach out for each other, their hands falling apart before they could touch one last time.

At the compound Steve fell to his knees in horror as Bucky turned to ash, followed by Sam, and Hope. Peter stumbled, falling and clinging to Loki, his eyes wide with fear, “I don’t want to go, I don’t want to go!”

Loki looked torn between anguished and enraged as Peter’s body turned to ash, he clenched his fist only to see his own body breaking down.

In the infirmary, Dick looked to Strange who’d just finished suturing Bruce’s abdomen, “What’s happening?” he asked, lifting his hands and watching with fear as they disintegrated,

“The beginning of the endgame.” Strange said, his body too beginning to fall apart, “Don’t give up
now Tony,” He whispered, “Only you can reverse this.”

Tony wept, his tears becoming bloody and staining his cheeks red as his very soul wept.

“Tony,” Clint grunted, shuddering and falling to his side, “I don’t… I don’t feel so…” He broke off, looking down at his legs which were turning into ash, “Tony!” He whispered staring at the Billionaire, he tried to reach out, to say something more but his body was too far gone and then Tony was alone, as even Cull Obsidian was claimed by the snap.

With his tears running down into the sand, Tony wept, feeling the grief of the entire universe as it seemed to scream with pain.
Steve really didn’t know how he got inside the compound. He didn’t remember getting up from when he’d fallen to the ground, his knees going out from under him as he’d his team turning to ash. He just found himself standing inside the compound holding a balloon glass filled with brandy. Rhodey and Natasha were in no better state, they were both pale and haunted, drinking their brandy and trying to make sense of what had happened.

Steve opened his mouth to speak but FRIDAY beat him to it. “I am sorry to interrupt you all, but Mr Wayne is regaining consciousness in the infirmary and still requires medical attention.”

Rhodey and Natasha shot to their feet at once, tossing aside their drinks to run to the infirmary, after a beat Steve did the same, easily keeping pace with them and getting into the infirmary in time to see Bruce moaning on the gurney and moving around, with an open hole in his abdomen and an aortic clamp still in place.

“Christ!” Rhodey hissed hurrying over to him, he placed his hands on Bruce’s shoulders, pushing him back down, “Just lay still man, you still need stitching up.”

“Dick.” Bruce grunted, Rhodey rolled his eyes, “Charming as ever.”

“NO, dumbass, he means his Son, Dick.” Natasha chided, She looked at the floor and the ash there, “He must have been treating Bruce’s injury along with Strange.”

“And then they both...” Steve trailed off. Bruce clamped a hand around Rhodey’s upper arm, fixing him with the bat stare.

“Where is Dick?” he demanded, “And Strange, they were both here.”

To his credit Rhodey didn’t bother sugar coating it, Bruce was not the kind of man who could have appreciated it anyway and there was no way to soften the blow. “We failed. Whatever Thanos did it caused half the universe to turn to ash.”

For several seconds Bruce did nothing, said nothing, he just held onto Rhodey, while Natasha took care of his wound, carefully removing the clamp, making sure that he wasn’t going to start bleeding again and then began to stitch the wound neatly with practised precision.

Mutely Steve handed her the things she needed, watching Bruce as he stared at Rhodey, his face stoic, expressionless, save for his eyes. They shone with an ocean worth of emotion, a swirling storm of anger, grief, pain, and sorrow. Steve supposed that eventually he would feel that himself, but right now he was too numb to feel anything really, which was something he was thankful for because when he did start to feel he knew it was going to hurt so much.

Clenching his jaw Bruce spoke again, his voice harsh as if his throat were tight, “Alfred, Tony?”

Rhodey shook his head, “Alfred isn’t answering the phone at the manor, and we can’t get in touch with Tony or Clint.”
For a second it looked like Bruce would cry, he sank back on the gurney, his hand leaving Rhodey and hanging limp at his side.

“Thor, Banner, Rocket, are still with us.” Natasha said, surprising Steve, he hadn’t known this, figured that she’d been in touch with Wakanda while he’d been catatonic. “They’re planning on heading back here,”

“No.” Bruce said,

“No?” Rhodey asked,

“Here isn’t where we need to be.” Bruce looked down at his abdomen as Natasha tied off his stitches, grunting he sat up, pushing off Rhodey’s hands as he tried to stop him. “We need to go to Egypt.” He said, taking off the oxygen mask and gritted his teeth against the pain in his abdomen.

“Bruce, you need to rest.” Natasha said, “You’ve had a serious wound…”

“What I need is moot at this point.” Bruce said, pulling the canula from his hand, making Steve wince, he could remember having them as a kid when he’d been sick and how much removing them hurt.

“Tony and Clint might still be alive, they might need help.” He inhaled sharply and climbed off the gurney. He staggered, his legs wobbling before he got his balance again.

“Bruce you could start bleeding.” Natasha said even thought it was perfectly obvious that Bruce couldn’t have cared less.

“FRIDAY, do you have the co-ordinates for the temple in Egypt?” Bruce asked,

“Affirmative Batsybaby.”

Had he the blood to spare Bruce would have blushed at the nickname, he heard Rhodey snort and shot him a look over his shoulder, “He calls you Platypus.” Bruce looked around the infirmary, finding the remains of his suit. He’d have to change before they left, this one wasn’t going to be any use without some major repair work that he didn’t have time for.

“Prep a jet Friday.” He said forcing himself to walk upright and not to stagger at all, “Send a message to Banner and let him know what’s happening.”

“You got it.” FRIDAY replied, this time without a cute moniker, Bruce raised a hand in acknowledgement as he made his way out of the infirmary.

“So…. We’re going to Egypt then?” Rhodey asked glancing at Natasha and Steve. The Captain just shrugged and shook his head, Natasha squared her shoulders,

“I’m going for a shower.” She informed them, promptly pushing away from the gurney and leaving them to clean up the mess while she went and cleaned herself up, (And took some time to herself to cry where no one could see or hear her.)

*****

Bruce’s determination got him to his and Tony’s room before his legs gave out and he fell to the
ground, letting a hoarse sob escape his lips as he stared down at the plush carpet beneath his hands.

“Mr Wayne? Should I get Colonel Rhodes?” FRIDAY asked in concern,

“No,” Bruce whispered just loud enough for FRIDAY to hear him, “I’m fine, I just…I need a minute.” That was an understatement. He needed more than a minute, he needed a miracle. He sank down so he was sat on the floor, loosely resting his arms on his knees and stared at his wedding ring.

He only shed a few tears, all he allowed himself to. Tears were not for Batman, not for Bruce Wayne. He hadn’t really cried since his parents deaths. Alfred had told him it was alright to cry that it was a healthy way to release emotion, but Bruce had never gotten the hang of it. Hell, he’d never gotten the hang of emotion at all. Would probably have all but eradicated it from himself were it not for Alfred, Tony, and Dick. They had kept him human, kept him from becoming the Bat completely. Normally he loved them for that. Right now though he wished they had not because if he felt nothing he would not have to feel this pain.

“Where are you Tony?” He whispered twisting his wedding band around his finger, “What happened to you?”

*****

Egypt

For the longest time Tony lay still on the ground shedding bloody tears until finally his ducts dried and he could weep no more. Then he curled up into a foetal position and closed his eyes tight.

“I’m sorry.” He whispered, “I’m sorry I wasn’t strong enough.”

‘Amenken’

The whisper seemed to come out of nowhere and echoed down the metal tunnel making Tony lift his head and look up in surprise. The darkness seemed flex and bend as if the air were moving and changing shape.

‘Anthony’ a voice called and Tony saw the figure of a woman garbed in light standing in the tunnel.

Slowly and unsteadily Tony rose to his feet, not questioning the fact that he could now stand upright when he’d been on his knees before, nor that the tunnel was filled with a golden light, the light of torches burning around him and the air smelled sweet with the scent of oils and incense.

‘I’m here, I’m waiting for you’ the woman, the voice called.

Tony wanted to ask who she was, but somehow he already knew. She wasn’t really a woman, wasn’t physical at all, she was just manifesting that way to guide him on. She was the Stone of Unity and she was calling out to him to come and find her.

Tony made his way down the tunnel approaching the Woman, he stopped when he was just a few paces in front of her and reached out his hand, but of course she wasn’t there when he tried to touch her and he found himself back in darkness, but with the uncovered door to the tomb at his feet.
There was an inscription written on the door, in Ancient Egyptian, which Tony found himself translating without even trying.

Enter only he who is worthy. He to whom the unity is bound. He who bleeds eternities soul.

“Damn, did I have to be so wordy and dramatic in my past life?” he asked himself, cringing at the inscription. He sighed and took his trowel from his belt, digging it into the palm of his left hand until he bled.

“This had better work or I am so kicking my own ass!” He muttered cupping his hand so blood dripped down onto the seal, seeping into the stone which glowed white and moved, sliding back to reveal stone stairs leading down into another tunnel, the torches lighting up on their own as Tony began to descend the steps and entered the corridor. He followed the torches that lead the way down to the temple where the statue of Amonet stood holding the Unity Stone in her hands.

“Alright then.”

Tony walked across the chamber and reached out for the stone, pausing for a moment, his hand shaking with trepidation before his fingers clasped around the stone.

White light consumed the entire chamber, flowing through Tony’s body, filling his veins and surging through him, filling his mind with images, knowledge, memories of the entire universe. Time seemed to stand still, as Tony became as one with whole universe. He saw everything, every moment that there had ever been up until that point, every star that had been born, every world that had risen and fallen, every being ever born, every life and death. He glimpsed further into time, saw that which had yet to be, what may still become, what could, might, and may yet be. Possibilities by the thousands, millions, endless choices and chances, consequences both good and bad.

As the light slowly faded and Tony came back to himself he found that he was wearing the Stone of Unity over his hand in the eternity bracelet he had seen in his vision. The stone pulsed and glowed rippling with energy, shimmering with the colours of it’s sister stones.

With the knowledge now inside him Tony knew what he had to do. Take a deep breath he centred himself and snapped his fingers…. 
The first Bruce knew that anything had changed was the sound of Dick’s voice as he shouted out his name, his feet pounding down the hall at top speed as he tried to find Bruce.

The Bat froze for a minute thinking he was hearing things, but then Dick threw the bedroom door open and burst into his room, throwing himself into Bruce’s arms, holding him tight. Before he even truly acknowledged what was happening Bruce had wrapped his arms about Dick and was holding him as if he were afraid that he was going to lose him.

“Bruce!” that was Steve, the super soldier appeared at the door, his cheeks flushed with joy, “They’re back, everyone is back!”

“How?” Bruce asked not releasing his hold on Dick for a second. He’d only just got his son back, he wasn’t about to risk losing him again.

“We don’t know.” Steve said, “But Strange thinks it was Tony.”

Tony. Of course. That made sense, he must have found the seventh stone and used it.

“We should go to Egypt and find out what’s happening.” Bruce said, reluctantly letting go of Dick so he could stand, his mobile rang, the phone vibrating across the desk. Bruce hurried over to it, snatching it up and barked as response.

“Master Bruce.” Bruce heaved a sigh of relief when he heard Alfred’s voice,

“Are you alright?” He asked,

“Fine. I’m not sure what happened to be honest.”

Bruce knew the feeling, “Thanos did something and we think Tony reversed it.” He stretched to run a hand over his face, wincing as his stitches pulled,

“Are you alright?” Alfred asked obviously hearing him wince.

“I’m fine.”

“He’s not!” Dick treacherously said,

“Shut it!” Bruce growled,

“Bruce Thomas Wayne, do not lie to me.” Bruce winced wondering how it was possible that Alfred could make him feel like a little boy sneaking cookies from the kitchen when he was pushing fifty.

“Alfred I’ve got to go.” Bruce said, “I’ll call you.” Before Alfred could argue with him he disconnected the call, as he turned he saw Dick giving him a scowl, “Don’t start.” He said, “I’m going to Egypt.”

“Yeah, and I don’t suppose arguing with you will achieve anything.” Dick sighed resigned to Bruce’s stubborn behaviour by now, Bruce smirked at him and actually had the cheek to pat his
shoulder on the way past.

The reunited team convened in the hangar bay where the jet was prepped ready to fly.

“You sure you’re up for this?” Natasha asked Bruce, who was garbed in one of his older suits sans cowl and cape for the moment.

“Try and stop me.” He grunted, taking a seat. Across from him Peter was bouncing in his seat besides Dick with Loki hovering near them, with an almost concerned expression on his face. The trickster was becoming attached to Peter, was growing to like him, and seemed protective of him.

“Alright, I can’t open a portal directly to the temple, but I can get us directly to Egypt, we’ll just have to fly in from there.” Strange explained,

“T’Challa is flying Thor, Rocket, Groot, and Banner from Wakanda.” Sam said, “Apparently Wakandan jets can go a hell of a lot faster than ours so we should get there around the same time.”

“Alright then, everyone buckle up.” Natasha ordered, taking the cockpit, as she took the jet into the air Strange opened a portal to Egypt and Natasha guided the jet in.

*****

Egypt.

Clint jumped awake, startled and looked around the now empty tunnel. The last thing he’d remembered was Tony having some kind of breakdown, now he was alone and… a thudding came from over head, scratch that, not alone, that over grown ape thing Cull Obsidian was still out there.

“Tony?” Clint yelled getting onto his knees and crawling down the tunnel, he found the opened door to the tomb beneath, the way lit by torches that hung on the walls, “Tony, are you down here?” He yelled carefully climbing down the steps into the corridor. He could see a bright light shining ahead of him and followed it, going deeper into the ground until he came upon a chamber where he found Tony. Only it wasn’t Tony, or not the Tony he knew.

The figure he saw before him was bathed all in bright brilliant light that seemed to be alive. Colours rippled and shimmered about the aura that surrounded Tony, constantly in motion, constantly surging with life.

It was like looking into a star. It hurt Clint’s eyes to do so, but he could not look away, he was too entranced by the beauty that had been revealed before him.

In the centre Tony stood, the heart of this star. He was changed by it, by the power coursing through him, filling him and rippling all about him.

He seemed taller, leaner, more statuesque. More like the depiction of a mythical warrior, tall, lean, and otherworldly.

His clothing had been stripped away, Clint noticed this after a moment, being too caught up in the
display before him to realize that Tony was naked. Clint averted his eyes then, blushing slightly as he
did, watching in awe as the pulsing light gradually began to fade, no, note fade, recede, like sea
pulled back by the tide.

It rolled back sinking into Tony, covering his body in what Clint could only describe as some kind of
armour. But it was not the Iron Man armour that he wore. This consisted of a breast plate, of some
kind of shimmering metal that seemed to shift colours as Tony breathed.

A pleated skirt of some material Clint had never seen, it looked both as durable as denim but as soft
as silk.

On his feet he wore leather thong sandals with the bands wrapping up around his calves. On his
shins and his forearms he wore metal guards of the same material as the breast plate and finally over
his shoulders he wore a leather and metal collar made up of clasps and disks that encircled his throat
and swooped down over his chest.

Slowly he turned facing Clint and the archer found himself taking a step back, not entirely sure if he
was welcomed here, if this was truly Tony anymore and not someone else some powerful ancient
deity who would strike him down for defiling his tomb.

However he need not have worried, as the strange shimmering eyes softened upon seeing him and
the figure, Tony, stretched out his bare hand for Clint to take, the other bearing the Stone of Unity.

“Okay.” Clint mumbled after a beat, walking forward and taking Tony’s hand, “So uh, you going for
a new look or something?” He asked, noticing that Tony’s hair was different, was a shining mass of
jet black reed plaits that reached down to his waist, secured loosely in a leather thong at his shoulder
blades.

He was wearing make-up too. Egyptian make-up, his colourless eyes were painted in kohl with lines
drawn out to his temples and his eyelids were painted in a green/grey malachite powder making them
appear wider against his alabaster skin that shimmered with colours the way his eyes did.

“Gotta say, the eyes are a little creepy.” Clint joked, the lack of pupils and irises was unnerving but
Tony smiled warmly and squeezed his hand before he used the Stone of Unity, taking them to the
surface where they found Cull Obsidian up to his shoulder in the sand roaring in impotent rage.

“Can you do something about that guy?” Clint asked as Cull’s attention turned on them. The beast
snarled and began to charge at them but Tony held his hand out and Cull Obsidian was consumed in
blue/white fire burning into ashes in a second.

“Holy Fuck!” Clint whispered stepped away from Tony, “Remind me not to pick a fight with you
anytime soon!”

“You’ll have no need to.”

The voice came from behind them and as they turned both Clint and Tony were hit with what felt
like a tidal wave without the water. They were thrown backwards across the desert landing winded
and spitting sand from their mouths.

Tony was on his feet again in a moment and throwing fire back at he who had struck, whom Clint
could only guess was Thanos.

He looked impressive, Clint had to give him that, he was monstrously tall and broad, skin purple, his
left side all gnarled and burned, like two two-face, the enemy of Batman, the former DA Harvey
Dent.
Staggering to his feet Clint watched as Tony and Thanos circled each other.

“So it is true.” Thanos said. “There is a seventh stone after all.”

“Indeed.” Tony replied. His voice was changed, it sounded deeper, older, more commanding. Like the voice of Saruman, a voice you stopped and listened to because it held power.

“You used it to reverse my solution.”

“Your solution was an abomination to the Universe. It could not be tolerated. Not even Death herself could accept such cold blooded and callous murder.”

“What you call murder, I call salvation.” Thanos challenged, “The salvation of trillions, who would have space enough, food enough, and wealth enough to live. What you offer them is a slow death of starvation, disease, and poverty. I can not let that be.”

Thanos held up his gauntlet covered hand and snapped his fingers, but as he did so Tony opened the palm of his bejewelled hand, absorbing the energy that Thanos sent out, crushing it and preventing a second snap.

Thanos staggered and swayed, his heavy body stumbling in the sand.

“You cannot withstand their power.” Tony said, “It is killing you. No mortal was made to handle such power, if you do not cease to use this is will destroy you.”

Thanos bared his teeth at Tony. “I am no mere mortal, and I shall take the Seventh Stone and add it’s power to my own.”

Tony braced himself, filling his hands with blue/white fire. Thanos closed his fist and his hands became encased in ice that gave off mist and dripped water over the sands, he glared at Tony and with a roar charged it him.

Fire and ice met, both battling for dominance, a great wave of ice arched up to the sky like a spiral of frozen water with an inferno of blue flames surging against it, the sand about the pair burned and froze. Clint was forced to run back or risk being caught in the battle of magics.

Thanos bellowed like a wounded boar as flames burned his skin, Tony screamed in pain as shards of ice lacerated his face, but neither gave ground, both of them fighting on.

From behind him Clint heard the familiar roar of jet engines and turned, seeing the Avenger Jet bearing down. On instinct he waved his hand into the air as if to direct them in, though there was no way they couldn’t have seen what was going on already.

From the magical battle field Clint heard Thanos roar in pain and saw the Titan thrown back across his own ice covered field by Tony, who stood panting but victorious on his field of flames.

“You cannot win this.”

“I can.” Thanos bellowed, “And I shall.” He closed his fist and created a huge broad sword twisting and turning it in his hand.

Almost appearing to sigh, Tony created a silver/White scythe with a wicked looking blade that gleamed in the desert sun as he swung the weapon back and forth. He took a fighting stance and cocked his head to Thanos almost mockingly calling out to him, “You ready?”

Roaring Thanos charged Tony, their blades meeting with a deafening crash like thunder splitting the
sky, sparks of lightning appeared to fly off the blades as they met, clashing against each other, back and forth. Thanos may have the mass and brute strength that Tony did not, but he was injured, Tony could out pace him, out manoeuvre him, he had speed and agility that Thanos did not. He was leaping up to the air, bringing the scythe down onto Thanos and kicking him in the head and the face.

He landed with the grace of a cat, one arm outstretched for balance the other aimed the scythe at Thanos who spat a tooth from his mouth, his lips dripping in blood.

“The power is mine, only I am worthy.” The Titan snarled at Tony,

“The power is consuming you, it will destroy you.”

“Not with the seventh Stone also within my grasp.” Thanos said, “With that I shall truly be as a God and have ultimate power through out the universe.”

He rushed Tony again, wielding his sword in an effort to slice off Tony’s hand, the Billionaire dodged him effortlessly and brought the scythe around, blocking the blade, he thrust forward and up, slicing the edge of the blade across Thanos’ face before he pulled back and preformed a perfect round house kick that Bruce would have been proud of.

Thanos staggered back, his bad leg giving out bringing him to one knee, Tony showed him no quarter, bearing down on him and knocking the sword from his grasp.

“What’s happening?” Dick shouted, running to join Clint, on the edge of ice and fire field.

“See for yourself,” Clint replied, watching as Thanos rolled away from Tony, only just missing having his head taken off by the scythe, he rose back to his feet, mouth tight with obvious pain and caught the scythe in his gauntlet covered hang mid swing.

Tony grunted trying to move the blade but Thanos’ meaty fist slammed into his face throwing him to the ground, his hands fell from the scythe and Thanos broke it over his knee with triumphant laugh.

“Maybe we should continue this elsewhere.” The Titan declared and closed his fist creating a portal,

“THANOS!” Thor bellowed hurling Stormbreaker at the titan, but by the time the weapon reached the spot he’d been, Thanos had already been consumed by the portal along with Tony.
“What the hell?” Steve demanded, looking at the burned and frozen landscape where Tony and Thanos had been fighting just moments before.

“Hell if I know.” Clint said shrugging his shoulders, “First I turn to dust, then I come back and Tony’s gone, I find him in a chamber all glowing and shit, then he gets this Ancient Egyptian armour and we come up here, he incinerated that fucked faced ape thing, and then Thanos showed up and well….” He gestured to the remains of the battle, “Shit went down.”

“Tony is fighting Thanos, alone?” Bruce said clenching his fists, Clint gave him a reassuring smile,

“He’ll be alright, big guy, trust me, Tony has gone total badass.”

Bruce was not mollified, he turned to Strange, glaring at him through his cowl, “Find them.” He barked. Strange arched his brows at him,

“In case you have forgotten my magic does not work here, the only reason Thanos was able to weild magic is because he possess six of the infinity stones.”

“So what, we’re supposed to just sit here twiddling our thumbs?” Dick demanded,

“How does one twiddle thumbs?” Loki inquired curiously,

“Oh, I can show you,” Peter said brightly, “You link your fingers like this and you turn your thumbs around each other like this.” He demonstrated for Loki who began to do the same,

“A most odd pastime.”

“Can we focus?” Natasha cried, she looked to Strange, “What do we do now?”

Strange opened his mouth to speak but there came a peal of thunder and the sky split open with a portal, dozens of chitauri pouring out. “I suggest we fight them.” He said with a heavy sigh,

The Avengers turned, readying themselves for another fight, “Where did these guys come from?” Bucky asked, checking his gun clip and taking aim,

“Out of time and space.” Strange replied forming magical shields, “Thanos could pull them out of anywhere and send them at us.”

“Well, I’ll enjoy welcoming them to earth,” Thor growled as the sky over head rumbled with thunder,

“Save some for us, big guy.” Steve said readying his shield, “Avengers Assemble!”

*****
Tony materialized midair and plummeted to the ground, hitting rocks and debris from what had once been some kind of space ships as he fell, rolling down into the strange burned ground where he finally stopped, wincing and panting with the air knocked out of his lungs.

He lay still for several minutes before he pushed himself up from the ground and saw Thanos standing in the dust and debris, sword at his side and a melancholic look on his face.

“So,” Tony said, looking around, “Are we going for round two, or just sight seeing?”

Thanos sighed, “Do you know where you stand?”

Tony paused, searching his now infinite memory, “Titan. What’s left of it. Your home.”

“Yes.” Thanos breathed, he waved his hand and an image of Titan in it’s glory was revealed, “At once we were the greatest more technically advanced society in the cosmos. We had wealth, power, knowledge,” He looked to Tony, looking almost sadly at him, “Your world is still young, but it will achieve this, it will rise to this one day.”

“I know it will.” Tony said, “And I’ll be one of those paving the way.”

Thanos nodded, “And yet you do nothing to avoid the same fate as Titan, for you already have the same problem that we faced. Over population, too many mouths and not enough to go around, and just like the elders of Titan, you will not see the logic of my solution, the balance that I offer for the betterment of your world, of all worlds.” He closed his fist and the image dissolved leaving only the broken world in its wake.

“When a body is diseased you cut out that which is infected in order to save the whole. What I am doing is the same. The sacrifice of limbs so that the body may survive and thrive.”

“No.” Tony said, shaking his head, “You’re not saving the body, you are damning it. You are not just amputating diseased flesh, you are cutting off all the limbs and leaving the body to haemorrhage. You dusted half of the universe, and you say it was to save the other half, well you already got that wrong because those deaths caused more death to follow, two thirds of the universe died by your hand and I could only bring back those whom were turned to ash, all those others are still dead, a third of life in this universe is gone and that is on you.

You think you are saving us, you think you are offering salvation, but you are not, what you are offering is grief and loss, you threaten extinction by thinning the gene pools, you are not saving the universe you are condemning it to an unnatural and early death.”

“It is the only way.” Thanos murmured, a mournful note in his voice and tears shining in his eyes, “It must be done.”

“No.” Tony said stepping forward, making his way over to the Titan and lay a hand over Thanos’ flesh hand, “You don’t have to do this, you don’t have to cause more pain than you already have. Can’t you feel it?” He asked, “You have the stones, you are as connected to the universe as I am, can’t you hear the cries of those who mourn their loved ones, can’t you feel their pain in your heart as if it were your own?”

Thanos breathed heavily closing his eyes and letting his mind open to what Tony spoke of. At once he heard the anguished sobs of the grieved, the mournful, could feel their anger, their pain and
sorrow, he felt their tears as if they were falling down his own cheeks, felt the weight of their loss sinking down into his gut as if he had swallowed a stone.

“Please.” Tony begged him, clasping his huge shoulder, “Stop this now.”

Thanos shuddered, letting tears roll down his cheeks letting the sadness fill him for a moment longer then his eyes snapped open and he growled out, “No.” He grabbed Tony by the back of the neck and flung him away, “You try to sway me from my cause but you never will.” He snarled raising his fist to the sky. Above them the moon of Titan exploded and huge chunks of rock began to rain down upon the planet effecting the gravity.

Tony was lifted up into space, and slammed into the huge chunks of rock, knocking him out cold as it hurtled down onto Titan burying him under tons of rubble.

“This is the only solution, the only way to save the universe.” Thanos clicked his fingers and nothing happened, pausing he looked down at the gauntlet and saw that the Soul Stone was missing.

While he’d been trying to make Thanos understand the consequences of his actions, Tony had pulled the Soul Stone from the gauntlet, ensuring that if he failed to convince Thanos to stay his hand, then he would not have the power for another snap.

Thanos chuckled without mirth and nodded his head, looking to the mountains of moon rock under which Tony was somewhere buried.

“Well.” He said, “I may not be able to achieve my destiny, but that does not prevent me from destroying your world, and killing all those you love.” He opened a portal behind himself, “I have never slain for pleasure, only ever for necessity, yet, I find that I shall take immense enjoyment in decimating your world.”

He turned and walked through the portal, reappearing in Egypt where the Avengers were battling the armada of Chitauri that Thanos had pulled out of time and space to fight them.

“Yes,” He purred, watching as War Machine and Falcon were slammed into by a Leviathan and Wasp was tossed aside, hitting the head of Anubis with a sickening crunch, “Yes, tear them apart.” He breathed, as T’Challa let out a cry of pain, his side pierced by a Chitauri spear.

Dick was struck across the back, falling face first to the ground and being kicked away as if he were a football. Thor was swarmed by Chitauri even as he brought lighting down upon them, his body forced down into the sand.

Natasha was brought down to her knees as an Outrider fists crushed her shoulder, it lifted her up into the air, holding her by the arms and legs, about to rip her apart when Rocket and Bucky fired upon it simultaneously, killing it and freeing Natasha, who forced herself back onto her feet, favouring her left side.

“You alright?” Steve yelled over the noise of the battle, joining her and kicking aside a Chitauri, Natasha drew her hand gun and fired,

“Try and stop me,” She snarled,

Across the battle field, Groot’s limbs spread under the sand and lifted the hordes of Chitauri off Thor, freeing him so he could return to the fight.

Between them, Falcon and War Machine managed to bring their Leviathan down, flying back to the battle and tackling another. Scott tossed Chitauri left and right as he scuttled through them in ant form.
to reach Hope who was struggling back onto her feet.

“Okay?” He asked returning to human size,

“Been better,” She admitted, just an Outrider roared and Spider Man leaped onto it’s back riding it like he was a cowboy, “Let’s get back to it.”

With his face bleeding and his abdomen throbbing, his stitches torn from having to fight, Bruce dropped down besides Dick who was groaning in pain and struggling to sit up,

“Stay down, you’re hurt,” Bruce said,

“So are you,” Dick coughed, blood spattering his lips from an internal bleed, both of them flinched as a Leviathan passed over their heads, but Loki and Strange were dealing with it and the Chitauri within.

“Dick…”

“Hurts to breathe.” Dick panted, he stared across the battle field, his eyes widening in horror, “Bruce?”

“Yeah…” Bruce turned following Dick’s gaze and saw Thanos striding towards the battle, “No.” He whispered fearing what the Titan’s return meant,

“Thanos!” Thor roared, charging at the Titan again, gaining the attention of all the Avengers as he hit the Titan with his lightning, forcing Thanos back several steps, Hulk then back handed the Titan across the sands and bellowed after him, grabbing a couple of Chitauri and smashing them together like toy cars.

Thanos staggered to his feet his body aching and exhausted, he didn’t evade Thor’s attack, taking the blow across the side and stumbled as Thor’s fist his gut, nor did he prevent Loki from leaped down onto his back, sinking his daggers into his flesh with a savage cry,

“For Asgard!” Thor roared readying Storm breaker, but before he could strike, Thanos closed his fist and both Thor and Loki were hurled through a portal to a desolate world beneath an ancient and dying star.

“Now what? Brother.” Loki drawled looking around,

“Just give me a moment,” Thor said getting to his feet and readying Storm Breaker, “And I’ll have us back there.” He attempted to call the Bifrost but nothing happened, “Why isn’t this working?”

Loki rolled his eyes, “The magic can’t manifest at that location, you’ll have to transport us somewhere nearby and then fly us there.”

“Right,” Thor smiled companionably, “I forgot.” This time when he used Storm Breaker he succeeded in summoning the Bifrost, transporting himself and Loki back to Earth and Egypt. Then, sweeping Loki into his arms like a bride despite the Trickster’s protests, he took them up into the air to fly back to the battle.

*****
Groaning and feeling like he’d been hit by a truck and struck by lightning, Tony came too on Titan, buried beneath the rubble and unable to move an inch.

“So much for doing things peaceably.” He muttered flexing his fingers and concentrating on the Stone of Unity, using it’s power he crumbled the debris that was pinning him down, freeing himself and got to his feet. Safely clutched in his bare hand was the Soul Stone, glowing like a chunk of burning amber.

“At least he couldn’t do the snap.” Tony said to himself willing the chains about the stone of Unity to grow and form a mount for the Soul Stone to slot into over his palm, “Time to go home and finish this for good.”

Summoning the power he opened and portal back to Egypt leaving the desolation of Titan behind.

The Battlefield was a horror, Thanos had torn through the Avengers again, leaving them prone and at the mercy of the Chitauri. He strode through the bodies of the fallen and defeated Chitauri, his boots crushing their remains as he took pleasure in the cries of pain from the Avengers.

“Make their deaths slow and infinitely painful.” He ordered the Chitauri, “As I will make Stark’s beloveds.”

Even bleeding and in immense pain, Bruce was on his feet, standing over Dick, protecting him as Thanos approached. He knew he didn’t stand a chance but he didn’t care, aiming shots at Thanos which the Titan easily evaded, ripping the batarangs from Bruce’s hands and tossing them aside. His huge hand wrapped about Bruce’s throat and he lifted him up off the ground holding him above his head.

“I would have shown you mercy, but now you have earned my wrath.”

“As you have earned mine.”

Thanos froze, then turned and saw Tony standing behind him his expression thunderous, “Get your filthy hands off my husband, Now!”
Thanos released Bruce, dropping him down onto the ground and stepped away from him, chuckling as he regarded Tony.

“You are tenacious I’ll give you that.”

Tony was not amused and he glowered back at Thanos, “If you throw another moon at me I am gonna be pissed.”

“It was supposed to kill you,” Thanos said, “But if at first you don’t succeed…” He reached out his free hand and snapped his fingers, summoning a couple of Outriders and gestured to Tony, “Kill him.”

The Outriders charged at Tony, who held his ground, summoning his scythe once again, placing his left foot behind him to balance himself and wielded he scythe as if he were born to it, slicing off the head of the first outrider and stabbing the second in the centre of it’s chest.

Pulling the blade free he turned his head when he heard a crack of thunder and saw Thor flying in with Loki in his arms, the God of Thunder roared letting lose multiple bolts of lightning that struck Thanos’ army incinerating them into ashes.

Deciding to give Thor a helping hand, Tony set his scythe in the sand and closed his fist, concentrating on the power of both the Stone of Unity and the Soul Stone. A second later Thanos’ army disintegrated into ash, their bodies crumbling away to be scattered over the sands.

The Avengers stared at Tony, all of them panting, all of them hurt in one way or another, but before anyone could speak or reach out to Tony, Thanos’s gauntlet covered fist smashed into Tony’s sending him reeling across the sands.

With a snarl Thanos picked up Tony’s Scythe and snapped it as if it were kindling in his fingers, tossing it aside, “I will kill you Stark, if it is the last thing I do.”

“No you won’t,” Thor bellowed charging at the Titan, he was seconds away from striking him when Thanos closed his gauntlet covered hand erecting a barrier around himself and Tony, preventing the Avenger’s from assisting Tony in this fight.

Tony rose to his feet, spitting sand from his mouth and rolled his shoulders, cracking the tendons in his neck.

“No more running, no more games.” He said, circling Thanos, “It ends here, only one of us walks away.”

Thanos bared his teeth, “Then I hope you are ready to die.”

With a roar Thanos charged at Tony who ran at him, leaping up into the air and delivering kicks to Thanos head, twisting himself around and punched the Titan in the face before his feet hit the sand once more.

Thanos swung at his head, the massive fist only just missing as Tony bent backwards with an agility that Peter would have been envious of, he then grabbed the Titan’s forearm and used it for leverage, swinging himself up onto the Titan’s shoulders and wrapped his thighs about Thanos’ thick neck in choke hold, then arched himself backward, using gravity to pull himself over into a handstand,
dragging Thanos back with him and flipped him over, sending the Titan crashing down into the sand which shot up around his bulk.

From behind the barrier Peter cheered for Tony, supported by Steve and Bucky, with the whole team watching the fight. Behind them, out of the storm clouds Thor had summoned the Milano carried by Captain Marvel landed, the Guardians of the Galaxy disembarking and running over to join them.

“What is happening?” Nebula asked,

“The final show down.” Strange replied, watching Tony as he dodged energy blasts shot at him by Thanos.

“Can’t we help him?” Carol asked,

“Not with the barrier in the way,” Strange said, “It’s all on Tony now, this is his fight.”

Tony thrust his hand down to the ground in his signature Iron Man move and blasted off the ground shooting high up into the air and shot down onto Thanos driving down to his waist in the sand.

Roaring Thanos threw Tony off him, scrambling out of the sand just in time to block Tony’s foot before it hit his cheek but he didn’t stop the fist that hit him or the kick in the knee that followed nor the full round house. Falling to one knee he managed to back hand Tony, stunning him slightly but not enough to throw him back and as he brought his gauntlet covered fist around Tony caught it, forcing his own stone covered hand inside the Thanos’ palm preventing him from closing his fist.

Grunting Tony grit his teeth and dropped to his knees as infinite energy flowed through his body.

“I am stronger than you.” Thanos growled, straining and bearing down on Tony, he forced Tony down, his fist closing about Tony’s much smaller hand, threatening to crush the bones. “You tried.” He said, “It was a noble effort, but you do not have the strength to match me.”

He flexed his fingers and concentrated, sending the full force of the infinite stones power down into Tony.

As Tony’s eyes closed, Thanos released his hold on him, rising and staggering away. He looked down at the gauntlet, preparing to snap his fingers only to see that every single stone was missing.

His head snapped around in time to see Tony rising from the ground, his entire body glowing with power that was surging through him from every single infinite stone which had taken residence on his body.

The Stone of Unity and the Soul stone were on his hand, The Mind stone was in the centre of his forehead, The Time stone was at his throat, the power stone over his breast bone, and the reality and space stone on his other hand.

“Impossible.” Thanos whispered, staring at Tony in shocked amazement,

“No,” Tony replied, but six more voices joined his as he spoke, the voice of every stone speaking through him, “We are Infinity.” He rose up into the air, energy crackling and shimmering around him, blinding light emanating from his body as he hovered over Thanos, glaring down at him, like an Angel accusing the damned.

“You sought our power to destroy that which we created. You tried to master our divine majesty,
bend us to your will, now you will pay the price for such sacrilege.”

Tony raised both hands and let loose a blinding stream of energy that bore down onto Thanos, ripping away his armour, tearing into his flesh and surging through his veins, shredding his muscles, burning him from the inside out, liquifying his organs and crushing his bones.

Slowly Tony lowered down onto the ground, watching impassively as Thanos lay before him, shuddering and spitting blood from his mouth,

“At least I offered the Universe mercy.” He rasped, looking at Tony with blood shot and pained eyes, “You condemn it.”

“You condemn yourself,” Tony and the Stones said, “And we are done with you.” He closed his eyes and every stone shone brighter than a star, breaking down Thanos’ DNA, disintegrating his cells and scattering them to the winds.

Tony stood still, the stones pulsing and shimmering on his body, communicating with one another, the energy barrier came down allowing the Avengers to rush to him, though non dared to touch him.

Opening his eyes Tony whispered out, “Go.”

One by one the stones pulled out of his body. The Mind stone was first streaming away to Wakanda where it embedded itself back into Vision’s head sending energy surging through his body, repairing the damage done to his systems and bringing him back to life.

The Tesseract spun up into the air, the blue light sparkling around it as it headed back to what remained of Asgardian space, the power stone was next, following in the wake of the Tesseract, heading for the remains of Xandar. The reality stone flowed from Tony next, fading back into the ether where it had dwelled for centuries. The time stone rose from Tony and flew back into the amulet around Strange’s neck, leaving the Soul stone, while pulsed and shone sending energy coursing through Tony’s veins before it took to the air and flew back to Vormir.

Finally, only the Stone of Unity remained upon Tony’s hand and he let out a slow breath, his eyes returning to normal, and his skin colouring to olive once more.

“It’s done.” He said sounding both relieved and exhausted,

“You did it.” Strange said, admiration clear in his voice, “You wielded all of the Stones, had the power of the whole universe, were in essence a God.”

Tony met his eyes, “Which is why I put them back where they belonged, that kind of power is not for mortals to bear, not even empowered ones.” He looked down at the Stone of Unity and then to Bruce and Dick, who were holding each other up, as were many of the Avengers, all of them sporting various injuries of some sort.

“One last job.” He murmured, closing his eyes and concentrating his power, sending out a wave of healing energy that flowed over the Avengers, repairing their injuries and sealing their flesh until it was as if they had never been hurt at all, then, with a look that was fond but resigned Tony undid the metal clasps on the bracelet and the stone rose, hovering in the air, he gave a single nod and the stone flew away, going back down into the tomb, sealing the way behind it as it returned to the hands of Amonet. The sands sinking in and hiding the temple once more from sight.

“What did you do?” Steve asked as the head of Anubis disappeared from sight,

“Removed temptation.” Tony said, giving his a small smile, but he had eyes only for Bruce and
made his way over to him, “It’s over, it’s done.”

“It is.” Bruce breathed wrapped his arms about Tony and pulling him into an embrace, which served as signal for the others to break out of the stunned silences.

“Hey, we did it, we won!” Peter cheered, retracting his mask and clasping Dick’s arms,

“We really fucking won.” Dick breathed, Quill let out a cheer and punched the sky,

“Alright!”

“This calls for a celebration.” Thor boomed a huge grin on his face as he hugged Loki, the Trickster scowling but not pulling away,

“Hey, look!” Bucky pointed to the sky where a shape was flying towards them, everyone turned their gazes and saw Vision coming into land.

“My apologies for not being here sooner.” The Android said, “I was others indisposed.”

“You were dead.” Rocket said, staring at him, “I am right aren’t I? He was dead?”

“I am Groot.”

“The Mind Stone revived me.” Vision said, looking to Tony, who beamed at him,

“I couldn’t lose you, Viz, you are the closest thing I have to son, except for Peter.”

Peter’s eyes widened at this and his cheeks flushed, “Mr Stark.. I mean Tony, I… wow that’s so…, wow!”

“Maybe we should take this elsewhere?” T’Challa suggested,

“Some place we can get a drink.” Clint agreed, “And Pizza, this calls for drink and Pizza.”

“And cake.” Dick added, reaching into his suit for his phone, “I’ll call Alfred, get him to bake something huge and covered in chocolate, and to order like three dozen pizzas.”

“Extra cheese on mine.” Tony said snuggling against Bruce’s chest, “Let’s go home.”

*****

They all descended on the compound, where Alfred arrived with two huge cakes of chocolate as Dick had requested, along with an order for Pizzas and side dishes.

Pepper and May joined them as Quill put on some music which started a fight between him and Sam over decent music choices, Wong joined them demanding Beyonce much to Strange’s chagrin. Rocket sat with Bucky trying to get him to give him his arm, and his gun, while Groot played video games besides them and Steve just laughed at the spectacle of a Racoon trying to bribe his best friend for his metal arm.

T’Challa and Rhodey tried to look aloof and mature, but it was a lost cause, especially when Clint and Dick began to fight over the PS4 games they were playing, Nebula sneered at everyone staying
close to Gamora and threatening Quill’s manhood every time he came close. Drax tried to keep away from Mantis as she tried to pressure him into dancing with her, egged on by Quill, and the fact that Scott and Hope were dancing.

Strange sipped what seemed to be an endless cup of tea while discussing obscure magics with Loki, Natasha challenged Thor to a vodka shot contest and actually seemed to be able to keep up with him.

Vision kept Peter company, seeming to like the notion that he and Peter were Tony’s surrogate Sons and therefore brothers, and soothed Peter’s blushing when May began to dance with Alfred, although his embarrassment was soothed a little when Pepper dragged Rhodey away from T’Challa to dance.

Tony and Bruce had only eyes for each other, departing for their bedroom as soon as they got the chance.

“Aren’t you tired?” Bruce asked as Tony all but tore off their clothes and pushed him back onto the bed, climbing onto him and straddling his hips. He let out a moan as Tony bent and kissed him heatedly, reaching down to stroke his cock and bring it to full hardness.

“I’m bursting with energy, baby.” Tony breathed, using Bruce’s precum and his own for lube, “I need you inside me, I need you so bad.” He bent again delivering another searching kiss, wriggling around and seated himself on Bruce’s cock, taking him all the way without a seconds hesitation.

Any worries Bruce might have had about hurting Tony were gone in an instant as he set a brutal pace, riding Bruce for all he was worth, bringing the Billionaire to climax within minutes.

As the bright lights faded from his eyes Bruce blinked as he felt Tony’s inner muscles clenching and his body continuing to squirm, trying to get him aroused again.

“Baby, I might need some recovery time.” He whispered closing his eyes and breathing out as his nipples were pinched and Tony’s nails ran down over his torso, the sensations got his cock interested, bringing it back to life, especially as Tony bent down and began to kiss, lick, and bite at his chest, teasing him and tormenting him until Bruce flipped them over, pinning Tony down and thrusting into him with renewed vigour, Tony moaning and keened, clinging to him, begging for more, begging Bruce to fill him, almost howling for it even as seed leaked out of him and down his thighs.

“God you really want this don’t you?” Bruce panted, Tony whined and nodded his head, his eyes closing and mouth parting in a cry as he came between them triggering Bruce’s climax, clinging to him tightly as more seed flowed into his body.

As Bruce softened he went to pull off Tony but the other Billionaire held him tight, “I can’t again, not without a rest.” He admitted,

“Just stay inside me.” Tony whispered, pulling him down so he was resting his head over Tony’s chest and Tony’s fingers were in his hair, “Stay here and rest, then we’ll go again.”

Bruce chuckled and kissed Tony’s neck, “I don’t know what’s gotten you so insatiable but I thoroughly approve of it.”

*****

All through out the Universe the Infinity stones pulsed and surged with energy, sending their power
through to Tony, granting him a gift he would soon learn of.
Chapter 49

Gotham.

Bruce’s desire to hang up the cape and cowl were all well and good but it couldn’t be done over night because he didn’t want to abandon the city and leave it to the likes of Joker, Penguin, and Riddler without someone to take his place. Dick was a natural assumption as a replacement but he was his own superhero now and Bruce didn’t want to take that from him.

The solution to this presented itself, or rather themselves in the form of two adolescents. The first being a street kid by the name of Jason Todd whom Bruce caught trying to steal the tires of the Bat Mobile.

Tony had laughed so hard he’d nearly pissed himself when Bruce told him and brought Jason back to the manor. The boy, who it turned out was sixteen, already knew how to street fight, but he was sloppy and undisciplined which Bruce aimed to change and mentor him and make him an eventual replacement Batman.

The second boy to arrive actually showed up on Dick’s doorstep. He was recently orphaned, his parents having died due to the snap. They had been in a taxi and the driver had been snapped away as had the driver of a truck that had smashed right into the taxi and exploded.

With no other family Tim was now in the system and loathing it. He’d been aware of Dick being Robin as he had recognised several signature moves that Dick did, back from when he’d been part of the flying Grayson’s.

At Fourteen he was all steely determination and fierce resolution to become a vigilante on his own if he couldn’t join Batman, having even made his own make shift costume of spandex that made Tony’s eyes water when he saw it as it was even worse than the crap that Peter had been wearing prior to his Stark tech suit.

Dick naturally brought Tim to Bruce’s doorstep and explained the situation while giving Bruce big puppy dog eyes that silently pleaded with him to take on the boy and give him another little brother to take under his wing.

Unsurprisingly Bruce had guardianship papers drawn up within weeks and adoption was finalized shortly thereafter.

While Tim was quite shy and mild mannered most of the time, still rather overwhelmed at being adopted by two Billionaires who also happened to be Batman and Iron Man, Jason was foul mouthed, sulky, and completely contemptuous of getting an education, learning table manners, or being in anyway polite at all.

He opened scorned the Robin suit, sneering at the name and the symbol, although Bruce caught him looking rather proud when he thought no one else was watching. He out right questioned everything Bruce said and tried to teach him, resorting to fighting dirty when something didn’t go his way and got his ass handed to him every time. He’d then call Bruce every name that came to mind and storm off to sulk somewhere, nursing his wounded pride, only to sneak back down to the cave later to practise what Bruce had been teaching him so he could use it on him when they sparred again later.

They decided to alternate between Jason and Tim backing Bruce up as Robin so neither boy would
get over tired, and once a week had the two of them work together as Robin and Tim’s own vigilante of Red Robin, with Bat Man keeping watch over them in case they got in over their heads.

Despite their differences in personality the two worked well together, with Tim tempering Jason’s head headed attitude and Jason encouraging Tim to rely on his instincts instead of trying to over think everything.

“I swear babe, only you could put together two kids that had never met and turn them into a fighting duo.” Tony commented as he watched the monitors as Bruce kept watch from a rooftop, viewing Tim and Jason taking down some mid-level drug dealers.

“Oh like you’ve had nothing to do with this.” Bruce scoffed, “The two of them call me B or Bruce, but they call you Iron Mamma when you’re not listening.”

“Why am I the Mother?” Tony demanded, “I’m not the one that wears tights in this relationship.”

“Neither do I.”

“But you did, Alfred has a picture of that first costume you had and OMG that deserves to go on Instagram!”

Bruce shuddered at the recollection of that pitiful costume he’d put together before Lucius had started supplying him decent Kevlar suits. “You dare Stark,” He growled,

“Dare he what Sir?” Came Alfred’s voice making Bruce paused,

“Where’s Tony?”

“He has had to retreat to the bathroom rather urgently I am afraid, whatever has upset his stomach of late seems to still be plaguing him.”

Bruce made an unhappy noise. Tony had been getting sick a lot of late, throwing up several times a day and feeling nauseous and constantly fatigued. At first, they thought it was a stomach bug or the flu, but now neither were sure since it wasn’t showing any signs of passing and he had no other symptoms, such as a fever, headaches, or muscular pain. In fact, the only other symptom he had was a sudden disliking of fish, any and all fish including anchovies which they’d had on a Pizza and Tony had nearly vomited all over it he’d been so repulsed.

“I wish we knew what was wrong.” He said to Alfred, his deepest fear was that the stones had done something to Tony, that using them all as he had, had effected him internally and he was now paying the price. After all they had nearly killed Thanos, he’d been burned black down one side from that gauntlet from the amount of radiation they’d been pumping out.

Radiation poisoning was a great possibility although it should have occurred within hours, but that didn’t mean that it couldn’t have caused cancer.

“He needs to see a Doctor.” Bruce said and rolled his eyes as the groan that came over the coms from Tony who’d obviously returned, “Well you do,” he said, “This isn’t right Tony, you shouldn’t be sick all the time, something is clearly wrong.”

“Yes, I know, and I will be seeing a Doctor tomorrow.” Tony said sounding exasperated,

“Strange isn’t a Doctor anymore.” Bruce grunted. They would be going to the Compound the
The following day for a farewell dinner for the Guardians who were headed back into space, as was Carol. Thor and Loki were heading for Norway where the Asguardian refugees were settling and Banner was going with them, and Scott and Hope were heading back to Sanfransisco.

“He was a Doctor for a long time, he can do an examination,” Tony said, “And I’m sure it’s nothing to worry about, I’m probably fighting a virus or something pathetic like that.”

“I hope so.” Bruce murmured.

****

Compound.

As it was the last time all the Avengers would be together for what was likely to be a long time barring another apocalypse (And Clint got slapped upside the head for daring to jinx things by saying it out loud) they went all out on the dinner.

Tony ordered the bed caterers to provide food for the events offering a range of cuisine and plenty of it considering the appetites of Thor, Drax, Steve, and Bucky.

T’Challa brought some delicacies from Wakanda with him, Okoye and Shuri accompanying him. The Princess was keen to see Tony’s workshop and to meet Deejay, who happily greeted her with an “Exterminate!”

She soon disappeared into science talk with Vision under the watchful eye of her Brother and Okoye.

Peter was swept up by the Bat Kids, whom he’d met when he’d visited Wayne Manor, or they had come with Tony to the Tower in New York. He had become close to Dick during the fight against Thanos, and was enjoying spending time with two more vigilantes his own age.

Thor and Quill quickly got into a content over who could tell the most exciting and daring adventure they’d had with Mantis hanging on every word, while Nebula openly scoffed at them and Gamora just laughed, as did Drax when Carol shut them both up with her own stories.

Clint was in high spirits as he was getting to see his kids more often, having them from Friday evening until Monday Morning every week with Tony flying them back and forth so they wouldn’t miss school, and they’d be coming to stay at the Compound or the Tower when it was the holidays.

Loki flitted around the groups, popping up seemingly out of thin air and making sarcastic comments before disappearing again, and frequently stealing things from Thor’s plate until his Brother grabbed him by his hair and made him go and get a plate of his own.

Steve chatted with Sam and with Bucky, who became engrossed in a rather alarming Vodka drinking contest with Natasha, the two of them exchanging rapid fire insults in Russian and spurring each other on as they took shot after shot barely pausing to breathe.

Rhodey joined Sam and Steve, cheering Bucky and Natasha on, rather amazed at the amount of alcohol they were managing to consume and remain upright.
Strange hovered literally on the fringes, acting aloof and disinterested in the proceedings until he was called to the medbay to do an examination on Tony, at which point he sighed and lowered himself to the ground, The Cloak leaving him to go and join the boys which had Strange rolling his eyes in fond exasperation, especially when it tugged on Peter and Dick, dragging them out to dance!

“Alright Stark, what seems to be the problem?” he asked as they reached the medbay and Tony hopped up onto one of the examination tables, “And why couldn’t you have just gone to a regular physician?”

“Because you are so much more convenient,” Tony replied, “And so many strange things have happened to me that I needed a very Strange Doctor to treat me.” He said with so much sweetness it was a wonder his teeth didn’t rot away.

“That is getting old very fast.” Strange sighed, “Alright, what are the symptoms?”

“Nausea, vomiting, and fatigue.” Tony listed, “And’s been going on for about two weeks now.”

“Interesting,” Strange said, taking Tony’s pulse,

“Could it be the stones?” Bruce asked, finally voicing his fear, “Could they have done something?”

“Doubtful.” Strange replied, glancing up, “If there were going to be any side effects from exposure to them it would have happened right away, I mean you saw the state Thanos was in, Tony was protected from that because he was meant to use them, so he was shielded from the energy they put out.” He frowned and went to get a stethoscope to listen to Tony’s heart and his breathing. “You’re heart rate is elevated, have you been particularly stressed lately?” He asked checking Tony’s nails for signs of anaemia, they looked pink and healthy but he made a mental note to run a blood test anyway.

“Not really.” Tony said, “Certainly a lot less than I was before Thanos was dealt with. My heart is damaged though, but it wouldn’t cause stomach upsets would it?”

“No,” Strange agreed, “And the vomiting and nausea is the only kind of stomach upset you have, no diarrheah or constipation?”

“No.” Tony said,

“Any tenderness to your abdomen?”

“No, well, no not really.”

“Stark…?”

Tony sighed and rolled his eyes, “I’ve been feeling bloated is all, I think I’m starting to get middle age spread,”

“You’re not.” Bruce said, “You look fine.” Tony shot him a doubtful look,

“Babe, you’d say that if I wore a bin liner, I know my own body and I’m starting to get a belly.” It wasn’t unexpected really, a man of his age and all, and considering the amount of muscle wastage he’d had from being in a coma he should be thankful he looked as good as he did.

“Let’s have a look then.” Strange said and Tony rose his eyebrows at him making the Doctor sigh
and look heavenward for patience, “For the love of God, Stark, I’m a Doctor, you have got nothing I haven’t seen a thousand times before. Now lay back and roll your shirt up.”

Tony grumbled under his breath but did as Strange said, baring his upper body for the Doctor who began to palpitate his abdomen, which to Bruce’s eye looked the same as ever, but then he knew from his own experience that people noticed changes to their own body for more than others did unless the change was dramatic.

“Hmm, that doesn’t feel like fat to me,” Strange said frowning as the firmness he felt under his palm, “No pain?” he asked and Tony shook his head, “Interesting,” he looked thoughtful, mulling over the symptoms Tony had given him, “Tell me, has anything unusual happened in the past two months since the battle, any changes in your… sexual habits?”

“What, no, nothing.” Tony sputtered, and turned to stare at Bruce when he cleared his throat,

“You were rather… insatiable for a few days after the battle,” which was putting it mildly, Tony had been jumping on him constantly for a about a week, seeming to never get enough of him.

“Complaining?” Tony asked archly,

“No, just commenting.”

“Well I think that’s it then.” Strange said, going to get the Ultra Sound unit they had in the medbay and some gel for the wand. “This will confirm my theory.”

“What theory?” Tony grunted, flinching a cold gel hit his stomach and he scowled at Strange, who ignored him, running the wand over his abdomen and stopping when he apparently found what he was looking for.

“That confirms it,” He said, turning the screen to show Bruce and Tony, upon which were two fuzzy blobs that were giving off heartbeats that registered on the monitor, “Apparently the stones decided to gift you with fertility and ensure that your blood lines do not die out.” Strange said a rather smug look on his face, “Tony, you are pregnant with twins.”

Tony stared at the screen his eyes wide and for once completely speechless as he stared at the images of the two beings growing inside his body. Besides him Bruce stared as equally as stunned as Tony, unlike Tony however he was not sitting down and when the world began to spin he had no where to go but the medbay floor in a dead faint!
Chapter 50

Bruce awoke to cold water being thrown in his face and a very unimpressed Tony glaring at him, hands on his hips and a dark scowl knitting his brows together.

“Big, tough, Batman, huh?” he drawled, “Scourge of the underworld, the terror of Gotham Villains. Faints just because his husband is pregnant.”

Bruce winced, “I’m not living this down anytime soon, am I?”

Tony rose and eyebrow and held up his Stark Phone which held pictures of Bruce unconscious on the lab floor, “What do you think?”

Yeah, he was screwed, he may as well kiss his dignity goodbye right now because he was never getting it back. Groaning, Bruce got himself up from the floor relieved when his legs remained steady and looked at Tony.

“You’re really pregnant.”

“Apparently.” Tony said, “Strange has fucked off to the Sanctum to look shit up, and do you remember the conversation we had before I went to Egypt? The one about what happens to your balls if you knock me up?”

“You said that if I got you pregnant with octuplets, this is twins.”

Tony gave Bruce a pointed look and the older man’s features softened into a smile, “Twins Tony, our twins.”

“I know.” Tony let out a deep sigh and shook his head, “I can’t believe it. Its… this doesn’t happen to men, I thought if we had kids we’d adopt, and we have, we’ve got the boys, but now…” He looked up at Bruce in alarm, “What if I can’t do it? What if I’m no good at it?”

“At what?” Bruce asked,

“Being a Dad, a Mum. I don’t know anything about babies, how to handle them or raise them, I might break them!” Anxiously Tony began to pace, gesturing wildly with his hands as he spoke, “I forget to eat all the time, I forget to sleep, I can’t take care of myself properly. What if I forget to feed the babies, or change them, what if I take them somewhere and forget them, and only remember when I get home and you ask where the babies are, and then we’ll have to find them, only someone will already have taken them, and we won’t see them again until their eighteen, and then they’ll hate me because I fucked their whole life up and…”

“Tony, Tony, Breath!” Bruce cried, taking hold of his panicking husband by the shoulders, “You are panicking about nothing that will ever happen. You won’t forget them at all, and they’ll let us know when they want feeding and changing, hell they’ll probably let the entire city know!”

“But I’m bad at this stuff.” Tony mumbled, worrying his bottom lip, “The feelings stuff and they’ve gotta learn that from us.”

Bruce winced, he knew that he was terrible at emotions, choosing to repress his as much as possible. He didn’t want his children to grow up emotionally stunted, he wanted them to be happy, to be emotionally healthy. What Tony was worried about there did make sense, they were either of them overly great at dealing with issues, preferring to bury it and themselves in work rather than facing
and dealing with it.

“I guess we’ll have to learn to be better at feelings.” Bruce said, making a mental note to ask Alfred.

“What if something goes wrong?” Tony whispered, “What if I lose them? I don’t think I can handle that. I’ve only known of them for a few minutes and already I love them so much.”

“You won’t.” Bruce said, sounding sure of this even though there was no certainty of that at all. While it felt odd to do so, on his very male husband, Bruce reached out and lay his palm over Tony’s stomach. “We’ll get through this together.” He promised, “We’ll go to parenting classes and learn what to do with new born babies, and we’ll read all the books, Alfred can tell us a lot, he looked after me when I was a baby so he’ll know what to do, and we’ll be totally prepared by the time they come.”

Tony managed to quirk a small smile, laying his hand over Bruce’s on his stomach, “You sure about that?” he asked, still half having to pinch himself to believe it. Bruce pulled him in closer and kissed his forehead,

“I’m positive.”

*****

Arm in arm Tony and Bruce went back outside where the party was still in full swing and were met by Steve.

“Is everything alright?” He asked, “You’ve been gone for a while.” He looked Tony over, “Nothing serious I hope?”

“Well…” Tony began and broke off, unsure of how to continue,

“It’s rather unexpected.” Bruce said.

“What, are you sick?” Steve asked in concern.

“No, no I’m not sick, I’m..” Tony paused again and looked to Bruce, “Should we wait?” Bruce shrugged,

“It’s up to you, and it is the last time everyone will be together for a long while.”

“Yeah, okay lets tell them.” Tony decided, his hand sliding into Bruce’s and gripped tightly, needing the support of his husband as they approached the rest of the team with Steve trailing behind them, confused and worried about what was going on.

“Everyone, can we have your attention for a minute?” Tony called out, waiting as the chatter died down and all eyes turned on him, “So, yeah. Bruce and I have some news that we learned about half an hour ago and we felt that you should all know too.”

“Is this what you were doing with Strange in the med bay?” Natasha asked, her sharp eyes looking Tony over, “Are you ill?”

“No, I’m fine, I’m… that is… it turn out, and believe me we have no idea how this happened and Strange thinks it was the Infinity Stones but he’s looking that up, but it seems that I…”
“He’s pregnant.”

This came from Loki who suddenly had everyone staring at him in shock, including Bruce and Tony, “What?” he asked shrugging, “It was obvious. I’ve birthed offspring myself, I recognize the symptoms.”

“If you knew, why didn’t you say anything?” Bruce cried, it would have saved them several weeks of worrying about Tony’s health.

“I didn’t see the need.”

“Wow Mr Stark, I mean Tony. This is, holy crap, you’re gonna be a Mum!” Peter exclaimed, all big eyes and fascination.

“This is for real? You’re not just playing an elaborate gag on us?” Sam asked, struggling to take this in. To be fair, Tony and Bruce were still struggling to take it in themselves and they’d seen the ultrasound!

“It’s for real.” Tony said, “I’m pregnant.”

Alfred broke out of his stunned silence next, letting out a choked sound as he shook his head and beamed, “I’d given up on their being a next generation of Wayne. Congratulations to you both.”

“Thank you, Alfred.” Bruce said, relaxing his shoulders. Alfred’s acceptance took away a lot of the fear over everyone’s reactions, the man was practically a Father to Bruce, and his approval meant a lot to him.

“God man!” Jason groaned, his nose wrinkling, “Can’t you guys do anything normal, why is it always freaky with you?”

Rhodey laughed and patted the teen’s shoulder, “Because Tony’s always gotta make it weird.” He said, making his way over to Tony and pulling him into a hug, “You’re making me an Uncle at last.”

“Sure am, Honey Bear.” Tony said, relaxing in his oldest friends’ embrace.

Slowly but surely everyone began to relax and offer their congratulations. They were all still shocked and that wouldn’t be changing any time soon, but they were also happy for Tony and Bruce, if rather bewildered.

With the cat out of the bag, Tony and Bruce went to sit under the shade of a tree and were joined by their boys, who brought a selection of food and drink, with Dick encouraging Tony to eat. “You’re eating for two now, so you’ve gotta eat lots!” he said looking rather alarmed as Tony picked at some apple slices and sipped orange juice.

“Three actually.” Bruce corrected, smirking at the gaping expressions that followed, “It’s twins.”

“No fucking way.” Jason said, “This just keeps getting weirder.”

“Tell me about it.” Tony said, and looked to Tim who’d been silent all this time, “Honey, what do you think about all this?” he asked,

“He think’s its fucking weird like everyone else.” Jason said and winced as Alfred slapped him upside the head.
“What you’re language from now on.” Bruce said.

“Especially once the infants are born, or they will learn words you do not wish them too.” Vision intoned, “If my data banks are to be believed then between nine months and one year is the age for speech development.”

“I was speaking at seven months.” Tony said, “And I was walking at ten months.” He looked back to Tim, reaching out and taking the boy’s hand, “If you’re freaked out by this its okay.” He assured him, “We’re freaked out too, hell Bruce even fainted!”

“Tony!” Bruce cried in protest as the boys laughed at his expense, even Tim managing a smile that grew even wider when Tony showed them the photos he’d taken of Bruce on the floor of the med bay.

“God I wish I’d seen that!” Dick said, “The big, bad, Bat, fainting like a Victorian Lady!” He grinned at Bruce’s death glare, which did nothing to deter Jason’s loud snorts of laughter, or Alfred’s chuckling and Peter’s terrible attempts to hide his laughter.

“I’m happy for you both.” Tim said, at length, handing Tony his phone back, “I just… well, I,” He bit his bottom lip looking uncomfortable.

“What honey, you can tell us anything.” Tony assured him,

“There was a boy in the care home I was sent to after my parents died.” Tim explained, “He’d been with a couple for nearly a year, they were looking to adopt him when they found out that they were going to have their own baby, and so they didn’t want him anymore and sent him back to the home.”

“Bastards.” Bruce hissed. Clearly Tim was worried that the same would happen to him and Jason now Tony and Bruce were having babies of their own.

“That couple don’t deserve children.” Alfred grunted, placing a supportive hand on Tim’s shoulder, “And you won’t be going anywhere, expect to university when you’re old enough.”

“Damn right you won’t.” Tony stated, pulling Tim into a hug, “You are as much our son as these babies will be. You’re gonna be their big brother and we want you in their lives, in our lives. We’re family now, all of us.”

“Yep, one big freaky ass family of Bats, spiders, birds, androids, English butlers, and knocked up geniuses.” Dick said as Peter let out a strangled noise of exclamation.

“Sup, Spidey?” Jason asked,

“I was just thinking.” Peter said, scratching his head and frowning, looking equal parts adorable and confused, “I get how the babies got in there.” He gestured to Tony’s stomach, “But how are they gonna, you know..” More hand gestures, “Come out?”

Everyone fell silent, wondering the same thing, then Jason snorted, “Well its obvious isn’t it? He’ll shi…”

“And that’s enough of that, Master Jason.” Alfred said, grabbing the boy by the back of his shirt and hauling him to his feet, “Come along, you can help me get some tea for everyone.” He ordered the teen, shoving him along despite Jason’s protests.

“Oh God.” Tony moaned, his face a mask of horror, “What if he’s right? My Ass isn’t made to do that!”
Everyone looked vaguely sickened by the thought of it. Vision, every the logical being offered a far more likely scenario.

“I would think that you will have to undergo a caesarean.”

“Unless you grow the parts you need.” Tim offered looking down at Tony’s crotch with wide alarmed eyes, “Would there be space for that? Would you have to like… lose anything?” he asked in an alarmed whisper that did nothing to alleviate Tony’s growing fears.

“No I think Vision is right.” Bruce said, “It’ll be a C-Section when they come to term.”

“It’d better be.” Tony growled giving him the stink eye, “Because I swear to God, if I lose any of my stuff, then I am chopping yours off and feeding it to the damn cat!”
Steve stared over at the family gathered beneath the tree. They were a family, he had to call them that even in his head. They weren’t conventional, not in the sense of what he had grown up to expect a family to be like. Yet they still embodied all of that enviable warmth and love.

Bruce was the obvious “Dad” figure of the group, for all that the kids teased him and goaded him, they obviously respected him, treating him as their Father and looking up to him as one would a Father figure, and while Bruce may act exasperated, or stoically unaffected, you only had to look into his eyes to see the pride shining in them over his brood.

Tony was the Mother, and was going to be a Mother, which was mind boggling in so many ways. Even before this pregnancy he had mothered the boys, worrying about them and checking up on them, and were he actually able to cook without burning down a kitchen, then he’d likely have been seeing to their meals as well.

Alfred was embodying the role of Grandfather. Considering he had raised Bruce since the Billionaire’s parents’ deaths, he was all but Bruce’s Father. He looked up on the boys as Bruce’s sons, even scolding them like a Grandfather would, especially with how he clipped Jason around the ear when the teenager was shooting his foul mouth off.

Steve hoped fervently that they managed to doing something about the boys swearing before the babies were born because otherwise they’d be learning words that no one wanted them to learn.

While Peter may not have officially been adopted by Tony and Bruce as Dick, Jason, and Tim had been but he was much their son as the other boys were.

Steve did wonder what May thought about this, if she felt slighted at all, with Peter seeking another parental figure, but it seemed from what he’d observed, that she was happy he’d found male role models to give him the guidance in becoming a man.

Seeing Tony, laying against Bruce’s chest, looking so relaxed and contented did send a spike of jealousy running through Steve. He knew it was stupid, he knew nothing was going to happen between him and Tony. Especially not now he was pregnant by Bruce Wayne’s.

“Well, maybe it could. Loki and Strange had spoken of other universes, maybe in one of them he and Tony had gotten together, maybe they had never fallen out as they had in this universe, maybe Tony would be having his babies then and not Bruce Wayne’s."

“Just when you think things can’t get any weirder, eh?”

Steve looked up and smiled at Clint, who joined him, drinking from a bottle of beer, “Stark pregnant.” The archer shook his head, “I suppose if a male pregnancy was going to happen to anyone it would have to be him.”

“I suppose.” Steve said with a grin, “Although apparently Loki’s given birth?”

“Oh yeah, Sleipnir. A fucking horse.” Clint said pulling a face, “I don’t even want to know how he got knocked up with a horse, let alone how he birthed one, because… eeeewww.”

Steve had to grimace too at the thought, it did sound pretty horrendous. “What you want to bet, two boys, two girls, or a boy and girl?” This came from Sam who was with a
grinning Bucky, the two of them writing something up on a tablet, which Steve guessed had to do with the question.

“You’re running a book over Tony’s pregnancy.” It wasn’t a question.

“Hell yeah, we gotta cash in on this.” Bucky declared, “And we’re not just taking bets on the genders, we’re getting bets on the weights, and the due dates.”

“How the hell did you figure a due date, that’s worked out from the Mother’s last period, Stark doesn’t have periods.” Clint said, when all three men looked at him in confusion he rolled his eyes, “I’m a Father of three, dumbasses, I’ve done all this.” He snickered, “Just wait until Tony’s mood swings and cravings start kicking in, then we’ll be in for some fun.”

“It can’t be that bad.” Steve said and was treated to three unimpressed looks.

“Dude, this is Tony Stark we’re talking about.” Sam said, “Drama Queen extraordinaire.” He looked over to where Tony was laughing at something Tim was saying, “He is going to make our lives a living hell for the next seven months, I guarantee it.”

*****

Three Months Later.

At five months pregnant Tony could no longer conceal the pregnancy, the twins were just too big now and with four months left to go they had to announce the pregnancy to the world.

He and Bruce had talked options over this. Trying to see if there was a way they could make it appear as if they’d had a surrogate carry the babies for them and she’d wanted to remain anonymous. But as other Celebs who had tried to keep their surrogates anonymous had found, the press always managed to find out the identity of the Mother one way or another.

There was also no way Tony could go into hiding for months on end and not have questions raised as to where he was, he was too much of a public figure to just disappear and there was no way he could hide his changing body shape indefinitely, certainly not now he was well into the second trimester.

With his body having never been designed to do this, Tony wasn’t really sure what to feel about the changes he was going through. He liked feeling the babies move, even though they weren’t kicking yet, or at least not strong enough for anyone else to feel. He was thankful that the morning sickness had finally gone after clinging on for four whole months, although he was devastated by not being able to drink more than three cups of coffee a day, and was unable to stomach eating cheese burgers his absolute favourite food in the world, as well as finding fish repugnant. Pizza was out too, anything with melted cheese was turning his stomach right now so it was banned from the manor and from the Compound if he was visiting.

While that might sound like he was having have a very bland diet, he was making up for it with his cravings, some of which were not too bad, after all anyone could enjoy custard or donuts, it was more the ketchup on ice-cream that had people alarmed, or chocolate cookies dipped in chutney that got people turning their noses up, well, that and the fact he’d have cravings at two or three in the
morning and whomever was available was sent out to get him what he wanted.

Once Bruce had been in the middle of patrol when Tony had come onto the coms demanding he go and buy him jam donuts immediately and bring them home right away or risk never being given sex again.

What the poor girl at the counter had thought when Batman was buying donuts at two am Bruce didn’t know, but Jason had been laughing himself silly for days, at least until he had to do a cravings run in the early hours to satisfy Tony.

Thankfully his mood swings hadn’t been too horrific, and when they had it’d been Bruce who’d born the brunt of them with Tony screaming at him for being, “An emotionless arsehole” “A complete ignorant prick” “A condescending, sanctimonious ass hat” whom Tony hated and would never sleep with again. Until about twenty minutes later when he burst into tears and threw himself into Bruce’s arms sobbing about how much he loved and needed him.

“Is this normal?” Bruce had asked Alfred after one such session,

“Oh perfectly Master Bruce.” Alfred said cheerfully, “You should be thankful, your Father spent more time sleeping on the sofa than in his own bed while your Mother was expecting you!”

Not being able to fit into his own clothes was not something Tony was enjoying about pregnancy, nor the stretch marks which were rearing their ugly heads over his lower abdomen and on his hips.

Bruce wasn’t bothered by them at all, he was after all covered in scars himself and didn’t find anything off putting by silver/purple lines on Tony’s skin. He was also finding himself increasingly unable to keep his hands off the growing bump.

Tony couldn’t blame him for that, he felt much the same himself, wanting to feel their babies round home all the time and reassure himself they were safe and sound inside him and growing strong and healthy. The only downside being the fact he needed maternity clothing, which wasn’t really made for men.

Clothing made for larger men wasn’t really a great choice since it would just swamp him over the rest of his body, and there just wasn’t the material cut into the crotch on maternity wear for Tony to feel comfortable wearing it.

The solution to the problem was found by Pepper and Alfred, who bought several pairs of XL Yoga pants and cut the waist bands from them, then cut the waist bands from Tony’s usual trousers and stitch the stretchy waist bands in their place.

The problem with his shirts was rectified in much the same way, with them either buying larger shirts and tailoring them to fit or adding extra panels of matching shades of material to Tony’s existing shirts.

This at least meant he had something to wear to announce the pregnancy to the world that looked smart, and gave him some much needed confidence.

In an effort to control the way the story came out, Tony and Bruce gave an exclusive interview to Christine Everheart, complete with a photo spread and copies of a couple of the ultra-sound photos to prove that this wasn’t in any way an elaborate joke they were pulling, although it’d have to have
been very elaborate considering Tony’s very obvious bump, which he and Bruce were pictured cuddling between them, along with a few shots of Tony on his own holding the bump.

Once she got over her initial shock Christine asked the relevant questions on how this happened, or was believed to have happened, what it meant for Tony in regards to his health, how he and Bruce felt about this, how their family felt about it and the Avengers.

(They opted to keep the boys out of the interview not wanting to parade them in front of the cameras, so they could have as “Normal” an upbringing as possible.)

“They are all very happy and excited.” Bruce said, “They were shocked at first, hell, we were shocked, you don’t exactly expect for your husband to become pregnant!”

“He fainted!” Tony just had to put in, making Christine snicker and Bruce groan, knowing it’d end up being put out in black and white for the whole world to read and mock him for.

“And how do you feel in general, Tony?” Christine asked, “It can’t be easy for you, your body wasn’t meant to do this.”

“It’s uncomfortable, but not unbearably so. The morning sickness is gone thank God, the cravings are driving me nuts though!”

“Driving you nuts?” Bruce asked incredulous, “I’m the one being sent out at three am to buy you donuts.”

“And you were the one who knocked me up.” Tony shot back, he grinned at Christine, “That wins every argument.”

“Well you both are clearly delighted by this, as surprising as it is, have you any names selected yet?”

“A couple, but we’re not telling anyone yet.” Bruce replied, “We don’t know the gender yet either, only that the twins are unidentical as there are two placentas.”

“And are you hoping for specific genders?”

“No, boys, girls, or one of each, we don’t care.” Tony replied.

The rest of the interview continued in much the same manner and Christine wrote up a light hearted and heart warming story that of course exploded the second it was in print.

After that the internet was filled with questions, exclamations, criticisms, congratulations, and demands for Tony and Bruce to comment, and to give more interviews.

They however chose to ignore the media onslaught beyond making thank you posts to their well wishers on their social media pages, and focused on a much more important issue.

Choosing which room to make the babies nursery.
They selected the room just down the hall from their own for the nursery and set about decorating. Tony helped pick out the colours and put together the furniture with Peter, but couldn’t help with the painting because the fumes made him sick.

So, Bruce handled that, with Dick, Jason, Tim, and Vision lending a hand. Vision were perfect for doing the ceiling as he could float up there.

They had chosen sky blue for the ceiling with white clouds, which Vision painted in carefully with small brush, and surrounded them with a sparkling silver paint.

The walls were painted a mint green by Jason and Dick, while Bruce and Tim painted in stencils of animals, creating a wild life theme for the nursery.

“I think it’ll be boys.” Tim said, tilting his head to the side as he carefully painted a giraffe. “I has to be boys really.”

“How do you figure that?” Jason asked,

“Well, both Bruce and Tony and male, there’s no female DNA to make a girl is there?”

Jason frowned thinking it over while Dick shook his head, “I don’t think it works like that, remember it’s the semen that decided the gender of a baby anyway, the egg is genderless.”

“So, it could be girls,” Jason said, “Or one of each.”

“Nah it’s gonna be two boys, I just know it”

“Richard is good strong name you know, Bruce.” Dick oh so helpfully put in, “Jason is the name of a Greek Hero.”

“We are not calling either of the babies Richard, Jason, or Timothy, so you can stop asking.” Bruce said, a small smirk on his face.

“Not as first names, but what about middle names?” Dick pushed and grinned as Bruce gave him the Bat glare, not that it mattered, ever since he’d fainted his glare had even less effect on the brat than it had before.

“Is not the first born Son supposed to be named after the paternal Grandfather?” Vision asked floating down a little from the ceiling and hovering mid air.

“Traditionally yes.” Bruce said, “But it isn’t that well practised these days. I wasn’t named after my Grandfather.”

“Yeah and technically both Howard and Thomas are paternal Grandfather’s.” Tim said.

“I doubt Tony will name any baby after Howard shit bag Stark.” Dick grunted, “Bastard that he was.”

“And the less said about him the better.” Bruce said, going to refill his paint tray and took a moment to look around the room which was coming along well. It reminded him that this was really happening, he and Tony were really having babies. He still felt like he had to pinch himself it was so
amazing, and just a few months those babies would be with them, they would be parents of children they had made themselves, their own flesh and blood.

“You alright, Bruce?” Dick asked, seeing Bruce just standing and staring for the moment,

“Yeah.” Bruce said nodding his head, “Just letting it all sink in.” He refilled the paint tray and got back to work, imagining carrying their son’s or daughters into the nursery for the first time, then feeding them and changing them, rocking them to sleep.

While was the most nerve wracking thing he had ever experienced in his life, it was also the most amazing and wonderful thing and Bruce couldn’t wait for the babies to arrive.

*****

“Its unbelievable. I can build the first Iron Man suit in a cave from scraps, I can make new elements in my basement, yet I struggle and putting together a couple of fucking cribs!” Tony spat in disgust. He tossed aside the instructions which were about as useful as a chocolate tea pot and scowled at the parts laying over the floor of the living room.

“I think this bit goes here.” Peter said not sounding very convinced of it, “Or maybe… this bit goes across to support the frame?”

“This is bullshit.” Tony said, cupping his belly, a frequent gesture since he’d discovered he was pregnant, he rose up onto his knees, “Right, screw the instructions, we’re going to do this ourselves and make these things up using our genius intelligence.”

“Great.” Peter said as enthusiastic as ever, he then paused and looked at the piles of wood, screws, and nuts, “Which bit goes first?”

With a lot of swearing, trials and errors, Tony and Peter managed to have all the furniture assembled and ready to go up the nursery by the time the others had finished painting for the day and went to wash up ready for dinner, which Alfred had prepared for them.

A good hearty roast beef, with roasted potatoes that Jason tried to hog until he got the back of his hand stabbed with a fork by Tim, Yorkshire pudding that Dick just about drowned in gravy, and a selection of vegetables that Tim turned his nose up at but was instructed to eat a portion of anyway, as was Jason, whom did not get away with trying to hide them in his napkin!

“Did you know that there is talk of a film company doing a series of movies about you?” Peter asked Tony, “From when you first became Iron Man, the whole thing with Justin Hammer, the Avengers, the Mandarin, and all the stuff that’s just happened with Thanos.”

“I had heard something about it.” Tony said, “Its still in the writing stage at present, but the director has approached one of my PR reps to arrange a meeting so I can look over the script.”

“There is talk of a cheesy rom/com.” Tim said, wiping his mouth with his napkin, “Of you guys and the pregnancy. They kind of wanna redo that Arnold Schwarznegger movie, Junior, but make it better.”
“Wouldn’t be difficult.” Jason muttered.

“Huh, I wonder if they’d cast the same guy who’ll play Tony in the Iron Man movies, for that movie.” Peter mused,

“If they get made.” Tony said, “Lots of movies never get out of the writing stage.”

“I hope they do, they would be so cool.”

“Cooler than a Bat Man movie?” Dick asked with a wry grin, ignoring the glare Bruce shot him and delighting in the wide eyed shocked look that came over Peter’s face.

“No, no, I mean, I, someone doing a movie about Bat Man would be just as cool as movies about Iron Man, both are super cool and I never meant that Bat Man wasn’t cool…”

“Relax Pete, Dick is just being his namesake.” Tony soothed. Peter stuck out his tongue at Dick who laughed until Alfred slapped him upside the head on his way to answer the phone. He returned a few moments later with his expression grave.

“What is it?” Bruce asked, his voice lowering to the Bat like growl, immediately expecting trouble.

“There have been attacks I’m afraid Sir.” Alfred said, as the dining room fell silent, he cast a worried glance to Tony, looking uncomfortable as he went on. “A Neo-Nazi anti-gay gang have committed joint attacks on both the Wayne Enterprise building, and Stark Towers, in protest over your pregnancy.” Alfred sounded utterly disgusted by what these people had done, and apologetic over having to tell Tony and Bruce of this, and thus ruining what had been a happy dinner after a very happy day.

“Oh God.” Tim whispered,

“Has anyone been hurt?” Bruce asked,

“Thankfully no, the night staff of both buildings were able to get out unharmed.” Alfred said, “But there has been fire damage to Stark Tower as Molotov cocktails were thrown into the building.” He paused again, looking to Tony and then back to Bruce, “There was also a lot of graffiti painted in Wayne Enterprises building, along with an effigy of Iron Man strung up and the middle slash open.”

“Bastards!” Jason roared over turning his chair, “I’m gonna fucking kill the lot of them!” He grabbed his table knife, his eyes blazing with fury, “Let’s hunt the fuckers down and disembowel them!”

“Too quick, let’s rip out their eyes, tongues, and cut off their hands before we gut them.” Dick said also standing.

“I’ll hang them from lamp posts.” Peter added,

“We should skin them.” Tim said, “Peel their skin of strip by strip, then take their eyes, tongues, and hands, and then gut and hang them!”

“No one is gutting, hanging, or mutilating anyone.” Bruce shouted, going to Tony, who had gone very pale and was sitting silently, cradling his belly. The effigy had been a clear threat to his life and the lives of the babies.

“They deserve it.” Jason snarled.

“Maybe, but doing that would make us no better than them.” Bruce said, kneeling besides Tony,
“Are you okay?” he asked,

“Yeah.” Tony whispered forcing a smile, “I guess I forgot how much people hate me and how vocal they can get about it.”

“These aren’t people, they’re Nazi’s.” Peter spat.

“Perhaps you should go and lay down?” Vision suggested, “Shock is not good for pregnancy.”

“No I’m alright.” Tony said taking a deep breath, he looked to Bruce, “We need to go and see the damage and speak to the police.”

Bruce nodded, “I’ll go, I can handle it with Pepper and Lucious.” He looked to Alfred, “Can you bring the car around?”

“Certainly Master Bruce.”

“No, I’m coming too.” Tony said firmly, “I’m not going to be cowed by a bunch of neo-nazi fuckwits with barely a teaspoon of brain cells between them. I’m coming with you and that is that.”

*****

In the end everyone went to see the damage, the boys and Vision refusing the remain behind, wanting to put on a united front and show their support of Tony and Bruce.

They went to the Wayne Enterprises building first as it was closest. The police showing them past the barrier and getting them through the press which had gathered outside and were screaming questions the second the family arrived.

Lucious Fox was already present and greeted them in the lobby which had taken the worst of the damage, lurid and disgusting words spray painted all over the walls and windows, paint thrown onto the floor, along with urine. The effigy had already been cut down and taken for evidence so Tony didn’t have to see it. The graffiti calling him a freak, and abomination, a disgust and filthy cock whore, were enough to turn his stomach without that.

“They spray painted the security cameras, but we’ve got enough before they did so to identify them.” Lucious said to Bruce, “I’ve given the tapes to the cops, and contacted our insurers. I’ve also got a statement prepared for the media, and if it’s alright with you, Mr Wayne, I’d like to shut the building down for a few days so it can be cleaned and re-decorated.”

“Do it.” Bruce said, “Give everyone five days paid leave, and yourself a bonus for handling all this.”

“Thank you, Mr Wayne, and if there is anything I can do for you, or Mr Stark…” Bruce gave Lucious a warm smile and squeezed his shoulder, thanking him again before going to Tony, who was staring at the graffiti.

“They are full of shit, honey. Don’t let them get to you.”

“I know.” Tony said, nodding his head, he forced a smile which deepened when Peter took his hand, “I’m alright, I’m not going to give them the satisfaction of upsetting me.”
New York.

As it was faster, Bruce got the chopper to fly them to New York, not wanting Tony to have to try and sit through a very long drive.

The Stark Tower had suffered more damage, the fire having consumed the lobby before the sprinklers could get it under control and the fire department could arrive and put it out.

Pepper was already on scene speaking with the police and fire chief when they arrived. Again there was a huge media presence demanding to know what Bruce and Tony thought of this.

“What the fuck do you think they think about this shit?” Jason roared, “Are you all fucking brain dead or something?”

“Jason, that’s enough.” Bruce hissed, grabbing Jason’s arm and pulling him away from the press, not that it made a lot of difference, with reporters screaming at Tony, asking if he was in fear for his life, if he was worried that the babies might be in danger, even having the audacity to ask if he regretted continuing the pregnancy in light of these repercussions.

Tony would have ignored everything but that, this was one thing he couldn’t ignore and when it was yelled out, he paused midstride and turned back around, marching to the barrier to speak with the press, or rather just yell at them.

“I will never regret continuing this pregnancy, I fell in love my babies the second I learned of them. I don’t give a fuck what these ignorant pricks think, they can call me what they want and think whatever they want, because I know the truth, and this is that Bruce and I have been blessed with a wonderful gift and I am proud to carry these babies and I will be damned before I ever say or think otherwise.”

“As will I.” Bruce said, his arm going around Tony’s shoulders making the smaller man startle as he hadn’t heard him come over. “We knew there would be small minded and ignorant people offended by our blessing, we expected there to be negative comments. We did not expect such violence though and are appalled that people would do something like this. But it does not and never will change how happy we are and how much we are looking forward to having our twins.”

“And we can’t wait to have little brothers or sisters.” Dick said, he and the others joining Tony and Bruce, making a united stand besides them for the world to see.

“So listen up, you neo-nazi fuckheads!” Jason yelled, “We don’t care what you say, you ain’t gonna break us and if you come near or try to hurt us, we’ll break you!”

“Jason!” Bruce hissed, but it didn’t matter, as the press had already recorded it.

“Family sticks together.” Tim said, linking his hands with Dick and Peter, “And we’re family, the Stark/Wayne family, and if you try and take us on, we’ll kick your ass!”

*****

Compound.
The Avengers were more than disgusted when the news reached them of the attacks against Tony and Bruce.

Clint cursed at the TV and threw a rolled up tissue at it, Steve shook his head, “How can people be so disgusting?” He asked, “Or threaten a pregnant person, threaten their unborn babies?”

“Hell if I know, Cap.” Sam sighed. “Some people are just fucked in the head, they ain’t ill, they’re just assholes.”

“Makes you wonder if it was worth saving them, doesn’t it?” Natasha murmured, scowling at the images of the graffiti shown on the screen. The little Nazis who’d done had better pray they never ran into the Black Widow.

“At least Tony wouldn’t let them grind him down.” Clint said, as a replay of Tony’s impassioned speech came up.

“He’s a fighter.” Bucky said, he grinned, “That Jason’s a right punk.”

“They’ve certainly got their hands full with him, that’s for sure.” Steve agreed. His eyes narrowed on the screen, “You know, I know that the police are looking into this and may eventually arrest the culprits, and I know it isn’t technically an Avenger jurisdiction, but…..”

“You were wondering if maybe we could find these fuckers faster?” Sam asked, with a grin spreading over his face, “Maybe call in Bat Man and his side-kicks to pool resources so we can get these assholes behind bars even faster?”

Steve grinned, “Sam, I think you read my mind.”
Gotham

Tony was in the shower when he noticed it. With his growing belly it was getting harder and harder for him to reach down between his legs, mostly he either relied on Bruce (Which often led to them doing something very different to washing) or he sat in the bath and let the soapy water do the work for him.

That morning however he put the flexibility of his body to the test and washed himself only to feel something odd between his thighs, something he’d never felt before. Of course, his fingers could only provide him with so much information, he needed to see what was going on, which was a difficulty since he couldn’t bend that much anymore, and using a mirror wasn’t much use because if he lay on his back then he couldn’t see over the bump, and if he tried to stand on one leg with the other lifted he risked toppling over and breaking his neck!

In the end he called for Bruce, literally shouting for him, and lay back on the bed, completely naked, knees bent and legs parted. This was rather unfortunate, as Dick, having heard Tony’s shouting, had gone with Bruce, worried that it might be an emergency and was treated to far more of Tony then he ever wanted to see.

“Oh God my eyes, my eyes, I need to gauge out my eyes!” He cried, screwing said eyes shut and bolting from the room.

“Try knocking in the future.” Tony yelled after him, unimpressed with Dick’s reaction. While Bruce was caught between amusement and embarrassment as he regarded his naked pregnant husband.

“I take it there is a reason that you summoned me?”

“Yeah, there is,” Tony said, pushing himself up to rest on his elbows, “I’ve got something between my legs and I need you to take a look at it for me.” Bruce’s lips twitched and Tony sighed, rolling his eyes. “This isn’t a seduction, dumbass, I felt something while I was in the shower, something… oh just have a look will you!”

Grinning, Bruce got down on his knees and peered between Tony’s parted thighs, “Where am I looking?” he asked.

“Behind my junk.” Tony replied. His breath hitched as Bruce lifted his genitalia to see what he’d been talking about, “Can you see it?”

“Yeah.”

“What the hell is it?”

“It looks like… well it looks like an opening.” Bruce said, frowning as he inspected the change to Tony’s body. “It’s shallow at the moment, little more than an indent, I can see skin inside it, but I would assume it’s how you’re going to give birth and that it’ll continue to develop until its time.” He pulled his hand away and sat back on his heels as Tony sat up.

“So I’m growing a vagina?”

“Part of one I guess.” Bruce said,
“So I can give birth naturally. Great, no caesarean, that’s good I wasn’t really looking forward to more surgery. No, wait, not good, not good at all, in fact its bad, its very, very bad.” Tony said starting panic, “I don’t want to give birth naturally, Bruce. I’ve seen it on TV and its horrid, its like torture! There is blood everywhere, and there is screaming, and things dilating, and the blood, did I mention the blood? There is so much blood, and the Doctors do nasty evil things, they cut down there sometimes and I don’t want to get cut down there, Bruce, what if the Doctor were to slip? I’d end up singing friggin’ soprano or some shit!”

“I doubt it’ll come to that.” Bruce laughed, only to have Tony grab him by his shirt and yank him forward.

“I swear to God, Bruce Wayne, if I loose my balls because you knocked me up, then I’ll take a pair of Alfred’s gardening shears to yours!”

More than a little in fear of his manhood being removed by his irate husband, Bruce patted Tony’s hands and smiled sweetly at him, “I’m sure everything will be fine, now how about some breakfast, you do need to keep your strength up.”

Grumbling under his breath, Tony allowed Bruce to haul him to his feet and guide him to the wardrobe to get dressed, so that he wouldn’t traumatize Jason and Tim the way he had Dick.

When they got down to the kitchen they were greeted to the sight of Rhodey at the table with the boys, drinking coffee, while Alfred was seeing to the waffles, bacon, and eggs.

“Platypus, what brings you to our casa?” Tony asked, gratefully taking a seat. His feet were always hurting these days, something that he suspected was going to get worse as the pregnancy progressed.

“I heard what happened, Tony, you didn’t honestly think I wouldn’t come to see you.” Rhodey said, reaching across the table and taking Tony’s hand, “I wanted to make sure you were alright, and that you weren’t giving those bastards the satisfaction of letting them get to you.”

Tony gave him a smile, “Cause I’m not. Takes more than a bunch of Neo-Nazi knobheads to get me down.”

“I keep telling you, just let me disembowel them.” Jason growled, holding his table knife like a dagger, “I could do it real slow, with a blunt blade so it’d hurt more, and I’d take my time, twisting the blade in a slow circle, making it wider and wider and deeper and deeper, so they could watch as their intestines turned to salami!” The downside of him saying this was that Alfred placed the bacon on the table at that moment.

“This just isn’t my day.” Dick groaned, “First I get to see Tony in all his glory, now I get to listen to Teenage murder fest, give graphic details on how he wants to slice some ones guts up.”

“You saw Tony naked?” Rhodey asked, “Tony, why are you traumatizing poor Dick?”

“Bite me, Sour apple, it was an emergency.” Tony shot back, gazing longingly at the coffee pot and scowled when Bruce placed decaf in front of him. “This is an insult to coffee.” He grumbled, sipping at it anyway.

“What emergency?” Peter asked, “Nothings wrong with Thing one and Thing Two is there?”

Bruce’s eyebrows shot to his hairline, “You are not calling my children Thing one and Thing Two.”
“Yeah, more like Hell spawn and Demon Child.” Jason snickered, getting a slap around the back of his head from Alfred.

“Mind your manners Master Jason.”

“What manners, he was raised by wolves.” Tim muttered, half asleep and looking like he might fall face first into his waffles if his elbow gave way.

“Blow me, Drake.” Jason shot back.

“Language.” Bruce chided him, “And in answer to your question, Peter, no there is nothing wrong with the babies. There has just been a development.”

Tony snorted, “That’s one way of putting it.”

“What would you like me to describe it as?” Bruce asked,

“How about, that I’m growing female body parts and might be in danger of losing my male body parts, and I swear to God, if that happens, then you are losing everything between your thighs, and there is no way in hell I am going through that torture that people call child birth, absolutely not.”

The others looked around the table at each other and at Bruce who shrugged helplessly. Eventually Rhodey cleared his throat, “You are developing a…. birth canal?”

“Oh, Dude!” Jason cried, shoving away his plate, “Fucking gross!”

“Language!”

“That’s gross? You were going on about disembowelment.” Dick cried.

“That’s less gross than talking about the bits that Babies get squeezed out of.” Jason protested.

“No it isn’t.” Peter argued, then rose an eyebrow when Tim let out a snore, somehow he’d managed to fall asleep despite all the noise.

“If I might suggest, perhaps a visit to Dr Strange is in order?” Alfred suggested, the voice of reason in the madness of the Stark/Wayne household.

“Good idea.” Bruce said and Tony rolled his eyes.

“Great, like I don’t get poked and prodded enough by the arrogant asshole, now I have to put up with gawping between my thighs.”

“Tony, you know he’s only doing this for your own good.” Bruce tried to sooth, but Tony was having none of it, or rather his hormones were having none of it.

“How would he know what was good for me? I’m a knocked up male, that isn’t supposed to happen, he’s just guessing everything, and meanwhile I’m swelling up like a frickin’ whale, getting holes where I’m not supposed to have holes, and now I need to pee, again!” Sighing grumpily he hauled himself up from the table made his way to the nearest toilet.

“His mood swings are going well, I see.” Rhodey commented cheerfully, then turned serious as soon as Tony was out of earshot. “I think we can all agree that those assholes who attacked WE and SI need to be dealt with, yes?”

“No shit, you heard about the disembowelment right?” Jason sneered.
“We’re not disembowelling anyone.” Bruce sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, he really needed to do something about Jason’s bloodlust. “What did you have in mind, Colonel?”

“Well, it’s more a joint venture actually,” Rhodey explained, “The Avengers want a piece of these asshole too, so we were thinking that we’d combine resources and find these fuckers and teach them a lesson they’ll never forget.”

“And by teach them a lesson you do not mean anything too excessive I assume?” Alfred asked, seeing the glint in Jason’s eyes.

“No excessive force.” Rhodey assured the older man, “Just, a very firm warning.” He rose an eyebrow when Dick raised a hand, “Yes?”

“Do broken legs count as excessive force?”

“Umm…” Rhodey was saved from answering this by Bruce cutting in.

“Not as long as the break is below the knee joint.”

*****

Compound.

When Rhodey returned to the compound, Tony and Bruce went with him via a chopper, to see Strange for another anti-natal exam so they could find out what was going on.

Stripping out of his clothes, Tony put on a hospital gown and lay back on the medical bed, where Strange lay a blanket over his pelvis to give him some modesty while he lifted the gown to examine and measure Tony’s bump.

“Fundal height is progressing well.” He said, recording the growth in the chart he was making, “How have you been feeling in yourself?”

“Tired, uncomfortable, I have heart burn, trapped wind, indigestion, and I need to pee all the time.” Tony grumbled, “And my back hurts, and my feet hurt, plus my shoes are getting too tight.”

“That’ll be water retention.” Strange said, “Try laying with your feet elevated, although you may need to go up a shoe size or two.”

“Great.” Tony muttered running his fingers up and down his bump, “I’ve been feeling them move.” He said, “At least I think I am, fluttering feelings, like something squirming inside me, I’ve been feeling that a lot, especially at night. I thought I was getting gas at first, but then I realized it was something else.”

Stephen met his eyes and smiled, “Yes, foetal movement will be becoming more pronounced now. They’ll soon begin to kick hard enough for others to feel.” Tony smiled, gazing down at the bump, looking forward to when Bruce would be able to feel their babies move. At that moment Bruce joined them. He’d been speaking privately with Steve about their joint venture to make the Neo-Nazi gang pay for what they’d done.
“I’m not too late I hope?” he asked joining Tony, “For the Ultrasound?”

“No, I’m just about to do that.” Strange said getting the gel and the wand ready. He squirted the gel on Tony’s bump and ran the wand over it until he found Tony’s uterus and the babies, who looked they were pressing their foreheads together they were so close.

“Everything is coming along nicely there.” Strange said, checking the measurements, “One is a little bigger than the other, but not by much, and they’re not sharing a placenta, so there is not risk of one getting more nutrients than the other,” He looked closer at the monitor, “Would you like to know the gender?” he asked, seeing very clearly what they were having.

“No,” Tony said, staring transfixed at the screen and the fuzzy images of the two lives inside him, “We want to wait until their born.”

“Alright.”

“About the birth.” Bruce said, “It seems Tony’s had a development in that department.”

“Oh?” Strange rose an eyebrow, and Tony sighed,

“I’ve got a hole forming behind my balls, we found it this morning.”

“Ah, so a natural labour may be possible after all.” Strange said, giving Tony a cloth to wipe the gel off his bump and pull the gown back down, “Would you mind if I took a look?”

“Oh be my guest, its not like I’ve any dignity left at this point!”

Strange helped Tony get his legs into stirrups and carefully examined the opening that Bruce had seen, “It certainly looks like a developing birth canal. Its shallow at the moment, but I would assume it’ll grow deeper over the next few weeks up to the birth.” Carefully he applied some pressure to Tony’s pelvis, feeling for space, “I’m not certain if you will be able to deliver naturally, its going to depend on whether or not your pelvis softens enough to do so. In fact I’d like to do an x-ray of your pelvis, and repeat it in a few weeks time so I can see what’s happening there.” He said, standing up straight. “A woman’s pelvis softens and widens throughout a pregnancy in preparation for the birth. A man’s is not made to do so, and unless it does then I’m not prepared to risk a natural labour no matter what orifices you might develop, a caesarean would be safer.”

“What about the radiation?” Tony asked, a hand going to his bump protectively.

“It’ll only be a very small dose, not enough to harm the babies at this stage.” Strange assured him, “You have the equipment here, I believe?”

“Uh huh.” Tony said, wriggling to get his legs down, Bruce rose and helped him do so, and helped him to sit up. “If my pelvis does widen, then I can give birth naturally?”

“Yes.” Strange said, “And I’ll arrange for you to start attending Lamaze classes in preparation so you’ll know what to expect.”

The X-Ray only took a few minutes and Strange examined the shots, thinking that there might be some separation, but wanted to repeat the X-Ray in a months time. After taking Tony’s blood to do a couple of routine tests and checking his blood pressure he sent the Billionaire on his way with Bruce back to Gotham, to continue making ready for the babies, and, in Bruce’s case, find where the gang was hiding so they could make then pay.
Chapter 54

Gotham

As it turned out the Neo-Nazi’s were not the brightest bunch, which was pretty obvious by the fact they were neo-nazis in the first place. But even though they had committed serious crimes and were looking at lengthy prison sentences, they had not really gone to ground, instead they had chosen to hide out in their (Head Quarters) A disused warehouse on Gotham docks, on which they had painted swastika and other racial, anti-gay, anti-semetic, and degrogotory symbols and words, fully advertising themselves.

They probably did this to show off, making themselves feel strong by showing their idiocy and bigotry to the world, but instead all they had done was paint targets on themselves which the Avengers and Bat family took full advantage of.

At nightfall they gathered at the ware house, surrounding it, with Bat Man, Nightwing, Spider Man, Robin, Red Robin, and Hawkeye on the roof, War Machine and Captain America at the front entrance, Winter Soldier, and Black Widow on the rear entrance, and Falcon and Vision circling in the air ready to pick up any strays that might escape.

“Everyone ready?” War Machine asked firing up his repulsors,

“Good to go.” Winter Soldier growled,

“Move in.”

War Machine blew apart the metal the sliding door to the ware house, storming inside with Captain America at his side throwing his shield which neatly sliced in half a Nazi flag before knocking down a couple of the idiots as they rose from a dilapidated couch.

“Funny, its been seventy years and I still hate that flag.” Steve said, catching the shield as it returned,

“I know the feeling,” Rhodey replied, blasting at the wall and preventing an attempted escape of a shaven and swastika tattoo headed youth. He flew down in front of the pale faced idiot and aimed a repulsor at him, smirking when the fool drew a gun, “Go on, give me a reason to shoot you?” He goaded.

The idiot actually fired the gun, emptying the clip uselessly against Rhodey’s armour, yelping when one of the bullets ricocheted back and hit him in the shoulder then whimpered in horror as Rhodey closed his gauntlet covered fist around the gun and crushed it.

“Dumbass.” Rhodey muttered giving the idiot a single punch to the face which knocked him out cold, meanwhile Steve was deal with a pair of scrawny junky looking types who had tried to rush him with razors, his Shield had deflected the blades easily and a couple of blows to the arms had knocked the blades from their hands (breaking their arms too) he’d then been non to gentle about cuffing them together and shoving them down on the floor where he told them stay, his voice full of threat of what would happen if they did not.

Bucky blew out the lock on the back door and he and Natasha stormed in, his metal fist colliding
with the elaborately pierced face of one man as he made to run, knocking him out and shattering his nose, he then seized the wrists of another shattering the bones within and wrenching a gun from his hand which he used to smack the man across the face, knocking him out to join his friend on the floor.

Natasha had tackled a shaven headed woman with a flick knife, kicking the knife from her hand easily and delivered a spinning kick to her face which broke her jaw, leaving her on the ground sobbing and clutching at her face in agony.

She turned to Bucky her eyes turning hard and with a nod of her head he had ducked down catching her feet on his shoulders, helping flip her over and come down on top of a hulking oaf of a man bringing him to the ground flat on his back with her thighs crushing his neck, cutting off the air supply until he passed out.

“You’re lucky I didn’t kill you.” She spat into his face getting up off him which Bucky dealt with a couple more, just as Bat Man and Robin came crashing through the roof, landing on the Cat walk in unison and delivering vicious punches to the nazi’s they met there, they were followed down by Robin and Red Robin who showed no mercy and dealing out blows for the Nazis.

From his vantage point above, Clint cut off escape routes with arrows fired within less than an inch from the bodies of the nazi’s who were then either taken down by Dick, Jason, or Tim, or were bound up in Peter’s webbing and left swinging upside down by their feet.

Bruce climbed up onto the side of the cat walk and leaped off, spreading his cape and gliding down, lading on the backs of the ring leader and his side kick whom he kicked the ground, just as an agonised scream came from above as Dick gleefully broke the leg of one of the Nazi’s.

“It’s the Bat, it’s the bat!” The Side Kick screamed trying to scramble out from under the ring leader and made a run for it, not that he got far as a Batarang was embedded in the back of his knee and Steve’s fist met his face in a solid, bone crushing punch.

The Ring Leader squirmed over onto his back, revealing a swastika tattooed face and pulled a gun on Bruce, who caught his wrists aiming the weapons at the wall and let him fire it until it was empty, he then delivered several vicious punches to the man’s ribs, taking pleasure in every sound of cracking bone, pulled the now empty gun from the man’s limp hands and used the butt to smash in the man’s cheek bones and nose.

Panting slightly, more from adrenaline than exertion, Bruce got to his feet and raised his foot over the whimpering Nazi’s crotch, “This is for Tony Stark.” He said and brought his full weight down in a single solid thrust.

The scream the Nazi gave was ear splitting and even Bucky winced at the shot Bruce had taken.

“Damn, B can be Badass.” Jason said admiringly then smashed his elbow back into the face one of the few Nazi’s who were still conscious.

“Is that all of them?” Steve called out surveying the damage.

“That’s the lot.” Bucky said, dragging a couple over and dumping them on the ground by the sobbing leader.

“I’ll call the cops,” Rhodey said, “They can come and pick the trash up.” He went outside to place the call, Falcon and Vision landing, with Sam looking disappointed that he didn’t get to punch a few Nazi’s.
“Why the fuck are you hassling us Man?” One of the few who were conscious, cried at Steve, clutching his broken and profusely bleeding nose, “We ain’t done nothing!”

“Nothing?” Steve repeated incredulous, “You attacked Wayne Enterprizes and Stark Industries, left vile commentary, committed arsen, and made a threat to the life of Tony Stark and his unborn babies.”

“Fuckin’ unnatural.” One of the girls spat, “Bad enough he bends over for Wayne, now he’s got fag babies, fuckin’ freak.” She yelped as the back of Natasha’s hand struck her face and gasped in terror as Natasha’s fist closed about her throat and she was brought face to face with the Black Widow.

“If I hear one more insult about Tony or Homosexuality come from your mouth, then I will cut your lips off and wear them as earrings, do you understand me?” Natasha whispered, her voice even more deadly than a blade.

The girl nodded frantically and huddled up in a ball when Natasha dropped her back on the ground. Natasha spun around and smiled deceptively sweetly at the rest of them “Has anybody else got anything they would like to say?”

Unsurprisingly they remained silent as they waited for the police to arrive.

*****

The Avengers and Bat Family facilitating the arrest of the Nazi group naturally made the headlines, even Jameson, the most vitriolic against superheroes was praising them, apparently having no love for Neo-Nazi’s either.

With many of them already wanted for other offenses, and public opinion having already condemned them, all twenty were looking at several years in prison and little chance of parole.

A couple of them tried to bring charges against the Avengers and Bat Family for assault, but considered several of them had been armed, and the fact that no one cared, least of all the courts, no charges were brought.

When asked by the media about the teams decision to intervene Steve simply replied, “We’re Avengers, we take care of our own, and personally, I have always had a problem with Nazis.”

Tony made a formal statement to the media thanking the Avengers and Bat Family for their actions, but in private he organized a movie night which they appreciated far more than flashing lights and pictures in the tabloids, especially since he had a cinema system to rival that of professional theatres which made watching all five Jurrassic park and Jurrasic World movies all the better.

“I think we should do another Jurrassic world simulation.” Peter said, “Preferably one where I don’t get splattered by the spitter.” Jason had unfortunately taken a mouthful of coke and ended up spraying his jeans with it as he burst into laughter, getting clipped around the ear by Alfred who knew what his filthy mind was thinking of.

“You have a Jurrassic world simulation?” Tim asked, his eyes going wide, “Ohmygod! We have so got to try it!”

“Not if I get eaten again.” Natasha grumbled,
“We never did get to experience the Spinosaurus.” Clint said, looking to Tony hopefully, as he sat nestled against Bruce, working his way through the most disgusting Ice cream sundae anyone had ever seen.

Vanilla ice cream, chocolate ice cream, tomato ketchup, sliced tomatoes, torn up donuts, and topped off with custard.

“I think we can arrange something.” He said savouring a spoonful, “Maybe Cap won’t get sliced up by a raptor this time.” He added giving Steve a grin,

“If he does I ain’t carrying him.” Bucky said between mouthfuls of popcorn.

“Am I ever living that down?” Steve asked,

“Never.” Rhodey said, “Tony’s like an elephant, he never forgets.”

“Like an elephant in more ways than that.” Tony groaned, “I swear I’ll burst before I give birth, and I am in mourning for my ankles which have disappeared.” Bruce made a sympathetic noise and rubbed Tony’s back consolingly.

“It’ll be worth it in the end.” He said.

“And its not that bad, Tony, you should stop worrying.” Steve said, only realizing when it was too late that he’d said the wrong thing as Tony’s gaze narrowed on him.

“Not that bad? How about you try carrying an extra thirty pounds on your front, watching your waist disappear, craving food all the time night and day, and needing to piss practically every five minutes?” Tony snarled at him, “You go through all of that and then you tell me its not…” He broke off going very still.

“Tony?” Rhodey said frowning.

“Is everything alright?” Natasha asked.

“Tony?” Bruce asked, and Tony let out a breathy gasp, shoving the sundae to one side and grabbed Bruce’s hand to place on his bump.

“They’re kicking!” he said, tears filling his eyes, “They’re actually kicking!”

Under his hand Bruce felt the thump of one or maybe both of the babies for the first time, and actual kick beneath his palm as a tiny limb moved about and pushed against the side of his or her watery home.

“Can I feel?” Peter asked, scurrying over on his knees,

“Of course,” Tony said, sniffing and wiping at his cheeks, he guided Peter’s hand to where the most movement was and Peter’s eyes widened as he felt a firm thump.

“Holy shit, you’ve gotta feel this!” he said to Dick, who wasted no time in getting over to feel his little brother or sister move, followed by Tim, and Jason who tried but failed to be as excited as the others.

“It seems to make it all the more real, doesn’t it?” Alfred said to Bruce who had become a little misty eyed as one by one all the team felt the babies move until finally they fell still again.

“Incredibly so.” Bruce whispered back, “And reminds me of just how unprepared I am.” He looked
to Alfred, “I’ve never held a baby in my life, Alfred. Never changed a nappy or given a bottle, I’m half terrified that when I hold them I might break them or something.”

Alfred smiled and clasped his shoulder, “All Fathers feel that way. Even your Father, and he was a Doctor. Yet he too felt as unprepared and frightened as you when your Mother was expecting, worried that he might get it all wrong. He’d sit up reading every book he could find on Obstetrics, Midwifery, and Babies, trying to learn everything he could about what was going to happen and what he should do, and do you know what?”

Bruce shook his head, “What?”

“When you came into the world, he found that the books were utterly useless, because while they could give advice on how thing “Should be” or “Could be” they couldn’t say that it absolutely would work out that way, because all babies are different and want things done differently, and so he, your Mother, and I, learned what to do as we went along, we learned how to keep you from getting too much colic, how to put your nappies on without you pee ing on us, how to hold out breath long enough to change the filthy ones, how to get you to sleep when you wouldn’t settle, and slowly but surely, amid what seemed like endless challenges, rounds of feeding, changing, and sleepless nights, we found our way, and you will too, just as we did, one step at a time.”

Bruce drew in a deep breath, he didn’t often get emotional or engage in emotional conversations like this, but once again Alfred had proven to be his rock and font of knowledge that he didn’t possess.

“Thank you Alfie.” He said giving him a grateful smile that turned playful, “But you know I’m going to make you do all the shitty nappies right?”

Alfred returned the smile in kind, “Master Bruce, there is no amount of money you could offer that would make me face doing that duty ever again!”
The next months examination showed that Tony’s pelvis was expanding as a woman’s would during pregnancy and Strange was satisfied that he would be able to have a natural delivery.

This meant that he and Bruce went to Lemaze classes together, something that earned them plenty of looks being two men together at a place where the men present were the partners or supporters of the pregnant women.

“I’m used to be centre of attention when I go to places, but right now I feel like I’ve a neon sign over my head showing how much of a freak I am to world.” Tony whispered to Bruce, as the other Billionaire helped him to sit down on the large pillows on the floor.

“You are not a freak.” Bruce admonished him, “You’re perfect.”

“Hmm, even with my ass expanding as fast as my waist?” Tony asked with a wry smile, and the mother-to-be next to him snorted,

“Tell me about it,” She said, “Why is it they never tell you that you don’t just carry the baby in your belly, but the rest of your body too?”

“Or that you puff up like a balloon with water retention?” Tony said giving her a grin, he held out his hand to her, “Tony Stark.”

“Amelia Crawford, and this is my husband, Martin.” A rather shy and bewildered looking young man of perhaps twenty-five gave them a smile.

“Is this your first?” Tony asked,

Amelia nodded her head and ran a hand over her bump, “We’re having a daughter, we’ve chosen the name Ava-Lee for her.”

“Oh, that’s sweet.” Tony said.

“Have you thought up any names yet?” Amelia asked. Tony looked at Bruce who ran his hand over his belly gently.

“We’ve got a couple in mind, but we’re keeping it secret for now.” He said, and frowned over Martin’s shoulder as a couple used their phones to snap photos of him and Tony, something that several of the expectant Mothers and Father’s were doing.

“Must get annoying, eh?” Martin asked, his voice timid and uncertain. Clearly Amelia was the driving force in the relationship, where he was the quieter of the two.

“And damn intrusive at times.” Bruce grumbled, “I suppose we should be thankful no reporters decided to stick a fake belly on and sneak in here to try and get an exclusive.” Tony groaned and slapped him,

“You do realize that is a total jinx, don’t you?” The was clapping from the Midwife as she called for their attention.

“Welcome Ladies and Gentlemen, I see we have some new comers to introduce,” She smiled to Tony and Bruce, “Welcome, Mr Stark, Mr Wayne.” Tony and Bruce murmured their hellos giving
press smiles to everyone around them until a man spoke up,

“I don’t think it’s right that they should be here, what they’re doing isn’t natural.” He said, looking down his nose as he spoke, he and his wife were sat apart from the rest with expressions that looked as if they thought themselves a cut above everyone else and wanted to remain separate in case they caught anything from the general populous.

“Neither is your tan, but I ain’t complaining about it, am I?” Tony shot back making several of the expectant parents in the room laugh at the rude man’s expense. His face coloured and he ground his teeth.

“I’m just saying it isn’t fit that they should be here with the rest of us. Not only are they queers, they’re having some sort of…. Freak hybrid thing, not a natural baby.”

“How dare you?” Amelia cried in defence of Tony.

“Our babies are perfectly healthy and completely human.” Bruce snarled, his voice little more than the Bat growl.

“We’ve only your word for that.” The Rude Mans wife snapped, she sniffed haughtily and turned her nose up, “Its bad enough not knowing where everyone has come from or what they might be carrying, without a couple of gays coming in here pretending they’re anything but unwanted.”

“The only ones unwanted here are you and your stuck-up husband.” One of the other Mother-to-bes snapped, “And what do you mean, saying you don’t know where we’re from or what we’re carrying? I can tell you, all I’m carrying is a little boy, who ain’t that little and I’ll be damn glad when he comes out!”

“Tell me about it, I’ll be glad to go for more than fifteen minutes without needing to piss!” Another expectant mother agreed, getting several nods and choruses of agreement.

“If we are such disagreeable company for you, why don’t you both piss off?” One of the expectant Dad’s said, “Then we can get on with learning about what to do when the labour starts.”

“Gladly.” The Rude man said, holding out a hand for his wife to take. Labourously she got to her feet, “It isn’t fit for decent people to be in here.”

“Don’t let the door hit your ass on the way out.” Bruce sneered after them he then began to apologise but the rest of the class wouldn’t hear of it, the two having been unpleasant since they first arrived three months before and would most certainly not be missed.

Looking rather the flustered the Midwife began to class, taking the parents through what to expect in the early stages of labour. How the Dad’s could help, what could be done to help ease the pain and to hurry things up to the second stage of labour.

She answered questions, and then took the Mum’s through some gentle exercises and had them focus on their breathing, which they would need to know when the labour began.

“I thought I’d mastered breathing at birth!” Tony snickered, “Who knew there was so much to inhaling and exhaling?”

“Never mind the breathing, I’m thinking as much pain relief as possible so I’m too high to notice the pain!” Amelia joked making Tony snort with laughter.
“Oh, don’t have the gas and air, it’ll make you sick.” One of the older women said, “This is my third, I’m an old hand at this.”

“Do they really give you enemas?” one of the youngest women asked looking afraid, “My Grandmother keeps going on about them, said she had them with all of hers, and she had six!”

“Enemas are given but not forced upon the women.” The Midwife said as several other women asked the same question,

“I swear to God, if Strange tries to give me one I’ll shove the damn thing down his throat.” Tony swore making Bruce chuckle. He squeezed Tony’s shoulder and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“I’ll be sure to protect you from the horrors of an enema.”

“You’d better.” Tony grumbled, groaning as Bruce helped him to his feet, “It’s your balls that are on the line if you don’t!"

*****

Compound.

“Now Toby, I know you are missing Tony, but please, please just give me some toast, I’m starving to death here!” Clint moaned at the toaster which flipped over and made a beeping noise that sounded like a raspberry being blown.

“Come on, toasting things is what you are meant to do.” He tried to persuade the toaster, “If you do this for me, then I’ll help you set the curtains on fire again!”

The Toaster shuddered and then made a sprong noise before flipping forward apparently agreeing to the exchange.

“Cap’ll kill me for this.” Clint said popping the bread into the slots, “But a Man’s got to eat.”

While Toby toasted the bread, he got the nuttella from the cupboard and filled a bucket of water ready for once the curtains were ablaze. He caught his toast as Toby sent it to the ceiling and set it onto a plate, then carried Toby over to the curtains and sat back to smother his toast in chocolate goodness and watch the entertainment.

“Planning on becoming a pyromaniac when you retire?” Natasha asked, making Clint swear as she’d crept up on him again.

“I had to bribe Toby to give me toast.” Clint replied, “I swear he gets more like Tony every day.”

“Likes setting things on fire?” Natasha asked, raising an eyebrow as the curtains began to smoke.

“That, and being a stubborn sassy mother Fucker.”

“Language.” Steve chided as he came into the kitchen, “We’ll have babies here soon, we don’t need them picking up bad words.” He paused on his way to the fridge sniffing the air as the stench of smouldering curtain reached his nose and he sighed, “Why are we letting Toby commit arsen again?”
“Because it’s the only way he agrees to make breakfast.” Clint explained, grinning as flames began to appear. Steve shook his head, going to the fridge to get some eggs and milk.

“I see Bruce and Tony attended a Lemaze class last night.” Sam said as he came into the kitchen, pausing at the sight of the flaming curtains and deciding not to bother commenting, it was a regular enough sight with Toby in residence. “There have been dozens of tweets and Instagram posts about it.”

“I saw.” Natasha said, “Sadly some trolling too.”

“We should let Toby loose on those trolls, he can set their arses on fire.” Clint said, finally taking Toby away from the flaming curtains and throwing the water over them.

“Friday, extractor fan for the smoke please.” Steve said as he mixed up scrambled eggs,

“Right away.” Friday said, “And Mr Barton, please desist in encouraging Toby’s pyromaniacal tendencies, he is enough trouble as it is.”

Toby made a beeping noise, “And no cheek from you.” Friday scolded.

“It’s a pity we can’t do more to help Tony and Bruce.” Sam said, jumping up to sit on the counter, “You’d think that this day in age people wouldn’t keep wittering about how unnatural homosexuality is.”

“I fought a war against fascism, and yet it seems its still in effect today in some peoples minds.” Steve sighed.

“It’s not just the homosexuality people are against, its that Tony’s a pregnant man. Something that is completely against nature, except for sea-horses.” Natasha said, “It’s a lot for people to get their heads around. Especially if they are small minded to begin with.”

“Or brain dead.” Clint muttered finishing his toast, “What about a baby shower?”

“What?”

“Why don’t we throw Tony a baby shower, here at the compound. To celebrate the pregnancy and the babies. We can do some social media ourselves, showing our support to the whole world and how happy we are for them.”

Steve nodded and Sam looked thoughtful, as Natasha verbally agreed, “I think for once Clint, you might actually have a good idea.”

“Thanks Nat… Wait, hey I resent that!”
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

So I saw Joker on Saturday, OMG So good. Phoenix has made a brilliant portrayal of the Clown Prince of crime.

Bruce is very agreeable to a baby shower and promises to help keep it a secret from Tony while the team plans the event and searches the internet for ideas.

A traditional baby shower is out of the question, after all, Tony is no woman, but the main theme of gift giving for the baby still stands.

“Tony would probably prefer a donation to the Maria Stark foundation than anything bought for him, beyond some gag gifts.” Clint said as they perused the internet. “But buying stuff for the babies will be cool, and as a Father I can say for a fact that you can never have too many clothes in varying sizes.”

“That figures.” Steve said.

“Nat’s knitting for them.”

Steve stared at Clint. “Natasha knits?” Somehow the Black Widow and knitting did not seem to go hand in hand. Steve himself knew how to knit. His Mother had taught him one winter when he’d been sick (Again) as a way to pass the time, but it had been years since he’d picked up a needle and he’d never been much good at it anyway.

“Yeah. She learned when she was a kid apparently. Russia has long cold winters, and woollen socks and gloves help.”

“Makes sense.” Steve agreed, still trying to process this information, when Clint gave a squeal of delight.

“Avengers plushies, Oh my God, I am so getting every one of them as my gift.”

“All of them?”

“Cap, look how cute they are, and it’s for twins, so there’ll be plenty to go around.” Clint said placing his orders.

They kept the menu alcohol free as Tony couldn’t drink, and Natasha and Sam managed to find some non-alcoholic cocktail recipes they could make up. Strawberry Magaretta. Virgin Pina Colada. Blue Hawaiian, and Pineapple Daiquiri, as well as the usual tea, coffee, and other soft drinks.

As Tony was off cheese and fish right now, they stuck to foods that contained neither so his stomach wouldn’t be upset, making sure to order plenty of jam donuts, and as he had a love of custard at present, they had strawberry trifles made up too.
Clint and Sam organized some activities for them to do that were pregnancy friendly, while Natasha and Steve decorated the common area for the party with blue and pink balloons, ribbons, and hand crafted banner saying Twin Baby Shower that Steve made himself and Vision hung for them.

With Tony still in the dark as to what was going on, he was brought to the Compound under the pretense of having to fix a glitch in FRIDAY’s servers that Vision hadn’t be able to repair.

With Alfred having brought Dick, Jason, and Tim on ahead, Bruce brought Tony who was greeted with shouts of SURPRISE! When he entered the common area.

Jumping and letting out a small laugh Tony looked around, taking in the scene, “You guys did all this for me?” he asked feeling tearful (Damn hormones)

“Yep, now say cheese.” Clint said snapping picture of Tony, “And lets get into the party mood.”

Tony was led to the couch where he was sat down and a ridiculous hat with about two dozen ribbons of blue and pink was placed on his head with a ribbon tieing it under his chin, which Clint and Jason gleefully took pictures of and posted online.

“You could almost be little Miss Muffet in that!” Bruce teased him.

“Oh ha ha, and I suppose Petey will be the spider huh?” Tony shot back as Peter came over with his gift for the babies. It was a book of classic fairy tales that he and Bruce could read to the babies.

“Thank you Petey-pie.” Tony said, sniffing a little, “It’ll be fun reading Peter Pan to them in a little while.”

“I can help read to them, Mr Stark, I mean Tony. I’ve done some baby sitting before and I’m good at doing voices.” Peter babbled.

“Nice to know you’re good at something Spider-kid.” Jason teased.

“Bite me.” Peter shot back.

Natasha gave Tony hand knitted booties, mittons, hats, and scarves for the babies in purple as they didn’t know the genders, when Sam tried to point out that purple wasn’t really a boy colour she shot him a death glare that shut him right up.

Clint gave Tony plushies of the Avengers, laughing over the Batman plushie that had Bruce blushing when he saw it.

Pepper, ever practical, had been thinking ahead, and since the babies would be born in winter, she had bought two thermal onsies that could be worn over their clothes to help keep them extra warm and snug when they went out in the cold.

Rhodey had bought several rattles and other toys that would help stimulate the babies minds when they began to move about, and no doubt drive Tony and Bruce made with the jingling and rattling.

Sam gave Tony two baby baths that were decorated with sea shells and sea horses, crabs, fish, and cartoon octopuses.

Bucky gave him an Iron Man onsie and a Batman onsie that had Tony cooing over how cute they were.

Steve gave Tony and Bruce a hand drawn sketch of Iron Man and Bat Man over a City sky sky line,
with Bat Man hanging off the side of building with his cape thrown back and Batarang in his fist, and Iron Man flying over head with one arm out stretched with a repulsor at the ready.

“I thought you could hang it in the nursery, so the babies will know they’re parents will always protect them.” He explained worried for a moment that he’d be thought cheap for not buying something, but Tony took it enthusiastically. It also went well with the joint gift that Alfred, Tim, Dick, and Jason had created with Visions help.

A home made light-up mobile that had the images of all the avengers and the Bat-Family.

“Aww, Thank you Guys, this is brilliant, and so cute.” Tony declared, hugging the Bat Man plushie to his chest.

“There is another present, from me.” Bruce said, surprising Tony. “A Pregnancy massage and spa treatment.”

“Oh baby, that’ll certainly help ease my back.” Tony said, already looking forward to being pampered and having his aches and pains rubbed away.

After the gift giving was over, Steve and Clint went out and got started on the BBQ, doing steaks, hot dogs, and burgers minus the cheese. Jacket potatoes, potatoe salad. Coleslaw, corn on the cob, and warm bread buns from the oven.

They put on some music and everyone talked, Peter and Tim sharing what they were doing at school, Tony and Bruce some anecdotes from home, how Jett had been most indignant when he had been curled up asleep on Tony’s lap only to have one of the babies kick him in the side and then again in the nose when he’d gone to sniff the bump!

“He keeps looking at it like its his mortal enemy now.” Tony laughed.

They were all also in stitches about how Bruce had attempted to put the nappy on the life sized infant doll at Lemaze only to have it fall straight off the doll when he’d lifted it up!

“Don’t worry, once you’ve been pissed, puked, and shit on a few times, you get the hang of it.” Clint assured Bruce who did not at all reassured, especially with Alfred nodding his head and looking far too gleeful at the thought of Bruce suffering such indignities.

Once everyone had eaten they moved onto the activies, the first being a plaster cast of Tony’s bump which they dried off with Nat’s hair drier, much to her exasperation, so they could paint it in red and gold with arc reactor blue in the centre like it was part of the Iron Man suit.

Naturally Tony had to get one of his Old suits assembled and brought up and they tied the bump cast onto the suit and took several shots of it to post on line with the hashtags Baby on board and Iron Baby Mamma.

They then painted Tony’s bump in skin friendly paint, with all their superhero symbols, a Bat, a Robin, a Dark bird with a blue streak, a red bird, a falcon, the Shield, a bow and arrow, a Spider, a Spiders web, a war machine helmet, an Iron Man face place, and Vision drew in himself with a cloak.
This too got photos and bets were taken as to which hero the babies liked best by which image got kicked the most.

They played a silly game of pass the parcel, with Avengers themed sweets wrapped between the sheets and the main prize being a Chocolate Hulk which Tim won. And a game of pin the bow on the baby which was a take on pin the tail on the donkey, with a prize of Avengers playing cards for the person who got closest to pinning the bow on the cardboard babies bonnet.

Natasha came the closest managing to get the pin in the the babies forehead and swiftly set up a game of poker with Bucky, Sam, and Tony and promptly trashed them all.

As it gone on towards evening they put movies on and settled back to chill out, with the Bat family staying over in the rooms at the compound rather than making the long drive back to Gotham.

****

The public response to the baby shower tweets, and pictures was mostly positive, there were of course a few trolls who had to complain or make negative comments, but they were drowned under the weight of the positive ones, especially with Ironbabymamma trending, and the images of the pregnant Iron Man suit, and Tony’s painted bump being forwarded and reposted across the net.

As they had spent the night, Alfred made everyone breakfast the following morning, with a cheerful Toby’s help. The toaster happily burning through bread like there was no tomorrow since he had his beloved creator back and giving him attention.

“How have you made any decisions on where you’ll be giving birth and what kind of birth you want?” Natasha asked as she sipped her coffee. She looked impossibly good for the early hour of the day, with a head band pulling her hair back from her face, a simple night dress on with a matching dressing gown and slippers.

“I’m thinking pain relief in vast amounts.” Tony said with certainty, “A drip of morphine, and epidural, and maybe a joint or two of weed and I’ll be good.”

Clint snickered, “If you’re anything like Laura was, it’ll be Bruce that needs the pain relief by the time you’ve done crushing his hands.”

“Birth can’t be that bad.” Steve said, “I mean women do it over and over, so I don’t think you have anything to worry about.” He looked up when the whole table fell silent and felt his cheeks heating under the disbelieving gazes. “I could be wrong?” he offered meekly.

“How about you push a couple of bowling balls out of ass and tell me it doesn’t hurt.” Tony offered scathingly and rubbed at his chest making Rhodey frown.

“No, not chest pains, breast pain.” Tony sighed, “Apparently I’m developing breast milk to go with my Mangina and my new boobs hurt and the nipples leak.”

“Eewww, fucking gross.” Jason protested, “TMI man, total TMI.”

“What the hell are you complaining about? It isn’t you who’s having to wear a fricken maternity bra,
“Is it?” Tony groused. He was not happy about this. He had thought he’d escaped gaining breasts and milk since the colostrum usually developed earlier in the pregnancy, but over the last week, his puffier pecs had begun to ache and tiny beads of fluid had been leaking from the nipples which Strange had confirmed was the preparation for nursing the babies.

“On the plus side breast milk is more nutritious than formula.” Alfred offered, placing a cup of decaf in front of Tony which did nothing to appease his sulk over his rapidly changing body and neither did one of the twins rolling onto his bladder, sending him to the bathroom.

“We are going to have to have a serious discussion about the two of you using my organs for beds to sleep on or punching bags.” Tony sighed to his bump as he relieved himself, feeling the odd sensation of the babies shifting inside him. He wondered if they were aware of each other in there, if they reached out and touched each other as they wriggled about in their watery home. In his mind he pictured them in their foetal forms reaching out with spindly fingers to touch one another, their large eyes gazing at each other with curiosity.

Washing his hands and drying them, he began to walk back to the kitchen, rubbing at his aching back as he went. “At least I’ve got my massage and spa session to look forward too,” He said to the twins, “And I expect the two of you to behave and lay quiet in there while I get pampered or you’ll be in big trouble.”

He took the following kicks as acknowledgment of this but didn’t hold out much hope, suspecting that the pampering session, like everything else would be interrupted by bathroom visits and needing to shift when a leg cramp started.

*****

The spa session took place two weeks later and was heaven sent as far as Tony was concerned. The babies were really starting weigh on his pelvis and back, making him ache all the time and he was desperate for some relief, which the warm, talented hands of the masseuse brought him as she expertly massaged the muscles and eased the straining tendons of his body while Tony lay back and let himself fall into a pleasant half dream state, that he remained, as he had his cleansing facial, head, neck, and shoulder massage, manicure and pedicure done sans nail polish, and finished up with dip in the jacuzzi.

“So you had a good time then?” Bruce asked, when he picked him up that evening, finding Tony looking relaxed and rested.

“Wonderful. I think I’m gonna move in here until the babies are born.”

“I don’t think they do room and board, Tones.” Bruce chuckled. Opening the door to the car and helping Tony inside.

“Okay then, we’ll have to abduct one of the masseuses, the one who did me, she had magick fingers, we’ll take her back home with us and hold her there until I’ve given birth.” Tony said, sliding back the seat and closing his eyes. He was asleep by the time Bruce had pulled out into the main traffic, and didn’t even wake when they got back to the manor, with Bruce carrying him up to bed and tucking him in, letting him get a good rest in preparation for his final weeks and the up and coming birth.
Tony cringed and turned his head towards Bruce’s shoulder wanting to close his eyes and plug his ears so he didn’t have to witness the bloody horror being portrayed in front of him, but he couldn’t help but to glance back and watch as the gory scene unfolded, his eyes transfixed even as he shuddered and his ears burned as the screaming intensified. How much longer could this go on? How much more horror did he have to endure?

Reaching out he grabbed Bruce’s hand and squeezed it so tight that his knuckles turned white. He bit down on his bottom lip praying for this to end soon, surely it couldn’t last much longer, and yet it seemed to get worse, the gaping maw widening and more blood than he’d seen in his life gushing out as a form moved.

Tony gripped Bruce tighter and held his breath, his ever muscle going rigid as the end came in sight and then with a great gush of fluids and a scream the body came into the world.

“And the baby is born,” The Midwife declared beaming brightly at the pale faced, slightly queezy looking parents to be who had watched the horror that was a woman giving birth.

“Just the placenta left to deliver.” The Midwife said, “Shots of ergemetrine are given to help help it along and the Midwife will help it be expelled from the uterus.”

Silently the expectant parents watched as the placenta was delivered, all of them too stunned/traumatized to do anything but watch in silence and then, as the class ended, make their way to their cars to head home.

“Well.” Bruce said as he sat before the steering wheel not yet feeling steady enough to start the car. “That was very…. Educational.”

“Educational.” Tony repeated, “More like traumatizing and emotionally scarring.” He screwed his eyes shut and shook his head, “The screaming, the blood, oh God the blood!”

“And the dilating.” Bruce murmured, “I didn’t realize how wide it got, or how long it takes for the body to come out. I figured that once the head was there that was it.”

“I can’t go through that.” Tony said, shaking his head, he looked down at his bump, “There is two of them in there, I certainly can’t do that twice. It’ll have to be a c-section, there is absolutely no way I am going through that.”

*****

“There is absolutely no reason for you to have a caesarean, Tony. You are in good health, both
babies have their heads down, so there is no reason why you shouldn’t have a natural delivery.” Strange said as he checked Tony over.

“No reason?” Tony snarled, sitting up as much as he was able to without help. He was big enough now that he needed Bruce’s help to sit up when he’d been laying on his back. “Have you ever seen a natural child birth?” he shouted, “The blood, the screaming, the pain!”

Strange sighed and gave Tony an unimpressed look, “All perfectly normal. And you’ll get through it just as other Mothers.” He flinched as Tony’s fist hit the side of the bed.

“I am not other Mothers!” Tony bellowed, “And I want a fucking Caesarean!” Before Strange could stop him, he had squirmed his way off the bed and stormed from the medbay, waddling as fast as he could through compound to find Bruce speaking Rhodey and Steve.

“We need another Doctor.” He declared, not at all bothered by the fact he was wearing nothing but a hospital gown or that he’d startled them.

“What?” Bruce asked.

“Are you going deaf? I said we need another Doctor, Strange is a fucking sadist who wants to torture me, so I want another Doctor.” Tony snapped at him.

“Stark, you are over reacting.” Strange said, following after Tony looking exasperated, a frequent expression when dealing with Tony Stark.

“What is this all about?” Steve asked.

“You stay out of it!” Tony snapped at him, “This is between me, Strange and Bruce, and I want a Caesarean and a new Doctor, because Doctor fucking Strangeness wants me to suffer endless agony that is akin to medieval torture!”

Tony stood, red cheeked and panting, looking a picture of hormonal fury while the other men stared at him in shock, confusion, and amusement. Rhodey coughed and covered his mouth to hide his smirk, mumbling something about needing to make a phone call and made himself scarce, leaving the others to deal with the overly hormonal Tony.

“Tony, honey, why don’t we sit down and discuss this calmly?” Bruce suggested, looking at Tony like he was a wild animal that might turn and chew his arms off at a seconds notice.

“Because I don’t want to discuss it, there is nothing to discuss, I am having a caesarean and that is final.”

“It really isn’t.” Strange sighed folding his arms over his chest.

“Really Tony, you shouldn’t go through an unnecessary procedure, that would be foolish. I know that birth is painful, but you’ll get through it.”

“What the bloody mother fuck do you know about it?” Tony exploded at Steve, “Have you ever seen it, seen a baby ripping its way out of a body? Seen the blood gushing everywhere, heard the endless screaming of the Mother in her torment. Torment that will be mine and no bastard cares!” Just as fast as he’d started shouting Tony started crying, loud terrible sobs as if he were broken hearted.

“No one understands,” He wailed, “I can’t go through that horror, I don’t want to be in agony like that, and you all expect me to suffer without questioning it.”
“Oh honey, we don’t.” Bruce protested going to take Tony into his arms, but Tony shoved him away, stomping off to cry on his own or to find someone else to comfort him and listen to his hormonal ranting.

“He really shouldn’t go through a caesarean, there is no need for it.” Strange said, “And he can have pain relief. Gas and Air, pethidine, an epidural if needs be.”

“I know, I’ll speak to him.” Bruce said.

“You sure you don’t need body armour to face him?” Steve asked, only half joking.

Bruce found Tony sitting in the room they used when they stayed at the compound, drying his eyes and blowing his nose.

“I hate these stupid hormones.” He grumbled as Bruce joined him, “They are the worst part of pregnancy, well that an the stretch marks that are making me look like a damn zebra.”

“Well you’re a very cute zebra.” Bruce teased, sitting down besides him and putting an arm about Tony’s shoulders, pulling him close. “What’s really bothering you? I know its not the pain of giving birth, there is something else.”

“It is the pain and the blood.” Tony sniffed laying his head on Bruce’s shoulder, “The memories they bring back. Of being in that cave when they had me strapped down and Yinsen was cutting into me.” He shuddered at the memory, the smell of blood, his straining screams as he’d begged for mercy from men who gave him none.

“It won’t be like that.” Bruce whispered, “You’ll be in a clean and safe medbay with plenty of pain relief, and I’ll be there all the way through, no matter how much you scream at me or threaten me, not even if you break every bone in my hands.”

Tony chuckled and snuggled closer to Bruce running a hand down over his bump, “Never mind the birth, how are we going to get through the next few weeks without going completely mad?”

“By taking each day as it comes and supporting each other.” Bruce said kissing Tony’s temple, “We’ll get through this together, as we will the birth and everything that comes after. I promise.”

****

The weeks passed, and Tony and Bruce worked out a birth plan with Strange that helped ease some of Tony’s fears, having more control over what was going to happen made him feel a bit better about everything.

Soon it was Christmas and everyone gathered at the compound, where Alfred cooked a huge Turkey dinner with all the trimmings, something he hadn’t done in a long time. There hadn’t been much point when it had just been him and Bruce at the manor, not even when Dick was there, but now they had a full family to cook for.

After presents and dinner, they all settled down to watch a movie while they digested enough to get into their gear as Tony had set up the Jurrassic World Simulation again, so they could tackle the
Spinosaurous.

He sat in the observation room, watching as the scene unfolded, with Steve and Bucky running as fast as their legs could carry them to escape the rampaging Dinosaur, Sam and Rhodey’s arial attacks had then dodging the huge head and teeth with Sam getting smacked into by the sail on the beasts back and thrown into a tree.

Natasha’s widow bites on enraged the creature more and she found herself unable to escape the Spinosaurous’ jaws. Tim and Jason fared no better, with Tim being crushed and Jason slashed by claws. Bruce and Dick tried to attack from the trees as did Clint, but they too were over powered by the huge creature.

Finally, Peter was able to blind the Spinosaurous and an “Injured” Bruce, with the help of Rhodey, Bucky, and Steve were able to take it down.

Tony clapped and cheered, “Excellent performance, Oscar winning, worthy of a Golden Globe.”

“Screw you, Stark!” Natasha groused, unhappy at having been killed again.

“I’ve said it before and I am saying it again, I am never fighting Dinosaurs with you lot.” Clint grumbled.

“Well lets hope we never have to face any.” Bruce said, removing his cowl and walking through the jungle as it disappeared, the training room returning to its usual state.

“We need to do a Star Wars simulation.” Peter declared, “With real light sabers too!”

“Fuck no.” Clint groaned,

“Oh hell yeah!” Jason cheered, “We have so got to do that.”

“I’ll see what I can do.” Tony said much to the groaning of the adults, “But I promise nothing until after the babies are born.”

“Pity we can’t do it for New Year.” Peter sighed, “Some of us are still too young to go out to the good parties.”

“And some of us are too pregnant.” Tony drawled leaning into Bruce’s supporting frame, “All I’m doing for New Year is Hot chocolate, a massage, and an early night.”

“Make the most of your early nights.” Alfred said, “You’ll be needing all the sleep you can get once the babies come.”

“Oh we’re prepared.” Bruce said sounding very confident of this, “The birth, the sleepless nights, we’re more than ready.”

Chapter End Notes

The birth will be in the next chapter
Chapter 58

Tony ended up going into labour earlier than expected, but as he was carrying twins, a slightly premature labour was not that unusual and he was only early by a couple of weeks.

At first he thought he was experiencing Braxton hicks contraction, which had been coming on and off since his eight month, but when they grew in intensity, with the pain running around into his back, he figured that it was something else.

Rising from the sofa with some difficulty, he waddled down to the bat cave where Bruce was training with Jason and Tim.

“See, you need roll with punch, let the momentum carry you over onto the roll, keep the motion fluid and when you come up kick out with left leg and follow through with a punch from your right fist.” Bruce explained to the boys. Tim was watching and listening intently while Jason looked bored and contemptuous.

“Sorry to interrupt the lesson.” Tony said, “But I think…” He broke off as a contraction had him doubling over, with blood and mucus running down his thighs, which, due to him wearing an over-sized nightshirt and dressing gown, were bare for the others to see.

“Ohmygod!” Tim cried, his hands covering his mouth.

“Its time?” Bruce asked sounding both excited and alarmed by the prospect.

“Yeah,” Tony said, nodding his head, “I think so.”

*****

Strange was already at the compound when the helicopter landed, bringing Tony and Bruce from Gotham. Bruce helped Tony made the short distance from the landing pad into the compound, where Strange was waiting with a wheel chair to take him to the medbay.

“You’ve had the show of blood?” he asked as she rode down in the lift.

“Yeah, but the contractions are still erratic, and my waters haven’t broken yet.” Tony replied, gripping the arms of the chair nervously, Bruce’s hand covered his and he looked up with a smile for his husband knowing that Bruce was as nervous and excited as he felt himself.

Bruce helped Tony strip down and put on a hospital gown, then got him onto the bed so Strange could give him an examination and see how far into labour he was and how the babies were doing.

“You’re only two centimetres dilated so you have a while to go yet.” He said, standing up and taking the gloves off his hands. “Lets just see how the little ones are handling this, shall we?”

He brought the image of the twins up onto the ultrasound monitor which registered their strong heartbeats, “All looks well, twin one nicely moved into position and the head is engaged.” Strange said, “You are lucky that they both have their heads down, often one twin is breech.”

“Hmm, will my good luck continue into this labour being very swift?” Tony asked him, stroking his
bump as Strange took away the wand.

“You never know.” The Doctor replied with a wry smile, “Now, I suggest you try and walk around, take a bath, and relax as much as you can.” He paused as he got some tissue for Tony to wipe the gell of his belly with, “Do you want an enema?”

“Not unless you want your eyes ripping out!”

Bruce shared a grin with Strange and then helped Tony to his feet, “What do you want to do?” He asked.

“I’d like to go and take a bath actually.” Tony said to him and gripped his arm tightly as fresh contraction hit.

“Remember to breathe,” Strange said, “Holding your breath will only make it worse, breath through the pain and relax your muscles, let your body do the work for you.”

With his eyes screwed shut Tony nodded his head trying to do as Strange told him, intellectually he knew it made sense, but the body's natural reaction to pain was to tense up so he was having to try and fight that instinct and get his body to relax. Slowly the contraction eased off and he was able to straighten up, “Bath?” he asked Bruce who nodded his head,

“Bath.”

On the way up to their suite they ran into the rest of the team who of course had heard the news and come to see how Tony was doing.

“You’re gonna make me an Uncle tonight!” Rhodey exclaimed excitedly.

“Hope so.” Tony said rubbing his back,

“If you need anything..” Natasha said.

“Someone to go through this for me?” Tony asked, making them all chuckle, “Right now I want to have a bath so I’ll see you guys later.” Knowing that this was a private time for Tony and Bruce the others didn’t waylay them, letting them go up to their suite, where Bruce ran a warm bath and helped Tony to lay down in the water. He knelt by the side of the bath stroking his hand over Tony’s bump, still when it went rigid with a contraction.

“Breathe,” He instructed, “In and out, in and out.”

Gripping the side of the bath tight Tony did so until it passed, then sagged back in the water. “Fuck, I hope that this doesn’t go on for very long, I can’t face hours and hours of it.”

“I know baby,” Bruce soothed, stroking Tony’s hair back from his face, “I don’t want you to be in pain, I hate seeing you hurting, even when it’s a natural pain that’s going to bring something good into the world.” Tony smiled at him, turning to kiss his wrist,

“I’ll apologize now for anything I might say to you when it gets worse, and any hand bones I might break!” Bruce snorted and nodded his head,

“Accepted.”

*****
Tony remained in the bath for two hours, with Bruce topped it up with warm water every so often until he decided to get out and try walking around the compound. He answered text messages from Peter and Dick, and Bruce spoke to Alfred, letting him know how things were progressing, the butler relaying the news to Jason and Tim who were, as he put it “Bouncing off the walls” with excitement.

“Peter can’t wait to meet his new siblings either.” Tony said with a grin, pausing and supporting himself on the wall as another contraction hit, this one bringing with it a gush of fluid as his waters broke. “God! Couldn’t that have happened in the bath?” he complained lifting his feet out of the puddle.

“Don’t worry, I’ll mop this up.” Sam said, hopping up from the sofa to go and get a mop and bucket.

“And we’ll get you back to the medbay and let Strange take a look at you.” Bruce said to Tony, supporting him more now as he guided him back to the medbay,

“Can I do anything?” Steve asked, feeling rather useless.

“Ice chips.” Bruce said, “Make sure he has a good supply of them.”

“Right, on it.”

The next examination showed that Tony had dilated a further three centermeters so things were progressing fairly swiftly as were the contractions and pain.

Strange got Tony settled onto the bed with a monitor around his middle to record the babies heart beats.

“You can still have an enema, it will help speed things along.”

“You bring an enema anywhere near me and you’ll need it surgically removing.” Tony snarled at him then cursed as another wave of pain hit it, “Holy mother fucking God, I hate you Bruce, I fucking hate you for doing this to me!”

“I know, I’m sorry.” Bruce said, taking the cursing on the chin while he rubbed Tony’s back, applying acu-pressure to help ease the pain.

“Ice chips delivery.” Steve said from outside the door, “Is it safe to come in, I’m not liable to be hit with anything am I?”

“You’re safe.” Strange said checking the readings from the monitor as Steve came in,

“Everything going alright?” He asked, hanging Bruce the chips, which he offered to Tony,

“Do I bloody look alright?” Tony snapped at Steve.

“Easy,” Bruce said, “Have some ice.”

“Oh screw you.” Tony spat, grabbing the ice anyway, “I’ll never forgive you for this, and I am never having sex with you again, do you hear me? Never again!”
Hours passed with the contractions getting closer together and their intensity growing stronger as Tony’s cervix fully dilated ready for the birth.

Unable to bear the anticipation, Alfred brought Jason and Tim over from Gotham, and Dick brought Peter to the compound to join the growing vigil of Avengers as they waited for news to come from the medbay.

“When Laura was in labour with our first it went on for nearly three days.” Clint said, “By the time it finally came to delivery she couldn’t even scream at me anymore because she’d worn her voice out!”

“Seriously?” Jason asked with a grin,

“So instead of cursing his name she dislocated two of his fingers while Cooper was crowning and it was Clint’s screams of agony that filled the air!” She smirked smugly at Clint who glared at her while the others laughed at his expense.

“Do you think Tony will break Bruce’s fingers?” Peter asked,

“I don’t know but he was pretty murderous when I took him the ice.” Steve said, “I’m glad I’m not the one holding his hand, I’d be afraid it’d get ripped off!”

“Or other parts.” Bucky put in with a wry grin.

By now Tony had stopped insulting Bruce and was instead clinging to his hands as the labour progressed and Strange told it was finally time to start pushing.

With his legs held up and apart in stirups, his face bright red and his hair plastered to his scalp with sweat, Tony bore down on the contraction feeling something moving out of him, his skin stretching and widening as his first baby inched towards Strange’s waiting hands.

“How much longer?” He sobbed, his chest heaving as he took in huge lungfuls of air.

“Nearly there.” Strange said, “The head’s nearly crowned, just a little more.”

“Baby you are doing so well, you are incredible.” Bruce said kissing Tony’s face, caring nothing for the sweat.

“And push!”

“I am.” Tony gritted out clamping down on Bruce’s hands, his knuckles going white and his teeth gritted as he bore down, pushing the head out of his body, then sagged, sobbing with fatigue, “I can’t do this anymore.”

“You can, you are doing brilliantly.” Bruce told him, “Just a little more, right Stephen?”

“That’s right Tony, just give me a few more big pushes.”

Letting out an anguished cry Tony did as Strange said, howling as the shoulders were delivered and then fell back against the pillows panting as Strange pulled the baby the rest of the way.
“Is everything alright?” Bruce cried, his heart in his mouth until he heard a spluttering cry.

“Perfectly.” Strange said, cutting and clamping the cord, he carefully wrapped the baby in a towel and lay the newborn on Tony’s chest, “A little girl.” He said beaming as Tony burst into tears of joy at the sight of her, all the pain and exhaustion quite forgotten as he stared down at his new daughter.

Bruce was no better, crying and laughing at the same time, “She looks like you,” He said to Tony, “Look at those little dimples.”

“I don’t have dimples.” Tony said, “Besides, that nose is yours.”

“It is not!”

“While you discuss whom your daughter takes after, may I get her weighed and measured before her sibling decides its time to make an appearance?” Strange asked, “And do we have a name for this little treasure?” Tony looked to Bruce from confirmation and he nodded his head,

“Morgan Amonet.” Strange rose an eyebrow at the unusual second name but said nothing, taking Morgan to weigh, measure, and clean her up, before getting her secured in a nappy and dressed in a warm onesie ready to go back to Tony, who was more than eager to have her back in his arms and make the most of enjoying her before the contractions started again.

Meanwhile Bruce took the news of Morgan’s birth to the others, the collective cheer reached Tony and Strange’s ears in the medbay.

“Did you hear that Morgoona?” Tony asked, kissing her cheek, “That’s your family, and they’re all so happy that you’re here at last.” Morgan made a cooing noise and blinked sleepily at Tony, her little lips puckering up into a kiss shape that melted Tony’s heart, “Have you ever seen anything more beautiful?” he asked Strange, “Aren’t you the most beautiful girl in all the world, Morgan, you are,” Tony cooed. Strange rolled his eyes,

“This is why I chose neurology not obstetrics.” He sighed, “So I didn’t have to deal with the sickeningly sweet cooing over new borns.”

“Oh hush up, don’t you pay any attention to Dr Strangeness there.” Tony told Morgan, blowing a raspberry, “He’s just sour because he’s not as pretty and perfect as you are.”

“I most certainly am.” Strange said sniffing, “And you do have dimples, Stark, I’ve seen them quite clearly in the position you are in!” Tony stuck his tongue out then winced and groaned,

“I think its starting again.”

“Alright, lets get Morgan into the cot,” Strange said, carefully taking her and laying her into the cot besides the bed as Bruce returned, flushed and grinning from ear to ear, “Perfect timing.” Strange complimented him, “We’re just getting ready to go again.”

“I don’t know if I can do this again.” Tony groaned shaking his head, “I’m so tired.”

“I know, but this won’t take as long now, will it?” Bruce asked, giving Strange a speaking look, warning him that he needed to agree or risk losing body parts, wisely Strange agreed and swiftly made himself busy checking the second twins position and heartbeat.

Sadly for Tony it took another ninety minutes before the end or rather the head was in sight, by
which time he was sobbing with exhaustion and begging Strange to end it for him, his body pushed right to its limit.

“Isn’t there anything you can do?” Bruce asked, wanting this to be over for Tony, hating seeing him so exhausted and in so much pain that he was in tears.

“I can use forceps but that risks tearing him and it’ll hurt like hell.” Strange replied, he sighed and looked to Tony, “I know you are beyond tired, but you can do this. You have the strength inside you to do this. The baby is ready, just a few big pushes and you’ll have delivered.”

“I can’t do it.” Tony whimpered, “I can’t, I can’t…” he broke off as sobbed as more pain flooded him, his muscles contracting and his body struggling to do as it needed.

“You can do this, I know you can do this.” Bruce said, taking Tony’s weight and helping to support him, “Think about how it felt holding Morgan for the first time, think how much love you felt on seeing her face. You are going to feel that again in just a few minutes Tones, just a few more minutes and we’ll have another baby.”

Gritting his teeth and drawing in the last of his strength Tony bore down on the next contraction, pushing as hard as he could. He wasn’t even crying out now, he didn’t have the energy left to scream with, instead he put everything he had in pushing his baby into the world, barely hearing Strange telling him that the head was out, barely noticing the few seconds gap before he started pushing again, and as he felt the slippery body leave him he collapsed back into Bruce’s arms, his ears filling with lusty cry of the new born.

“A healthy Son.” Strange declared, “Congratulations Tony and well done.”

Weakly, feeling like he could sleep for a decade, Tony reached out for his Son whom Strange placed in his arms. “Look at you.” He whispered, his voice hoarse, “You are the image of your Daddy, a proper little Wayne I think.”

Bruce was crying again as he stared at his Son, whose bright blue eyes blinked at him with knowing and terrifying promise for mischief in the not too distant future.

“Have we name for this little Prince?” Strange asked getting the ergometrine ready to inject into Tony to bring on the after birth.

“Damian.” Bruce said sniffing and wiping at his cheeks with his sleeve, “Damian Alfred.”
Tony was too exhausted for a long visit from the team and family, but everyone was too excited at meeting the babies to stay away, so once the after birth was delivered and Strange and Bruce helped him to clean up a bit, everyone piled into the room to get their first glimpses of the new babies.

“Oh my God, it looks so much like you!” Jason exclaimed looking down at Damian who was nestled contentedly in Bruce’s arms.

“He Jason, he not it, he, and his name is Damian Alfred.”

“Alfred.” The Butler repeated an expression of delighted wonder on his face.

“Damian.” Jason snorted, spoiling the moment, “Fitting name for the hell spawn.”

“He’s not hell spawn, he’s cute.” Tim said staring down into soulful blue eyes that blinked back at him with more intelligence than a baby should have.

“What’s my niece being called?” Rhodey asked, beaming down at the bundle in Tony’s arms.

“Morgan Amonet.” Tony replied staring at his daughter with pure adoration.

“She’s so pretty.” Peter said, looking at her with wide eyes, “But should she be so red and wrinkly?”

“All babies are like that at first.” Clint told him, “Well done Tony, they’re perfect.”

“Of course they are, birdbrain, they’re mine and Bruce’s, two of the hottest men on the planet, it’s only natural that we’d make perfect offspring.” Tony said, stifling a yawn.

“Tony does need to rest.” Strange said, he understood that everyone wanted to see the babies and touch them, but Tony was beyond exhaustion and would probably pass out if he didn’t get to sleep soon.

“Okay, let’s just get a few pictures and we’ll leave you guys in peace.” Sam said taking out his phone and swiping the screen to bring up the camera. The next few minutes were spent posing for photos, with Tony and Bruce holding the babies while surrounded by the rest of their family. Then one with Alfred, Dick, and Bruce looking down at the babies, one with Tony and Rhodey holding the babies, once of Dick, Tim, Jason, and Peter around the babies cots, and one with everyone around Tony’s bed.

Once they were done Tony was already half asleep, so everyone quietly left the medbay so Tony could get some much needed rest before the babies awoke demanding their first feed.

Bruce and Strange carefully lay the twins down into the cots besides Tony’s bed and Bruce pulled the covers up over Tony, making sure he was comfortable before he settled down to get some rest on the chair besides the bed and Strange went to get some sleep in one of the spare rooms in the compound.

For several hours everything was peaceful, Tony was sleeping, catching up on his rest, Bruce himself a drifted off to sleep despite how uncomfortable the chair besides the bed actually was. All of the team glanced in at the couple with their new babies a few times, before continuing on down the
corridor. Tim, Jason, Peter, and Dick all managing to break free from Alfred at some point to get peaks at their new siblings and their parents while they slept, and while he scolded the boys for it, Alfred himself couldn’t help but to go and get another look at his pseudo Grandchildren.

The babies too were contented, sleeping in their cots quite happily until their stomach’s began to rumble with hunger which awoke them.

In normal cases a baby would begin to cry at this point until they fed, but this was not a normal case at all. Damian and Morgan were much more than normal, their minds far more active than that of a regular infant, being inbued with abilities from the infinity stones that had brought them into being.

Wriggling as best they could, their chubby little limbs moving about the twins looked to one another letting out small whimpering noises as they tried to figure out what to do, their bodies were not capable of much movement and they were hungry. They knew where to get sustenance, they could tell by instinct that they had only to go to their Mother. But Mother was asleep and far away, or it seemed far, so how could they get to him?

Morgan grumbled and squirmed focusing her energy on what she wanted, she needed to get to Mother, she wanted Mother. Suddenly her whole body seemed to tingle and everything around her became a blur of swirling lights and then she was laying on Mother’s chest!

Damian let out a choked cry, unhappy about Morgan leaving his side and getting to Mother first.

“What?” Bruce slurred waking up. He blinked sticky, sleepy eyes which focused on Tony who was slowly coming around, and saw Morgan laying on him.

“What, how?”

“I don’t know.” Bruce rising to his feet just as Damian let out a demanding wail that Morgan echoed, “I guess they’re hungry.” He said staggering toward’s Damian’s cot only to leap back in shock as Damian suddenly levitated!

“Holy shit.” Bruce exclaimed staring in shocked horror at the sight of his new born son levitating in the air.

“Catch him!” Tony cried, sitting up, his arms securing Morgan and wincing as his sore lower anatomy was jarred, “Get hold of him before he falls!”

Dumbliy Bruce staggered forward capturing Damian in his arms, jumping when the boy let out an even louder cry and positively glared at him accusingly, not at all happy about having his fun spoiled by his Father.

“Bring him here.” Tony said, fumbling with the hospital gown to expose his nipples. It took several minutes but with Bruce’s help he managed to get both Morgan and Damian latched onto his breasts, their bodies laying supporting against his chest and arms as they suckled hungrily.

“Go and get Strange back in here.” Tony ordered Bruce, who had stopped to just stare at the maternal scene, “We need to know what the fu….frick is going on.”

“Right.”

As Bruce left to get the sorcerer, Tony gazed down at his twins worry flooding him. How could he possibly care for them if they were going to start floating everywhere? They could fall, injure themselves, become lost, they might get attacked, some predator might see them and try to turn them into its dinner, and that didn’t even take into account the human predators that could take advantage
of Tony’s escape artist babies. Kidnappers would have a whale of a time with this, would jump at the first opportunity to snatch the babies away from two Billionaires, and what about Magical threats? These babies were clearly magical, people might try and hurt them because of that, steal them to use their powers for their own ends and hurt them if they didn’t comply.

“I can’t let it happen.” He whispered as tears began to run down his cheeks, his whole body beginning to shake with panic, “I can’t let anything happen to you, I can’t, I can’t!”

*****

Strange was thankfully awake when Bruce knocked on his door but was not too happy when he was grabbed by his tunic and dragged along the corridor.

“What the hell is going on?” He demanded breaking away from the Billionaire who glared at him.

“The babies are flying.”

That put an end to any of Strange’s arguments and he followed Bruce to the medbay where they found Tony in a flood of tears, practically hysterical and babbling about needing to protect the babies, who had finished nursing and were grizzling against his chest needing to be burped.

“Tony they’re fine, we’ll keep them safe no matter what, I promise.” Bruce said trying to soothe Tony and lift Damian up so he could burp him, as he did so an unpleasant smell hit the air and he felt something ooze over his arm that he didn’t even want to think about.

“I suggest you change him and wash him.” Strange said looking hatefully smug about Bruce getting shit on by his Son.

Bruce glared at him, “You breathe a word of this to anyone and I swear you will need far more than magic to save your sorry ass.” He made to go into the bathroom with Damian but Tony cried out for him to stop, clutching Morgan to his chest and half climbing out of bed, groaning in pain as he did.

“Tony I’m just going to change him.” Bruce said.

“You can’t take him away, I can’t let him out of my sight, not either of them!” Tony cried, growing more agitated, something Morgan picked up on and began to sob unhappily, “Someone could get them, they could be hurt,” He shook his head, “No you can’t take them anywhere, they have to stay with me always.”

“Tony, I’m not taking Damian anywhere, he just needs to be changed.” Bruce tried to explain, he longed to go to Tony, to comfort him, but Damian was squirming and grunting in his arms and his nappy was smelling truly toxic. But Tony was adamant trying to rise from the bed despite how sore and aching he was, he didn’t get more than a few steps forward before his legs gave out and Strange caught him, lowering him down to the floor.

“Tony, you have to calm down.” Strange said as Tony’s breathing became more and more erratic, “Nothing is going to happen to the babies I promise you.” Tony shook his head, gasping for air, “I have to protect them.” He wept trying to get up, but Strange held him back, keeping him in place and scratched Wyn the rune of harmony onto Tony’s shoulder, embuing it with magic to help calm Tony down.
“Bruce, Go and change Damian.” He ordered, “You take care of him and let me handle this.”

Bruce looked stricken, his heart breaking, especially when Tony let out a choked moan at seeing Damian being taken away even if it was only for a few minutes.

“Breathe Tony.” Strange instructed him, “Just focus on your breathing, in and out, nice and steady. Your babies are safe, you are safe, there is nothing to worry about, you just need to relax and breathe.”

Strange kept the talk up until Tony had calmed down enough to be helped back to bed, by which time Bruce had finished changing Damian and had to joy of doing the same for Morgan who decided to scream shrilly about it until she was clean and settled back into new nappy and fresh clothing. He lay her back into cot besides her Brother who had fallen asleep again and turned to Strange who was taking Tony’s pulse and checking him over.

“So, what happened?” he asked once the doctor was done.

“The babies are inbued with the powers of the infinity stones, as is Tony.” Strange replied, “And they have access to those powers. I assume they were hungry and felt that the best way to resolve it was to get to Tony, which they did, either by teleportation or flight.” He shook his head, looking at the twins in wonder, “It’s fascinating really, that such young under-developed minds could achieve something like that.”

“It’s not fascinating, it’s dangerous!” Tony snapped at him, “What if they fall? They’d smash their heads open on the ground or break their necks. What are we supposed to do, put pillows everywhere so we can make sure they always have a soft landing?”

“Of course not.” Strange said scoffing, “For the time being, I would suggest you physically restrain them so they can’t leave their cribs, although with a teleport that would be difficult….”

“And not happening!” Tony declared, “I’m not letting anyone tie up my babies as if they are criminals. He threw back the sheets and determinedly got to his feet, hobbling over to the cribs, “They did it because they needed me. Well if I am right here all the time, then they won’t have to search for me.”

Bruce shot Strange a worried look and placed a hand on Tony’s shoulder, feeling him tense at the contact. “Honey, you can’t stand and watch them indefinitely.”

“Yes I can.” Tony said, “If they need me then I am going to be right here, I am not leaving them, not going more than a few inches away from them.”

“Tony…”

“Stark, you need to listen…”

“NO!” Tony bellowed and blue fire erupted from his fingers with his anger, “I am not leaving them and no one is taking them away from me.” He closed his fists smothering the flames but darkness shone in his eyes, the dark threat of what he would do if either of them tried to separate him from the babies, even by moving him back to his bed.

“Tony,” Strange said, keeping his voice calm as he spoke, not wanting to spook Tony more than he already was, “You need to calm down. I know you’re scared, I know you’re instincts are screaming at you to protect your babies, but you need to listen to me and to Bruce. We can help you care for them, you don’t need to do this alone, we will help you. Everyone will help you, the team, your family, we’ll all help protect these babies and keep them safe.”
Tony stiffened and shook his head, “You don’t even know what to protect them from.” He sobbed as more tears began to flow down his cheeks. “They’re so tiny.” He whispered, “So innocent and vulnerable, anything could happen to them.”

“We won’t let it happen.” Bruce assured him, he wavered, his hand hovering above Tony’s shoulder, not quite daring to touch him and risk startling him again.

“How can we stop it?” Tony choked out. He whirled around his eyes brimming with tears and cheeks red with misery, “I’m useless, I’m already failing them and they’re not a day old!”

“Oh, Baby no!” Bruce cried pulling Tony into his arms, he felt Tony stiffen at first, his body going rigid against him, before he slowly relaxed and began to cling to Bruce, burying his face into Bruce’s chest as he sobbed.

“I don’t know how to keep them safe, I don’t even know what I’m supposed to keep them safe from, not even from themselves.” Tony wept, “Bruce I’m so scared. I can’t lose them, I love them so much, I couldn’t bear it.”

Bruce held Tony tight and kissed his head fiercely, “You won’t, we won’t.” He said, “We’ll protect them, and we’ll find a way to deal with their powers, won’t we?” He looked to Strange who nodded his head.

“I’ll speak with Wong, perhaps we can find a way to temporarily bind their powers, or at least dampen them so they can’t teleport or fly for the time being.” The Sorcerer said.

“Yeah and make sure they can’t set anything on fire, that is the last thing we need happening.” Bruce added making Tony choke on a laugh that was startled out of him, he lifted his head and wiped at his nose and eyes.

“Think other parents ever have to deal with shit like this?” He asked,

“Flying babies? I doubt it.” Bruce chuckled ruefully, he pulled Tony back against his chest, “I wonder what other tricks they might have up their sleeves.”

No sooner had he said this than Morgan had wiggled her fingers in her sleep and sparkly butterflies had appeared and started dancing over the cribs.

“You just had to ask.” Strange dead panned.
Chapter 60

“Magic babies that fly. Only you Stark, only you could do this.” Clint said with a shit eating grin on his face. “For most parents, the biggest concern they have with new borns is getting pissed, shit, or puked on, but you have to go and have kids that break the laws of gravity.”

Tony shot Clint a sour look from his bed where he was trying and failing to find a comfortable position.

“Screw you feather head.” He shot back, “And FYI, Damin has already shit on Bruce.” Clint looked delighted by this news and beamed at the slumbering Damian. “Of course that should be what I am worrying about, and trying to find enough sleep between nappies, feedings, bathing, and yet more nappies, loosing the baby weight, and yet more nappies, but instead I am worried my children are going to crack their heads open on the ceiling, or fly out of the window and get themselves lost in another county or something.” Tony sighed heavily, “Life is never fucking simple is it?”

“Not when it’s you.” Clint unhelpfully replied. At this point Morgan opened her eyes and let out a whimper.

“Pick her up.” Tony ordered, “bring her here before she decides to teleport or fly or set something on fire.” Clint was just reaching into the crib when Tony said this and yanked his hands back with a yelp.

“What do you mean set things on fire?”

“Will you just pick her up, she’s going to explode.” Tony snapped.

“You don’t know that.” Clint shot back, “And I am very attached to my hands and arms, and all my parts thank you very much.”

“Including your head because I doubt losing that would do much damage to you considering that it is totally empty.”

Clint glared at Tony and flipped him off, then timidly reached into the crib and lifted Morgan up, “I am trusting you not to set me on fire.” He informed the infant, carrying her over to Tony. He set her down just as she began to cry.

“What’s wrong little miss, are you hungry?” Tony asked, lifting her up, “Damn, I only fed you like an hour and a half ago.” Never the less when he offered her his breast she quickly latched on and began to feed hungrily. They were only half way through her nursing when Damian awoke with a screech that could have woken the dead and deafened them at the same time!

“Jesus, this kid has a set of lungs on him, doesn’t he?” Clint said, picking up the squarking infant and carried over to Tony who got him on his free breast, “You only give them a breast each huh?” Clint said with a frown.

“Well I only have two!” Tony said with a roll of his eyes.

“Yeah, it’s just, when Laura nursed Ours, she’d spend twenty minutes on one breast and then twenty minutes on the other.” Clint shrugged when Tony frowned at him, “It could be why they are hungry again so soon, they didn’t get enough from their first feeding.”

“Well what am I supposed to do?” Tony asked helplessly, “I can only feed them as much as I have.”
He could feel a pain in the back of his throat and a burn in his eyes signalling an onset of tears. His hormones were completely out of wack, everything was making him want to cry right now, and this, perhaps not being able to provide enough food for his babies was like a gut punch.

“You could give them turns on the breast and the bottle.” Clint suggested. “Like Morgan has the breast next time and Damian the bottle, and then at the next feeding it’s Damian on the breast and Morgan on the bottle, that way they are both getting all the goodness of breast milk.”

It was sensible suggestion, one that made sense and ensured neither Twin missed out, and if he’d been in a rational state of mind and not hormone ravaged, lacking sleep, and struggling with the overwhelming onset of new parenthood then Tony would have agreed without question. But sadly he was not rational right now, he was hormone ravaged and exhausted, and couldn’t help the tears that began to roll down his cheeks.

“Oh shit, no Stark, don’t cry!” Clint yelped in alarm, “You can’t cry, if the others think I made you cry they’ll string me up!”

“I’m sorry.” Tony mumbled, “Can’t help it.”

“Is everything okay?” This came from Bucky who put his head around the door, his eye locking in on the tearful Tony and the alarmed Clint. “What did you do?” He demanded of Clint.

“Nothing!” Clint cried.

“Well you must have, or Tony wouldn’t be upset right now.” Bucky said, coming into the medbay, a dark scowl on his face.

“Seriously, I haven’t done anything.” Clint protested, “It’s his hormones.”

Bucky scoffed but Tony agreed, “It is, he’s right.” He said sniffing hard, “That, and I can’t produce enough milk for my babies!” he burst into a fresh flood of tears terrifying both men who looked to each other as if they would know what to do. Clint shrugged helplessly and Bucky rolled his eyes in disgust but really didn’t have any suggestions to help with the situation and neither of them wanted to approach the bed when Tony was so exposed, it seemed a violation of privacy to do so, something that only Bruce should see, and damn that bastard getting to fly over to Gotham to get enough clothing and toiletries to last him and Tony while they stayed in the compound until Strange had the babies powers sorted out.

“What’s going on?” Natasha asked, her voice filled with suspicion as she came into the medbay with Steve, the two of them wearing sports wear and a lot of sweat having clearly been working out.

“What did you two do?” Steve demanded of Bucky and Clint.

“Nothing!” They both cried.

“I’m a bad mother.” Tony sniffed. “I can’t feed my babies!”

“What?” Steve asked clearly confused since it looked like Tony was feeding them right now.

“He’s struggling to provide enough milk for two hungry babies.” Clint explained, “And his hormones are fucking insane.” He yelped when Natasha slapped the back of his head and called him something rude in Russian, making her way to Tony’s bed and getting tissues to wipe his face and holding them under his nose so he could blow it.
“There, you’re not a bad Mother, anyone would struggle to feed two at once and it’s not like your body was made to do this.” She said giving him a smile so tender that it was almost creepy on a woman who could snap necks with a flick of her wrist.

“I know, I want to get everything right for them though.” Tony sniffled.

“I don’t think there is a perfect for parenting.” Natasha said, “Is there, Barton?” She said this in a tone that demanded he agree or would have her knives embedded in his gut.

“She’s right Tones. So long as the kids are gaining weight and not falling out of their nappies then you’re doing fine.” Clint said, not suicidal enough to challenge Natasha.

“Really?” Tony sniffed, blinking wet, red eyes at Natasha.

“Absolutely kotyenok.” Natasha replied. As Morgan finished feeding she lifted the little girl up and balanced her over her shoulder, patting her back until she burped and spit up, nearly hitting Bucky who swore and glared at her, Natasha ignored him and lowered Morgan back down to hold her only to wrinkle her nose and turn to Clint, holding the baby out to him, “You can deal with this.” She stated, shoving Morgan into his chest.

“Why do I get shit detail?” Clint grumbled, taking Morgan to go and change her, “Damn. How can babies be so cute at one end and totally toxic at the other?”

“I think Dami’s about done.” Tony said lifting him off his breast, he took a towel that was hanging over the head board and used that over his shoulder as he burped him, only there was no need, as Damian didn’t spit up, he produced multi-coloured bubbles that floated in the air and laughed happily at them.

The adults watched the bubbles and looked to the laughing baby, then back to the bubbles, then to each other.

“Well, that’s different.” Bucky offered, Damian giggled loudly and blew more bubbles into the air.

“Maybe I should give Strange a call?” Steve asked as Clint came back in with a freshly changed Morgan, she let a squeal when she saw the bubbles and squirmed in Clint’s arms wriggling her fingers and made more butterflies to join the bubbles.

“You should definitely call Strange.” Natasha said, “Preferably before they conjure up a dragon or something.”

*****

Sanctum

“Wong, you have the greast library in the world at your disposal, how can you not have any information on this?” Stephen cried into the phone as he paced the sanctum, the Cloak trailing behind him.

“This is hardly a normal situation Stephen.” Wong admonished him, “Magic babies that were created
by the infinity Stones themselves and born from a male’s body is not something that any sorcerer from Kamma Taj has dealt with.”

“No other sorcerer from Kamma Taj has had to deal with Tony fucking Stark in a hormonal meltdown either.” Stephen grumbled. He wondered how the Ancient one would have handled this. The old bat was probably laughing at him in the afterlife, relieved she hadn’t had to deal with this shit.

“If they were just mages or cradle witches then I would suggest to bind their power until they are older.” Wong said, “I have plenty of spells for that. But with the infinity stones in the mix I doubt they would work.”

“It does complicate matters.” Stephen agreed with a heavy sigh. “But we have to do something. Tony is terrified of them hurting themselves and he has a point. Although I doubt their powers would allow them to come to any harm, but convincing a Mamma bear of that will be easier said than done.”

“They could come to Kamma Taj.” Wong suggested, “They’d be well protected here.”

“Yeah, but that isn’t an option. Tony can’t just take off to Katmandu for months or years and he’ll never let the twins out of his sight, and Bruce certainly won’t.” Wong made a disgruntled noise in his throat and Stephen heard the fluttering of pages from a book.

“We could put protection barriers and wards around the compound and Wayne’s mansion.” He eventually offered, “That would at least buy some time for us to look up something more permanent.”

Stephen blinked, “That’s not a bad idea,” He said, “I’ll get on that right now.”

“Fine, oh and Stephen? When you sling here again, I want a pepperoni pizza.”

“I’m not your maid, quite listening to Beyonce and get your own damn pizza.” Strange shot back disconnecting the call, “Come on.” He said to the cloak and made a portal appear.

Wayne Manor

Bruce was shoving clothing into a suitcase, it was easy to choose for himself, shirts, boxers, socks, and trousers. For Tony it was more complicated with his changing body shape. He still looked pregnant right now, about five or six months, but that would change as his womb contracted or disappeared since no one knew if it would stay put or just disappear, and his stomach muscles reconnected after separating. That could take a few days or a few months, there was no way of knowing which.

If Bruce took in Tony’s normal clothes and he couldn’t fit into them he was likely to get upset about it, but then he might also feel insulted if Bruce just took in maternity wear. It was a difficult balance to find.

In the end he settled on yoga pants and jogging bottoms as they would work no matter what his shape. Nursing bras of course, the Mrs Doughfire Knickers as Tony had named his maternity knickers, socks, loose fitting t-shirts, and pyjamas.

“I have everything the Twins should need to last a few days, Master Wayne.” Alfred said, having
packed for the twins, “Is all in order for Master Tony and yourself?”

“I think so.” Bruce said, hoping he’d made the right choice in clothing, he didn’t want to see Tony in tears again, especially not for something he’d done. “Will you be able to handle the boys for a few days?” He asked, meaning Jason and Tim.

Alfred rose and eyebrow, “After raising you, I believe I can handle anything!”

“You are not paid to be sassy.”

“No, Sir, that you get for free.”

Bruce grumbled into his breath, then let out a yelp as Strange portaled into his bedroom.

“Bad time?” The sorcerer asked.

“Can’t you use a door like normal people?” Bruce snarled, Stephen just smirked at him obnoxiously and closed the portal behind him. “Why are you here?” Bruce demanded.

“Because I am going to put protection spells over your house and then over the compound.” Strange explained sounding as if Bruce should already have known this and was being very slow, “So the Twins might be able to use their powers but won’t be able to hurt themselves while doing it, or leave the confines of said buildings without someone physically taking them out, and by someone I mean yourself and Tony, Etcetera.”

Bruce opened his mouth to say something, then closed it and nodded, it might not solve all their issues with having magic using babies but at least they would be safe.
Chapter 61

One Month Later

Gotham.

They soon found that Damian was the more demanding twin of the two, when he wanted something he let everyone within a mile radius know it too, screaming his lungs out and getting red in the face as he howled loud enough to raise the dead until his demands were met, and if they were not met then he would kick his little legs and lash out with his magic, making objects fall from where they were placed, windows crack, and lightbulbs explode.

Morgan by contrast was a quiet baby, would only cry when she was dirty or hungry, otherwise she was contented to gurgle and hum to herself, making illusions appear to either entertain herself or to let others know that she wanted their attention. If this didn’t work, then she would use teleportation and appear before Tony giggling in amusement.

Strange’s spell worked, the twins couldn’t leave the grounds of the Compound or the Manor unless they were being carried out by a member of the family.

Flying babies was still something to get used to, but when Tony saw that the babies were more than capable of keeping themselves levitating indefinitely, he was more reassured they would not come to harm.

In fact, it was more the harm that Damian could do to others when he was throwing a tantrum.

He also seemed to make a sport of pissing on whomever was changing his nappy, shooting a smirk that was downright evil if he managed to get them in the face!

“If you are like this now, what the hell will you be like when you reach the terrible twos?” Bruce sighed as he washed himself off and changed his shirt once again. Damian grunted and blew a spit bubble that floated up into the air.

“Come on you little brat.” Bruce said, lifting Damian up into his arms and carried him through to the nursery where Tony was sat back in the rocking chair feeding Morgan, whose turn it was to be on the breast.

Feeding the baby in turns, one on the breast and one on the bottle was working well, Tony was able to provide enough milk without difficulty and the Twins were steadily gaining weight and growing well. There was also the added bonus of breast feeding helping Tony loose the weight he’d gained during his pregnancy. Bruce was worried that if it continued he might loose too much, but Strange had assured him that this was very unlikely to happen. For one thing, if Tony became underweight then his body would not be able to provide milk, and he was making sure to eat extra calories to keep up a healthy milk flow.

At present Tony had an interesting body shape, his waist had returned and his stomach muscles were reconnected which had flattened his belly leaving the extra weight positioned on his lower abdomen, hips, and his breasts, creating a very feminine hourglass shape. So far Tony hadn’t felt in anyway amourous since giving birth and Bruce was not going to press the issue, however he made sure that
Tony knew that he still desired him with lingering touches and heated kisses, looking forward to exploring his husband’s new body once Tony felt ready for sex again.

“I swear our hellspawn gets more demanding by the day.” He said, as he set Damian down in the cot, his nose wrinkling as Damian let out a loud fart and he could have sworn the little sod smirked at him.

“We need to stop calling him that, he’ll get a complex.” Tony chuckled, unfortunately the nicknames Demon Child, and Hellspawn had rather stuck since Damian’s birth with Jason insisting on calling him those names.

“If he stops peeing on me then I’ll consider a better nickname.” Bruce said handing Tony a towel as he finished feeding Morgan and burped her. “This little one is an absolute angel by comparison.” He said stroking her soft downey head.

“No, she’s just more manipulative than Damian, aren’t you, Morgoona?” Tony said, bringing her back down from his shoulder, she giggled at him her little hands reaching up to pat at his face. “You’re going to be just as much trouble as your Brother aren’t you? You’ll get into just as much mischief only you’ll be secretive about it, where he will be brash and bold, letting everyone know what he’s doing,” He grinned at her, “You are going to give us far more running around than he will, I just know it.”

Damian, feeling left out let out a loud wail, kicking his legs and squirming until Bruce picked him up and carried him over to join his Sister against Tony’s chest. As always, both twins quieted when they were lain next to each other. Having been in the womb together it seemed that they were drawn to one another, needing each others presence to be calm.

“Pepper tells me we’ve been offered two million dollars by vogue for the first baby pictures and an interview with us on how we’re handling parenthood.” Tony said rocking back and forth gently in the chair, they had learned that gentle rocking helped sooth the twins into sleep, “OK wants to do a three page spread on me, get my take on pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery, and Hello wants exclusive rights to the Christening, and that got me thinking, we haven’t really considered having them Christened, have we?”

“No,” Bruce said blinking with the sudden realization, “We haven’t.” He cupped the back of Morgan’s head, stroking his thumb over her scalp where dark hair was growing, “Do you want to have them Christened?” he asked Tony, who shrugged.

“I’m not much of a believer in God, and I know you aren’t too, but I would like for Damian and Morgan to have the option of having Church Weddings when they grow up.”

Looking at the twins now it was impossible to imagine them as adults starting out on their own ventures into life.

“It would be good to give them that choice,” Bruce said, “I have nothing against them being Christened, whom would we have as God Parents? Alfred?”

“Yes Alfred, and Rhodey.” Tony agreed, “Also Pepper, and Peter.”

“Would you be adverse to Selina Kyle?” Bruce asked, it was a big ask, Selina didn’t exactly have a stella reputation to say the least, but Tony grinned and shook his head.

“Ask her, and we should have Dick, Jason and Tim as God Parents too.”

Bruce hummed his agreement, then frowned, “You don’t really want to give Hello exclusive rights
“Fuck no, oops!” Tony winced, “Mamma said a bad word, don’t repeat that.” He said to the sleepy Twins who blinked and yawned at him, “I’m not really interested in Vogue’s offer, but we are going to have to introduce them to the world eventually, and not doing so on a large scale could look like we’re ashamed or hiding something.”

Bruce sighed heavily. Sadly this was true, for any other celebrity couple, they might get away with wanting to keep their children out of the limelight and be forgiven the desire to keep the cameras away from their children. But He and Tony were not any other celebrity couple, they were two men who had born twins without a surrogate, if they did not show the world how happy they were, or how healthy and contented their twins were then the haters would swiftly spread rumours of discontent, of the twins being deformed in some way, of their having something to hide.

The only way to keep that from happening was to do something public, and the vogue offer was generous to say the least.

“We could put the money in trust for them.” Bruce said, “Or donate it to the Maria Stark Foundation, or the Wayne Orphans trust.

“We can split it between the two.” Tony said, “And we can negotiate on the questions, keep away from anything truly private.”

“Perhaps we should get the boys involved, and Alfred, have the whole family present.” Bruce mused, “That way it won’t look like they are separate from the babies.”

“So long as Jason watches his mouth and Tim doesn’t talk about how he put dry ice down the toilets at school and made them explode!” Tony had been torn between exasperation and amusement at that, although the bill for the damages wasn’t amusing at all.

“So we’ll do it then.” Tony said.

“We will, and we’ll look into booking a church for the christening.” Bruce said, he looked down with a smile as Damian let out a soft snore, he and his sister had fallen asleep perfectly content in their Mother’s arms as their parents discussed plans.

“I think Alfred has my Christening robe.” He mused, “Do you have one?”

“If I do it’ll be at the mansion.” Tony said, “But lets get them something new, we’ll let Pepper handle that, she’s dying to buy them more clothes, and this will give her the chance to pick out something fancy instead of something practical.”

“Alright, but promise me one thing.”

“Yeah?”

“No Iron Man or Bat Man onesies!”

*****

The Vogue interview and photoshoot went smoothly. It was held at the manor two weeks later with
Jason and Tim on their best behaviour and the twins laying contentedly in Tony and Bruce’s arms, neither using magic for once, which their parents were very grateful for.

The questions were kept pretty basic, how they were finding parenthood, how was Tony feeling in the aftermath of giving birth, how Jason and Tim felt having two small babies in the house, what if any plans did they all have for the near future.

Tony and Bruce were sent copies of the photos, and their favourite, which was family photo, with Tony and Bruce sat on the sofa, Morgan and Damian in their arms, Jason and Tim on either side of them, and Dick and Alfred standing behind them, they had framed and set on the mantle piece above the fire.

All prospective God parents readily agreed, including Selina who had been rather surprised at being asked to be God Mother.

The only problem they faced, was that most of the churches did not want to christen babies born to two men who had been conceived with magic, as the church leaders saw this as an affront to God.

“The Westboro Baptist Church has declared the babies abominations and the whole family unholy.” Bucky spat, “The Cardinal of New York is saying that he cannot allow children born outside of God to be Christened in the One True Church!”

Sadly the media had gotten hold of Tony and Bruce’s struggles to get a Church to agree to Christen their twins and had run with the story. The LGBT community was up in arms over it, while the anti-gay lobby was backing the churches decisions.

“One true church my pasty white backside.” Clint grunted, “Where the fuck were they when Thanos attacked, where was their God when he was snapping us all away into nothingness?”

“It does seem strange that people argue the existence of this deity, when the existence of extra terrestrials like Thor disprove the Bible so readily.” Vision mused, “It is also cruel that they condemn two innocent children because of how they came into being.”

“Biggots don’t care whom they hurt.” Natasha said, sharpening her knives with more force than necessary, whenever she was angry about something she sharpened her knives and got a glint in her eyes that suggested that she wanted to impale someone.

“Is there anything we can do?” Bucky asked, and she shook her head.

“We can’t change the minds of Church leaders, so even if the Priests and pastors wish they could Christen the babies, they would not be allowed to, because their leaders have forbade it.”

“Wankers.” Clint declared,

“Oh you a wordsmith, Mr Barton.” Strange said, appearing through a portal and smirked as he made the archer jump.

“Screw you, Strange.” Clint shot back.

“No chance Barton, blondes aren’t my type.” Strange said, as the Cloak settled about his shoulders.

“You have a reason for being here, no doubt?” Natasha asked, as Steve and Sam came in from their morning run about the estate.

“Captain, Sergeant.” Strange said nodding to them, “I do, as it happens,” He said, “I have heard of
the troubles that Bruce and Tony are having in getting Damian and Morgan Christened.”

“The entire world has heard of that.” Sam said, heading to the fridge to get some juice, he offered the jug to Steve who nodded, and proceeded to pour two glasses, swallowing his own in three huge gulps.

“Well, the Masters at Kamar Taj and I feel, that considering the special nature of these babies, we can perhaps be of help.” Strange said, “You may have heard of the Wiccan Handfasting which is a marriage rite?”

“In passing.” Clint said.

“On Charmed.” Sam admitted.

“Well, there are also Naming ceremonies, and blessings, that are similar to that of a Christening.” Strange explained, gaining the teams attention, “I believe as Sorcerer supreme I can perform the ceremony upon the twins, and that with some effort, we can create the perfect venue here for the ceremony to take place.”

Steve looked to Natasha who nodded, glancing to Vision, “I do not see any reason why not.” The Android agreed, “However the decision must be made by Tony and Bruce.”

“Indeed,” Strange agreed, “And I shall hasten to Gotham and speak with them at once.”

*****

Strange did not make the mistake of going straight into the manor via a portal, instead he arrived before the front door and knocked, waiting to be admitted by Tim.

“Both twins needed changing and have made such a mess they need to be bathed so Tony and Bruce are rather preoccupied, and Alfred is sorting out clean clothes for all of them.” Tim explained.

Strange chuckled at the thought of the two billionaires running around after two demanding infants, “I can wait.” He said, letting Tim led him through to the living room, he paused to admire the family photo on the mantle. “You make a beautiful family.” He said to Tim, “I read that you find having brothers and a sister awesome.” Tim blushed, recalling his words and looked down at his feet shrugging his shoulders,

“I never had siblings. Tony and Bruce took me in, gave me a family, made me welcome in their home. I never expected to feel at home anywhere after my parents died, and Dami and Morgan feel like they’re my Brother and Sister even if we don’t share blood.”

Strange nodded, “There is much more to family than blood.” He agreed.

The sound of footsteps reached Strange’s ears and as he turned he saw Alfred, the elder man acknowledging him with a smile, “I thought I heard the door.”

“Hm, I hear the twins are giving you all the run around.” Strange said and Alfred rolled his eyes,

“They are certainly keeping us on our toes.” The butler agreed, “But I doubt that you came here because of messy nappies.”
“No, I have a proposition for Tony and Bruce, one I think will make them very happy.”

Once the twins were clean, dry, and in fresh clothes, they joined Strange in the living room where he presented them with his offer of a naming and blessing ceremony that he would perform himself, before all of the Sorcerers of Kamma Taj and the Avengers.

“It would not be seen as a Christening by the Church, nor would it permit them the right to be wed in a church in the future, but they would be blessed before the higher powers and they will be acknowledged by all Sorcerers and Witches in the world.”

Tony wet his lips and looked to Bruce, “It seems like a good idea to me.”

“It does.” Bruce agreed, they were both angry by the Churches refusal but there was nothing they could do to change religious matters, and this was an option that would give them what they wanted inspite of the Church.

“You’ll agree then?” Strange asked,

“Yes.” Bruce said, “Lets do it.”
Chapter 62

Gotham

Tony stood before the three way mirror in his Bruce’s bedroom turning back and forth. He wasn’t overly sure he was happy with what he was seeing, although that wasn’t helped at all by the robe that Strange insisted that he and Bruce had to wear for the blessing ceremony.

It was similar to his weird ass tunic thing, but ankle length, with a high collar, long flowing sleeves, and a wide belt that reached over the bottom of the ribcage and ran down to the top of the pelvis.

With Tony’s new body shape it just emphasized his hourglass curves, making his rounded hips, and backside look all the wider and his still milk heavy pectorals, (oh hell who was he kidding, they were breasts) all the more obvious.

“I look like a freakin’ chick.” He said with a scowl. The irony of this was, a Woman would have likely been very pleased by Tony’s new body shape, but he was not a woman, and it was far from a man’s body shape, with the weight distributed in areas that men didn’t tend to carry weight.

“You look good.” Bruce said coming up behind Tony and snaking his arms about his waist, and rested his chin on Tony’s shoulder, “I like the new look.” The less than subtle press of his erection against Tony’s backside was clear proof of that.

“Of course you do.” Tony drawled, “My ass is twice the size it used to be and you’ve always been an ass man.”

Bruce grinned at him and slid his hands down to grope shamelessly at Tony’s ass, “What can I say? Kim Kardashian has nothing on you, babe.”

Tony snorted and rolled his eyes but didn’t pull away. Bruce’s easy acceptance and obvious arousal at his body relieved a lot of the worries Tony had about his changed shape. Sadly not all of the general public were of the same opinion and the photos in Vogue had been trolled, with people making insulting and hurtful comments about how he looked now.

It wasn’t so much the extra weight that worried him, he could eventually loose that with diet and exercise once he finished nursing. What did worry him was that his body had changed dramatically and Tony didn’t know if he would ever look the same again, not with how much his pelvis had widened, and it wasn’t all extra fat, some of it was the bones and muscles having stretched out, adding additional inches to the width of his hips.

“It’s gonna be a nightmare getting jeans to fit right.”

“So get them made to fit you, don’t change yourself to fit some pre-packaged design.” Bruce said with an easy shrug. “And don’t worry yourself about looking different. You’ve done an amazing thing, honey. You carried and delivered twins. Something your body was never made to do, it’s only natural that it’s going to have been changed by all it went through.”

“Or unnatural as some people say.” Tony muttered, pulling out of Bruce’s embrace and made his way to the bed where his yoga pants and over sized, faded metalica t-shirt were laying. He’d been pretty much living in this style of clothing, not daring to try on any of his pre-pregnancy clothing. His shirts would be far too tight over his breasts right now, and while his trousers would fit his waist, he
wouldn’t likely be able to get them past his ass and hips. Really he needed to get some new clothes, but doing so meant admitting defeat in some way that Tony’s pride wasn’t quite ready to relinquish, so yoga pants and stretchy jogging bottoms and baggy t-shirts were his wardrobe choices right now.

“Honey, there is nothing unnatural about you.” Bruce said, frowning at Tony’s choice of words and the slump of his shoulders as he got changed, setting the robe aside.

“According to the church I am unnatural,” Tony said, “My pregnancy, our twins, are an abomination, a sacrilege, as unholy as Satan himself, and after such an unnatural event, is it any wonder that I am left looking like a freak?” He jerked to a stop, startled when Bruce took him by the upper arms and held him fast.

“Stop it.” The older Billionaire demanded, “You are just quoting bullshit writing by brain defective, barely literate bullies and trolls, who spend their entire pathetic existence sat behind a computer looking for things and people they can make nasty comments about, so they can feel better about their own worthless lives. You are not a freak, and our babies are certainly not abominations, no matter what any troll, Clergy Man, or homophobic dumbass have to say.”

Tony let out a breath and slumped, “But they’re gonna keep on saying it aren’t they?” he said in a tired and defeated sounding voice, “It’s not gonna stop. Denying them a Christening is only one of the difficulties they are going to have to face in life, and right now they are too young to know about it. What about when they’re older, when they go to school and are exposed to this shit? Or what about when they are just out in the street to buy ice cream and some Bible Bashing bigot starts screaming abuse at them?” He shook his head and pulled out of Bruce’s arms, turning his back to his husband to look out of the window.

“I thought the birth was going to be the hardest part of all this, or at least the most painful. But it isn’t. That pain is nothing compared to what I feel, knowing what Dami and Morgan will suffer when they are old enough to know what is being said about them, and it will be bad enough when kids from school just repeat what they’ve heard their bigot parents say, but what about when it’s adults doing it to their faces, telling them how unnatural they are and how they should never have been born.” He turned back to Bruce his expression striken, “What if they are denied other things, not just a Christening. What if they aren’t allowed on a school trip because the place they are going to visit doesn’t want them there, or if they aren’t welcomed into a friends house because their friends parents won’t allow it. What if they don’t have friends because of who they are? What if they are just isolated and excluded all their lives and never get to be happy or have a real childhood all because….”

“That’s enough!” Bruce shouted cutting Tony off. The smaller man flinched and realized that he was panting and shaking, almost on the verge of a panic attack. Steadily he controlled his breathing, taking slow deep breaths in and out until he had himself under control again.

“They won’t be alone.” Bruce said in a softer tone, “They won’t be isolated or lonely. For a start they have Dick, Tim, Jason, and Peter for big brothers. Multiple Aunts and Uncles. From what he says, Clint is dying to introduce his brood to the twins, so they’ll have three more potential friends there, and there is Cassie Lang.”

“I know.” Tony said, nodding his head, “I know. But I meant friends their own age. Even Clint’s youngest is a couple of years older than our twins and Jason, Peter, and Tim are all going to be in their twenties by the time the twins start school.”

It was on the tip of Bruce’s tongue to say that they could home school the twins, get them a private tutor to educate them. But that would risk them being isolated even more, and they would eventually
have to have friends their own age, they would need to socialize and interact with society. Keeping
them hidden away from the world wouldn’t be fair on them, and it would be letting the bastard
bullies win, which Bruce was damned if he was going to let happen.

As he racked his brain for something comforting or reassuring to say to Tony a memory clicked in
his head that was just perfect and made him smile.

“Do you remember our first time at Lamaze?”

“I’d hardly forget the place I got to see the worlds worst horror movie!”

Bruce snickered at the reminder of the natural birth video. “Well, do you remember that stuck up
couple who didn’t want us there?” Tony nodded, recalling the assholes. “And do you remember how
many people in the class were on their side?”

Tony didn’t even have to think about it. “None.” He replied with a small smile, getting what Bruce
meant.

“The majority is already on our side. It’s just a few small minded morons against us, and in the years
that will pass before it’s time for our twins to go to school, that will be even less. Hell, even the
Churches might join us in the twenty-first century and get over themselves!”

“I wouldn’t hold your breath.” Tony chuckled sinking into Bruce’s arms, “They’re still wearing the
same style clothing as they did in medieval times.”

“Stranger things have happened.” Bruce said pressing a kiss to Tony’s head, “And who couldn’t
love our twins when they see them?” No sooner had he said this than there came a yell from the
nursery.

“Oh you mother fucking skunk!” Jason cried.

“Language!” Alfred reprimanded.

“Tony, Bruce, your Hell Spawn has shit everywhere and it’s fucking toxic. Seriously, the little
demon is producing nuclear waste and trying to poison everyone!”

Bruce groaned, and Tony laughed against his chest, “You were saying?”

******

Avengers Compound.

Strange and the Sorcerer’s of Kamma Taj, along with Witches, from several Covens from all over
the world had descended on the compound and set to work transforming the grounds into a sacred
space for the blessing ceremony.

Actual Broom sticks were used by the witches to sweep clean the grounds of bad energy. They
swept from left to right, east to west following the path of the rising and setting sun. Sprinkled salt in
a clockwise circle about the grounds, chanting placing charms, at various points on the grounds,
which they told the Avengers, when asked, that these were points of mystical power, where the veils
between the various realms were weaker and powers pooled there, too be harnessed for good or ill.

The charms they set up there would promote only good energy and add to the protection of the estate and the babies for the day.

In the very centre of the open grounds an alter made of natural hewn rock, brought from Scotland by a Celtic Coven was erected, with a high arch of flowers stretching over it, the wooden sticks supporting the structure had been intricately twisted and shaped to form runes and at the top most point was a pentacle star, this arch was brought by an Asian Coven, and the flowers smelled richly of spice and perfume that gave a wonderful heady scent to the alter, which was only added to by the incense and oils brought by an Italian Coven.

Semi-precious rocks, carven rune stones, sea shells, candles, a cauldron, a boline, and charms were added to the alter as the big day approached. With the Sorcerer’s of Kamma Taj bringing the book of shadows and Athame, which took centre place on the alter.

On the day of the blessing all of the guests, and all of the avengers gathered outside of the compound, standing either side of a path that was strewn with white flower blossom leading to the alter, which Strange led Tony and Bruce down, carrying the twins in their arms as they went.

Once they were stood before the alter Strange called the corners, summoning the elements of magick and formed the circle, lighting God and Goddess candles on the alter and opened the book of shadows.

“Since the beginning of all things, the sacred union of the God and Goddess has given forth new life, gifted us with great bounty, and the wisdom to bless the fruits that nature bestows in the eternal cycle.

On this day we name and bless these souls before the Mother and Father of all.

Damian Alfred. Morgan Amonet.” Strange dipped his fingers in the water in the cauldron and gently drew symbols on the babies brows, then began to chant.

“Blessed be your breath, may your breathing be deep and relaxed, may you breathe in power with every breath you take. Blessed be each breath you take.
Blessed be the fire inside you, may your will be unbroken, and may it be as strong as fire and as supple. May your passions burn truly and free. Blessed be your fire, may it burn strong.
May your will be as strong as water, and as supple. Blessed be the waters of your life.
May your blood be strong. May the flow from your loin be joyful and fertile.
Blessed be all your life waters.
Blessed be the earth of your body. May your muscles be strong and fearless.
May your heart beat with love, soul, vigour, and courage.
Blessed be your body, which is the body of the God and Goddess.
Blessed be your spirit, may you always have health in spirit, may you be whole.
Blessed be your spirit.
May you always have community, may you be prosperous in all ways.
May you love and be loved.
May your voice, both your complaints and special offerings be truly heard.
May you always be surrounded by the warmth of family and community.
May you know the intimate goodness of your being.
Blessed be.”
“So Mote it be.” The High Priestesses recited, followed by the covens, sorcerers and Avengers.

“I doubt Damian will ever have any difficulty being heard when he complains, he’s deafening now!” Tim said, making Peter stifle a laugh.

“And neither of them lack for courage or spirit, or fire for that matter.” Dick agreed, watching the various witches and sorcerers went up to Tony and Bruce to meet the babies, giving them special wishes, some making sigils and runes over them for protection, harmony, and health.

“This is way better than a Christening or Baptism.” Jason said, “No freezing ass Church or stuffy sermons, just a quick chant by Strange and we can party.”

“This isn’t a party.” Alfred scolded them without much heat. He had pretty much given up on getting the brats to behave themselves, he found he had fewer headaches that way. So long as nothing major was getting broken and they weren’t planning world domination or mass genocide then he tended to turn a blind eye.

“Sure it is.” Jason said, “Look, we have the booze,” He gestured to the wine, that several covens had brought, “We have cake,” these too had been brought by covens, honey and fruit cakes which were sliced into thin pieces. “It’s a party!”

Alfred rolled his eyes and went to get a drink.

“So, happy?” Bruce asked Tony as they made their way through the hundreds of people who’d come to celebrate their babies blessing ceremony.

“Honestly?” Tony asked, “I couldn’t be happier or more overwhelmed.” He admitted, “It shows how precious our babies are to others as well as to us, and it gives me hope for the future, that the world will accept and love them with us.”

“They will be.” Bruce said, accepting a cup of wine in a celtic designed goblet from one of the witches with a nod of thanks, as did Tony, “Now lets get some cake and enjoy this day.”

Tony grinned, “So mote it be!”
Chapter 63

Chapter Notes

I am ending this fic as there is going to be a sequel. Hope you enjoy. <3

The rest of the year passed by at seeming light speed. Before Tony and Bruce even knew it, their twins were rolling over onto their stomachs, and then they were sitting up and starting to crawl around, or in Morgan’s case bum-shuffle since she seemed to prefer this to crawling.

Their first words came in within days of each other at an astonishing seven and a half months.

Morgan was first and her first word was “Shit.” Tony and Bruce were both mortified and elated by their daughter’s quick development, and not to be outdone by his Sister, Damian followed up with his first word three days later, a resounding “No!” which he used for everything, complete with a dark scowl that Tony swore he had inherited from Bruce.

As the twins learned to move about more without using their powers to fly or teleport, (Which on one occasion had Morgan teleporting into bed, between Tony and Bruce who had been engaged in activities that were not for a child’s eyes!) The cat Jett began to take more notice of them, keeping a wary eye on them, suspicious of creatures that had the ability to pull his whiskers or tail. He tended to keep to perches that were too high for their grabby hands to get to him, and only bore their petting on sufferance when he was curled up on Tony’s lap.

By nine months they were both weaned from the breast and eating soft solids. Tony took an instant dislike to processed baby food and between himself and Alfred, they cooked up food specially for the twins which they put into a food processor to mash it up for them.

Morgan adored sweet potatoes and baby rice pudding, which Alfred cooked with less salt, fat, and sugar than an adult version would have. She also ate pretty much anything, only really turning her nose up mashed carrots.

Damian was a fussy eater. He seemed to have something against all things healthy, which Bruce swore he’d inherited from Tony, and put up a fuss over eating anything that wasn’t banana custard, which was his favorite food. Had he been permitted to, he would likely have lived off it, but Tony and Bruce insisted he have a more varied diet despite his protests, and both became very used to wearing a lot of what the twins ate, as they adored sticking their hands into their food and squeezing it, then slapping said hand on their parents, or any convenient surface.

The parents also swiftly learned that years of being superheroes did nothing to prepare them for how fast the twins would be able to move once they began to crawl and bum shuffle, or how curious they were. Baby proofing everywhere became the next step, to stop the twins from accidentally hurting themselves when grabby hands tried to get hold of something.

As they grew their difference in personalities showed more and more. Damian was a very demanding child, wanting constant attention from everyone. He was also the more noisy of the two loving to bang his toys together and yell loudly in baby babble or the few words he picked up, his favourites being “No. Now. And Bugger!” He also completed hated bath time for some reason.
When he was made to go for a bath he would scream his lungs out, kicking and flailing his fists around, thoroughly drenching the person unfortunate enough to be bathing him, and would spend an hour sulking about it after it was over.

Morgan was a quieter child, and the more inquisitive. She wanted to see what made things work, would watch with fascinated eyes when Tony was working on something, from the play pen that had been set up in the lab. She also adored the Bots, who were equally as fascinated by the mini humans.

Whereas, Damian needed constant attention, Morgan was content to entertain herself and she enjoyed bath time, giggling and wriggling like a fish, making magic bubbles appear as she was bathed and only protesting when the bath was over.

For their first birthday, Tony and Bruce threw a huge party at Gotham manor, inviting all their friends to come and share in the day with them.

The twins were still a little too young to understand what all the fuss was about, but enjoyed tearing paper from their present, which consisted of cuddly toys, clothes, and early learning toys for their development.

As Bruce had bad experiences with Clowns (Joker) they didn’t have any clowns for the party, instead they hired a puppeteer, who had the twins giggling at the brightly coloured hand puppets antics.

They also thoroughly enjoyed their birthday cake, blowing out the candle with Tony’s help and getting rather hyper on the sugar, but as their Super soldier Uncles were present, they were worn out by the end of the afternoon and went down for naps without too much difficulty, which gave their tired parents a chance to sit down and relax themselves.

“Your Damian is certainly a handful.” Bucky said, impressed by the fiery nature of the boy.

“Tell me about it.” Tony said rolling his eyes and ignored the muttered comment of “Hell spawn” that came from Jason.

“They’ll be walking soon too, I suppose.” Steve said.

“Very soon, they’re already pulling themselves up right, so it won’t be long before their toddling.” Bruce agreed, half dreading it happening, the two were enough trouble already without them walking!

“I’ll bet you never thought that parenting could be harder than being Iron Man or Bat Man, did you?” Natasha asked with a smirk.

“It’s harder.” Bruce agreed, with a look to Tony, “But far more rewarding.”

“Speak of,” Tony said, “We were going to talk to you about that, about Iron Man anyway.” The Avengers all sat up straighter, paying attention. Peter and the boys already knew what was happening, so they continued with their computer games. Rhodey, Pepper, and Happy also knew what Tony had to say.

“I haven’t really been active as Iron Man over the past year. I’ve only suited up twice. Once with that
Steve looked to Natasha, and then to Sam, before looking back to Tony. “You’re quitting?”

“Retiring.” Tony said, “Officially, I’ll be making a public announcement of it in a few days, but I wanted to tell you all first.”

“But you.. well still need you Tony, I still need you.” Steve protested and Tony shook his head,

“My children need me more and they are my priority. Now if there is something apocalyptic happening then I’ll suit up, and I’ve still got my magic abilities. But otherwise, I’m stepping back from the superhero gig and concentrating on being a Mother to my kids.”

Steve made to protest but Bucky caught his arm, “He’s right, Stevie. His kids have to come first.”

“I’m not saying they don’t, I just…” Steve broke off with a scowl, his shoulders rigid and expression unhappy.

“For what it’s worth, I think you’re doing the right thing.” Sam said,

“Me too.” Clint agreed, Tony smiled, glad to have their support even if he didn’t have Steve’s.

“What about Bat Man?” Natasha asked, looking to Bruce.

“I’ll give it another couple of years,” Bruce replied, glancing at Jason and Tim. He wanted them both to be a little older before he handed over the mantle to them.

The adults talked for a few more hours before the party broke up, both Bucky and Natasha promising to speak to Steve and get him to understand Tony’s reasoning as they departed. Peter headed back to New York with Happy and Pepper, while Rhodey headed back to the compound with Vision, Sam, Clint, Bucky, Steve, and Natasha.

Dick, Tim, and Jason headed out on Patrol, and Alfred got on with some vehicle mantainence on Bruce’s car, so with the twins in bed Tony and Bruce had a rare moment to themselves.

They curled up on the loveseat drinking hot chocolate and listening to some easy rock.

“I think they all took it pretty well.” Tony said, “Only Steve had an issue with my retirement.”

“He’ll get over it.” Bruce said dismissively, “And you are doing the right thing, so don’t let his attitude upset you.”

“I’m not going to.” Tony promised, “Besides, I’ve got too much to do getting our new house ready for when we move in, and taking care of our little terrors.”

They had purchased land in the Hudson Valley, besides the river, where Tony was building them a ranch style house to live once Bruce fully retired from being the Bat, already he was letting Tim, Jason, and Dick handle more and more, only going out on patrol himself twice a week now instead of every night, preferring to cuddle with Tony, and spend time with the twins, to beating the crap out of a thug in an alley.

“Who’d have thought that we’d have become so domestic, eh?” Tony joked making Bruce smile
wryly.

“Not me.” He admitted, “Certainly not back in our party days. But I’ve got to say I am far happier now than I was back then.”

“Me too.” Tony said. Plenty of people had asked if he ever missed his party lifestyle, and in all honesty he didn’t, looking back he couldn’t ever remember being really happy so much as in a constant state of exhaustion, and bordering on depression.

His life now was far different, consisting of nappy changes, baby food, homework from the older boys, and bedtimes. But he could honestly say he had never felt more content and satisfied with his life than he did now.

Smiling, he snuggled closer to Bruce and sipped his hot chocolate, enjoying this brief moment of peace with just the two of them, before their family called for their attention again. As Bruce had said to Natasha, being a parent was harder than being Iron Man or Bat Man, but it was far more rewarding and satisfying.

Works inspired by this one
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!