The Great Library War

by overcastskeleton

Summary

All throughout history, the greatest wars have been won with a mix of perseverance and shrewd tactical skill. That was exactly how Tony Stark was going to win the battle he had found himself in the midst of.

However, this adversary seemed a formidable foe. Indeed, Stephen Strange was a force to be reckoned with, and he would not go down easily.

Notes

This wasn't supposed to be a multi-chapter fic but oh well I got a little carried away.

I love these idiots and I love this ship.

Petition to change the ship name to Endgame?

See the end of the work for more notes.
The Confrontation

Before we start, let's imagine this Stephen Strange:

With this Tony Stark:

Carry On

All throughout history, the greatest wars have been won with a mix of perseverance and shrewd tactical skill. That was exactly how Tony Stark was going to win the battle he had found himself in the midst of.

However, this adversary seemed a formidable foe. Indeed, Stephen Strange was a force to be reckoned with, and he would not go down easily.

The battle began one Friday night. It was a fairly warm night for March in New York, and Stephen really was in no rush as he made the trek across campus. All around him, the signs of nightlife were starting to present themselves.

To another person, the nightclubs and bars would seem enticing, to Stephen they were merely distractions. Not to say that he didn’t partake of these distractions every once in a while, but tonight he was on a mission. This exam wouldn’t study for itself, and it was on nights like these that Stephen wished it were possible for his body to be doing one thing while his mind did another.

He entered the Hallowed Gates of Knowledge- which he called “the library” when he wasn’t being
pretentious- smiled at Christine, the cute girl who worked at the circulation desk, and headed towards his usual table on the top floor.

It was the perfect spot, nestled in the back corner, barely any foot traffic and secluded enough that no noise from the lower levels reached it. Stephen had discovered it his first week at school two years ago, and since then had claimed it for his own. He thought it was common knowledge, but apparently the stranger sitting there had not gotten the memo.

Stephen came to a stop ten feet away, mouth drawn into a hard line.

The guy was about his age, with short, messy hair. His entire demeanor seemed to scream “FUCK YOU,” his band t-shirt was untucked, jeans ripped and he had his sneaker-clad feet up on the table. His dark eyes were narrowed, staring at a magazine intently. He looked up at Stephen, having sensed the malicious glare being aimed at him and raised an eyebrow.

“There a reason that you’re staring daggers at me?” He called loudly, closing the magazine.

Stephen resisted the urge to shush him. “You’re sitting in my seat,” he whispered back.

“Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t see your name on it,” he retorted. “Maybe I didn’t conduct my search thoroughly enough, I’ll get back to you in a moment.”

Stephen rolled his eyes. “I always study here.”

The stranger looked up again, clearly annoyed at the interruption. “You study here? On a Friday night?”

“I don’t think you’re one to talk, you’re here too.” Stephen crossed his arms over his chest.

“Yeah, you got me there.” He pulled his feet down from the table. “But, I’m just here hiding from a crazy ex. Seemed like a good place to lie low.”

Stephen sighed. “Well I actually have to study, so if you could move now, that would be great.”

“You’re seriously gonna make me move, when there are twenty other tables on this floor?” The guy snorted. “Sorry, your highness, not gonna happen.”

“I’ve been sitting at this desk for the past two years, my mind is used to it. And sitting here helps me remember things. You know, we just studied this theory in one of my classes that says-”

The stranger snorted. “Yeah, yeah. I think I read that one in that one textbook called Talking Out of Your Ass 101. I got here first, so if you really want the seat, you can wait until I leave.”

Stephen’s glare intensified, and if looks could kill the stranger would have been dead five minutes ago. “I had no idea that we went back in time to kindergarten. Could you possibly put on your big boy pants so we can handle this like adults?”

“You’re the one whining here.” He put his feet back up on the desk and opened his magazine. “Besides, I’m exploring some very adult themes at the moment.”

To Stephen’s absolute horror, he realized the magazine that the stranger was so enraptured in was a Playboy. This was the last straw, whatever patience he had left dissipated.

“In a library?” Stephen hissed

“This is the most action these walls have seen in years,” the stranger said with a smirk. “Believe me,
they’re not protesting."

Stephen walked up to the stranger and snatched the magazine out of his hand. “Here’s an idea, why
don’t you go back to your room, and act out any of the sick fantasies that this magazine has brought
to your head Mr.….” He searched the cover for a name. “Stark.”

“It’s Tony.” He stood quickly, the legs of his chair scraping against the tile, and sidled up close to
Stephen. “Why don’t you go police somebody else?” He snatched the magazine back. “Officer
Stickler.”

“My name is Stephen Strange.” He pinched the bridge of his nose.

Tony whistled lowly. “Man, your parents must have hated you to stick you with a name like that.”

Stephen chuckled. “You know, you’d seem a lot more intimidating if you weren’t six inches shorter
than me.” He looked down at Tony. "I think Snow White is missing a dwarf. Now which one are
you? Dumpy? No I know, you're Douchebag."

“Be careful with that big head of yours, I’d hate for it to topple over and bring you back down to
earth.” Tony glared up at him.

They maintained eye contact, eyes narrowing slightly.

“There are people over here trying to study, so if you two could just fuck already, preferably
somewhere else, that would be greatly appreciated.” Somebody yelled from a table across the room.
Stephen looked away, blushing; thankfully for his fragile ego, the room was basically deserted.

Tony snorted. “He’s right. I’ve got better things to do than play musical chairs with Darwin over
here.” He pushed past Stephen, bumping into his shoulder on the way out. “That chair was really
comfortable, I might have to try it out again sometime. See you later, Stephen.” He waved. “Oh and
nice purse.”

“It’s a satchel!” Stephen yelled, earning an irritated shh from the other person in the room.

Tony turned over his shoulder and grinned at Stephen, wagging his eyebrows. Stephen flipped him
off as he slumped down into the vacated seat. Tony returned the gesture and left the room.

“Looks like a purse to me,” chimed the stranger. “I swear my sister has the same one.”

Stephen groaned and dropped his head into his arms.
The First Battle

Chapter Notes

Whoops, sorry it took me forever to update. I got distracted by a Tony Stark fanfic.

I've gotta be honest, I didn't have this beta'd, and I only read through it once, so there will probably be mistakes. I'll fix them at some point.

Oh, and everything in italics is sign language. Because in this house, we don't erase Hawkeye's deafness.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By Tuesday, Stephen had shoved his encounter with Tony Stark deep into the furthest depths of his mind. He had bigger problems to focus on than a petty argument.

His biochemistry exam was coming up, and thanks to his photographic memory, all he had to do to prepare was read his textbook; the problem was finding the motivation to read his textbook. With only two days left until the exam, he had about 200 pages left to go.

Stephen had decided to camp out in the library until he had finished, sleep and food be damned. He was 137 pages in, when his eyelids began to droop. He glanced at the screen of his phone, the clock read 2:18 pm, around five hours since he started.

*I deserve a break*. He decided, scrolling through the missed messages, some from Wong, a few from his mother, one from a kid in his class named Bruce Banner, asking to meet up and study. He ignored them all, slipping his phone into his back pocket

He stood, rubbing his hands over his eyes, and headed towards the bathroom.

From across the room, a guy holding a comically large newspaper pulled out his cell phone from his purple hoodie.

*This is Purple Hawk to Shellhead. Come in.*

His phone vibrated against the wooden table, signalling an incoming text. Purple Hawk? Really Clint?

Clint groaned. You’re taking all the fun out of this Tony. You asked me to spy, we do it my way.

Tony replied within ten seconds. Fine, Purple Hawk. What’s happening?

Clint glanced around the room. Subject has left the room. Appears to be going to the bathroom. You’ve got a five minute window.

Tony exited his hideout between the bookshelves and caught Clint’s gaze from across the room. Not one for subtlety are you? He signed, gesturing to the folded up newspaper.
I didn’t want him to see me. Clint signed back.

So you opted for the giant newspaper? Tony raised an eyebrow.

Clint shrugged. Well he didn’t see me, did he? So it worked.

Tony sighed and slid into Stephen’s chair. He stared at the open textbook in front of him, words he didn’t understand swam in front of him. Who reads this stuff?

“People who actually care about their education,” Stephen said, now standing over Tony. “Look, I really don’t have time for this. I have an exam and 63 pages left to read before Thursday.”

Tony looked up at Stephen. “You can read sign language?” He put his feet up on the desk.

“Not the point,” Stephen said. “I’ve got to study for an exam. So get out of my seat.”

Tony grabbed the science textbook and balanced it carefully on his legs. “Looks boring.”

“I beg to differ. I think it’s a real page turner,” Stephen replied dryly and pulled the book out of Tony’s lap. “Tell your blonde friend over there that I can see him. It’s hard to ignore someone reading a newspaper with the headline Gordon Ramsay Sex Dwarf Eaten By Badger.”

He noticed the newspaper. I told you he would. Tony signed quickly.

Clint made a very rude gesture that would have sent any ASL fluent nun into a coma.

“I noticed him a few hours ago, I just didn’t know you guys were together. I guess idiots do travel in packs,” Stephen said flippantly, marking his page in the book.

Tony covered his heart with his hand. “Call me an idiot all you want, but don’t you dare bring Clint into this.”

Stephen rolled his eyes, wondering just what he had done to deserve this. “Are you done dicking around?” He shoved Tony’s legs off of the desk.

Tony turned to face him and came face to face with Stephen’s crotch. “What a nice view.”

Stephen sighed and pulled Tony up from his seat. “Goodbye Tony.”

“Aw you remembered my name,” Tony grinned. “And here I thought you would forget me.”

“I could never do that.” Stephen sidestepped Tony and sunk into his seat. “You’re like my own personal flea, a recurring pain in my ass.”

Tony pretended to swoon. “Aw Stephen, the things you say.”

Stephen rolled his eyes and forced himself to concentrate on the page where he had left off. However, he found this incredibly difficult, considering Tony had dropped into the seat beside him, and was now staring at him.

“You know, I hate being ignored,” Tony said, leaning on his elbow.

Stephen took a deep breath. “It must be incredibly taxing on your friends to have to continuously inflate your ego,” he said, his words clipped.

“Most people find my presence to be very addictive,” Tony said matter-of-factly.
“Most people are bought out by your pocketbook,” Stephen mumbled.

Tony shrugged. “I like to think they have good taste,” he countered, his smile drooping a little.

Stephen’s eyebrows quirked at Tony’s reaction to his words.

“It takes a certain palette crave you, Tony Stark,” Stephen said quietly.

And despite every rational bone in his body, Tony visibly shuddered, as Stephen’s words went straight to his dick. There was just something about the way Tony’s name had sounded coming off of Stephen’s tongue.

“You cold?” Stephen smirked.

Tony stood up suddenly, his chair scraping noisily against the floor. His rapid movement was met by a chorus of shushes. “There’s somewhere I have to be.”

“Do you have a date?” Stephen taunted.

_Let’s go_. Tony signed to Clint, who had been watching the entire encounter with an amused smirk on his face. “Believe it or not, Strange, you are not the center of my universe,” Tony quipped. “But you won’t have to miss me for too long, we’ll meet again soon.” He smiled, tapping the textbook as he passed.

Stephen sat in stunned and confused silence for a moment, wondering what exactly Tony meant by that sentence. He had to admit, the possibilities weren’t great.

_Somebody has a crush_. Clint signed gleefully as they exited the library.

Tony shook his head. _I do not._

Clint snorted. _Okay._

Tony wondered how someone could pack so much sarcasm into sign language. “Do you want to help me fuck shit up or not?” He turned and spoke slowly, so Clint could read his lips easily.

_Always_. Clint signed back. _That’s my favorite thing to do._

_Let’s go have a chat with Bruce_. Tony smiled, a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

I want to write more IronStrange, so if you’ve got any prompts, let me know.
The War Council

Chapter Summary

The war continues and Tony Stark consults his top informant.

Chapter Notes

You guys are the best. Thank you for your patience.

Sorry for potential typos.

Tony and Clint cut across campus, dodging other students and made it to Central Park in record time. They would have made it to their destination sooner, if Clint had not stopped to pet a golden retriever they encountered near the science building.

Once there, they grabbed their usual chili dogs from their usual street vendor and set out to find Bruce, who would no doubt be at his usual spot studying for his upcoming exam.

Sure enough, there he was, leaning against the dark uneven bark of a large old oak tree, books, spread out messily in front of him.

“Brucie!” Tony shouted when they were about ten feet away.

The other boy looked up startled, when he spotted Tony and Clint approaching him, his confused look turned to one of annoyance. “Go away!” He yelled back. “I have to study.”

“I brought you a hot dog, Banner. Thought you’d be hungry” Tony offered it to him. “When’s the last time you ate?”

Bruce cocked his head to the side, eyebrows furrowed as he thought. “Sometime this morning.”

“Take it.” Tony shoved it under his nose. “It’s got relish and onions on it, just like you like it.” He moved it in circles slowly, allowing the aroma to waft into Bruce’s nose.

Bruce caved, and accepted Tony’s peace offering. “I’ll take a break for lunch, but after I finish this, you guys have to leave.” He ripped open the aluminum foil and sighed hungrily.

Clint pulled his hearing aids from his hoodie pocket and fitted them into his ears. Take it easy Bruce, it's a hot dog not a naked lady. Clint signed, sitting across from Bruce.

“Fuck off.” Bruce rolled his eyes. “What are you guys doing here?”

Tony feigned offence. “Can’t we, your two best friends-“

Only friends. Clint interjected and dodged the bunched up napkin that Bruce threw at him.
“Come because we wanted to check up on you?” Tony asked.

Bruce snorted. “Right, you took a break from whatever stupid thing you were doing to come make sure I was okay? As one of your two best friends, I’m going to have to call you out on your bullshit Tony Stark.”

Tony laid out on the grass beside Bruce. “Fine. I need your help.”

“Is it a math question?” Bruce asked.

*More like a chemistry question.*

“Barton I swear to God, I will throw you back into whatever dumpster you crawled out of this morning—”

*Tony has a crush.*

“I do not!” Tony protested.

Bruce wiped chili sauce off of his chin. “Who is it?” He asked with his mouth full.

“I do not have a crush!” Tony said louder, but Bruce and Clint ignored him.

*He woke me up at the crack of dawn to tail some guy to the library.*

“You stalked someone Tony?” Bruce raised an eyebrow.

Tony sat up. “Well technically Clint stalked him—”

“We talked about this!” Bruce gestured wildly with his free hand. “You can’t go all Quasimodo when you find people attractive.”

“You know what, you insinuating that I act like an ugly hunchback hurt my feelings, so for the sake of this friendship, I am choosing to ignore it,” Tony said quickly. “And it wasn’t stalking, just a little light observation.”

Clint chuckled. *Stalking.*

“Barton there’s a Central Park trash can with your name on it.” Tony rolled his eyes.

Clint mimed zipping his lips and laid back onto the patchy grass. He put his hands behind his head and closed his eyes.

Bruce finished the hot dog, crumpling up the paper. “Who’s the current eye of your affection.”

“Tall, dark curly hair, pretentious attitude,” Tony listed off. “Happens to be in your biochemistry class, studying for the same exam you are.”

Bruce bit the inside of his cheek, eyebrows furrowed. Tony could see the gears in Bruce’s head turning as he ruled out potential candidates using Tony’s algorithm. Finally, the answer dawned on him, and Bruce’s jaw dropped.

“Stephen Strange?” He asked in disbelief. “You’re the idiot with the Playboy magazine? I should have known!”

Tony jolted forward. “He talked about me to you?”
“More like complained loudly to the whole classroom, I just happened to be listening,” Bruce explained. “What were you doing sitting in the library anyways.”

“Hiding from an ex. That’s not the point,” Tony rambled quickly. “I need you to tell me everything you know about him.”

Bruce held up his hands. “I am not about to get sucked into whatever stupid plan you’re coming up with Tony. They always get me in trouble.”

“That’s not true!” Tony objected.

“In our senior year of high school-”

Tony clapped his hand over Bruce’s mouth. “I don’t need a highlight reel of my failures, I need answers. And if you don’t give them to me, I will be forced to do something even more ridiculously stupid to get them, and that will be on you.” He pulled his hand away and fixed Bruce’s shirt. “It’s just a few, will you please answer them?”

Bruce felt his resolve crumbling under Tony’s puppy dog eyes and pouty lips. “Fine!” He agreed begrudgingly. “What do you want to know?”

“When’s your next class?” Tony asked, crossing his legs and leaning forward.

“Thursday, the day of our exam,” Bruce answered. “Please don’t do anything crazy on exam day, for the sake of my good grade.” Bruce begged.

Tony made a mental note of that. “How does he like to study? Alone? In groups?”

Bruce bit his bottom lip nervously. “I really shouldn’t tell you this, but Stephen and I are supposed to study at the library tomorrow.”

Tony grinned like the Cheshire Cat. “Oh really? What time?”

“I’m begging you Tones, I need to get a good grade on this exam or I’m gonna fail-”

Tony rolled his eyes. “Bruce you could ace the test in your sleep.”

“No, my grade comes before whatever twisted love game you’re playing.” Bruce crossed his arms over his chest. “Stephen is one of the smartest guys in that class and he chose to help me. You can’t mess that up.”

Tony held three fingers up. “I swear, Scouts honor.”

“That would be more convincing if you had actually been a Boy Scout.” Bruce shook his head.

Tony took Bruce’s hands in his own. “I swear to you on my Black Sabbath CDs and the stash of imported liquor in my dorm room, that whatever I do tomorrow will not jeopardize your precious exam grade,” he said slowly, staring deep into Bruce’s eyes. “Is that good enough for you?”

“Get a room you two.” Clint signed lazily.

Bruce sighed. “If you mess this up-”

“I won’t. Didn’t I just promise you that I wouldn’t?” Tony dropped Bruce’s hands.

“Neither of us have class until the afternoon, so we’re gonna be there as soon as the library opens,”
Bruce said.

“Excellent.” Tony tapped Clint on the shoulder. *You still sleeping with that one girl who works at the library?*

Yeah. Clint sat up.

“What girl?” Bruce asked. “What are you planning?”

Tony waved away Bruce’s concern. “Nothing too bad. You won’t even notice, promise.”

* * * * *

“You removed the desk from the library?” Bruce hissed into the phone. He was pacing the hallway near the bathroom.

“I know. Pretty genius move huh?” Tony beamed proudly, popping a cheeto into his mouth.

He and Clint had snuck into the library that morning and took Stephen’s beloved desk from the room. The only thing left, were the four wooden chairs positioned around where the stolen desk would be.

“No, Tony! He knew it was you, and now he’s pissed.” Bruce ran a hand through his hair. “What if he doesn’t want to study? What if I fail my exam? I’ll fail the class and then I’ll have to drop out of the university and get a desk job.” Bruce shuttered.

“Bruce, you’re not gonna fail the test!” Tony shouted. “Just talk him down, try to get him to go to a different desk.”

“Tony, you promised that-”

Tony held the empty bag up to the speaker and crumpled it. “Bruce...breaking... up.”

“I know you’re crumpling up your bag of chips!” Bruce pinched the bridge of his nose.

“I’ve gotta go. But I’m sure you’ll figure it out. Love ya.” Tony made a kissing noise and hung up the phone.

Bruce let out a sigh of annoyance and stared at his phone, as Stephen walked around the corner.

“Who was that?” He asked.

Bruce nervously fidgeted with his glasses. “My cousin,” he said quickly.

“Seems like a jerk,” Stephen observed.

Bruce smiled. “You don’t know the half of it.”

“I figured out the source of our seating issue,” Stephen said, clearly annoyed. “There’s this guy that’s been annoying me. I think it’s his special way of flirting.”

“O-oh y-yeah, w-what’s his name?” Bruce asked, messing with his shirt.

Stephen’s eyes narrowed. “Tony Stark. Do you know him?”

“I-I-I’ve heard of him around, yeah.” Bruce nodded multiple times.
“Oooookay.” Stephen raised an eyebrow. “Anyways, one of the librarians managed to find the desk, they’re bringing it over.”

Bruce held two thumbs up. “Awesome. I’ll be right there.”

“Take your time,” Stephen said, slightly weirded out by Bruce’s bizarre behavior.

Bruce kept a tight smile on his face until Stephen disappeared around the corner. He looked over his shoulder and checked his phone.

Tony had texted him. Did you blow your cover?

No. Bruce typed with shaky fingers. I think I did pretty good. He has no idea.

Meanwhile, Stephen walked back over to where Christine was standing. “Thanks again, for finding the desk.” He said.

She smiled at him. “Of course.” She nodded. “Oh, while you were away, some guy brought this to the front desk. Said it was for you.” She handed Stephen a pink sticky note.

He squinted at the messy scrawling. It read: You Know Who I Am. Stephen swore and tore up the sticky note.

“Any idea what it meant?” Christine asked.

Stephen pocketed the torn pieces. “Yeah, I’ve got a few ideas.” Stephen sank into one of the chairs and opened his textbook.

“Good luck on your exam!” Christine said cheerfully and walked back towards the front desk.

Clint stepped from between the bookshelves of the history section. Christine smiled and waved at him.

He grinned back mischievously. Thanks babe. He signed. I owe you one.
Stephen Strange was twenty-two years old when he lost his mind for the first time. He had always been a laid-back guy, never really one to obsess over anything. But on this fated day, coincidentally six days after meeting Tony Stark, Stephen finally went crazy. Allow me to set the scene.

It was the day of the dreaded exam, but Stephen wasn’t worried. He woke up early, took a shower and went over his notes a few times as he had his morning tea. Stephen was a stickler for routines, and made no exception, even for exam day. His roommate, Baron Mordo, was still sleeping soundly when Stephen slipped out the door.

He plugged his earbuds into his phone and walked to his class to the beat of the music while his mind worked out the possibility of which questions would appear on the exam. All in all, it was a strong start.

And then along came Tony Stark.

When Stephen arrived at his classroom- 20 minutes early, as always- he noticed two very out of place things. One: There was a giant group of people surrounding his desk. Two: Bruce Banner was standing to the side of the group, looking extremely anxious.

Stephen pulled an earbud out of his ear and walked over to his classmate. “What’s going on?”

Bruce jumped. “S-somebody covered your desk in sticky notes,” he stammered quietly.

Stephen raised an eyebrow. “Sticky notes?” He repeated.

Bruce nodded.

Stephen stalked towards his desk, grumbling curse words under his breath; the crowd of people parted as he passed them.

Sure enough, every inch of his desk was covered in neon sticky notes, each bearing several different messages scrawled in familiar messy handwriting. The phrases “You Know Who I Am” and “Good luck, honey” being the most frequent.

“Somebody has a secret admirer,” somebody - Wade was it?- murmured under his breath, causing
the group to laugh.

Stephen’s face flushed with embarrassment. He began tearing the sticky notes off of his desk quickly.

“Who’s the lucky lady?” Asked the girl who sat behind him.

“Don’t think it was a lady, Neb.” Wade leaned against his own desk. “I saw some guy walking out of here with a bunch of sticky notes under his arm when I came in.”

Stephen glared at Wade. “Mind your own business,” He muttered, shoving the sticky notes into the trash can.

He wasn’t sure how Tony had gotten into this classroom or had known which desk was his, but there was one thing he was absolutely positive about. He was going to murder Tony Stark.

Their professor, a short and stocky man with a disorganized and frantic air, rushed into the classroom. “Everyone in their seats please, we will begin the exam in five minutes!”

“Did you remember your good luck kiss this morning?” Wade taunted.

“Fuck off.” Stephen rolled his eyes and slumped into the chair.

Wade snorted, settling into the chair beside Stephen. “You seem like the type of guy that gets off from a conversation about quantum psychics.”

“And you seem like the type of guy that has every STD,” Stephen retorted, pulling out his notebook.

Wade copied his movements. “Well not every STD, just the deadly ones.” He grinned.

“I’ve heard about you,” Stephen said coolly, “ten seconds isn’t all that impressive.”

“Maybe so, but it’ll be the best ten seconds of your life.” Wade winked.

The professor cleared his throat. “Gentlemen, we have more pressing matters than your personal lives.” He admonished, as he walked by. “And Mr. Banner, is there a reason you’re not in your seat?”

“No,” Bruce stammered, and hurried to his spot beside Stephen.

“What's his damage?” Wade leaned over to whisper in Stephen’s ear.

Stephen narrowed his eyes and watched the other boy fidget. “No clue, but I’m gonna figure it out.”

“No talking. You have an hour and fifteen minutes to complete your exam. Starting now.” The professor placed the exam papers on his desk.

Stephen managed to stave off the thoughts of Tony for the thirty minutes it took him to complete the exam. He spent the rest of the day thinking of various ways to get back at Tony Stark.

* * * * * *

“You sound crazy,” Wong said calmly. “Take a deep breath.”

Stephen continued to pace the sidewalk in front of the bench where Wong sat meditating. “Tony Stark has messed with me for the last time. The library desk was one thing, but my grade, my future
“is another thing entirely.”

“It sounds like he’s trying to talk to you,” Wong suggested, with his eyes still closed.

Stephen ran a hand through his hair. “If he wanted to do that, he could have just said ‘Hi’ like a normal person.”

Wong made a very undignified noise. “He’s Tony Stark. You and I both know he’s anything but a normal person. Maybe this is his way of saying ‘Hi.’”

“No, no, no, no, no.” Stephen resumed pacing at double the speed. “This is something else entirely. He’s trying to trick me into something-”

Wong sighed loudly. “Please stop pacing and keep your negative energy to yourself. He’s not trying to trick you into anything, he is very obviously flirting with you, and if I can see that and you can’t, then you must be blind.”

Stephen continued to pace, ignoring Wong’s words. “And there’s something up with Bruce Banner. You don’t think they could be working together, huh?”

“Why should I give my advice, it’s not like you listen to it anyways,” Wong replied, opening his eyes.

“It makes sense,” Stephen continued. “How else would Tony know that Bruce and I were studying that day? How could he know which desk I sit at in class. The only common denominator is Bruce.”

Wong straightened his legs. “Did you deduce all of that on your own, Sherlock?”

Stephen glared at Wong. “I am not going crazy.”

“I once had a relative who would repeat that to herself often, then we realized she was really trying to convince her friend that nobody else could see,” Wong said sarcastically. “One day, we finally decided to get her help, because at this point she was having entire conversations with herself and-”

“Shh, stop talking!” Stephen froze mid-step, staring past Wong. “Wait a minute, is that…”

Wong turned to look over his shoulder. “What are you talking about?”

“That backstabbing Judas!” Stephen hissed, scrambling onto the bench next to Wong. “I was right!”

Wong’s eyes narrowed in confusion. “That you’re crazy?”

“No!” Stephen turned Wong around and pointed to three figures sitting under a tree. “See those people over there?”

“Those three distant blobs, sitting under a giant blob?” Wong asked, squinting.

Stephen huffed. “Put on your glasses Wong.”

“You know I don’t like using them-”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. The natural state of the body was not meant to be improved yada yada. This is important. Put them on!” Stephen all but yelled.

Wong grumbled under his breath as he pulled his thin-wire framed glasses from his shirt pocket. “Happy?” He slipped them onto his face.
“That’s Tony Stark and he’s sitting with Bruce Banner and that blonde kid from the library.”
Stephen explained.

“Clint,” Wong said. “He’s in the philosophy program with me,” Wong clarified at the puzzled look on Stephen’s face. “He helped with my sign language.”

Stephen shook his head. “Anyways, they’re friends. They’re in cahoots. Partners, amigos-”

“The point Strange, find the point.” Wong waved his hand.

Stephen pulled out his phone. “The point is, Tony has been messing with me for a week, and he’s been using Bruce to do it. So now, I’m gonna use his own secret weapon against him.”

“Stephen, what are you doing?” Wong leaned over Stephen’s shoulder.

“Sending a text to Bruce for him to meet me in the library tomorrow to talk about how we think the exam went.” Stephen sent the message and stared at the trio. “But I don’t actually want to talk about the test. I’m luring Tony into a trap.”

Wong narrowed his eyes. “What makes you think he’s gonna see the message?”

Stephen pointed back towards the tree. “That.”

Tony was discreetly leaning over Bruce’s shoulder, lips moving quickly as he read the text. He moved away quickly as Bruce looked up.

“What’s happening?” Wong asked.

“Tony just took the bait.” Stephen smiled. “Now I’m gonna text Bruce and change the meeting time to earlier in the day.”

Wong nodded. “But Tony won’t know so he’ll show up on time.”

“And then the second battle will begin.” Stephen said, leaning back against the bench. “It’s elementary, my dear Wong.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a couple chapters left!

Thank you so much for reading, it means so much to me.
The Equalizer

Chapter Summary

In which Stephen and Tony find discover Tony's true feelings

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for your patience! Between work, the World Cup and crippling writer's block, I haven't had a lot of writing time. But I have managed to crank something out for you guys.

I hope you enjoy it!

As far as Tony Stark was concerned, he was the only one of his kind. In his very short life, he had never met an equal in his intellect or charm. And it was with this confident mindset that he went to battle the next day.

Of course, Tony had no idea he was in the midst of a battle, and to be fair he had never gone toe to toe with Stephen Strange.

Tony walked into the library with his head held high and a spring in his step. “Hey Christine,” he leaned against the circulation desk, a bright smile on his face.

“Why are you in such a good mood?” She asked, stacking a pile of books.

Tony drummed his fingers on the counter. “I have a date,” Tony explained. “And from the looks of it, you just came back from a successful one.”

Christine blushed and pulled up the collar of her sweater to hide the purple bruise on her shoulder.

“Didn’t know Clint was such an animal.” Tony grinned.

She cleared her throat. “Who’s your date with?”

“Stephen Strange,” Tony whispered. “Only, he doesn’t quite know it yet.” Tony looked around the first floor. “Have you seen him?”

Christine shook her head. “But I just started my shift a few minutes ago. Check his usual spot.” She suggested, picking up the stack of books.

“Thanks,” Tony said over his shoulder.

“No problem.” She waved, heading to the back office.

Stephen and Bruce were nowhere in sight when Tony made it to the top floor of the library. He spared a cursory glance between the bookshelves as he made his way to the vacant desk.
The tardiness was weird, Bruce was a stickler for punctuality, and Tony doubted the stick up Stephen’s ass would allow for delay. Still, it wasn’t peculiar enough to raise any red flags.

“Where are you Stephen?” Tony mumbled, sinking into the coveted seat.

He looked around, the room was filled with students hunched over desks, intensely poring over textbooks. The faint sounds of pens and pencils and the clacking of keys were the only noises in the room; the sound of productivity.

Five minutes passed, and still no sign of Stephen or Bruce. Was he sure he got the time right?

Tony pulled out his phone and sent a text to Bruce: I thought you were meeting His Royal Dickwad in the library. Where are you?

Bruce replied a moment later. I met him a few hours ago.

A few seconds after that, a follow-up text. Wait...how did you know I was meeting Stephen today?

A few hours ago? Tony squinted at the screen of his cellphone.

That didn’t make sense. The text Tony read had said now. So something probably came up and Stephen had to change the meeting time. And yeah, maybe Tony would believe that, if he wasn’t in the middle of a battle with one of the most brilliant minds on the planet.

“ Shit ,” Tony mumbled under his breath.

This was a trap.

Tony tried to get out of his seat, and found that he couldn’t. His ass was literally stuck to the chair. “What the fuck?” He stood and took the chair with him. “Oh you’ve gotta be kidding me.”

“Having trouble?” A smug voice asked.

Tony looked up, coming face to face with a smirking Stephen Strange. “Fuck off.”

“You shouldn’t talk like that to the one guy who can get you out of your little predicament.” Stephen smirked, hooking his fingers in his belt loops.

Tony settled back into the seat- not that he had much of a choice. “What the hell is this stuff?”

“I got it from a friend of mine named Reed. Don’t worry, it’ll dissolve in a few hours.” Stephen slid into the seat across from Tony. “Which’ll give you and I a chance to talk.”

Tony grimaced, slumping forward. “Well I’m sorry if I’m not currently a stimulating conversational partner, given my ass is glued to a chair.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that. I’m just gonna ask you some questions.” Stephen leaned forward, lacing his fingers together. “And besides, you love to talk about yourself.”

Tony dropped his head into his arms. “Fire away.”

“What’s your deal?” Stephen asked. “Why are you stalking me?”

Tony rolled his eyes. “I am not stalking you,” he protested.
“Bruce told me everything. How you asked him for information about my class and used him to lure me into the library.” Stephen said. “I have to say, he was a little upset that I wasn’t actually here to talk about the test.”

“That Saruman,” Tony mumbled under his breath. “So, you're using my own tactics against me.”

Stephen grinned. “Something like that. You never answered my first question.”

Tony huffed. “I was bored,” he answered offhandedly.

Stephen scoffed. “Yeah right. You went through all that trouble, the stalking, the plotting, just because you were bored.”

“Believe it or not Stephen, after the inventing and the partying, there’s still a large part of my day left unaccounted for.”

Stephen stared at Tony, blue eyes narrowing in concentration.

Tony squirmed, uncomfortable under Stephen’s calculating gaze. He broke eye contact, focusing instead on the sleeves of Stephen’s large Columbia hoodie. The dark blue material accentuated his eyes, the long sleeves hung off of his lean arms. Stephen had pulled the ends of the sleeves over his hands, and Tony had to admit, it was adorable.

He shook his head, clearing the thoughts from his mind. Stephen was still staring at him, eyebrows raised.

“Okay,” Stephen finally said, resting his chin on his folded hands. “Let’s say you were bored. Why me?”

*Why not you?* Tony thought, gaze wandering to Stephen’s face. He was captivating, Tony had to admit that. His wit, his pretentious attitude; that goddamn smirk that made Tony’s body ache.

Tony had never planned to keep up this childish fight, but there was something about the way that Stephen challenged him, pitting his ego against Tony’s. It was...attractive.

With a shock, Tony realized that he wanted to keep seeing Stephen, to keep hearing his teasing voice, even the insults.

*Holy shit!* Tony sat up suddenly. *Barton was right. I have a crush.*

It should be noted that Stephen was also working through his own list of possible explanations for Tony Stark’s behavior. He had just set aside the theory that Tony really didn’t have a life and was bored, when he noticed Tony’s unwavering stare.

It wasn’t the same annoyed glare that greeted Stephen when he first walked up to him. It was a look of longing. And it sent warm feeling throughout Stephen’s body, which terrified the fuck out of him.

He stood abruptly. “I’ve got to go.”

“But I haven’t answered your question yet,” Tony protested, trying to get his newly realized crush to stay.

Stephen stumbled backwards, a hand on his chest. “Yes, you have.” Stephen all but ran from the room.

“You could at least get me out of this!” Tony shouted, incurring a few death glares and a “shut the
fuck up” from the other patrons of the library.

* * * * * *

“He likes me.” Stephen was once again pacing in front of Wong as he sat on the park bench.

Wong opened an eye. “You left him in the library with his ass glued to the chair?”

“He did all of that because he had some stupid crush on me?” Stephen ran a hand through his hair.

“Well, love makes people do crazy things,” Wong said.

Stephen held up a hand. “It’s not love. It’s some fleeting infatuation. That guy’s never had a stable relationship in his entire life. He’s a spoiled trust fund baby, and he reeks of daddy issues.”

“Then you guys are perfect for each other,” Wong replied cheekily. “You have so many things in common, for instance you’re both assholes who don’t listen to their friends. And you’re both so arrogantly stubborn that you can’t admit your feelings.”

Stephen cast a sideways glance at Wong. “Who’s side are you on?”

“The side where you finally let yourself be happy for one second.” Wong said.

“I don’t feel that way about Tony.” Stephen shook his head. “He’s a pain in my ass.”

“Because he’s trying to get your attention,” Wong argued. “And besides, you don’t know anything about him. All of your opinions are preconceived from the gossip and slander of biased people.”

Stephen stopped his pacing and stared at Wong.

“And you can fool yourself, Stephen. But you can’t fool me.” Wong stood, grabbing his bag. “This may have started out as a pissing contest, but you like that he challenges you.”

Stephen tried to argue, but couldn’t find the words.

“I’ll see you after class.” Wong clapped Stephen’s shoulder. “Don’t judge a book by it’s cover, or the reviews you’ve heard about it.”

He walked away, leaving behind a very confused Stephen Strange.
New Players

Chapter Summary

Tony Stark is an over-dramatic disaster, and Stephen Strange is running from his feelings.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy what is undoubtedly the longest chapter in this story, so far.

A special thank you to my wonderful beta, Andro, for giving me some much needed plot direction.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Tony!” Bruce shouted over the rock music pouring from Tony’s room. He pounded on Tony’s door in their small apartment. “Open the door, Tony! Come on! It’s not the end of the world.”

“My life is over!” Tony yelled back.

Bruce looked over at Clint, who was absorbed in his game of COD. Bruce wondered how Clint could focus on anything when death metal had been blaring at top volume non-stop, but then he saw his answer; Clint’s purple hearing aids were sitting on the coffee table.

Bruce rolled his eyes and stood in front of the TV. Really? He pointed to the hearing aids.

Clint shrugged and waved Bruce away from the TV.

We have to do something. Bruce insisted. He hasn’t come out of his room in three days. I can’t take the loud music anymore, I’m going crazy.

Clint paused the game. Okay. What should we do?

Bruce thought for a moment. We should call him, he’s the only person who can make Tony snap out of it.

Not him. Clint shook his head. He’s scary.

I think Tony needs a little scary. Bruce picked up his phone. Besides, I’m going to get really scary if I don’t get some sleep soon.

Clint shrugged. Tony’s gonna be upset. He unpause the game.

“He’ll get over it.” Bruce said aloud and pressed the call button.

“Hello?” A gruff voice answered.
“Tony’s in the midst of an existential crisis, and he needs your help.” Bruce explained. “How soon can you get to New York?”

The voice on the other end of the line paused for a moment. “Give me four hours.”

* * * * * *

Stephen had not set a foot in the library since the incident with Tony. To say he was avoiding Tony would be the understatement of the century. He had eliminated any possibility of their paths crossing, abandoning his usual desk at the library, getting to classes late and leaving early.

He wasn’t just avoiding Tony, as Wong pointed out at least twice a day, he was avoiding conversations that would lead to the development of feelings for Tony.

Man, he really hated it when Wong was right.

As it turned out, the end of the semester and subsequent conclusion of his junior year was an excellent distraction. Stephen threw himself into his studies, spending long days and nights hunched over work in a 24 hour cafe on the fringe of campus.

That’s where he was today, sipping on caffeinated tea as he prepared for his anatomy final.

Stephen had been here for a while, he supposed. He tended to get lost in work, sometimes not even coming up for air until several hours had passed. When he started, the cafe was full of other students just like him, now it was mostly deserted, save for a few employees.

The bell above the door jingled, and in walked a small group of guys. Stephen looked up at the sudden noise and locked eyes with one of them. The other boy smiled, he leaned over and said something to one of his friends and headed over to where Stephen was sitting.

“You’re Stephen Strange aren’t you?” He asked, words altered by a strong accent, and stopped in front of the table.

Stephen nodded. “Yeah. And you are?”

“Charles Xavier.” He stuck his hand out. “We had a class together last year. Interesting enough, considering it was my senior seminar and you were a sophomore.”

Stephen raised his eyebrows, racking his brain for any familiarity of Charles Xavier.

“I don’t expect you to remember, I mostly kept my head down.” Charles retracted his hand, confidence unshaken. “Your presentation on stem cell regeneration was bloody brilliant.” He grinned. “You’re a genius.”

“So I’ve been told,” Stephen said, staring down at his notes.

Charles chuckled. “Not much for conversation, are you?” He ran a hand through his hair.

“I’m a little busy right now,” Stephen mumbled, writing in the margins of his textbook.

“I know you’ve got a photographic memory, you bragged about it enough last semester,” Charles said, shoving his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

Stephen opened his mouth, ready to quip back, but Charles’ voice lacked the hard edge that he was used to. The hard edge that Tony always threw his way during a conversation.
“It never hurts to be sure.” Stephen shrugged, still disoriented from his discovery.

Charles narrowed his eyes. “I bet you could recite that entire book in your sleep.”

“Probably,” Stephen snapped, just begging for a snarky remark from Charles.

But it never came. Instead, he sat down across from him. “My mates and I are going to a bar a few blocks away. You should take a break and join us.”

“I don’t drink.” Stephen said.

Charles grinned. “Neither do I. But between you and I, my pal Erik, the big viking looking one, he’s not a great conversationalist when he’s drunk; and I would really like to have a coherent discussion.” He leaned forward as if sharing a secret, and Stephen caught a whiff of his cologne. He smelled like leather and spices.

Stephen found he rather liked it.

“Charles, old friend!” Erik called, walking up behind Charles. “You coming?”

“I’ll catch up.” Charles turned back to Stephen. “They’ve got really good food,” he prompted.

“Sure,” Stephen agreed, gathering his things.

Charles sighed. “Good, for a second, I thought I’d have to offer to pay.” He stood, offering Stephen a hand.

Stephen took it, a small smirk on his face. “Is the offer still on the table?” He shrugged his bag over his shoulder.

“Tell you what, if you tell me more about your research, I’ll buy you whatever you want. Deal?” Charles asked.

“Deal. I’ll warn you, I have a refined palate,” Stephen teased.

Charles chuckled, dropping Stephen’s hand. “I hope you can appreciate mediocre bar food.”

“I thought you said it was really good?” They walked towards the door.

Charles’ grin widened. “And it is really good, well as far as bar food goes.”

* * * * *

Reinforcements showed up around the 77th hour of Tony’s metal marathon.

Bruce threw open the front door, a relieved smile on his face. “You’re here!” He threw his arms around his savior’s shoulders. “Oh god, Rhodey, I never thought I’d be so happy to see you in my entire life.”

Rhodey extracted himself from Bruce’s arms. “Wow thanks, Bruce, I value our friendship too.” He pulled his sunglasses off. “Where is he?” He asked, seemingly unphased by the loud music.

“In his room.” Bruce led the way through the apartment.

“Hey, Hawkeye!” Rhodey waved.
Clint groaned, pulling the throw pillow tighter over his face. He had re-inserted his hearing aids at Bruce’s insistence that they should suffer together.

“How long has he been living here?” Rhodey asked.

“A week,” Bruce answered. “Tony and I found out he wasn’t joking about being homeless, he’s been sleeping on our couch ever since.”

Rhodey nodded. “What am I walking into?”

Bruce ran a hand over his face. “He found out he has feelings for somebody, and ever since, the person in question has been avoiding him. He’s been taking it pretty hard.”

“Well, he’s always been dramatic.” Rhodey rolled up his sleeves. “I’ve got this Bruce. You and Clint should get out of here, you look ready to explode.”

“Thanks.” Bruce looked relieved.

Rhodey sighed, looking back at the door. “Just doing my job.”

“Godspeed.” Bruce clapped Rhodey’s back.

Rhodey knocked on Tony’s door. “Tony! Open up!”

The volume of the music dipped considerably. “Rhodes? What are you doing here?”

“Bruce called me, said something about a guy.” Rhodey tried jiggling the locked doorknob “I’d much rather have this conversation face to face, so open the door, Tones.”

Rhodey heard shuffling on the other side of the door, and the faint click of the lock.

“It’s open,” Tony said.

Rhodey took a deep breath, mentally preparing himself for whatever he may find on the other side. This wasn’t the first time Rhodey had to rescue Tony from his own self-destructive behavior, and Rhodey had seen some bad things.

Tony was sitting on the windowsill, leaning out into the night air. “Hey Rhodes.” He turned, and Rhodey could see the glowing light of burning embers on the end of a cigarette.

“Rough day?” Rhodey asked, shutting the door behind him and walking over to where Tony was sitting.

Tony moved over, giving Rhodey adequate space to sit down. “Yeah, what gave it away?” Tony joked with a crooked grin.

“You haven’t touched one of those since high school.” Rhodey gestured.

Tony took a drag, eyelids fluttering shut. “Better this than to start drinking.”

Rhodey nodded. “I’d rather do this.” He took the half-smoked cigarette and put it out. “Than rush you to a hospital and have your stomach pumped.”

Tony’s lips quirked, but he didn’t put up a fuss about the wasted cigarette. “How’s MIT?”

“Good. But I’m not here to talk about MIT, I’m here to talk about you.” Rhodey slung an arm over
Tony’s shoulders.

“I thought we’d get a little small talk in before we start unpacking my issues.” Tony dropped his head into his hands.

Rhodey chuckled. “It’s not the same since you left.”

“Well, you can’t stay after you’ve taken all the classes, Rhodes.” Tony smiled.

“Could have came on staff,” Rhodey suggested.

Tony snorted. “What twenty-one year old wants to be taught by another twenty-one year old?”

Rhodey raised an eyebrow in agreement.

They were quiet for a stretch of time.

“What’s going on, Tones?” Rhodey asked softly.

Tony cracked a smile. “How pissed would you be if I told you that you drove all this way, because of unrequited love?”

“I’d drive anywhere for you.” Rhodey squeezed Tony’s shoulders.

“Careful, Rhodes, your gay is showing.” Tony teased.

Rhodey rolled his eyes. “So what if some idiot doesn’t like you, you’ll find somebody else. You’re Tony freaking Stark.”

“He’s not an idiot.” Tony shook his head. “And sure, I might find somebody else, but not like him. There aren’t any other guys like him.”

Rhodey was shocked. Tony never talked about his romantic conquests like this. It almost sounded like...Tony actually liked this guy.

“Tell me about him,” Rhodey prompted.

Tony sighed. “His name is Stephen and he’s an asshole. He’s smart and he knows it, super pretentious and everything. But he’s funny in a witty way, and when he smiles, his eyes crinkle; he’s got really pretty eyes, I can never tell what color they are. He’s always got some smart remark for whatever I say.” Tony’s eyes lit up.

“Sounds like a match made in heaven.” Rhodey grinned.

“I thought so.” The smile disappeared. “You should have seen the way he looked at me before he ran out of the library. He’s been avoiding me ever since.” Tony dropped his head into his hands and tugged at the brown locks.

Rhodey rubbed Tony’s back. “I don’t think you’re the problem, Tones. It sounds like Stephen is scared. Feelings are weird and can be shocking, sometimes it takes a little while to process them. Especially for egocentric geniuses. Give him a little time to figure it out.”

Tony leaned his head against Rhodey’s shoulder. “Rhodey Bear, you always know what to say.”

Rhodey smiled, resting the side of his head against Tony’s. “Now, we’re gonna get the hell out of this apartment. When’s the last time you ate?”
Tony shrugged. “Wasn’t high up on the list of priorities.”

“Well, go take a shower and get dressed. There’s a bar not far from here, has good food...well, as far as bars go.”

Tony looked up at Rhodey. “You really trust me around alcohol right now?”

Rhodey guffawed. “Hell no. That’s why I’m going with you. Time to put on that chaperone hat once again. Hurry up, I’m starving.”

* * * * * * *

Meanwhile, at the bar in question, Stephen sat sandwiched between Charles and his viking friend Erik.

True to Charles' claims, Erik wasn’t good for chit-chat when intoxicated. Luckily, Stephen had the other guys in Charles’ group of friends for small talk.

There were Loki and Thor- yes, like the famous Norse gods- brothers, although they were polar opposites. Thor was big and jovial, whereas Loki was slender and preferred to spectate. Thor carried the sunshine of a warm summer’s day and Loki better portrayed the more harsh winter nights. But once Charles broke the ice, Stephen realized Loki was more than his cold exterior.

And then, beside the brothers sat Logan, who Stephen had never seen before and was almost positive did not attend the school. There was just something about his gruff demeanor, scruffy look and willingness to smoke cigars that didn’t scream Columbia. Logan hadn’t spoken to Stephen since uttering a gravelly hello and was otherwise involved in a drinking contest with Thor that he was swiftly losing.

“You were right,” Stephen admitted, wiping his mouth with a napkin and tossing it onto his empty plate. “As far as bar food goes, this is pretty good.”

Charles grinned. “I told you so. It makes me nostalgic for the pubs back home.”

“You’re not from here.” Stephen noted.

Loki rolled his eyes. “An astute observation. I wonder what gave it away.”

“Where are you from?” Stephen asked, ignoring Loki.

“Scotland, Glasgow, to be exact.” Charles ran his finger around the rim of his glass of water. “My family moved to England when I was 11. I decided to study abroad, so I’ve been here for a couple years.”

Stephen nodded. “What do you think of America?”

“I don’t think you really want to know the answer to that question.” Charles smiled.

“Fair enough,” Stephen conceded.

It was at that point that Logan’s head hit the table.

“I think that’s our cue to leave.” Loki said, nudging Logan. “I’m sure my brother isn’t far behind, I should get them home before he passes out. You can handle Erik, right?”

Charles nodded. “Of course. I’ll see you guys in a bit, get home safe.” He shook Loki’s hand.
“Come on,” Loki grunted, grabbing Logan and lifting him to his feet. Either Loki was stronger than he looked, or Logan and Thor were made of feathers. He waved to Charles, as he walked out of the bar, dragging his brother and Logan behind him.

“I’m going to take a piss.” Erik said, standing shakily and heading in the general direction of the restroom.

Stephen watched him leave. “Should someone go help him?”

“He can do it by himself.” Charles leaned closer to Stephen. “You still owe me an explanation on your research.”

* * * * * *

Tony and Rhodey walked the streets of New York, enjoying the warm night and chatting idly as they neared their destination.

“He really glued your ass to the chair?” Rhodey asked, a disbelieving grin on his face.

Tony nodded, a small smile on his face. “Yeah, he got me good.”

Rhodey whistled. “I never thought I’d see the day that Tony Stark was bested.”

“Believe me, I was just as surprised. He’s really something…” Tony stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, staring ahead.

Rhodey kept walking, unknowingly. “No wonder you like him so- Tony?” He turned around.

“What’s wrong?”

Tony shoved his hands into his pocket, digging his fingernails into his palms. “Nothing. I’m just not hungry.” He turned and walked in the other direction.

Rhodey ran up behind him. “What are you talking about? An hour ago you were complaining about your empty stomach.”

Tony shook his head, willing his angry tears away. “Changed my mind. Must have been the walk.”

Rhodey stopped in front of him, forcing Tony to come to a halt. “Tones, come on-”

“I don’t want to talk about it, okay?” Tony snapped, glaring straight ahead. “Let’s just go home, we can order in Chinese or something.” Tony’s eyes were glistening with tears.

He didn’t press the issue further. “Okay,” he agreed. “Let’s go home.” He slung an arm over Tony’s shoulder.

Tony tried his best not to dwell on what he had seen- Stephen sitting in a booth laughing with a rather cute and obviously older man. They had looked cozy, sitting close together despite the room that the booth provided.

No matter how hard he tried, it seemed the image of the stranger’s arm wrapped around Stephen’s shoulders would be imprinted in his mind forever.

Rhodey didn’t even question Tony when he pulled a cigarette from his back pocket and lit it up with shaky hands. But, he made a silent vow; he would figure out what had made Tony so upset, and if it involved that Stephen guy, he would beat some sense into him.
Chapter End Notes

I know I say this every time, but it means the world to me that you guys read and enjoy this story.

Thanks for the comments and kudos!
The Armistice

Chapter Summary

Finals week is upon us

Chapter Notes

This story is almost over!

Quick note that I adore my socially awkward son Stephen Strange and that he will come to his senses eventually.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“That answer wasn’t even close to correct!” Tony said, tossing the flash card onto the couch space between him and Clint. “You should be able to tell Confucius from Socrates. They weren’t even alive at the same time!”

*I’ve only been to class twice this entire semester*. Clint signed. *I think I opened the textbook once, and that was to laugh at the picture of the naked woman on page 274.*

Tony rolled his eyes. “I don’t know how you haven’t flunked out by now.”

*I’m resourceful*. Clint shrugged. *And I’ve convinced one of the guys in my class to slip me the answers in exchange for some alcohol.*

“Your crooked moral compass scares me,” Tony admitted, leaning forward to grab another flashcard. “If you’re just gonna cheat, what’s the point of studying?”

*The experience*.

Tony snorted, flipping the card over to read the next question.

“How’s it going?” Bruce asked, shutting his bedroom door behind him.

Tony leaned his head back, looking at Bruce upside-down. “It would be going a lot better if I got the coffee and pastries you promised.”

“I’m going,” Bruce mumbled, grabbing his keys off the kitchen counter. “The world doesn’t run on Tony Time.”

Tony chuckled. “It would be so much more efficient if it did.”

“I’ll be back in ten minutes,” Bruce promised, waving his keys as he opened the front door. “Clint, try to focus.” He said before closing the door.

Clint didn’t even acknowledge Bruce, as he was too busy staring at the ceiling with one eye shut.
His tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth as he concentrated. He flicked his wrist quickly, and rejoiced as the object in his hand, a pencil, now hung from the ceiling.

“Yeah, easier said than done.” Tony glanced up at the putty. “I’m gonna go take a shower.” He stood. “I’m not properly caffeinated to deal with this. Let me know when Bruce gets back!”

Clint ignored him, grabbing another pencil.

* * * * * *

“Right again!” Charles congratulated Stephen, leaning back in one of the café’s metal chairs. “I’m starting to think that you’re just showing off.”

Stephen shrugged. “I really am trying to study, but showing off is an added bonus.”

“I really don’t understand why you bother with this anyways.” Charles sifted through Stephen’s notes for a question he hadn’t answered yet.

“Pride comes before the fall,” Stephen quoted. “The moment I get cocky about my abilities, is the moment that I forego my perfect score. Plus, it’s a good distraction.”

Charles raised an eyebrow. “Hm, and what demons plague the great Stephen Strange?”

“Nothing I want to discuss over green tea and croissants.” Stephen deflected the dig into his personal life.

Charles leaned forward with raised eyebrows. His eyes settled on something past Stephen. “Do these demons have anything to do with that guy who’s staring daggers at the back of your skull. I can’t read minds or anything, but it looks like the guy wants you dead.”

Stephen turned to look over his shoulder; Bruce was standing at the pick-up counter, waiting for his order. His brown eyes were narrowed, dark with malice.

“Who’s that?” Charles asked.

“Bruce Banner,” Stephen answered.

Charles folded his fingers together and rest his chin on his hands. “Okay, I’ll bite. Why is he looking at you like you just killed his cat?”

“I have no idea,” Stephen said, tearing his gaze from Bruce’s fiery one. “We’ve only talked a couple times.”

He knew exactly what was wrong, and why Bruce was staring daggers at the back of his head.

Stephen cleared his throat and turned back to Charles. “Let’s get back to studying.”

“Do I need to worry about him?” Charles nodded towards Bruce, who had now received his order and was heading towards the front door. “Because I should really be prepared if I’m going to have to save your life.”

“You’re gonna save my life?” Stephen snorted. “I’m not as fragile as I look, and these hands can pack a punch.”

Charles chuckled, taking Stephen’s hand. “You’ve got musicians’ hands; they’re smooth and slender.” He traced the inside of Stephen’s palm with the tip of his finger. “They’ve never seen
violence a day in their lives.”

Stephen coughed, his face turning red, and pulled his hand away. “So, uh, biochemistry then?”

Charles smiled. “What chapter do you want to start at, doc?”

* * * * * *

“I’m back.” Bruce walked through the door, kicking it shut behind him. “I see you guys have been busy.”

Tony and Clint were lying on the couch, Xbox controllers in hand. Their notes and flashcards were scattered around them unceremoniously. Bruce noticed with horror and confusion, that several pens, pencils and - was that a pocket knife - were suspended from the ceiling.

“Clint, I hope you have some cash lying around, because you’re gonna be paying our security deposit.” Bruce set a coffee cup on the small table in front of Tony and Clint.

Tony paused the game, and dove for the coffee.

*I’ll just paint over it.* Clint waved Bruce off.

Bruce looked up in disbelief. “It’s on the ceiling.”

*Don’t worry about it*. Clint picked up one of the paper coffee cups and sipped from it.

“So uh, Tony?” Bruce wedged himself into the space between Clint and Tony.

“Mmm?” Tony answered, chewing on a donut.

“I saw Stephen in the coffee shop with another guy,” Bruce said, tentatively.

Tony followed his mouthful of donut with a gulp of hot coffee. “Yeah, so?” Tony asked indifferently.

“So, he uh-”

“Spit it out, Banner,” Tony said dryly.

Bruce took a deep breath. “Do you know who he is?”

“No, and I don’t care.” Tony gathered up the flashcards. “I’ve got other things to worry about.”

“Tony-”

“How about a walk in Central Park? Fresh air helps me think, and I’m a little famished” Tony stood.

Bruce grabbed Tony’s arm. “You just ate a donut, Tony. Sit down-”

Tony shook him off. “I’m feeling a chili dog, what about you, Clint?”

*I’m pretty hungry*. Clint agreed.

“Good, it’s decided then. I’m going to grab my shoes.” Tony quickly left the room.

Clint climbed onto the back of the couch.
“What are you doing?” Bruce asked, exasperated.

Clint braced himself and then jumped, grabbed the pocket knife lodged in the ceiling, and landed lightly on his feet.

*I’m gonna look for Stephen and his new friend.* He signed, knife still in hand, his face a mask of determination.

“What about a slight maiming? Clint asked.

Bruce sighed. “It’s like talking to a wall.”

“Let’s go.” Tony walked out of his room, now wearing a pair of beat up sneakers.

“Tony, I think we should talk about this,” Bruce insisted, blocking the way to the door.

Tony sighed. “I don’t want to talk about this, use your context clues, Banner,” he spat. “But fine, if you really want to know; I’m pissed off. Rhodey says he’s running from his feelings, but it really looks like he’s running from me.

“And yeah, it fucking sucks, he doesn’t want me. But I’m trying not to think about it, because if I do, then-this-this jealousy, this hurt, this anger, it’s going to consume me. And you of all people should know what that could mean.”

Bruce stood in stunned silence.

“I have never wanted a drink more than I do right now. I want to swallow cheap vodka to try and numb the storm inside of me,” Tony said honestly. His hands were balled into fists. “But that can’t happen. So please, let’s just go for a walk and get a chili dog and pretend like none of this is happening.”

Tony looked between Bruce and Clint. “Please?” He begged, bottom lip wobbling.

Bruce and Clint stared at each other, a mental conversation passing between them. There was a mutual understanding that they would indulge Tony for now, without completely letting him off the hook.

“Okay.” Bruce nodded. “Yeah, let’s go.”

“Thank you.” Tony smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Hey, maybe we can get an extra hot dog, and make the squirrels fight for it.” He walked towards the door.

*Good idea.* Clint followed, slipping the knife into his back pocket.

“Clint,” Bruce said sternly. “Leave the knife here.”

Clint sighed dramatically, and jerked his wrist; the knife now stuck out of the wall, wobbling slightly.

“If you keep doing that, Clint, you’re gonna be sleeping in dumpsters again,” Bruce threatened.

And Tony laughed, a genuine laugh. “Come on Bruce, you know I’ve got enough money for a hundred security deposits.”
But Bruce didn’t really care about the security deposit, well, for that small moment. He just wanted Tony to be happy.

Chapter End Notes

I’m working on another IronStrange fic, who wants to read it?
Stephen had done it. He had survived his junior year of college, GPA unscathed and sanity still somewhat intact. Despite a few speed bumps- confusing feelings for Tony- he had managed to put aside all distractions and finish strong.

Which was why he wasn’t beating himself up over having a few drinks with Charles and the gang in celebration. Of course, he had brought Wong along to make sure he got home safely.

“So, Loki,” Wong asked apprehensively. “I don’t think I’ve seen you around campus before.”

Loki rolled his eyes. “I wouldn’t be caught dead on that campus. I go to Juilliard,” Loki explained and took a sip of his drink. “I study theatre.”

“I love the theatre,” Wong said. “When I was in elementary school I played a drawer in my school’s rendition of Beauty and the Beast.”


“Come now brother, don’t be so haughty,” Thor chastised lightly. “Beauty and the Beast is an excellent production.”

Loki huffed. “I’m surrounded by idiots,” he mumbled under his breath.

“What about you Thor?” Wong asked. “What are you studying?”

Thor gripped the handle of the stein of beer in front of him. “I prefer to learn apart from the confines of institutionalized schooling.”

“Thor spent a year abroad in Nepal in high school,” Loki explained. “He’s been like this ever since. My parents nearly had a heart attack when he denounced higher learning.”

“Then why are you here in New York instead of your fancy castle in Norway?” Wong raised an eyebrow. He still found it hard to believe that Loki and Thor were related, and would require a little more proof before he accepted that they were distant relatives of royalty.
Thor shrugged. “I visited Loki a few years back, and found that I rather liked your way of life here in
New York. So, I moved into Loki’s apartment—”

“Rather suddenly if I may add.” Loki mumbled.

“-and I’ve been here ever since.” Thor concluded, with a giant gulp of beer. “Oh, and I’m currently
teaching myself the basics of astrophysics,” he said casually, which caused Wong to choke on his
water.

“You’re teaching yourself astrophysics?” He sputtered once he composed himself.

Thor nodded. “It’s a bit complex, but I have a friend, Erik Selvig, he answers my questions. Oh, and
the internet, of course, so helpful.”

Wong looked dumbfounded, Thor just smiled proudly.

Stephen and Charles were standing near the old jukebox across the bar—well Stephen was leaning
against it, as he was on his fourth drink of the night.

“So, your junior year is finished. How do you feel?” Charles asked.

Stephen sipped from the glass he was nursing. “I feel great, free. What about you?”

“I’m not quite done yet,” Charles said. “I submit my paper on unorthodox methods of nerve
rehabilitation tomorrow morning, and then I present it later that day.”

“And then you’re done with school?” Stephen asked. “What are you going to do with your
newfound freedom?”

Charles chuckled. “Pay off my looming student loans and try to find a place to use my degree.”

“Maybe you could teach. You’ve got a knack for it,” Stephen suggested.

“Professor Xavier has a nice ring to it,” Charles admitted.

Stephen finished his drink. “I’d go with Professor X, it sounds cooler. Gives you that mysterious
young teacher vibe. That and your accent, will drive the ladies wild.”

“I’d have to disappoint them then.” Charles smirked, leaning across the jukebox. “I’m not attracted to
the fairer sex.”

Stephen flushed at the revelation. “I’m gonna get another drink,” he said, knowing he’d already had
way too much. He wanted a way out, before he did something stupid.

Charles stopped him. “I think you’ve had enough already.”

And Stephen couldn’t help but notice how close he was to Charles, or how the dim light reflected off
his pale blue eyes. He leaned closer, as if attracted by Charles’ piercing gaze.

Their lips met, barely a second, before a shock went through Stephen. His mind, addled by alcohol,
screamed at him.

This was wrong. He thought. Because he didn’t want to be kissing Charles in a mediocre bar. He
didn’t want to run his hands over Charles’ body and through his hair. He wanted—

The world slid out of focus for a moment, sounds muffled by Stephen’s loud thoughts. Charles was speaking rapidly, but Stephen wasn’t paying attention. All he could think of was the stupid, egotistical boy who had stolen his library seat and his affection... *Fuck.*

“... I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression.” Charles’ words were coming back into focus. “And you are extraordinary, Stephen, if I wasn’t with Erik—”

*What?*

“... then maybe I’d consider. But I’m going back to the U.K. soon and there really wouldn’t be a future for us anyways.” Charles continued. “I didn’t mean to lead you on, I saw you at the cafe and remembered you from class, and I really needed some help with my paper...”

“My research,” Stephen mumbled.

Charles nodded apologetically. “But you really are a great guy. And, I’d like to keep in touch.”

“So you can use me again if you hit any snags in your master’s degree?” Stephen shook his head. “I have to go.” Stephen pulled his phone from the pocket and ran from the bar.

Wong was so involved in a heavy debate with Loki about Hamlet’s morals in correlation with philosophy, that he didn’t notice his friend’s hasty exit.

But Thor did. He stood, looking from the door to where Charles stood by the jukebox. *They must have had a fight.* Thor thought, and followed Stephen outside.

Stephen was on the phone, gesticulating wildly as he walked down the street. He was drunk, obviously so, but moving quickly. He had quite the head start on Thor.

“I should follow him to make sure he doesn’t hurt himself,” Thor decided.

* * * * * *

A very different celebration was taking place across town, one that involved pizza and trashy action movies, instead of alcohol and theatrical debates.

Tony and Bruce were lounging on the couch, when Bruce’s phone rang.

“Dude,” Tony complained, shifting under his fluffy blanket. “Phones on silent, remember.”

“Sorry.” Bruce said, pulling his phone from his pocket. His eyes widened when he saw the caller I.D. “I need to take this.”

Tony groaned. “It’s movie night,” he whined. “Dom and Brian are about to jump skyscrapers.”

“The fact that you remember that, means you’ve seen this movie too many times already. This is important, I’ll be right back.” Bruce walked into his room and answered the phone. “You’ve got a lot of nerve calling me.”

“I need to talk to Tony.” Stephen said, sounding out of breath.

“Why now as opposed to three weeks ago?” Bruce asked. “Or were you too busy with your new boyfriend?”

“He’s not- Charles is not-” Stephen exhaled sharply. “I made a mistake with Tony, and I realized it tonight. I know,” he said, cutting off Bruce’s comment, “it took me a long time to figure it out, but I
need to fix it. So please, help me.”

Bruce sighed. “What do you need?”

“Where’s Tony?” Stephen asked.

“He’s at our apartment,” answered Bruce.

“I need your address, I’m on my way.” Stephen said, breathing heavily.

Bruce started. “Wait, now?”

“Yes. But don’t tell Tony I’m coming,” Stephen begged. “I can’t imagine he wants to see me right now.”

“You’re right.” Bruce told him the address.

“Thank you,” Stephen said, he sounded relieved, as if he expected a bigger fight.

“Stephen, don’t screw this up.” Bruce hung up the phone.

Tony was huddled under the blankets, eyes glued to the television screen when Bruce returned.

“Who was that?” He asked, eyes glazed over.

“My mom,” Bruce lied smoothly- he was getting better at it, a fact that he wasn’t all too proud of- and sat back down onto the couch.

Tony was too enraptured in the movie to notice Bruce fidgeting slightly beside him. Bruce cast furtive glances at his phone every few minutes, checking the time and for any incoming messages or calls from Stephen.

He should have asked for an ETA, it would have saved him the anxiety from the impending doom.

Stephen was a no-show for the rest of the movie, and, just as Dom and Brian parted ways to the tune of Charlie Puth’s beautiful voice, there was a resounding knock on their apartment door.

“Who could that be?” Tony asked, standing to his feet and stretching his arms above his head. “It’s midnight.”

Bruce sat completely still. “Probably Clint.”

“Clint has a key.” Tony walked over to the door.

“Not if he lost it,” Bruce argued.

Tony shrugged and opened the door.

Stephen stood on the other side, hands held up in surrender. “Tony, I-”

Tony slammed the door in his face, cutting him off. “Bruce,” he said calmly, turning to face his friend. “Why is Stephen Strange standing outside of our apartment door.”

“He said he needed to talk to you, so-”

“You gave him our address?” Tony yelled. “Who’s side are you on, Bruce?”

Bruce stood. “The side of your happiness! And if that narcissistic asshole out there makes you
happy, then I’ll do whatever it takes to bring you two together!”

“You know, this door is really thin, I can hear everything you’re saying.” Stephen knocked.

“Seriously though, does he make you happy? Because I gotta say, he wouldn’t really be my first choice. He’s got an ego the size of Texas and—”

Stephen rattled the doorknob. “Bruce! You are a terrible wingman.”

“That’s because he’s not your wingman!” Tony yelled through the door. “Bruce, I appreciate the effort, but I don’t want to talk to him.” He raised his voice so Stephen could hear him.

Bruce put a hand on Tony’s shoulder. “Just hear him out. And if you still want to throw him out after he says his piece, be my guest. I’ll even help if you want.” He reached behind Tony and opened the door.

“Thanks,” Stephen replied, sarcasm dripping from his voice, and walked into the apartment.

Bruce looked affronted. “You shouldn’t be rude to the guy who helped your sorry hopeless-romantic ass.”

“My apologies,” Stephen’s response was even more sarcastic.

Bruce looked between Tony and Stephen. “I think I’m gonna take a walk, get some fresh air.”

“Good idea.” Tony nodded, glaring at Stephen.

“Good luck.” Bruce clapped Stephen’s shoulder. “Give him a chance,” he mouthed to Tony as he closed the door.

Tony crossed his arms. “You’ve got a minute to convince me not to kick you out.”

“Tony, I made a mistake—”

“Damn right you did,” Tony snapped.

Stephen rolled his eyes. “Are you going to keep interrupting me?”

“45 seconds. Tick-tock.” Tony tapped his wrist twice.

Stephen groaned. “I didn’t run from you because I didn’t like you.”

“It sure seemed like it,” Tony mumbled under his breath.

“FOR GOD’S SAKE TONY LET THE MAN SPEAK!” Bruce yelled.

“I thought you were taking a walk, Bruce!” Tony shouted.

Stephen pinched the bridge of his nose. “Tony would you please just listen to me!” He took a step towards Tony.

Tony caught the distinct smell of alcohol on Stephen’s breath. “Are you drunk right now?”

“A little, but that’s not the point.” Stephen waved off Tony’s concern.

“So you can’t even come talk to me about your feelings when you’re sober?” Tony’s voice was colored with anger.
Stephen shook his head. “No, no. I was with Charles-”

Tony snorted. “Get out.”

“and we kissed,” Stephen continued, ignoring Tony.

“I’m not listening.” Tony plugged his ears.

Stephen walked over to Tony, surprisingly quickly considering the amount of alcohol in his blood at the moment, and grabbed his hands. “Stop acting like a child!”

“I’m acting like a child?” Tony raised an eyebrow. “Says the man who couldn’t even tell me he liked me, so he ran away from me and avoided me for three weeks.”

“I’ve always considered feelings to be a weakness,” Stephen said, the alcohol acting like a truth serum. “A weakness, and a distraction.”

Tony huffed. “That’s all I am to you? A distraction.”

Stephen shook his head, and squeezed Tony’s hand. “No, you Tony Stark, are my greatest weakness.”

Tony looked shocked for a moment. “No.” He stepped back, dropping Stephen’s hands. “You don’t get to do that. You don’t get to avoid me for three weeks then spit some corny, romantic shit and be forgiven. You hurt me. I don’t think you understand that.”

“I’m sorry,” Stephen said quietly, blue eyes staring at Tony intensely. “I really am.”

Tony shifted from foot to foot under Stephen’s gaze. “How do I know that tomorrow you’re not gonna remember? Or worse, you’ll remember and regret it?”

Stephen took Tony’s hands again. “I won’t. And if I do, you can knock some sense into me.”

“I think Rhodey would like the honors,” Tony whispered, resting his forehead against Stephen’s.

Stephen leaned back slightly. “Who?”

“Long story, it doesn’t matter.” Tony wrapped his arms around Stephen’s neck, pulled him closer and kissed him.

* * * * *

“Excuse me?”

Bruce pushed away from the door, startled by the deep voice. He turned quickly and stumbled, tripping over his feet. A pair or strong arms caught him, and stood him upright.

“Are you okay?” The voice asked again.

Bruce looked up, pushing his glasses back up his nose. He blinked twice, willing his brain to come up with a comprehensible string of words. “Uh, yeah- yeah, I’m good.”

The man standing in front of him was a god, there was no other way to describe him. He was six and a half feet of pure muscle, and while his body might suggest him to be a warrior, his blue eyes were kind. His crude haircut didn’t quite fit with the rest of his carefully crafted look, but Bruce didn’t mind. It added a sort of ruggedness that Bruce found attractive.
“Then maybe you can help me, I’m looking for a friend of mine,” He said. “His name is Stephen, he’s tall, but very scrawny; like he hasn’t eaten a good meal in a while. He had a fight with another friend of mine and left the bar we were at. I followed him to this building, but he disappeared into one of the apartments, and I can’t find him. Have you seen him?”

Stephen. Bruce thought. Why does that name seem so familiar?

There was shouting from the other side of the door.

Oh!

“I know where he is.” Bruce said.

“Great.” The guy smiled, and Bruce melted. “If you could just point me in his direction, then I can grab him and be on my way.”

Bruce shook his head. “No can do, he’s in my apartment.”

“If he’s in your apartment, then why are you out here?” The stranger asked.

“He and my roommate had a falling out,” Bruce explained. “They both like each other but they were too stupid to admit it. And then Stephen started hanging out with some guy named Charles-”

The stranger nodded. “Ah yes, I know that guy, he’s my friend.”

“Right, well, it really hurt Tony,” Bruce continued, leaning against the door. “But Stephen finally realized he liked Tony, and now they’re arguing-” There was a crash from inside the room.

The guy pressed his ear to the door. “I think they’re killing each other.”

“Stephen!” Tony groaned, and the door thumped.

Bruce blanched, stepping away from the door. “They’re not killing each other.”

“Oh my God.” Realization dawned on the stranger’s face. “Are they-”

“Yup.” Bruce answered.

“Against the-”

“Yup.” Bruce deadpanned. “Looks like I’m trapped out here for a while.” He sat against the wall on the opposite side of the hallway.

The stranger sat beside Bruce. “As am I.”

“You could leave, I don’t think Stephen is in any real danger- well maybe from Tony’s ego tomorrow morning.” Bruce said.

He shook his head. “I’m not going to leave you here all alone.”

“I appreciate it, but-”

The guy shook his head. “I insist. Come on, we can go grab some food.”

“I don’t have my wallet,” Bruce protested.

“My treat.” He stood. “Consider it treatment for trauma.” He offered his hand.
Bruce took it. “What’s your name?”

“Thor.” He pulled him to his feet.

“Like the god?” Bruce asked.

*Ironic*.

Thor chuckled. “My parents were enthusiasts. And your name is?”

“Bruce.”

“Well come on, Bruce. Let’s give our friends a little privacy.” Thor smiled and led him down the hallway.

Bruce couldn’t help but notice that he hadn’t let go of his hand.

Chapter End Notes

Never fear, there will be an epilogue, so keep an eye out for that!
Stephen woke up in an unfamiliar bed, in an empty, unfamiliar room. He sat up, and rubbed the last traces of sleep from his eyes.

The memories of last night flooded his thoughts; every thought coated in an alcoholic daze and punctuated by a pang from his hangover. He and Charles’ kiss, Charles’ confession. And Tony: the argument, the kiss...everything after the kiss.

“Oh God.” Stephen smiled, it was a nervous smile, but a smile nonetheless. He touched his lips, running his fingers over the skin left ragged by Tony’s teeth.

Stephen stretched, his limbs aching in protest. He was in Tony’s bed, wrapped up in sheets that smelled faintly like cologne and leather.

Voices and low laughter trickled from somewhere in the apartment; it appeared Tony was already awake and had started his day.

Stephen rolled out of bed and walked towards the door, stopping for a moment to glance at himself in the mirror hanging on Tony’s closet door. His hair was a mess, although Stephen couldn’t tell if that was from sleeping on it or Tony’s fingers. The t-shirt he was borrowing, courtesy of Tony, was too small and did nothing to hide the purple bruises that littered his neck and collarbone.

But he looked happy, noticeably happy. He had a dopey grin and a glow. He had thought stuff like this only happened in books and movies- clearly he was mistaken.
Stephen heard light laughter once more. He opened the door, and followed the sound of the voices into the kitchen. What he saw made him freeze in the doorway, jaw dropping at the scene in front of him. Bruce and Thor were sitting at the kitchen table; Thor wearing nothing but boxers, and Bruce clad in a shirt much too large to be his.

“Thor?” Stephen asked, eyebrows raised.

Thor’s smile widened. “Stephen!” He called jovially. “I see your night with Tony worked out after all.”

Stephen flushed. “Your night went just as well.”

“Indeed.” Thor threw an arm around Bruce’s shoulders. “Bruce and I enjoyed ourselves thoroughly.” He wagged his eyebrows.

“Thor.” Bruce choked on his coffee, face turning bright red.

“Where’s Tony?” Stephen asked.

“He-” Bruce coughed, trying to regain his composure. “He left you a note.” Bruce held up a piece of paper.

Stephen took it from his outstretched hands. “Dramatic.” He mumbled, unfolding it. It was written hastily, the letters uneven and words running together.

Stephen, if you meant what you said last night, about wanting to be with me. Meet me in the library.
- Tony.

“Why the library?” Stephen wondered aloud.

“Well, if you think about it, it’s where your relationship began, isn’t it?” Thor said. “It’s almost poetic in a way.”

Stephen paused. “How do you know about that?”

“Bruce told me last night while we were waiting for you and Tony to vacate the living room,” Thor explained. “You guys put so much energy into that petty argument just for the both of you to lose.”

Stephen held up a finger. “I didn’t lose-”

“Well, you didn’t win,” Bruce argued.

“And neither did Tony,” Thor added.

“So, that brings us to a...draw,” Bruce concluded.

Thor leaned back in his chair, wrapping an arm around Bruce’s shoulders. “And a huge waste of time fueled by large egos.”

Stephen stared at the two of them, mouth agape. “I- you- that’s not.” He sighed. “I’m going to the library. He returned to Tony’s room to grab his shoes, and when he returned, there was another familiar face in the kitchen.

“Well damn,” Clint said, words slurred by an obvious lisp. “Am I the only one who didn’t get laid last night?”
“You can talk?” Stephen asked, shock disabling his filter.

Clint rolled his eyes. “I’m deaf, not mute. Asshole.”

“I’m sorry,” Stephen apologized quickly. “I didn’t mean to-”

Clint grinned. “I’m just fucking with you. I prefer to sign, but I didn’t know if the Gentle Giant over there could understand me.”

Thor looked up. *I spent a year with a deaf monk in Nepal.* He signed. *I can understand you."

“Jesus, did you make this guy in a lab, Bruce?” Clint grabbed an apple off the table and hopped onto the counter. He sank his teeth into it, freeing his hands. *Where’s Tony?*

“In the library,” Bruce answered, leaning his head against Thor’s shoulders. “Stephen is about to go get him.”

“More power to you.” Clint finished the apple, and tossed it towards the trash can across the room. It rolled around the edge delicately, before falling into the bag. “I’m going to sleep. Do me a favor Bruce, if you and your Build-A-Boyfriend start testing hypotheses, give me a heads up so I can take out my hearing aids.”

Bruce raised an eyebrow. “I don’t know how you managed it, but you just made science sound sexual.”

Clint winked, and retired to the couch.

“If you keep Tony waiting any longer, he’s going to be a lot harder to placate. You’re gonna have to use more than just a kiss,” Bruce advised.

Stephen smirked. “I think I can handle him Bruce, thanks for your concern.” He left the apartment, with a confident swagger.

“Do you think it’ll work out between them?” Thor asked, kissing the top of Bruce’s head.

Bruce smiled. “I hope so, they’re the only people with enough self-esteem to tolerate each other.”

“What about us?” Thor asked, kissing Bruce’s cheek. “Is there a future for us, or was this a one-time thing?”

Bruce looked up at Thor, a glimmer in his eyes. “I’m thinking about it,” he answered coyly.

“Is there anything I can do to convince you?” The corners of Thor’s lips quirked up.

“Well, you can do what you did last night.” Bruce got up from the table slowly.

Thor’s smile widened, as he followed Bruce’s movements.

“Hey Clint!” Bruce yelled, reaching for Thor’s hand.

Clint held up his purple hearing aids. *They’re out.*

Thor’s smile turned mischievous, as he chased Bruce into his bedroom.

* * * * *
Stephen Strange was never one to pursue; he preferred to be chased, enjoyed it in fact. But now here he was, running after Tony Stark. He was never one for personal attachments, picking his studies and success over emotional ties. Yet here he was, falling for Tony Stark with reckless abandon. Love did crazy things to you.

He was sure it was love. There was only one explanation for why he was running across a deserted campus the day after finals following instructions from a full-tilt diva.

Stephen sprinted up the flights of stairs to the top floor and came to a stop on the fourth floor, chest heaving.

“Told you long enough,” Tony’s voice sounded from the back of the room. He was sitting at the library desk that started it all.

Stephen broke out into a grin. “I had to get over the shock of seeing Bruce in Thor’s clothes. When did that happen?”

Tony stood. “I have no clue. I saw them this morning when I left. They are disgustingly affectionate.” Tony paused in the main aisle between the desks. The smile on his face mirrored Stephen’s.

“It’s cute,” Stephen said.

Tony flushed, shoving his hands into the pocket of his jeans. “I didn’t think you’d come. I mean, I did—” he stammered, “but a small part of me wondered if you were gonna run again.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Tony.” Stephen assured him. “You’re stuck with me.” He closed the distance between them and kissed Tony passionately.

Tony pulled away, lips crooked into a smile. “Good, cuz if you ran off in my favorite shirt, I’d have to find you and kill you.” He wrapped his hands in the collar of Stephen’s borrowed shirt.

Somebody started clapping from behind them. “Fucking finally!” The person groaned.

Tony whipped around to find—


“The one and only.” Wade was sitting in the coveted seat, feet up on the desk.

Stephen rolled his eyes, stepping away from Tony. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Watching you.” Wade shrugged. “I’ve been with you since the beginning. Just like everyone else.”

Tony raised his eyebrows. “‘Everyone else?’ What are you talking about?”

“You guys really waited eight chapters for this?” Wade asked, looking straight ahead, as if he were staring into a camera. “If I were in charge of this show, they would have fucked in the first chapter. I mean come on, the sexual tension was rolling off these two in tsunami waves. It was almost unbearable.”

“Wade, why are you here?” Stephen asked.

Wade stroked his chin in an exaggerated manner. “Why are any of us here?” He pondered. “Well, you two are here to act out the homosexual fantasies of a repressed girl with no life or romantic relationships. And I’m here because out of a long list of names including Brunhilde, Rocket and
Steve Rogers, I somehow made the cut.”

“I don’t know who any of those people are.” Stephen looked around. “Who are you talking to?”

“Why are you acting like this?” Tony asked.

Wade tapped his head. “Uhh untreated ADHD and possible schizophrenia. Also, I have no control over my own actions and neither do you, watch: Stephen, hop on one foot.”

Stephen did so, a terrified look on his face. “What am I doing? Why can’t I stop?”

“There’s a higher power in control here,” Wade said. “She’s ruthless, believe me, you do not want to get on her bad side. She can kill you with one keystroke.”

Tony looked from Wade to Stephen- who was still hopping on one foot. “Look, Wade was it, I have no clue what the hell is going on, or who you are, but could you please fix whatever you did to Stephen.”

“I can’t.” Wade pointed up. “But she can.”

“Who is she?” Stephen asked, exasperated; his leg was beginning to cramp up.

“Only a few people know her real name.” Wade stood. “Those of us who don’t just call her The Author,” he said ominously. “She said you can stop.”

Stephen collapsed into the nearest chair with a sigh.

“But don’t worry. She’s not done with you boys yet.” Wade said with a wink.

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Tony asked.

“Something about an alternate timeline where you raise a kid, and another one about high school. I don’t get the specifics, all I know is that I’ll be seeing you guys real soon.” Wade grinned. “Until then, adieu!” He walked past them and out of the room.

Tony stared after him, his jaw dropped. “That was…weird”

“Yeah, it was,” Stephen agreed.

“Do I even want to know what he was talking about?” Tony asked.

Stephen shook his head. “I wouldn’t worry about it; that guy’s like a bag of cats.” He stood. “I don’t know how he got me to jump like that, and I don’t think I want to find out.” Stephen took Tony’s hand. “I do, however, want to go get breakfast with my boyfriend, and erase any doubts in his mind about my commitment.”

“You said boyfriend.” Tony flushed in spite of himself.

“Tony Stark and Stephen Strange,” Stephen said as they walked out of the library together.

“It’s got a nice ring to it.” Tony leaned into Stephen.

Stephen squeezed his fingers. “Yeah, it does.”
A FEW FINAL NOTES:

1. Like Wade said, I have two fics coming out soon. One is a high school AU centering around Tony and Bruce's senior year of high school. It'll be interesting, I'll post the link when I start writing it. The other centers around Tony and Stephen's attempt at fatherhood, when baby Peter Parker is quite literally dropped on their doorstep by Nick Fury.

2. If you would like to read these stories, subscribe to my user or this series for emails and stuff when the stories are posted.

3. If you liked this fic please please please share it around

That's it. Thank you so much for reading!

End Notes

Thanks for all the kudos on my other IronStrange story. This fandom is starved of content and I intend on feeding it.

Leave kudos and comments, tell your friends. I may be a hoe for IronStrange but I'm an even bigger hoe for validation

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!