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**Drifting, Falling**

by [raptor_moon](http://archiveofourown.org/users/raptor_moon)

**Summary**

Wakanda watches as Tony Stark recovers from the so called Avengers: Civil War

**Notes**

T'Challa sees Tony Stark for the first time since Siberia at the conference on Amendments to the Accords.
Watching in a Trance

T’Challa stepped off the plane in Kampala, Uganda accompanied by the Dora Milaje. This was to be the first of many meetings held around the world about the Accords, accepting feedback and soliciting information for revisions. T’Challa sighed. In the six weeks since Siberia he had faced the fallout from his father’s deception and the challenge to his throne. He had barely settled back into power before Rogers pulled the prison break and brought the rest of the Rogues into Wakanda. He still supported the Accords his father had worked so hard to bring about and disagreed strongly with Rogers actions, but he had come to recognize the need for amendments. He had wanted to kick them out but ironically he had been counseled against that action by his mother and sister. He had been complaining about the Rogues ridiculous sense of entitlement and suggested handing them over to the UN and Mr. Stark.

“Dr. Stark, brother, he has PhD’s in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, and Computer Science.” Shuri smile showed him exactly how badly he felt he had screwed up. “And he doesn’t need the stress of dealing with them at this time brother.”

“How is his recovery?” T’Challa asked, hoping he would get a different answer this time.

“He is alive, no thanks to you!” Shuri sneered. Ramonda placed a calming hand on her daughter’s shoulder.

“I see no way for you to turn them over at this time without making things worse for Wakanda.” Ramonda sighed. “You should speak to them, see if you can find out their objections to the Accords, so the revised documents would be acceptable to them.”

Discussions with the Rogues had not proved very useful as it became obvious only the Black Widow had actually read the documents. But the fallout that had become known by the press as the Avenger’s Civil War had made it obvious that the Accords as proposed were not workable. So now he was here to show Wakanda’s continued support for the Accords his father had proposed, and recognize the need for amendments.

As he made his way into the conference, he was distracted from his thoughts by a commotion down the hallway. The Dora quickly surrounded him as they attempted to identify the threat.

Tony Stark had entered the building. He was in a bespoke suit and tie, signature sunglasses firmly in place as reporters hounded him with questions that he was ignoring as he walked towards the meeting room. Suddenly a man broke through the crowd and shoved him into a wall.

“My pregnant wife was killed when that tunnel collapsed. You think that paying off her medical bills and funeral expenses fixes anything…” The man screamed at Stark, punctuating his words with another angry push.

“Domnule Ion Lupei, I know it fixes nothing.” Stark sighed. “I simply didn’t think you and your daughter needed to deal with those expenses while you grieve. I am sorry for loss.”

T’Challa wondered why Stark had not moved to defend himself as he strode toward the commotion. Security finally closed in and pulled Stark’s assailant away as he reached Stark and the Dora surrounded them.

“Dr. Stark, are you well?” T’Challa regretted asking at the barely concealed glare. “Why did you not
defend yourself?"

“Your Highness,” Stark pulled himself away from the wall, arms wrapped around his torso and cradling his left arm once more. Pain flashed across his eyes before he answered, “That man is suffering, grieving for the loss of his wife and unborn child while facing the future as a single parent. We were responsible and he needs to know that the people of power don’t forget them, not punished for an excessive display of his anguish.” Stark moved off into the conference room, the Dora moving aside for him to pass.

“But Stark wasn’t even directly involved in the tunnel chase and collapse, was he?” T’Challa asked the empty air.

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The conference had droned on for hours. Every country’s representative felt the need to speak, Wakanda as the originator of the Accords was slated to be next to last. He said his piece supporting the Accords while recognizing the need for amendments. As he returned to his seat he saw Stark approach the podium to speak on behalf of the Avengers.

“There was an idea called the Avengers Initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could work together when we needed them, to fight the battles that ordinary people never could. And that idea worked well when we were faced with an intergalactic threat like the Chitauri. But even then it underestimated what ordinary people could do. So many more lives would have been lost that day if the police and firefighters had not worked to get people away from the destruction and the National Guard and US Military worked to help contain the stragglers. While we stopped Loki and closed the portal, they helped save the day. And that cooperation is what I believe the Accords hoped to formalize. To use the special talents available when needed to fight the extraordinary battles, and to let daily life go on as normal when possible. Those guidelines, for when the Avengers, mutants or other enhanced people should be called in, are needed to protect both sides as history has shown,”

Dr. Stark’s speech was interrupted by a cough. He dabbed at his mouth with a handkerchief that he quickly pocketed and swallowed some water with a grimace.

“History had shown too many people ready to misuse those with extraordinary powers for nefarious purposes, as the recent indictment and trial of Thaddeus Ross has shown. It is that fear of misuse and abuse that feeds the protests against the Mutant Registration Act that in its current form seems less like a way to call upon talent when needed and more as a way to contain those we fear. We have a chance today to find a way for us to work together if we can give a voice and protection to all relevant parties: Avengers, mutants, enhanced and ordinary people alike.”

Stark coughed again, “If not these documents will continue to divide,”

Blood was visible on his lips now as he appeared to struggle to breathe, “divide us as certainly as the Avengers Civil War.”

The last words were practically whispered as he collapsed across the podium and sank to the floor.
Shuri’s Starkphone lit up with an incoming call notification, but instead of ringing a hesitant Irish voice was heard, “Princess?”

“FRIDAY! How are you doing today?”

“Boss is stable and improving, but I am…at a programming impasse.”

“Would you like to discuss it with me?”

“Secretary Thaddeus Ross is threatening to arrest Boss. He wants to see him undergoing medical treatment, as he believes it is a lie to protect the Rogues. I do not think Boss would survive being incarcerated in the RAFT upon release from the Cradle. Dr. Cho said it was vital for Boss not to be disturbed for the first 48 to 72 hours.”

“Have you put Ross in contact with Dr. Cho?”

“No…”

“It is her job as a physician to protect her patient and his medical privacy. I think you will find her a most effective ally.”

“Thank you. I will warn Dr. Cho and put them in contact the next time Ross calls. May I call you again tomorrow?”

“Of course.

Shuri’s Starkphone lit up with the incoming call notification, “Princess?”

“FRIDAY! How are you doing today?”

“Much better, since Dr. Cho will attempt to wake Boss tomorrow. Ross is flying to Dr. Cho as she convinced him Boss could not be moved. He will be in the room when she attempts to wake him, but had to agree not to interfere with his medical treatment in any way. Dr. Cho agreed I could be in a suit on stand-by in case he does not keep to the agreement.”
“I cannot believe that Dr. Stark is under such suspicion. He signed the Accords and worked to bring the Rogues in.”

“But he failed to do so, so he is blamed. Trend analysis shows that this is usually the case. I will be glad when Boss regains consciousness. Dr. Cho says he will still need daily treatments in the Cradle for the first two weeks, but I will be able to communicate with him otherwise. This is the longest I have been without input from Boss since I was activated during the Ultron incident.”

04:00:00:00.000

“Secretary Ross, you will remember that I am the attending physician. You will only approach Dr. Stark when I say it’s ok and you will cease with your questions as soon as I say so. He was severely injured, his entire thoracic region compromised. Also with the bruising, swelling and hypothermia his appearance is rather disturbing at the moment. Speaking will most likely be difficult, so keep your questions to a minimum.”

“That suit doesn’t look like it has seen any action.”

“It hasn’t. That’s the suit that brought him in, the other was too damaged to fly.”

Dr. Cho opened the Cradle and a hiss of compressed gas condensed in the air.

“Dr. Stark, please do not panic. This is Dr. Cho and you have been in the Cradle. You came to me severely injured and suffering from hypothermia. After six hours of surgery you have been healing in the cradle for the last three days and will need to continue treatments for at least two weeks.”

Dr. Cho then proceeded to check for neurological damage and healing before she allowed Secretary Ross to approach.

“Stark, where’s Rogers and Barnes”

“Don’t know.” Tony’s voice was halting, barely a whisper.

“What happened?”

“Zemo…Supersoldiers.”

Ross huffed angrily. He had been there when Prince T’Challa brought Zemo in. He heard the tale of Zemo wanting revenge against Avengers for Sokovia and using other supersoldiers that had been in cryo for his plan. Given the damage, it looked like Stark had gotten his ass handed to him by a bunch of supersoldiers.

“So how many more threats like Barnes do we have to deal with now?”

“Dead.” Tony began to cough.

Dr. Cho stepped forward immediately. “Interview’s over.” She turned a few dials and the cradle resealed as sedation and medicine to ease his breathing filled the chamber. Ross stepped away. “Well, it does not look like you weren’t exaggerating his injuries, but I still think he’s hiding Rogers and Barnes.”

“With the extent of his injuries even if he once knew where they were, he probably won’t ever remember. He will be lucky if there is not permanent neurological damage given the severity of his
concussion. Now will you let my patient rest?”

Ross glared suspiciously at the Cradle. “For now.”

04:07:00:00.000

Shuri’s Starkphone lit up with the incoming call notification, “Princess?”

“FRIDAY! How are you doing today?”

“I did not get to speak to Boss, but he was awake and able to answer Ross’ questions. Dr. Cho assures me he is doing better than he sounded. I look forward to tomorrow.”

“That’s great. Tell him I am glad he is doing better.”

“I will, I hope this gets Ross off his back.”

“So do I.”

05:00:00:00.000

Dr. Cho awoke Dr. Stark again to check his progress. At the end of the session, she stepped aside with a smile. “Someone wants to talk to you.” She stepped aside as the suit approached the Cradle.

“Boss, I…I do not know what I want to say?”

“Hey baby girl.” Tony huffed quietly. “How’s Rhody?”

“Ms. Potts has helped him arrange transport home. I’m sorry Boss. His doctor’s say he is paralyzed from the waist down. He contacted her when he awoke and you weren’t there. As she did not know your whereabouts she went to him. When he asked me about you after the Mother Hen protocol had expired, I put him in contact with Dr. Cho. She convinced him to head to the Avengers Compound, informing him that she would be sending you there as soon as you were well enough to transport. I am assuming Ms. Potts has been apprised of your condition through him.”

“So how did I get here? Vision?”

“Vision has not been in contact since the incident at the airport. Princess Shuri of Wakanda accompanied their medical rescue team to retrieve you from the bunker.”

“You contacted Wakanda?” Tony realized his baby girl AI had been getting desperate to reach out that far. “I need to thank her.”

“I will call her in 7 hours. She has been providing useful additional input while you have been offline. If Dr. Cho approves, you can speak to her then.”

Chapter End Notes

Next update... Tony & Shuri finally get to have a conversation.
Starting to Collect, Requested Data

Chapter Summary

The road to recovery and the accords amendments...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

05:07:00:00.000

Shuri’s Starkphone lit up with the incoming call notification, “Princess?”

“FRIDAY! How are you doing today?”

“I have had the opportunity to converse with my creator and catch him up on recent events. Boss said he wanted to speak to you, if you are amenable?”

“Of course, how is his recovery progressing?”

“I’m alive, your highness.” FRIDAY had patched him in to the conversation. “I have you to thank for that.”

“FRIDAY called for help. It would be wrong not to assist.”

“Too many people would have ignored her call. It is easy enough to walk away. After all Rogers and Barnes did.” Tony paused.

“Dr. Stark, I…” Tony cut Shuri off before she could begin to apologize for her brother’s behavior.

“I know T’Challa was there, chasing Barnes and then Zemo, trying to bring your father’s real killer to justice.” Tony was breathing heavily, whether from stress or the damage to his chest, FRIDAY did not know so she continued to monitor boss closely as he continued talking. “I understand the need to do that. I don’t blame him.”

Tony coughed and a pained noise escaped his lips.

“I do. But you need to rest and recuperate now Dr. Stark. I’d love to talk about how you create beings like FRIDAY someday.”

Shuri could hear Dr. Cho moving in the background. “Ok. I’ll rest. Take care of yourself princess.” His words were slurring at the end.

“Dr, Cho has sedated boss so he will rest some more.” FRIDAY updated. “Could I ask a favor of you? Boss is worried about Vision. First the Scarlet Witch pushed him through 12 floors of the compound and then she distracted him, resulting in Colonel Rhodes injury. He has not responded to my attempts to contact him. I believe he is hiding from us. If you can find him...let him know boss does not blame him.”

Shuri shook her head in amazement and sadness. “Of course. I may be out of touch for a few days
for my brother’s coronation. But I will talk to you again soon.”

“Thank you.” FRIDAY ended the call.

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07:00:00:00.000

“Good morning Boss. Dr. Cho feels you are strong enough to travel. The Quinjet that you modified for medical transport has arrived and we will be loading the Cradle in the next hour so you can continue treatments back home. You WILL be resting on the flight in a standard medical bay. Dr. Cho is accompanying us to the compound where Colonel Rhodes is set to arrive within 48 hours if his discharge protocol remains on schedule.”

“You don’t need to be quite such a mother hen FRIDAY, and we have work to do get the Accords amended, and clean up the mess Rogers caused.”

“Why do you need to clean up Rogers mess?”

“Innocents were hurt by his actions. The Avengers that signed the Accords need to be shown as doing the right thing. And the accords need fixing, and the next conference is only five weeks away.”

“But you need to heal first Boss,” FRIDAY argued, “I…I almost lost you.”

“I’m sorry baby girl.” He sighed feeling the shift of rods in his chest. “We need to determine the best combination of materials to create an artificial sternum that mimics the bone and cartilage of the human rib cage. It needs to have enough natural flex to meet human norms, but be stronger to handle the strain puts on my body. It needs to support an improved pacemaker for my heart powered by one of the new miniature ARC reactors, and housing to hold the nanites for the Bleeding Edge™ armor when inactive. That way I should never be stuck without functional armor again.”

“I like that idea, Boss.”

“But first we need to design some leg braces and get my platypus back on his own two feet.”

“Dr. Cho has said no lab for at least another week. Your arm and chest need more time and treatments in the Cradle.”

“Hence working on the Accords right now, where all I am doing is reading and writing on a tablet… or you can write while I talk.”

“I will cut power if you exceed the guidelines placed on you by Dr. Cho.”

“I would expect nothing less baby girl.”

~~~

09:10:32:46.257

The reunion between Rhodey and Tones was filled with apologies and confessions. Rhodey held Tony as he explained what had happened with the super-soldiers, breaking into tears as he explained how his parents were assassinated by the Winter Soldier when HYDRA wanted the super-soldier serum Howard had been working on recreating. The anger and betrayal in Tony’s voice over Steve’s betrayal and the guilt and self-loathing over his emotional attack on Barnes caused Rhodes to flashback to a 17 year old Tony angry over Howard’s perceived drunk-driving accident and guilt-
ridden over fighting right before they left.

Rhodey refused to let Tony out of his sight as they designed his leg braces and Tony’s nanotech armor and housing. He felt frustration as the only options they found for reconstructing Tony’s chest was vibranium and an alloy of starkanium and surgical steal. Each atom of starkanium had to be synthesized in a particle accelerator, but Tony refused to melt down the shield as he still felt something was coming and the Rogues would be needed. An arc reactor took only a tiny quantity, but the alloy would require so much more, weeks’ worth of synthesis. Memories of palladium poisoning where his best friend almost died before he found a cure, all without Rhodey ever realizing it haunted Rhodey’s dreams as a certain shield slamming down haunted Tony.

41: 15:23:09.134

Rhodey watched Tony board the SI jet and fly away. Iron Man would be gone for 9 days for Accords meetings and War Machine had to remain behind as an active Avenger while attending physical therapy and meetings to recruit new Avengers. He couldn’t help feeling this was the funvee all over again.

Chapter End Notes

Now that the six weeks had been addressed, we can return to Tony's collapse next chapter.
T’Challa had been mesmerized as Dr. Stark had spoken eloquently on behalf of the Avengers, Mutants and Enhanced in support of amendments while recognizing the need for the Accords. Dr. Stark’s speech was interrupted by a cough. He dabbed at his mouth with a handkerchief that he quickly pocketed and swallowed some water with a grimace. T’Challa was no longer following his speech as he was studying the man. Stark coughed again, blood visible on his lips now as he appeared to struggle to breathe. His last words were practically whispered as he collapsed across the podium and sank to the floor.

T’Challa stood quickly, but only got two steps towards Doctor Stark before security reached him. He went to tap his kimoyo bead and found his hand stilled by Oyoko. He instead pulled his Starkphone and contacted Shuri.

“Sister, Dr. Stark has collapsed at the conference. Can you contact his AI and physician, as I fear his rather unique medical history may prove challenging for our neighbors?”

“Immediately brother. I will also send our medical transport to you in case we need to move him here.”

As he ended the call he was distracted by the scene in front of him. Emergency medical technicians had arrived at the conference and they were examining his chest, the suit now in shreds. The man looked so much smaller exposed on the floor. His chest was a mass of scar tissue, but most striking was the downward curved arc across his chest, a scar made by the shield. He had seen the footage of the battle, but to see the reality of the damage done and to realize that the man had been trapped in a broken suit and left to die…that he had trusted Rogers and not checked for himself that they were not leaving a man behind to die alone in the cold. T’Challa closed his eyes and prayed to Bast for forgiveness.

The next few minutes were a blur as Dr. Stark was lifted onto a gurney and wheeled from the conference center. He was surprised when the AI, FRIDAY, informed him of which hospital her “boss” was being taken to and advising him of her boss’ current condition. “Based on my sensor data, I believe the attack compressed his chest cavity, causing one or more of the temporary support rods to bend or break and possibly re-cracking broken ribs. The bleeding is most likely from something loose puncturing a lung or impaling the stomach or esophagus. His respiration is shallow and pulse is fast and thready. I have relayed the information to Dr. Cho and Dr. Adisa, who has been fully briefed by Dr. Cho and will reach Boss first in approximately 15 minutes. If you could meet her there to assist in any medical privileges disputes and handle the press that would be greatly appreciated.”

T’Challa sighed. He had forgotten that this had been the first meeting on the Accords since that fateful meeting that had resulted in his father’s desk. Cameras had been in the conference room
recording the speeches and had no doubt caught Dr. Stark’s collapse on tape. The vultures would soon be descending on the hospital. He had left the conference immediately and made his way to the same facility. He had reached the hospital and successfully used his position as King of a neighboring nation to smooth the way for Dr. Adisa to work, when the doctor and medical transport arrived.

“Where is my patient, and what imbecile let him go to the conference?” Dr. Adisa swept into the room. She was Wakanda’s Chief of Emergency Medicine under appointment to the King. The position existed so someone could deal with any injuries the Black Panther might face, but she was the expert in dealing with any unusual trauma. She was the best in her field with little tolerance for stupidity. “He shouldn’t have been out of a hospital bed, let alone speaking in public!”

T’Challa chuckled at her tirade. “I think you will find Dr. Stark tends to do what he wants.”

“Stupid stubborn suicidal man! It’s a miracle he has lived this long…” she hissed in frustration as she left to scrub up after before surgery. T’Challa was left to stare at the x-ray showing the damage and delicate frame of wires holding the man together.

He wondered how long until the hospital would be surrounded by a sea of reporters and started to realize the madness that made up the life of Dr. Stark.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry its short, wanted to get some sort of update...
“Today marked the first of several conferences scheduled for locations around the world to discuss amendments to the Accords. The first Accords conference was marred by the bombing that ended Wakandan King T’Chaka’s life. Today’s events were off to a smooth start with multiple stakeholders speaking on the topic of amendments. Dr. Stark’s appearance was eagerly awaited, not only for his opinions on the Accords but also as this event marked his first public appearance since the Avenger’s Civil War. Dr. Stark remained in seclusion during Secretary Ross’ trial and those who speculated that his absence was due to injury gained support today as Dr. Stark collapsed at the conclusion of his speech. We have footage showing Dr. Stark being accosted upon entering the conference. His assailant identified, as Domnule Ion Lupei, lost his wife due to the actions of Captain America and the Rogue Avengers during the Civil War.”

T’Challa frowned. Even the Ugandan news feed running on the TV in the hospital waiting room was focused on Dr. Stark’s collapse at the Accords conference. He was not surprised when his phone vibrated in his pocket with an incoming message from FRIDAY. “I contacted Colonel Rhodes and he is now headed towards Uganda. He is travelling in the Avenger’s Medical quinjet with Dr. Cho and the Cradle onboard. Colonel Rhodes also contacted Ms. Potts, who remains in the US dealing with SI and the stock fallout from the news. They request you make a statement to the press if he is out of surgery prior to Colonel Rhodes’ arrival.”

T’Challa sighed. He headed back to the see the hospital’s director to arrange better security and set up a press conference. By the time Dr. Stark exited surgery, Colonel Rhodes and Dr. Cho had arrived.

Dr. Adisa entered the room soon after. “I’d like to update Dr. Cho if you could give is some privacy please.”

Rhodey rolled over to introduce himself. “I’m Colonel James Rhodes and I have Tony’s Medical Power of Attorney so you can include me and FRIDAY in all updates to Dr. Cho.”

“FRIDAY? Dr. Stark’s AI?” Dr. Adisa scoffed in disbelief and then Rhodey and T’Challa’s phones rang.
“They failed to remove Boss’ earpiece before surgery. He regained consciousness briefly on the way to the hospital. I informed him of Princess Shuri’s decision to send Dr. Adisa to expedite his care. He said to keep the princess and King Kitty informed as the princess would worry about his sorry old bones and Mufasa would learn anyway when she started scolding him again. So you can speak freely Dr. Adisa.”

“Ok. The chest cavity had been compressed and the support rods on his left side had separated, resulting in a punctures to the lung and stomach. We have cleaned the wound and remounted the supports, and the pacemaker that was knocked loose. He is stable, but why has a replacement sternum not be located and installed?”

Dr. Cho sighed. “Dr. Stark recognized that a replacement cadaver sternum would not hold up to the abuse he takes in the Iron Man armor. Titanium was a viable option, but given the area that needs replacement it is also problematic in combat situations. He will not consider permanently stepping down from his duties as Iron Man. He was working on some options and said he would have something ready for me to see in the next four to six weeks.”

“He told me he’d be back in the air within six months.” Colonel Rhodes interjected. “Even so he was worried about the lack of protection and has been working to create the New Avengers team.”

T’Challa thought about the venom spewed by his unwelcome houseguests. Rogers had been quiet enough, content to stare at his refrozen friend for hours, but once he broke the others out of the raft, he had sent them all away. They were still hidden in Wakanda, but out of the capitol city, on a royal estate in one of the most rural areas, where the tribes focused on animal herding and some farming. As they lounged around complaining about Stark being too lazy to get them pardons and free them from the RAFT, the man in question had been, while still severely injured, working on the Accords, trying to develop a new management strategy and recruit for a new Avengers team, and trying to find an appropriate material to reconstruct his sternum and ribcage.

“So he is back to square one on his recovery, but unlike before where no one knew what had happened or where he was, this time the world knows. The hospital is already under siege.” Rhodes turned to T’Challa, “Thanks for arranging additional security for Tony, your highness. But he is going to be hounded by the press and those out for his blood, seeking to blame someone for the mess Rogers left behind.”

T’Challa wanted to deny that, but he had seen firsthand that kind of mindless lashing out; it was what had place Dr. Stark in hospital again. “So, a press conference is in order?”

43: 15:30:23.647

The press conference began with the hospital director thanking everyone for attending and introducing the participants. Colonel Rhodes then began to speak. “As has been speculated, Tony Stark was injured during the events of what the press has dubbed the Avenger’s Civil War. He re-injured his sternum and ribcage, both of which were originally compromised during the convoy attack in Afghanistan a decade ago. The confrontation at the conference resulted in undoing some of Dr. Cho’s delicate work putting my friend back together.” Rhodey had to stop and take a sip of water to compose himself.

T’Challa stepped in to continue the narrative. “I have come to know Dr. Stark first through my father’s work and then through my work on the Accords. Knowing he had been under the care of Dr. Cho and that she was hours away on another continent, I immediately contacted Dr. Adisa, the Wakanda Royal Emergency Medicine and Trauma specialist to consult on his case.”
Dr. Adisa took over. “Dr. Stark was attending the conference against Dr. Cho’s wishes as the delicate reconstructive work needs time to heal, especially considering Dr. Stark’s age and the number of times he has had severe trauma to the thoracic region. I was able to repair the damage, but with internal lacerations comes a risk of infection. He is stable and resting comfortably at this time.”

Dr. Cho was shaking her head. She knew how Tony hated any perception of weakness. “As any adult who has broken a bone knows, as we grow older our bodies complete the bone growth and calcification process more slowly, so a process that might take 6 to 8 weeks in a teenager could take 12 or more in an adult, especially if there had been damage before. I had hoped Dr. Stark would take a full 3 months off to allow his body to heal completely, as it was the new bone growth was too fragile and broke at the attachment to the grafts, setting back his recovery by several more weeks. It is our hope that you will allow him to rest peacefully during this time…” Her words were interrupted by the sound of an explosion.
The ship is waiting

Chapter Summary

The search begins...

“It is our hope that you will allow him to rest peacefully during this time…” Dr. Cho’s words were interrupted by the sound of an explosion. Moments later the lights flickered and went off. T’Challa and Colonel Rhodes sprang upright.

T’Challa turned to the hospital director. “Have there been other threats against the hospital, or do you think its anti-Avengers protesters after Dr. Stark?”

“There have been no threats against this facility,” the director sighed, “so except for the increase in activity related to the Accords…”

“FRIDAY, status update.” Rhodey was greeted with silence. “T’Challa, FRIDAY’s not in the system. Looks like an Electro-Magnetic Pulse took out the power.” Rhodey attempted to activate his gauntlet watch with no success. “It took down Tony’s tech, so I think Tony is the target and it’s probably not terrorists, but HYDRA.”

T’Challa tapped his kimoyo bead and tried to contact the Dora Milaje but the EMP had taken out Wakandan tech too.

Dr. Adisa stood and turned to the director. “How long until your emergency backup generator kicks in? Any electronics in use are most likely fried, but those not powered should be usable. Get them out of storage.” She turned to Dr. Cho, “We need to get to the ICU.” The ladies took off at a run.

“If it’s HYDRA, they will not hesitate to harm civilians. We should go…” T’Challa trailed off, once again taking in the braces that were allowing Colonel Rhodes to walk. He suspected they were another creation of Dr. Stark. As miraculous as they were, there would be no way the man could fight with his injury.

“If I can get to the War Machine Armor, I can flip the interface and pilot it remotely. So I need to get to the Quinjet.” The Colonel borrowed a weapon off hospital security, T’Challa activated the Black Panther armor and they headed out. He wondered how the armor managed not to be affected, but knew such questions could wait until later.

They left the room full of reporters staring in wonder as the heroes rushed out. After a moment of silence the reported started clamoring for paper and pencil. There was a story here and they would report on it, even if it had to be done the old fashioned way.

As the duo moved through the halls it became obvious that the attack was directed towards the post surgical recovery rooms. It also became more likely that it was HYDRA they were facing. Rhodey realized that Tony would never willingly do what HYDRA would want. A normal terrorist group would quickly kill him in the process of “persuading” him as Tony was not as resilient as he was back in 2008, his friends body had just been through too much. HYDRA on the other hand, would use their bastardized serum and brainwashing to try to make, not a super-soldier, but the ultimate weapons designer. A shiver ran down his spine that he was sure was NOT imagined. He drove
himself to move faster.

As they saw the destruction in the hallway, T’Challa began to realize how lucky they were that Dr. Stark had not fallen into HYDRA’s hands earlier. When he had trusted Rogers’ judgment and left the man helpless in an “abandoned” HYDRA bunker, they could have easily taken the genius. As it was, he was again vulnerable to attack. He resolved that the man would recover in the relative safety of Wakanda if he made it through this attack. They made it to the room where Dr. Stark should have been, but there was no sign of the man, or the four Dora Milaje he had left to guard him.

“He’s not here!” T’Challa could hear the despair in Colonel Rhodes’ voice.

“Neither are his guards.” At the Colonel’s surprised look, he clarified, “I asked some of my personal guards to watch while he was unconscious. As they are not here, they must have tried to move him somewhere safer. But as the EMP effected Wakandan tech as well, I do not know where.”

“HYDRA seems to have given up, so they either got Tony or are in pursuit.” Rhodey sighed. “Let’s get to the Quinjet. If I can get the armor working, I may be able to find them.”

They found more destruction but no bodies as they got to the helipad where the Quinjet had landed. Rhodes groaned as he saw a hole blasted in the side, one wing sheared completely off. He scrambled inside and breathed a sigh of relief. The War Machine armor was still there. His relief was short-lived as he looked around to see there was no sign of Tony and the Cradle was missing.

“If you can fly the armor remotely, could Dr. Stark do the same?” T’Challa asked. As Rhodey nodded, he continued his train of thought, “Could he do the same with the Quinjet?”

“Yes, but why…”

“My jet is also missing. If they departed with the Cradle on my jet, and set this one to take off to mislead HYDRA…”

“They could have escaped.” Rhodey breathed a sigh of relief. “Is your vehicle armed?”

“Why?”

“Because I think HYDRA is chasing them.”
Chapter Summary

The escape progresses...

Tony awoke to the all too familiar sound of a cardiac monitor beeping. He felt as if he was floating and could feel the warmth of a heated blanket on him, so he knew he was not long out of surgery. He sensed someone in the room with him and forced his eyes open. He blinked to focus and saw a figure dressed in red, spear in hand. He recognized that it was one of the Wakandan’s royal guard. He sighed. FRIDAY must have reached out to Shuri again when he collapsed. But he trusted Shuri, and she trusted the Dora Milaje completely, so he should too. He allowed his eyes to close again.

The next time he awoke suddenly, gasping for air as if awaking from a nightmare, but he remembered no dreams. The room was quiet…silent. There was no beeping from the cardiac monitor. Had his heart stopped? He tried to open his eyes but there was only darkness. Was he dying? Light suddenly streamed in from a doorway, a shadowy figure stepped through.

“Dr. Stark?”

He squinted at the figure in the dim light. He recognized her garb as that of King T’Challa’s royal bodyguards.

“I am Aneka. This is M’yra. We were with the Princess when she rescued you from the bunker. T’Challa asked us to guard you here. There was an explosion and the power has been cut. We have lost communications.”

“If it’s taken out FRIDAY and Wakandan tech, it’s most likely HYDRA coming for me.” He pushed himself upright with a wince. “As long as I am here, I am putting every other patient at risk. Can you find some gauze and tape so I don’t bleed everywhere when I pull the IV.”

Aneka and M’yra looked at each other, knowing the man should not be moving so soon after surgery, yet realizing his assessment of the situation was correct. With the power out, they faced stairs to get off this floor, needing to go upstairs to the medical transport or downstairs to escape the building. If he could be mobile, they would have more flexibility when confronting HYDRA. They nodded and stepped out to find needed supplies and inform the other two Dora Milaje to be ready to move.

When the ladies moved away, he reached under the blankets and pulled the catheter with a wince. He did not want to be facing HYDRA with tubes and sensors attached. The Dora returned and M’yra helped remove the IV and wrap his arm. Aneka brought scrub pants and top. They turned away as he slipped into the pants.

As they made their way down the dimly lit hallway, Tony noticed that only a third of the emergency lights were working after the EMP. They made it down two corridors and had just made it around the corner of a third when they were confronted by the first HYDRA attackers. A few wild shots were fired by the HYDRA goons, but the Dora Milaje quickly subdued the enemy as they were unmatched in close quarters fighting. Unfortunately those few shots were sure to bring more HYDRA and any ranged weapons the Wakandans had, as well as his gauntlet watch had been
rendered useless by the EMP. They hurried on, and soon they came upon some of the hospital security that had been incapacitated. He grabbed a standard issue pistol from the guard, as a simple projectile weapon should still work. They had almost made it to the stairs when another HYDRA group came up behind them.

The Dora had formed a diamond formation around Dr. Stark. Progress was slower than she would have liked, by Aneka was still amazed that the man was even standing let alone reacting to he HYDRA threat and shooting an attacker who had managed to disarm M'yra with an energy blast.

When they reached the stairs, he stopped their progress, “Where are we headed?”

“The medical transport is on the roof.” M'yra responded.

“And the Quinjet?”

“Parked on the hospital grounds with the retro-reflectors on.”

“What about T’Challa’s jet?”

“It was brought from the airport. It is also on the hospital grounds in stealth mode.” Aneka realized he was taking stock of their resources.

“Ok, new plan. Head towards the ground.”

M'yra couldn't stop herself from asking, “Why?”

“Two reasons. First, it looks like HYDRA has blocked the way up to the medical transport.”

Aneka took over the questioning, “And the second?”

“I'll never make it up the stairs.”

At Stark's admission, M'yra paused to really look at Dr. Stark. He was pale and trembling slightly. A thin sheen of sweat glistened on his skin and his breathing was labored. She was amazed the man was still standing. She locked eyes with Aneka who nodded and declared, “Down it is!”
Chapter Summary

The escape continues...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The impact was transmitted upward, fire radiating throughout his chest, threatening to overwhelm him. The pain threatened to throw him into a flashback. He’d done that once already when he regained consciousness in the ambulance. Pain with each breath, unknown hands on his chest and foreign voices took him back to the cave. Without FRIDAY in his ear he would have succumbed to a full blown panic attack, now he lacked that lifeline. Focus. One foot in front of the other, bend the knee, step down. He kept a firm grip on the handrail as another wave of pain was transmitted upward through a chest held together by pins, wires and surgical glue. The descent down the stairs had become an endless cycle of agony and respites, but the breaks between were becoming shorter and he knew he would not last much longer. Three of his protectors were spread in a triangle around him, the fourth stood next to him, supporting more of his weight with each step. He stumbled when they reached the final landing.

“We have reached the ground. What’s the plan?”

“Can T’Challa’s jet hold us all?”

“Yes, but shouldn’t we take your Quinjet with the Cradle?”

“I would think that his jet is faster, more maneuverable and even being a diplomatic vessel, better armed than a medical transport.”

“But you need medical support?”

“I need to get out of here before anyone else gets hurt. I could get in the suit…”

M’yra’s hand tightened on his arm. They were supposed to protect this man, not assist him in killing himself. “No…”

“So, I set up the Quinjet to be flown by FRIDAY as a distraction, fly the Iron Man armor remotely, while you fly us away from here in his jet. I assume one of you can fly that thing.”

“All of us can but Ayo is the best pilot among us.”

“So Ayo gets the jet going, I’ll get FRIDAY going on the Quinjet and grab my suit.”

They made their way across the grass to the vehicles. It took longer than he wanted to get the FRIDAY rebooted from the protected server, but soon enough it was done and he grabbed the remote interface for the suit. He was overcome with dizziness upon standing and again being found himself being supported by M’yra. He was hustled to the Cradle and forced to sit inside.

“Fly the armor from there. We will take care of the rest.” She nodded to the other three who helped
lift the Cradle and carry it out of the Quinjet and into T'Challa’s transport. As soon as they were inside Ayo ran to the cockpit and finished takeoff procedures.

Moments later, HYDRA agents came pouring out of the hospital. FRIDAY had barely gotten the Quinjet airborne when HYDRA blasted a hole in its side. The familiar armor of red and gold flew out of the opening and began returning fire as T'Challa’s jet took to the sky.

They evaded several shots, before HYDRA gave up and retreated to their own ship. But HYDRA soon found they had lost any advantage in the air and the Ironman armor managed to damage their vessel, forcing a retreat. Tony managed to dock the Ironman armor with T’Challa’s jet, and with shaking hands, Tony removed the interface mask and lay down in the Cradle. Alarms started going off as soon as he lay down and the Cradle began assessing his status.

“Ayo, how far out are we from Wakanda?” Aneka asked.

“About an hour at normal speed.”

“Go faster.” M’yra replied, “I don’t know if he has that long.”

Chapter End Notes

Short update again, hopefully better than no update, but evil cliffhanger again.
Earth Below Us

Chapter Summary

Colonel Rhodes and T’Challa take action.

“If you can fly the armor remotely, could Dr. Stark do the same?” T’Challa asked. As Rhodey nodded, he continued his train of thought, “Could he do the same with the Quinjet?”

“Yes, but why…”

“My jet is also missing. If they departed with the Cradle on my jet, and set this one to take off to mislead HYDRA…”

“They could have escaped.” Rhodes breathed a sigh of relief. “Is your vehicle armed?”

“Why?”

“Because I think HYDRA is chasing them.”

T’Challa turned to the Dora Milaje that had accompanied him. “We need to get the medical transport from the roof. We also need Dr. Cho and Dr. Adisa. I suspect Dr. Stark will need additional medical care and I am sure the others will have headed towards the safety of Wakanda. We should as well.”

Oyoke quickly relayed orders to the others. “I will wait here with you. I am assuming that Colonel Rhodes will be vulnerable while remotely piloting the armor and you wish to remain here to ensure his safety?”

T’Challa nodded. Colonel Rhodes had reached for his armor and grabbed the faceplate interface device as soon as he had announced his suspicions about HYDRA. Now he seemed lost in his own thoughts.

Rhodes remembered the conversation with Tony, his overwhelming guilt over Rhodey’s fall and injury so present when the man was so injured himself that he could only sit upright for a few hours at a time.

“First I’ll get you walking, platypus, and then I will get you flying again.” Tony declared, grabbing for his tablet so he could begin designing.

“Walking again would be great, Tones, but it can wait until you are back on your feet.”

“Non-sense, besides I am going stir crazy just lying around. So I can adapt the Ironman exoskeleton to provide support for the leg braces and then adapt the armor…”

“Tony that can wait. I don’t think I’m ready to get back in the armor…” he paused at the look on Tony’s face, the self-loathing evident, like he had destroyed something precious and irreplaceable. He tried to lighten the mood, “I know my physical therapist doesn’t think so.” He expected Tony to joke back about the sadistic tendencies of his therapist like he had in the past, but Tony looked away.
“But you love to fly…” was the barely heard whisper.

An uncomfortable silence filled the room. A battle raged inside James Rhodes. He knew he was not ready to even consider getting back inside that armor, but Tony looked more defeated than that fourteen year old kid at MIT when Howard had “visited” after a business trip. He had scolding Tony for falling behind on weapons designs for SI before tearing up some robotics blueprints that in hindsight liked like an early draft of DUM-E’s manipulative fingers. He had ended it with informing Tony not to waste the time coming home for the short break of Thanksgiving as he work to do and they would be on a business trip checking SI’s European facilities. Tony appeared unfazed until “Howard” left the room, then the façade crumbled. James had invited Tony to Thanksgiving with the Rhodes family moments later. Tony had argued that he would be fine in the dorms for the long weekend, he had that project for robotics class he needed to redo, but James could tell he wanted to accept. James explained the situation to his mom and when his family came to pick him up Tony got the full “Momma Rhodes” treatment and was packed up to join his family. The genuine smiles of that weekend were ones he cherished. He had never wanted to be responsible for bring that defeated to Tony’s face again. He had done it that one time after Afghanistan when he had told Tony to “get his head on straight” and he still wondered if that loss of trust was part of why Tony had kept the palladium poisoning secret from him. He had not been a good friend back then; he had to do better now.

“Remember how you piloted the Iron Man armor remotely to save the people on Air Force One?” At Tony’s nod, he continued, “What kind of a range could you get with that?”

“Transferring a signal between my satellites with an onboard AI to handle any brief interruption of signal, you should be able to pilot the armor anywhere.” He could see the gears turning in Tony’s mind and a smile returning to his face.

War Machine took to the air, heading off in the direction they suspected Tony and the Dora had departed with HYDRA in pursuit. He flew out over the city. Luckily it looked like the attack was localized, as the power only seemed to be out for a few blocks around the hospital. He flew above watching the ground beneath him shift from city to savannah to tropical forest. He was about to give up the search when he noted smoke from the trees below. He flew down to examine the wreckage. It looked as if they had managed a controlled descent and HYDRA personnel had disappeared into the forest surround. He saw no sign of Iron Man armor, so he was hopeful they had escaped safely. He directed the armor back to him and let the AI take over as autopilot.

T’Challa watched the perimeter but there was no sign of attackers on the premises, giving credence to the idea that the attack was orchestrated by HYDRA and Dr. Stark was the target. He soon found himself distracted by the tech surrounding him. This was the medical transport designed for the Avengers, designed to deal with potential injuries to enhanced and non-enhanced alike. Where the HYDRA blast had blown off a wing, disabling the jet, it had also blown open a storage cabinet and several stuffed animals had fallen onto the floor. He picked up a teddy bear of softest plush, staring at it quizzically.

“Looks like HYDRA’s jet was taken down and no sign of your jet, so I think they manage to escape. War Machine is headed back but can meet up in flight.” Rhodes spoke suddenly, looking up from the interface. “You are wondering about the plushies?”

At T’Challa’s nod, Rhodes continued.

“Tony had insisted it also be ready to render aid to civilians. Too often they were flying in with medical staff and with so many enhanced on the Avengers team, few injuries to treat. But the medical staff hated standing by when injured civilians needed aid and the first responders had yet to
arrive. He made sure they had what they needed, and the plush toys were for children who were hurt, separated from their parents or upset because their parents were hurt.”

“No Ironman plushies?” T’Challa smirked, wondering about the vanity and ego of Stark the press notoriously promoted.

Rhodes snorted. “Tony knew that even when the Avengers were acting for all the right reasons, like in the Battle of New York, people who were hurt and lost their homes or loved ones, did not necessarily view the Avengers as saviors. He’s too afraid the image of the Iron man armor could be a trigger to a traumatized child, so he wanted only teddy bears, puppies and kittens, the softest, cuddliest ones he could find.”

T’Challa noticed Oyoke’s and the other returned Dora’s raised eyebrow at that. T’Challa is beginning to realize how big of a disconnect exists between Tony Stark™, and the real Dr. Anthony Edward Stark. He is looking forward to getting to know the man behind the image.

As they loaded everyone into the Wakandan Medical transport for the T’Challa’s kimoyo bead finally sprang back to life, “We are headed to base at maximum speed with Dr. Stark and the Cradle.”

Friday had regained control as well and sent alerts to Rhodes and Dr. Cho. “Boss’ vital signs are crashing. Initializing automatic cryogenic suspension in the Cradle.”

Oyoke was already moving to the cockpit as T’Challa ordered, “Get us back to Wakanda as fast as possible.”
Steve placed his hand flush against the cryogenic tube. He hated that Bucky had felt the need to go back into suspension. He was sure they could fight the trigger words. He knew Bucky must hate the cold as much as he does, but Bucky had willingly gone under. They were waking him at six weeks to gather some additional baseline information that had been requested in the hopes of developing a treatment, and they had allowed Steve only to return to the capitol city to see and be with his friend for the two days of planned testing, then he would be returning to where his team was hidden in the outskirts of Wakanda.

While Steve was overwhelmed by the technological marvels that earmarked the Wakandan capitol; he had come to realize that the quiet of the countryside reminded him too much of the abandoned farms and towns during the war. He lay awake listening for the sound of distant bombs or the rumble of oncoming tanks and when he finally dozed off he awoke screaming from nightmares of Bucky’s fall. He had finally confessed his problem to Sam who suggested a white noise generator of city sounds. His apartment in Brooklyn with its paper thin walls had been fine, but he had been asked to leave after the mess with SHIELDRA and had difficulty procuring another, the novelty of having Captain America living next door outweighed by the fear of collateral damage when the villains came calling. Ironically, he never had trouble sleeping at the compound, which was also away from the bustle of the city. Steve had never realized that JARVIS had noted his difficulty sleeping when visiting the tower with its soundproofing and after the first few sleepless nights had begun playing various background noises to find his perfect mix. Tony had sleep health protocols written into JARVIS’ code post-Afghanistan, when the nightmares and insomnia became a major issue. It had automatically been installed into the Compound as well. Steve just knew he never slept better anywhere else.

Steve was looking forward to getting to see Bucky again. He looked on in anticipation as the doctors prepared to awaken him. Suddenly an announcement was made into the room.

“Cryo team. We have an emergency medical transport coming in with Dr. Cho’s Cradle, a medical tissue regeneration system with an experimental cryogenic suspension system. Patient inside was experiencing hypovolemic shock prior to start of process and underwent major thoracic surgery three hours prior before having to leave recovery to escape a HYDRA attack. Please join the emergency medical response teams at the runway immediately.”
The team stopped the reanimation sequence immediately. Half the team started to prepare supplies on a stretcher and a portable cryo tube while the remainder ensured Barnes was stable in suspension. As the team began to exit leaving only two technicians to monitor his condition, Rogers finally realized what was occurring. “Wait, what about Bucky?”

“Sorry, Mr. Rogers. The tests and procedures will have to wait until after we deal with this emergency. Hopefully this is resolved quickly and we can get back to his case tomorrow.

Rogers left the room, planning to return to his quarters to try and sleep, when the words he had heard finally clicked. The Cradle. Ultron had been after the Cradle to try and create a new body for himself. Dr. Cho had been ready to walk away from her work after that, wisely realizing that she shouldn’t be trying to play God with things she didn’t understand, but Stark had been trying to convince her that she should continue her work for the “benefit of medical science. He knew he should have followed up when Stark left the Avengers. What monster had the man managed to create this time? He had to stop this new evil from being unleashed on the world. He changed direction, heading towards the airstrip instead.
The assembled medical teams waited for the jet to land.

“\textquote{I thought Dr. Adisa had performed surgery to stabilize Dr. Stark. What has happened?}” asked an emergency medtech, while one of the cryonics team complained, “\textquote{More importantly, why is another outsider being brought into Wakanda?}”

Chief EMT Ampadu answered, “\textquote{HYDRA attacked the hospital where Dr. Stark was being treated. He got up out of bed less than an hour post-surgery to leave the hospital and lead the attackers away from other vulnerable patients. King T’Challa offered Wakanda as a safe haven.}” She felt that should be sufficient, but added. “\textquote{I was with the Princess when she rescued Dr. Stark from the bunker. He was almost brought to Wakanda then,}” she trailed off as the jet came to a stop before them and they sprang into action.

M’rya spoke as the technicians lifted the Cradle out of the vehicle. “\textquote{He passed out after he remotely piloted the IronMan armor and took out the HYDRA jet that was pursuing us. I suspect internal bleeding, sutures rupturing as we made out escape down three flights of stairs. He shoved me out of the way of a HYDRA weapon blast and fell heavily into the railing so check his ribcage. He essentially has no sternum…}”

Ampadu’s eyebrows raised at that as the cradle was placed on a gurney and rolled towards the medical facilities.

They had almost reached the building when a blur crossed their path, leaping at the Cradle and almost knocking it off the gurney. It tilted dangerously and the technicians moved to stabilize it. Two of the Dora met the attacker, knocking him off his feet and easily pinning him to the ground with their weapons while the remaining Dora formed a protective circle around the Cradle.

“\textquote{Don’t bring that thing in here. You don’t know what type of monster that thing is holding. ULTRON tried to use it to create a body. It’s dangerous.}” Steve Rogers declared with all the confidence of Captain America from his position on the ground.

“\textquote{The Cradle is a healing device for tissue regeneration. Rebuilding broken bones, punctured organs and damaged skin. The cryogenic function is merely there to sustain life until further treatment can occur. As for holding a monster…}” Princess Shuri scoffed as she continued her walk from the building towards the assembled. “\textquote{I have heard him called a self-sacrificing idiot by his best friend, but HE is no monster.}”

The Princess sighed, “\textquote{You need to go back to your assigned rooms Mr. Rogers. The only monster here will be you if you continue to delay needed medical care. Even fallen enemies are supposed to be shown mercy; the basic tenents of the Geneva Conventions were in place well before you hit the}”
ice. Would you deny a fallen comrade?" Shuri turned to the medical teams, "We need to try and determine what triggered cryostatis and if Dr. Stark is stable enough to wait for Drs. Cho and Adisa."

Steve moved aside as they resumed motion towards the medical facility. “Wait, did you say STARK?”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry - schoolwork and holidays have interfered with writing time, so a short chapter again.
The delay is discussed and medical procedures proposed.

The cradle was rolled into the medical bay. The cryo-team stared at the Cradle in confusion, trying to determine where to begin.

Shuri strolled into the room, “FRIDAY, can you interface the Cradle with our medical systems? If so, you have my permission to do so.”

“Yes, I can. Thank you princess.” Monitors flared to life, displaying Dr. Stark’s vitals and the results of the Cradle’s scans.

“Dr. Adisa, Dr. Cho are you getting this information?” Shuri asked of the passengers on the incoming jet.

“Yes, it looks like he passed out due to low blood pressure. The shadow on that scan is probably the source of internal bleeding.” Dr. Cho looked at the scans calmly. “Do we have enough data to estimate the rate of bleeding? If it can be managed with intravenous fluid replacement and a drain we can keep him sedated and avoid another major surgery before the sternum replacement is done.”

Dr. Adisa shook her head in disgust at the scans, “I’d like to know why you wouldn’t just keep his suicidal self in cryo the next few weeks, as he doesn’t seem to have any self-preservation instincts.”

Colonel Rhodes laughed, “Oh, she’s got your number, Tones.” He turned a more serious face to the Doctor. “Knowing Tony, while he probably has at least three versions ready for he FRIDAY to implement, he will wants to do a few tweaks on a final version.”

“But what is the cause for the delay?” T’Challa spoke up, “Surely Tony Stark could expedite any procedures, obtain any materials.”

FRIDAY spoke up. “Standard surgical stainless steel or titanium alloys lacked flexibility. A titanium vibranium alloy would work, but Boss refused to use the shield and ordered me to arrange its return to Wakanda, stating ‘Starks have a bad reputation with vibranium anyway. I don’t know how Howard…dad…got the vibranium for that Frisbee, but it should go back to King Kitty, let him get his claws in it, again.’ A weak chuckle was heard as the recording shut off. Boss then decided to focus on the titanium-starkanium alloy, determining it would give the best balance of strength and flexibility but it takes time to synthesize. He estimated a two to three month time frame and had agreed not to step into his armor unless it was end of the world type danger.”

Dr. Cho sighed, “So that explains the delay in creating a replacement sternum.”

“Wait,” Shuri exclaimed, “Are you saying that he has put off life saving, needed surgery for weeks because he lacked VIBRAINUM?!” Shuri whimpered, “Why didn’t he just ask me? FRIDAY, your primary programming is to protect him, why didn’t YOU just ask me?”

“Boss forbid me from asking, saying you had ‘done enough saving his ass from freezing to death in Siberia.’ His life was not in immediate danger, so I had to follow Boss’ orders.”
“That is not what I would have expected...” Dr. Adisa shook her head.

Rhodey shook his head, “Self-preservation instincts of a mayfly.”

T’Challa sighed, “I see that I have severely underestimated Dr. Stark.” He turned to Colonel Rhodes, “Do you think he might accept the needed vibranium from me?” That it would be part of an apology for trusting Rogers judgment and inadvertently leaving him to potentially succumb to his injuries and the Siberian winter.

“Perhaps,” Rhodey replied, “FRIDAY, any issues using the vibranium with the arc reactor powered pacemaker and housing for the bleeding edge armor?”

“No Colonel Rhodes, and with the Princess’ permission I can set up her fabricators to begin construction of Boss’ replacement sternum.”

“Can you safely wake him to consult with him, get his consent for the procedure?” The colonel turned to the doctors.

Dr. Cho nodded while Dr. Adisa looked incredulous. “He needs this surgery. He must be in immense pain, and if we give him anything for it…”

“No narcotics.” Dr. Cho interrupted.

At the raised eyebrows, Rhodey spoke up. “When he was orphaned as a 17 year old, he went a bit off the rails. He never used drugs regularly, alcohol is the Stark drug of choice, but dealing with his grief and the invasive press, he almost died of an overdose that first Christmas. As far as I know he never touched drugs again, despite his father’s business partner Obadiah Stane seeming to encourage his reckless playboy behavior. In hindsight, he probably was doing that to keep him from taking back SI, since once Tony started to focus on the business more, Afghanistan happened.“

“Afghanistan?” Dr. Adisa asked.

“The birth of Ironman escaping from his captors,” T’Challa nodded, “but how is that related?”

“Stane ordered the hit.”

“How many times has Dr. Stark been betrayed brother?” Shuri sighed, “He would be within his rights never to forgive you.”

“So no narcotic pain relief, I understand.” Dr. Adisa began, “so again, why would we want to force him awake before surgery? You have his medical proxy…” She turned to Colonel Rhodes for an explanation.

“Because when he was kidnapped, they ordered a fellow captive, Doctor Ho Yinsen, to save his life or risk death. Tony had been hit by one of his own weapons, one that left shrapnel heading towards his heart. What the doctor couldn’t take out he kept from reaching the heart by installing an electromagnet in Tony’s chest. They did the surgery without his consent, without anesthesia. He regained consciousness during surgery screaming with foreign hands in his chest. He awoke to find himself strapped to a car battery to power the thing. When he gave me his medical proxy, he made me promise…” He paused at the memories.

Dr. Cho continued, “The sternum was removed to make room for the electromagnet. The original housing was a cylinder almost 90 mm wide and 75 mm deep. It reduced his lung capacity and there is evidence that he experienced electrical shocks through the device because of the burns on the sinoatrial node damaging the pacemaker cells.”
“We figure he was waterboarded and when the wires attaching him to the car battery got wet, he received a bonus torture of electrocution. So you’ll understand that while I hate the thought of him being in pain, I will not agree to something this invasive without his consent unless there is no choice. I know this was essentially his plan, but accepting the vibranium is a major change, I will not force upon him. As it is he will be upset that we’ve told you this much, it took years for Dr. Cho and I to get this much detail from him about those months in captivity.”

“The new sternum should be ready in 57 minutes.” FRIDAY interrupted. “The princess suggested we go ahead and start fabrication so it would be ready if Boss consented. If he doesn’t we can just melt it down again.”

“Good thinking. How long until we arrive?”

Oyoke spoke from the cockpit, “around 35 minutes, your highness.”

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Steve shook his head. He wondered how Tony got hurt, so he had followed the Cradle to the med lab, and hung back in the shadows, letting his super-soldier hearing fill him in. He was confused by what he heard. He just took out the power on the suit, he didn’t understand how that translated into leaving Stark to die. Tony could be melodramatic and beside, he was the one trying to hurt Bucky! Steve never knew those things about Stark, and was not sure if he really believed them, though he saw no reason for Colonel Rhodes to lie. If Stark had suffered those injuries years ago, perhaps his health was fragile enough that he could have been injured when Steve took out the power. But if that was true, he should never been in the suit in the first place, he should have given it to the military like he did with War Machine and stuck to making and repairing the team’s gear.

Steve sighed. None of that mattered, it was in the past. Even if Stark was incapacitated at the moment, he would be a threat as soon as he regained consciousness, wanting to finish what was started in Siberia. He couldn’t risk Bucky’s safety. He slunk back into the shadows, to the safety of the cryolab. He had to figure out what to do.
Trying to Relax

Chapter Summary

Insight and Introspection

Steve stared at Bucky’s face, barely visible behind the frost of the cryotube. He wished he could talk to his friend but he had chosen to remain frozen until the triggers could be removed. He didn’t know what to do. He was still staring when his phone rang.

“Hey, Steve.” Natasha spoke. She had provided needed intel for the jailbreak and had rejoined the team then. “Have you had the chance to see the news?”

“No, it’s been busy here.” Steve admitted, wondering how to break Stark’s presence to Natasha.

“You want to see this. The news was covering the Accords conference that T’Challa’s attending. Evidently Stark collapsed at the Accords conference after he was accosted upon entering…”

Wanda’s voice piped up. Natasha evidently had the phone on speaker. “Seems Stark tried to buy the man’s silence after his pregnant wife was killed. Big surprise, he throws money at a problem. Didn’t work for once and he getting what he deserved.”

“I’m trying to find out more detail on what happened and how Stark is doing.” Natasha interrupted. “The footage implies he may have had some kind of cardiac event. There are also rumors of HYDRA attacking a hospital.”

“Stark’s here!” Steve blurted out.

“What?” Natasha and

“They brought him here in the Cradle. They said he had passed out from blood loss, internal bleeding; they need to replace his sternum and pacemaker.”

“Pacemaker? Well, that confirms the heart condition he was always joking about whenever I startled him.” Natasha’s smirk disappeared as she remembered dismissing his concerns. “So he may have had a heart attack. He had been complaining of pain in his upper arm and shoulder in Germany…”

“If he’s in the Cradle, he’s hurt a lot more than just a heart attack.” Clint paused. He was angry at Stark for working with Ross and not doing more to stop them from being arrested and incarcerated on the RAFT, but since he had been talking with Natasha again he was starting to understand all that had been happening during his retirement. He had trusted Steve when he called saying Wanda needed be rescued. He had not been paying attention to the rising backlash against mutants and enhanced individuals and now grudgingly admitted Stark was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Natasha had explained the original accords and some of the proposed changes Stark had come up with before she had defected. His presence at this Accords meeting implied he was still working on them despite being abandoned by most of the team. He wondered again what had happened between Stark and Steve in that bunker that left Bucky hurt. Did he get hurt then? Was it something that the attack on him re-injured?

“The Cradle was used to create a monster like Ultron.” Steve recalled.
“Ultron was using it to make a body,” Natasha corrected, “and that became Vision.”

“Dr. Cho only uses the Cradle for critical injuries that can’t easily be healed in any other way.” Clint said quietly, caught up in his thoughts. “She used it to save my life.”

Steve was still in defense mode. “Fine, but Bucky’s in danger. Stark…”

“Stark hasn’t seen you. Bucky’s safe in cryo.” Sam stated calmly. “T’Challa is an honorable man and will keep it that way.”

“But it’s Tony. He’s sure to find out and try and hurt Bucky again. He tried to kill him last time.”

“Then I am surprised he’s not dead,” thought Natasha, recalling Stark’s track record with those who crossed him. But what she said to Steve was, “Sounds like he has a long road to recovery and I seriously doubt they will be letting Stark wander freely around all that technology and vibranium.”

“They brought him into the country…” Steve argued.

“If HYDRA really attacked a hospital to get at Stark,” Sam countered, ”then moving him to Wakanda to prevent civilian casualties sounds exactly like something T’Challa would do. It doesn’t mean they trust him.”

“After all, didn’t Howard purchase stolen vibranium to make your shield?” Clint continued. “I don’t think the Wakandans have ever forgiven the Stark family for that.”

“Howard was just doing what was necessary for the war effort.” Steve argued. “He was a good man.”

“A fact you liked to remind his son of on a regular basis.” Natasha thought, wishing again she had found a better way to stop Steve, but letting him go had reduced the collateral damage down to one. Once again, Tony seems to be the only one dealing with the public fallout. But exactly how and when had Tony gotten so badly hurt? She couldn’t help but wonder if it was all related. She audibly sighed. “Let the Wakandans deal with Stark, get out of there before he sees you, and we will monitor the situation.”

Steve sighed and ended the call. He just wasn’t comfortable with Stark being near his friend especially with Bucky so helpless.

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As the jet entered Wakandan airspace, Colonel Rhodes gestured to one of the cases he had insisted be brought over from the damaged quinjet. “Tony wanted to return this to you properly, but it will most likely be a few days before he is well enough to even think about it. And as it was used to bash in his chest and shatter his sternum, frankly I don’t think he should ever have to look at it again. So…”

T’Challa opened the case. Inside was the Captain’s infamous shield, claw marks still visible in the vibranium alloy. He nodded his head. “I agree, Dr. Stark should not be troubled by the sight of this. I thank you both for the return of the vibranium.” He spoke to one of the Dora who resealed the case and took possession of the offending article as the jet prepared for landing.

As soon as the plane Drs. Asida and Cho rushed off to the medical facilities. Shuri met them on tarmac and smiled that sweet smile that told T’Challa he was in trouble. “Brother, there is an issue in the cryo lab you need to deal with. I’ll escort Colonel Rhodes to see Dr. Stark.”
“Colonel Rhodes, if you don’t mind me asking, how are the braces Dr. Stark designed for you working out.”

“Please, call me Rhody.” The Colonel smiled. “I know he’s been discussing these with you. This is the third design to make production, who knows how many were done and rejected before fabrication. We are still working on…”

T’Challa sighed as their voices trailed off into the distance. He felt certain he knew what or more accurately who he needed to deal with.
T’Challa looked into the cryonics lab. Rogers was once more staring at the frosted cryo tube that held his frozen friend. He realized that the Black Widow was correct in her evaluation that the man would not stop. She was, however, misled in her belief that his actions were for the greater good. His moral compass was skewed when it came to his friend, Sergeant Barnes. He wondered what emotions drove his obsession: guilt, grief, love or loss. He recalled six weeks prior when he let his emotions rule.

“It is done. Father’s killer is in custody.” T’Challa was surprised when his sister and mother greeted his jet when it landed in the early morning hours.

“Come, my son.” Ramonda spoke calmly. “This family has been too disjointed. We shall have a light repast and then you should rest.”

Shuri glared at him, “You have calmed your heart from your need for revenge, brother?”

“I did not kill him as he deserved. I did not stand in judgment over him; instead I gave him over to the authorities.” He was confused by her angry attitude.

“What of others you have hurt, brother, through action or inaction?”

“I have promised we will do what we can for the mind of the man I wrongly pursued. I have agreed to reparations in those countries that sustained damage in the pursuit. I will continue father’s work on the Accords and bringing Wakanda onto the world stage. What more should I do?”

“You should not be an idiot!”

“Shuri, do not speak to your brother like that.”

“Mother, if Dr. Stark dies, he will not just be an idiot, he would be an accessory after the fact for murder.”

“Stark was fine when we left.”

“You checked, saw with your own eyes…or trusted the word of a supersoldier who fights with a shield, who was frozen before the dawn of the atomic age about damage to a man in a high tech suit.”
“I…It was not my fight to intervene.”

Shuri thrust a tablet into T’Challa’s hands. The video of the fight, from the showing of the assassination to the disabling of the suit by a shield through the arc reactor played and T’Challa felt a growing feeling of dread. Stark had also been reacting to grief and betrayal. He had been so intent on Zemo and Barnes that he had ignored his former ally, and failed to confirm his well being. If the man had been injured, trapped in a disabled suit…

“Is he ok?”

“No thanks to you!” Only her mother holding her back prevented her from slapping her brother upside his head. He needed some sense knocked into him. “His heart stopped three times during surgery! He almost died!”

His poor choices had led to this. Six weeks later and Dr. Stark’s life was again at risk. Rogers needed to be out of the picture.

T’Challa stepped into the cryonics lab and cleared his throat. Rogers startled and whirled around, taking a fighting stance. “Mr. Rogers, I believe you were asked to return to your room, why are you here?”

T’Challa kept his voice neutral, almost bored, not wanting to incite a fight with Rogers in a medical facility.

“If Stark finds out Bucky is here, he will try to kill him again.”

“First, I think a super-soldier with one arm could defend himself from a non-enhanced human with no sternum or ribcage.”

“Not while Bucky’s still frozen, Stark could just put a bullet through his head like Zemo did with the others. He’s vulnerable.”

“So is Dr. Stark right now.” T’Challa sighed. He had received a quick update on how the super-soldier had almost attacked the Cradle with the injured man inside. “For almost a quarter of a century he blamed his father for accidentally killing his mother while drunk driving. He blamed himself for the argument that had his dad having one more drink before they left. Now that he has had six weeks to come to terms with the shock of learning that his father was assassinated and his mother was collateral damage, do you honestly still think he wants to go after the weapon and not HYDRA who fired the weapon?”

Steve turns to look at T’Challa in shock. “You know?”

“I saw Zemo showing you that footage.” T’Challa admitted, “I didn’t understand the importance until Shuri showed me the complete footage. I was too focused on apprehending my father’s killer, capturing Zemo. I also understand how grief and shock can make you lash out in anger and make irrational decisions.”

“Princess Shuri?” Steve was shocked. He wondered exactly how and what the princess knew.

“When you disabled Dr. Stark’s suit, you left him without a way to get home, without communication to get help. It was four hours after contact was lost that his AI FRIDAY first reached out to Wakanda for help, the princess answered.” T’Challa took a deep breath to calm himself. “It was another two hours for the medical evacuation and rescue team to reach Siberia to help. That’s six hours that he was trapped in his suit, in the cold, with crushing injuries and internal bleeding.”
“I didn’t know, he seemed fine, he was still angrily yelling when we left…” Steve stopped. He was so worried about Bucky he never thought about the fact that he left Stark alone in a disabled suit in a HYDRA bunker.

“Zemo recorded Stark’s reaction, to the video and your deception.” T’Challa sighed. “I didn’t understand why he was willing to forgive my negligence, not checking for myself he was ok, until I thought about his reaction in that footage. He understands losing oneself to shock and grief, and the regret that follows. So, you will trust that I will keep my promise to protect and help Sergeant Barnes and you will return to the outskirts of Wakanda with the others until we are ready to wake him for testing.”

Steve looked ready to argue for a moment, then paused, “Stark’s injuries now are from the attack at the Conference, right?”

“Your shield shattered his sternum, broke his ribs. He has been awaiting a replacement. The conference confrontation aggravated those injuries, the HYDRA attack undid my surgeon’s work fixing that.”

“Bucky will be safe?”

“Despite these recent revelations, you still have my word.”

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“We’ve removed Dr. Stark from cryostatis. The cryo team reported no complications,” Ampadu stated calmly to Drs. Cho and Adisa. “We’ve inserted a drain and a warmed IV of fluids to help replenish blood volume. He’s stable enough for now, and should be waking soon.”

Princess Shuri smiled as she led Colonel Rhodes into the room. “I am in agreement, Dr. Stark should recuperate in Wakanda as long as possible. I also have no doubt that the moment he returns to the USA he will again immerse himself in work to the point of near exhaustion. I am a genius, yet he claims I am smarter than he. But even I could not deal with politics, business, inventing and rebuilding the Avengers on an average day, let alone recovering from major surgery. He must let himself rest.”

Rhodes shook his head. “He didn’t rest after Afghanistan or the palladium poisoning. He barely took time after he had the arc reactor removed. We will see if the wonders of Wakanda can distract him.”

Tony blinked his eyes open with a moan. Rhodes was immediately by his side. “Hey Tones. You are safe. We are in Wakanda. This is Princess Shuri.”

The princess smiled down at him. “Hello, Dr. Stark. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, though I wish it was under better circumstances. You need to stop scaring FRIDAY. But do not worry. I will keep her company while you heal.”

T’Challa strode up, “Welcome to Wakanda, Dr. Stark. You are welcome here for as long as you need to recover.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I am afraid that your other houseguests might not approve of my presence. It didn’t end well for me last time.”

“Other…” T’Challa looked confused.

Rhodes looked outraged. “Are you telling me the Rogues are in Wakanda?”
“He’s keeping them contained.” Tony whispered, “They’ll be available if needed. The world is safer this way. “ He coughed and winced painfully.

“I told you he’d figure it out.” Shuri snickered at T’Challa’s contrite expression. “The man is a genius, brother.”

“Dr. Stark, I assure you that you will be safe here. And I owe you an apology, for failing to ensure you were ok…” T’Challa began again only to be interrupted by the injured man.

“You’re not the first to be deceived by the poster boy for Truth, Justice and the American way.”

Tony sighed.

“Still, I must apologize. I would hope you would accept a gift of vibranium, just enough to allow you to create a new sternum and rib cage, to have the needed surgery sooner rather than later.”

“No, I can’t accept…”

“Tones,” Rhodey pleaded, “You need this.”

Before the man could refuse again, Shuri spoke up, “Please, for FRIDAY and me?”

“You can’t say no to a princess, Tones.”

“Let my brother make up for his error; accept the vibranium.”

As his eyes slid shut and he sank back into unconsciousness, Tony whispered, “As you wish…”
As pain drew him back down into the blissful darkness of unconsciousness, Tony granted his approval of the vibranium sternum and ribs replacement as he whispered, “As you wish…”

“Did he just…” Shuri looked perplexed.

“He granted approval and managed a Princess Bride reference.” Colonel Rhodes shook his head, a fond smile gracing his features. He spoke to his unconscious friend, “Cryogenic suspension does NOT equate to mostly dead all day, Tones.”

The medical team sprung into action, preparing for the upcoming surgery.

“Colonel Rhodes, you said you have the housing?” Shuri inquired, leading him towards her lab.

“It’s the high tech pacemaker he needs for his heart, plus a reservoir to hold the nanites that will become the bleeding edge armor, all powered by a miniature arc reactor.”

“Bleeding edge armor?”

“He was inspired by your Black Panther’s suit, and so he’s created an armor he can always carry with him and capable of some level of self repair.”

They quickly got the housing installed in the vibrainium chest replacement and sent it for triple sterilization prior to implantation. Rhodey sighed and sat heavily.

“Those braces are amazing, Colonel.”

He refused to take the distraction, “So the rogues…”

“My brother, after wrongly pursing Sergeant Barnes, agreed to help him. The man genuinely wants to be free of the HYDRA programming, and he voluntarily returned to cryogenic suspension until we can figure out how to break the triggers.”

Shuri sighed at the man’s unimpressed raised eyebrow and sat heavily on her lab stool.

“The captain heard about the other’s imprisonment on the RAFT and left, so he was gone when my brother faced the challenge to his throne.”

“FRIDAY said you were out of communication for over a week. Tony mentioned something about sons always paying for the sins of the father, as if their own mistakes weren’t enough. I didn’t pry.”

“We learned some uncomfortable truths,” the princess was silent for a moment, memories of sadness overwhelming her, then anger flashed in her eyes, “and when it was over, the captain arrived with
the rogues in tow and expected us to accommodate them.”

“And why did you?”

“Because by then we realized for some reason Dr. Stark feels the world will someday need them, but he doesn’t need to be bothered by them. We could keep them…contained.”

“Every since the invasion in New York, he has feared something bigger coming…” Rhodey sighed. “Well as long as we keep them far away from him so they can’t finish what they started.”

“They are in the Royal villa in a region known for herding and farming, far from the capital city where they could be spotted.”

“You mentioned Barnes back in cryo…I wonder if that’s why he’s been working on BARF again. I thought it was for his own trauma, but this fits. The self-sacrificing idiot feels guilty for attacking Barnes in the heat of the moment and needs to atone. If his tech can help…”

“He sent me scans of the HYDRA arm so I had that data if Barnes is ever well enough to need a new one, but what is BARF?”

“Binary Augmented Retro-Framing. He did a presentation at MIT about 8 weeks ago, just before all the Accords fallout. It’s designed to deal with past trauma. I imagine he will offer it to you soon, now that he has admitted knowing Barnes and the others are here. That might be something to work on to keep him resting in Wakanda.”

“I can see how that can keep him in Wakanda, but that is not resting.”

“It is for him.”

They began the walk to the observation area above the surgical suite.

“You sure you want to watch. The doctor’s say this will take several hours.”

“I need to be here.” He stumbled slightly and was surprised when one of the ever-present Dora Milaje caught him. “But I probably need to get out of these braces for awhile.”

His wheelchair was brought in as well as a comfortable couch. He settled on one end and the Princess curled up on the other. Royalty had it perks.

“You don’t have to stay princess.”

She awarded him with a glare. “FRIDAY, are you monitoring?”

“Always.” FRIDAY seemed to sigh. “Will Boss really be ok?”

“He’s survived open heart surgery with no anesthesia in a cave.” Rhodey sighed, hoping what he said next would be true. “He can survive this.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the short and late update. None of my works are abandoned, work and parenting are just very time consuming right now.
T'Challa walked into the observation room of the surgical theatre. Shuri appeared to be sleeping, she had stretched out on the couch, her feet on the Colonel’s Lap. He rubbed her ankle absently as he watched the action below. T'Challa glanced at the scene below and stopped in horror. The skin had been peeled back from Stark’s chest, the ribcage, or what was left of it, exposed. The lungs looked deformed, he guessed this was the cause of the reduced lung capacity they mentioned, and he could see the heart beating weakly. He found himself wondering if Wakandan medicine could do more to help the man recover as he realized just how much strain the man had been under, inventing a way for his friend to walk, a new sternum, pacemaker and armor for himself, all while working on the Accords, fending off Ross and building a case against him.

“It looks bad, doesn’t it.” T’Challa startled at the sound of the Colonel’s voice. Rhodes shook his head. “I sometimes forget just how invasive the original electromagnet was. That he made the original miniature arc reactor in a cave from scraps of weapons, powered by palladium.”

“But that’s toxic!” Shuri was suddenly upright, not as asleep as initially thought. “Yes, princess, it was killing him, and he didn’t ask for help or even tell any of us he was sick. He invented a new element to fix himself. Did you know he didn’t want it to be named Starkanium? He wanted to have it called Badassium.”

The princess snickered. T’Challa was glad to see her smile. “Of course when Wakanda provides vibranium samples to the world for analysis, I imagine they will rename it vibranium on the periodic table.”

“No! He deserves his element.” Shuri pouted.

“Colonel?” FRIDAY spoke up.

Rhodes tensed, “What is it, is something wrong?”

“Not as far as I can tell, Boss’ vitals are stable. I just wanted to tell you, having access to the princess’ files on vibranium,” T’Challa raised an eyebrow at FRIDAY’s comment, but Shuri just glared back. “I believe that Starkanium will remain on the table, as it falls between adamantium and vibranium in proton number.”

Shuri clapped her hands with glee, her youth showing in her excitement.

“Princess,” the Colonel turned serious. “No feeling guilty about not offering the vibranium sooner. He wouldn’t have accepted it. He saved himself then, he was determined to do the same again.”

An announcement broke through, “We are switching Dr. Stark over to the heart lung bypass now to
install the node for the new pacemaker and to repair the puncture to lung and try to reduce some of the scarring.”

“Thanks for the update, Dr. Adisa, Dr. Cho.” T’Challa responded. He turned back to Colonel Rhodes. “So as SI’s military liason you have known Dr. Stark a long time, back before he became Iron Man…”

“What you mean is back when he was still the playboy?” Rhodes sighed. “Yes, I knew him then. Howard was always distant and expected Tony to grow up too fast, but frowned on any behaviors that would ‘bring shame to the family name’ which was ironic since Howard was the consummate playboy well into his 40s. Once his parents passed, Obidiah seemed to encourage such behavior.”

“His parents died when he was in graduate school?” T’Challa inquired. Rhodes felt the unspoken judgment, that Tony should have been mature enough to handle it.

“Yes, his first year, he was 17.”

“Seventeen!” Shuri exclaimed. “He was only a year older than I am now.” She thought of how the loss of her father had effected her. If she had not had her mother to lean on, even her brother to share her pain and loss, how would she have handled it?

“Seventeen?” T’Challa was confused. “But he was in college?”

“At seventeen, he had already completed five different bachelors degrees in just three years. He was home on break, having just completed his first semester of graduate studies, when he was notified of their deaths. Howard’s will had his second in command, Obidah Stane, taking control of SI until Tony turned 25, so Tony had time to finish 5 doctorates and meet his R&D responsibilities to SI. Once he had turned 21 he had access to his fortune and no real guidance; he was brilliant, but really just a lonely rich kid…”

“So how did you meet Dr. Stark?” Shuri was trying to picture a Stark at University.

Rhodes nodded. “I had been accepted into MIT a year early at 17, majoring in aeronautical and electrical engineering. I received a full ride on an air force ROTC scholarship. My parents were so proud. Anyway, I’m sitting in one of my classes that first week as a freshman and this scrawny kid is in the front row not just questioning but correcting the professor. Tony was just fourteen and small for his age. At first I resented him and the privilege he represented. I should have known better, but so many assumed his daddy bought his way in. After all Howard Stark had just donated a new lab. He did do that for Anthony, but not to get him in. He just wanted him to have a secure workspace. Tones had been designing weapons for the company since he was ten. I had class in that building and just happened to walk past his lab during one of his dad’s visits. I overheard Howard berating the kid for not making some corporate deadline. It was midterms and he was a fourteen year old freshman with a full course load that already included some advanced classes. Found him after class the next day as he was wandering the halls trying to find some coffee, at that point he had already been up for over three days straight trying to study, finish midterm projects and complete SI work. He had bumped into an upper classman and the guy had Tones shoved against the wall yelling at him. I seem to be pulling out of situations ever since.” Rhodes looked down into the operating theater. “I don’t think I’ve been doing a good job lately.”

“He was supposed to have a team behind him, others to watch his back.” Shuri glared at her brother. “You should not have had to do that alone.”

“I just hope he can get a chance to recuperate before the next crisis.” Rhodes sighed in defeat.
T'Challa stood. “He will be undisturbed in Wakanda. You have my word.”

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Natasha pleaded with the Dora Milaje assigned to monitor them, “Steve will not leave Bucky unguarded. I think I can get him to agree to go if Clint and I are there to watch him.”

“What makes you think Stark would tolerate your presence any better after your betrayal?”

“I knew Steve wouldn’t quit. I thought this was the best way to keep someone from getting hurt.”

The Dora gave an unimpressed glare. “And how exactly did that work for Colonel Rhodes and Dr. Stark?”

“Look, I was not given all the facts before and I made a bad call. ‘Tasha did too. Unlike Steve we don’t believe Stark is a threat to Barnes and we were both trained in stealth and infiltration.” Clint spoke up. “We would actually be trying to avoid a confrontation with Stark. I can’t say the same about Steve.”

“I will call the King and advise him of your counsel.” As the Dora turned away they glanced at each other with relief. Perhaps this mess could still be resolved.

Chapter End Notes

Brief edit to clarify ages. Spring break next week, so hopefully another chapter sooner rather than later.
Chapter Summary

Wrapping up surgery

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“An automated implantable cardioverter defibrillator is a device implantable inside the body, able to perform cardioversion, defibrillation, and pacing of the heart. The device is therefore capable of correcting most life-threatening cardiac arrhythmias.” FRIDAY explained. “Boss’ version is powered by an ARC reactor and has enhanced microcomputer control. Also I can interface with it, downloading data and updating the control software as needed.”

“The ICD is in place. We are ready to take Dr. Stark off the heart lung bypass.” Dr. Adisa announced.

Dr. Cho spoke up. “FRIDAY, are you ready?”

“Of course.” FRIDAY assured, “Restarting Dr. Stark’s heart in 3, 2, 1…” A tiny jolt of electricity pulsed, but nothing happened. A second jolt soon followed and a tense moment later a third. Finally the battered and scarred organ began to beat once more.

Rhodey sighed and collapsed back on the couch. “Dammit Tones, quit scaring me like that.”

He turned to the princess and saw the look of horror on her face, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. “Hey kid, he’s gonna be alright.”

“But if his heart had not restarted…” Shuri clutched a pillow in a death grip.

“Then the doctors would have tried something more aggressive.” Rhodes stated with more confidence than he felt. “But it did work, so no worries, OK?”

Shuri nodded.

“I will admit that was more dramatic than I would have liked.” T’Challa stated, letting out the breath he had been holding.

“Well, his old ‘team’ always said he was overly dramatic.”

The irony of that statement made a hysterical giggle slip from Shuri’s lips and soon the three were laughing in relief as the doctors proceeded to close up Dr. Stark’s chest in the surgical suite below.

As it would be several hours before Dr. Stark would awaken, the trio went to get some rest. Colonel Rhodes noted that the hard part was just starting. It would not take long for Tony to start trying to escape medical and they had agreed to meet in the morning over breakfast to hear tales of how he had slipped out against medical advice in the past and plot ways of keeping him resting in bed for as long as possible. Rhodes fell asleep quickly, years of military training taking over, though he knew
Tony would try to send him back to states as quickly as possible to work on the New Avengers. Shuri couldn’t sleep, wound up from the events of the day, so she pulled up the MIT lecture on BARF that Colonel Rhodes had mentioned and drifted off to sleep snickering over a young Tony Stark even as she realized that these painful memories were the last he had of his parents. As T’Challa reached his quarters, he was stopped by his Dora with several messages.

“Mr. Rogers missed his transport to leave. He has not returned to his quarters. We are searching for him now. We expect he will not go quietly and wish to know the acceptable amount of force you wish us to apply to subdue him.”

“Allow no others to be hurt, and protect yourself, as he is enhanced and still does not seem to understand his strength, but do not seek revenge. Minimum force necessary.” T’Challa was surprised at how quickly the Dora Milaje had become protective of Dr. Stark and wondered about the details of the escape from HYDRA at the hospital that had undoubtedly been shared among the ranks.

“The Black Widow and Hawkeye have offered their services. They think they can convince Rogers to leave if they take over guarding Barnes. They stated that they do not believe Stark is a danger to Barnes and they were trained for covert operations so will make sure Stark remains unaware of their presence.” The Dora had smirked as she delivered that information.

“You believe Stark knows more than he reveals?”

“Especially as the princess has allowed Friday access to monitor her boss, I am certain he would be aware. Still, as neither of them directly tried to kill him, he would probably be more comfortable with them than Rogers. Rogers willful ignorance can do far more damage and we would still be watching the watchers.”

“Agreed. Bring them in and locate Rogers.”

Steve had gone for a run to clear his head. He had tried to go back to his quarters like his hosts had asked, but he could not settle. So he decided some exercise was in order. He kept to the jungle paths, away from people as he ran in the crepuscular grey. He should make the waterfall by dawn. His thoughts spiraled. He couldn’t have hurt Stark as badly as they seemed to think, he just took out the power to the suit. He admitted he had been angry enough he had almost brought the shield edge down on the man’s neck, but when anger flashed to fear, his eyes looked like Maria’s as Bucky… as the HYDRA arm strangled her. It had made him redirect the blow. But surely the suit could take such a hit…but had there been blood on the edge of the shield. He had only been concerned about Bucky, in pain after Stark blew his arm off, so he hadn’t really looked. But if Stark was here, so was IronMan. Could he operate the armor remotely? Could it take out Bucky even while the man lay in a hospital bed? The man made a murder bot, he made ULTRON though he managed to convince the world it was not wholly his fault using his money and influence no doubt. He couldn’t risk leaving Bucky unprotected. He turned around and headed back towards his friend.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry only a short update. Spring break has been full of bills, taxes, make-up work and a science fiction convention...i.e. busy, no time to write. :-( 
The comforting weight of a warming blanket and the beeping of the cardiac monitor greeted Tony on his return to consciousness. He opened his eyes to find a nurse moving around his bed checking his IV line and making some adjustments to his oxygen flow. He had trouble tracking and gave in, closing his eyes. He waited until he sounds of movement faded away before he whispered. “Friday, are you there?”

“For you boss…always.” A soft Irish lilt in his ear.

“Run diagnostics on the nanites. Send me a report when I next awaken. You have the watch.”

“Scanning now.”

Colonel Rhodes awoke the next morning to sun slanting through jungle trees and bird call. He briefly admired the spectacular view from the balcony as he contemplated putting on the braces, but decided he needed a break as he had been in them far longer than he was supposed to be yesterday, dealing with everything. Yesterday, the day before…hearing of Tony’s collapse, rushing across half the world to get to his side only to find him undergoing life-saving surgery again, the HYDRA attack and hospital escapes and then the “hopefully final” surgery to replace his missing ribcage and sternum. He knew he would have been notified if Tony… “FRIDAY?” he called suddenly remembering her presence.

“Yes, Colonel Rhodes?”

Tony had finally allowed FRIDAY full reign at the compound now that it was just him and Tones most of the time. He had known Tony had to have activated another AI for the suit, but after ULTRON, there were no warm notes of JARVIS’ greeting and presence both inside and outside of Tony’s lab. He had been worried. Tony was too often a target, and even with being “IRONMAN” one could not be vigilant 24/7. Tones was also too susceptible to self-blame and depression. He sometimes wondered if his characteristic recklessness was almost an indirect form of self-harm. Either way, he was far too happy to know that there was another set of electronic eyes keeping watch on his friend to worry about one his AIs going SKYNET. He wondered if the stone’s influence could explain his lack of response when Thor held Tony up by the neck, near strangling him where one good shake of that god-like strength would have snapped his neck. He was ashamed of his inaction and too afraid that the answer could be no to ask if he could have been affected.

“Did you need me for something?” FRIDAY inquired at the delay.

“Sorry, lost in thought,” Rhodey explained. “How’s Tony?”

“Boss awoke during one of the nurse’s check-ins at 5:37 AM. He remained conscious for 1.37
minutes. His vitals continue to improve and all tests on the ICD and the nanites in the system pass. He is currently unconscious, indicators are for REM stage sleep.”

“Thanks, FRI…and thanks for keeping an eye on him for us.”

“Always, Colonel as the Boss does seem prone to getting into trouble.”

“That is an understatement.”

Rhodey did some basic stretches, but put off the majority of his workout for now. His therapist would not be happy, but he owed a certain Princess some stories and he wanted to be there when Tony regained consciousness again. He quickly dressed and rolled out of his room.

He found the princess and the king gathered around a breakfast table with an older woman who could only be King T’Chaka’s second wife and Shuri’s mother Ramonda. FRIDAY had learned the family lineage when an annoyed Shuri had emphasized her “idiot half-brother” and FRIDAY needed clarification. It was only since Siberia that Tony had removed the last of the restrictions he had placed on FRIDAY, fearful of his imagined hand in ULTRON’s creation, and her youth showed in basic knowledge gaps on human behavior. JARVIS’ first area of choice to study had been psychology, to “better understand my creator” and he suspected FRIDAY would soon be following in big brother’s footsteps if she hadn’t already started.

“Why is Rogers so stubborn?” T’Challa huffed in annoyance, looking over to Rhodes and gesturing him towards the table. A place had been set and one of the Dora quickly whisked the chair away.

Shuri scoffed. “Don’t get me started on that entitled…”

“Tony has a theory that the serum enhances everything, emotions as well as physical characteristics.” Rhodey interrupted the developing argument. “It’s why Red Skull was insane, the Hulk is always angry, Killian was power hungry…”

“And Rogers is an ass.” Shuri stated.

“Shuri! Language…” Ramonda interjected.

Rhodey couldn’t hide his smile. “That’s why Tony only wanted Extremis in weakest form for the shrapnel surgery and had it deactivated. His research had shown it wasn’t a truly unique idea and was in fact another variant of the super-soldier serum his father, Howard Stark, had worked on with Dr. Erksine. Tony refused to use it a second time for this round of surgeries, even though it could reduce healing time by weeks. He just felt it was too much of a risk, and with his mind…”

“He could be the greatest super-villain of all time!” Shuri exclaimed.

“Shuri! How can you say such a thing.” T’Challa was shocked.

Rhodey just shrugged. “He thinks that of himself often enough. He has never been able to shake the Merchant of Death moniker, even though he shut down weapons manufacturing and switched to green energy. All the good he did as Ironman has been over shadowed by ULTRON, despite the UN clearing him of any wrongdoing. And now he is shouldering the blame for the damages the Rogues did in the so-called Civil War. With the economic power Stark Industries already wields, the world should be grateful he has no desire for world domination.”

“And we should be glad HYDRA hasn’t gotten his hands on him.” Shuri glared at her brother who just sighed.
Ramonda broke in to keep the siblings from fighting again. “You said that Dr. Stark will attempt to escape medical long before the doctor’s approve?”
“Yes, he is great at avoidance. I once saw him come out of the ironman armor with a dislocated shoulder and he set it himself rather than visiting medical. Of course since I saw, I dragged him down to be checked out. He once told me ‘Stark men are made of iron.’ Something his father drilled into him. Taught him as a child that any weakness would be exploited and illness and injuries are weaknesses.”
“That is an unfortunate lesson to learn so young.” Ramonda looked sad. “And I imagine his genius makes being idle a hardship as well. I know Shuri always needed more distractions when she was ill or hurt than T’Challa did.”
“Yes, he once rewired all the monitors to give false readings so he could sneak out of medical. He could barely stand, but was found working in his lab. Rolling chairs are his friend.” Rhodey grimaced at the next memory, “He was dying of Palladium poisoning and I didn’t even realize…”
Tony awoke to the feeling of a presence in his room. He opened his eyes to a nightmare…Steve Rogers stood looming over his hospital bed.
“Rogers has trouble staying still when stressed.” Clint noted as they searched Steve’s quarters for his whereabouts. “His workout clothes are missing and he discovered the jungle running trails and ran regularly when we were here after he freed us from the RAFT.”

“So Rogers will most likely return from his run to guard Bucky.” Natasha surmised, “Unless he believes Stark to be an immediate danger to Barnes, in which case he will go after Stark.”

“How could a man who has not yet regained consciousness after major surgery be a threat?” Aneka, the Dora who had been accompanying them scoffed in disbelief. “Rogers is paranoid.”

“You do know Stark made the first IronMan armor from scraps while he was being held captive in cave by terrorists. He built the first miniature ARC reactor while carrying around the car battery that was powering an electromagnet in his chest.” Clint stated with a raised eyebrow.

“Rogers fears what he doesn’t understand.” Natasha explained. “He has never understood Stark’s technology.”

“He’s probably imagining a dozen IronMan armors attacking Bucky at once.” Clint shook his head. “So we need to get to Steve before he does something stupid.”

“You do realize that your ICU is virtually indefensible.” Natasha marked off vulnerabilities on the map. “There are way too many entrances and exits.”

“No Wakandan would attack an injured man. There is no honor in that.” Aneka sighed. “We expected an attack like HYDRA in the outside world, but no one can get inside Wakanda’s borders without permission.”

“If Steve thinks Stark is still a threat to Bucky, then he would not see it as a dishonorable act.”

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“So has he always been bad about accepting medical assistance?” Shuri asked.

“As long as I have known him.” Rhodes replied. “I first realized how bad it was fall semester of college Tony’s sophomore year. He was so overloaded with coursework trying to complete the aeronautical and chemical engineering coursework his father wanted while taking the computer science and robotics courses he wanted and designing weapons for his father.”

"So he did not want to follow in his father's footsteps?" T'Challa asked.

"Not at all," Rhodey answered. "Anyway, he caught the virus that was running through the school. He’d been feverish, wheezing and unable to keep food down for days, but he still kept going. When he passed out in the hallway on his way back from class, I carried the kid piggyback across campus to student health. I agreed to get his assignments so he would stay in bed and rest, but while I was
out his father called berating him for not getting the designs finished. He crawled out of bed and locked himself in the lab to finish. Something went wrong and an experiment exploded. If he had been well, he probably would have been treated for smoke inhalation and released. But with the fever and bronchitis, they hospitalized him. Put him in ICU because his oxygen levels were so low.”

"That poor child." Ramonda shook her head sadly. "How did his father react to the news?"

"His dad came out with a team to ensure it was a lab accident and not sabotage, but never saw Tony when he came by the hospital to deal with the medical paperwork. Since I had turned 18, he made me Tony’s medical proxy ‘in case he couldn’t get there right away.’ Being only 15, they put Tony in the children’s ward after they released him from ICU. He asked me to buy him two toy helicopters and an RC car. He built a drone 4 years before we saw their first use in the US military and used it to fly another kid’s stuffed toy tiger up to a security camera. The video of the guard’s reaction to a toy tiger filling the security camera feed was a priceless.” Rhody snickered at the memory. "FRIDAY, can you find that video on Tony’s servers? FRIDAY?"

Tony awoke to the feeling of a presence in his room. He opened his eyes to a nightmare…Steve Rogers stood looming over his hospital bed. “Rogers?” Tony rasped out. “FRIDAY, am I awake?”

“You tried to kill Bucky. You’re here to try and finish the job, aren’t you.” Rogers took a step closer. Tony flicked his wrist, but he wasn’t wearing wrist gauntlets. He felt his heartbeat and respiration rates increase as he realized just how helpless he was right now. That would probably trigger alarms that would bring help, civilian medical help that could be hurt by Rogers. He took a deep breath to try and calm himself and the pain almost made him pass out. Before he could try and say anything, Rogers continued.

“Bucky was controlled by HYDRA, he wasn’t responsible for your parents deaths. Why can’t you understand?”

“If you had told me when you first found out…I would have had time to come to terms with it.” Tony whispered. He felt a cool flow like a liquid spreading from his chest and realized FRIDAY had activated the nanites. This first activation was probably taking the majority of her computing power, as he did not know how well she was assimilating into Wakanda’s rather different systems.

“You would have hunted him down like a rabid dog.”

“I would have tried to find him, the Winter Soldier is a danger to us all.”

“But Bucky…”

“Was a POW and deserves to be free of HYDRA control.” Tony interrupted. “You used my money and my tech without my permission to find Bucky. You gave me no choice, no chance to come to terms with my parents being assassinated by him, and when I lashed out in grief and anger you almost killed me. If I had been trying to kill Bucky, he would have been dead.”

“Why can’t you understand,” Rogers reached towards Tony, “it was the Winter Soldier, that’s not Buck…”

Tony felt the armor close over his hand. “FRIDAY one percent power to the right repulsor.” Rogers’ words were interrupted as a repulsor blast sent Steve Rogers flying across the room and into
the wall, six inches into the wall. Alarms began to wail throughout the building.

“FRIDAY was that one percent?

“No, Boss. I went for 10%. I know you have to ‘run before you can walk’ and I didn’t think 1% would be sufficient to get the point across.

“What point?”

“It took me hours to get help to you, hours where I did not know if you were still alive. I wanted him to understand he would not be allowed to hurt you again.”

“I understand, baby girl. But next time if I ask for 1% give me 1%. “

“Did I hurt you, Boss?”

“No, but I think I need to pass out now.”

“Rest Boss, help is on the way.”
There's no reply

Chapter Summary

To the rescue?

Chapter Notes

I apologize for how long it has been between the updates, but with the end of the school year with state testing and exams, then training and summer school thereafter, updates will be continue to be slow. But for good news, the hurt should be mostly over, time for some comfort soon. Enjoy the chapter.

“FRIDAY!” The lack of response had ice running through the Colonel’s veins. He found himself forgetting that he didn’t have the braces on that Tony had built as he attempted to rise from his wheelchair. “Is anyone with Tony?”

T’Challa rose from the table, tapping his kimoyo bead as he stood. “Oyoko, who has eyes on Dr. Stark?”

“We were assessing access points to the medical facilities. My team will converge on his location.”

“I will join you.” T’Challa strode from the room.

Shuri had moved from the table to a computer console. “I’m not seeing any signs of anyone hacking FRIDAY’s systems.”

Rhodes rolled over, “Is she just ignoring us?”

“No, she has focused all of her attention on something else.”

“What could possibly take all the attention of an AI, she’s only limited by the size of her servers and…” Rhodes stopped talking realizing he was possibly revealing too much.

To his relief Shuri continued his line of reasoning, “and I have given her free reign in our systems to be sure she had room to grow while Dr. Stark is here.”

She frowned, “She had said that it would take a major allocation of processing power to activate the armor. She didn’t want to do that until she was sure the pacemaker was adapting well to changing demands, which meant monitoring it during the demands of physical therapy at the very least. We agreed that it would be ideal to have data from an actual sparring session but FRIDAY didn’t think he would wait that long to test the armor, not wanting to be unprotected. We had hoped he would be safe in Wakanda…”

Rhodes smiled. Tony would love seeing these girls interact, as Shuri treated FRIDAY as a person with feeling instead of a just a complex machine. Then he sighed, the implication of what she had said was obvious. “So, most likely Rogers somehow made it to Tony’s room and instead of notifying
us for help, FRIDAY is trying to activate the armor to protect him. She takes after her dad.”

“If she was afraid Rogers would act before help could get there…”

Alarms started to blare. “Seismic disturbance detected.”

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Natasha and Clint had set off together to try and find Rogers, but when the call came out for eyes on Stark they split up. Natasha headed to the cryo chamber to check on Bucky and then planned to head to Tony’s room from there while Clint took to the vents. Natasha had started to notice Steve’s near obsession with Barnes soon after they learned he was alive. He wondered if Steve had told Tony what Zola had revealed about his parents and Bucky’s role in their death. He had said he would do it as team leader and asked her not to say anything. Now she suspected he had never said anything as he kept the nature of the missions secret while using Tony’s means and money to find Barnes. She wonder again what really happened in Siberia.

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T’Challa strode towards the medical wing. Part of him wanted to run, but that would not befit a king. He had to trust in his people. They were headed to protect Stark. While not enhanced, the Dora combined should be able to handle the supersoldier. It was unthinkable to attack a man when he was vulnerable post surgery. That Hydra would attempt it made sense, but Rogers was supposed to be an honorable man. But Rogers had shown that he was not rational when it came to protecting Barnes. T’Challa feared that his assurances of Dr. Stark’s safety revealed his own naïveté. As he went contact Oyoke for an update, hoping someone now had eyes on Stark, when an alarm blared into life. The seismic monitors had been placed decades ago after fears that vibranium mining was creating instability in the hills of Wakanda, had detected vibrations in the walls in the medical facility. T’Challa broke into a run as he transformed into the Black Panther.

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Clint made his way through the Wakandan ventilation system. As he paused to check his direction, he heard Rogers’ voice in the distance.

“You tried to kill Bucky. You’re here to try and finish the job, aren’t you.” Clint’s eyes widened in alarm. Steve had obviously found Stark. He scrambled onwards.

“Bucky was controlled by HYDRA, he wasn’t responsible for your parents deaths. Why can’t you understand?” Steve’s raised voice travelled clearly through the ventilation system. There was a pause. Clint wondered if Stark was awake and trying to reply.

“You would have hunted him down like a rabid dog.” Steve obviously was denying Stark’s claim the he would have tried to help. Reverberation in the vents made it difficult to tell how much further, but he had to be getting close now.

“But Bucky…” Clint squinted. He saw light at the end of the tunnel. He was almost there. As he approached the opening, he could hear the rasp of Stark’s voice, soft and rough post-surgery.

“ You gave me no choice, no chance to come to terms with my parents being assassinated by him, and when I lashed out in grief and anger you almost killed me. If I had been trying to kill Bucky, he would have been dead.”

Clint froze in shock. Stark…Tony’s parents were assassinated…by Barnes? And Tony found out in Siberia. That would explain Barnes’ missing arm and Steve’s evasiveness on the subject.
“Why can’t you understand,” Clint heard movement with the words and suspected Rogers was moving to attack. He wasn’t going to make it in time. Steve was going to hurt an unarmed man, helpless post surgery. “It was the Winter Soldier, that’s not Buck…”

“FRIDAY one percent power to the right repulsor.” Clint heard the repulsor fire and felt the impact through the walls. He almost laughed in relief. He should have known a Stark was never helpless, still Tony should not be exerting himself if he just got out of surgery. Clint punched out the vent covering and did a rolling flip to the floor. He stood and nocked a tranquilizer arrow, aimed at the super soldier who had been become a notch in the wall behind him. That was one percent? With his target in sight he heard the last part of a private conversation between FRIDAY and Tony.

“FRIDAY was that one percent?

“No, Boss. I went for 10%.” Clint nodded at FRIDAY’s words. He could believe 10%,

“I know you have to ‘run before you can walk’ and I didn’t think 1% would be sufficient to get the point across.” Clint smirked at that.

“What point?” Tony whispered.

“Your suit was disabled with no communications, no power. It took me hours to get help to you in Siberia, hours where I did not know if you were still alive. I wanted him to understand he would not be allowed to hurt you again.”

Steve had left Tony behind in a broken suit in a frozen HYDRA base! Clint sighed. FRIDAY should have used more than 10% to knock some sense into Rogers’ thick skull. He needed to talk to Natasha about what he had learned.

“I understand, baby girl. But next time if I ask for 1% give me 1%.”

“Did I hurt you, Boss?”

“No, but I think I need to pass out now.”

“Rest Boss, help is on the way.”

As Tony slipped back into blissful unawareness, a harsher tone overtook FRIDAY’s circuits. “Agent Barton, I must ask, ‘Friend or foe?’ Even with Boss unconscious, I can still summon a repulsor.”

“No need FRIDAY. After my stupidity, I doubt Tony will want to ever call me a friend again, but I am certainly not his enemy. And I am here to make sure the good Captain here doesn’t try to go after your Boss again.”

“Very well, in that case Boss wanted you to know that he moved your family to a new location when ‘Ross came sniffing too close.’ They are safe.”

“Thanks FRIDAY.” Before Clint could say more the Black Panther arrived through the doorway on the left followed closely by Natasha, and several of the Dora Milaje streamed through the doorway from the right. Natasha ran to Tony’s bedside.

“Nat, is Tony ok? He repulsored Roger’s into the wall before I got here.”

“He’s passed out, and the cardiac monitors look like they had some wild readings…I’ll grab a doctor.”
“I will go,” Oyoke declared. “You deal with your errant Captain.”

Natasha nodded, taking a moment to brush Tony’s hair off his forehead before turning to a now waking Rogers. She and Clint hauled the dazed man from the room.

T’Challa watched as the Dora took up protective positions around the man’s bedside as the ICU nurse rushed in followed closely by Dr. Adisa and Dr. Cho. He was too focused on receiving an update on Dr. Stark’s health to notice when Shuri and Rhodey arrived, the younger riding on the back of the wheelchair as they rushed into the room.

“So Full Panther, huh brother. Very protective of you.”

“King Kitty come to my rescue, I’m touched.” Tony coughed weakly. A nurse was quickly there with a glass of water. He lifted his head and took a few sips greedily and then collapsed back on the pillow.

“So what happened?” Rhodes asked. “We lost communication with FRIDAY.”

“Sorry Colonel.” FRIDAY responded. “I had to activate the armor sooner than planned.”

“So the seismic disturbance was a repulsor blast?” Shuri asked excitedly.

Dr. Cho was looking over the data. “And the focus and energy drain disrupted pacemaker functions, mild dysrythmia led to low blood pressure and passing out. I’d like to have him undergo a treatment in the cradle later today, but overall he is healing well.

Rhodey rolled over. “Can’t I eat breakfast in peace? There is always excitement around you, Tones.”

“Not my fault.”

“It never is, Tones.”

“I did see Clint and Nat here?” Tony’s eyes darted around the room.

T’Challa nodded. “They offered to assist with Rogers. His focus on Barnes’ safety is concerning.”

“He needs help, but not from me. Rhodey, get the phones to Clint and Scott.”

“Sure Tones. Rest and get well.” Rhodes watched until Tony’s breathing evened out in sleep and then he wheeled his wheelchair back to his hosts, “Well shall we finish our breakfast?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Shuri grinned. “But brother, you might want to change?”

T’Challa belatedly realized he was still in full armor and suddenly understood Dr. Stark’s King Kitty comment. He sheepishly deactivated the armor and followed his sister out. He took one long back at the man resting peacefully now, and realized that his promise of a safe and quiet recuperation period would be harder than he ever imagined.

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