Summary

A fluffy epilogue to Electric Veins that can also be read as a standalone Tony/Rhodey oneshot.

Notes

I know there were some people reading Electric Veins that wished it would have turned to a Rhodey/Tony story, and I originally wanted it to be, but eventually decided it should just stay gen. But for those that wanted to see some shippy goodness, here's a little epilogue for you, fairly short but hopefully sweet :)

If you haven’t read Electric Veins and are just reading this as a oneshot, here are the important points: Tony died (in Siberia at the end of CW), Thanos invaded shortly after and killed a ton of people, Tony was resurrected using the Infinity Stones (with a few physical changes and some new powers) and defeated Thanos and saved the world, the ex-Avengers that are still alive (Steve, Natasha, and Clint) are out of the picture, and Tony and Rhodey have helped form a new team (the Sentinels) with Dr. Strange and laid down the groundwork for responsible planetary defense (documents called the International Defense Acts), as well as pretty much found a family in each other, Peter, and Harley.

It’s the second Resurrection Day, and the excitement has already started. Everything that happened is still close enough in people’s minds to warrant a true expression of life and freedom; not just a celebration, but a time to reflect on what’s happened and feel grateful for what’s still here. To
realize that eventually, there will be children for whom the invasion is a story, not a memory, and
the holiday is nothing more than a party, and that will be a good thing.

Naturally, Tony’s speech from last year is being replayed everywhere. Rhodey’s already heard it at
least four times this morning, plus a few more in the last week or so. Not that it’s a bad thing, even
though Tony’s mildly uncomfortable with all the attention. As much as Tony doesn’t want it to be,
this day is about celebrating him—his defeat of Thanos, him ending the invasion. It’s about Tony’s
resurrection as much as the world’s, and the world wants to pay respects to Tony and the sacrifices
he’s made. His call for unity is being replayed and respected all around the world today.

Or maybe Rhodey’s just waxing poetic in his head because of how much he’s seen, how close he
was to the epicenter of all of these changes. Either way, the holiday is easily the most anticipated
day of the year so far and once again, millions of visitors have flooded into New York City to
come to the events and hope to get a glimpse of Tony.

It’s still early. Peter and Harley are both sleeping in, tired from long days at school and longer
nights in the lab. They’re both growing into their respective genius faster than is probably safe, but
they’ve got plenty of people watching them now. Professors at school—they both finished high
school early after the invasion and are now taking college classes online and in person—Tony and
Rhodey in the lab and at home, May from close by and Harley’s mom long-distance when he’s
here in New York, Peter’s team over at the training center, the rest of the Sentinels.

They’re both highly responsible, considering their age, their brainpower, and their access to
resources that could help them cause a hell of a lot of trouble. They’re wise beyond their years, like
most of their peers who survived the invasion and the long and difficult reconstruction that
followed. Rhodey’s happy to see the world back to a relative normal, if nothing else then for the
fact that kids can be kids again.

It wasn’t as jarring a realization as he would have thought, when he first noticed that they’d
become his kids. His and Tony’s. Tony’s always had a habit of adopting strays and letting people
close, which brings them close to Rhodey by default. And they’re good kids, brought closer by
hardship, responsible and caring and just as important to Rhodey now as they are to Tony. Part of
their family.

Last year, the rest of the extended family was here as well; Strange, May, Harley’s mother and
sister, Rhodey’s mom. This year, they’ve all stayed back. Some with their own responsibilities, like
May, who’s helping to organize one of the parades this year, and Stephen, who’s dealing with
some ridiculous mishap at the Sanctum involving magically enhanced bats, apparently. Rhodey’s
mother sent her love a few days ago but was planning to spend today cooking for a neighborhood
party and couldn’t take the time out for the long journey up to New York and back. Likewise,
Harley’s family wanted to stay home and celebrate in their own small town this year, though
Harley’s been here with Tony and Rhodey at the Tower for the last two months, studying online
and working in the labs.

Harley’s also been training regularly with Tony in the modified suit Tony’s been working on for
him, to the eternal stress of both Rhodey and Harley’s mother. But the kid’s nearly an adult and he
can make his own decisions regarding this. More than that, too, they know very well that he’d be
creating his own suit and throwing himself out there even without their approval, so the most they
can do is support him and try to help keep him safe. It would be hard to tell him no when Peter,
who’s the same age, is a reserve member of the Sentinels and training with his own team of young
Enhanced on top of it.

Rhodey glances down to read the time backwards on Tony’s screen. Tony’s due to make several
public appearances today and he’ll need to get up and get ready for them soon, but Rhodey knows from experience that he needs to wait until the last possible moment to interrupt, or be subjected to Tony whining for whatever length of free time he ends up with about how he could have been working.

Tony’s sprawled across the couch with his head in Rhodey’s lap, a holographic screen projected in an arc over his head from the sensors stuck on his temple, working on two or three projects simultaneously as usual. He’s still in the clothes he slept in, though at least he actually got some sleep last night. Rhodey was up all night in the lab, working with Stephen on integrating his latest suit upgrades with part of the portal system Stephen has been trying to set up. They’d known the hours were fading away into morning, but they’d been on a roll and didn’t want to stop, at least until Stephen got pulled away for the whole bat thing. Rhodey got back early this morning, just as Tony was getting up, and he’s been dozing on the couch for most of the morning while Tony works.

He threads his hand absentmindedly into Tony’s hair, and Tony closes his eyes, leaning back into the touch. His marks shine on his face and through his shirt. It took months after the destruction of the Time Stone and the settling of Tony’s powers to be certain of it, but eventually Rhodey concluded for sure that Tony glows a little brighter now when something makes him happy. Seeing it now, affection wells up in his chest, utterly familiar but no less strong than every other time. He opens his mouth to point the glowing out to Tony, planning to ask him if it’s intentional or not, but what comes out instead is, “We should get married.”

Rhodey immediately freezes in place, shocked at what his mouth just said without his brain’s permission, but Tony just smiles, eyes still closed and body completely relaxed. “Okay.”

The stammering excuse for the insanity that just came out of him is already half-formed in his throat when he registers Tony’s response. “Y—okay? What?”

Tony’s eyes open again and he swipes a hand over to minimize his screen, sitting up to level a questioning gaze at Rhodey. “Did you not mean it?” There’s no hurt in his tone or his expression, just a patient understanding. Rhodey gets the feeling that Tony, in this moment, knows more about Rhodey and his feelings than Rhodey himself does.

He blinks and lets himself think for a second. “I meant it,” he says slowly, “can’t say I could pinpoint where it came from, but I meant it. But I wasn’t expecting you to…” he throws a look at Tony’s bright eyes, confusion and benign suspicion. “Have you thought about this?”

Tony smiles again, and it’s full of fondness and the tiniest hint of something else, somewhere between smug and mischievous. “I may have,” he says simply.

Rhodey fakes an incensed expression. “And you didn’t think to tell me about any of this? I’m hurt. I thought we shared our thoughts in this household.”

“You’re the one who just blurted out that we should get married, on the couch at eight in the morning. Quite the proposal, Gumdrop, how long did it take to plan that?”

Rhodey’s still a little shocked by that fact, but the teasing is helping him regain his footing and it’s second nature to respond to the fond sarcasm. “I’m so sorry, did you want me to get down on one knee? Hire a skywriter? Take you to a beach at sunset, riding a horse?”

“Of course not,” Tony says seriously. “I don’t know how to ride a horse.”
They both burst into laughter, the last of Rhodey’s trepidation after his sudden, unexpected proposal melting away. Tony scoots closer to him, their thighs pressed together, and takes one of his hands, staring down at it. “I’ve thought about it. Maybe haven’t put it into official terms in my head, but I’ve definitely thought about it. We’ve already got a family here. Nothing would really be any different, would it?”

“Still,” Rhodey says softly, “it’s not like we’re—you could find someone you want to be with, down the road. I wouldn’t want you to feel like you’re stuck with me.”

“I could never be ‘stuck’ with you,” Tony says, and the raw sincerity of it pulls at something in Rhodey’s chest. “But the same goes for you. You could find someone too.”

Rhodey lets out a quiet sound of disbelief. “I doubt that. Not because of anything personal, just… I’ve never focused much on the whole ‘romance’ scene, you know? Never had the urge to, and I still don’t. I’m nearing fifty, man. If it hasn’t happened by now I doubt it will. And I know, it’s not like you can’t find love in the second half of your life, plenty of people do, but I just don’t see my life heading that way. Any need for family I have is plenty satisfied here, with you all.”

Tony smiles at that and leans into his side. “I’d say the same goes for me. There really isn’t much more to a romantic relationship than what we have. Besides, it’s not like I’ve exactly been thinking much about sex in the last couple years.”

Rhodey snorts at that. “Your twenty-year-old self would be appalled.”

Tony’s eyes crinkle in silent amusement at that, but the expression is quickly replaced by a serious one again. “Marriage is about more than that, more even than romance or intimacy. I’ll never be able to trust anyone else the way I trust you, and that’s more important than anything. I doubt I’ll ever find anyone I love as much, either.”

Tears prick the backs of Rhodey’s eyes despite his fighting them. “You know the same goes for me. I trust you with everything I have, everything I am and more. I love you more than I ever thought I could.”

He’s not embarrassed by his strong emotional response to the words. But even if he were, seeing the matching shine in Tony’s eyes would reassure him. They shift around to pull each other into a tight hug, lingering on it even longer than usual.

When they pull back, Rhodey tentatively asks, “So, we’re really doing this?”

Tony nods and smiles, and it’s not his glowing marks that make the smile so bright.

Rhodey can’t keep a sappy, stupid grin off his face for the rest of the day. He accompanies Tony through the parade and a few of his public appearances for the day, hangs out in the background for the others. He watches the way Tony interacts with kids, how he talks to citizens, and understands what Tony meant when he said nothing would change. The deep love he feels for Tony is already strong and isn’t going to change somehow when they sign a marriage certificate. It’s just a formal declaration of the commitment they’ve already made to each other.

Actually, he amends silently when he sees the way a few women in the crowd are looking at Tony, one thing might change. There might, hopefully, be a decrease in the number of random strangers who propose to them. Tony gets it more than Rhodey—and likes to rub that in Rhodey’s face when they’re both bullshitting and trying to one-up each other like idiots—but so far, in the year since the last Resurrection Day, they’ve both been proposed to by at least five people apiece—and that’s just in person. Thankfully, someone from the Tower staff is paid a lot of money to sort through
their mail, because they’ve been sent a lot of things they’d rather not think about.

He and Tony agree that there’s no reason to run off and do anything immediately. They also debate, and quickly discard, the idea of actually having a wedding in any traditional sense. Neither of them really want to walk down the aisle or recite vows or anything like that. They do agree that their friends will probably roast them both alive if they don’t do anything, so they should throw some kind of a party after it’s done, but there’s no need to hurry.

The kids have already noticed, naturally, that Rhodey and Tony are acting “a little off,” as Peter put it, or “weirder than usual,” in Harley’s eloquent words. There’s no reason not to tell them, so that evening, when the parades and speeches and public appearances are over—not to say that the parties are over, the streets are still full of noise and now fireworks are going off all across the city—they sit the boys down and announce what they decided that morning, straightforward and to the point.

“Ha!” Harley’s triumphant shout isn’t the reaction Rhodey’s expecting, and his confusion quickly turns to a fond exasperation when Harley turns to Peter, shoving him in the shoulder. “You owe me twenty bucks!”

“Seriously?” Tony asks, crossing his arms. His attempt to look stern is ruined by his smile.

Peter looks chagrined, but Harley just rolls his eyes. “Come on, you guys sleep together. You’ve both got the hottest people in the country throwing themselves at you on a regular basis, you could have anyone you wanted, and neither of you has so much as gone on a date in years. I thought it was obvious.”

“I just thought you were really, you know, good friends,” Peter offers.

“Yeah, well, you wouldn’t know romance if it bit you in the ass, would you? What did it take you, like, three dates with that Lauren chick before you realized they were actually dates?” Harley counters, and Peter flushes.

Tony’s smile turns a little more mischievous. “If it makes you feel any better, Pete, you’re not any worse than Rhodey here, don’t get your advice on a proposal from him, he—mmrph—”

Tony’s voice is muffled as Rhodey slaps a hand over his mouth, far too late to avoid the highly interested looks he’s now getting from the two boys. Harley stares Rhodey down for a few seconds, then declares, “Oh, we’re getting this story.”

“Over my dead body,” Rhodey deadpans. He does have a badass reputation to keep up, after all. He manages to distract both boys by tackling Harley, which pulls Peter and Tony into what ends up turning into a ridiculous three-way wrestling match, with Peter having to play the role of responsible adult who pulls them all apart easily with super strength. His goal of redirection and distraction accomplished in the short term, Rhodey herds the whole group into another room to watch movies until they all fall asleep, something that’s now becoming a Resurrection Day tradition.

In the morning, May calls to congratulate them and simultaneously berate them for not telling her sooner—Peter, sweet kid that he is, is terrible at keeping secrets—and Harley gets his mom and sister on a video chat so that Tony can tell them. Rhodey calls his own mother and has a conversation that ends in happy tears on both sides, which makes him grateful that he found a private place to talk. Stephen drops by halfway through the day, the whole bat thing finally figured out, apparently. When he’s done updating them, they drop the news, and he gives them both a rare
hug, which surprises but warms Rhodey. No doubt word will get around to the rest of the Sentinels soon as well.

Over the next day or so, Rhodey debates with himself for a while over an idea that popped into his head near the end of Resurrection Day. At first it seemed stupid, more of a joke in his mind than anything else, but the more he thinks about it, the more it starts to seem like a good idea.

So, three days after they initially agreed to get married, Rhodey sneaks down to his and Tony’s personal lab while Tony is in an SI meeting. After a cursory check to be sure Peter and Harley are nowhere to be seen, he begins sorting through extra and discarded pieces and parts, even looking through old storage areas for bits that were damaged in combat and put aside.

He eventually selects the two small pieces he wants: a bent plate that used to be part of the shoulder armor of the War Machine suit, and a discarded former spinal joint from the Iron Man suit that isn’t damaged, but was replaced by an upgraded, more flexible model. They’re small, they won’t be missed, and they’re perfect for what he needs.

Two days later, when Tony’s again busy with the company and won’t miss Rhodey’s presence, Rhodey takes his prizes to a small but well-reviewed jeweler just outside the city. It’s a small enough place, far enough out of the way, that he feels confident in his privacy and their discretion.

The jeweler looks moderately surprised when Rhodey describes what he wants, but remains professional and doesn’t ask anything beyond what’s necessary. Rhodey’s credit card—and, he suspects, his general status as well—gets him a quiet promise of continued discretion and an accelerated one-week deadline for a finished product.

He gets a call five days later, two days earlier than promised. When he goes back and sees what’s been created, he actually tears up right there in the back of the store. The jeweler doesn’t appear to judge him for it—if anything, he looks proud that his work got such a strong reaction—and Rhodey ends up leaving a tip twice as large as the already-generous one he’d been planning, as well as a promise, when the news finally goes public, to tell everyone where he got them.

He shows them to Tony that night. It isn’t a big production, there’s no fanfare; that’s not what Tony would want and it’s not really what Rhodey wants, either. They hadn’t even necessarily planned to do this part at all, but it just felt right. Rhodey sits Tony down on the couch and presents the two small, elegant boxes.

Tony opens them and spends a moment just staring, blinking slowly. Then he reaches out to hover a finger over one of the rings, examining it more closely where it sits in black velvet. The jeweler took the matte gray piece of the War Machine armor and really turned it into something beautiful, shinier and smoother than the armor but still unmistakably a piece of it. Silver inlays twist naturally within the gray, eventually coming together to rise slightly into an elegant setting that holds three gems: two delicate pieces of citrine on the outsides of a slightly larger ruby. The stones aren’t elevated far from the smooth surface of the ring, yet the way they’ve been cut means that they sparkle and shine from it anyway.

“These are…” Tony murmurs, finally touching one of the rings, running his fingers over the band.

“Pieces of our armor,” Rhodey confirms softly. “Got them from storage, damaged or outdated pieces that weren’t going to be reused.”

Tony turns his attention to the second box, running his fingers just as reverently over this one. The twin and yet the opposite to the first, this one’s band is the bright gold of the Iron Man armor, polished into a refined shine. The same silver tendrils twist through this band, coming together to
form an identical setting. This one holds three diamonds: a larger, classically clear diamond surrounded by two smaller deep gray ones.

“Wow,” Tony says. He doesn’t seem capable of anything else, and Rhodey chuckles softly.

“I’m guessing that’s a good thing.”

Tony looks up, and his eyes are suspiciously shiny—more so than just their usual electric blue. “They’re perfect,” he says.

Rhodey looks down at the boxes, preoccupying himself with pulling out the one made from his armor, hoping to hold back the burning behind his own eyes. Tony really has turned him into a gigantic sap, or maybe it was the invasion, Tony’s death and resurrection and his long emotional recovery. Tony would say he was one all along.

He pulls out the gray ring with the red and gold stones and Tony holds his left hand out without prompting. Rhodey slides the ring onto his finger, and despite the usual connotations of the gesture, it doesn’t feel clichéd or cheesy or overdramatic. It doesn’t feel demeaning to Tony or overbearing for Rhodey. It’s just another expression of their incredibly intimate, unique friendship, brotherhood, the deep love they have for each other.

Tony takes the other box as soon as he’s done and repeats the gesture, sliding the gold-banded ring made from his own armor onto Rhodey’s hand. He keeps Rhodey’s left hand captured in his right when he’s done and Rhodey steals his other in return. They both spend a long minute just looking at their intertwined hands, admiring the contrast of their two hands and now their two rings.

Then their eyes come up and meet, and something about the moment changes. Another thing that Rhodey didn’t expect, but now just feels right, finds its place in his mind and heart and body. He sees the same deep, complicated something reflected in Tony’s eyes and the way he watches Rhodey with such intensity, mixed with something Rhodey’s never seen before—or never noticed.

Before he can overthink it, or really question it, he’s leaning forward, closer into Tony’s space. Tony meets him halfway, and this really isn’t unusual for them, the way they’re so used to sharing space now, but something is different this time. There’s a tense, expectant feeling stretching between them, something building up inside them that’s huge and powerful and overwhelming.

That feeling crests like a wave when they shift, together, and their lips meet. It’s a tentative thing at first, soft, not hesitant so much as just a test. The moment hangs in space, time could be frozen for all they know, and that intense wave turns into something sweet and warm that starts in his core and spreads outward until it feels like it’s spilling from his body.

They part, only moving far enough to breathe each other’s air instead of tasting each other’s lips. “Oh,” Rhodey breathes out.

He feels more than sees the way Tony smiles. He can practically hear Tony thinking, and he knows him so well by now that every expression, every breath is an open book to Rhodey. There’s a pause and then the tiniest of nods, like Tony is deciding something. “Okay,” he says, and he pushes forward once more.

This time, there’s no testing the waters, no inching along in case either one of them should suddenly decide to withdraw. They’re both sure that they haven’t misinterpreted anything, and Rhodey’s hands come up to frame Tony’s face and Tony’s go around his shoulders and they kiss with the intense but unhurried passion of two people who are so utterly used to intimacy and yet now are exploring uncharted territory, finding out after all this time that there’s an entire new
aspect of their relationship to discover together.

There’s a shift as Tony moves, pulling away for the briefest moment, only to climb into Rhodey’s lap. And he’s been there before, so many times, but not like this; legs spread on either side of Rhodey, pressing his whole body close, hands sliding up around the back of his head. Settling onto Rhodey with an intent far beyond the comforting closeness of a friendly touch.

Tony leans down to kiss him yet again and Rhodey thinks he’ll never tire of this feeling, even if they live another hundred years. This may be new and unexplored territory for them, but they’re charging into it with no reservations and so far, they’re discovering nothing but good things.

Rhodey’s hands go to Tony’s hips, settling low and pressing him close. It’s nothing absolutely new, he’s touched practically every part of Tony’s body before, yet something—the intent behind the action—is palpably different this time. A shiver travels through Tony’s body and he shifts, and a new kind of heat sparks deep inside Rhodey, something he honestly hadn’t ever thought a situation like this would inspire.

Well, he thinks as he holds Tony close with one hand, sliding the other up into his hair to press a deeper kiss to his lips, he’s always been an enthusiastic adventurer.

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