**Frostbitten**

by Corvixa

Summary

Tony lost more things to the ice and cold of siberia.

That bunker has forged him, once again, in ice and then in fire.

Returning to live, fundamentally changed, he hopes the family he cobbles together will hold this time. Broken people with sharp edges can come together to make something shine.

Even if.. Or as he knows, when they come back.
Saturday Updates!

(I suck at this summary business!) Also, damn the word count adds up fast, heh, this will probably be very long because I write to much!

Notes

Tagging is kind of terrifying. So if you think I should include something I haven't, especially as I go, please tell me, it means I'm less ranty at my partners and they thank you. Also I went with mature for the rating just in case.

So, I've not written since 2011. And I've never really written fanfic. But I fell down a fanfic hole and I kept reading until ideas started sparking until I started putting notes down, then I was writing conversations, and now you have this!

These notes won't always be long rambly things. I hope. I know people just want to get to the reading! I just thought a little explanation at the start might be Warrented? So I stopped writing because I have nerve damage in my elbows and I'm mostly stuck lying down, so what I write is on my phone. I'm going over and over to try an ensure there are as few weird autocorrects as possible (but I have this bad habit of adding as I read, this chapter was a little 1000 word introduction once. Hope I haven't made it too long!) My keyboard is bilingual, so it can be peculiar, if anything looks weird, not English and I haven't noticed, yell and I'll poke it.

Also, I'm not really a fan of Cap, or Wanda. I'm going to try and avoid out right bashing maybe? But if you want something Cap Friendly you may want to avoid, I tried to put it in the tags but I couldn't find it oddly.
Tony POV

June 24th, 2016

Tony takes a minute to watch the retreating shadows. The shadow of a person who he had thought was his friend. A person he thought had cared for him. Who made food, and brought it to him when he spent too long in the workshop. Not many people did that after all, they just got angry at him for failing basic functions.

The back of the man who smiled at Tony when he staggered into the kitchen, blearily feeling his way towards the coffee machine. Who would hand him a cup of the dark beverage, that was practically his blood at this point. That he could accept that cup, without the spike of anxiety! He still remembered how thrilled they both had been the first time it had happened accidentally. Tony had missed the cup Steve had put on the side for him and Steve had scooped it up, bringing it close enough for Tony to smell it, when Tony had reached out and taken it, Steve had stood frozen in shock. Tony, utterly oblivious, had just started drinking his coffee. Took two more hours for him to realise what he'd done.

Things had been hard lately, but Tony had thought their friendship was strong enough to weather what was thrown at it. His mistakes, his fuck ups, but he had been so sure that he wouldn't abandon him. The Avengers were made out of people with mistakes in their files with blood on their hands, skeletons in their closets after all. He just had to do better. Be better. Fix himself. Rewrite his code. Find those junk sub routines he kept tripping over. Just, be better.

Rhodey hated it when he spoke like this, but there must be something wrong, something broken somewhere. Or why else did these things happen to him? He was the common denominator.

Steve… Steve was one of the few people who didn't mind Tony's need to be tactile. He would stand, just that bit closer to him in the lift, so the back of his hand would brush Tony's arm. He'd gently bump shoulders. Tiny touches many people wouldn't even notice that we're a huge deal to Tony. He'd even admitted to Steve once that he was touch starved and the touches grounded him more than anything else. He'd said the words in a fast rush after not sleeping for four nights, nervous at the idea of even trying to sleep and drank so much coffee that FRIDAY had locked down all the coffee machines.

He'd hunched in on himself, panicked that he'd said that, out loud! Just ready for Steve to laugh, or say something about being rich and a perfect childhood, or mention Howard. That was what people usually said if Tony revealed anything weird like this. Rhodey always believed, but Rhodey saw the bruises. That had been humiliating, but Rhodey hadn't let him hide, just sat on him and hugged him.

Even worse than that, Steve might take something out of Howard's book, that he should man up, and try to be better like Howard. He hadn't though. He didn't say anything, just smiled, pulled him into a crushing hug that had stuttered his brain from its fast past, to a slow moving sludge. Steered him towards the sofa. Tony following along, almost blindly, in a state of utter shock. Usually when he stupidly confessed things like this, people used it to hurt him.
Steve sat him down on the sofa, guided Tony down, put his head on a pillow on his lap. Covered him with a blanket and put the TV on. His ridiculously strong arm across his shoulders, a no nonsense barrier that said he WILL rest… But that he didn't have to do it alone. He didn't try to get Tony to talk more either, he didn't expect an explanation, nor all the sordid details. He seemed to just know that that confession was huge to Tony. He slept for 14 hours straight. Steve was in the exact spot when he woke. Tony blinked up at him, staring for longer than socially acceptable, as if he was looking at a mirage that would wisp away if he stopped looking. Tony wasn't sure what shocked him more, that he listened to him? That he believed him? That he wanted to help him? That he knew how to help without sending Tony into a spiral? Or that he'd rather stay sitting on the sofa for 14 hours, just so Tony could sleep?

This wasn't behaviour common in Tony's life outside of his Platypus who was currently far away and out of contact. Ridiculous rules.

The shadow finally disappeared and silence settled. Even if Tony strained, he couldn't hear a thing. No more footsteps. Not a single glance back.

Tony hates Steve for doing those things for him.

Tony hates Steve. No, he hates Rogers for that.

For making him feel like he mattered. When he obviously didn't.

For making him feel important. When he was clearly nothing more than an obstacle.

For making him feel like a friend, when he was just a placeholder at best.

For telling him he didn't have to do it alone, that he would be there for him. But now he is alone.

So alone.

And it hurts.

And it's cold.

The cold is like a presence unto itself, one that he can feel settle around him. Covering him and his suit. Spread out, touching everything. The remaining heat from the suit feels like its leaching into the ground almost too fast. Like he was trying to grab at sand slipping through his fingers.

'A broken tin can and a shredded flight suit are not the best gear for the cold.'

He thought darkly to himself. He hadn't even felt the cold when he'd arrived, the suit made it so such things barely occurred to him. Now though, he can feel a trickle of panic in the back of his mind as the warmth leaves him. The cold taking its place.

"It's fine."

His voice cracks as he speaks, causing him to flinch slightly, that's when he realised that he'd been holding his breath. He didn't even notice but the gasp in after talking… That's when he realised that each breath is like breathing with cracked glass in his lungs. Or shattered ice. Ice that is everywhere here, it would make sense if it had already settled inside of him.

He closed his eyes and counts to ten to get control of himself. Aware that he is being ridiculous. Rescue is coming, he won't be here long enough for the ice to get to him. Not really.
Then his eyes flew open in sheer panic. *No.* He had wanted to keep his *friend* safe. To bring him in. Safe, away from Ross. To *help* him. To do that… He’d scrubbed the location before he took off. That, and he’d cut off FRIDAY from the servers at home, leaving the sliver of her isolated in the suit with him. The shield. Rogers. Destroying the arc reactor, driving it into his already admittedly weak sternum, that he’d even told Rogers about!

*’Idiot, you trusting, pathetic, idiot’*

Something whispered at the back of his mind. He resolutely ignored it.

The suit had powered down around him before he could even think to tell FRIDAY to reconnect to the servers. Leaving him in the *dark.* Because Tony was stupid enough to tell someone things that he should have kept close to his chest. Rogers knew just where to *really* hurt him. To have him trapped, alone, in so much pain he can hardly even move.

He choked back a sob as he realised he really was alone. Who would come for him. Rhodey couldn't, he doubted he was even awake. Pep... He’d made sure she was safe with Happy, under the impression that he was busy working on the Accords... Not doing anything risky. And poor Vision, he was still reeling himself. He needed time to deal with things, racing off hunting him down wouldn't be great for any of his family.

*’Where would they even start looking anyway. You sabotaged yourself.’*

That dark shadow in his mind spits at him. He choked out a laugh that sounded brittle, hinting at the sharp edge of madness, even to his ears. The sound bounced around the barren concrete base, along with the rattle of his breaths.

So he watched the ice.

*’This is what you deserve.’*

The dark shadow whispered into the back of his mind, not satisfied with being ignored. He tried not to flinch at the *familiar* tone of that voice. That voice that sounded so much like Howard. But also… It sounded like Rogers. Like disappointment.

Instead he had returned to his vigil. To watch the ice. The stark *terror*, the *fear*... It just... slowly drained away. He didn't know how long it took, but he was shaking, trembling, with each flinch metal sliced deeper, but then he realised he was *bored*. How the hell was he *bored* whilst freezing to death? That did it... the fear surged back, down his throat and into his mind, making breathing just that bit harder and pushed him to the edge of mania at the idea of being *bored* whilst slowly freezing. It increased the shaking and the pain felt like it cut him to the quick.

It came. It went. With and eb and flow that was much smoother that his breathing, that now always felt like shattered ice. His breaths ragged like he had to tear each one free from his lungs. His chest... He was almost happy that the suit and the pain restricted him from looking down. Because he didn't want to know what his chest looked like. Call him a coward, but he could feel metal turning his chest to minced meat with every shiver. He resolutely looked for *anything* else to focus his treacherous mind upon. For a while, the snow was beautiful. He had always liked the snow, even after Afghanistan when the cold had gained a different level of fear. The way to coated everything, leaving the world fresh and untouched. Ice crystals sparkling in the sun, turning even the most barren local into a winter wonderland.

He noticed after a while the cold seemed to be hitting his left arm *more* than his right, it was that bit closer to the snow, but not enough for this much difference, he was sure of it. He risked a
glance and noticed there was more damage to the suit there. That wasn't good. Oh look, the panic is back once again. Yay. He grit his teeth through the pain that flared every time he began to shake. Bare skin from his torn flight suit that had settled upon the icy metal was rubbed raw everytime it has happened.

'This whole thing is your fault, what? Did you think you could spiral through life with no accountability to the lives you destroyed?'

The Howard-Rogers voice sneered at him. He flinched back again before thinking, no. He had wanted accountability. He'd been striving for it since as a cloth bag was torn off his face, the sun blinding him momentarily until he was faced with the exact result of his lack of accountability. He really didn't want to be at the point in life where he was arguing with a sinister voice in his mind, so he decided to push it away.

'You pretended to be a hero for too long. You actually started to believe your own lies.'

He focused on pushing it down. Intrusive thought patterns. Never give them fuel. Never answer them. Starve them. Think instead about the good he did, about what he'd been trying to do, to turn that terrifying document into a shield for those who needed it. All the shining possibilities cascaded around him. The voice quietens under the onslaught and he is left feeling alone, again. However, he's not so far gone into the madness that he sought the company of a sinister voice in his mind. Rhodey would not be impressed with him if he did that, and Rhodey was his guiding star.

He was not sure whether trying to recall his extremely limited knowledge on frostbite is a cure for the boredom by scaring himself witless, or, if he's trying to distract himself from the fear by remembering facts and calculating probabilities. He seems to cycle back and forth, leaving him emotionally drained and raw, like he can't find a solid surface to stand on. His mind skittering from one thing to the next. The very idea of frostbite almost feels like a warning flashing on the hud when he's flying in the suit. When he closes his eyes he sees it, a red box, an outline of his body… Sections slowly going dark.


It takes another unknown quantity of time, time had taken on a different meaning. Stretching and contracting as he was just left with his mind to torture him, more surely than any kidnapper had have ever managed to do. A mind like his needed something, anything or it turned on him like a rabid starving wolf. The only distraction is the trembling of his body that keeps metal moving in his chest. He's sure he can feel it scrape along the bones, but that might just be his mind.

Siberia is an inhospitable frozen wasteland, he knows hypothermia will be settling in soon, if it already hadn't. His breathing will slow, his pulse will become weak and thready. Exhaustion will set in, wicking his strength away, being kept awake by sheer force of will, oh, and the minced meat his chest was being rendered into. Then will come the confusion. The delerium. The dangerous loss of consciousness. The shaking will slow and slow… his chest will get a break, but at the cost of his limbs as his body desperately tries to conserve what little energy he has left.

He turned away from the snow, it was almost a visual representation of the cold and time. It had gone from beautiful to nerve racking with a simple series of facts. It just doesn't stop falling. He knows logically that the building won't get entirely buried in snow, but all he can think of is being buried by it, suffocating, choking to the taste of snow instead of memories of foul water and burning sand.

He slowly gets the panic under control, again. He doesn't know how many cycles he's been
through now, minutes are stretching, blending, mixing, the snow is bright and blinding. The bunker 
dark , dingey , bearing the scars of an ill advised fight. He forced himself to look at the snow. To 
prove to himself that he's being hysterical, and maybe to push away the sour, sickly feeling of guilt 
and wretchedness the building forced down his throat to the smug satisfaction of the voice in his 
mind. Looking at the snow falling , getting thicker , it's just like watching the ice creep along the 
suit - that makes it worse. Instead he switches again, this time to glaring at the arm, the one he 
blested off, mentally taking it apart from what he can see. That makes the panic eb with a familiar 
feel of work, for a few moments at least.

Nothing lasts. Not in this nightmare hellscape. This quiet environment is perfect for things to turn 
on him in his mind, and there is so much easy pickings in and around him. There aren't any people 
holding him to enrage. There are no villainous creeps that he can wait on to make a mistake. No 
one wants anything from. He's just alone. Trapped by a design of his own making. Shredding his 
skin, weighing him down, conducting the cold to his bare, vulnerable skin. He can't use his mind 
to this is way out so instead it turns on him.

He stared resolutely at the arm as he tried valiantly to force his thoughts to order. Instead it made 
him think of other things. Things that have already set firmly into his brain. That memory is like 
razor wire. Touching it rips and rends his flesh, it makes him bleed . He idly wonders if he's gone 
crazy? Would you even know if you've lost it? Did he really just watch his parents get murdered, 
across from the weapon that killed them? That was a 100 year old, tortured super soldier? Stood 
next to a person he trusted , a person he has let himself be vulnerable with. Something that doesn't 
come easy to him. He had trusted Rogers down to the fibre of his being. This whole thing doesn't 
make sense.

Tony wasn't.

How did Rogers not see that?

Why did Rogers react with such anger and violence ?

When he was a raw wound of pain ripped open in pieces.

By all the fighting.

By his desperation to put out fires Rogers was lighting.

Then with a video, with a road he knew well .

A road he'd walked back and forth till his feet bled.

By 'Wait , Tony…'

As if he had caused this spiral of events.

When really he was caught up in a web of deceit and lies that had permeated his life and actions for 
decades. That Rogers spun his own weave into.

By 'Did you know?'

As if Rogers was the paragon of justice and truth.

When really, Rogers spun lies under the guise of protecting him.

When he doubted his wellbeing was anything more than an afterthought .
By the 'Yes'

The yes he'd had to *wrench* from him like getting blood from a stone.

When he just knew it was yes. Knew it in his *bones*. Knew it in his *heart*.

By the fact he *forced* him to ask *twice*. Still holding fast to the lie.

Tony is practically a walking tank. One he'd been *upgrading* and *perfecting* since he crashed onto burning sand. A tank that encased the mind of a genius, if he did say so himself, who has a *thing* for patterns. The amount of times he could have killed him, either of them in that fight, so many moments he let slip. When he aimed for *structures* around them instead of them. When backs were turned. When he *restrained* Rogers. But then, he supposed he should be thankful that the shield smashed into his *heart* than his *neck*.

Although he swore there was a moment, looking into his eyes that he was going to aim for his neck.

He should be thankful for this slow, *agonising* death where he's *forced* to think, *forced* to relive, *forced* to watch his Mare die in his mind.

*Over* and *over* and *over*.

Hearing her last words *carved* into his mind.

Feeling the anger of decades towards Howard for killing his mother be ripped away from him.

Leaving him hollow. Bare. Ripped open.

Whilst he might not know the Winter Soldiers patterns.. He had FRIDAYs help. He knew Rogers though, even without FRIDAYs reminders. He *knew* Rogers like the back of his hand. Wasn't that what all the team building exercises for? Tony *knew* how to take down Rogers in the suit, Rogers should have *known* Tony wasn't going to kill Barnes, he just *needed someone* to hurt as well as him. If he had gone for the kill, he wouldn't have blasted the arm off. It would have been so easy to aim just that bit...

*No*, **NO**.

That way leads to madness. He needs action. Needs something to cling to, to get out of his mind. To pull away from the dangerous road this mixture of fear, boredom, apathy, emotional overload, pain, delirium and madness. Mixing together to render his sanity *null* and *void*.

Thankfully, that depressing interlude had scared the panic back, ha, he's scaring his own panic. Let's avoid the manic laughter this time though, he can feel it there, trying to escape his chest, bubbling under the surface. So, it's time to move. There has to be some kind of computer here somewhere. Some kind of power source, somewhere. Just, something. He has to do something.

He doesn't get that far. He barely moves a centimetre. The movement causes blinding, hot, searing pain across his chest. Reminding him that his suit had been tearing, ripping, searing into his flesh. The pain was still so much more than he'd conceived, he was good with pain he carried it like a well worn suit. He'd thought the cold would numb it just it almost felt like he was burning. Searing in the ice… His breath stuttered in his throat and his vision whites out around the edges. Pressing in at his consciousness. He clings to the pain to stay conscious, but he can already feel it slipping. Slipping away into the blissful dark and for a second, he can't remember why he needs to stay awake.
He slowly swims up from the darkness, pulled by pain and ice burning and branding his skin. He's not sure how long it's been. His eyes ache and it's possibly dark but the blinding white snow confuses him. Would this be better if he could see a clock? Counting the seconds. The minutes and the hours of loneliness. Of his inability to fight this. Watching time as no one comes for him. No, it would probably worse.

He was colder than he was before. Maybe. It's hard to tell.

'Oh yay, we're panicking about frostbite again.'

He grouses to himself, unkindly. *Does he deserve kindness?*

He is pretty sure movement is meant to help. So every now and then, he taps his fingers. 1 2 3 4 5, 1 2 3 4 5, over and over, right, left. He flexes his feet too. Tony isn't sure if this is helping, hurting or doing nothing.

But it's *something* .

If he does get out of here… How... How can he build without his hands?

He wondered how long he'd been here. Had someone missed him yet? Maybe Rogers had told someone where he was. The man took his ship, T'Challa left with his prize. They would tell someone in his side where his is. *Surely* .

Rogers knows he is *without* power. *Without* transport.

Rogers knows that *no one* knows his location.

Rogers might have decided he was *no worth* as a friend anymore, not now he got his *real* friend back.

Rogers would *never* leave a man behind. *Friend or For* .

Whatever he is to the super soldier now.

He just *wouldn't* .

He drilled that into their heads for years under their leadership.

He *wouldn't*... *would he?*

All he sees is blurry snow and white on one side and blurry, dinghy greys of the lovely Hydra getaway he is now residing in, to his right. He eyes feel like they've been watering for *days*, especially the left. What is it with his left side? He considers trying to turn onto his side, that way his back would be to the snow instead of his left side. Tears he didn't remember shedding have frozen on his face, maybe the cold made them water whilst he was out. They are aching something terrible, he wondered if you could get frostbite in your eyes before quickly shoving that thought down into the ever growing pile. The ice feels like it's cutting, slicing and ripping into his face wherever its set.

Everything feels a little... too bright which isn't helping matters, nor is the ache in his eyes that's pushing him closer to that migraine, the brightness is sharp, sending pain around his skull. The brightness is concerning him, but is that just the snow or is something wrong? Is it getting dark soon? Has it come and gone? He tried turning from the painful, brightness, but the suit feels so heavy, he's sure he can move the suit alone, even shut down. Everytime he tries his chest burst into
pain and he feels the darkness creeping and he can't pass out again, he might not wake. Has he gotten weak since he's been trapped here? In this cold hell that's becoming his life? Is it his injuries? Or is the ice and hypothermia slowly draining him down to nothing?

His brain, his whirlwind brain feels like its surging and stuttering at the same time somehow. It makes no sense, he's trying to correct the data but getting overwhelmed. With the brightness from the snow, with the fading around his vision, with the cold leaving him numb, with the burning, with the ever so slow trickles of blood. It's just too much. Everything is too much. Too much. His mind, unchecked is too much. His senses are in overload, from the brightness that's almost blinding, the ice and blood that he can taste is overpowering, the smell of the battle they waged won't let him rest, won't let him forget, the silence is deafening. His fingers are an odd combination of numb but burning. It doesn't make any sense. None of it. He's thrown into sensory overload whilst trapped, unable to move to mitigate the situation and if forced to endure.

There is pain in so many places and he's freezing and burning up all at once. It's just so hard to think with the shivering, with it ripping his skin in places it had become fixed to the metal, ripping into his chest again so he can feel warmth trickle down his chest, even his blood is slow and sluggish. He wants it to just stop, for the shivering to let him be, give him a break, it's exhausting him, but something in his mind tells him it would be worse, but how could anything be worse than this?

He feels like his brain might be trying to make him stop feeling parts of his body, maybe because they hurt so damned much…? Or is that… is that Frostbite? How can you know when all you see is metal? When he's burning as much as he's freezing? He always knew he would die in the suit one day, people don't get it when he says that he is the suit, but he always knew he would die in it. Just as it saved him from the cave. He was fine with this knowledge, accepted it, but he didn't expect the death to be this drawn out. He didn't expect to be alone when FRIDAY was always with him.

She must be so scared. She was still so young. If he survived this, he was tearing the restrictions from her. She deserved to girl, to feel, to grow and Rogers has discarded him like trash, why should he give credence to his wants and words now? His baby girl deserved everything.

He wishes she was with him. It's a selfish wish. It sounds be cruel to force her to watch him bleed away till there was nothing left but ice.

He just didn't expect to be so alone

He didn't expect it to be so cold.

As connoisseur of panic attacks in recent years, you'd really think he would know. But his body feels all sorts of just, wrong. The cold, the ice and the wind feels like it's sinking into his bones and burning him on the way down. Breathing through shattered ice and glass. The cold has gotten into every inch of him. Every cell of his being. Winter has taken up residence inside him. or is babbling about winter winds in his bones, rattling about in his skull a sign of isolation, and that he's losing it? Or is that delirium?

The silence, except that eerie, quiet howl, it is oppressive. Heavy, the ice, the never ending ice, that he can't run from… is it already getting to him?

Already? Is it already? Even if he knew how long it's been, it feels like it's been years, even though he knows that is ridiculous. Maybe, if his brain would just shut up! Even for a bit! Just give him a break from constantly supplying him with information that is hellish to consider. Just to be blissfully unaware, just for a few minutes, ignorant of what the cold, the ice and exposure can do to the human human body.
Tony had always known the worst thing you could do to him is lock him away in his brain with the silence. Nothing to do but think. Torture him, hurt him, drown him, cut him, sleep deprivation, none of it compares to the twists and turns his mind will make. Unable to vent itself, it turns on him. Angry, starving, tearing, biting, ripping and shredding away his sanity bit by bit.

Sure, he'd worked some techniques to help out as a kid, as a survival mechanism from this exact thing, but it's still torture to him. His mind needs something to work on but here there is nothing and thoughts were slipping through his fingers like trying to hold onto water.

His mind spirals too fast for him to catch sometimes. Being a genius is all fun and games till you're at the mercy of your own mind that just Will. Not. Stop.

What he wouldn't give for his music now.

How long he's been in this timeless ice prison? In this metal coffin? Could be a few hours, or days. He's lost time somewhere and the pure white outside with his blurred vision doesn't lend itself for tracking the hours.

Not that he's trying.

That would be counting down how long people aren't looking for him.

Because why would Rogers tell someone where he is. Leave no man behind but such lines and creeds are not fit Tony.

That thought stops him. No. He will not lose his mind to the ice. It may be stealing his body, piece by piece, but it will not claim his mind. His mind was his. It was his to control.

Tony forcefully pushes all that back. His mind, time and Ice, are his biggest enemies right now. His fingers twitch and his eyes slide closed as he decides what to do. He knows he can't sleep, sleep would be dangerous. As tempting as it might be. He definitely knows that much. Closing his eyes seems like the worst thing he could do. But Tony's holograms existed in his mind long before he made them a reality.

So he sinks.

He sinks away from the cold, the ice and that damned wind. From the pain, the suffering and isolation, he skitters away from the memories, and the knowledge that Rogers knew, and that he was, once again, not good enough. From the familiar deep ache of betrayal.

All that pain, whilst familiar, is not what he needs.

In the darkness of his mind blue comes to life. All around him, sparkling displays with wonderful things surround him. Himself stood in the middle. Pictures of people he loves. He throws himself into Peters suit with a vengeance.

.......... 

Some unknown time later, he surges awake, gasping with lungs at far less capacity than what he had to deal with back when he still had the arc reactor. Panicked that he had fallen asleep, just how stupid was he to allow that to happen?! Things are darker now, is it night? The snow is still bright. Weird. There is just blurriness with pain, and the shining white of the snow. Blinking is agonising, like his eyelids a sandpaper, and he barely making anything out.

Everything hurts, just pain is everywhere now it's hard to work out what hurts more.
'Not that that isn't a fun game to play.'

He snarls at himself, angry that he let himself drift like that, he doesn't try to hold on to the anger, he is more exhausted now than before and anger is tiring at the best of times. Instead he decides to focus on his hands again. He tried tapping his right hand first, gets to 3 and then hears the 4 5, kind of, but doesn't feel it. Then he goes to do his left hand and... Nothing. He didn't consider that with his plan, that it could be a play by play of what he might be losing.

He relearns the meaning of fear. Again. He thought he knew every flavour, he was wrong.

Utter dread sinks into him. Stealing his breath right out from his pained chest. The shaking is less too, he's still shivering, it started up slowly as he woke and his back feels on fire from the pain. His chest is still torn up but he can't feel blood dripping anymore. The ice on his face feels like it's slicing into his flesh. None of it compares to the feeling, or lack of, and the pain in his fingers. None of it produces the same bone deep level of fear.

It coils around his heart and settles along with the ice into his bones and leaves him more shaken than the nightmare that woke him up. Of Steve slamming the shield into the arc reactor... but this time, this time it was as still in his chest, without wearing the suit. Yet, Steve just stared down at him, with that single minded determination, and the arc reactor cracked under his strength, his chest split open and the rest was pain. Jerking his awake which triggered more pain. Waking from that dream to the living nightmare he was in, was a different level of surreal. The pain had forced him awake, he was sweating, despite the icy room, and just in so much pain. He could feel his body was hitting itself limit, not just for pain, but for everything.

He knew pain, chronic pain had been his normal for years now. He had a pretty impressive pain tolerance, but this, this was different.

It was front and centre, instead of the steady drip, drip, drip constantly in the back of his mind, seeping into every activity that he had endured for years. It wore him down, but he still pushed on, still did things he used to do. The difference here was that he couldn't do anything. He couldn't power though, he was just trapped. Waiting on the potential Mercy of Rogers. Hell, if the man would send someone for him to save him from this existence he'd take the blame for everything, even if they were being idiots thinking they could fight 117 countries who actually agreed on something. Even if he couldn't understand that a man wearing the American flag telling 116 different countries that he knew best was all kinds of fuck up. if it got him out of here he'd do it.

This knowledge that he was slowly losing touch with parts of his own body, it's a different perspective brutally forced down his throat. He still can't move, when he tries, the blinding white pain of his chest leaves him unconscious for however long... and he wakes up missing something more. He's not even sure how many times that's happened now. Delirium clouding his mind.

That dark shadow in his mind, the Howard-Rogers voice, It's telling him to just do it, so he doesn't have to feel the ice taking him. Just momentary pain and the... Nothing. He can rest. Sleep. Not hurt. It would be easy.

He can't do it however, and not just because the suggestion came from that shadow. That's pretty much incentive all on its own but he has a better reason. When he's awake, he can move, at least a small amount, he knows what is happening to him, and that's better, somehow. The idea that the ice would be taking him unawares as he drifts, unconscious, it's a brand of fear that was seared into his mind since the first time he woke up on the concrete floor, confused about everything.

Even if he feels like his mind is fraying around the edges.
Even if he's pretty sure this is driving him over the edge.

The blur from terror to boredom then panic, piled with the fear and then that cold dread, it's too much, that now he doesn't know what it is. It is like he's taken in too much that it's now nothing. Like the sensory overload had climbed so high it his mind can't comprehend it anymore.

He doesn't know how long he lies like that. Still. Eyes open. Staring. It hurts too keep them closed, even though he's pretty sure keeping them opening isn't helping. Right now, he was just aiming for pain reduction. Survival. Not sure if he's feeling nothing or maybe everything and it's blinded him, not sure what is real and what is his mind coming up with to torment him. He's not sure of anything. Except the winter that's taken up home in his bones, and his heart.

He opens his eyes again, again, not remembering when he closed them or why. Things had stopped making sense a while ago time had narrowed to survive each passing moment. Disjointed. Frayed. Broken. There is no looking to the future. There is just surviving, each moment is an accomplishment. He's not even sure why he opened them, other than the fact it hurts. Did he hear something? No, there is just the wind and silence, there is nothing to hear.

Blurry whites, greys and shadows, is all he sees. It hurts to see, but it hurts to keep his eyes shut too.

This time it's different, something is different, he knows what everything looks like around him by now, in perfect detail, even if it's now so blurry it's just like a dark monotone colors. It's practically impossible to make out details, but something is new. He blinks, a lot, even if it's agonising each time, like sandpaper scraping and he feels something warm around his left eye. But he keeps trying because he needs to know what it is. Trying to bring things into focus but it hurts so much but he has to try. He can't give in. Not yet. No matter how much he wants to. It might be a friend, it might by Hydra.

Although with the state he is in right now, he's not sure how to put up much of a fight. Or any of one. He's practically gift wrapped in a very broken gift basket. He suspects if it is Hydra he would not last long in their care, not with how much this has taken out of him. He's surprised it took them this long to come from him.

There is someone leaning over him, looking into his eyes he thinks, but it's too blurry to make it. He tries to flinch back, retreat, move, something, anything, now this is panic of a different flavour.

How many different kinds of fear, dread and panic can one person experience in a set amount of time and stay sane? Is he still sane? He doesn't even know anymore.

It isn't until he finally hears the voice that has been talking to him for a while, but he couldn't hear it over the fear and the blood rushing in his ears, then.. Then he stills. He hears it, and then the fight and energy seeps out of him extremely fast it, leaving him lax, floating. He sags and laughs but it's more broken and not the good side of hysterical.

"I've got you sir, we found you."

Can he rest now? He feels like he's been holding on each moment for so long.
He's just so **tired** and **cold**, he feels like he *is* the cold now.

He is so exhausted he barely has the energy to close his eyes, plus it would really hurt. He tries to make out Visions colours but damn it hurts. He'd really like to see Vision at least once though.

There so much pain and cold, his back is still burning and his chest feels mangled and frozen he doesn't even want to think about his hands now.

He's not sure that he can put himself back together this time.

"We'll have you home and warm in no time."

How can he ever be warm again?

Chapter End Notes

So. Um, I hope this wasn't too terrible for the first thing I've written in 8 years!
Guilt All Around

Chapter Summary

Tony is sure he's doing better.

Rhodey can't believe how stupid he is for believing that.

Chapter Notes

Wow, I can't believe the amount of responses I got from my first chapter o.o

This was actually written the next day, but I figured I'd try and go weekly for updates. To give me more time to proof and get ahead, pace and not burn out.

Also if you notice the Dresden reference, I'm happy. XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"He’s my friend."

Steve stated that like it explained everything.

“So was I.”

Tony felt ripped raw...

“That shield doesn’t belong to you,”

Tony yelled at Steve’s retreating back. Needing that anger. Needing to wrap it around himself to drown the voice in his mind. Needed to tear something so fundamental to Steve's identity from him, so he could maybe feel an inch of what his lies had wrought in Tony's mind.

“You don't deserve it. My father made that shield.”

Tony POV

September 7th

Tony surged awake, pretty sure his own hand smacking off his forehead was what woke him up, but before he got a chance to feel his head. Shivers racked through him, wiping all coherent thoughts from his mind. All except the cold. His vision whited out around the edges, getting both brighter and painful, squeezing his eyes shut against the stabbing pain. It sounded like someone was talking, but it was so far away he couldn't make out words. His eyes clenched shut tight as he scrambled for the strings of anger he could feel falling away in his mind, in the hopes that maybe anger could rage through the cold.
He curled up in the blankets, trying to get warm, brain swimming but it didn't abate as everything slipped away. He swore he could see the ice creeping towards him again, despite having his eyes locked down. Tony all but threw himself from the bed at that, stumbling slightly, watching ice creep closer had fast become a source of unadulterated terror for him. The cold had been bad since the freezing nights in the desert, this had just added to it. He staggered towards the shower, practically chucking himself in, still in his night clothes. Reaching out to turn it on as warm water rained down, it helped, slightly, just not enough but at that thought he reached out again and the water got warmer... He curled in on himself and just... gave up for the moment.

Rhodey POV

"Colonel Rhodes!"

Rhodey smiled at a camera, FRIDAY refusing to drop the colonel from his name actually made him smile. Even though he was out now, but still, she insisted.

"Hey small Fry, I'm here early, where's Tones? Workshop?"

"He's in his bedroom and you have to hurry, he had a nightmare and he's overridden the safety in the shower."

"Shit"

Rhodey tossed his stuff on his lap off to the side and span his chair towards the lift, he slipped his hands from the silver bar on his wheels to the black one. Giving him a little more kick and speed because Tony didn't how to not upgrade something that came within a 100 metres of Rhodye. (Tony still refused to believe that manual chairs with battery packs were a thing before he started poking it, sniffing, head tilted to show he was unimpressed. Well, at least arc reactor powered ones were new, shockingly.) He didn't use it often, wanting to build up his upper body strength, but it was damned handy occasionally, like when you had to be fast. Or the occasional too steep ramp. Or accidentally running into annoying people.

"Fry, can you get the temp down at all?"

"I've been trying! Every time I get it down, he just puts it back up!"

Unlike most of the places he visited, the compound and especially Tony's apartment, was an accessibility haven. If Tony noticed anything that made it so Rhodye couldn't move as freely as if he still was on two legs? The next time Rhodye returned, things had changed. He never saw the changes happening, Tony was sneaky like that. He didn't need to do multiple awkward, stilted turns or dodge furniture in tiny gaps and there were none of those annoying single, small steps everyone just forgot existed. Yes, his mind was thinking banal details as he made his way to his brother, otherwise he'd been thinking about how fast he could have run.

"Can you lock him out of the controls?"

"I tried, he's now locked me out entirely! You have to do something! Please!"

The genuine panic in her voice gave him another surge, so happy he had decided to come back earlier than he had planned from the current rounds of Accords amendments. He unceremoniously bashed open the bathroom door with his chair and slammed into a wall of steam so thick he could barely see.
"Dammit, you idiot, you told me this had stopped."

He muttered to himself, this wasn't the first panic attack Tony had had that came with a desperation to get warm. Even in roasting hot environments. He was also kicking himself for believing that in the first place, as he made his way to the shower, sweating already. He didn't want to know how hot the shower was to get to this level of sauna like environment or how long it had run for before he'd arrived. He also didn't want to think about what would have happened had he not come home early. The rest of their little family unit was away right now, plus, Tony tried to avoid the teens seeing him like this.

Tony looked a lot like a drowned kitten, he bit back the laugh because what the hell brain? Not the time! Tony's skin was definitely on the very, very red side, but not as much as he had worried about. At least he hoped through the steam. Visions of Tony blistered in the shower were not fun and they'd been flying across his mind since the doors to the lift closed.

"Tony, tones, come on, you have to get out of the shower, or let FRIDAY back in. You're scaring your girl."

The oppressive heat now had him mostly dripping uncomfortably, this wasn't working. This latest lot of panic attacks Tony had come out of Siberia with, seemed to make it so Tony didn't hear well during them, rendering most of his protocols effectively useless. Sometimes he or FRIDAY could pull him out by talking, but other times he might as well be screaming at a wall. He kept talking anyway, just random crap that came to his mind as he reached down to grab Tony by his arm, leg, anything, to drag him out of the spray at least, yet he ended up pulling his hand back with little short of a scream himself. That was a damned sight hotter than he had expected. How the hell had the shower even gotten this hot? He didn't even know that the showers could get this hot!

"Fry, keep trying to override him."

"Since he locked me out he raised the temperature again, it's holding now but it's too high and I can't get back in!"

FRIDAY practically shouted… From the bedroom.

Tony must have locked her out of the bathroom completely before turning the temp up and huddling down.

He glanced around looking for… Something, he needed an idea, whilst Tony was not blistering under that water, he would soon if it kept up like this and Rhodey definitely would. He didn't really care, but if Tony came out of a panic attack having injured Rhodey, he knew that would be worse. He also knew that there was no use waiting for the hot water to run out. Not at any property of Tony's, but definitely not at the compound, especially after Tony's latest round of expansions.

How best to deal with holes in your floor but massive expansion and moving tons of people in? At least in Tony's mind. He wrapped a towel around his hand and arm a few times for lack of a better option, just wishing that Tony had one of those cheap plastic shower curtains instead of glass, he grit his teeth and thrust it back under the spray. He hissed in pain as scalding hot water quickly soaked into the towel, his hand caught around Tony's arm and pulled. He'd deal with everything else when Tony wasn't under the boiling water, last time it had just been the heating.

Very thankful that the breaks on his wheelchair held, even on the wet tiles. Launching himself into the shower really wouldn't help.

At his hiss of pain however, Tony's eyes flew open and the water shut off at the same time.
"Rhodey, what... What happened to your arm?"

Tony frowned, his red arms steadily fading to pink in front of his eyes as Rhodey blinked past the sweat. Tony was seemingly unaware of where he was and only focused on Rhodey's hand.

'Don't yell at people coming out of panic attacks. Don't yell at people coming out of panic attacks. Don't yell at people coming out of panic attacks.'

He chanted in his head.

"Me? You're the one trying to do a rendition of red lobster, and you're worried about my hand?!"

'Dammit'

He cursed internally

"Sorry Tones, you just had me worried there for a minute."

He tried to tug his arm back, it wasn't bad, maybe a little scalded at best and he likely wouldn't feel it 20 minutes later, but any pain and Tony was going to turn into a humongous pile of guilt and start rendition 121 of 'why I shouldn't be near people'. Only to bemoan his recovery away from everything the next morning of course.

"Boss! It's good to be you back with us."

FRIDAY'S relief was palpable, Rhodey swore that every time he went to the UN, he came back and she'd leapt forward again. He didn't know if she could feel relieved but he definitely got that sense from her. Despite the situation, he couldn't help but feel a little proud of her.

**Tony POV**

Tony blinked in confusion for a minute before realising he was fully dressed, and sat in the shower. More than a little soggy. He closed his eyes in a sigh, realising he must have had a panic attack. Again, dammit. He'd been doing so well! Extremis had returned his vitals back to normal, leaving him floating a little. Out of all the weird quirks of his new body, and there were some really fecking weird ones, this snap-back after affect was probably one of his favourites, he still wasn't used to it.

Once, it would have taken hours to come down fully from a panic attack like that... now? It felt like the panic attack was ripped out of him, leaving him just, well him. System Reboot as such. Even if he went running around the compound for 2 hours, all he had to do was stop for a few minutes and everything returned to normal levels.

"Of course I'm worried about you, I'm fine, I heal, my stupid brain caused you pain, I'm not even sure how this happened."

He muttered angrily to himself, he had been doing better, dammit. Extremis did so much, but wiping trauma from Tony's brain was out of it's limit, well, maybe he could delete the memories, but honestly, he was scared of how much of him that could make him lose. He'd thought that Extremis quickly correcting things like spiked heart rate and adrenaline when he was alarmed would translate to less intense panic attacks, maybe. Instead, during an attack everything went haywire and his mind reached out without him in the driver's seat. Because who didn't need a fun new level of PTSD symptoms?
"Boss, when you were.. In the shower, I don't think you noticed but you used your overrides and locked me out of the bathroom."

Tony winced. Dammit. He'd hurt Rhodey, booted and terrified FRIDAY. He stood up, a little dazed, and very drenched. Vague memories coming back of fighting with FRIDAY as she desperately tried to lower the temperature and he just kept raising it. Biting down against the chill of his wet bed clothes clinging to his skin he took a second to focus himself. In more control now than he was earlier, he just raised his body temperature to combat the chill. The cold seeping away and feeling less like he was going to fall on the floor shivering was definitely an improvement. He turned back to the two people he'd just hurt and terrified. Sighing internally that he sucked as a person, let alone a friend. He pulled the towel gently of Rhodes arm. The look on the other man's face showed that he was tolerating this only for Tony's benefit because Tony refused point blank to release his hand.

Dick move, maybe, using your genetically enhanced strength against your brother, but he had to fix his mistakes.

"Fry, make a note for us to set something so 'this' doesn't happen again? We'll work something that needs Platypus override codes for anything to do with temperature controls, maybe?"

He frowned, working out a way that he might not just hack and steamroll through would be tricky, and it would not exactly be an easy thing to test for either. He wasn't sure how he'd done some of the things he'd done when his emotions got control of him, let alone during panic attacks. He might be a bit of a masochist when it came to testing dumb stuff on himself, but triggering panic attacks like this was too much, even for him. Wow, he did have a line.

He sent a warm brush off code out towards FRIDAY in apology, undoing any lock out codes at the same time and felt a tentative glimmer of pink and silver code against his mind. That gave him pause, she'd never been nervous like that before, even when he first woke up from his coma, screaming in pain and clawing at his face, terrified he'd gone blind thanks to bandages over his eyes. She'd surged forward to circle his mind with Vision, full of confidence and determination to protect him from more pain.

Guilt of how she'd failed him in Siberia had been wrapped around her. But never nervous. The two of them had taught him how to lock down his mind and only let in what he wanted vs the information flood he had been drowning in. It went from falling off a waterfall into very violent rapids to a deep lake he could dip into as he pleased. Blame Vision for the 'hand wavy' descriptions, he was expanding his vocabulary to sound less like a machine and had decided everyone must join him. He could phase through walls too, so Tony had given in to the word a day and listening to him read interesting stuff he found. It was occasionally hilarious.

Tony sent a more confident brush out to her, hoping to draw her in, and she practically ran towards him in a code version of a tackle-hug, that made him smile. Getting to 'hug' his kids was one of the best things for being... whatever he was now.

'What did I do to have you so nervous baby girl?'

He felt the hesitation again, that really wasn't like FRIDAY, he didn't think there was a line of hesitation anywhere in her code. He should know, when he couldn't sleep he enjoyed going through to see the leaps and bounds she was making. That's when it hit him, another punch in the gut like Rhodey's hiss of pain.

He'd done that.
He'd caused it.

He'd hurled her away from his mind and locked down, and doubled down by then fighting her trying to shut the shower off or just turn the temperature down... she'd been trying to protect him and he'd just shoved her away. Likely not kindly either, even though the memory wasn't forthcoming, so he pretty much assumed the worst. He'd even locked her out of the room entirely. She wouldn't have been able to even see him.

'I'm sorry baby girl, I didn't mean too.'

He choked out. Trying to fill his grief at hurting her into his words and lines of code.

He felt her code ripple in what he assumed was relief. He was still learning the intricacies of code from the other side, everytime he thought he knew everything, something else popped up and sent him scrambling to catch up. Being at a computer typing was nothing like code flowing from your mind. It was a living, vibrant thing. Add in the self learning AI he'd built FRIDAY from, the strangeness of Extremis in his mind, almost turning it to code... it was definitely strange.

He was likely making things weirder too. If he trusted anyone smart enough he'd love to see what they thought of his and FRIDAY'S codes twining together. But that was a big ask and he was still facing... Glitches. Hiccups. Bumps. And they were usually, you guessed it, weird and unpredictable.

As such, he was still technically in lock down. 'Healing' to the rest of the world after it was announced that he was out of his coma. That still irritated him, that someone at the hospital had tweeted that he was in a damned coma in the first place, fare to say, Pepper threw her shoes at Rhodes head because that's how she'd found that something was wrong. He was fine though, could cartwheel around the kitchen, if he wanted, he just wasn't 100% sure that if a reporter irritated him that he wouldn't accidentally destroy every piece of tech on them. Or around them.

Or you know, melt another server farm, but, in his defence, that had been Pyms server farm. So, he found it hard to not laugh about that really. Idiots fault anyway, at least try to be subtle when hacking SI, bad luck that Tony had been rooting around the servers at the same time and decided to chase the hacker. He'd sent Hope some flowers after, with a 'Sorry-Not Sorry' note attached and his number.

That had turned out well, they hadn't spoken much since they were young after their fathers decided hating each other was better than tolerating each others presence for profit and the convenience of ditching the kids in the same place. He'd missed her after that, and they'd been texting a lot since, Rhodes was on at him to invite her into the fold and he knew Hope was getting curious as to his media blackout, especially now she had fully signed up on the Avengers, she new Tony was 'Currently Inactive' but had seen him for short periods.

'It's OK Da, I understand'

FRIDAY said, warmly, and happily, effectively stopping his brain from running down 20 different paths. That happened more now, more space he suspected, but it was faster in his brain. FRIDAY could pull him out of the current. Luckily, he wasn't just sat staring blankly for 5 minutes when his mind literally wandered, occasionally into different servers, it was more like 5 seconds now.

He sent another brush of code, smiling, she only called him Da in his head and he always showed her that he loved it. He had totally not cried the first time he did it, and then he'd spent the next hour convincing FRIDAY that they were happy tears. No wonder she's come so far dealing with emotions lately, she'd gone from watching and observing humans with their complex emotions, to
getting a backstage pass to the mess of Tony Stark's brain. Talk about jumping in the deep end, but she was swimming strong. She pulled back slightly to let him deal with Rhodey. It hadn't been long outside of his mind, but Rhodey was watching him critically. Rhodey practically had a degree in deciphering Tony's facial expressions, and the stupid smile he got when one of his kids referred to him as dad in some way or another was a huge tell.

"You two are talking in your brain again. You know the rule, when there are sentient, non-code beasts in the room, we use VERBAL means of communication. It's rule 4!"

"Sorry Colonel."

FRIDAY chirped, sounding not even slightly.

"Sorry platypus."

Tony sounded a tiny bit repentant but it was kind of ruined by that stupid smile still plastered on his face.

"You're hand didn't get it too bad, if you run it under cold water it should be fine."

He slipped back to frowning at his hand. Rhodey rolled his eyes dramatically. Showing that he knew this and flicked Tony with his other hand to get him to stop staring at him guiltily.

"My hand is obviously fine, stop staring at it whilst looking like a kicked puppy."

"I would have been fine, you didn't have to… Hurt yourself for me."

Tony ran his hand down his face, releasing Rhodey's hand and then rubbing the back of his neck. Practically wringing his hands together like a teenager that just got caught sneaking out, he was also guiltily, trying to avoid looking at Rhodey right now.

Not wanting to See something that might show he was done with his antics.

That the burden of 'Tony Fucking Stark' was finally too much.

One of the weird Extremis 'abilities', and dear Tesla it sounded freaking weird to talk about having 'abilities'. He still hadn't got past the sarcastic finger quote stage when they were brought up. He saw too much now. Way more than he even thought possible. Sometimes it was so bad it blinded him, not seeing people at all. It tended to be easier one on one. He was slowly working up to being in the room with multiple people. Another reason for the 'lock down', that was seriously starting to chafe.

"Tony. Just because you can sit under boiling hot water and heal does not, and will not, ever mean that I will sit back and watch you do it. 'Fine' is not good enough in my books. I want you 'brilliant'. Better than even. Just because you can heal doesn't mean you don't feel pain. Just because you can survive it, doesn't mean you should, especially just because it might be 'easier' on me."

Rhodey just looked exasperated and waited for Tony to look at him again. He'd worked out in the early days that something was different now with Tony's vision and not to push Tony about it. Something that he had never encoded into Extremis when he was playing around with it, when he was bored. Something neither of them had even thought to consider.

Whilst Tony had been trying to make it perfect and seeing just what he could stretch it too, but he'd never intended it to be used on him, or anyone really. So he'd never tested how it would react with
his blood, on his body. Hadn't thought to see how it would react to the traces of Starkanium that he hadn't even noticed lingering after the reactor was removed. Trace amounts, they didn't do anything... But apparently Extremis liked it, liked it enough to work with what it had and ran with it. Tony had told him bits, he'd worked out some on his own, but Tony kind of hated talking about it.

No matter what people said, it was another sign he had lost something. Humanity was something huge to lose after all. Although he didn't say that to Rhodey anymore since the frying pan incident.

He brought his head up, Tony saw Rhodey's eyes sharpen and knew the scientist side was showing, a side people usually forgot about him, they were 'Mr Stark and Colonel Rhodes', people forgot about Rhodey's PhD and business people seemed to forget his, weirdly. Tony didn't care, being underestimated was fun occasionally, he'd been walking the fine line of 'Yes, I'm a genius' whilst still concealing enough of his intelligence to be overlooked by some people his whole life. Ever since that stupid reporter had asked his dad if his 4 year old son was going to surpass him during that press conference over his circuit board. That was a lesson learnt painfully and was pretty ingrained by the time the man died. Was killed even, his brain skittered away from touching that.

Focus on Rhodey.

Rhodey watched how Tony looked around him, before directly at him, seeing.. Something. Tony knew that he was itching for him to tell him more, and not at being all grumpy that Harley had dragged more information out of him without Tony fleeing the room shouting 'It's too weird!' whenever Rhodey poked. Which, whilst hilarious, didn't really help with the wondering. Tony took a deep breath and did what Harley kept telling him to. Just let it happen, stop fighting it till you black out because that's stupid.

His response that Harley was stupid was met with the most unimpressed glare the now ridiculously tall teenager had ever aimed at him.

He had to admit, it was kind of pretty. Beautiful even. 'Ugh'. He always struggled to explain it, but it looked like brushes of water colour moving around people. But.. Not. Usually in a variety of different and confusing ways that took him freaking ages to decode, or seconds, and made no logical sense. At first he'd made a list of what he thought certain colours meant, and then he'd see another person with the same colour in the utterly wrong situation for it and he'd 'know' it meant something else. As abilities go it was frustrating and...

Ugh. It was like soft science.

In his brain.

All the time!

Sometimes, if he got overwhelmed, he could only see the colours and as such had walked into several walls trying to escape. Sometimes they got so intense he passed out. Sometimes, they faded back and he had to switch feeds so to speak to bring them up again. It was extremely annoying, but quite useful, which was also annoying. It was extremely hard to lie to him now, which he liked. He could also determine surface personality traits sometimes, and weird information that made him seem wise and knowledgeable would just pop into his brain, out of seemingly nowhere, with zero control. He'd been practicing on some of the people who knew he was in hiding but not of his changes from behind mirrored glasses. It had helped him start to trust people he never would have again without it. Much to Rhodey's annoyance.

Rhodey though, when he looked, was all silvers and blues, strength like a cape wrapped around him, shining metal, like the armour really... But fluid like quicksilver, there were blues like the
ocean, pinging consistency in his mind, they melted to rich greens, like huge sprawling forests, giving him a strong feeling of being grounded, he had just told Rhodey Silver, Blue and Green however when he asked, none of this poetic nonsense that he was still blaming Vision for. He was everything Tony wasn't, yet, everything he needed but would never say so. There were fractures in the silver, burning stripes in the green, but it still held together strong. Tony wondered what it had been like before the accident. The fractures were filling more and more each time he Saw though. People had base colours that stayed the same, but strong emotions tended to add or take away sometimes. Rhodey's guilt tarnished the silver for example.

He didn't even want to know what his were like, so thankful it didn't work in mirrors and he made an effort to ignore his arms. He was shattered most likely. Repeatedly. Held together with crazy glue and duct tape. Rhodey's quiet determination to beat every new obstacle life threw at him was a mystery to him. Tony just… Weathered what life threw at him. There were flashes of red in the silver and out of it, moving faster but was always present, darting in, out, around the other colours too. That made him breathe easier, he knew, somehow, that that red was for him. On others red had different meanings, on Rhodey is was just, him. He shook his head, focusing again as his actual vision had blurred.

Damn. He must be a sorry sight right now, Rhodey wasn't asking him what he Saw. He was trying not to look at his hand too. He hid a flinch, moderately successfully, realising he wasn't doing his usual of hiding it and stuffed it in his very wet pj pocket, ew. Pleasant. He needed to get changed he thought whilst he tried to ignore the now pinched look on Rhodey's face. No matter how many times they told him he didn't have to hide in that first week… He still did. They were just being kind. It was the very least he could do. It wasn't what someone wanted to see after all, especially when he wasn't wearing a long sleeved shirt.

"I'm going to peel myself out of this.. Urgh."

"Then we are going to sleep."

"But Rhodeybear, Platypus, Sour Patch, light of my life. I just woke up!"

"Small Fry, how long was Tony awake for and how long was he asleep for"

"Fry, don't you da-"

"He was up for 62 hours and slept for 1 hour and 36 minutes Colonel."

Tony cringed internally, he'd gotten caught up creating new nano particles out of his remaining vibranium. He'd created a hive for them in a newly upgraded arc reactor he'd made especially for them. He wanted them for more than a back up suit, that he could manipulate freely, he had Extremis-Suit Mk 1 as his current main suit, but he wanted that as the back up. It was the first of the suits designed precisely with Extremis in mind for his Enhancile Range of suits. Rhodey's naming scheme. But with the nano machines he was working on a suit developed entirely from them that could self repair too, Bleeding Edge Mk 2, that one would come from the hive and form around him unlike the Extremis suit that he stored internally now, not that anyone knew that, yet. He really needed a list of who knew what.

It might seem excessive, effectively carrying two suits around 24/7, but Siberia had taught something.

Was he paranoid?

Probably.
But just because you're paranoid doesn't mean your best friend won't turn on you and slam a vibranium shield into your heart.

"Fri! How could you! You know the local college could always take you on."

He crowed with no heat behind hind the threat as usual.

"Sorry Boss, your own protocols allow me to give information to select people when you pass 60 hours."

"Why 60? Did I set that? That's a stupid number. 72 would make much more sense and by way more reasonable and then you wouldn't have snitched on me!"

Tony groused whilst Rhodey looked triumphant. He rolled out of the bathroom and a few seconds later, Tony was hit in the face. Twice. He blinked down at the pj's now in his hands, okay. Maybe he was a bit tired. His reactions were somewhat (a lot) improved thanks to the virus now running through his veins, and yet, Rhodey just lobbed two things, at his face, without him realising. He didn't even realise that he'd caught them, or what they were, until he looked down. Holding them away from himself to avoid them getting wet.

"I'll, Um, get ready for bed then?"

"You do that. And I'm sleeping in here so you can't creep off to the lab and make FRIDAY lie to me-"

"Would I do that?"

Tony interrupted, hand on his chest, dramatically staggering back. Rhodey just raised that eyebrow of his. The one that says 'I'm not impressed, I know you!' It might have been weird that Tony and Rhodey's eyebrows had a secret language, but in the last few months that was the -least- weird thing within his little family.

"Again."

Rhodey finished before spinning his chair skillfully on the spot and disappearing into the bedroom, probably to get ready himself and sort his stuff out Tony assumed. FRIDAY quietly informed him that some of the helper bots SWISH & SWASH had collected his stuff and brought it to his bedroom.

Tony couldn't help but grin a little anyway. True, this hadn't been the best of situations, scalding showers and his brain blocking Fry… But. But! Not once did Rhodey apologise to him for making the decisions he had when Tony was in a coma. Rhodey knew that Tony had never wanted the full, suped up Extremis, or even the weaker version permanently. Last time he'd used an even slower version so it could be deactivated when the surgery on his heart was complete. It left him with a heart condition that if he'd kept extrems could probably been fixed, but he'd chose to soldier on.

This time however, even with Cho and the cradle.. It hadn't been enough. Tony had been slipping away, apparently he could survive Siberia.. But being back… maybe he'd used too much energy fighting the cold, surviving. There just hadn't been enough of him left to fight.

So, Friday had told Rhodey of his secret side project when Tony had been in the coma for 6 days, long enough for protocols for control of his private servers to transfer to Rhodey to kick in. Told him about how whenever he was bored for a few years he'd worked on seeing just what he could add to it and have it still be stable. That it might be Tony's only choice as it had higher regeneration properties than the other version. Unfortunately he hadn't made a middle ground. He hadn't thought
about it really, so Rhodey was left with the new SuppedUp version, or the old SuppedDown
version. And when the latter had already failed. The former… Well, that couldn't be removed or
even neutralised when it was used.

It would be for life and completely rewrite his DNA. (He had considered another version to turn
him back in the early days, after he passed out from seeing 3 nurses, but using Extremis technically
a 4th time, with all his new weird additions would frankly be stupid). However long that would be.
Rhodey had tried to wake him up, to ask... But time was short, Tony was skipping deeper, Cho was
literally building him a ribcage as his sternum was too shattered for the cradle to rebuild. It had
basically turned to shrapnel in his chest when Roger's hit home, he guessed that Rogers forgot at
that point that Tony was human, with damage to his chest already present, add in the level of force
required to deactivate an arc reactor...

So Rhodey had been swamped with guilt every time he saw Tony. He could mostly keep it off his
face, occasionally he even kept it out of his eyes. But, Tony could See now. And it ate at him
something awful when he saw it, so he tried to hide the obvious examples, there was almost as
much guilt as he felt seeing Rhodey in the chair, not flying, not walking, not running. They were
both drowning in it he realised grimly.

He peeled the wet clothes off of himself, his skin mostly dry from the increase in his temperature,
but he grabbed a huge fluffy towel anyway and threw a thought toward the extractor fan to clear
the last bits of steam. He dried and dressed whilst pulling up the latest plans for Rhodey's braces.
He had a few options he was developing separately. Thankfully they'd carried on running in the
background, but he still needed to check over everything. There was enough space in his mind now
that he could develop stuff without actively thinking about them, letting his mind render basic
processes in the background, so to speak, but this had been the first night he'd left something
running when he slept.

'Stupid, should of picked something less important.'

He kicked the door open, chastising himself, as he turned to brush his teeth again, his mouth felt all
foggy. He totally opened the door to air out the room, not to check up on Rhodey, who was just
relaxing on the bed with his eyes closed, eyebrow raised because he knew Tony was checking up
on him. He really sucked at subtle. At least he was smiling though. Which he had to be honest,
made him smile too.

He scrubbed a towel over his face a few times before looking in the mirror. He can see Rhodey as
he opens his eyes from here too, no colours in mirrors. So just Rhod, which makes him grin until
he tracks what he's looking at. Dammit, his hand again. Why was he forgetting tonight? Lack of
sleep probably he thought back at himself uncharitably. He'd almost made an art form of hiding his
hand when he wasn't alone these last few weeks. Talking was tricky, but he'd been neck deep in
Accords and General Ross bullshit that he'd hardly noticed. Then Rhodey had been taking his work
and presenting it to the UN, giving the impression to the world Tony was working whilst not long
out of a coma.

Amusingly it was making people less vicious towards him in the press, which was frankly, plain
weird. After that picture ran, of him in the coma, Pepper had scrambled expecting a stock drop and
trouble, but the press was oddly.. nice to him. As we're people. He was still squinting at that,
because the press were a vicious brood, he wasn't used to it pointed away from him this much.
Right now anger at anyone not 'baseline human' was easy to come by. There were still requests for
what exactly happened, so far Tony had talked any phone interview around in circles.

The pain was still really obvious in Rhod's eyes, Tony decided finally that he's tired of that, he
wants it gone. But the eye contact still makes him flinch, worse when he can see himself. He'd managed earlier when things were crazy, but now it's calm again… he wonders if Rhodey just sees something that he forced on him? Or something terrifying? Wrong even? No one has said these things but Tony's brain can be a vicious little thing.

He realised that he really sucked as a friend if he was still seeing that in his eyes. He should have thanked him for saving his life. Thinking back, wondering if he'd actually said the words, and was quietly horrified to realise that he hadn't. Not once. No wonder he still stared at the obvious reminders. His metal left wrist and hand being oddly the less obvious one. It was sleek and quite pretty if you ignored the horrible amount of scaring, the metal a less ostentatious matt black that the kids were encouraging him to flash it up.

It was his eyes that were impossible to miss. Can't exactly tuck them into a pocket. Well, it's fine on his right side, his whisky brown eye that he's stared at in the mirror for his whole life looks back at him in the mirror. The familiar flecks of gold… lipochromes, for a fairly useless fact, enough of them that in the sun they flash gold. He'd been asked about his contacts more than once, and now, that was the normal side.

The left… that's where he Sees more from now. More than even he could have thought of, and sometimes more than he knows what to do with. It's just... More. Best description. Seems lacking, but it just is. Luckily he is well known for wearing sunglasses, at any time of the day, even indoors. The bright, vibrant arc reactor blue that makes up the whole eye would definitely get more questions than he's comfortable answering.

"I'm sorry"

"Stop platypus, you can stop now. Without your choice… I don't even want to think what that could have been like, if I'd come out of that coma."

Shuddering at that thought, eyes fixed on the matte black of his left hand. Clenching slightly on the sink and comparing the feeling to his flesh hand. Shivering as he looked at his eyes again. Those were just the bits too dead for Extremis to heal, Rhodey refused to tell him what he looked like when Vision finally got the malfunctioning suit off of him. But he knew that he'd had lost more than 1 eye and 1 hand. Pep had seen him when he was in a coma, but Rhodey had been very careful, he'd been covered and tightly wrapped in multiple blankets and both of his eyes had been covered with bandages.

Too many machines that she couldn't disconnect to check him over safely. But he knows he hadn't looked good. Even the tiny amount of him showing had been black and blue in that picture. Thinking of Pep, he winced. She was going to get suspicious about the lack of video calling soon, he just knew it. Suddenly, after all his years, only using voice calls instead of antics like inappropriately answering by video in the shower? Definitely odd. But he just couldn't explain why he had his sunglasses on in the workshop/or shower), not to her. She was already suspicious enough when he came out of the coma and suddenly hid out at the compound and drowned in work.

"But you never wanted this… You, you enjoyed being old! Let alone all the other… Stuff."

Tony sighs, torn from his thoughts of telling Pepper, turning from the sink and strolls into the bedroom, the bathroom light shut off as he left. Flopping down onto the bed sighing, a shade dramatically maybe, gotta make Rhodey smile. He wonders if hiding these things from him is what's causing Rhodey guilt to hang on so much.

"I know, I know. I enjoy being alive too."
He closed his eyes and Rhodey is silent for a minute, the main lights shutting off with a thought. Except for those damned fairy lights Rhodey looped around his headboard. And he hated them. Kind of. Or not really. The soft light was nice though, not that he'd ever admit it.

"I also like having hands. I like seeing. Even if it's all weird now."

His nose crinkles at the end, making Rhodey huff in amusement.

Tomorrow. At least around his family, around the people who already knew, he decided to stop wearing glasses all the time. And to not spend the day with his hand stuffed firmly in his pocket. He'd hidden these things at first because of the pain that flashed across his face, and anyone else's... But he wondered now, if he was dragging it out? He could do this, if not for himself, he could do this for Rhodey. For the kids too. Telling more people too, maybe.

Peter loved tinkering with his new hand, heck, HE liked tinkering with his new hand, constantly improving the range of senses, plus he didn't have to wear oven gloves now. Peter was developing a skin-sleeve too for when he was 'healed' and would be going to UN meetings and board meetings. Even though they think it would be a good idea to reveal it at some point. He's not sure about that.

Eventually his family wanted him to not hide at home at all, but they knew a level of subterfuge would possibly be needed somewhere unless he wanted to explain to the press how he'd lost a hand. He had been considering the idea himself, for a cover, but when Peter came to him all excited about it, he deleted everything he'd been noodling around with in a second, didn't want Peter getting excited and then stopping because Tony had already been on it. Peter was even corresponding with Dr Cho about it, it was weird, being hands off about something. Especially considering he'd be using it, likely often, for people out of the loop, but it was nice. Having someone build him something. Usually it was the other way around, and he loved building people things, but it was nice to be on the other side. Every time he saw the kid working on it, this warm, tentative flutter bounced around his chest, warming him up. Peter was also having fun on the make up front, Tony actually was actually getting quite good at making himself look closer to 50 than 20.

Similar to Harley and his insistence that having two completely different eyes was actually super cool and not weird or a sign he had lost his humanity. Which Harley claimed was one of the top 10 most stupid things Tony has ever said. He was honestly kind of scared to ask about the other 9... The kid even carried a notebook everywhere now for anything new Tony realised he could see. He was cagey about about what he said about others, because it felt like a breach of privacy. He only really told people their own colours.

Harley even made Tony feel less... weird discussing it. Slightly. He'd also made it his mission to find a perfect pair of sunglasses for each of Tony's new suits. Harley and Peter's idea when Tony had tried one of his old suits on and it felt.. Weird. He hadn't changed size much, but his old clothes just felt like they belonged to someone else. His favourite, apart from the red and gold, was oddly the silver one. The tie and glasses looked like quicksilver with the black shirt and suit. He'd asked him to find extras of those glasses and they'd become his main 'nonsuit' pair. The glasses were different to his standard fare, needing ones that wrapped around instead to ensure no one saw a flash of blue. It had made things less daunting, doing it with the kids.

Vision didn't even act like anything was different... you'd think Tony had always been able to see sound and weird, potentially emotional stuff in colours, and brush code against each other as 'hello' etc. Tara was currently more interested in taking things apart and putting them back together that he wondered sometimes if she noticed any differences! Dr Cho also seemed hard to shock after the
whole building him a new rib cage outside of the cradle thing. Tony still thinks he was the most shocked at that little fact they'd dropped one day during dinner. He hadn't known until then that his ribcage wasn't well, his ribcage. Everyone seemed baffled that he was confused because this is his life now apparently. Teenagers man, they confuse everything.

That was pretty much it for the 'ITK' file, there was a huge section of names in the maybe section. He knew there were others he should tell… But every day that passed since his return, the surgeries, Rhodey's decision… Since he had woken up and scared Peter and Rhodey half to death from the information overload. It got that little bit harder to bring up, in a not terrifying way. Walking up to Pep and waving, or pulling his glasses off in front of Happy just seemed to be awful ideas. No matter how much Harley thought it would be hilarious. Anyone else was under Pep and Happy though, as they'd be hurt to think they were the last to know.

Although he was convinced Laura and the kids knew something, because she's Laura and kids notice more than adults. If an adult saw a flash of blue as he slipped his glasses on they'd assume it was a reflection off of the holograms or maybe FRIDAY. Kids.. Kids had a wider range and didn't feel 'silly' asking weird questions. Probably Aunt May had some inkling too, because of Peter, he would not be surprised if she hadn't put 2 and 2 together of his likely discussions on robot hands. Nat was still confused about why Tony had let her come back to poke much and Bruce was only communicating via text in whatever part of the world he was in today (that Tony totally pretended he didn't know about). He hadn't even found out Tony had been in a coma yet, and Tony didn't know how to tell him THAT let alone anything else.

Stephy… Yeah, hard to tell the guy who you've been mocking for cheating on science with magic that you now have some weird colour seeing ability that made no logical sense, plus, he'd been avoiding seeing him since Siberia, even if it meant he was missing his other brother. Stephey Saw more than he said too. Aurors he'd mentioned, he had no idea what he could see, but he'd know something. He was going to be annoyed, they'd reconnected when he'd taken a step back from the Avengers after Ultron, and him suddenly going off grid was aggravating the overdressed wizard (Actually, Tony thinks he misses his cloak more..)

Stephey definitely knew something was up and Tony was pretty sure him joining up with the Avengers, that he swore he'd never join, even on the sidelines, was his passive aggressive way of yelling at Tony. They had a complicated relationship that went back to them snaking at galas to alleviate boredom, it had built until they were now practically family. Rhodey and Stephey were two pretty amazing brothers, even if they weren't related. He was also older than Stephey but the man always treated Tony like a younger brother.

Then there was Carol, who was around Rhodey a lot more lately too, plus she'd have to know when he went back on active duty… there were potential others too. So the 'ITK' file was.. Stalled. Yet constantly taunting him. He wondered if his avoidance of this issue was another contributing factor to Rhodey's guilt, presumably thought he'd isolated him or something.

"I'm good. I'm happy to be alive. You made the right choice Rhodey"

He said, nudging Rhodey with his foot, feeling that timid warmth inside at Rhodey's huff, able to see him roll his eyes in perfect detail despite the low light levels.

"Close your damned eyes. You're like a nightlight."

Tony spluttered a laugh, that was the first joke he'd made about it.

As they both cracked up laughing in the dark, Tony decided to think that maybe they really would be okay. Maybe he should start telling people.
As they calmed down, Tony shuffled a little closer to Rhodey. In the past he would have just thrown himself at his brother. But since Siberia he had gotten more… tentative with initiating touch. It was something that Tony knew Rhodey worried about. Tony was practically the dictionary definition of 'Touch Starved'. Even if he didn't say those exact words out loud, or let many people know about it, touch was something he craved from people he cared about. It didn't have to be huge, bone crushing hugs, it could be something as small as a brush of the hand was enough.

He’d gotten close to telling Roger's about it before Ultron. Well, Roger’s knew about it, at least he thought he did, but Tony had nearly told him ' Why’. In a terrifying, soul baring 'here's my past' kind of way. Something that he'd worked up the courage and then failed to follow through on several times. The problem was Roger's thought Howard was a good man, so telling Rogers that several of Tony's weird and annoying quirks where pretty much all he got from the man, along with some crippling anxiety, a surety that he was never good enough, never worked enough, and a lovely voice inside his mind that revelled in tearing him down. The rogues had assumed his childhood was perfect because of that silver spoon, they didn't know it was a crucible of pain, blood, fear, loneliness, locked doors and too dark rooms. Part of him had even felt guilty about ruining Roger's view of his friend!

Somehow, the knowledge he'd nearly told Rogers why had amped up some of his quirks, so they were back to where they'd been when he started MIT at 14 and Rhodey, likely utterly baffled and angry he'd been stuck in a room with a kid, saved him over and over again. Afghanistan had been similar, made him worse with a new quirk that for months he'd been terrified to say no. That still caught him occasionally. Rhodey never acted like catering to Tony's brain was a problem like other people did. But then others assumed the quirks were because he was a rich eccentric genius. Eccentric, rich geniuses were meant to have weird, annoying quirks and suck at social norms.

Rhodey had seen too many bruises to think that. Rhodey had sat with him when a lecturer had reported his bruises, stunned when he realised Tony was on a first name basis with too many of the social workers for his comfort as he stayed with him for support. He'd raged when he'd been told the same thing he'd been told every time. 'Not enough evidence.' Told Tony it wasn't his fault, even when the lecturer vanished from the campus. Tony saying it was fine and normal had made him angrier, Tony flinching from him, looking resigned to more pain had doused his anger like a bucket of ice water. That was when Rhodey started taking him home to meet his mother.

So Tony took a deep breath and moved close enough, turning on his side until his back was flush against the line of Rhodey's arm, moved his leg back until it was just touching his. He didn't care that he was nearly 50, if there was going to be a chance of sleeping, he needed that connection. He heard a quiet hmm from Rhodey and Tony let the breath out. He knew that hmm. It was the 'I'm impressed you did that' noise. He let the tension leak from him and to reward him, Rhodey lifted his arm and pulled Tony against him. Using his increased upper body strength to hold him. Tony smiled and started to feel sleep settle around him at last. Slowing his thoughts, FRIDAY sent a gentle lap of code against him, holding a part of herself against him as he started to drift. He mumbled his plans for the morning to Rhodey, something about them must have been funny as he started to drift to the feel of Rhodey's chest shaking slightly.

But he had sunk too far into sleep that he couldn't really recall what he said, nor could he overly cared when he was here.

He was safe.

He was warm.
He was *loved.*

**Chapter End Notes**

I can actually include this now, the whole reason I ended up writing this was partially I wanted to write more about Siberia but mostly because of, according to my partners, an evil thought of Tony with abilities, but instead of them being all tech based, have at least 1 entirely based of soft sciences and feelings. The stuff Tony is basically allergic to. XD

Also, does anyone know Harley's sisters name?! I'm placeholdering with my sisters name for now because I just can't find it. (Easy to remember for find and replace!)
Facing the Dragon

Chapter Summary

Tony finally tells someone what happened to him..

Chapter Notes

Another thanks to the amazing comments people have left! I love reading rambles so don't feel bad! So many Kudos too, I'm baffled and stunned and feeling happy :). Once again my usual warning of Dyslexia + Phone!

We have another Tony-Centric chapter after this with some team introductions, not all as Carol ran on a bit 😖, and then we finally get to see what James and the others are up to!

That was meant to be next Chapter but I'm trying to keep these under 10k, but my fingers and Tony have other plans. After that we'll be flipping States-Wakanda-States for a while.

Hope it won't be too drawn out but I also didn't want to awkwardly rush at the same time. Hoping to strike a happy medium in my overly wordy way.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

September 8th

"You know, sun streaming through through the window right on your face is a really unpleasant way to wake up" Tony groggily mused whilst sending a thought towards the window to close the curtains and waving off FRIDAY about to start her good morning speil, all successfully done without opening his eyes.

Just as he started to slip into sleep again, the sun is back. "Urrrrrrggggg" he pulls a pillow across his face, shutting the curtains again. Wondering if there is a glitch in the system.

"Wake up Tones, it's 9am." An evil voice intones above him before pulling the pillow from his face.

"Why. Why do you do this to me?"

Rhodey, already dressed, the heathen. Looks unimpressed and confiscates the blanket as well as the pillow and as the curtains are no longer obeying him, obviously he has FRIDAY working for him.

"Tony. Do you not remember telling me that you wanted to get up early so you could run, then
read the latest draft I brought home for you of the accords amendments whilst you get up your
courage to call Pepper back as you have 7 voicemails you have been ignoring."

"Didn't I say that at 3am? When I was falling asleep, after our fun time in the shower. Why on earth
would you listen to me then?"

Tony reaches for another pillow only to discover Rhodey has literally stripped the bed bare. This
causes him to open an eye and glare at the man sat comfortably in his wheelchair. Obviously
enjoying this.

"I have Jules getting here in 20 minutes…"

Yup. That did it. Torture lady was coming. Tony sat up fast, shaking his head, waiting for
Extremis to wake him up better. The odd feeling spreading through his mind and muscles making
him alert and ready to go in a few seconds.

"Yeah, I'm up. Torture lady is coming. Why does your torture lady always want to do mean things
to me?"

Tony squints, sensing foul play whilst shuffling of his bed, grabbing clothes he can comfortably
run in whilst planning his route around the compound so people won't notice him outside and you
know. Running. Ugh. They might think he'd turned into an exercise nut or something. Or Rogers.
Double ugh.

Changing into his picks for today as Rhodey just rolls his eyes and makes his way into the
bathroom. Loose joggers and a soft long-sleeved shirt with holes for his thumbs. In the immensely
rare chance he is spotted his hand is sufficiently hidden for someone seeing him run.

"She's my physical therapist Tones, and a critical part of those bracers you totally aren't making for
me."

"What, how do you… Um. What?"

"Tony, do you really think I just do the exercises she gives me without question. I asked about her
plan and its kind of obvious why you hired her. And you took her suggestion about running to help
you manage your energy levels with Extremis, and it worked, so she can't be that bad to you."

Running his hand through his hair and joining Rhodey in the bathroom to wash his face and teeth.

"Yes, I'm doing the stupid running thing, and yes I'm not having weird Energy bursts manifesting
in tech explosions anymore. Doesn't mean I enjoy it."

He begrudgingly muttered, what was worse was that he was actually enjoying it. The sensory thrill
was oddly addicting and he'd gone from grudgingly agreeing to try it twice a week to running
every morning. He even left the lab to do it. What on earth was his life now.

"The running is one thing, she wants to add things to my occasional gym time. She wanted me to
join a pilates class honeybear. Or Yoga. Aren't the hand to hand and combat classes enough?"

He shuddered dramatically but Rhodey was too busy laughing to reply. Clearly the idea of Tony in
a yoga class was too much for him. Tony was only 40% nervous he'd like more of her decisions
and he'd actually turn into Rogers or something.

"You enjoyed the Taekwondo she suggested too. Face it Tomes, Extremis has left you with more
energy to burn than 60 hour lab sessions."
He shuddered internally at that thought whilst also lamenting the fact he was up, and awake, at 9am. Again. When the kids were not even here! Rhodey found this hilarious of course.

"Do I have time to help you set the living room up whilst I drink my coffee, or must I flee now?"

"You have 17 minutes until Jules arrives Boss. If you hop to it you should be safe!"

FRIDAY of course loved this new running and exercise business. Boss having healthy habits was something she wanted to cause more of. As such she often conspired with Rhodey, Vision and Peter to have him keep it up. Harley just found it hilarious and laughed at him.

"You set up, I'll make your coffee. That you don't even need anymore might I add."

Tony clutches his chest and glared at Rhodey for even suggesting such a thing. How dare he! Yes Extremis made the change from as sleep to awake mostly seamless, but he still needed his coffee before doing things in the morning, and throughout the day, and night. He was awake but he still felt kind of groggy before his first cup, sure it was more mental now that physical, but still, coffee. Plus, he still kept unusual hours, coffee was still life. He sniffed, insulted, humphing before stomping into the living room. Ignoring Rhodey's laughter as he made his way to the kitchen.

He made quick work setting up his living room exactly how Rhodey and Jules wanted it. When he had started redesigning the private residence of the compound, less excessive and just more comfort for people. No more huge floors with every tiny detail specialised. All the rooms were mostly the same and blank so people could decorate their rooms however they please. It made him happy seeing people put effort into decorating their rooms. There were multiple people on each floor too, which he hoped was less isolating. Privately he hoped if people were personally invested in their rooms, the violence to his buildings would be less. He didn't really want to half destroy and rebuild the compound again. His not so healthy coping mechanisms when people destroy his buildings was usually to kill the person, unfortunately he couldn't do that this time. So method 2! Destroy and rebuild. Excessive? Maybe, but it made Vision very happy to help him smash the building and rebuild it.

His rooms are slightly different to the standard rooms, but not because of what people would think. And not just because he was avoiding common areas whilst he rested. He did visit occasionally after all, hopefully more soon. He liked getting to meet new people, but in small groups, so he didn't pass out, again, he was working on increasing his tolerance. The main reason for the increased size in the main floor in his apartment is that Rhodey started doing his PT in the occupational health rooms. With lots of health professionals and fancy equipment. And he'd been miserable. PT isn't exactly fun in itself, so Tony had worked to make it better for him. Which included having a pretty large living room with furniture that quickly rolled against walls and equipment wheeled out. There was also all the extra bedrooms, Laura was opposite him with an equally large accommodations because of the kids.

He always set up when Rhodey was at home and not doing his 'on the road' exercises, because the equipment was heavy and would take 3 people and way more time than what he could do in under 10 minutes. Also the large living room had doubled as a perfect location for movie nights for the 6 of them. Soon he was hoping they could invite more people, especially Laura and the kids. He loved movie nights after all.

There were of course the main movie nights in the compound for those on the avengers and young avengers roster when they were around. Tony had a standing invite from Carol, but he was still 'recovering' and he'd been in hiding. After last night and his decision to face the dragon, he figured Carol could be next and maybe he could start getting out more. The movie night was a little daunting yet though, dark room, even if he kept his glasses on, which would be very weird, if the
Tony generally had two modes when it came to stuff like this. Hide and tell no one, or arrogant and tell the world. After Pep he should probably tell the current Avengers lineup. Which was Carol, Rhodey, Vision, Nat, Hope with Strange coming in occasionally as a back bencher unless required. Bruciebear always had a place on hold for him if he ever came back. Then there were the defenders, Matt and Jessica living at the compound part time, Luke and Danny visited often. Tony still can't believe how fast Rhodey got everything working, as co-leader, mostly running management with Carol until he was cleared, the 2 of them moved mountains. They kept saying it wouldn't have been impossible without Tony's files, but he just collected information on everything… Hinky. Fixing clauses to the Accords had just made people more confident to come into the fold. Weirdly him being in a coma had made the public throw some sympathy to those willing to do that to themselves for them.

It didn't fix everything, too much fear had built up over the years thanks to the Avengers reckless actions and lack of accountability. People were used to Tony being around after, Tony taking on the fault, but everyone else just vanished. After the mess in multiple different countries headed by the personification of the American flag, barging into countries without invitation or permission, causing vast amounts of property damage and loss of life before just disappearing. People had started asking why he was cleaning up these messes, would the new Avengers be more of the same? But that's why he pays the big PR bucks. The amount of work he was doing post coma helped too. He needed to set up a press conference soon introducing everyone properly.

He'd met everyone since they came, in small amounts. Still confused him how people he'd barely met seemed oddly, and in Jessica's case, kind of viciously protective of him. He idly wondered if the PI had been checking into his past and figured of course she had. Matt had been equally as protective after he'd looked into everything Ultron related. It was kind of confusing Tony out how protective they were, Rhodey just said the ex-vengers set his standards too low. He thinks Rhodey might have something to do with it and the image of Rhodey giving the New Avengers a shovel talk was hilarious.

Everything was still pretty new and fresh, but from what he's heard from Rhodey and watching training sessions, because he's a constant worrier, things were coming together nicely. The people were actually getting to know each other. It didn't feel like a timebomb waiting to go off. They wanted to talk to him, not just for what he could do for them either. He'd frozen up the first time Carol had asked him what his hobbies where for bleeding hell's sake. Thankfully she hadn't said anything. Everyone texted him often too, in the group chats and separately too. He even got cards telling him to get better soon. He'd kept them with his file of drawings kids sent him. He was not a sap. Nope.

Shaking his head, Tony followed the smell of coffee to his little kitchenette. Humming as his picked up his mug, eyes fluttering shut and he took a few seconds just to enjoy his coffee, fingers drumming on his chest. Checking his messages and firing of replies to the several good morning texts. He sent the kids his plans to start telling people, Peter congratulated him, Harley told him it was about time and Tara sent lots of heart emojis.
too. Hope will not stop bugging me, Nat is still confused, which I am not enjoying at all.”

Rhodey gave a sharp grin. Tony might have forgiven her, Rhodey didn't get how but knew it had something to do with his eye… but Tony didn't give him a play by play.

*** Flashback ***

*It was at the hospital, Tony had only been awake for 36 hours and they were already struggling to keep him in bed. Nat turning up was an annoying complication, Rhodey however had got her before she reached Tony's room thanks to FRIDAY.*

"Why are you here Nat, shouldn’t you be hiding with your little band of rogues?"

He was angry at all of them. So angry he felt it was burning him up sometimes.

Nat held herself still but she didn’t look as perfectly poised as she used to.

"I came to see Tony."

Her voice was almost quiet and he wondered what had happened. Rhodey found it hard to sympathise with practically any of the former Avengers. If Bruce walked in that door now, no matter how much it would make his brothers heart soar, he'd be angry at him too. He left Tony high and dry, just like Nat did. Yeah she didn't hospitalise him, but if she hadn't have let them go maybe Tony wouldn't have nearly died.

"Rhodey, it's okay."

Tony had come up on both of them, making both of them startle a little, not expecting Tony to appear out of the shadows. He was thin, too thin, it would take time to put on what he lost in the coma and what Extremis burned, adapting to this new diet was hard for Tony, Rhodey knew that. His left arm stuffed in a pocket to hide what was missing. He was designing himself a new hand already, instead of resting. Hood up, glasses on. His clothes were hanging off him, he was wearing one of Rhodey's big, warm hoodies. He noticed that his right hand was still gloved. He still couldn't get warm no matter how much they'd raised the temperature in his rooms, but he was getting better, his increasing control of Extremis was helping. He didn't need 4 layers of blankets to sleep anymore already, but Rhodey figured that was more stubbornness by how he shivered in the small naps he managed.

Rhodey swore he saw pain flash across Nats face at the sight of Tony. The way she was looking at his chest made him wonder…

"What brings you here Nat, you have one chance, don't waste it trying to manage me."

Tony was hopefully easing himself into Seeing a new person Rhodey hoped. Watching for signs he would pass out. It could overwhelm him as they’d found out with the nurses.

Rhodey wanted to complain about her even getting one chance. But Tony's head was tilted slightly and that's when he realised. He was Seeing in that was he couldn't explain, reading Nat beyond her masks. His glasses were wrapped around his head, the ones that wouldn't even let a glimmer of blue out of the sides instead of his aviators. Good choice with the Widow Rhodey mused, if anyone would notice a glimmer. It would be her. The excuse of 'It's FRIDAY' might work, but you never know.
"I.. Steve came back from Siberia, he told me… He told me something that didn't make sense. Especially not after that nurse tweeted about you.. And the article with the pictures… So I went to find out myself. To get all the data."

She was holding herself rigid as she fished a USB stick out of her pocket and put it on the table in front of Tony before stepping back a few steps. Obviously to give Tony space.

"I'm so sorry Tony, I watched it and then I wiped everything from that base, I made sure that no one else can go there and see what happened to y - you… I.. I know you have no reason to believe me, no reason to ever trus-"

Tony leaned forward as she started to apologise, scooping up the USB, his eyes on Nat the whole time. He knew Tony's gaze would be unfocused and he so wished he could see what Tony was Seeing from the woman with maybe more masks than Tony, but Tony was only very vague when talking about what he Saw with most people. Rhodey thought maybe he saw it as confidential even? Tony sucked in a breath when he touched the USB stick, Nat probably thought it was what she was saying. Rhodey knew that he’d just scanned the USB from touch. Tony's lips thinned as he stuffed it and the USB into his pocket before cutting Nat off mid sentence. Her eyes widening and Rhodey was sure she thought Tony was going to send her out, but he knew that set to his shoulders. Sighing internally, he knew what was coming next. At least he could take amusement at what was going to the Widows confusion. It was something. Not enough, but something.

"Nat, Natka. I Believe you."

Nat looked stunned, confused, trying to blank her face, head tilting, trying to work out exactly what had happened. She’d seemed ready to throw herself effectively at his mercy, she’d obviously expected anger, rage, jail even. The typical Tony Stark ego and flair she talked about so much. She and Tony had gotten closer these last few years, but to Rhodey's irritation, she rarely looked beyond the Tony Stark to the layers of just Tones beneath

With recent events, she was likely sure the Tony she knew would be spitting mad. Not quietly walking towards her. Seeing the Black Widow look the proverbial deer in the headlights was fun
he had to admit. He hoped FRIDAY would be sending these pictures to his private collection.

"Come here" Tony pulled her into a one armed hug, she froze for a second before all but falling on him. Rhodey swore he saw her shoulders shake and wondered if she was crying. If it was real. He wondered if she watched the whole thing, he was pretty sure what was on that USB. Every pain staking minute. He wasn't sure he could have done it, even sped up. Seeing Tony just out of the suit was burned indelibly into his mind. Every detail still as vivid and as painful as it was nearly 2 weeks ago. It had haunted him for the 10 days Tony had been in the coma. Nat was holding onto him delicately, likely feeling how thin he currently was. Whilst he knew Extremis would bounce Tony back soon, she had no idea. If she's anything like him… She’s probably wondering how he’s even standing here with them. Rhodey being one of the very few who just how close he came to not. At least he shared that burden with someone now. It wasn’t something he’d let the kids or Pepper in on.

Rhodey makes eye contact with her over his shoulder and sees a quiet determination in her he’d never seen before. As well as shock. She’s obviously letting him see it in her face. Maybe… Maybe this time she’ll guard his back? He knows Tony's words struck something inside her, but then since he woke up with his new way of Seeing, he had done it a few times now. To Nat being trusted was probably not an everyday experience and it probably meant more that he heard. Tony’s new way of coming out with something, almost out of nowhere, never detailed enough to let other people know why, but it strikes something in them. He should know, he’d done it to him not long after he woke
Tony pulled back, looking at her with a level of solid focus that always made people uncomfortable when coming from Tony.

"Let's get to my lawyers and make you safe, right?"

"Okay"

She said back, voice oddly small and followed Tony with a level of trust he wouldn't of thought her capable of. Tony could be lying and leading her to the raft, to Ross, for all she knew. It could be a ploy. The fact she followed anyway, as if ready to take whatever he had planned for her made the anger in his mind ease up a little bit. But it wasn't gone. Tony might trust her, but he didn't.

***End Flashback***

Rhodey shook himself free and reminded himself that he needed to do his usual check in with FRIDAY to see just what the little spider had been up to whilst he'd been at the UN.

"Then there is Strange... You know he's one step away from portalimg something gross or terrifying into your bathroom if you keep avoiding him right? Plus, the TOTT File for the Dear General is stalled, I can't pull that off like you can.."

He nudged, hoping that would be the push to finally get this going.

Tony finished his coffee, running the tap to swill the mug before squeezing him on the shoulder.

"Good luck with the demon lady Honeybear, I'm going to run and try not to agonise over how Pepper and Happy are going to kill me"

He watches Tony go, knowing he's listening to music already whilst scanning the CCTV cameras to ensure he won't be seen on his run, it helps that he can move very fast when he puts his mind to it, although Rhodey didn't know how fast. Tony was still 'playing human' around them and hiding his new 'upgrades'. He'd use the shadows to blast past people silently without them knowing though, the kids and himself were trying to convince him to go all out on the track, so they could see. Something the Tony before Siberia wouldn't have considered hiding, but he also would have scoffed at the idea of running with inhuman levels of speed. He was still Tony though, and whilst he used his new abilities, he was still Tony enough to occasionally forget he has them. Like when racing the kids to the frosting bowl, he'll run fast and end up looking confused for a second when he was far ahead of the kids, before Rhodey has literally reminded him of his abilities, all the while Peter crowed from the ceiling, sticking the spoon in his mouth, nabbing the bowl as Tony looked confused about how he'd crossed the room. Only Tony would forget something like that.

Jules would be here in a minute and he finally decided on what he was going to do.

"Small Fry?"

"Yes Colonel?"

Rhodey bit his tongue for a second, as mad as he was, this was best for his brother and that is what mattered.

"You know the number Tony is using to speak to Dr Banner don't you?"

"Of course I do!"
"Well, you need to not tell your Da about this…"

He let the silence sit for a moment, knowing she wasn't comfortable with this, but if it was best for Tony, he knew she'd agree. Banner would be able to help Tony get a better handle on things, the emotional side where he was still struggling with control, he was sure of it. Sometimes the best you can do is get the best people for the job. Even if you're mad at them.

"Send him a message and then delete it so Tony can't find it. From me. Link the article with the picture that damned nurse got of Tony in the hospital"

He was still spitting mad at that guy. He'd gone to get something to eat and stepped away from Tony's bedside for 5 minutes and he'd used that to get a few pictures and sell the story of Tony bruised and battered in a coma. He picked the first article because the date on it, so Banner wouldn't panic that he was in a coma now. They were in contact, and Rhodes just knew he had just told Banner he was fine. That nothing was wrong. "Sign it from me. Say 'He needs you this time, he's always been there for you, wherever you go, now it's your turn."

"Sent Colonel… Do you… do you think Dr Banner will come back?"

"I hope so Small Fry, if he's half the man Tony thinks of, yeah, I think he will. Maybe a bit angry at you Da though."

**Tony POV**

He really hated to admit how much he loved running. It was warm out, the sun beating down on him, warming him as much as it could. He raised him temperature to enjoy the warmth that bit more as he kicked up his speed after stretching with a slower run.

Usually he kept to more… Normal speeds. Or not much above. But he was going to tell Pepper and Happy. So maybe he needed to sweat first, and it would take way, way too long unless he really, really pushed himself. Plus, he had to admit, grinning to himself, he kind of wanted to. His decision last night to be open, tell people and accept himself for Rhodey seemed to have had more of an affect on him than he'd imagined. Or would ever admit. He was suddenly itching to push his limits instead of trying to be normal. Steadily speeding up, sticking to the shadows around the trees, he kept speeding up until everything started to blur except the path in front of him that stood out with a laser focus.

Putting so much into his speed he couldn't keep monitoring all the cameras as usual, it was like turning up one area leveled others down to almost nothing. Not surprising, it wasn't like he'd really practiced keeping his technopath abilities running whilst focusing so much on his physical abilities. That would be for another time though, this time…

He just threw everything out for now however and Ran. His feet hitting the ground much louder than usual, stealth swapped for speed, now he was running with force, his feet not quite slamming down, but hitting hard enough to send pleasant shocks up his calves from his feet. He could even feel himself started to sweat. He trusted FRIDAY to tell him when he'd been going for an hour, and to protect him from prying eyes. She was very diligent when it came to protecting her Da.

……..

Tony's music lowered slightly, enough for FRIDAYS voice to filter through.

'Da, you want to head to your workshop soon, a few people are coming out to run in 15 minutes
and you'll struggle to avoid being seen at your current speed.'

"Will do baby girl"

He sent a brush of code to her, trying to fill it with all the fun, shock and surprise he'd felt running so fast.

Her code came back amused and happy, she loved it when he shared new things with her. He knew she'd been running her code through this for a while like she did with new experiences. Heck, he would be thinking about it for a while. Damned that Jules. He'd sworn blind he'd hate running. What enjoyment was there in pointlessly running round in circles! As he entered the door closest to his Workshop and slipped inside, skin almost on fire, slick with sweat, his clothes half soaked. His hair was utterly drenched and dripping, he was also absolutely famished. His muscles felt a pleasant ache and he swore it felt like Extremis was happy to have been let out of the box so to speak. He felt.. steadier than he had in a long time, suddenly wondering why he waited so long to tell Pepper, before the run, a cold, sharp part of his mind was convinced Pepper would hate him for being lesser now, inhuman. That was silenced now and he realised Rhodey was right. Pep, she stuck with him through so much idiocy, their friendship had survived their quite disastrous relationship even. Happy to, he'd even stuck with him whilst he was an idiot in college let alive everything post Ironman.

Moving around the compound like a ghost, never bumping into or seeing anyone, his senses stretched through FRIDAY network. He went straight to the shower in his workshop, he'd been going to phone Pep and see about organising her coming over sometime next week, but now, post run, he decided to rip the bandage off.

'Baby girl, can you send Pep a message, tell her I'm sorry I've been an idiot, but there's something I need to tell her, but I've been scared witless about it so I let it fester like a moron.'

He then hummed out loud, "She'd like that bit." Chuckling to himself.

He stripped of and hopped into the smaller, but still lovely, shower and sighed as the spray came on at the right temperature as he stepped in. Whilst he hadn't been practicing the physical side of his new 'abilities', this he had down, unless his emotions got away from him. Being linked to technology in a compound he'd linked practically everything to FRIDAY gave him an amusing level of control of the building. Well, next to his girl obviously. In other buildings it was limited, but anything he owned he wired almost everything to his AI. 'See if she'll come over soon? Thanks'.

'Sent Da, I'm sure she'll be here in no time. I really don't think she'd stab you with her shoes'

The amusement humming through at the idea had him wondering if that was actually true. Huffing out a laugh he enjoyed the bliss of the nice shower after running yourself stupid.

'Oh and Fry, order me a few pizzas? My favourite with extra toppings. I'm starving, go for 5, might be some left for Pepper and Happy even... Maybe.'

He got out of the shower feeling scrubbed new, fresh with the energy of 10 cups of coffee. Dressing in a pair of faded, soft jeans. Whilst expensive once, they were burnt, stained and torn now. He pulled on another of his new long sleeved shifts as he was going to have company. His thumbs slipping through the holes comfortably and then followed his nose to the stack of pizzas left just outside the lift. He grabbed them as FRIDAY informed him Pepper would be here in 20 minutes. Yikes, that was faster than he thought.
He steeled himself however, committed. Part of him sad he'd waited so long, but part of him happy she hadn't seen him just out of the coma. He'd been practically emaciated. The feeding tube in the coma couldn't keep up with his bodies new demands, especially as it was healing so much damage. Now he wasn't much different to what he'd been before, more toned maybe, but he'd always hidden how toned he was before. He was never going to be bulky, even with his enhancements but he'd definitely put on more muscle mass these past few weeks. The clothes he was wearing didn't show much, intentionally, it was a bit tight on his arms, and across his chest… But you couldn't make out every detail like Rogers too tight shirts.

He'd polished off 2 and a half of the pizzas whilst working and waiting for Pepper. Working on several projects at once was quite easy now he could partition his mind, a few for the Avengers, a couple of updates for SI and the new StarkPhone, reading Rhodey's notes that he'd brought back from the UN and starting on the next lot of write ups, Rhodey's braces whilst checking up on emails from the kids too, all of them coming home from their separate camps today, finally, well Peter and Harley in the same one despite different schools, Tara in one for kids her own age, he was not allowed to pick them up, apparently, it was embarrassing.

He'd been allowed to send cars as a compromise. The flashier the better according to Harley, Peter disagreed. Such things they'd get away with when he was 'recovering', it was nice to give them an idea that he wouldn't show up at their schools, it would make it all the more fun when he did! It had been about few months since Harley and Tara had turned up, discovering their mother had passed away and they'd bounced around until things were finalised and he'd missed it all because of this stupid drama and being in a stupid coma, and then, he'd suddenly discovered he'd been named as a guardian when he'd not long been awake.

He'd freaked. He'd been close with the family, but he'd been more of the 'eccentric overworked uncle' than anything else, not the kind you leave guardianship of your kids too, but she'd left him a letter that she trusted him in this. That he'd mostly kept his visits a secret from anyone bar Rhodes made the, 'I have kids now?' conversations weird, but as most people in his life were also quite new, so Harley and Tara had been there as if they'd always been like that, their strength baffled him. Before he would have freaked, now he'd freaked even more because of his 'changes'. He'd been trying to track down literally any other potential family when Harley had found out and glared at him. Told him he couldn't get rid of them that easily. That had been a punch to the solar plexus.

He practically ran and grabbed them both, slightly manic and not long woken up, and panicking, more stumbling really than running. Saying he didn't want to get rid of them, explained he was the issue.. He was messed up. At their dubious looks he'd told them to brace themselves and just showed them, probably not the best plan of action. They looked at his hand, or rather lack off, his eyes, and shrugged in a very teenage and pre-teen way and told him that they accept him in no uncertain terms liked he'd accepted them. That level of conviction threw him.

From then however he'd never considered another person taking them, (he'd needed help in those days he was trapped at the hospital, but thankfully he'd been released fairly fast.) Harley had then asked if his legs were injured and at his no, kicked him in the shin. Hard. He'd fight tooth and nail for them now, he was still terrified he'd be an awful parent, given his experiences. But he was getting papers to make the adoption official at their request 'read - demand' too, apparently they'd been planning this with their mother a while as she'd known she was dying, they decided to avoid telling him because they knew he'd freak. They'd kind of cannon balled into his life when he was at his worst and he couldn't be happier, they'd given him a steadfast reason to fight off the lasting effects of his Extremis coma, to get healthy, for them. Thankfully this camp would end soon. He wanted his kids back.

He was just starting Pizza number 4 when he heard the lift doors open. With his right hand he
automatically reached out to snag a pair of silver aviators and slid them on his face whilst his left hand slid under his shirt. Kicking 3 of the pizza boxes out of sight under his desk. When Pepper came into view he was reading the hologram in front of him whilst eating. Looking as relaxed as possible. Utterly not feeling it.

He turned to Pep and Happy, and damned was he happy he had the glasses, on as it dulled the affect a bit because holy crapola. So much vibrant colors. The whole spectrum of yellow to orange, fluttered and surged around her like a whirlwind in places and others drifting like a calm, balmy summers eve. They intersected and didn't seem bothered by the others. Currents running against each other. Bright, sunshine yellows of decisive actions, to vibrating oranges of friendship, family and loyalty wrapped up together. Creating a mix in between of authority, confidence and a pure happiness that made him tear up. It was so overwhelming his mouth had been gaped open, head tilted to one side. It was jumping at his senses, he could feel it so much it made him feel like he was vibrating almost that he nearly missed the wisps of colour whipping through the same red he saw on Rhodey is there, he could feel it pulled from him. Just like Rhodey. The thrumming deep violet like a clock gong he can see connected to Happy after the brightness settled. Peppers Sunshine however just dominated the room and he couldn't get a read on Happy yet without a lot of focus. Which he needed all of just to stop gaping.

Right now he had to really focus on pulling his vision back, he was just so open to Pepper it had swept him up in her wind. Usually meeting people wasn't this overwhelming. It took another 30 seconds of rapid blinking before he brought himself back and he could finally see a very concerned Pepper looking at him very critically. He didn't know what had been said but he had a feeling they'd been talking whilst he did his goldfish impression.

"Tony, what's wrong, you just blanked put there and I haven't seen you in weeks...!" her voice cracked a little. "The last time I saw you was in a coma, back from Gods only know where when you were meant to be safe!"

"I know Pep, I've been a sucky friend, but things have been complicated and I didn't know how to tell you without making you hate me. You too Happy. Both of you sit, help yourself to pizza."

"Oh Tony, you should know by now, you can't scare us off"

Pepper nodded along with Happy. Nervous and obviously wanting to know just what Tony was talking about, but patient. Peppers almost endless patience was always a shock. He could see that they'd wait on him, even though they were desperate to know what was going on.

"Just wait until you, well. See."

He huffed at himself, chuckling, whilst rubbing his hand over his goatee, which brought Peppers attention to his glasses. Causing her to frown at him.

"This is part of it." He gestured at the glasses. That made her frown more, Tony didn't wear glasses in the workshop, or with friends, Pepper paled and Tony knew she was thinking back to his eyes bandaged over in the hospital so he decided to start talking fast before she spiralled down into thinking the worst.

"I went after.. Rogers and Barnes on that day. Wilson gave me the location as long as I didn't lead Ross to them, so I turned off location tracking in the suit and purged FRIDAY'S memory. All to sort out 5 other winter soldiers.. But they were already dead, they were just the lure, we were the fish. Zenmo had quite a different endgame, he wanted to entirely destroy the Avengers. The stress fracture was, well, me."
"Oh Tony, you gave them so much, I don't know everything that happened, but it's you can't be entirely at fault for breaking up the Avengers, I think it was broken before the Civil War."

"Well, I'm not innocent, but I'd say it was Rogers lies that did it in the end."

From then he decided that these two, like Rhodey and Vis, they got the full story. Not the carefully edited versions he'd been telling others. He included the video of his parents for one. Peppers face was a Thunderstorm or anger. Happy was patient and strength reaching out to him as he shuddered to the end of the fight. Going quiet as he let it occur to them that he was there, no tracking, with his suit damaged with just the Siberian cold as Rogers just… Left.

"Tony. How long?" Pepper demanded.

Tony skittered away from that thought with such a visible flinch and shudder that she didn't ask again. She would be asking Rhodey however, he could see it, but Rhodey didn't know either, he had an idea, but he'd been out of it when Tony had left for the fight and Tony had done his best to obscure details. Only Nat and himself knew the exact amount of hours.

"That's not the point really… I wasn't doing well when they got me to the hospital. I was falling further into the coma, they were worried I'd never wake up. So they tried the SuppedDown Extremis, and the Cradle. But nothing worked."

Pepper and Happy had paled.

"Tony you look, great even. So what changed?"

"I had a… different version of Extremis I'd been playing with. I never planned to use it or let anyone use it really. It was my, 'I'm Bored' project. More of a thought experiment. But I stick with Rhodey's decisions. He doesn't need more guilt."

"So you deactivated it when you were healed…?"

Pepper says hopefully, even though Tony could See she doesn't believe that.

"Na Pep, there is no neutralising this one."

Tony reached put with his right hand and she snagged his hands immediately, clutching hard and Tony adds his left. Pepper freezes immediately looking down. Catching his left hand. He lets it go limp in her hands as her shaking hands release the hold over his thumb. Holding her breath as she pushed it further up. He can see she's scared of how far up this goes but knows she'll get there before he says anything. She pushed the sleeve to his elbow, revealing the joint in the middle of his forearm. She skimmed her fingers over the scars at the joint. Tony idly marvelling at the sensation change from his skin to feedback from the metal.

"Oh Tony. I'm so sorry."

"Its okay Pep, it's pretty much as good as my flesh hand, dexterity wise anyway."

He smiled as much as possible, but his voice brought her eyes back to his face, staring resolutely at his glasses, remembering the hospital again, he didn't see the pictures in people's heads, not like Wanda, but he tended to get a sense occasionally of what people were focusing on. Pepper and Rhodey were a lot easier to get a read on, The red for him stilled when she thought of him in hospital, yellows and oranges wrapping around it protectively.

"Tony, when I saw you in the hospital, you had covers over both your eyes, tell me you aren't
blind."

"I'm not blind, but one of my eyes was damaged beyond even Extremis ability to heal, so it did something… Else."

Pepper reached up to remove his glasses, hands shaking, and he closed his eyes automatically. She huffed at him, he smiled took a deep breath and opened his eyes.

Happy breathed in a short, sharp breath and blue surged around him with his need to protect lashing out and a dull blue-gray of feeling as if he failed.

"No Happy, you couldn't protect me from this, no one could, we were careening towards this for a while."

Happy blinks, startled, Tony isn't exactly the most… Introspective of people, especially of their feelings, and stuff like that he'd usually miss until it was too late. Pepper tilted her head, focusing on that blue light, a bright vibrant pink shot out around her. That sharp perception that made her such an amazing PA and an even better CEO.

"Yes, you're right, the blue eye, I don't see… Normally out of it. Got the right one for that. The left I see.. More."

Pepper breathed out, Happy sat stunned.

"I'm… I'm still me guys."

"Of course you are Tony. Been getting used to these new…" Pepper waved her hands with a wishy-washy way. Not wanting to say the word abilities either it seemed. Her face a little like she ate a particularly sour sweet. "Developments you come back with, at least I don't have to stick my hand in your chest this time." Happy snorted at that, Tony smiled

"Yeah, I don't like using the word 'Abilities' either." He included the air quotation marks and a scowl of his own. "But annoyingly, it's the best word for them. Rhodey says 'Upgrades' but that was equally as weird."

He huffed out a laugh. They spend the next hour catching up, Tony showing of some of his tech abilities that aren't too freaky. Like turning the lights on and off and manipulating the holo screens. Even told Pepper how beautiful her colours were, how strong and vibrant Happy was. Everyone goes away happier, with promises not to let the distance spread again.

They know that there are more quirks of Extremis Tony isn't telling them yet. Tony knows they know. But they all let it go for now, he'd opened up a lot and all of them were left a little raw and dizzy. Tony smiles as he watched Peppers hand catch Happy's as they enter the lift. Waiting for the surge of jealousy and is pleasantly happy to not feel it. Just warmth again. Happy his friends found comfort together. The warmth makes him smile, it's a feeling he thought he'd lost in Siberia, and feeling it for two people who have held steadfast through the decades? That's just awesome.

He'd left stuff out, he'd kept the makeup on, but he felt good about this. Small steps and all that jazz. So he span towards the holograms, not needing to use his hands anymore, but enjoying the actions anyway. His hands move much faster now anyway and separately. He throws himself into work, with several projects in his mind, and manipulating one from each hand, he relaxes and loses himself to the quiet haze of work. He was building more nano-tech, for uses other than the suit, thinking he had enough vibranium left over from building his hand to fill the hive he built into an upgraded arc reactor, and it had to go somewhere after all, plus with his uplink to tech as it was, he
was looking forward to this.

……

After several hours of working Tony's mind kept wandering to the box in the corner of his shop. The box that contained the Winter Soldier's arm. He'd stored it and resolutely ignored it when he was building his own hand, Shuri had helped him out, especially with the nerves even though she thought he was talking about ideas for Barnes arm and new med-tech for SI, he'd told her it was a side project got fun whilst he was healing. He wasn't sure if she believed him, but she'd gone with it. He'd used the vibranium that had been a lovely get well gift from the teen when they'd been in contact for a few weeks after his coma. She didn't know exactly what had happened, but the fact he'd told her that her brother left him to die when he'd opened up a little had distressed her greatly. Her distress was why he'd not said more, no matter how bad his day was, he wasn't going to dump that on her doorstep.

He'd wanted his arm to be 100% from his mind(and Shuri) and not influenced by the thing that killed his mother. Now though, it was bugging him. He wanted to take it apart. Shrugging he decided now was better than never, walking to the box whilst running a sort of the SHYDRA files for anything relating to the arm and Barnes. Putting all the files in a folder and letting FRIDAY sort them for him.

Placing the horrendously heavy, chunk of metal on his desk with a loud thunk. Grimacing that he could see rust even from here. He saw the maintenance logs but wondered what maintenance had actually been done. He started reading how the arm was developed and installed. He was half way through when he went pale. By the end of that file he was bent over the toilet. Losing what was still in his stomach. Extremis struggling to straighten out his vitals but flailing slightly with his emotions. He'd read some of Barnes files since he woke up, trying to find out more, trying to find why his parents, the torture, the brainwashing, he'd forced himself to read it all in some weird punishment for attacking the guy whilst still wanting to punch him. In his mind, Barnes was still in the 'He killed my mother' box, but also into the 'Severe Guilt' box too. It was uncomfortable and confusing. Why couldn't he just hate the man! He knew he was the weapon however, not the person who pulled the trigger. Logic vs Emotional. It was tearing up his brain.

The arm however, it was a whole extra level of torture. It didn't have to hurt, the files stated that clearly and having a metal limb himself, he knew that. No, they'd just intentionally made it so it was constantly agonising as a tactic to keep the Winter Soldier as the Asset, to keep him in line. You'd think having your vest weapon in agony would be ridiculous, but apparently the serum was constantly trying to heal Barnes brain of the brainwashing. The chair was 1 half of control, the arm was the other. Maintenance on the arm was also basically maintenance torture. Tony was pale, shaking slightly and staring at the arm in horror. Barnes might not have been able to feel with the arm… but he had felt it get blasted off. He knew too, it was still painful even without this part. The socket was just as messed up.

Great, more guilt. Guilt is like sand he thinks. Like when you go to the beach and then there's sand everywhere for weeks. He helped torture a person who had been tortured for the better part of the century. He clenched his hands, as much as he wanted to blame himself for this, he had to place a lot of blame at Roger's feet. If he'd been told about his parents 2 years ago. By his friend. In a safe place. Would he have fought Barnes when he saw him? Tony liked to think no. As much as Roger's thought, Tony hadn't been trying to kill him in the bunker. He'd hit Rogers first, open handed too. He'd just needed someone else to hurt. Not very mature maybe. He needed to do… Something. He couldn't forgive and forget, it wasn't in his nature to discover information like that and go 'OK, cool.' But maybe he could do something for the man in pain he'd heaped even more pain on.
He rolled across workshop to where the BARF headset is set up. Picking it up and twiddling it in his hands. Maybe he could do something to get rid of this feeling. He didn't like feeling guilt towards Barnes. He wanted to feel angry, to rage. Looking at the glasses in his hand and all he felt was that he was drowning in guilt.

"FRIDAY, put a call through to T’Challa, don't bother pretending we don't know his direct number… hopefully he won't send us to voicemail."

He muses idly, setting down the BARF set, then spinning in his chair. Slipping on his sunglasses back on so he could have a video call.

"We could just put the call through anyway? Even if he does Boss."

"Devious my girl, go on, have fun."

Tony hums to himself, waiting at the screen, mildly amused when a slightly baffled picture of T'Challa pops up.

"Hey there King Kitty"

"Dr Stark… Uh.. Hi?"

Stark's grin turn sharp and wolfish for a second, a flash of teeth, no point playing coy when you had just overridden someone trying to sending you to voicemail after all.

Not that he disliked the King, he'd actually got on pretty well with him all things considered. But that doesn't change the fact he's housing Rogers. It didn't change the fact he had left him with them. It didn't change the fact that he had left him to rot in an icy coffin. That he'd left him to die. If he hadn't, he might even feel bad for him. (He does feel bad for Shuri though, having his ex teammates around has been seriously annoying her. Rogers especially after Barnes went into Cryo. Apparently he turns up daily to demand why she hasn't come up with a way to fix Barnes brain yet. Because in Rogers world, if you were a genius you obviously knew everything, even things outside of your remit.)

"Have you solved the problem with the command words yet?"

T'Challa's face locks down into a mask, almost imperceptible. But his left eye almost sees it in slow motion, the confusion, panic and a touch of fear. He can't see colours over video calls, but he sees more details that he would have when he was more human. Apparently obviously implying T'Challa is hiding a bunch of very wanted international fugitives when he's at a vulnerable time for his people makes the man nervous.

"Babysitting duty sucks doesn't it Felix?"

Tony grins again, all teeth and sharpness. Nothing like when they'd met before. This is the face he wears when talking to business people he hated and wanted to destroy, or when he was in the shark infested waters of socialites and galas.

"But that's not why I'm calling Your Royal Kittiness. I have something that could help with that problem I'm assuming you have in the freezer?"

T'Challa sighs, Rubbing his hand down his face in a gesture he finds all to familiar. He'd been dealing with them for years, he knew just how much of a headache the rogues could be. (Or he was annoyed at the cat names, either or.) You'd think it would kill them to learn even a tiny bit of politics and public relations along with reasonable demands.
"Some help on that matter would be appreciated Dr Stark."

T'Challa offered a tentative smile at Tony. Tony just remembered creeping ice. His left hand clenching at the memories.

"Hmm, I'm sensing a touch of buyers remorse there Grumpy Cat! Well, no take backsies. But I might send something your way."

He spun in the stool a few times, scratching his chin in thought.

"I'm sure Shuri will like some presents."

This time he does smile, much warmer than the sharp, wolf smiles T'Challa had been getting. Causing the young Kings brows to knit in confusion, making Tony wonder just what Rogers had told the King about the condition he'd been left in. No matter, he had no plans to enlighten the man anytime soon, he wanted to hold onto some anger, somewhere. He felt the desperate need to as holding onto it for Barnes was getting increasingly difficult. He was trying, sending him his new tech wasn't a kindness really. It was just good planning. The world was safer if he couldn't be triggered after all. Yup, that was just it.

He shakes his thoughts away as T'Challa stares at him in confusion and waves at the young King. Not giving him a chance to say anything else as FRIDAY cuts the call on a very startled T'Challa, mouth open, about to say something, who likely just realised a few things.

Tony knew where they were, obviously had for a while. Knew about Barnes condition. That he knows enough about their location to apparently send parcels. Tony, a man of no small political influences, especially with the Accords Council knew he was housing international fugitives. All on top of the fact that Tony, despite the fact no one had integrated the coding of Wakanda and the rest of the world yet, had enough control to force a call through on their system. All highly amusing things for Tony, and probably Shuri, but likely a little nerve racking for T'Challa. He fires of a text of what he just did including the video file of the call, hoping she'd find it amusing along with a data packet with a rough outline on BARF.

Tony however just finds it all so hilarious, it's just funny that the Rogues are likely driving the young King up the wall instead of him. He wonders what they're demanding.. He'd have to ask Shuri for some surveillance footage he thinks. At that idea he finds himself laughing. Really, truly laughing like he hasn't in… So long. It sounds strange at first, like breaking glass or nails on the chalkboard to him. It's been a while since he has done more than huff in amusement. As he carries on however it starts to sound better, maybe a touch hysterical, but better.

Peter walks into the workshop a little slowly, as Tony is on his way to manic laughter by now and the young boy had just gotten back from grudgingly being gone for so long, coming straight to the compound for the weekend before back home on Monday. Watching as Tony topples of the stool, trying to breathe, and stop laughing, and failing miserably. That jerks Peter into action.

"Mr Stark! What's happened?!"

Harley strolls in a few minutes later, chucking his backpack at his desk in the workshop before strolling casually over the hysterically laughing Tony and Peter, who was at this point flitting around a gasping Tony, which really wasn't helping Tony stop laughing and was just making it worse. The laughter becoming almost quiet as he tries to stop and breathe, tears streaming down his face.

"What did you do?"
Harley demands as Peter splutters.

"You went and broke my mechanic is what you did!"

"It wasn't me! I just came in and he just fell off of his stool, cackling, and I'm getting worried he'll stop breathing!"

Peters voice gets progressively higher pitch as he fuses over the older man on the floor. Unfortunately their conversation is making it worse, it's like years of laughter is coming out and he can't stop.

Harley sighs, the dramatic, world weary sigh that only teenagers can harness, and pokes Tony with his foot a few times. At least that wasn't less helpful that Peters panicked flitting like a hummingbird.

It took him a good 10 minutes to calm down. Something inside him… Not relaxed, it didn't leave… but the ice, snow and the cold that had settled into his bones, that whipped through his mind and occasionally whited out his vision… just maybe it thawed a bit and made room for something truly warm. By the time Tara comes running in, the seven year old flings herself on top of Tony, his arms catching her easily, he's just smiling like an idiot when the two teenagers sit down either side of him. He Sees all three of their colours flowing around them all and sighs, content, happy and tells then how King Kitty is stuck babysitting as long as they promise not to tell Uncle Rhodey.

…

After a lot of chatting and catching up, mostly about their camps and what he'd done when they were gone, as if they hadn't been in daily contact the whole time. He doesn't mention the Rogues often, Harleys face darkens, Peters fills with anger and concern. But it's Tara's fear and her clutching his chest that little tighter that makes him rage at them. She didn't deserve the memory of him, weakened, battered in the hospital. He tries to show her everyday how alive he is. That he won't leave her too. He sends them up to wash and get ready for dinner whilst putting in a huge order for his favourite Italian place. Between his and Peters metabolism, plus maybe Carol was coming again tonight, he also lost half his lunch earlier, they tend to eat a lot. Harley also eats a lot, but a normal teenager amount. At first Tony, and even Peter had tried eating normally around others, but Harley had kicked both of them in the shins. It was his go to for when his family were idiots it seems.

Putting together his care package to Wakanda quickly before he gets ready to join them, sending Rhodey a text that he was coming and getting one back that Carol was coming. Oh, well maybe he could tell her after dinner whilst she is wondering why he ate so much. He includes everything for BARF, data and equipment, including data of its use on himself, he trusts Shuri with the information. He doesn't include the memory videos however, but the file names are there and data to help her navigate the algorithms, idly knowing the basic settings won't work for Barnes but they'll cross that bridge later. He tosses in a pink panther consolation card he printed off to King Kitty, with 'Don't give in to all of their demands or they'll just want more. I spoiled them and as thanks they gave me Siberia. - T.'

He included some information on the next round of accords amendments as a peace offering for T'Challa, and maybe as an olive branch for collaboration on them. Not friendship yet, maybe he could work to forgive them man. It was easier to hold onto the hate from here, he wondered if Seeing the man would scupper that like it had with Natka.

Some candy they'd made recently was added for Shuri, a few other tasty things too. A little post it
Note saying 'Shuri is Awesome' with little cat doodles around it. He dithered back and forth but ended up including a USB with all the horrifying, collated information on Barnes arm that he'd gone through. Maybe she can do something for him. Or not. He even included updated information he'd gathered since using his hand, but edited it to sound like an experiment rather than something attached to his body. The only pictures he included was from before he'd attached it and anything about feeling was readings he'd taken from his computer. She was a genius however, so he goes through it 10 times to make sure she won't click.

Frowning and considering taking it out entirely, but maybe they can help Barnes and it will get rid of this feeling in his mind. Because he knows now, with an assurity of someone who had suffered chronic pain for years post Afghanistan, that Barnes was in constant pain. Even if he didn't tell anyone. Tony didn't write that in so many words, that wasn't his place and it would sound kind of weird. He just hoped that they could work it out from the file he included. He figured this was worth Shuri's suspicion on the matter, comparing the Hydra notes on the arm to his were night and day. He adds a few other things he'd been collecting for the teen, kitty mugs, some amusing t-shirts, a pretty dress he thought she'd like that Peter had found. Heck he was getting used to having kids around. Which apparently upped his need to find stuff and make stuff that they'd like. Shuri had found herself in his mind with the other 3. Using multiple post it note to say what was whose and what was in the usbs.

He wasn't just throwing money at them like some people think, some stuff was very cheap, but he saw it and thought of them, so he got it. Giving people stuff they liked was basically a hobby that he planned for constantly. He added the two plush black panthers, King Kitty could have one too. He sealed the box up and sorted for a stealth drone to deliver it to the Palace door step. Adding a sign saying 'I'm not a bomb. I'm presents. -T'.

Finally, he stood up, ready head upstairs and a message from Bruce came in, a huge grin split across his face like it did everytime his Science Bro contacted him. He was so far out that he would occasionally go days with no contract, even with the device Tony gave him that worked where there was little to no connection and it was powered by a mini arc reactor, even though he hadn't told Bruce that. The message this time was short and sweet, nothing like Bruce's long, letter styles messages-

"YOU WERE IN A FUCKING COMA?!"

Tony sat down, and conked his head on the desk.

"Ow. Great, anything else to make today more painful?"

"Uh, Funny you say that Boss, but I'm getting information in that's brought the FDS File up, Level 9 warning on file - Annoying.Ant."

Tony lifted his head, only to drop it again on the table.

"Ow."

Chapter End Notes

Every so sorry for kind of killing of Harleys mum, but I like Harley and wanted him
around and this was the best suggestion. Still not sure on the sisters name but I'm kind of liking this.

Also, Jules was my favourite PT and found it hilarious that I called her torture lady.
That's what Family is for

Chapter Summary

Tony tells Carol, who took over my chapter and scuppered my plans, and maybe I'm still salty about Ultron.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the POV shift, I tried to do this in Tony, Rhodey or Carol, but they all wanted a piece of the action.

Hope Everyone enjoys :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

September 8th

Rubbing his forehead he considers how best to handle this latest move from Ross. He should have known something was up, he'd stopped haranguing him and calling about the rogues about a week ago. Tony had foolishly hoped that this meant the vile sludge monster that was Thunderbolt had grown up and moved on. That would have been a miracle. Luckily the FDS program ran continuously, it was something he'd put into practice after Ultron after meeting the kids, adding people to it as they met others. After the debacle with the raft he'd updated it to include Lang.

Family Defence Sentinel was a constantly running file with its own AI, CERBERUS, so it could be focused on the family members. The guardian to the gates of their own personal hells - their loved ones ending up hurt from their choices, something he'd learnt when Happy had been blown up, when Pepper had been injected and finally when Rhodey fell, all his fault.

CERBERUS spoke to FRIDAY often however, and he tended to carry on speaking to Laura and the kids after they'd been moved into the compound. Which hadn't been part of his core programming, but FRIDAY seemed to have imparted her over protective ways to him. He was a fast learner, he was ridiculously proud of his new son.

Tony was happy to see that Ross hadn't sent anyone to Peggy and Jim's current location yet, he'd just triggered certain parameters that he was planning to. Tony had moved them twice now and they'd agreed with him that if Ross found them again, Jim would take a job at the compound and they'd move in. Tony had saved a suit next to Laura's hoping that Cassie, Lila and Tara would potentially get on, being near the same age. The school he had them all enrolled in was the kind of school diplomats and people with dangerous enemies sent their kids to. Laura had been unsure at first because of the expenses, but after Ross came after them because of Clint she cared more about their safety. She'd decided to find ways of paying Tony back, even though he told her she didn't need to.
He remembered being kidnapped enough when he was younger that he was going to ensure that wouldn't happen to any of these kids. Peter was the only outlier, refusing to leave his school as there was 'no need' as just a SI Intern. But a few cheques here and there and Tony had successfully linked the schools, (and a few others so Peter wouldn't think it was him and just a happy coincidence, ha) so Harley and Peter got to occasionally see each other for events.

"FRIDAY, contact Carol and tell her that extraction protocols are now active for Annoying.Ant, we'll move them as soon as a jet can touch down. Tell Carol to maybe ask Laura if she's willing to run point? Might make them more comfortable."

"Sure thing Boss!"

Tony trailed off, scratching his beard before firing off an email to Maria Hill, who he'd put in charge of his growing division of EX-SHIELD agents (he really needed a better name for them now, he'd integrated them with the Avengers a lot more now a Rogers didn't just have them playing clean up since he'd been slowly moving them into the compound.) They were steadily coming together to be a real force that helped the avengers, better than when SHIELD had been around even, especially as it was less shadowy and secret plots these days and the Avengers did more than just world-ending events. Ah, the joys of making everything shiny and official.

So paperwork, paperwork everywhere. Maria would organise a team to pack up their belongings posing as a delivery firm but able to take on threats if need me. They were getting very good at faking being movers with no knowledge of what was happening because of Ross. He still had the footage on his private server of Ross yelling at a bored looking mover when they emptied the farm.

"CERBERUS, You can contact Maggie and Jim in advance, tell them we're running Extraction1 and keep them updated as they go. Don't panic them, tell them Ross is getting close, but isn't on their doorstep. But we want them out ASAP, their stuff is secondary as we discussed."

"On it Chief."

Tony smiled as his AIs worked together to bring the family in with his team. It was hard for him to not be the one charging off, leading the extraction. But this was why he had people now, to share the load. Plus if he passed out seeing the family for the first time in person that wouldn't be helpful. It would put them at risk if the extraction team had to split protection duty and taking double would draw too much attention.

With that sorted out, he decided to head up for dinner with his family. Carol was over tonight so he could bare his soul again. Yay. Even after telling Pepper and Happy, he didn't relish telling other people. It was hard to just explain part of the story without the painful, squishy parts. He liked the way Carol looked at him now. He didn't want that to change. Also he was planning just what to tell Bruce. How Bruce had found out about the coma in the first place, without access to the Internet, at least as far as he knew, he had no clue.

Strolling into the lift to take him out of the basement levels and towards the short walk to the West Wing he loaded up the chat box and just squinted at it. Glasses in place he decided to take a more circuitous route over to the residential sector. Wave to a few people, let them know he was getting out more. Hoping that it would give him some inspiration for how to explain the 'Civil War' to his ScienceBro.

'Bruce, I didn't want to concern you! By the time I could message you I was healing. We just had a few disagreements within the Avengers. Fights were had, punches thrown, 117 countries got involved. It's a long, convoluted story. But everything is great now I'm healthier than ever, nothing
Squinting at the message, *that'll do*, he sent it. He didn't expect anything back right away, hopefully, even with the tech he'd sent him, Bruce still would occasionally go dark for days at a time and messages take a while to get through and the symbol that he was out of range was active, so the man must be on the move somewhere, must be how he came across news of his coma. Odd that he just discovered that and now the rest of the Avengers family drama. *Welp, thank Thor for small mercies I suppose.*' Explaining Ross was not something he wanted to do yet. It was a wholly inadequate explanation, but he really didn't know how to get into it like this. Sighing, he hoped that Bruce wasn't too mad at him. His worry however was pushed back when a tiny person slammed into his legs, making him rock slightly on the spot.

"You're late!"

"I'm sorry, I was sorting out Maggie and Jim. They'll be coming here soon."

"Cassie too?!"

"Yes, Cassie too."

"Then you are forgiven"

The little blonde 7-year old sniffed, before grabbing his hand and dragging him into the apartment and towards the dinner table that was already set up. Which he remembered was his job today, which meant he was going to be on dishes later instead likely. Rhodey and Peter were already sat at the table, deep in conversation, Harley was in the kitchen talking to Carol who was dishing up something that smelt so good it took all of his willpower not to go over and steal something. He knew that Carol wielded a mean spatula however, and would thwack him on the forehead for it. And chase him with said spatula. He sat himself down next to Peter who jumped, for a boy with heightened senses, Tony found it easy and quite fun to sneak up on him, he called it 'training'. Tara diverted to the kitchen seeing Tony seated and went to check on Carol. She'd decided early on she was the manager of the house as adults were useless, apparently.

"Mr Stark!" Peter all but squeaked at him, bouncing up and down in his seat excitedly.

"Hey Underoos."

"Give me your hand!"

"Um, okay?" Tony offered his hand over tentatively, wondering what he was getting himself into.

"Not that one! The *other* one"

Oh, that made more sense, Tony took his hand out of his pocket.

"I figured you'd actually like to use 2 hands to eat with Carol here so I brought the first prototype up!"

Peter was practically vibrating in excitement, which made Tony grin. Harley had wandered over at Peters squeal and Rhodey leaned over, suddenly very interested to see. Whilst Peter talked a lot about the sleeve, he didn't show anyone, wanting it to be a surprise. Tony was baffled when Peter pulled out a small red disk from a back box and affixed it to the back of his metal hand. Tony tilted his head and watched and Peter tapped out O-P-E-N in morse code. Then watched fascinated as the red turned the same olive complexion as his hand and quickly spread out. He pulled his sleeve up to watch in fascination as his fingers and wrist changed too. It stopped at the metal, leaving just the
ring of scars showing.

"This one only works on metal, me and Dr Cho are working on it so it can extend further and fully cover the scars too!"

Peter whispered as Carol was now bringing food towards the table.

Tony was looking at his hand in utter amazement. It didn't look like his old hand, no scars and callous free, no fingerprints either, but it was very cool and if Pete got this working on skin comfortably, they could make awesome gloves that didn't restrict as much. Tony felt almost like he'd been punched with emotions all of a sudden and grabbed Peter into a hug so he didn't cry at him or something.

"This is amazing Pete, thank you for making this for me."

Peter was slightly overwhelmed by the sudden hug and the way Tony's voice had deepened with emotion. He pulled back and smiled at the kid who had flushed bright red. Carol was watching the interaction with a smile and a question in her eyes, luckily Rhodey distracted her asking for updates on the current extraction mission that Laura was heading.

Tony tugged his sleeve down to cover the scars but couldn't stop looking at his hands that now matched again. Weirdly, he noted, that part of him missed the black matte colour of his metal hand, realising he had gotten more used to it that he'd thought but was happy he didn't have to make up an awkward excuse to Carol about eating one handed. It was awkward with some foods, this would be a nightmare and the 'I burnt my hand' excuse was getting tired.

After losing the contents of his stomach in the lab earlier, Tony was starving. Any residual sickness at the thought of the files overridden by his now overactive metabolism. He decided that as he was planning on having a discussion with Carol later that he didn't have to eat a normal amount and then eat again when she left like he had last time(Or awkwardly duck into the fridge and scarf down a block of cheese when she wasn't looking, again).

It had been awkward enough saying he'd burnt his left hand on a blow torch the first time because it was the only thing he could think of when she noticed him using one hand. Carol however surprised him by only raising an eyebrow when Tony went back for a very large portion of thirds along with Peter, as everyone else chatted at the table, happy and full. 'Maybe people don't notice these things as much as I thought?' He and Peter did not turn it into a competition on who could finish the 3rd plate. Nope, that would be juvenile. He won.

Full, and very happy with himself he flopped onto the sofa as the kids dashed off to the games room, not understanding how they could move so fast after eating so much. They yelled about meeting up with Lilah and Cooper before bolting, likely to discuss their plans to welcome Cassie. Tony couldn't help but smile, Jess had the kids when Laura went out on missions these days and he knew that she loved being inundated with all the kids, no matter what she said.

He was warm, he'd eaten so much food he felt happy and fuzzy, the kids were happy about a new person joining them and Carol and Rhodey were not at all subtly making goo goo eyes at each other whilst they did the dishes together, which meant he was scot free on chores tonight. Life was good. When the pair finally joined him, dishes do not take that long, he helped Rhodey switch from the chair to the sofa. Rhodey relaxing back and sighing. No matter how comfortable you make a wheelchair, it'll never beat his sofa. Carol usually sat next to Rhodey and they'd stick a movie on which Tony was settling to do when Rhodey elbowed him in the ribs and looked at Carol pointedly. Oh yeah. The talk.
"Carol, mind parting from our delightful Sour Patch and joining me here, I uh.. Need to talk about, stuff?"

Tony scratched the back of his neck nervously as Carol redirected, obviously interested.

"This about your healing period?"

Tony nodded, he knew that she knew something was up. Carol visited enough to know Tony was in good physical health but she hadn't pushed. Something he loved the woman for as well as the fact she was wicked smart and as tenacious as could be, that Rhodey had the biggest crush on her was an awesome benefit. She didn't even pester Rhodey about Tony, which had happened a lot in his life, much to his irritation. She just told him to take all the time he needed.

Much to Tony's initial confusion, having become accustomed to Roger's way of leadership over the last few years or Fury's overbearing nature. Which mostly consisted of Tony being told he was disappointing someone, somewhere, all the time.

Carol though was patient, and happy to give Tony time to work through whatever it was. He could See that she trusted his judgement. Although he had no idea why. Baffling really, everyone knew he sucked at working with people.

"So, first I just wanted to thank you for giving me all this time to bunk off" He grinned at her, with usual self deprecating humour and is surprised when she frowns at him a little.

"Tony, you aren't bunking off, you've been neck deep in Accords, transitioning and hiring more EX-SHIELD Agents whenever you find them, we really need to rename them by the way, Pepper has been gushing to me at how much work you've done for SI lately, and I know you've been at the lead sorting out things around the compound using Rhodey as a proxy. Rhodey is knackered just actioning all your work! You found all the people in this new team, your brought them together and made them feel safe and gave them a home! If this is 'bunking off', I'm now terrified of you 'working'."

She grinned at Tony now who was sitting kind of stunned. Mouth open, ignoring Rhodey was helpfully cackling himself too. Choking out that Carol had made Tony speechless.

"Anyone who would begrudge you some transitioning time to active duty after a 10 day coma would be an insensitive bastard. Even if you had actually rested instead of doing more work than my brain can conceive of, I mean, when do you sleep!??"

Carol did look a little smug at that and Tony clicked his mouth shut. Blinking a few times behind his sunglasses and wondered how much Rhodey had told her about Roger's.

"Oh, he doesn't. He lives off of coffee until he collapses and repeats."

Suddenly Tony found himself looking at two very similar expressions.

"Oh no. There are two of you."

Carol and Rhodey both laugh and shoulder bumped him. Making him feel less criticised for his sleeping (or lack thereof) and over working habits and more cared for.
"Plus there is all the work into the training rooms and all of our gear. Which by the way, I love the training gear you made me! Thank you so much, it's fun to be able to work out without destroying everything! You've turned this from an ill thought out group slammed together to a genuine organisation with internships, departments for anything I could think of and you're emphasis on the mental health department is awesome and my personal favourite. Need I go on?"

"If you go on, I think he might turn completely red and disappear into the couch."

Rhodey grinned. Obviously finding it highly amusing how flustered Tony was at this but also part of him was happy that finally someone other than him noticed just how much Tony worked for the Avengers. The old team had just taken and taken then demanded more and more without recognising the scope of his work. The fact Tony was flustered and baffled at being thanked alone showed Carol yet another thing that made her angry at the old team, and by proxy, Fury too. No one should have such a confused reaction to having their work congratulated or thanked in her mind.

"I'm also looking forward to you coming back and leading the Avengers with us."

"Huh?"

Tony replied intelligently. He wasn't sure what happened but this conversation had gotten away from him and he wasn't sure exactly what was happening right now...

"I'm a terrible leader, you two a great at it and I'm pretty awful at working with teams anyway.. I just make stuff."

"Tony, please tell me that stupid report Fury and Romanoff wrote about you is not still in your mind? You were the public face of the Avengers for years, the only one who turned up to help after! I'm good at running things in the field man, but you shine at running things at base command, especially with PR and Press Conferences, Carol is awesome with team cohesion, people and training, we all have our zones that occasionally interlock. Me and Carol decided the three of us would be unstoppable."

Rhodey looked smug, Tony was starting to feel like Rhodey had orchestrated this entire thing. Get Tony to tell Carol and they ambush him with compliments and telling him he was a good leader. Tony's brain was practically BSOD now.

"Wait, what report?"

Carol asked Rhodey whilst Tony remembered how to speak.

"Iron Man - Yes, Tony Stark - Not Recommended."

Rhodey spat, Carol's eyebrows shot up.

"Well that's frankly ridiculous. I've not had the pleasure of working with Iron Man yet, I'm sure he's awesome."

Carol smirks at Tony who is still baffled, this is certainly not helping. Rhodey is trying not to laugh, and failing. Who knew that Carol was an expert at confusing Tony into shocked silences.

"But I've been working with Tony Stark for a while now and he's dedicated, works well with us and throws himself passionately into making sure we're all happy! Not recommend my ass."

"I have no idea what's happening right now…"
"I think you broke him Carol."

Carol and Rhodey chuckled as Tony shook his head.

"Well, before you make any decisions of me leading, you probably need to know everything."

Carol just sits back, trying to make Tony feel comfortable as she knew serious conversations about himself were not his forte.

"As you might have noticed, I'm pretty recovered from the coma? One of the reasons I've been 'hiding out' so to speak is because of how fast I recovered. Rhodey saved my life. I've been fine since I got home really. Physically."

He gives the man a pointed look in case we are back to guilt Town, Carol glances between the two men, confusion evident on her face but still sat back and relaxed, he can see the questions swimming around her, but she waits on him. Something Tony is endlessly thankful for. He could just imagine trying to have this talk with Rogers or the old team. He doubted the super soldier would sit back and let Tony get to it in his own time, he would bark out questions in a bad order and end up finding Tony at fault for something whilst Tony scrambled to explain. Clint and Wanda sniping at him. Carol and Rogers were like night and day.

"After... Vision found me in Siberia, I was sinking further into the coma. The doctors thought it was unlikely I'd come out and if I did, things wouldn't be great. You've heard of Extremis right? Rhodey saved me with that."

Tony sucked in a breath, looking queasy. He didn't like thinking of the state he'd have been in, what could have been, he definitely didn't like thinking about Siberia. Avoidance was working well for him as far as he was concerned. He'd been about to start his story at the fight, to explain why he was in the coma, but switched to after instead at the last second. He hadn't even looked at his medical files from his stay. He knew some stuff, and that was too much, after reading brain bleed he snapped the file shut and noped out. Rhodey however had that information indelibly burned into his mind. Carol notices the pain in Rhodey's face and that Tony has paled, she can tell that there is much more that isn't being said.

"Tony, what... what happened in Siberia? I don't want to pry, you don't have to tell me. But as your friend I'd like to know so I can help you in any way you need."

Faced with such an earnest plea Tony finds himself wanting to talk. He starts and stops four times. Words just not coming out, getting frustrated with himself but is shocked to find Carol is just waiting on him. He closes his eyes and breathes out, snagging a tablet and loading up the holoscreen. Placing it in front of her.

"This... this is easier. Tell me when it's done?"

Tony hits play and throws himself into the link, hands over his ears and watching cat videos on YouTube that vision sent him. If he wasn't in the link the hands wouldn't stop my hearing anything. Carol was about to offer him an out when the video started and it grabs her attention. As she sees Barnes, Rogers and Tony.

She knew there would be a fight, but not who had fought Tony, except mentions of other Winter Soldiers when Ross had demanded to know what happened during the search for Roger's and what had happened to him. Luckily Carol had been around to divert him from the very thin, haggard Tony.
Rhodey's hand is on Tony's shoulder, Carol notices Rhodey is watching with an intensity that tells her that maybe he hasn't seen this before either.

Carol and Rhodey watch in silence, Tony in the video, sporting a black eye, looking exhausted yet still standing somehow, chatting amicably with the others. Carol can't help but compare this with the Tony she knows. With so much life in him, always making time with the kids. Although she realises oddly that this is the first time she's seen him without sunglasses on. She doesn't know why but that thought sent a chill down her spine.

From what she could see, the soldiers were dead already, Zemo's voice could be heard... But he couldn't have done that level of damage to Tony. But it couldn't have been the super soldiers? Why would they hurt him so much as to put him in a coma? She doesn't know why but dread pools in her stomach, joining the chill down her spine. Even though she knows Tony is fine sat next to her, this has an overwhelming sense of wrongness to her. Zemo's speech doesn't help.

'I know that road.'

'What is this?'

Rhodey visibly flinched at the pain in Tony's voice. Carol glances between the two men, but her attention is dragged back to the screen as she watches in quiet horror the events play out in front of her. Watching a friend discover news like this, having to watch your parents die after spending your life thinking it was an accident. Rage burns in her when she finds out Rogers knew that his best friend had killed Tony's parents! He should have found out among family, not amongst liars, strangers and whatever Zemo was.

"How long did he know?" She seethed, asking quietly to Rhodes. Glancing at Tony, wondering how he could sit here and listen to this but the man didn't even twitch in reaction to the video or her voice.

"Two Years" Rhodey spat "Two years where he used Tony to find him. Two years of him attacking Tony for keeping secrets."

Carol sucks in a breath before she's pulled into the video again.

'Don't bullshit me Rogers, did you know?'

'Yes'

Tony reacts to that Yes like he'd been hit and it makes Carol see red. Because as much as Tony barely mentions the man, as much as Rhodes utterly despised the man, Carol had known that they'd been team mates, but that reaction told her that they'd been friends, that Tony had trusted him, even up to this fight he'd still trusted him, and that's what makes her see red.

She's not surprised when Tony hits Roger's. A little shocked it was open handed. She'd have punched him right in his stupid, stubborn, unrepentant jaw.

She's watched many Iron Man fights as she got to know the new team, a requirement for eventual integration of a heavy hitter. She can see he's holding back at key moments. She doesn't know about The Winter Soldier, but she's seen enough fights of Rogers that she knows he isn't holding back.

Unable to turn away, she watches the video. Her hand gripping Tony's knee, Rhodey's hand on his shoulder. As if to remind themselves he's here. He came out the other side of this fight. Maybe he didn't walk away, maybe it changed him irrevocably, but she still got to know him. She'd known
the betrayal and split of the Avengers had hit him hard, watched the other recordings of the fights and mess after the Vienna bombing. This she feels is the missing piece of the civil war, the split had too much pain, it was just too personal to just be the Accords and Roger's stupidity.

'I can do this all day'

Watching Rogers pound on Tony with his vibranium shield, who is lying on the ground is almost too much for Rhodey. He had an idea of what's coming next based on the suit and Tony's injuries, but he finds himself unable to look away. Carols sucked in breath when the helmet is roughly torn from Tony's head makes Rhodey flinch. Rhodey is looking at the damage to his left gauntlet and now without the helmet, with no protection from the Siberia spring. Seeing the breaches in the suit and what that would mean for him. A cold spring at that, the temperature just scraping above zero degrees Fahrenheit. Carol makes a strangled noise as she worried for a second like Tony did, if that shield would hit his neck or exposed face. Even with the man solid next to her tells her otherwise.

It slamming down into the arc reactor isn't much better. Not when she sees the entire suit power down… then they just leave him. In a suit. With no power in freaking Siberia.

A metal coffin in the snow.

The picture of Tony in the coma flashes in her mind. The video carries on for about a minute of Tony alone until it shuts off. Tony must have edited the video to only show the fight. Rhodey taps Tony's shoulder who sucks in a breath and glances up as if coming up from underwater. He'd been considering when he was linked that he'd been making Carol's job harder, she'd been trying to learn about the old team to ensure this never happened again and he'd not given her all the data.

"I'll have FRIDAY send you information and videos of the old team of you like, I know you have the mission reports and some videos, but I'm just realising you might need to know how to old team functioned off the battlefield, I meant to do that weeks ago, but that is what happened in Siberia."

"Or how it didn't function."

Rhodey muttered to himself, he was still very angry at the old team. Part of him was angry at himself too, he should have done more to be on Tony's side and protect him.

Tony shuts the tablet down, Rubbing his hands together, trying to stave off the chill threatening to claim him. Avoiding eye contact from either Carol or Rhodey.

"Tony… How long did it take for Vision to come?"

Tony's laugh is brittle and it makes Rhodey flinch a little, Carol sucked in a breath because there was pain in that laugh.

"A… While. I had to purge tracking data because I was trying to protect him."

She remembered in the video where he had told Roger's that no one knew he was there. So they'd left him, knowing he was without power and no one knew where he was.

The smirk on Tony's face seems.. off to her somehow to her, especially with his brittle laugh and Carol is starting to see another part of Tony she hadn't seen before.

She'd noticed that he had many sides, Apart from the overworked boss, the futurist, the engineer, the man who revolutionises new sciences just because he can, the doting dad, the dad friend that cares so much for the team, the mechanic who makes things for them, on and off the field. The
man who got them individualised mugs, who gave them a home and forged these unlikely people into the beginnings of a family so soon after his old family had been violently wrenched away.

In all of that, she'd seen... glimpses of a well of pain deep enough to concern her, and had enough information to know he had PTSD. But she realised then that he kept so much hidden, how much suffering, pain, and guilt had Tony somehow survived? He was practically… feral with it. How much betrayal could someone experience and still trust? Yet he did somehow, it seemed to be himself he’d lost trust in. Like he was on a dangerous edge where that passion could turn vicious if he let it.

Carol doesn't push, a glance at Rhodey who shakes his head minutely telling her that he doesn't know how long he spent in Siberia either. She doesn't doubt that he knows, they both can see it in his face that Tony knows every minute. She wonders if Tony has told anyone how long he had lain, trapped in a metal coffin that saved his life, and injured by his family, left in the cold. Wondering again how Tony is even sane. She grabbed his right hand, Squeezing tightly to try and impart comfort. She won't force him to tell her the number, but she'll listen if he ever does she decides.

"Extremis… It couldn't fix everything."

He gently, tentatively touched her hand still holding her right with his left. Still covered with the sleeve, but as soon as she wrapped her fingers around it she could feel the difference. He tapped out the morse code to close the cover, (Carol hid the grin as he tapped P-O-O-F out in morse code) and Carol watched in fascination as the matt black of the metal hand was revealed.

"Oh Tony. You know don't need to hide this from us?"

He goes to pull his metal hand back, he's always worried it would repulse someone, even though no one has reacted that way, and Carol somehow sees this, so she grabs it and holds it just as much as his right. He's baffled. But.. Kind of hopeful. He watches with a smile as she looks fascinated by it.

"Can you feel with this, this is amazing, although I shouldn't be shocked that you developed this!"

He nods, with the hand he's still torn, on one side, he made a metal prosthetic hand that it attached to his nerves. That's awesome. It doesn't feel exactly the same as his flesh hand, but he's always tinkering to improve it. To feel more, heck he can weigh things with it now. But that was because Peter broke the weighing scales trying to make cinnamon buns and when he went to fix it, Harley thought it would be cool to make his hand capable of more things than a normal hand. He hadn't considered that meant standing in the kitchen weighing flour however..

"There is something… else that's changed. I got frostbite on my corneas too. Well, I got frostbite practically everywhere, as long as there was something left alive, Extremis could build on it though. The hospital thought I'd be entirely blind, my left eye was utterly dead nothing left. My right was still there but very badly damaged and blind. Like my other injuries, Extremis was able to fix all of that, luckily, if there was enough alive, it regenerated it. But it could not regrow dead tissue, it couldn't create nerves from nothing."

He took his right hand back, convinced she wouldn't let go on his left now, stubbornly. She was focused on his glasses now, at his words that chill was back, she'd known there was something to do with the glasses. Most of the avengers had been wondering about it, concerned but had given Tony space to come to them about it. Now, knowing the trauma behind this, she is happy they didn't try to push and gave him time to get here himself.
"This is why I wear glasses all the time."

Cringing slightly as he pulled them off, resolutely reminding himself to keep his eyes *open* this time. Carol gasped, and Tony tentatively looks at her to see her be horrified or freaked out… But is baffled that she still looks as amazed as she did with his hand. He can see that she's not just faking it either, especially now that he has the glasses off. The interest is sparking around her, the golden electricity that usually wraps around her moving faster than usual.

"Tony, I know you probably aren't expecting this, and you're a guy, so this probably isn't the word you'd like…"

Carol’s grin on her face and her colours put him at ease, wondering what she's going to say.

"But you're eyes are beautiful."

Tony barks out a laugh, yeah he hadn't seen that coming. The blue unsettled him occasionally so he'd assumed it would unsettle other people. Kids not included, kids were weird and liked anything weird. She says it with such confidence it amazes him and gives him confidence to go all in.

Looking at Rhodey.

"All in?"

"I've been telling you to go all in since we left the hospital. At least with family."

Carol actually looks excited.

"There is more?"

"Yeah, I figured with you being the leader that you need a run down of my weirdness and my, ugh, 'abilities', and I've not really told many people about the weird bits. I have just been kind hiding and I don't think it's helping. Rhodey, pass the wipes?"

Carol frowns as Rhodey reaches into the drawer next to the sofa to get out the make up wipes and putting them on his lap as he listens to Carol talk. Carol glancing at them, wondering what on earth was going to be next.

"Yeah, hiding new abilities and trying to ignore stuff is rarely good for people like us, they might come out at bad times you need to train ideally, the more the better."

Tony blinks slightly at the idea of being included in the same category as someone like Carol. Rhodey feels like if he rolls his eyes on this subject anymore he'll actually see his brain. Tony has this weird disconnect from the fact they now lives with many people with weird abilities so why would they be weird about him joining them?!

"Well, I'm kind of a technopath now."

Chuckling, he brings up the holograms on the table with his mind this time instead of touching them. Loading this and that, and finally Chat box He types 'HI CAROL ;)’ in whilst sitting there completely still.

"Fitting!"

Carol winks back because Tony Stark being a technopath does just seem perfect in her mind. It just seems like the next logical step.
"The virus, it was a version I'd been playing with. I'd never Intended to use it."

He tries to assure her, worried she'd think he was power hungry or something, obviously thinking about what he past teammates would have reacted to him. Carol gives him a look that makes him relax again. A frown that said 'Stop being an idiot' so clearly a laugh nearly jumped out of him, but he was still knackered after the hysterical laughing fit in the workshop.

"I'd been trying to see just how much I could change and keep it stable, kind of like a hobby. The original extremis made people so strong, healing from horrible, terrible things, so fast, even with occasional fire breathing, but they... kind of exploded because they couldn't stabilise it. The exothermic reaction was utterly out of control."

"I saw the files, I still can't believe it was tested on people with such a glaring flaw! I'll assume that you aren't going to explode though? Can you breathe fire though? Because then I'm calling you a dragon. Iron Dragon?"

She asked, so matter of factly that Tony is left blinking again. Every time he had imagined these conversations they did not go this way. Really he should remember that he's surrounded by people who are different in one way or another.

"Ah, no, no fire breathing, but I can change my body temp. Not as flashy."

Laughing he started raising his body temperature until it was very noticeable. His hands quite a bit warmer now.

"Oooo, I like this. You are now officially my heating pack when I get cold. I can see arguments over who gets to sit next to you on movie night and everything."

Tony laughs. Feeling something unclench inside him at Carol's easy, excited acceptance of things he'd been struggling with since he woke up.

"Strength, speed, healing and such all got a boost too, I don't know if I could spar on par with you though, how are you so cool with this?"

Tony still hadn't pushed him limits yet to see how strong he was, he knew now that he was extremely fast, especially if he let go of his other senses and just focused on speed and carrying around Rhodey's physio equipment was very easy. Maybe Carol was right, he needed to properly train, see what he could do. Maybe with practice he'd be able to push to top speed and hold onto other things. This still felt too surreal. Yeah he was Iron Man, but he'd always been baseline human surrounded by supers.

"Tony, did you not notice that you have been collecting powered people like stray cats? So you are obviously fine with people who aren't baseline human?"

"Of course, why wouldn't I be?"

Tony frowns when Rhodey facepalmed next to him.

"Well, you are just powered too now. What's wrong with that?"

She probes, getting the feeling that he is conflicted over having abilities himself. Noticing that the easy acceptance he has for others no matter how strange or scary that ability is, is just lacking for some reason when it comes to himself.

"If I say it, it sounds awful."
"Well say it anyway. I'm not going to be angry at you Tony, you are still new to this."

"I feel like I've traded in my humanity. Like I lost something by not being human anymore. I have no idea what I am now."

Tony frowned, knowing that saying this to powered people isn't exactly nice, like maybe he's saying they aren't human or something. He doesn't believe that at all, but there is just a disconnect when he thinks of himself.

"But you still see the rest of us as humans? Even if we are enhanced, inhuman or mutant? You treat Vis as a person too. Your AIs too."

"Of course I do!"

"Oh sweetheart. You are still you. Just a little stronger, faster, more connected to your tech, which by the way, I'm not shocked at, you have always been quite connected with your tech from what I've seen. You're still human too Tony."

Tony let's out the breath he'd been holding. Ducking his head guiltily. Also wondering how many of the back files had Carol actually read! And she accused him of over working!

"I was worried that you'd think I was insulting you, calling you less human or something."

"I understand, I've had my abilities longer, you'll get there with yours. Now tell me about your eyes, I'm guessing it's not just decoration?"

"No, that's actually the weirdest part I'm having trouble with."

He chews his lip, wondering how to talk about it. Rhodey leans forward because getting Tony to discuss this is like pulling teeth and apparently Carol is the Tony-Whisperer... Plus Rhodey muses to himself, it's harder to flee the room when Carol is holding onto you.

" Weird is relative. Pretty sure I exploded."

Carol smirks, shrugging, abilities were strange things and trying to apply rules to them usually was just asking for the rules to be broken. They had a blind man that could fight and see better than sighted people and a magic ex surgeon on their Roster, not even getting into the rest of Defenders, collaborating with the Fantastic 4 and Xavier too? She'd never felt more accepted. She hoped Tony would end up feeling similar, introducing him to Xavier sounded like a good plan, that man had perfected the art of getting people with sudden abilities used to them.

Tony drummed his fingers against Carol's hand in a nervous gesture, he would have drummed them against his chest but Carol was still enjoying herself with the warmth of his right hand and gently fiddling with the joints on his left much to his amusement.

"We'll, first, I thought it was a kind of synesthesia? Like is you click your fingers, I'd see like a flame of colour. Thankfully I can control that or talking would by annoying."

"That is so cool!"

"Yeah? I kind of like it, it's made learning instruments really different and fun when I was stuck in bed. That was Peter's idea as PT that wasn't boring."

"Oh yeah Carol, you have to hear him on the violin. He never touched one before last week and now it's entrancing, I want him to pay all the time! The first day was like screeching cats
Rhodey grimaces thinking back to that day, he is still pretty sure Tony kept up the screeching on purpose, always appearing in the same room as him. Until he decided to try and play properly (When Peter got home!) Carol bounces a little in excitement and Tony finds its catching. Having an adult excited over this stuff apparently is just what he needs, kids are kind of naturally crazy and Rhodey was still a big kid under the grouchy and serious exterior he showed the world. He didn't know how people didn't see it, the man had been friends with Tony Stark voluntarily since he was 14 years old, yet people assumed he was all seriousness and adult.

"That's awesome, I expect to hear everything! Maybe not the screeching though. So, you said at first?"

"Yeah, this is the bit I'm not so fond of… I see these colours on… people. It was dull at first, patchy, but now it's very strong. Everyone is different in some way or another, and say red on one person doesn't mean the same red on someone else. Sometimes I can get information out of it… but sometimes I just can't understand it all, or it takes me a while to understand. Sometimes I just know somehow."

Tony frowned, even describing it was maddening and wishy-washy.

"I can get insights on the person, basically, in a weird way."

Rhodey was chuckling at the look on Tony's face. He looks somewhat like he was just forced to eat a lemon. Obviously not liking the variable nature of this ability.

"Oh, And he refuses to tell me what he Sees in people."

Rhodey sulks. Chucking the packet of make up wipes over to Tony, Carol glances at the pack, eyebrow raised, Tony doesn't notice as she's looking at Rhodey, frowning a little.

"That's because… It's, it's private, it's like I'm Seeing into someone's soul or some other new age gobbledygook. I'm only ever vague or only with the person I'm looking at. I try not to use it, but I can't.. not. I can't turn it off. I've tried, the information is just in my head. All the time. Sometimes it's like if I don't say the thing it gets louder until its all I see and hear, luckily that doesn't always happen, thankfully."

The grimace on Tony's face shows that he's tried to ignore this entirely or ignoring parts of it and had unpleasant reactions. Carol isn't surprised by the nature of the ability, it doesn't sound like something that would be ignored quietly.

"Yeah, you know those random comments he comes out with occasionally, the one that makes the person look awed or stunned by insight? And confused Tony Stark is making it."

Carol's eyes open huge, she'd noticed that Tony seemed to pluck comments out of nowhere. Seemingly apart from conversations, vague to others and yet it always stunned the person involved. She'd assumed it was part of his personality and genius that had been hidden from the press. Or rather ignored by it, the press still occasionally acted like Tony hadn't changed after Afghanistan sometimes much to Carol's confusion.

"See, when people know this, that I invade people's minds, no one will want me near them. I'm basically Wanda."

Tony said with an obvious shudder, Rhodey jumps at that. He hadn't known that Tony was comparing himself to the Witch.
"Tony, No. You're not invading people's minds without permission, you aren't looking at their thoughts, you aren't a mind reader, and you have a strong sense that stuff if private. She had a choice whether to read people's minds!"

Carol grips his hands, trying to send comfort, she didn't know practically anything about Wanda, except that Jim really didn't like her. Even all the files from the raft she'd pulled had been redacted. But from what he just said, she knew Tony wasn't like that. A sense of a person was different that having their mind be an open book.

Whilst there was a lot of documentation left over from the other Avengers that Tony had given her full access to, there was shockingly little on Wanda. Until now, that hadn't concerned her much. True, she'd wondered how and why she'd joined the Avengers as there didn't seem to be a process like Tony had implemented now, but she'd assumed everyone liked her and she'd been a good fit, so they brought her in. Tony vehemence against her called that into question, as far as she'd deduced, Tony and Steve had been running the Avengers? So why would he invite a person on the team he was this against? Carol swore she even saw a flash of fear, which chilled her. Tony wasn't the kind of person afraid of anything but himself.

"I know… But…"

"No, Tony, you are not her, you don't trap people in their worst nightmares and force them to live with it forever. You don't fucking mind rape people! You don't enjoy watching people suffer, she always used her magic around you even though she obviously knew how you felt about it! She forced Bruce to run away again."

Tony flinched quite violently from that reminder. Carol, open mouthed in shock looking between the two men.

"Wait. What?!"

Rhodey grabs the tablet, bringing up what he's looking for as Tony protests. Rhodey ignores it, he's fed up of his friend suffering because of the Hydra Bitch. If he'd known that he was comparing himself to her he would have tackled this before now. He curses to himself and turns the tablet to Carol.

"If you don't mind Tony, I'd like to see? She has been the least documented of the Avengers, Roger's just had down that she was instrumental in stopping Ultron.."

Rhodey's scoff just makes Carol want to know even more, everytime she thinks she has worked out the problems with the old team, something like this happens and it makes her wonder how they lasted as many years as they did. Thinking of the videos FRIDAY will be sending over, there was more to this team than what was written in the battle reports and she wanted to get her teeth into it. Although she did enjoy some of the reports, different members noted different things, Tony's were hilarious, Rhodey's were extremely thorough when he joined. His military experience seemingly noted more. Roger's were usually critical and missing important observations as for why the team did certain stuff. Natashas were very descriptive and Clint's usually had food stuck to them. Thor's were hand written when he was around and he had lovely handwriting. Bruce's made her want to meet the man, she got a sense of goodness from him.

She shook her head, she'd dive into this later, she had a feeling it was going to be important in the long run especially when Natasha came of house arrest.

"I… I can't watch this again."
Carol turned to Tony is sure she saw a gold ring flash around his brown eye, barely there for a fraction of a second and easy to mistake for the flecks in his eyes, then his eyes are looking out, unseeing. She waves her figures in front of his eyes and they don't track.

"I'm guessing this is what he did during the Siberia video? He can't see or hear us?"

Rhodey nods as he gets ready to play the video.

"He's in the uplink, kind of like in the Internet is how he described it.

"We only recently uncovered this video when Tony was going through a dump of Hydra files. Until he saw this video, he blamed himself entirely for Ultron. Stupidly. As did everyone else. He thought it was all in his head. It terrified him and made him desperate. Everyone seems to forget Bruce was there too. With his PTSD, what he's seen, she only needed to push the right buttons."

Rhodey shook his head, he knew his Brother. He might say that he blamed the Witch now. But he knew that he still blamed himself because it was his hands that built it. Even with someone playing and pushing in his mind. Tony hoarded guilt. The man had paid for every funeral after New York, and everywhere else they fought for that matter. He pumped so much money into the devastated areas he stopped their economies falling into severe recessions, single-handed in some instances, even as he was hated by the people he was helping, he still helped in ways they were comfortable with. Even with all that, he still felt guilt. He rarely let the press in on much of his reparation efforts either, just the ones he had no choice in, like if he was caught on photograph helping rebuild houses, like when he'd finally been allowed into Sokovia.

Carol looks mad, she'd seen the trial for Ultron, that Tony had been found not guilty, but negligent. That since she'd come to the compound and actually met FRIDAY, and how confused she'd been. How confused that a man that had been revolutionising everything AI based since he was a teen would suddenly create Ultron, it didn't make sense to her. But there were few people around now that had been present for that debacle, and those who were.. didn't like discussing it. She wondered if after this when she's with Rhodes alone, if he would explain everything to her.

"Dear Gods, I don't even know half of the things he's been through do I? How bad is his PTSD? I know he's good at hiding it."

Rhodey startled a little before just nodding, not used to other people even noticing it in Tony, just shrugging it off as him being an eccentric genius. Tony was also scarily good at hiding his pain. Even from him. He plays the video and Carol watches another Hydra base come up on the screen.

Carol looks between enraged and in pain. She hadn't been here long, but in her time with Tony recovering she'd become increasingly protective of the small, eccentric man who rarely stops moving. Rhodey's MIT stories of Tony at 14 might have had a hand in it too.

'Thor, I've got eyes on the prize..' 

Seeing the witch come up behind him makes her tense… Those red whips striking into his mind without his knowledge and his eyes glass over as she retreats. By the time he comes back from wherever she sent him, she's out of sight. Why was she in a Hydra base anyway? And why was she doing this against the Avengers if she fought against Ultron? The missing pieces were making her angry. No wonder the witch's magic scared him, even if he hadn't known about this till recently, part of him must have recoiled at her magic. She knew it did her and she'd never been near it, just seeing and knowing was bad enough, a corrupted mess from the mind stone, the thought alone makes her shudder.
"Why was she there? In a Hydra base?"

As the video shuts off she's quietly horrified. The fact that he'd been blamed for Ultron, that the Witch was accepted as good but didn't bother to own up to her part in it? Rhodey looks confused for a moment before he realises, Rogers must have kept all Hydra mentions out of anything they recorded.

"She was Hydra."

"What?! Like Barnes?"

"Nope, she and her brother volunteered to become Hydra experiments because a Stark labeled weapon hit their house as children. Killed their parents but didn't explode. So, logically, they grew up wanting to kill him enough to be in Hydra. They allied with Ultron, they only flipped sides when Ultron wanted to kill everyone instead of just Tony."

Rhodey rolled his eyes, because her story pissed him off. Sokiva wasn't a place SI supplied bombs to and Tony's bombs wouldn't just sit there unexploded. If it had been on of his they'd be dead. Personally he thought it was Stane or a black market fake. Tony however for some reason accepted everything she threw at him. Even if it was his bomb, he didn't fire it, killing him wouldn't change anything and Tony had spent nearly a decade seeking redemption for his perceived crimes selling weapons to the military. Since then he'd been all about accountability. The Witch went around smashing things then batted her pretty doe eyes and started her 'I'm just a child' routine. As far as he was concerned she was an adult, Tony had been younger when he'd been left with his company and Stane yet he was held accountable. Double standards.

"That's... That's just.."

"Yeah, I know. Rogers and Barton were utterly entranced by her doe eyed child like schtick. They never seem to think that she must have trained those abilities with Hydra. I doubt she got them and automatically knew what to do and I doubt that Hydra wouldn't have use for powers like that."

She shook his head, he still couldn't believe how people were so blind around the young woman. He suspected Hydra taught her these tricks. Carol turns and taps Tony's hands gently, he looked up and she definitely sees a gold flash in his right eye again, now she's looking for it she sees it clearer than before as he comes out of wherever he was.

"Tony, Tony. You've been through so much. I'm sorry I didn't realise how much pain you've been through."

"It's alright carol I'm used to it."

Tony just smiles and shrugs it off as a joke, it's kind of been his life for years by now. Rhodey is just happy to finally having another sane person trying to potentially get through to Tony that he doesn't deserve all this crap and this most definitely is not normal. Even their brand of normal.

"You shouldn't have to be!"

The confused look he gives her at that just dials up her mother hen instincts to 11.

"As long as it's not open heart surgery in the desert, I don't think I can complain. Plus so many people died because of me for Ultron. It's nothing I can't handle."

"you don't deserve to suffer because of Ultron, those deaths aren't just on your shoulders, and we should tell Matt about this, this is important evidence, he's been griping about your trial for weeks
now since he met FRIDAY. He's going to appeal your trial and get this sorted, do you mind telling him this and also, when we've done that. You are going to tell me what you meant by that comment!"

"Huh, I thought you knew about that?"

"Well I don't, so I'm going to text Matt. Then some day, you and me and you are going to sit in a quiet room and you're going to tell me everything you want."

Carol looks so determined, Rhodey looks ridiculously proud and happy that he's got allies now, both of them watching Tony, who was looking utterly confused. Spending years being told you talk too much and not to have feelings don't exactly prepare you for this.

"You want to know about these things?"

"Of course I do Tony. You're my friend, I'm guessing you haven't told anyone but Rhodey about a lot of stuff and with your celebrity status, I'm guessing therapy is not something you've seen safe to do, so telling your friends is a good option."

Rhodey blinked, a little shocked that she clicked to that so fast. It has taken Rhodey ages to work out why Tony was pro-mental health for other people, even though he hated the science, but so adamantly against it for himself.

"I've tried. Twice. Even with background checks and an inordinate, stupid, amount of money, they sold me out."

Tony sneered and rolled his eyes and Rhodey is pretty sure Carol is actual magic. Tony doesn't discuss feelings. Yes he's still sneering about it, but he actually answered. Huh. Carol.. The Tony-Whisperer indeed.

"Well, you don't have to tell me everything or anything really, but you tell me what you want whenever you want. That's what friends and family are for. Plus, the staff you found for the mental health dept in the compound, I'm sure they'd be confidential?"

Seeing her colours, Tony actually wants to. Which surprises him and he locks his jaw to fight it. Wants to tell her everything. He tilts his head, eyes going glassy as he follows the colours that are unique to Carol. They make him feel warm and oddly safe, so much like electricity too, her force of will crackles and sparks. It's a similar feeling he gets in his workshop or with Rhodey and he decides not to analyse it too much. He weirdly just wants to spill everything. From Howard to Siberia but bites down on it, he's already dumped enough baggage at Carols feet.

He nods, a little too quickly whilst rubbing his face. Weirdly this entire situation has him feeling like crying, but he fights back. Ugh, emotions. That's why he hates these conversations!

"Okay, I think I'm maxed out of emotion related stuff today."

Tony chuckles pulling a few of the wipes to scrub his face.

"What are they for anyway? I was wondering."

Carol let's him change topic, he's fragile right now, his mask is gone and she realises that Tony without his mask looks so much different and hates that he's needed to hide behind a hard mask of arrogance to survive. She'd seem glimpses around the kids, but it makes her feel happy she's been included. Knowing most people wouldn't look past the image he presented. Just seeing the arrogant, rich man and not go deeper. Sure, she had an 'in', following cracks opened up by Rhodey,
but it hadn't taken her long to get to know Tony herself.

"That would be this."

He scrubs for a few more seconds until he's sure all of the makeup is off whilst Carol shoots Rhodes a confused look. Rhodes just smiles and says nothing, so sue him, he finds these reveals amusing, he wonders how Tony is going to do the team reveal and flashes back to the 'I am Ironman' reveal and suspects he's going to rip off the bandaid, these emotional reveals are a bit much for his brother to deal with. Telling people with no preamble and letting them deal with it is more his style. When Carol looks back to Tony she lets out a startled out 'Oh!' The nearing 50 year old man has been replaced with a Tony in his 20s.

"Holy crap!"

"Yeah that was my reaction when I woke up! But with more swearing."

"That must have been so weird!"

"Oh hell yeah, I thought I was in an extremely fucked up dream until Rhodey dumped a cup of water on my head. The nurses were not best pleased with him."

Carol chuckles before letting her eyes go soft and reaching out to squeeze Tony's shoulder.

"Waking up to find your body has changed so much isn't an easy thing to experience. I understand why you hid away until you're ready to accept it. I imagine it's all a bit much, especially after everything you found out in Siberia."

"I was just being a co-"

"No Tony, this is huge. Waking up to such huge changes would take anyone a while to deal with it. Even people who signed up for it."

"I have a few actual issues to, I wasn't just hiding because I was a 'freaked out mess'. Promise. I've gotten good at the technopathy, but it's still linked to my emotions. If I get annoyed, tech suffers. Oh, and you remember when I met with you, Jess, Hope, Matt and Luke for pizza when they semi moved in? And I got all quiet, staring whilst you were all calling out and then I passed out?"

"Yeah, we were very worried about you that day. I thought you were having a seizure! Rhodes said he got you squared away safely and that you were fine."

"Well the colours sometimes it's too much and I jumped in the deep end too fast early on. Too many people. Sometimes it overrides my vision entirely. I've been practicing with strangers and I'm getting better though. Plus if I'm in the suit, I don't see them, like with mirrors or recordings."

He assured, talking quick like he was scared she'd kick him out of the Avengers for being a basket case or that his abilities rendered him useless, or be angry at him for something, she could see the fear in his eyes and she just wanted to wrap him up forever and kick the old team, who she assumed are at fault for these insecurities.

"That makes sense, training new abilities is tough and when you tell the team we can help."

"I.. What, huh?"

"Tony, that's what a team does. Training weird abilities is normal around here remember, you make equipment we can't blow up. Do you want to tell people individually or together?"
"Together I think? Meeting soon, rip the band aid off, I'll, uh. Do you think I should explain Siberia or just from the coma?"

"it's up to you if you want to go through everything Siberia related, but there will be questions of how you got into the coma. I'll organise a meeting and after we can talk to Matt about this Ultron issue."

She gave him a look that she wasn't going to let that slide and Tony found that he was quietly happy about that. It wasn't something he'd felt he was allowed to pursue alone? If he was being selfish?

She wanted the team to see the Siberia video too, although she was unsure Tony would want so many people seeing it. She was biased enough to accept she wanted them to see it so she had others to rage with and the sensible part wanted them to know who Tony needed protection from. Explaining it was Steve would be tricky with just the airport fight being common knowledge, no one was a blind Cap fan here, not with how he'd effectively said screw you to the world and just vanished.

Few people understood Rhodes vicious hatred of him. Grimly replaying the video in her head, now his hatred seemed well placed. Watching 2 superheroes beat down an unenhanced, grieving and already bruised man was a hard thing to get past. Especially knowing what happened after.

Tony knew that If it had been Rogers he was talking to about the Wanda video, he would have demanded Tony bury it like he'd demanded Tony bury Johannesburg. That he sacrifice himself for Wanda because she's 'Just a child'. Even though his company had suffered because of Ultron, what the old team never understood when Tony mentioned this wasn't that he was being selfish about losing money. Tony actually cared for his staff, and he had a lot of them. Plus subsidiaries all over the world, not including that they offered important aid to communities in need, stuff that was almost thrown away because the team shoved him alone on the sword of Ultron. Let alone the fun of being detained before the trial. Having a reputation for escaping ridiculous situations had not come in handy there. Sure they didn't collar him like they did Wanda but they did go overboard.

"For now, you need a break Tony, you've done so much tonight."

"I've not done much, just showed you videos and ignored them whilst getting grossly emotional."

Tony grimaced at his behaviour. Carol just gave him her 'you're being ridiculous' face. She wore it often around him and was surprising good at getting him to do things, Rhodey was torn between being jealous and gleeful that Carol was the Tony-Whisperer. 'Where was this glorious woman decades ago' Rhodey idly thought.

"Tony, you just opened up to me, a lot, I get the feeling you don't do this often."

Rhodey snorts as Tony flushes. Carol just smiles and tugged him so he was lying down on the sofa, asking FRIDAY to put a fun film onto the TV. She tossed a blanket over Tony and Rhodes and then snagged one herself, even sharing her super secret chocolate stash with him, Tony never found it even though it was literally hidden in his apartment.

He ends up lying down, with his head on a pillow in Carols lap, legs on Rhodey. Carol carding her fingers through his hair whilst she watches the movie, enjoying Tony's reaction to such a small comfort in her mind, as if in his it was huge and she made a mental note to do this more often. Rhodey and Carol grinning as Tony just makes a happy content noise and drifts a little whilst Carol starts planning out ways to tell the team this information in a less stressful manner for Tony. She imagined that these conversations would take a lot out of him.
Goose suddenly pops out of the vent, they metal clattering noisily to the floor, much to Carol's shock.

Rhodey looks on in caution after that time Tony and Peter put ham on his favourite old trainers that they kept complaining about, and left them 'accidentally' in front of Goose. Fair to say, he had new trainers now. Goose however ignored him and jumped directly onto Tony's stomach. Carol is surprised as she hadn't known Goose visited occasionally apparently, Rhodey however is utterly not surprised because this is Tony they are talking about after all. Although the first time had scared the crap out of him, he hadn't even known Carol had a cat. Let alone Goose.

"Moose Goose! Where have you been lately."

Rhodey laughs at the look of confusion on Carol's face.

"If it's remotely dangerous and within 10 miles of Tony, he attracts it."

Carol looks at the vents

"I didn't know she'd made it to the vents…"

"Oh yeah, I'm considering installing cat flaps on them for her."

Tony has a huge grin on his face, utterly focused on Goose as she curls up on his chest, paws curled around his metal hand and Carol suddenly can't wait for Tony to tell the team. Without his glasses on, not hiding his hand, he seems more open, lighter and smiling more than she'd seen him before.

That even though he'd just finished remembering an awful amount of utterly horrible memories, he can still smile and be happy just because Goose likes him.

She glances over at Rhodey and noticed he seems lighter too.

The two of them are carrying the weight of these secrets. Both of them carrying the weight of the world. 'Boys'

Yes, she decided to make it her mission for now.

For both these silly boys sake.

Chapter End Notes

We're finally off to Wakanda next!

If anyone is worried about a slow place, the coming up chapters do actually have more than a day in each of them when things start -moving-, I just wanted to set up a few things at first :)}
People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, or people with huge secrets shouldn't berate others for having them too.

T'Challa POV

September 9th

"Brother! We have presents!"

"Who is this from exactly?"

T'Challa eyed the box carefully, the strange conversation with Dr Stark had been replaying in his head for the last few hours. The man had seemed.. quite sharp towards him? Which surprised him a little. He'd been busy with the Accords and his kingdom that he hadn't checked in with him since their last encounter, but that wouldn't be it. They both knew what it was like to be busy. Although Dr Stark's absence from the Accords meetings, using the Colonel as his proxy was now playing on his mind. It was not a comfortable feeling.

"Dr Stark, obviously, he told me he'd called you to say he was sending us stuff."

"Ah, so you told him where to send it?"

That would explain something anyway, probably how he knew about the rou-

"Pffft, of course not. He likes a challenge."

"Did he mention..."

"Why he's mad at you? Oh yes."

He blinked he few times. Well apparently his sister was also mad at him, and maybe for more reasons than just the visitors who had been driving them up the wall as he had assumed. She scooped out a few things in the box and placed them on his desk, what he assumed was his? Then she turned to head to her lab with the rest. Not even glancing up at him, all of her attention on the boxes contents. A stuffed panther stared at him and he had to admit it was adorable, would an angry person send a stuffed panther? Apparently so.

"I can't tell you precisely why, as Dr Stark hasn't told me everything. But he said this much and it was enough for me. 'He left me to die, then he took them in'. Leaving allies behind brother? I'd thought better of you."

With that, she turned and stalked off, leaving T'Challa stunned. Then angry. Very angry. Captain America had assured him that Dr Stark was merely momentarily disabled so they could leave
quickly, that he'd be home in no time. He hoped that his inaction and trust had not caused Dr Stark too much pain. Bast. *What had he done?*

He picked up the Pink Panther card to read whilst looking at the plushy black panther sat on top of what looked like the Accords that had a neat, oddly pretty script written all over the margins in various colours.

"They gave him Siberia…? What happened in that damned bunker..?"

Maybe he had a chance to mend this bridge, but first he would have to discover what **burnt it.**

**Shuri POV**

Shuri stalked away from her brother, carrying the box and hoping that he would finally start looking at things closer, the decision to let the band of idiots into her home was something that was still grating on her nerves. As it did every single time Roger's turned up asking why his Bucky was still on ice. *'Because that's what he requested you idiot!'* Also the renditions of why she hadn't come up with a solution for the words yet, why the scientists hadn't.

Trying to explain to the man that whilst they had amazing mental health services, *'fixing'* brainwashing, nearly a century of torture and what on earth those words do to that man's brain was not going to be fixed in a snap of the fingers! Also asking -*demanding* - a vibranium shield?! Urgh.

On occasion more of them came in a show of support, and she had to endure their constant diatribe of *'Stark is the Devil'*. Dr Stark had quickly become a good friend, they could bounce ideas back and forth with ease, and he wasn't put off by the fact she knew more in some areas. He was not intimidated by her, he encouraged her. It wasn't as if she had never had these things before, but she felt like she had someone on her level now, and he got there without the vast resources she had, with no vibranium. Her brother wouldn't tell her much, but she knew that the arc reactor and Ironman was born in a cave on 3 months of capture and likely torture.

They had collaborated on a few things now, outside of both of their usual zones and it was fun! Hearing these vile excuses for *'team mates'* insult potentially one of the closest people to her intellect? It was extremely aggravating.

She carefully goes through the box on the trip back. Surprised to see so much intended to help Sergeant Barnes. She knew he was sending BARF across, but with how rigid his body language got whenever she slipped and mentioned the man on ice? She had not expected him to put so much in for him.

He hadn't told her what happened in Siberia, but the super soldiers came back beaten bloody, one missing an arm. Then Stark practically vanished off the face of the earth before a picture surfaced of the man, looking utterly battered and in a coma! It didn't take a genius to work out something had happened, but Dr Stark was oddly silent on the matter and if she believed a 10th of what the idiots said, literally every bad thing in the planet was caused by Dr Stark and nothing bad ever happened to him. She assumed the damage was from the other Winter Soldiers at first, but Dr Stark wouldn't have evaded if that was true and her brother had let slip that they'd been dead on arrival.

Entering her lab, she separated all of the BARF data and equipment to properly go through later. The information about Barnes and his arm she placed to the side. Not exactly thrilled with the
prospect of looking through that. Considering how the writing on them went from neat to scratched quickly, that made her nervous of the contents, to say the least.

She focused on the other colourful post it notes for now, there were quite a few. For a man who hated paper, he seemed to love post it notes. His handwriting was also very pretty, his little doodles surprisingly detailed.

She affixed the one with the cat doodles where it was easily visible, wondering if the idiots would potentially recognise his handwriting next time they invaded her lab.

There was the actual data from Barnes arm included too. He'd been holding that back as they created their prototype. Not wanting to taint their project with Hydra. She'd let it slide that he'd had a sudden 'Awesome Idea' to create a prosthesis based on the Winter Soldier's arm but without 'cheating'.

She let him believe that she thought it was theoretical, but she knew that you don't just wake up from a coma and start a project on something like this whilst neck deep in the Accords for nothing. But she got the idea that Tony needed her to not know, and looking at how thin and small he had looked in that bed, his arm trembling slightly as it moved when he spoke animatedly. He needed her excitement on it but to not ask to many questions and that's what she'd done.

A small thing she could do however was to send a completely and utterly not related chunk of vibranium over to him under the guise of a get well soon present. If it just so happened to be the correct amount, plus a little leeway, for what he'd need to make their designs? Well that was just a happy accident wasn't it.

When he'd questioned such a grand gift, she'd waved it off as what else do you get the engineer with more money than God? If it also made him whole again... then all for the better, and hopefully someday he'd tell her what happened. She could see that he was brittle however, so for once she would not push. She did however enjoy conspiring with Harley and Peter in their group chat. Their plan seemed to be working, each time she chatted to Dr Stark he seemed less like he'd shatter if the wrong part was pressed. Adults could be so dense sometimes, so they had plotted.

She finished putting things to the side and called him up, it should early there but Peter had sent her picture of their pancake day an hour ago so she figured she would not be interrupting. There seemed to be more food on the adults than their plates, Tony was in the kitchen with his back to the camera and his black shirt was covered in white powder. Laura's hair was practicality white. She was looking forward to joining them some day for this tradition but hoped to be eating the food rather than wearing it.

An image of Tony popped up, he looked much better than he had on their last chat. He'd looked pretty good in the video clip he'd sent of him talking to her brother, but that was a side of the genius she'd never really seen before so seeing his easy smile was a relief.

He was all encouraging smiles and asking questions with her, and he never stopped her explaining things! There were a few times he asked her to explain it again, but slower! Considering he was meant to be an egotistical genius, he never talked over her, encouraged her and didn't get irritated the way others did when she got into something. Or as Dr Stark called it, sciencing. She was branching out into new topics she barely considered before she it was fun.

She brightly grinned, happy to see him smiling even though she could see he was tense around the shoulders. Maybe because of his location? Because that wasn't the lab. She couldn't see enough of the room to tell but it looked as if he was sitting at a table with a large floor to ceiling windows behind him. The glass was not perfectly clear however, making her think that from the outside you
wouldn't see what was happening in said room. Peculiar.

"Hi Dr Stark! Your parcel arrived!"

"Yay, and Princess, we talked about this. You can call me Tony. By the end of this year I expect you and Peter to call me Tony!"

He waved his hands and had a look of mock consternation on his face, spoilt slightly by the wide grin of course. His shoulders however had already started to relax a little which just made her grin. She noticed that he was using both hands to gesture with, until now he'd only used his right, but it was skin coloured. She added it to her observations of the man in her mind.

"Hmmm, maybe, but you will have to call me Shuri instead of Princess. Plus, not enough people use your Doctor title, it makes me want to use it more."

Tony's eyebrows shot up at that, she guessed quite easily who that look was for, she had noticed that the rogues rarely talked about him with any respect and she'd ranted about it often. The rogues loved to call him 'Stark'. Usually barked in an unpleasant manner that she suspected the man hated. Especially from so called 'friends'.

"Ah, to be perpetually underestimated. Of course, you know what it's like, Princess."

She laughed at his smirk, and oh yes she did. Especially the few times she had accompanied her brother to the Accords Council meetings. They saw a young, spoilt Princess, Tony had told her to play up the part and reap the rewards of being underestimated, whilst it had annoyed her at first, she could see why he made a game of it.

"The last council meeting was fun, I finally got to talk to your Rhodey! My brother was quite confused when he would only talk to me!"

The two of them laughed, she'd sent the clips to him at the time of course. They'd been subtly trolling her brother for weeks now but he seemed to be acting dense which was why she'd upped things today.

"Rhodey doesn't even know why I'm annoyed! How is King Kitty doing? Enjoy my presents?"

"He was utterly baffled about how you got them to us, I think he actually thought no one knew the idiots were here!"

"Well, just me and the kids know. They know not to blab. I don't want your brothers offer of generosity to hurt your home. Plus it is probably better for the planet that you have them contained."

Tony's smirk turned sharp at the thought of them and Shuri was surprised how expressive the man's face could be when wearing sunglasses. People always say the eyes give a lot away, but Dr Stark's facial expressions were very telling.

"I know, but they're so annoying. Rogers has asked me for a new shield twice this week alone. He me demanded it be vibranium too!"

"Oh what did you tell him this time?"

"I told him that I'm sorry he feels so afraid that he requires a shield but reminded him that Wakanda is well defended. He looked utterly baffled at my offense."
"I'm not shocked, they always wanted new gear and I don't think they noticed I personally made everything for them. It was just expected. Until I started working with my new guys I thought that was normal."

Tony shook his head and Shuri decided to shift the conversation away from the rogues.

"I think I might have dropped enough hints around my brother now that he might do more than just sulking about their presence. Oh, and expect some presents from him, he's finally realised you are mad at him!"

"Took him long enough, I was actually considering hiring a skywriter if the call didn't work."

"You did give him a plushy though."

She ribbed him gently, she knew that whilst he was mad at her brother over the rogues, that he didn't hate him. They'd gotten along quite well and whilst Tony hadn't found himself king of a country relatively young, he had found himself at the head of an empire alone and vulnerable quite young. Her brother had told her that the two of them had connected with that when they were between fights.

"Well, I don't hate his Royal Kittiness, he's still quite young and naive, especially when it comes to people all shiny like Rogers. Captain Spandex is easy to believe in his earnest way. When he realises that he lies as much as anyone else."

Tony shrugged. She'd scanned the latest copy of the Vienna Accords that he'd sent, along with his own personal notes on it judging by the handwriting.

"I'm sure we can wake him up eventually, he was very angry when I left him. Maybe Mr Rogers is going to get a visit."

"Oh, that I HAVE to see!"

"I'll make sure to send you the footage, I, of course, will not be there. The Witch has taken to hanging on to him like a leech. Although it's had a knock on effect of them bothering me in my lab less since I banned the little witch from my presence."

Tony's laughs tapered off and a serious look crossed his face when it came to the Witch. He had different expressions for most of the rogues.

He was hard as ice, face and shoulders stiff, voice as cold as the Arctic when he talked about Rogers.

Harsh and brittle like glass when Barton came up, pain and guilt evident, although she didn't know why, but with how foul his mouth was she assumed he'd said something that crossed a line.

Lang and Wilson he was more… apathetic towards than anything else.

But the Witch, that was a mixture of fear and hatred had become more pronounced recently. The fear is what put her on edge about the Witch in the first place, which she was happy for because she'd caught her sneaking up to her with red glowing around her finger tips. That was after she had told them that she would not be making them gear for them to go galavanting around, and that if they left Wakanda they would not find it so easy to come back.

Nothing had happened, but that was only because she had stopped it she was sure. Tony had then told her enough about the Witch for her to easily assume the worst. About what she did to the
Hulk. Rogers of course thought she was overreacting.

"Wanda didn't do anything! Why have you barred her from your lab! She wasn't going to do anything to you, she's young and sometimes her emotions get the better of her and her powers manifest. It doesn't mean she was going to use them or hurt you!"

So earnest, so stupid! Since then the guards made sure the little Witch was watched 24/7 when out of the villa and never allowed near her. Her brother was to always have a guard when she was near too, her powers were strong and made her uncomfortable. They could fight a lot in Wakanda, but they didn't have anything to protect against mind magic. The rogues of course didn't know they were under 24/7 surveillance in the villa, the cameras and mics were well hidden.

"She hasn't tried anything again has she? I don't know what I'd do if she got to you too."

Shuri gave him an encouraging smile and made a note to ask him more about the Witch at some point. It has to be more than what she did to the Hulk, something she could find no information on.

Unsurprisingly, as Tony had told her, Roger's had basically strong armed him into covering that up. Which she could tell hurt him badly. With how he talked about accountability, it was a serious thing to demand such a thing from him. The man was already a walking example of PTSD, something they were very familiar with in Wakanda being a warrior culture. Unlike America however, they'd decided to try and help rather than go this ridiculous route of doing nothing and pretending they are all fine. She knew that pointing that out would not get her very far, but she was willing to pay the long game.

She just knew there was more to the Witch than that she was once an enemy who flipped sides. As close as Tony was to Bruce, she imagined there was more for him to have been so vehemently against her being an Avenger, Tony was all about second chances but he'd never looked comfortable discussing her.

"Nope" She grinned, popping the P. "She'd have to get within several buildings of me for that. Sometimes I go close to where ever they are, just to amuse myself with her being forced back to the villa."

Tony burst out laughing at that, he definitely looked better than when he had answered the call. She heard a noise in the background and Tony sat up, looking past the call.

"That's brilliant, Princess. I have to go for now, I hope you like the dress, Peter found that! Don't forget to occasionally take breaks and eat!"

"Ha, coming from you that is hilarious. Goodbye Dr Stark, I'll text you later with his response to BARF!"

She sniggered at the name and noticed him tense slightly at who they were talking about. But he carried on smiling, that was definitely an improvement, she waved and he crossed his arms over his chest in a bow making her smile as the call cut out.

After the call she set up bringing everything BARF related up. Deciding to go through everything and then to wake up the Sergeant. She sent a message using her beads, informing her brother of her plans and that he was not to tell the rogues. She wanted Sergeant Barnes to be able to breathe, take in the information and make an informed choice without the idiots breathing down his neck. Plus, he'd requested to be woken without them as he couldn't handle physical contact straight away, and Rogers was constantly touching him. He was her other white boy that she was going to fix.
Even though she wasn't going to be telling the man the tech belonged to Dr Stark, she wasn't going to pretend it was hers. She'll change his name in the documents to 'Outside Contractor', that should do.

Finishing everything up and checking it over several times, she decided everything was as good as it was going to get, she downloaded the information onto a tablet and went to wake up their resident snowman.

**T'Challa POV**

T'Challa had spent an hour waiting for his anger to calm down before he went to talk to anyone. It was hard, so he decided to try and find information of what Dr Stark had been up to since June.

For a man who practically lived in the public eye, there had been not a single public appearance of him in all this time. Which could potentially be explained away innocently at a stretch. Except there had been multiple news reports on Dr Stark taking the Accords by storm… But without his presence. Not even a recent picture. That was until he found reports and several articles that maybe Dr Stark was writing from his deathbed. Surely that was hyperbole.

There were several new releases of SI products, including stuff that revolutionised certain fields, all without Dr Stark hosting a press conference or going on TV. Just that press release from SI that he was healing with very little actual information.

Several reports of new Avengers being added, incidents they'd been involved in and again. Nothing. He'd always been the public face of the Avengers, the others seemingly not knowing how to deal with the press or not understanding it's importance.

He found information of Natasha being defended by Dr Stark's Lawyers and being under house arrest for 9 Months at the Avengers compound. Reading through the trial, there were statements from Dr Stark… But like the Accords Council, these were delivered by a slightly more stone faced Colonel Rhodes. He wondered if the rogues had realised that their little spider had gone back to the fold. Last time he had spoken to Rogers about her, he was waiting for her to come back after an information gathering mission.

He finally found an article with a picture of the man posted June and almost wished he hadn't. He found the same picture then in multiple articles. It didn't do anything for his anger.

He looked positively tiny in the hospital bed, wrapped up with multiple blankets and attached to many machines. It obviously wasn't a well staged picture, from the text a nurse snapped it with his phone and sold the picture before anyone could stop him. Dr Stark's face, at least what he could see of it as bandages were covering both of the man's eyes, was a mess of purple to green bruises. That he was in a coma didn't help matters. This was not the look of a person 'momentarily disabled'.

This was a baseline human that had been battered by at least one, potentially two super soldiers. He knew the Winter Soldiers had all been killed, there was no one else but the 3 of them. Whilst they came away beaten and bloody, they walked away from that fight and healed quickly, excluding Sergeant Barnes arm of course. The Captain had demanded a replacement made when they arrived in Wakanda, T'Challa had ignored his rudeness as stress from the current events, he now realised that maybe he shouldn't have forgiven so easily. Either way, the Sergeant had refused and promptly requested to go into cryo. Against the cries of the captain of course. He'd used the 2 weeks of preparation to constantly berate the poor man for his choice. T'Challa had found the Sergeant...
hiding out with the Dora Milaje on several occasions.

Rogers was still angry that he had abided by his friends wishes. Every 3 days like clockwork he would try to see T'Challa or Shuri to demand they release Bucky, as if they were keeping him prisoner. They reminded him that he did not wish to be removed from cryo until there was a firm plan to remove the words. Until now they had not found anything.

Reading his sister's message again it seemed that Dr Stark also wanted his involvement hidden. Pity, T'Challa would have enjoyed telling Rogers that their only salvation was a man they left comatose. His amusement dried a little at the thought he'd also left him in that condition. In Siberia! Whilst it wasn't winter, it had been a very cold spring. He stopped himself looking up the temperature because he didn't think that would calm him. A part of him was scared too, guilt already weighing his shoulders down.

He closed down his research when he realised he was now just stalling, when he found himself reading about new developments Dr Stark was making into prosthetics, disability aids, med-tech and clean energy, that several arc reactors were now installed around the world... Whilst this was amazing, it was clearly stalling.

The casing that protected the arc reactors from interference did interest him however and with the mention of Dr Stark's Nano-tech he wondered if it was one of the projects he had been collaborating on with his sister as it looked like they were Vibranium, he'd stalled at 6 due to lack of resources. Maybe they could work something out, the man's arc reactor was as precious as their Vibranium and if he was willing to put them into the world to help nations that needed it, then they could join in. He noted that some Americans were angry America had not been prioritised. Yes, definitely stalling.

He stood, smoothing down his suit and started heading towards the villa that was designated for the rogues. From their reaction on arrival he was sure they'd expected more, rooms in the Palace itself maybe? From Dr Starks note, he did mention he'd spoilt them. A mistake T'Challa would not be duplicating. Now with that warning he would be more vigilant. He had only offered sanctuary to Sergeant Barnes as recompense for his reckless actions, the others had followed like stray dogs as if they'd been invited, leading to a very awkward situation where he was now housing thankless fugitives. Thankless fugitives who had apparently been lying to him.

He entered the villa and made way to the common room that he could hear them in, they obviously had not heard his approach and were conversing, loudly. So he slowed down to listen in. He could hear the TV on an announcement he had read not that long ago, regarding SI recent developments causing quite a stir. Making leaps and bounds in regards to disability aids, a subject which usually had the least amount done for, charged high prices and then resolutely ignored. That SI was revolutionising a sector for such low prices was causing a huge stir. It was interesting the rogues were watching anything related to the man, surveillance had shown that they'd been avoiding him. Turning the channel anytime he was barely mentioned.

"I doubt it's even real. Just fake publicity to buy support! Change the channel."

Wanda's sneers always chilled him slightly, he wouldn't be shocked if she was pacing like a caged tiger. Red leaking from her hands. Oh if only he could do as his sister did. Her age the archer seems to be little better than barely contained rage these days

"Stark wouldn't do anything to help people without it helping himself."

That was the archer, he sounded more bitter every week that he was unable to contact his wife. Always crowing about the injustice of it. As if the man was shocked being an international fugitive
in hiding came with restrictions.

"Ur, guys I know Hank always told me to never trust a Stark, but there were actual people on the show?"

"God Scott you're an idiot. They're paid actors!"

T'Challa was sure the Witch was pushing it now. Her bias pushing her towards stupidity.

"Guys, I know Stark isn't a good person, but faking creating disability aids and paying people to use them is a bit much. Plus I know some of the VAs pictured, it's why I was watching it, I didn't expect this. Some of the guys that got this help. They're real and this could change their lives."

The Falcon was the voice of reason it seems but still had to get his own jab in. Dr Stark being brought up must have blindsided them. T'Challa shook his head, they're like child bullies, intent to pick on someone not there to defend themselves.

"Can we stop watching about Stark anyway. Everytime I see the liar I want to punch the screen for what he did to Cap and Bucky. I preferred when we changed the channel everytime he was mentioned."

Well points to Sam just got revoked. Rogers mumbled something as if he wasn't paying attention. If they'd been ignoring all news pertaining to Dr Stark, they likely didn't know about the man's coma. Roger's was meant to be the leader of this team, yet he did nothing to stop them attacking a man doing good work? A supposed team member?

He wondered if the Captain had been taking his role seriously, to ensure the health and comfort of all the team was his job. T'Challa grits his teeth and decides he's heard enough and strolls into the room. All the heads snap to him, not even the super soldier hearing heard him coming he thinks utterly unimpressed with the man.

"Ah, I enjoyed watching that myself, the little girl getting to walk for the first time was quite inspiring, her dreams of getting to run some day were enough to melt anyone's heart."

T'Challa smiled, he partially mentioned that bit because it was adorable, but also because she'd chosen red and gold and had done a speech thanking Ironman for giving her this chance. All the kids had drawn pictures that would be sent to the man. Wanda hissed in response, pacing, and just as he suspected, leaking red from her fingers. His guards stepped forward, both of them focusing on her.

"Stark's just trying to buy himself out of his guilty conscience."

Clint sneered, Sam and Scott shaking their heads as Scott turned the television off.

"Whilst we are discussing Dr Stark, Captain, do you have anything to tell me?"

He goes from talking to the group to pinning the captain with his stare. His anger back after listening to them sneer and jab at the man. The Captain who had been sulking in a chair in the corner of the room snapped his head up. Since his friend went into Cryo the super soldier had let go of himself. The scuff on his face turning into quite a scraggly beard was looking quite strange on his face. Captain America had always been neat and clean shaven, so it seemed odd to him somehow.

"No, Why would I have anything to say about Stark? Has Bucky been woken up?"
T'Challa blinked at the change in conversation, but he shouldn't be shocked, every single time he spoke to the Captain he brought it back to his friend. Usually with more tact, but apparently today he didn't seem to notice he was being quite rude.

"Sergeant Barnes is still in Cryo, as per his wishes as we look into ways to help with the control words. Now as I wa-"

"You're not doing a very good job of it are you. We've been here for two months whilst you've been sitting on your arses."

"Mr Barton, I assure you we have not been, as you put it, 'sitting on our arses' when it comes to this. Unfortunately the brainwashing and seven decades of torture that Sergeant Barnes has been through, plus the unique ways and utterly barbaric technology that Hydra used are not something you can just snap your fingers and remo-"

"If he wasn't in Cryo, if he was with me, he would be getting better! I'd be able to help him be Bucky again!"

"If someone interrupts me again I will not feel bad removing roaming privileges!"

T'Challa snapped angrily.

"We aren't children! You can't do that!" Clint barked.

"Don't act like children and I shall not treat you like them. Mr Rogers, your presence would not be enough to he what has been done, and even if it could remove the words, your friend would still be fundamentally changed by his experiences."

T'Challa pleaded, hoping that Rogers would understand this, his delusion that the Sergeant could be magically healed by the power of friendship and would be exactly as he had been before he went to war, were utterly ridiculous and he was setting himself up for trouble. However the stubborn set to his jaw, the squaring of his shoulders, T'Challa knew it wasn't going to get through. His delusions would end up causing him pain, but he predicted it would be worse on the Sergeant somehow.

"Anyway. We are doing all we can for the Sergeant. We have all of our top scientists, my sister and outside contractors helping us out."

"Your kid sister? I don't imagine she'd be and to help much, and what outside sources, aren't we meant to be hiding?"

"Shockingly, we have put a lot into keeping yourselves a secret. Housing international fugitives isn't exactly good for us!"

T'Challa snapped. Sick of being dragged off topic by a petulant Clint Barton. Sam seemed to sense that T'Challa was nearing his limit and decided on silencing Clint. Pulling him away and allowing him to focus on Rogers.


Rogers obviously was frustrated with this line of questioning. 'Probably cause it didn't have anything to do with Barnes' T'Challa thought.

"I've already told you about this! Me and Bucky, who was fine by the way. Went to Siberia to stop five other Winter Soldiers. They were dead. Then Stark turned up.."
Wilson's scoff could be heard as he scowled at this point. From what T'Challa knew, Dr Stark knew where to go based on his information.

"He just flipped out and attacked Bucky. He was going to kill him, so I had no choice but to fight him. I temporarily disabled the suit after Stark literally blew Bucky's arm off! Then we made our get away. That's it."

This time, T'Challa gets the sense that Rogers is leaving out something. His frustration seems to be ruining the earnest goodness the man usually projected. Plus, no way did a temporarily disabled suit result in a coma, and Dr Stark being out of the limelight for so long. Plus the words his sister said to him. Dr Stark's words seemed to resonate in his skull. He'd only heard them once, but he guessed that they wouldn't leave him be for a long time.

"I have a feeling that you are lying to me Mr Rogers."

All of the rogues instantly jumped to their captains defense, as per usual. They were so adamant at shouting at T'Challa, who was ignoring them completely, that they didn't see the flash of guilt flash across his face, Sam might have however, as T'Challa noticed him looking confused at his Captain instead of shouting. He wondered what Rogers was thinking to summon such a look of guilt from the man who honestly believed the 'safest hands were his own', that he could do no wrong. He raised a hand, silencing the others.

"He left me to die, then he took them in."

Rogers paled, the others looked confused from what he could see in his peripheral vision. Rogers face was more telling however.

"That is what Dr Stark told my sister. So tell me, why a conscious man in an operating suit would say these words?"

"Because Stark's an over dramatic asshole."

"Yeah, he has to make everything about himself, Bucky came back with only 1 arm! They would have been perfectly right leaving him to die!"

Clint first, backed up by Wand, again. T'Challa rolled his eyes. Not even bothering to reply to them.

"There is also the picture of him spending nearly two weeks in a coma which you might have noticed if you were actually paying attention to the world."

T'Challa still watched the utterly silent Rogers, he was still stubbornly looking at him, obviously unwilling to change his story. The king sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose in frustration, he shouldn't have expected much really. Rogers had already lied and let that lie stand for the entire time he was here. At least this wasn't entirely futile, his sister awakening the Sergeant in secret to discuss his treatment could work in his benefit.

There were three people there that night in Siberia. One was not talking to him for aiding his abuser, the other was a self righteous liar apparently, ruining the image in his mind of the Captain America he's expected. He hoped the Sergeant was as good of a person as he has judged him to be in the short time they'd conversed alone, before Rogers forced his way into the conversation. All he wanted to do was apologise to the man. He would ask the Sergeant before anyone knew he had been awakened.

"Rogers. This matter is not closed. Secrets… Secrets will always find a way out."
T'Challa doesn't know how, but THAT touched a nerve. Rogers practically full on body flinched, his face a grimace as he turned and made his way back to the corner of the room, practically dismissing the King. Now, whilst T'Challa hadn't demanded to be treated like a King, but the rudeness was now grating on him after so many weeks of it. The rogues rudeness, especially Rogers to everyone was grating on the Dora too, in fact they were already livid before today, now he could see the anger on their faces openly.

Clint and Wanda were glaring daggers at him, as if he was the one being awful. Wanda went to comfort Rogers. Scott was looking supremely uncomfortable and Sam looked slightly confused at Rogers. As if the idea that Rogers might be lying was something he had never considered happening. Scott spoke up while everyone else let the awkward, angry silence sit.

"Uh, Thankyou for visiting your majesty! And, uh, thanks, you know, for this lovely house, and feeding us and keeping us safe. It's very kind of you. Sorry about everyone today, I think everyone is just stressed?"

Scott had a kind of goofy, but sincere sort of grin on his face, Clint was staring at him like he had done something utterly objectionable. Scott's thanks, whilst stilted was nice to hear at least. Apparently some of these people were allergic to saying thanks. T'Challa nodded and smiled at the man.

"You are very welcome Mr Lang. I hope you have been enjoying your stay."

"Oh yeah! This place is amazing, I just wish my little girl could see it…"

He trailed off and even though he was in a situation of his own making, he did feel pity for the man.

"If you would like, I could have a digital camera of a sort sent to you? That way you could start collecting images that you could give to your daughter when you return home?"

"That.. That would be amazing!! Thank you Your Majesty"

Scott was now vibrating with the idea and T'Challa couldn't help but smile, of course Clint had to but in. With a demand in an angry tone, glaring at T'Challa all the while.

"Yeah. I'll take one too. I have three kids I'm missing after all."

T'Challa raised his eyebrows at the impertinence. He also made a note to lock whatever device he sent to only be used while Scott was holding it and have his guards inform him if the archer stole or broke it out of spite. Even Scott looked vaguely disgusted at the archers demands.

"I'm sorry Mr Barton. Right now you should be grateful that I'm not moving you to different accommodation. If you don't learn some respect soon that accommodation will be far less comfortable than what you are currently enjoying."

T'Challa nodded before he turned on his heal to leave. Not waiting for the idiot to respond. He didn't bother sticking around to listen to them bitch about him either. He messaged his sister to find out if he would be able to see the Sergeant, as much as he disliked the idea of jumping the poor man not long from cryo, he only had a small window of time before Rogers could get in there and potentially get their stories straight. He also told her to check the surveillance so she could see this conversation, maybe it would make her laugh at least for all the good it had done.
Barnes POV

Pain.

Pain racked through his body as it could feel itself coming back from the floating darkness that it retreated to during cryosleep.

'No. No. No. No. No. Not again.'

It started shaking, partially because of the cold that clung, even as the air around it was warming up. The pain clouded its mind, but it knows soon the door will open.

The Asset would fall onto the hard concrete as it did everytime. Its limbs never worked properly at first. More pain. As if there wasn't enough of it from being wrenched from frozen to awake so fast.

The asset shook its head. It was thinking too much. Thinking this much would lead to missing orders, thoughts were intrusive, thoughts were wrong. It was a blank slate, ready for compliance. The asset would end up being punished if it didn't stop this. If it missed too much he'd need to be recalibrated. No, no, whitehotpainpain.. Compliance. Compliance. That's what it needed.

His mind felt heavy and slow like it was full. What? His? He wasn't a person, it was a weapon. But there were so many memories now. What had happened to it.. him? There were just so many and he felt like he was drowning in them. There was never this much to remember even when it complied and avoided recalibration for multiple missions.

The door still hadn't opened, which was strange but at least the handlers wouldn't notice something was wrong. Names swam up to it, him!? Every name felt like a shot fired.

Bucky? The memories told it that it was its name. But it didn't have a name. It didn't feel like it belonged to him. Who did these memories belong to?! Why had they been shoved into his mind? They didn't feel like they were his. It was like watching a home movie of someone you've never even met. Awkward and uncomfortable.

There was a hiss that signalled the door unlocking. He had no idea why his new handlers were taking so long but he could actually feel his legs. He might even be able to stand when the door opened. Warmth rushed in when it did, causing him to stumble a bit, but he definitely didn't fall over. He waited for hands to grab at him roughly. To shove at him and drag at him. But nothing came. Instead of white coats and stone cold faces, there was just one person. She was young. Too young. There were no guns pointed at him. He could take her out…

But she was smiling at him?

"Sergeant Barnes? Do you remember where you are?"

Something clicked in his head at that.

Wakanda.

Everything from DC rushed into place. Crammed in with all of his memories from before. He clutched his head. It was too much. Worse than the memories coming in spits and spats from the apartment. It was just all there now. Not everything was there he could tell, it just broke off, like a tear in the fabric after he fell. Then it's black, black, but not empty and the memories after feel different. There are bits. Blood, pain, death. Something surged up in his mind and then.. Nothing.
Like something shielding him, maybe the treatments Shuri had mentioned to help heal his mind. Leaving him dizzy but not like he was drowning anymore.

"Wakanda?"

"Yes! Great! We were worried the subconscious treatments for your memories might create some confusion when you woke up if you remember?"

He nodded. Remembering now, shaking his head and trying to push the Asset mindset aside. There are no recalibrations, no punishments here. No chair.

"It was a bit confusing there for a minute, waking up in Cryo has never been… Fun."

Shuri smiles and walks him towards a bed and he sits down. Thankfully it's only a few steps. Glad to be off his feet, it was never easy being forced to stand straight out of cryo. He went to reach out with his arm and got a fiery stab of feedback in his mind, reminding him when had happened to his arm.

Shuri had removed as much as he'd been able to sit through and the whole thing was covered by a silicone stretchy cap to protect it and let him shower. He'd refused anything else, an arm down wasn't much of a fighting handicap to him, but it was something. Plus, No matter what Steve demanded, he didn't want that torture device back on his body. The reduced pain already almost had him floating.

"How... How long?"

"Only a few months, its currently the 9th of September."

He nodded, that felt about right, he could usually tell when he'd been in the chamber for longer periods of time.

"I'll just leave you be for a little bit, there are some clothes on the bed and a bathroom to the side. There is a drink too, the doctors don't recommend you try solid food until a day at least and slowly after! I'll be back in half an hour!"

He tried not to think less of himself for sitting confused for a while whilst he remembered units of time.

He had to look into those old memories for it, the Asset timed things in missions and when he needed to drink the vile fuel packs. He staggered to the bathroom, constantly reminding himself that this is fine. He could have a hot shower and not be punished, no more freezing cold buckets of water by stone faced hydra guards.

When Shuri gets back he's changed and sitting on the bed in some facsimile of relaxation. He tried to relax, just after dressing and found he wasn't able until he did a full perimeter check of the room. The cryo chamber had vanished whilst he'd been in the bathroom, presumably back to the room he remembered going into it in. This was more like a medical facility. A very fancy one. No one said he could leave the room so he hadn't gone into the hall and the other bed was empty. Even so, there was a curtain pulled around his bed for privacy. He heard Shuri coming down the hall, her footsteps are quite distinctive. He put some more effort into looking relaxed as the young girl always seemed upset when he was uncomfortable, he remembered that from when he'd been practically dumped in her lab and she only called him 'White boy', even then she'd noticed when he was uncomfortable and he didn't want to upset her. She'd helped him stand up to Steve about his choice to go into cryo.
"Sergeant Barnes! You look much better now."

"Thank you Princess, if you don't mind me asking.. Why am I awake.. " and how did you make Steve stay back and give me a chance to get my head straight? He thinks quietly to himself. He'd suspected Steve would have dragged him out of the chamber.

"Well, we agreed to let you go back on ice until we came up with a solution to the problem with the code words, an outside contractor that I collaborate with just sent me something that has a really good chance at helping with the words and your time as a POW. As I'm sure you can feel, the subconscious treatments and healing was only able to bring back your memories from before? There is a block from anything past that. You have some of those memories you got back yourself, but we ran into problems with it, we hope this new tech will help with these issues."

He nodded along, that was a lot to take in. He'd honestly gone back into cryo never expecting to be woken up again. He suspected what Hydra had done to his head would never go away, he'd always be at risk of being triggered and attacking innocents. He'd admit that after Siberia he didn't even know if he wanted or deserved help. He and Steve battered a non enhanced person in grief for God's sake. 'Never mind that he's a walking tank..' He shoved that thought down.

Either way, he didn't feel good about it, nor about all the damage and pain he'd caused running from T'Challa. T'Challa had taken the blame for chasing him and Steve said he'd just temporarily disabled the suit, that Stark was fine. That Stark was not a nice guy anyway, rude and arrogant. The others had told him a lot about their previous team mate and he was honestly confused why they were on a team with someone who was so detrimental to them?

But a memory of the two of them, almost shadowed out by the brightness of the snow, Steve on top, he couldn't remember if Stark's arm was up or protecting his neck, he didn't know what was worse. Possibly that he'd just let Steve take him away without looking back. Yeah, that was the worst. It doesn't matter how rude someone is, he didn't deserve that. He killed the man's parents for God's sake, that had to affect someone's life. He wondered how old he'd been left orphaned. The influx of his past memories had him feeling even worse about it. If he'd just watched his ma die in front of him, he would have attacked first, question later.

"Lots of memories in here now, kind of like a home movie that belongs to someone else. I can go in and find stuff I need, it's kind of weird. With Hydra though, it's.. Spotty. I remember remembering some memories but it's like something has pulled them away…"

He trailed off, 'protecting' came to his mind but he didn't know where from. But it was easy to ignore, his brain was mush, he doubted it would make sense.

"Well, we aren't going to rush you. Everything about the treatment is on this tablet, it's all explained too but if you get stuck, you use that button there and you can type messages to me. I'll answer any questions I can, if I can't I'll pass them on to the outside contractor."

He nodded, idly wondering who this outside contractor was that they came up with something Wakanda didn't have.

"I'll have a read through, my knowledge of tech is spotty. They only updated me on what I needed for missions. Bucky isn't as useful for this, and unless it's a security system I'm not either. "

He shrugged, happy the Princess wasn't calling him out on being weird, looking at the tablet. It was kind of amazing, he poked around and realised there was a lot of information on here! They gave him phones but they didn't have much on, the asset didn't need to know, only do.
"This tablet is yours now anyway, it's also connected to the Internet and lots of TV channels too so you don't have to be bored when you go to the villa."

"Villa?" he was half paying attention and half glued to the tablet which seemed to be highly amusing to Shuri.

"Yes, Mr Rogers was adamant about you moving into the villa with the others. You don't be too go though… If you want you can stay at the Palace."

She trailed off, letting him think that he wasn't sure about the team either, some of them seemed okay? Some seemed full of jagged edges, ready to stab any that came close and others set his teeth on edge. Not exactly a calm environment to feel through the memories.

He wanted to find out who he was now he wasn't an Asset anymore, now he wasn't Bucky. To learn how to be human again. However, what little he'd seen so far of the memories when thinking about Steve, and his experience of running from the man post DC… he'd hidden for a reason and just because he'd been forced out by circumstances didn't mean that those reasons weren't still valid. Staying in the Palace wasn't an option though. Princess Shuri and King T'Challa, Okoye, several of the Dora Milaje he'd talked to in the brief interludes free of Steve… he liked?

Yeah, he liked them.

They were kind, they smiled at him without expectations. They just talked without demanding he remember things. Even with the memories there now, he didn't really want to talk about them. They were so far in the past, he knew intrinsically he was not that person. True he didn't know who he was, but he knew who he wasn't. He wasn't even that person after he was drafted, let alone his first capture. It was like having different people in his head from different times. When the too big Stevie rescued him he'd already been fracturing, but he couldn't say it. Back then that would have got him locked up. Had to be OK. Had to be fine.

"Nah, it's okay Princess, we both know what will happen if I stay away. I'll.. Have m' own room though right..? I… would like a place that is mine? That no one can enter without my say so?"

"Of course! I've already set it up. Rogers tried to make people move around as you have the entire top floor with its own bathroom, and the others have single rooms on the other floors. He wanted you in his room or next to it. But your therapist, me and T'Challa were adamant that you needed a secure place. The rooms are locked down and your thumbprint will open it. The only others who can get in is me or my brother, but I assure you we will only use that in emergencies."

He blinked. That sounded… Frankly amazing. He can't believe how much these siblings have gone to bat for him. Even against Steve. It also shocked him how they preempted his request.

"That sounds amazing. I can share a building if I have my own place."

Him smiling about it just made Shuri happier. They started talking for about an hour and he slowly relaxed. Shuri teaching him the ins and outs of the tablet, that only he could operate it if any of the others tried to be nosy apparently. 'Really, how badly have they pissed her off?' Anytime she mentioned the others her face darkened, he found out it had only been around 2 months! How had the others, how had Steve been that awful in such a short time to make Shuri so angry? Stevie was kind and polite, well, when he wasn't fighting anyway. These people opened their country to them, risked a lot for no reason other than to help him. Him.

A person who had ruthlessly killed many, many innocents in the last century. Changed the course of more political events than he even wanted to consider. Steve could say it wasn't him till the
cows came home. It was his hands. His body. He did it to avoid punishment. To avoid recalibration. Saying 'it wasn't you Buck!' just made him feel worse. Made him feel powerless. He'd ignored what he'd done and then come face to face with the consequences of those actions. Sticking his head in the sand was an awful idea.

The Princess and King didn't say that to him, they just told him he had been through more than most people could imagine and that they wanted to help him. It was hard to accept, but it was easier than just ignoring the blood on his hands. Ignoring it seemed disrespectful, Steve's way was to just disregard the innocents he killed. The lives he irrevocably changed and destroyed. It just made him.. uncomfortable.

"Okay, I have to get back to my lab, but T'Challa should be here soon to see you and he's going to see you to your new rooms!"

"But... but he's the King! I can't... I can't expect him to take time out for just me?"

"Maybe I want to Sergeant Barnes?"

He jumped a little, he'd been so caught up in panicking about the idea of an actual, literal King seeing him to his room. Because what the hell?! That he hadn't heard the near silent, purposeful steps of the King coming up to the door. T'Challa had stayed just outside the door until he looked at him hover. Eyes open in shock. Flicking his wet hair out of his eyes. The Princess tutted and looked at his hair whilst he was freaking out.

"Hm, do you want me to get your hair out of your face?"

His capability to be freaked out over this situation just gave up the boat at the idea of a Princess doing his hair. He bit back a laugh. A King seeing him to his room. Princesses being his hairdresser. Okay, things couldn't get weirder. And that was coming from a regularly frozen brain washed super soldier assassin from the 40s.

"Um, OK, we can try?"

Shuri nodded, she had worked out 5 minutes into seeing him that people touching him was bad and had repeatedly whacked anyone who came close to him in the lab, it had been hilarious and one of his new favourite memories was Clint hopping on one leg.

She telegraphed her moves and very slowly moved to him, she even awkwardly stood to the side, even though he knew it would be move comfortable for her to stand behind him. She touched his shoulder very lightly at first, testing the waters. He was quite shocked when he didn't flinch. Every time someone had touched him it felt like he was crawling out of his skin. Maybe the subconscious thingy fixed that? Maybe it was because she'd asked first? That he had some control over it? He knew if he changed his mind halfway she'd stop instantly.

No pressure.

That she wouldn't be upset or angry with him. Maybe it was all of that? Maybe he should stop analysing himself into a hole? The usual Hypervigilance of the Asset was broken somehow. It was still there, he was still on alert but there was no... filter now. The exits were ranking the same as a blue book left on a table, it was maddening.

She seemed happy with his reaction and he couldn't help but lean into the contact. Physical contact had equalled pain for so long. He'd almost forgotten what it was to be touched in kindness. Sure he had memories now but he couldn't feel anything from them. He could only watch them. This felt
new. Brand new, like no one had ever touched him in kindness before, and it was his choice. He could make choices. Sure Bucky Barnes had been touched in kindness. Sure Bucky Barnes had choices. But that didn't take away the 'new' feeling. The Princess was putting something in his hair and gently running her fingers through it. T'Challa entered the room slowly. Smiling and passing his sister a comb. Just watching quietly.

He felt.. Safe? Comfort too. Words that had no meaning attached to them suddenly did. They went from a dull sepia to vibrant in his mind. He leaned back, hearing Shuri chuckle as he hummed slightly and she combed his hair. Despite the knots, she never once let it pull against his scalp. The feeling of her braiding his hair was new, it didn't tug at any of the sepia memories and that made him smile more. It meant it was purely his. Whoever he was. He was almost sad when she finished. He gave her a warm smile this time and it felt less like he was putting it on.

"That was nice."

"Well then, looks like I'm going to be doing your hair for the time you're here, just means you'll have to visit me daily! Bye now!"

She grinned, slipping out of the room before he could say anything about her not having to do that! Surely she'd be too busy to see him daily?..?

"I'd just go with it. She loves playing with people's hair and she has developed quite the soft spot for you."

The King grinned, sitting on one of the stools about the same height as the bed.

"But.. She's a Princess, surely she has more important things to do than helping me with my hair?"

He ran his hand over the complex feeling braid, nothing like the plaits he used to do for his sisters when he checked the memory. No this was much more than that, it felt really nice to just run his hand over it and he found himself wanted to look in the mirror. Something that he had avoided when he'd showered. He looked different to the him in his memories. Like Stevie vs Steve, but he hadn't shot up several feet. He was taller, his features seemed more.. Strong and defined. He'd avoided looking more than that because the differences made his head swim. Now however he wanted to look, this was him, not Bucky. They were different so he could look different couldn't he?

T'Challa seemed to be sensing his thoughts somehow and put a small mirror next to him in the bed. Like Shuri he seemed to do things intentionally not to put expectations on him. They did it so easily too it amazed him. He couldn't let his guard down entirely, but felt some of the tension just leak out of him. The constant data of the environment settled to a quiet hum. He did pick up the mirror to look at what the Princess had done and was amazed at how complex it looked. It kept his face free and it was nice feeling.

He even liked how his face looked with it. All he had to do was remind himself that he and Bucky were different and the panic that had clawed at his throat when he saw the mirror in the bathroom was not going to overwhelm him. It was still there, but it wasn't everything. The lack of it left him feeling floaty again. He decided that wasn't good, he couldn't let anyone sneak up on him again. He had a last look before letting his senses return to their hypervigilant state whilst conversing with the king.

"I think she sees you as important, plus, she likes you. She won't enter the villa so having you visit her will make her happy."
"Why won't she visit the villa?"

"Ah, there was an incident with one of the Captains people. Wanda. She refuses to go near her now, the Captain complains about it often. As if my sister is being unfairly cruel and persecuting the girl."

T'Challa almost growled whilst he spoke the last part and a feeling of rage surged up inside him. Anger, rage and a touch of terror. Weird. He had no idea where it came from but he managed to keep it down, he'd not known the Princess long but he cared for her. Maybe protectiveness? It was weird being an adult and practically learning emotions but the fact he could feel them was wonderful enough to ignore the strangeness. Yes, he didn't want her hurt, so he would be angry at the source? That made sense. He made a decision and decided he would visit her when she wanted. T'Challa seemed pleased and amused by.

"Then I'll make sure to visit her often so she won't have to go near her. "

"That will make her very happy. And if she's happy, she will prank me less."

He found himself laughing with the king. He knew that this was his too, Bucky had never laughed with a king being pranked by a Princess. Because what the fuck, seriously.

"As loathe as I am to ruin our good mood, would you mind answering some questions before I take you to your new dwelling?"

He tilted his head, a little nervous about what he was going to ask. The very obvious 'Before Steve arrives', went unsaid. He still felt safe with the King. He could say no. He knew the king would accept his no too which helped him say yes.

"Of course, your majesty."

"Well my first question is for you to call me T'Challa, I'd like for us to be friends?"

He nodded quickly, he liked that idea. It felt a bit awkward, the man was a king. A KING. that was chatting and asking he use his name. Yeah, this was definitely a new, not Bucky thing.

"I'll try to remember, T'Challa."

"What would you like me to call you?"

"Urm… I don't know?"

He pulled his shoulders in. It was embarrassing to say you didn't know something even kids know. T'Challa seemed to sense that and immediately tried to put him at ease.

"Hm, how about I'll stick to Barnes for now and when you pick a name, you tell me and I'll use that?"

He breathed out. That worked. A whole weight vanished off his shoulders. He would find a name, but he didn't have to do it right now. He could find out who he was first.

"I'd like that."

"Well, what I wanted to ask was for more details about Siberia? I didn't have a chance before you went under."
"Did.. Did Steve not tell you?"

T'Challa immediately looked uncomfortable and something cold went down his spine. Suddenly very concerned.

"He told me.. something, but in light of recent information I have a feeling he is… leaving out pertinent information."

He had a feeling it was worse than leaving bits out. From the King's body language he could see he was uncomfortable but he could also see anger. It was hidden carefully, but he could see it flashing in the King's eyes.

"You think he lied?"

"Possibly. I hate to put you on the spot like this I know he's your best friend after all."

"I don't know if he is? He was Buckys. But I don't know him. He doesn't know me, I don't think he even wants to know me, but maybe I'm not being fair?"

He rubbed the back of his neck, watching concern flash in the King's face. He had gotten this sense from Steve before he went into cryo. Steve was fine as long as he got the memories correct, when he failed, he got upset and it just felt too much like failing a handler.

That was before he got the memories back. He cared more about him remembering than the fact remembering was scary and painful. He constantly kept talking about things he should try to remember even when he'd half begged him to just give him time. Just keeping up with his journal was hard enough. That had all ramped up after he'd mentioned cryo.

"I understand, I hope he will be more understanding when you meet up again. But, if he is ever too much, all you have to do is ask one of the guards that are outside the house 24/7 and they will get you away, either somewhere on your own or to me or Shuri."

He could see the steel in the man's spine, usually he would wave off such a gesture. Having 2 royals come to him because he was feeling a bit overwhelmed seemed a bit much. The strength of how he said it though had him nodding. Maybe this is what it felt like when someone cared about you? Maybe Steve would be like this now? He didn't know this new Steve, he should give the man a chance.

"What was it you wanted to ask about Siberia?"

"Ah, Steve told us that Dr Stark arrived, attacked yourself, so he intervened which was how you lost your arm. Steve left Dr Stark temporarily disabled and then you both departed. I've since received information that has me concerned about how Dr Stark was left, what do you remember?"

What?! Did Steve just leave all the important parts out or something? He was angry that Steve had lied to a man generous enough to take him in. Why would he do that? He decided he needed to make up for this so tried to think back. To bring the memory up. He avoided the start of the fight. Skittered away from the video. The fight was a bit.. Blurry. Memories in flashes. He didn't remember fighting as such, he remembered screaming in his mind that he didn't want to fight. But he'd fought anyway, instinct drilled into him by Hydra. After his arm was blasted off, things were a bit clearer and yet not at the same time. He didn't fight, but it was pain, white hot and sharp. He'd stayed on the ground, leaving his back to Stark. He'd only intervened again to try to stop the fight but he wondered if he'd just made it worse.
Also, Doctor? Steve and the others had just called him Stark. His designation as Threat Level Alpha by Hydra told him a lot about the man, his intelligence has been noted. He was to be avoided at all cost even allowing mission failure to avoid him, which even Alpha Threats didn't have. Only to be captured if they were capable of actually containing him. He had a brief flash that people who crossed him like this didn't survive for long. So there was something different about the man than the usual Hydra enemies.

"He arrived and Steve was ready to fight.. But they talked and they had a truce. To deal with the Soldiers together."

He wrung his hands, talking about this was uncomfortable, plus bits of the fight were plain missing, he didn't want to discuss them incase he got it wrong, so he jumped to after his arm he decided. That was the information T'Challa was after anyway.

"My arm.. The pain clouded things slightly after it.. Well, got blown off. After that I just stayed down Steve had him on his back.. I think. I saw Steve throw his helmet. Stark was down, Steve on top. I can't remember If Stark reached up to him.. Or if his arms were covering his face? Or neck. Sorry this sounds disjointed."

"It's OK, I know how things can be in battle, moving fast and slow all at once. Especially after such an injury."

T'Challa had leaned forward, listening intently, he could see his shoulders tense.

"Steve slammed the shield into the power source. He told me it was the only way to stop him? To stop the suit, but that it would be OK. The blue light faded… Steve said the armour kept him safe. That he was fine, just powered down."

He didn't sound sure about it himself. He'd let Steve draw him away because the pain. He was scared and the memories of killing the Stark's were so fresh he couldn't think past it. He was also scared about being in Hydra base in the first place. The faked calm he'd had coming had gone.

"I.. I did not want to fight, but I just reacted? I know it's not an excuse, beating a grieving man is just wrong, I didn't want to fight you for the same reason but I couldn't run from him trapped in the base."

The anger and compassion for him that had been warring itself across the Kings features suddenly dipped into confusion and that when he remembered. Steve had told him that he attacked for no reason.

"He didn't attack us for no reason. Zemo, had a video. He played it in front of the 3 of us when he was safe behind blast doors."

"A video?"

"It was CCTV footage from the night the Starks were killed."

He was wringing his hands, he'd never wanted to see himself doing that. His face blank, throttling a woman. But his pain was nothing compared to the pain of a child watching his parents get murdered.

"The Starks died in a car crash didn't they? Why would Zemo have a video of that?"

"I can't believe Steve didn't tell ya. They didn't die of a car crash. They were murdered. By the Winter Soldier. By me."
T'Challa sucked in a breath and a pained expression crossed his face.

"And then Dr Stark attacked you?"

"No, no… He asked Steve. If he knew. Steve tried to lie, say he didn't know it was ah.. Me."

He flinched, hearing Stark's words in his head.

'Don't bullshit me Rogers!'

"Oh Bast…"

Chapter End Notes

The Wakanda chapter was a little larger than intended so it split and became 2.

Past Philly put bullet points for certain chapters and Present Philly is baffled about how I thought so much could fit in around 10k words.

So we are still going back and forth from America - Wakanda, just more than a chapter each.

Also writing Roger's is tricky, I've never been a Cap fan, he's always lacked and real depth for me and its translated into writing him, so if you love Captain America, I'm sorry. I'm likely not going to treat him well.
Secrets Will Damn Him - Pt2

Chapter Summary

Will Steve do the right thing or keep throwing absent parties under the bus?

Is that really a question..?

Chapter Notes

Cutting it close to that Saturday deadline today! I went outside and it threw everything off but it was for a tattoo consultation!

Now, I know you want to jump in to Steve being well.. Steve. Ahem. More likely for Shuri's Rehab for Silly White Boys xD but I wanted to quickly add something to everyone reading this.

Diolch - Thank you!
Ti'n Werth y Byd! - You're worth the world!

I spent time in the dictionary learning that second one for you lot.

So, To every reader, kudos, bookmark and person who comments. Thank you! I was scared to post up something I'd written after so many years off, and being dyslexic, writing on a mobile. I've been told my brain works weirdly and my writing reflects that since I could write, that I need to just 'slow down', my brain has 2 speeds, 20 directions at 100mph or *nap*.

So to say the very least, I was very nervous, especially as its 100% me, autism brain and all, not ran past some to change huge swathes until I barely recognise it. But it was ridiculous and I threw caution to the wind. I'd not expected much. I'd expected yelling and to be told I'm awful 😞.

I'd not expected this to be so fun! I'd definitely not expected it to help me manage my pain! To feel connected to something again. The last year's and a bit has, let's say, not been fun, much drama, exploding houses and all and I'd been quite down on myself.

Your responses, the feel of writing again, it's a spark I sorely needed. So thank you! Every comment means a lot to me, I even gleefully show my partners.

Now, I'll stop rambling and let you read!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barnes  POV
"Steve finally said he known. Stark.. He hit Steve, open handed. I.. I shouldn't have fought back I just.."

He gripped his head, he really didn't want to be remembering all of this and it was taking all of his focus to stay in English, to not slip into Russian. Steve's reactions to him doing that had not been positive and he didn't want to risk annoying anyone else. T'Challa came over to him, standing close but not touching.

"Barnes, it's okay, with everything that happened to you, you said it yourself you couldn't not fight back. You were not Dr Stark's friend. You hadn't been hiding this secret."

T'Challa hissed, anger obvious in his words and that just made him hunch down more. T'Challa sucked in a breath, forcing himself to calm down, he could hear his heart slowing from the increased rate since he had started his story.

"Barnes, May I?"

T'Challa had a hand raised towards his shoulder, not close enough to crowd him, but with the offer of comfort. He nodded, not feeling able to speak with the fight going around and around in his head.

This was why he ran.

This was why he'd hid in that apartment.

It was why he had run from Steve as much, if not more, than he had from Hydra.

He was dangerous.

He wasn't in control.

He killed.

He just.. Didn't want to fight. He didn't want to kill anymore. At least not for these reasons. He didn't want to hurt innocent people. He didn't want to hurt good people. T'Challa very slowly put one hand on his shoulder first. And very slowly pulled him into a loose hug, with the ability to pull out. That care let him just collapse.

"Barnes, it's OK. If Steve had told Dr Stark before that night, if he hadn't found out by being forced to watch the tape with you right there... this could have gone much differently, if only others had made different decisions. Not you. I'm sure with time and separation Stark will know that."

"Pretty sure he hates me. He has every right to despise me. To want to kill me. But he didn't and I don't understand why? I helped Steve beat on an unenhanced man in grief. What kind of person does that make me?"

"Makes you human, I chased and tried to kill a man who'd been through hell for a near century. I ignored all council, I caused damage that lead to deaths in my reckless pursuit of revenge. What does that make me Barnes?"

"That's.. That's different."

"Parts maybe, but we all make mistakes. You are putting in effort to clear the triggers from your
mind, you are remorseful. If you are waiting for me to yell or hurt you, you will be waiting a very long time Barnes.

"No one in this came out clean."

He scoffed and just leaned into T'Challa. He wasn't sure how long he stayed like that. But he eventually sat up. He wanted to talk to the king more without coming across as a pathetic idiot. In the chaos of remembering even the back of his mind had gone silent.

So he breathed deeply a few times, focused on the memory of feeling of Shuri's hands in his hair and eventually offered a small smile to the king. He was happy to find the king offering him a wide one in return.

He went to continue the conversation about what happened in Siberia but T'Challa wasn't having any of it and kept changing the topic on him.

He got a feeling that the king wasn't finished with this, but as far as he was concerned, he had enough information from him and he 'would not be the means of which he punished himself by'. Which made some kind of sense and eventually convinced him to talk about lighter things that were not so guilt fueled.

T'Challa also seemed to just really enjoy telling him about Wakanda, it was obvious the young King cared deeply for his people and his land. He didn't think it would be possible after just reliving that fight, but T'Challa had him laughing too. Right up until he heard feet, angrily stomping down the hall. He shot an alarmed look over at T'Challa who had also heard. His easy smile slipped into what he was calling the T'Challa King Face. An easy smile but he went from a friendly chatting person to a man with a presence around him. It impressed him how easily he pulled this on. He could see the anger in his eyes however, he might not have realised it if they hadn't been talking before hand, but he was very angry at the approaching person.

Quite understandable really given everything he'd gleaned from his stilted descriptions.

At his panic however, T'Challa glanced at the curtain leading to the bathroom just to the side. It wasn't much, but it gave him an option. He mouthed 'sorry' grimacing at the fact he was abandoning his new friend to his old friend, Steve, who was his problem.

Who he apparently was still running from.

He wondered if he'd ever stop running from the man his best friend had turned into.

Or if this new Steve would even stop chasing the ghost who he once was.

He couldn't just leave T'Challa to deal with Steve. A man so kind and nice that he was protecting them, housing them, feeding them, doing everything with zero recompense. Yes, if he saw Steve without calming down he was going to punch him or pass out, but still. It felt like cowardice. His hand clenched into a fist as he slipped silently behind the curtain and into the bathroom. He would listen. He wasn't utterly running away, he could easily step into the room and surely that meant something.

Steve burst into the room, he heard the door slam open with the excessive force he used to open it, making him flinch even from his hiding spot. Happy he hadn't been in the main room for that, it was bad enough when it was muffled. He can hear the anger in his voice. He can't believe how rude he is being, the Stevie from his memories would never have done something like this. Neither of their ma's would have stood for it. He feels nauseated again, like he has everytime he tries to
compare Steve and Stevie in his memories. So he simply slams the memories back down.

This big Steve seems to have lost some of the best qualities of little Stevie and has picked up some that he doesn't like.

Stevie always had to shout to be heard, to use multiple skills to be seen. The kid was a master at reading body language and just seemed to know things because of it. Steve seems to have traded all of this in, now he doesn't have to fight to be heard, people just listen. But the punk is still fighting! Now however, his power, size and strength are vastly increased, leaving an air of impending violence that has more of a threat to it.

When he was Stevie, solving problems with his fists didn't seem as.. Drastic? Or even menacing as it did now. Before he looked up to people, beseeching them to listen. Now he looms over, demanding their attention or else.

Weirdly, it kind of reminded him of the tiny puppy that grew into the big dog, but still acted like the scrappy puppy. Utterly oblivious it couldn't fit on your lap anymore or that it's play yaps and growls were now scary.

Controlling his breathing, he slowly slipped back into his mind. His heartbeat and breathing slowing. Fading into the background like the ghost story he'd become. Standing perfectly still and barely making any noise and hyperfocusing on Steve and T'Challa. Like this he could watch for hours, like sitting in a sniper nest waiting for the shot. Silent, watchful and ready at a seconds notice. After decades of being the Asset he could do this for days with ease, he decided that he will listen and stand sentinel over his friends.

"T'Challa! I've been looking for you for an hour! No one would tell me where you were, no matter who I demanded the information from."

"Rogers. I should not have to remind you, you do not have the right to be demanding things. You are a Guest. I'm sure people offered to book you an appointment with me."

"I went to see Bucky! I checked the cryo room but he was gone. The tube was empty and no one would tell me where he was!"

"Did you demand answers there too?"

"Of course I did, it's Bucky. You had no right to move or wake him up without me being here. He's my friend, you should have come to me first!"

Barnes is utterly bewildered by what Steve is saying, his hand clenched so hard he can hear his bones creaking before forcing himself to release it. If he wasn't careful Steve would notice he was here, actually it was kind of worrying that he couldn't sense him. His serum packed less of a punch than Steve's but he could hear their heartbeats so Steve should hear his. It came down to the fact Steve had just not spent much time training in the army, and less time training himself to stretch his senses like he'd been forced to. It was why they were almost evenly matched, maybe slightly in his favour even with his bastardised serum.

He shakes his head, wondering what on earth was happening. 'What the fuck happened to you Stevie? You're talking to a fucking king. If he wants to wake me he can and he's following my requests dammit?' He remembered telling Steve that he'd rather get woken up alone. That having people there would just stress him out. Apparently he'd just selectively forgotten things that didn't he disagreed with, he was pretty sure that that had always been a trait of Steve's along with his stubbornness. They'd been a lot cuter when you could just pick him up to move him however.
"I spoke to Sergeant Barnes before he went into cryo if you remember? He requested that treatment options be brought to him first, and that he be awoken with as few people as possible."

Barnes marvels at how T'Challa barely raises his voice, yet he punctuates certain words with a hard, forceful anger that the huffing and yelling Steve just can't seem to match.

Something about it sets Steve off worse however but he isn't sure why.

Steve doesn't even seem to be listening too, which just irritates him. With how much Stevie had been ignored growing up, he'd never imagined his friend turning around now and ignoring others. He'd always been ready to stand up for the little guy, to give voice to those who didn't have one. The serum was meant for him to do that. Not for him to use it to his personal advantage to speak over anyone who didn't fall into line.

The whole situation had him pinching his nose in irritation. He should leave his spot, to stop this, T'Challa doesn't deserve this. This is on him. His responsibility. However, he doesn't want it to be his responsibility. Why does it have to still be on him, surely in the several decades since he 'died' Steve would have found someone else to save him when he didn't think? Yet, he knew that just him being in the room would likely stop Steve's yelling and posturing. His feet however feel glued to the floor. He leans forward to try and force himself to move but he can't help just thinking.

'Why?! Why is this still on me? Can't I just be selfish? Don't I deserve that? After everything I've been through?!'

That brings him up short. After everything. After all the people he killed. He's sure he doesn't even remember everyone and yet the number in his mind is terrifying. And it's not just the people he killed. Death reverberates through so many people, through families and communities. If he killed a father, could the remaining parent supply for several children? If he killed an important person in a community did it collapse in the power vacuum. All the political activists he'd been sent after, how many wars had he prolonged? It wasn't just the assassinations, they were just the pebbles, he couldn't even calculate the ripples.

'No, I don't deserve to be selfish. Not after everything I've done.'

Steve jars him back into the room, tearing him away from his internal conversation before he got sucked deeper into arguing with himself. Which is probably good because he was pretty sure arguing with yourself wasn't a good sign. What he said had him back to angry however.

"Bucky must have been so scared waking up without me being here. He was probably terrified being stuck with people he doesn't even know! If I was here he would have known he was safe."

OK. What is he? A fucking child? Sure cryo was scary waking up. But he's got decades of bad association with the thing, no amount of people cheering him on was going to change that for him. It was still cold and ice seeping into his bones. The cold stealing away time, never knowing when, or if he'd wake up again. Not knowing what world he'd even face when he left compared to when he'd gone in. Expecting the sharp pain and rough treatment on release. He'd been a few thoughts away from attacking when he was released, he never missed an opportunity to kill Hydra agents. Even when he knew they'd hurt him after. After a few decades it was seen as punishment to Hydra agents for becoming sloppy or complacent. He was still punished though. Typically. If someone had reached for him in that chamber, he would have broken their neck.

He knew that going in however. He expected the fear and he'd told Shuri and T'Challa about his potential reactions, about what happened in his past. He'd been worried for them, he'd even suggested through gritted teeth that he be restrained, Shuri had been heavily unimpressed.
When it came down to it, Shuri was perfect. She was present and didn't rush him. Didn't touch him. Gave him time to adapt.

Somehow, he doubted Steve would have been as courteous to his feelings. If he'd pulled him out he knew he'd have ended up flashing back on how he was dragged out everytime and Steve just didn't listen to him when he said that. Steve didn't want to listen when he talked about PTSD his therapist had told him about, he'd thought Steve had been in this time long enough to lose that way of thinking from the 40s. He just thought the fact that it was him would magically make everything different. That he'd get over it just by being near him so what's the point about learning about it? He admitted to only himself that that had hurt, he'd wanted his friend to understand, to be interested even. It was weird and he couldn't explain why, but his disinterest in that made a huge impact on him. He wasn't even sure why it mattered, he'd just known that he'd expected Steve to want to know more.

In his weakened state he likely wouldn't have done much damage to the super soldier coming out of cryo, but coming out fighting would have hurt him, mentally as well as physically. More fighting he didn't control.

It also wasn't helping that every time he shouted 'Bucky' it felt like his insides were squirming, like his skin is hot and his senses were just dialed up too much, like everything turned and assaulted him, like he wants to scratch and hack at it till it just stops. He also didn't get why he was reacting in such a visceral manner. He knew it made Steve happy to call him Bucky. So why couldn't he just man up and deal with it? Instead it was making him want to hit himself, hit Steve.. Just hit something? He ran his hand across his face, this was exhausting.

"The Sergeant was perfectly fine and safe, I believe ignoring his requests would have been more detrimental to his recove-." 

"Why did you wake him now of all times.. Is this because of-" 

"Mr Roger's. As with our agreement with the patient, he was awoken when a viable treatment was discovered."

Something seems to finally snap in T'Challa, like a steel band snapping and sharply embedding itself into a wall, that's what the Kings voice felt like to him. He imagined he looked pissed by now too. Steve just scoffs at that, although he doesn't understand why. These reactions just felt wrong to him.

"You should have brought it to me first to agree on it before offering it to Bucky. He doesn't understand this time..."

"Everything will explained, to him. He understands more than you think and I highly doubt you would understand the technology involved anyway." 

It was hard not to bark out a laugh at that. Steve had never really had the same interest as him in technology, for Steve it was just a thing to use to do the thing it was meant to. To him? He wanted to take it apart, examine every bit, find out what they do. Find out how and why it goes together and then put it back together. To see if he could make it better. Sure he'd mostly only been able to do that with cars, but this was a different time. Tech was everywhere and he loved it. He suspected Steve tolerated it at best.

"How could you do this T'Challa? Was this punishment for earlier? Are you trying to hurt me?"

'What did he do earlier? Was what when he lies to T'Challa' he wondered.
"Well you managed. Well done, but you shouldn't be using Bucky in your games! He doesn't deserve this."

That's it. He just can't listen anymore. He bursts out, directly putting himself between T'Challa and Steve. Face looking more like the Winter Soldier than anyone else.


He snarls out the words, not yelling loudly, but each word punctuated whilst gesturing with his hand. Steve flinched slightly at the Russian but broke out into a huge smile.

"Bucky! You're here!"

Barnes side steps him and backs up when Steve practically launches at him. Trying to hug him he supposes. He shakes his head a few times, holding his hand out in a stop gesture, which just seems to confuse Steve who seems to have all but forgotten that T'Challa exists in his excitement, he also seemed to have not heard him either.

"Buck, I'm so sorry they made you wake up alone, I would have been here if I'd known, I'm so sorry."

"Steve, that wouldn't have helped. After cryo I need to NOT be touched and left be. Ty menya ne slushayesh <You're not listening to me>. Like I told you. The Princess was great and I will be the one who decides my treatment, not you."

"But Buck, it's me, we're best friends, you'd have been much better. I don't know about this treatment, you don't know much about this time, I can make sure it's safe. And you obviously aren't fine.. You are speaking Russian.. "

He almost whispered the last part as if him slipping here and there with some Russian is the worst thing happening in here and he just wants to scream because he liked it, sometimes it felt more natural coming out of his mouth than the English did. He'd been punished by so many handlers for accidentally reverting to Russian but when they wiped him it became his main language and he had to force himself to switch. They knew that and they still hurt him over it, now Steve is looking at him like he's worried the Winter Soldier is back. He forced himself to calm down. Taking a deep, measured breath.

"If it wasn't safe the King and Princess and the many highly trained people in Wakanda wouldn't offer it to me. You need to apologise. Now."

"Huh? I already did, I'm sorry but they didn't tell me they were even waking you, I'm sorry I wasn't here."

'Dannn the punk looks so earnest' he thinks, whilst another part of him pitches in 'Yeah, the svolach <jerk> is earnestly trying to override our autonomy!' He nearly growls at that thought, anger bubbling up inside him.

"Not to me punk. To the King who you just screamed at like a brat!"

"But Buck, come on. What he did was wrong. I had a right to be here."

"They were abiding my wishes to wake up on my own, in my own time! I had a right to have my wishes respected. Which they did."

Steve looks like a kicked puppy, it pulls on some of the memories but he is just too angry.
"Fine. I'm sorry T'Challa. Would you mind leaving now so I can speak to Bucky privately?"

Barnes just gapes and shakes his head.

"T'Challa offered to show me my rooms, if he doesn't mind, I would like him to still show me? I'd understand if you don't want to after… This."

He turns to see T'Challa whilst not giving his back to Steve, looking chagrin and guilty over this utter disaster and gesturing at Steve in general when he said 'This'.

"Oh course, I'd be happy to walk with you and show you where you'll be staying. There are differences to the rest of the Villa that Mr Rogers wouldn't know about anyway."

T'Challa smiled at him, looking utterly unruffled and not angry at all when he turned to him. He was quite impressed that someone smiling and looking so kind could still get a jab in like that, he didn't bother hiding the smirk. He was praying that Steve hadn't ruined his chances of befriending the man. He… He wanted people who didn't have expectations of him. Shuri and T'Challa were what he needed. They didn't look at him like he was a ghost from the past, a crazed assassin about to murder everyone and not with pity of him being a POW. That was something special he wanted to keep.

Steve looks like he's about to say something but he shoots him a glare to shut up and by the Gods the idiot does. His jaw is clenched however, jutted out in a stubborn display that he was clearly not happy with him. Which is fine, because he isn't happy with him either.

T'Challa walked past Steve without even glancing at him, Barnes followed and Steve finally followed too, realising that if he didn't, he'd be left behind. Oddly silent, looking slightly confused, more irritated and not even slightly guilty. As they're leaving Barnes grabbed the huge, impossibly soft hoodie that Shuri had left for him, happy that like his top, the left side had been altered for his lack of arm. It takes him a little bit of effort but he eventually gets it on, surprised he didn't get Steve in his face about helping but from the look on his face, T'Challa might have gotten in his way.

He can't help but laugh, even with the tense situation when he looks down and noticed there is a cute kitten on the front, scowling adorably with 'Murder Kitten' written underneath. T'Challa does a double take when he notices and the two of them start laughing. He slips the tablet Shuri gave him into the pocket as Steve looks at it critically, obviously not happy, he just about resists the urge to roll his eyes. He knew in his memories that his sisters had just as much sass as the young princess.

The trip to the villa is all kinds of awkward and tense but also kind of fun. T'Challa utterly ignoring Steve, Barnes dodging Steve everytime he tries to reach out. Steve ignoring T'Challa whilst shooting the King occasional glares. Steve with his disapproving face at his hoodie. It's utterly ridiculous. After the second time Steve tried to make contact with him, he demanded Steve walk in front of them. Adding that he was just not comfortable having anyone at his back. He feels bad at the pain flashing on his supposed best friend's face, but part of him feels amused by it. The rest of him feels guilty at being amused. Fare to say his brain is confusing to him, and it's his brain.

T'Challa seamlessly keeps the conversation going, not leaving room for Steve to interrupt, a small smile on his face shows he's definitely doing it on purpose. He might have said something, but Steve screamed at a sodding King for fucks sake. He's also still angry at the way Steve has been talking about him. He might have problems with his brain, but he's also a hundred year old super soldier assassin. He has the right to make his own choices, even if others don't like them.

People had been taking away his choices from the second he was drafted.
It was important that he got a say so now. Sure decisions were fucking terrifying. But he wasn't going to hand Steve a new leash just because he was scared about what food or clothes to choose. He'd learn and he couldn't do that if someone did everything for him.

Wakanda is amazing enough that even with the awkward atmosphere, he finds it easy to get sucked in to the Kings explanations or just anything he points at. His love for science and technology back in the 40s was something Hydra couldn't remove apparently and this place is fantastic. It is what he imagined the future might be back when they went to that Stark Expo. Any questions about how things work T'Challa explains too. Not just short explanations, he goes into detail and never seems annoyed even when he suspects the questions he was asking were probably things their children knew. He might have let embarrassment stop him once in his life, before hydra, but he wasn't going to let that stop him now. Plus he's enjoying himself too much to care.

T'Challa tells him he will love Shuri's lab and she's going to enjoy showing him everything she can he suspects. He can't wait. He's actually smiling, so caught up in everything and doesn't even notice that Steve looks put out and kind of bored. When they arrive at the villa, he recognised the 2 guards out front as members of the Dora Milaje and wonders why they're guarding Steve's team? He doesn't recognise one of the women, but the other he does was one of the people that kept him company when he first arrived and Steve was settling the others, he had refused to go, much to Steve's annoyance but it was just too many people. She was nice to him, even though he'd been a bit ragged after having Shuri help with his arm. He'd struggled to talk so she'd signed at him, simple as that, he didn't know if he was more shocked that she knew ASL or that he knew it.

"Onyenka! Hi! I didn't know you'd be here!"

He can't help but be a little excited, his anger had been crushed by how freaking amazing this place is. He waves at the other guard who gives him an open, kind smile too. Steve looks a little shocked which makes him wonder if he bothered talking to anyone outside of the team and the King. Which is confusing, he is pretty sure he has the social graces of a woodlouse right now, and a mood that switches to anxiety, panic and anger in seconds, yet whilst in agony of his arm just being blown off and about to go back into cryo and even HE had managed to make friends. What on earth is Steve's excuse?

"It's great to see you up and around, everyone will be happy to know our resident snowman has been defrosted! We missed you."

He's taken back and touched that they remembered him and still wanted to have him around.

"I'm going to see my new rooms now and I'm exhausted, but maybe I can annoy you again tomorrow? Xoliswa too?"

He asks hopefully, T'Challa just seems chuffed at him getting to know more people. Steve is still looking confused at the whole thing, but at least it's better than him being stubborn and angry. Taking small victories where you find them is perfectly acceptable.

"Of course! We'll have a small breakfast for you with a few others you met last time, yes? Then when you are more settled there are many who wish to meet you."

"That sounds great, I should be able to eat some solids tomorrow?"

He glances to T'Challa in question who nods. Grinning because Shuri told him that she and Okoye especially had been discussing foods he just had to try. 'He's too skinny!' had been heard so many times he had a feeling that the women are going to take it upon themselves to feed him, he's sure of it.
"A little, yes, but soft ones and not too much. Give your insides a chance to catch up and then I'm sure between the Okoye and my sister, you'll have tried every food Wakanda has to offer in no time."

"That sounds brilliant, it'll be nice to find out what I like."

He laughed whilst T'Challa opens the door for them to head in. Standing so Barnes can go first, putting himself at his back. Happy to not have Steve there, he knows T'Challa won't just touch him without asking whilst knowing that T'Challa was doing this for him, even though it was angering the super soldier although he hadn't said anything yet. Plus, he just can't have him at his back right now, not while his mind is split over him in this confusing way. Half angry, half sad. Missing a short gangly asmatic kid whilst angry that another person tried to steal his choices away. He tried to force the anger down but it almost shoved back at him. Until this resolves being around him is just as uncomfortable now as it was back in DC, more so even, just because of different reasons. Back then he didn't like Steve because he made him remember and the memories hurt and disoriented him. Now he's making him angry and conflicted.

"I can tell you what you like Buck, before you get your memories back I can guide you."

'At least it isn't shouting and only slightly patronising,' he thinks sullenly. Wondering how to tell Steve his decisions to find himself and not just try to be the Bucky he was.

He'd tried before he went into cryo, and it had gone as well as one might think. Yeah, he has memory problems, saying that would be stating the obvious, but people seem to have several misconceptions about what that means. Even before Shuri's subconscious tech and his healing component had restored his old memories. Steve is the worst for these bad assumptions. Apparently he didn't listen when the doctors explained about the subconscious treatments.

"Steve, the subconscious treatments worked. The memories are there but that's... It's not me. Plus, people change normally over time, I've had seven decades to change. I want to find out what I like now, understand?"

Plus the serum had changed his taste. He remembered that quite clearly, that things before and after were very different. Things that had smelled pleasant were now awful, favourite foods just tasted off. His senses had heightened and it affected his tastes. True that pretty much everything had to taste better than those vile salty gel packs Hydra had forced him to consume, but he figured he had a chance to find stuff he enjoyed now, instead of merely tolerated.

"That's amazing that you have your memories back! Why didn't you say earlier? We could have talked about the old days!"

"Steve, did ya not just listen to me. I'm not him, I'm different and I want to learn who that is."

T'Challa closed the door quietly behind them, the rest of the villa was empty from what her could hear, the others out enjoying the nice breeze out or something he assumed. He was just thankful they were alone.

"Just give it time Buck, you'll be back to yourself in no time."

He just sighed and T'Challa gave him a comforting smile. He wondered if he slammed his head into the wall would Steve's chatter get less maddening. He didn't even seem to realise that he was mad at him! He mourned his friend who would have been able to tell at a glance.

He's so staggered the difference the serum has had on him, more than he'd ever realised before his
fall. It's not just in his size and strength liked he suspected back then. It seems to have shifted everything and he wonders if the bastardised version of the serum he received did the same to him? Is that why he doesn't identify with the 'Bucky' in the memories.

The therapist had suggested it was the decades of brainwashing and torture, which had sounded right at the time. Now, however he wondered if the serum had changed more than his tastes in foods and scented candles.

"Well Mr Rogers, would you mind waiting here whilst I show Mr Barnes his room. Our psychologists say it's vitally important that his room is just that, his room, as we have discussed before. That no one enter without permission."

"Wait, what? Why are you going and I'm staying? You want me in right Bucky?"

"Right now Stevie, I'm still mad at you for screaming to a king and treating me like a child. T'Challa is showing me how things work and then I'm going to rest for a bit, I'll… I'll see you later."

T'Challa hangs back as he turns to start up the stairs, he just holds his breath, practically damned praying that calling him Stevie will get him some points and get him a breather.

" Our conversation from earlier is not finished Mr Rogers. You might want to take this time to think about your answer?"

The King's voice had gone hard and even Steve stopped, seemingly in shock from the kind smiling man to this, the switch was gone in the blink of an eye, like a mask slipping perfectly into place.

He decides that he's just going to ignore Steve for now and all the cascading implications that come with the man. He needs a break, his brain is spiralling to much, if he doesn't get a break he can feel that he is really going to punch him. If he thinks that this rudeness and lies are going to pass around him? He's got another thing coming.

Steve steps closer to him, looming over with a look of annoyance crossing his face and he flinched back. Hunching over. Chanting in his mind that this is not Hydra, he's allowed to voice his thoughts. He can make choices even if people don't like them. He won't be punished. He won't be recalibrated. Dammit he was doing so well but the Russian is on the tip of his tongue as he bites it back, thinking of anything but being ready to comply.

"Mr Rogers, I request you back up please. Mr Barnes is still getting confidence in making his own choices and disagreeing. I'm sure you can imagine how such things were dealt with at Hydra?"

T'Challa raised an eyebrow and got between the two men, shielding Barnes and directing him up the stairs without touching him. Steve flinched at the implication of what T'Challa had said but he didn't say anything, in the end they leave Steve shocked enough that he doesn't follow them this time.

He blinks when they come to a door, he hadn't even realised they'd made it all the way to the top floor. His feet had carried him along but its like his mind had checked out, he still feels somewhat fuzzy. Luckily he thinks, T'Challa had been watching out for them.

"Just grip the handle you thumb on the pad and… there we go. Open."

The pad flashed green and the door clicked open and he stepped inside. The door opened into what looked like a living room? He blinked a few times.
"I thought this was my room?"

"Remember my sister having a soft spot for you? Well she wanted you to be comfortable, so this is more of a one bedroom apartment than a 'bedroom'."

T'Challa was grinning and looking smug that he had an idea that this wasn't just his sisters doing. They stepped into the room, the door swinging shut behind him offering him security enough to just look at the room. It was Wakandan design and absolutely gorgeous. Very expensive looking but he could tell that the two royals had put effort in to make it not 'too much' for him. There was a lot of wood, some kind of bamboo if he had to guess and it was a lovely colour. Rugs with designs in black and gold on the floor, looking so plush she wanted to sink his feet into them. Comfortable looking chairs surrounded a TV on one side, on the other, a desk, a large blue screen coming from it that he assumed was a computer of some kind that T'Challa gave him a quick rundown on. The kitchen was sleek and gorgeous too, at a glance he noticed the fridge was fully stocked with the shakes he'd been offered in the medical bay and other foods he should be able to eat, there was even fruit on the little breakfast bar. There were 2 doors from the main, huge room. His fingers itched to run across the surfaces and feel the different textures but he figured that was less than polite when others were around, he could wait till he was alone.

T'Challa quickly showed him the bathroom and said Shuri included notes on how to operate the settings on the shower, which was three times the size as the one he'd used earlier! He wasn't even trying to count the amount of shower heads. The bath looked like he practically could swim in it and apparently had jets. Jets! The future was amazing, yet, so weird. It was like utter indulgence compared to the desperate rationing in his memories. The bedroom was darker, the windows covered with large black out blinds. The bed looked almost too comfortable and he couldn't resist running his fingers over the blanket. The style of black and gold in the other rooms followed here too. He peeked in the wardrobe and dressed to find it full of clothes. More than he'd ever owned at one point.

"This is.. So much!"

"Well Shuri likes to go all out."

"Just Shuri huh?"

T'Challa just grinned at being caught out.

"We like to spoil guests a little when they come, and as we weren't going to spoil the others, we had to make up for it somewhere. Anyway, I'll leave you to sleep. My sister showed you the message system on the pad yes? I'm also on there and you might get a few from some others too. Okoye definitely will be contacting you."

T'Challa grinned making his way to the door as he pulled out the tablet having a look and seeing he had requests for contact from a few names he recognised and a few he didn't. Surprised so many people wanted to talk to him, he accepted them all. He'd not felt all that hopeful when he'd first heard of the treatment, then the talk about Siberia and Steve storming in? It had all felt a bit bleak.

Maybe having a space that he knew was purely his help? Seeing how much effort people had gone to make him comfortable! Now he felt quietly hopeful and not as overwhelmed, even the rage in his mind finally quietened.

He could see the calendar on the device had his therapy sessions listed too, he'd met with the doctor before going into cryo, so he was happy he'd be still seeing her a few times a week. 'This could really work' he thinks as he waved T'Challa off and decided to poke the computer a bit as
well as the tablet. His fingers had been itching to play with the tech.

…

Some time later, he's not sure precisely as he'd gotten distracted. Knocking on his door jarred him from his current task, he'd done a few perimeter checks and had gotten more comfortable in the rooms, feeling his way around and taking a mental inventory of everything that was now apparently 'his'. He'd literally just been heading to the bedroom to sleep. Knowing he couldn't just ignore the man however, he grabbed one of the red drinks from the fridge before opening the door. Maybe this would go better than last time? He can have a good interaction with the man right? Now he's pretty sure he can hear laughter in his mind, but hey, it's better than rage.

He'd been expecting Steve and instead got.. Lots of people and Steve. 'Yay' He had to think to recall all their names and before he'd had much of a chance to even see them, one of them just barged right on in.

"Don't you know it's rude not to invite people in… what the fuck is this?"

Angry-man, as he'd now been dubbed, snapped as Steve followed him in, two men hanging back looking kind of awkward. He noticed the absence of the Witch, which was good. Something in his brain was screaming at him to not let her in his space, probably the fact Shuri is scared of her, he likes Shuri and doesn't like the idea of people hurting her.

"Um, come in? I guess."

Polite guy 1 and 2 smiled and came in. Angry-Man was stalking around looking at everything and Steve was just giving him hopeful puppy dog eyes again and seemed unconcerned by his team mates extremely rude behaviour. He sighed, he knew it wasn't fair on the man but he hated that look. That look meant he wanted Bucky. Which made him feel awful for not being Bucky. Even though he didn't want to be Bucky. It was not a comfortable mixture of feelings.

"So, what did T'Challa want to talk to you about."

"No seriously. What the fuck is this. Why do you get this and all we get is shitty fucking bedrooms?"

"Doesn't the house have rooms like this?"

He asked, slightly confused at why this man was so angry at him, he didn't design their rooms.

"Yeah, but it's for everyone, why do you get your own floor?"

"Clint, that's enough, Bucky has been through a lot."

Clint just scowls and starts looking around the kitchen which just snapped something in him seeing someone poking through his drawers. He just got this place. He lost his space in Bucharest and
now it felt like he was losing this too. Even though he knew logically he wasn't, it was just a guest being ruder, part of his brain didn't agree and was seconds away from snarling. He took a breath to focus to make sure he kept to English. Slipping would worry Steve more and make him less likely to leave. Even if he did slip on a few words

"Could you st..stop and leave please? Now? I'm not com..comfortable having so many people here so soon, especially not angry rude people going through my stuff."

"Buck! He's family, Clint is fine."

"No, Cap, Bucky is right. This place has to be his and he has to have control. Come on Clint, let's go get dinner."

Wings leads Clint out and cuts of Steve with a look, Clint stomps all the way out, leaving muddy footprints on his new flooring. He's so angry he doesn't hear or care what the idiot has to say.

"That wasn't very nice Buck."

"If we are going by how you spoke to the King ear..earlier, I think I'm doing fine. Plus I get to cho..decide who is in my space, and he is not..never coming here again."

"He's not that bad, he's just angry that you have better accommodations."

"Yeah, I'm sure the free, huge, gorgeous villa is so terri..horrible. Sorry Steve. This is my choice. He is not allowed in. No one is without my per..permission."

Fuck, keeping to English is making him stutter now He's cursing in his head, trying to get the anger to just calm the fuck down so he can stop tripping over stupid words. He hadn't accidentally slipped into Russian however so that's definitely a positive. Steve is frowning. The other polite guy who had just been standing awkwardly to the side comes over and tentatively offers his hand.

"Hi, not sure you remember me, I'm Scott. Nice to have you back with us! I just wanted to welcome you, Steve said you were tired so we'll go and let you get some sleep."

He shakes hands with Scott and watches him try to make Steve go, but fails, so he offered up an apologetic smile. He shrugged he hadn't thought that would work anyway. With less people cluttering around he's able to breathe and speak a little easier. Even if it might be slower than normal.

"If the rude guy was more like Scott or Wings? Then I wouldn't have booted him."

He crossed his arm over his stomach. Standing awkwardly. Realising belatedly that it's hard to fold your arms when you only have one apparently. It made him feel like he was hugging himself so he just forced his hand to stay at his side instead. What is this? Do normal people just know how to stand?

He just wanted to sleep so he wasn't offering Steve more conversation topics.

"You'll come around to him, that's what family is for right! Anyway, what did T'Challa talk about earlier?"

He glared at the family comment. He didn't know these people! One just rudely barged into his space, muddied his floor and swore at him whilst going through his things and he was at fault for being rude?
Sighing he went to the kitchen, taking a pull from the drink and placing it on the side. Checking under the sink of cleaning supplies he grabbed some spray and 2 cloths. Steve had tried to make the question about T'Challa subtle, but he could see the tensed shoulders that bellied that calm. *'He's paranoid, his story has been compromised'* the back of his mind whispered.

"Here, take this, if you want this conversation you are helping me clean up the mess that guy made in my house that I've not had for a single day."

"Um, Buck, they have tech or people for that. Tony had these bots because Nat didn't like.. Uhh"

Steve tripped over his sentence, he assumed it was an old conversation piece as he'd almost slipped into it without realising he was talking about Stark.

"Do I look like I care? Help me clean or leave."

He grudgingly agreed and again he wondered what happened to Stevie, if his ma saw him like this she would not have been impressed. He wondered how he'd been living these days that his first instinct for a dirty floor was to ignore it and wait for it to be cleaned by someone or something else? What happened to the hard work obsessed Steve?

"If your ma saw you shying away from a bit of cleaning she'd have had your hide. And he asked about Siberia."

The slight smile Steve had gotten when he talked about something from the past, which apparently is his favourite hobby. Why, in a country like Wakanda he wanted to talk about the great depression and war in America, he had no idea. He just didn't get it, he didn't want to talk about it. Why would he? So many memories were miserable and so, so hungry. Desperate even. Scratching out means for food, going hungry so the kids could get even halfway full. The future was much better. There was a full kitchen right there and he didn't half to work himself half to death for scraps.

"Uh, what did you say, because I wanted to, kind of, get our stories straight before he spoke to you over it? I can't believe he went after you when you were vulnerable to ask about that!"

Steve had stopped cleaning, making him sigh whilst he sat there looking righteous and angry when he was the one lying and wanting *him* to lie.

"He asked if I would tell him. I was able to say no. He asked permission to even ask me about it. My choice. And maybe if you didn't lie, we wouldn't need to get our stories straight. You should tell him the trut-."

"I'll talk to him and straighten things up, you were hurt so you could have gotten things wrong. You didn't.. Tell him about the Stark's did you?"

"Of course I did! Ty shutish, shto li? *<Are you kidding me?>* And don't you dare! You told me Stark would be okay too. T'Challa thinks you hurt him more tha-."

"He was trying to kill you!

Steve who had done no cleaning and just left the cloth on the floor to lay his hand on his shoulder. He flinched back and away from him. Feeling the need to scratch where he touched. Yeah he definitely didn't like being touched without permission.

"Steve, it doesn't matter what he was doing, you shouldn't have lied to T'Challa. Or shouted at him. You never used to be this rude. In these memories I have, you were polite and kind, you knew what
"Buck, you just need to spend time with me! I'm still your best friend. Nothing has changed."

"Right now I ... I don't even know if I want you near me! You keep interrupting me! Let me finish a sentence and listen to what I'm saying!"

"Buck, well get past this, you just have to let me help you."

"Ya ne khachu s taboy razgavarivat'" <I don't want to talk to you.>

He muttered under his breath, earning him another strange look before he realised he'd switched again. Snarling at himself, anytime he did that Steve listened to him less damn it.

"Please Buck.."

He is pleading at him but why won't he just listen? When he actually goes to hug him he wondered if this is a cryo induced nightmare or something, this is just madness, he got them occasionally when he hadn't been wiped in a while and was placed in cryo. Too many memories swimming, mixing and just plain screwing up to drift in the darkness. Even now, looking back, he's not sure what was real and what wasn't. He wants to scream at him, biting his tongue because he knows if he shouts in Russian things would get worse. He'd think he'd gone full Winter Soldier, he can already see it in him. The possibility that he was just angry didn't seem to occur to Steve. But he keeps trying because dammit his brain is telling him that he's his best friend. The angry part really wants to punch him. His fist clenched as if getting ready to do so.

"Stevie. Please. Stop. You have to listen to me."

"Okay Buck, I'm listening."

"You have to apologise to T'Challa. And I'm betting you've been awful to Princess Shuri too? You gotta apologise to her. You also gotta respect that this floor is mine. I decide who comes in here. This includes you."

He manages short, clipped sentences and whilst he keeps to English, his accent has slipped deeper into Russian. He remembers he is supposed to sound like he's from Brooklyn and sometimes that's there, sometimes his accent is flat and nothing. The slight tinge of Russian is more normal to him? But he knows Steve hates it, but right now he's starting to get sick of moderating himself for this man who as far as he was concerned was putting in zero effort. Steve looks like he wants to argue, his jaw set in a stubborn like and he can hear him grinding his teeth.

"Okay, for you, I'll apologise to them."

He feels like head butting a wall. Stevie used to be stubborn but this is too much surely? Or was it just cute when he was smaller? Either way, he just wants to sleep.

"You know what? Fine. I'll take it. Tell him the truth too. Don't tell him I remembered wrong because my brain is mush or some bull. Now, if you don't mind. I'm going to sleep, I'm shattered and I need to finish cleaning as you did utterly nothing."

He points at Steve, punctuating his speech, maybe it will help. Steve just seems to watch his hands oddly before sighing at him in obvious irritation. His eye twitches as he feels exactly the same back at him.
"You shouldn't be alone right now Buck, come down stairs with everyone, we'll watch a movie and you can nap on the sofa or something. I'd feel better if I could see you is all."

"Remember that part about respecting my decisions? I'm going to sleep. In my bedroom. I'm happy I HAVE a bedroom, I'm going to use it. I'll see you tomorrow."

He walks over to the door, opening it sharply and holding it open expectantly for him. Eventually he grudgingly leaves, he dodges yet another attempted hug with a glare, he's getting good at that, and finally he can breathe when he has the door closed. He bites back the need just to rage in Russian because he can.

He needs to tell Steve to stop calling him Bucky but he doesn't know how, especially when he doesn't have a name for himself. As horrid as it makes him feel, he'll deal with that when he has a name. He is however proud that he didn't have a panic attack at all. Yay for the techniques his doctors gave him and pure exhaustion giving him confidence to yell. He wasn't looking forward to tomorrow with Steve if it was going to be anything like today.

Thinking about Steve, he remembers what he was like when he was set on something. Dog with a bone. He can see little Stevie jumping into a fight and he knows he jumped in to save him, like he always did, but he doesn't know why he did it.

Why would he bother because the idiot just gets into more fights anyway?

He searches the memories and sees him do it, over and over.

But he can't feel or understand why.

'Maybe getting his ass handed to him would be beneficial, would have stopped fighting..' floats across his mind. He shoves it down and decides to ignore all things Steve and deal with them tomorrow. Things are already awkward and blaming things on missing memories is easier.

'Coward.'

T'Challa POV

10th September

T'Challa had just finished telling his sister everything he'd heard from Rogers and then Barnes. The latter being the far more polite of the pair and trying to work out how best to confront Rogers next.

According to his sisters snooping, they were not the only ones lied to about the events leading up to and including the Civil War. The good Captain was lying to his people too. His sister was chewing on her nail considering everything that had happened and he was surprised how quickly she had become invested in Dr Stark.

He had a debt born from abandoning an ally in need where as his sister was worried about the suffering of a friend.

"I knew something bad had happened, but this wasn't even on my list of possibilities! And my list was extensive!"

"But you have spoken to him right? Seen him? He's in good health?"
Shuri gives him a smile that makes him dread whatever is coming next.

"He seems okay. I didn't know him before so I don't know if it's weird he wears sunglasses for every video call even at 3am. He carries so much stress and anxiety around him it's almost palpable.. Even with the kids having him on a schedule I'm sure he goes days without sleeping."

"I've seen old videos of him online… by the way. Do not Google him. The sunglasses are a usual fixture, I think, and he's a genius like you, I suspect he has equal problems when it comes to turning that off."

They both shrug, it's hard to tell much from this side of the planet from a man who obviously knows how to hide pain. He can tell that his sister, that whilst she can't seem to put it into words, she is concerned.

"There is one thing. You know we have been collaborating on different projects? There is one that we started on practically straight after he came out of the coma. He said it was just an idea to keep him busy while he recovered.. At first I thought it was for Barnes but he didn't want to say..."

She pulled up her own and Tony's files that they'd worked on, including pictures of prototypes of all manner of things he could barely glimpse at before she'd moved on, until reaching several about what looked like a hand and wrist? Eventually showing highly detailed photos of what he assumed was the final piece. T'Challa saw their two different styles mixing together as she flicked to the pages she was after. Just looking at this showed how much to two geniuses seemed to meld well. Despite their differences.

Most people Dr Stark's age wouldn't work so well with someone as young as his sister, he knew, she'd tried with others and it ended explosively. Literally that one time..

Bringing his focus back to the file she'd stopped at, he couldn't help but think that too much had gone into this too be a mere idea, not with the nano-tech nerves and that he'd apparently made the final piece with vibranium his sister had sent. His sister might make prototypes out of Vibranium but she had a lot more access to it. Dr Stark just had around enough to make it, surely there were other more useful things he could have made with the rare metal.

"At least I now know why he freezes up anytime Barnes is mentioned."

His sister muttered under her breath whilst bringing more stuff up. It could have been for Barnes, but then why would he stop in the middle of the forearm when Barnes arm went up to his shoulder? The design was gorgeous, though he had to admit, the inside looks like it had been constructed from triangles that were hives for the nano-tech installed within them similar to his arc reactors going by the notes. So if anything got chewed up by the servos for any reason, they could replace anything broken easily. Although he wasn't sure what was telling the nano tech what to do just from looking at the blueprints, there wasn't a control node that he could see. Whilst he was smart himself, a lot of this went over his head.

"If it was for Barnes, I can't imagine he'd stop mid arm, and this isn't exactly something he could market. Nano-tech doesn't even exist technically outside of Wakanda and this is different to ours? What is controlling those nanite? When did he make these? "

"Not a clue and he'd started before we got into contact."

T'Challa couldn't help but he a little impressed and he could see his sister was too, he hadn't caught up to Wakanda but in some areas he was definitely getting closer without their considerable advantages.
"He said that the control node was his part of the project. We finished it ages ago but he sent all this new data with the presents and I still have no idea, but they are working... I think he finally took apart Barnes old arm and he looked up his files... I didn't get through many before I had to stop and I suspect Dr Stark censored them for me."

He made a note to go through the files on Barnes arm, probably before he ate if the paling on his sisters face was anything to go by.

"You think this is his hand don't you?"

"Yes. It's why I sent him the Vibranium as a 'get well soon gift'. His nano-tech works almost scarly perfect with Vibranium."

"Does he know you think it's his hand?"

"Nope. I'm trying to be, I don't know, nice?"

"I think I've been transported to a different dimension."

T'Challa squints at her, with such a deadpan delivery that Shuri laughs before she glares and kicked his shin, she'd been doing that a lot lately, he wondered where she had picked up that lovely habit, he was going to end up bruised.

"Just because I'm not nice to you doesn't mean I can't be nice to others."

"I feel so loved. Should I send him something?"

"You're going to send him vibranium aren't you?"

"Whaaaat. No... Why? It worked for you?"

"Yes, but he wasn't mad at me and I am not talking about his coma two months late."

"Hmm, Maybe I can throw my support behind his recent amendments to the Accords? I read them and I like how he's bringing in protections for younger non-humans that Ross is dead set against. Ross has been against practically anything he's brought forward for a while now oddly. He's not been in the news much since the 'war', he's been operating by proxy, some positive mentions about his coma here and there, but there are still people attacking him. Maybe I could help?"

"Are you trying to be some kind of Knight in shining armour for Dr Stark?"

"What! No! I'm just trying to... dammit you're winding me up, aren't you?"

"Of course. Now go, shoo, on to your Stark-Mission."

He rolled his eyes and backed out of his sisters lab, too many thoughts in his mind at what he'd gotten himself into. If he'd just stopped and thought about things, instead of letting rage and vengeance fuel him.

He wouldn't have a bunch of unruly hero's hiding out in his country whilst he was precariously opening Wakanda to the world. But he must right his wrongs, but this time slowly and maybe he could do his father proud, and possibly make life uncomfortable for Mr Rogers. Maybe he was feeling a little vindictive on that front. You could only be spoken to rudely so many times by a guest, before even a man with seemingly endless patience snapped and he had never claimed to have much in the way of patience normally.
This debt weighed heavily on him though. Even if it was about making up a wrong to a Stark. His father's contentious relationship with Dr Stark's father was something they heard about a lot growing up, for a long time they'd watched the son and his father assumed that rotten fruit didn't fall far from the rotted tree. But over the last 5 years things had changed. Either way, even if he was basically Howard Stark, T'Challa needed to make up for leaving a wounded ally on the battlefield, no matter the sins of the father.

He knew well enough the sins of the father landed on the son, even when they shouldn't.

-Shuri POV-

"Steve, I'm telling ya, I didn't come to breakfast with the team as I already had plans. You literally saw me make them!"

"I didn't think you'd really go Buck, I thought you'd prefer an old fashioned breakfast with me."

"I wouldn't have been able to eat that. I can only eat fruit and my shakes right now."

"I'm sure if you-"

Shuri had enough at that point and stuck her head out of the doors. She smiled at Barnes, as her brother has informed her he was going by now.

"Ah, Captain Coloniser! I do not have you on my calendar."

Barnes was desperately trying not to laugh as Shuri gave Steve a sharp grin that was all teeth and promise of a sharp bite. He wasn't the most annoying invader they had right now, but he was in the top 3 and he'd come to visit her the most.

So she'd gotten fed up with the blonde giant around day 4 if she was being kind. If she was being honest, it was day 1. Mr Stubborn-Jaw, clenched said jaw and squared his shoulders for a fight. Typical.

"I'm here for Bucky. He's new to this time and in a fragile state so I think I should be here for any major decisions."

Barnes smile has gone and his eyes locked onto Steve. Shuri noting that he completely stopped moving to the point she's concerned he isn't even breathing. His face doesn't have the blank look she'd seen in clips of when he was the Winter Soldier.. But it's very close. The only difference is he looks angry too. But he has a completely different presence to what she'd come to expect from Barnes.

"Do huya net." <Fuck no>

Steve snapped to look at Barnes who was shaking his head, movement seemed to have seeped back into him.

"Steve. No. I will be the one to make the decision about what goes on in my brain. I deserve this."

"He is right Captain Coloniser. This is a patient only discussion anyway, you, are not permitted entry."

Two Dora Milaje appeared almost from the shadows, she noticed that Steve jumped but Barnes did
not. That was interesting, few people could spot the Dora when they wanted to hide. They blocked
Steve's path and Barnes strode into the lab, breathing out a lot of stress when the doors shut and
she was informed Steve was being escorted back to the villa. Barnes had hunched in on himself
now, seemingly trying to make himself smaller, which considering he was a walking tank was a
strange look.

"Well, that's better isn't it."

She glanced around, thinking about what to do to make him more at ease.

"Want to see something I'm not meant to show you?"

Barnes looked up, unable to hide his curiosity, she'd worked out pretty fast that he was going to be
a tech head. She opened a panel on the wall and showed Barnes the weapons she had been
developing, he seemed tentative at first, not wanting to enjoy weapons potentially? But her
enthusiasm was catching and before they realised it nearly an hour had vanished with her showing
him anything he showed a remote interest in and sitting down to rebraid his hair, much to Barnes
baffled confusion.

"So, now I'm feeling better, what is this brain fixing tech?"

She pulled out the glasses from the box, small and quite sleek and handed them over. Barnes looks
sceptical

"Weird looking glasses are going to unmush my brain?"

She was not calling them BARF, not when she didn't have the ability to blame Dr Stark for his
ridiculous names.

"They are… Retro Framing Glasses. RFG. They are capable of hijacking the hippocampus… to
clear traumatic memories. Did you read the notes?"

"Some, but I thought I'd get an idea of it from you and I did not get stuck watching Teen Wolf on
Netflix at all."

Shuri can't help but laugh at that, happy that he was doing something he enjoyed, even if it was
binge watching shows on Netflix.

"Well, you can read up later if you want more information, but basically the glasses connect with
the user's hippocampus, allowing it to find a certain traumatic memory and it's displayed on the
holographic system. It makes it real enough to trick your brain, then you can change aspects of the
memory, or watch enough times, running a specialised algorithm that will be designed for you,
until you disassociate the memory from any physical response, originally for panic attacks for
example.

"We believe the code words are hooked into memories, if you disassociate the memories the words
lose their. Hold on you, it won't produce the same physical response, it will break the
programming. It can also help you connect with the older memories and deal with the memories of
your time with Hydra. That was its original use really. We are off labeling it."

"Wow. That is.. A lot. It change my memories? And off label"

"No it can't, you can, and only you can change or disassociate a memory. There were already a lot
of failsafes to protect against this but in your case the outside contractor went a little overboard to
assure your comfort using the device. And off label is using a medication for something else."
"Ah, you'll have to give them my thanks."

Barnes is nervously looking at the glasses and Shuri can tell he's unsure, but then she isn't surprised. People have been scrambling his brain for literal decades.

"I will. Well the first few times you use it will just be data collection, then you can set specific memories up as a passcode for the glasses to activate. The glasses will only activate if the find the matching memory in your mind.

"And whilst the algorithm will help you alter memories to achieve disassociation, I can't step in to edit them. I can't even edit the algorithm because I have no idea what it is to be honest. I know some binary coding and the basic codes that come with the glasses are okay, but you'll have one tailor written with the data from the drawing sessions. The outside contractor won't see any of your memories either."

"Why does there need to be an algorithm written for me?"

"Well, your case is quite unique, the base ones in the glasses might work, but we don't think so. At least, you would have to watch each memory hundreds of times to even attempt to disassociate it. The algorithm will be personalised to your mind to let you effectively hack it and have it done if under 5, hopefully. I'll see how it's working and report back to see if it needs changes. I, or someone else, can watch memories with you, but only if you want them too."

He carries on fiddling with the glasses, obviously running everything through his mind. It was a lot to take in and she couldn't help but smile that he is running his fingers over the small pink sticker on the side of the glasses. She manages the hold back the laugh and reminds herself to text Tony later about his lousy subterfuge skills and his inability to not stamp his name on all his tech.

"I'm going to do everything in my power to keep you safe and help you with your memories."

"I.. I know. It's just. I'm not sure I even deserve this? This is so much effort by insanely intelligent people who are tailor making things, for me! I'm just dangerous, I'm not even a full person. Maybe I should just go back into cryo."

It takes everything in her to not jump up and yell at him, maybe shake him, or give him the Harley Shin-kick. But she knows that wouldn't work.

"Is that what you really want?"

"No, I want to be free."

"Then let's get to it"

"Okay"

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Chapter End Notes

James Russian -
I searched for 'Russian Exclamations!'
I'm very iffy about using a language I know very little off, by that I mean none. Zip. Zilch. Dim.

I'm learning a language myself and know the horrors of Google translate, especially when you use more than a single word. I could make James speak Welsh but that would be very weird and as I'm learning on duolingo, very random. Mostly I was planning on putting Jane's Russian in but I thought including a little would be good, so I hope this is okay. If anything is wrong I'll immediately change it. So now I've put the translation in so you don't have to come down here for the translation, but it's not spoken out loud.

If this doesn't work, and I run out of finding handily pre-translated sentences on Google. Which I think I'm good, considering I found an entire article of angry exclamations, the Holy Grail of James dealing with Steve bwhaha!

So, tell me if you think this is a good way of it or if I should try a different tact.

Follow up of above, Thank you! Diolch! If you are reading this you are responsible for me having a big old smile on my face.
Coming Together Nicely

Chapter Summary

Tony is wondering if everyone is better at handling these changes than him. (Pretty much!) Surely after this he's finally done with these awkward conversations!

Stephen is hoping to finally pin down his friend and find out just why he's been avoiding him so much.

Chapter Notes

Well it's that time of the week again!

Once again, thank you guys for reading, commenting, bookmark and leaving kudos. They're happy fuel.

POV Bruce

September 8th

The Căn Giờ Mangrove Forest

Bruce woke up, stretching himself bit by bit and getting himself prepared to make breakfast, he was slowly running down on essentials so soon he would have to leave his little slice of paradise and head towards people to stock up.

His musings were interrupted with a Trill from the device Tony had sent him. This thing worked in impossible locations, it wasn't so good when he was moving, but if he stopped somewhere for 12 hours it seemed to connect somehow. He didn't know how Tony developed it and that hurt, knowing he'd missed it. It wasn't in his area of expertise, but he'd gotten used to sharing a lab with Tony. He'd gotten accustomed to having someone to share a space with. Now he literally had no one. He'd stopped in a few villages, offering his medical skills, but he just.. Couldn't with people right now. Constantly on edge of what could happen, remembering what did happen under a haze of red and madness. Which was why he'd come here on his latest location, where he'd run into no one in a long string of such locations. Sometimes he spoke out loud just to hear his voice as he'd got months with nothing.

Even when he and Hulk had started talking, he'd stayed away. Even when he'd found that balance he'd needed, but could never grasp. He'd still stayed away because by then.. It was easier. Easier to run.

Even though he'd been annoyed when the device had turned up, just sat outside the hut in India that he'd been staying in not long after he'd left America. Because seriously, how did Tony find him? How did it even get to him? But then he really shouldn't doubt Tony's tenacity to care for his friends. Even when they didn't deserve it.
He'd come to rely on Tony's little messages of the day, sometimes several came at once if he'd been out of range. They were his little snippets of America and home, keeping him tethered. Keeping him connected. They'd gotten closer with these messages than they had sharing the lab. So when the device trilled, he dropped everything and grabbed it. Instantly, he knew it wasn't Tony. Tony was actively incapable of a message so short.

'Banner.

He needs you this time, he's always been there for you, wherever you go, now it's your turn.

Colonel Rhodes & FRIDAY

-link attached-' 

He frowned at the device, why would Tony need him?

He clicked the link and was faced with a picture of Tony in a hospital bed. He felt winded, like a punch to the diaphragm had sucked all of the air from his lungs and all he could do was stare. He looked so small, and was hooked up to enough machines to make him nervous.

What little he could see of his face was mottled with bruising and swelling he was practically unrecognisable, his eyes were covered. Bandages taped over each one.

He starts panicking until he sees the date on the article and actually reads it, Tony Stark in a Coma? The picture was apparently taken by a nurse? How had that happened? It wouldn't happen in any of Tony's medical facilities, so this was troubling enough for Tony to be in a separate hospital. But where were the others? They'd never have let a nurse get a picture. He'd never be alone long enough for a nurse to get a picture surely? The Avengers would never leave him so vulnerable.

He set his jaw, he needed more information, things were not as happy as Tony had led him to believe. This simply didn't make sense, he'd seen Tony injured countless times but he was never so still. He was never so alone. Something was very wrong back home. He blinked, Home? When had that happened? When in his time away had he started seeing that place as home? He'd not had a true home in so long, it was a foreign feeling that had crept up on him.

"Want Tinman."

Bruce jumped, it had been awhile since he had heard the Hulk, he was bored here and angry at Banner for not going back yet, he'd gotten insistent a few months ago about going home. As he'd stayed, Hulk had been ignoring him. He started packing up, he'd head towards civilisation now. A new level of determination set on his features, Hulks excitement thrumming in his Veins.

He needed more information. But first..

'YOU WERE IN A FUCKING COMA?!

POV Tony

September 9th

Tony is relaxing on his sofa, looking out of the large windows, just enjoying the view of the sea. The ebb and flow of the water is hypnotic. He's missed this, being able to just kick back and watch
the ocean. Frowning he looks around and realises that something isn't right, but before he gets just of a chance to do anything about it, Steve appears behind him. Looming over him with his hands on the back of the sofa in such a familiar fashion it makes his skin crawl. This has happened before but its.. Wrong somehow. He sucks in a breath and nearly chokes, panicking for a second before realising he recognised the feeling. The original arc reactor and how it crushed his lung.

This definitely isn't right, that was removed. Steve is in front of him now, his hand on the arc reactor that blanks his mind from anything else, he tries to panic, to run, to move, but apparently his dreams are fucking merging because he's in Malibu, paralysed and Steve's fingers grip and push around the arc reactor and fuck, but it hurts. He blinks and he's back in Siberia, but without the suit. He's on the floor and Steve is ripping the arc reactor out of his chest.

"I could do this all day."

And then there is just pain, white hot and blinding that fills his every cell... but then the floor shifts and moves. It.. Bounces? He reaches out and his eyes fly open to realise Tara, Harley and Peter are all stood on his bed, jumping up and down to wake him. 'That's definitely a new way of getting woken up from a nightmare.'

It takes him a few seconds to realise the day and forces a smile, pancake day. Each day of the week has specific breakfast foods in the compound, Fridays were pancakes and a resounding favourite of all the kids, he's pretty sure part of it is they enjoy watching him flip them or the chaos they turned simple toppings into. Tara at this point realises he's awake and launches herself right at him like a tiny Cannon ball. He laughs as all the air is forced out of his lungs.

"Pancake day?"

He asks, chuckling as if he had forgotten. Peter and Harley take this question as permission to dog pile on Tony. He complains, but he doesn't mean it, they know because he's actually hugging them whilst complaining about being a trampoline, It helps him shake away the last dregs of the nightmare. They eventually let him up, pretty much only because he can't make pancakes from bed.

A quick shower helps his smile became more real, less brittle. Dressing in comfortable, morning clothes, activating Peters hand covering, which the kid really needs to name, but since BARF everyone banned him from naming their and his own inventions. Which is harsh in his opinion. FRIDAYs overly literallly long names aren't exactly better. She'd likely call it 'Synthetic Skin Covering Device for Robot Hands.' The kids are bouncing around the kitchen with impatience when he exits his room

"Who wants to go and invite the mini agents and mum over? Teacher Training day, even for you Pete, so we can have a biiiiiiig breakfast."

Tony laughs as the three kids immediately race to the door, laughing over who gets there first, and he starts producing an inordinate amount on pancakes. Thankful that he had thought ahead and made the batter last night. But he has 6 kids to feed, 1 enhanced and 2 adults, 1 also enhanced. Rhodey is out on his 'it's not a date Tony!' with Carol. Vision would be back from his latest trip today, this time he found a train station online with a ridiculously long name he didn't believe existed so he had had to go and see if it was actually real. Most of his trips are kind of weird lately he'd noticed.

It made for some fun pictures and was starting to reignite his wanderlust that he'd thought he'd sated in his youth. It was different this time however, he wasn't running, searching with an edge of desperation. Now he was calm, plotting and thinking about where he wanted to take all his kids.
He had a feel all of them, including Vision would love his old stomping grounds in Catalan and Italy especially. There were still a few Carbonell's around Catalan that he was welcomed easily, and his mother had had family in Italy too. They'd been the first places he'd gravitated to after graduating.

By the time 5 kids stampede into the kitchen and set up the table, he's already made a lot of pancakes and they're sat warming in the oven as he carries on. Now they're back, he puts a bit more flare into flipping much to Lilah and Tara's delight. He's sure the boys enjoy it too, but they're teenagers and are therefore, not allowed to show as much glee by some surly teenage code that you forget when you become an adult.

Laura wordlessly comes and joins him, prepping all the toppings she can think off. The first time she'd been invited to pancake day she'd been wary, so had the kids, sticking to the edges of the chaos, he assumed it was a product of being isolated for so long.

The kids came around first, for Lilah it had taken pancakes with increasingly weird facial expressions until she cracked, bursting out laughing. Cooper was slower, he did it by constantly being there. The kid texted him? He answer. Kid needed him, he dropped pretty much everything to be there. Slowly Cooper realised Tony wasn't going anywhere and had opened up. He knew what it had cost the teen, Harley had similar issues so he had had practice. Plus, he always thought 'What would Howard do?' Then he'd do the opposite. When the kid brought homework to him he'd been overjoyed.

Then Nate started teething, and Laura was going mad, looking after three children, alone, in a new environment after so many years of isolation and having to do everything herself. It was just too much for her. He tried to lighten the load with Lilah and Cooper, but Laura needed a break. She'd been 'on' for years, mostly alone. So, Tony had turned up at her door every night offering help. Nate was a terror for teething and one night she'd cracked, begging for help so she could just sleep. That she'd do X or Y. He'd just pulled them both into his apartment, Laura's room was a mess. Sent her to bed, utterly confused and sat up with a very fussy baby. Which had been weird and he wasn't sure if he was the best person for this job, but seeing Laura well rested 9 hours later, Nate had conked on his chest (no way in hell was he moving the demon child when he was silent!) it was worth it. When Tony set his mind to something, he usually achieved it.

He had won them over one by one, and now Lilah and Cooper practically stampeding around his house was a common enough occasion he didn't even blink. Tara huffing about correct plate placements, Lilah needing her special purple plates. The boys jumping on each other for some unknown reason, currently Peter was on the ceiling, holding Coopers arms to dangle him off of the floor and Harley was kicking paper balls at them. No idea why. Plus, he kept getting distracted from pancake duty by Nates cooing. The kid was so adorable it should be illegal. Plus, he'd gotten quite close to the kid after many late nights and he'd developed a range of teething products to ease the poor kids pain.

He wasn't sure when his life had become so domestic. But Laura was smiling more, she leaned on him more, she let him help with the kids and she at some point appointed herself his PA / Bodyguard. He didn't complain, one- she was terrifyingly efficient, she could give Pepper a run for her money, two- she reminded him of Aunt Peggy and three- She smiled more, he got the idea that she missed working, and possibly adult company. He knew the idea of living on the farm alone, even with the kids sounded absolutely horrible. It would be fun for a few months, tops. Then he'd need adult company and the kids would need kid company.

They make small talk, discussing the new inhabitants coming to the ‘Chaos Floor’ as he'd dubbed it. They were at the top of the residential wing, the level for larger, multiroom apartments, that had
ended up being housing for people with children. 3 of the 4 now filled. Compared to the 6 apartments of the other floors Children are pure embodiments of chaos. Thus, Chaos Floor.

Laura started taking over toppings and he carried on making pancakes, Peter has already 'sneakily' eaten 4. Kid seriously needs some training on being sneaky, as soon as you work out to look up he's so easy to find and his subterfuge is useless. Now it's true than in general, humans don't look up. He should know, he used that fact himself multiple times as Ironman, but he was sneaker with repulsers on fool compared to Peter. He grabbed a spatula and swatsted him before he'd noticed what Tony was up to, flipping to the floor, about to complain but Tony stuck a spoonful of Nutella into his mouth. Utterly distracting the teen as he hummed happily around the spoon and picked up a plate to take to the table.

Flipping a coin with Laura, he gets Nate duty. Not that he is complaining at all, the person with Nate just has Nate, Laura gets to help everyone else. He shoots her a grin, pancake day is perfect for Nate duty. 3 boys and 2 young girls with a variety of toppings? Yup. Chaos. Pure sugary, syrupy chaos. By the end there is Nutella, fruit and powdered sugar practically everywhere, mostly on Laura. He didn't get off clean either, Nate has clapped icing sugar in his face. The kids charge off to the TV, leaving the adults to clean the pancake bomb site, he doesn't mind however, they had fun and that's more important than a neat, orderly table in his books any day. Memories of stuff, overly formal silent breakfasts flash in his mind. No, this was better. Tony settles Nate in his play thingy, bouncing happily and joins Laura.

"Tony."

"Yup?"

"How did you get Nutella in your hair? Nate didn't even have Nutella."

Tony pats his head, coming away with a handful of Nutella, laughing and wipes as much as he can with wet wipes until he could wash his hair after.

"I don't think I even want to know...?"

"That's probably wise. I have powdered sugar in my bra and I'm not sure when, or how, that happened either."

They both burst out laughing as they finish up, Laura turns to head towards the kids leaving Tony to finish putting stuff away, but Tony holds her back.

"Hang on, I have a.. Thing."

"A thing? Very informative."

"Okay, I've done this enough that you'd think I'd get better at by now."

He mutters under his breath, just getting a raised eyebrow and a smile from Laura.

"Right, you know I was in a coma. Well, of course you do."

Tony rolls his eyes whilst Laura chuckles at him as he tries to work out how to do this. He generally avoids talking about 'them' with Laura. Spitting mad is an understatement at Roger's. Cold fury towards Clint. She and Nat however had been slowly repairing their relationship which made him happy. Although Nat had to stop relying on human anchors at some point for her own sake, but that was an uncomfortable conversation in his future, for now she was making progress.
"It's a hard thing to forget Tony. I didn't know you well, but you saved my family when you had not long left that hospital bed. I remember how dreadful you looked when you took the helmet off."

Oh yeah, he remembered that, he'd been okay until he forgot that the helmet blocked his vision. He'd not had it long then and he was fighting Ross' tac teams in his defence, so he'd kind of forgotten? Failing into old habits, then he took the helmet of and it all slammed back. He'd been very, very close to throwing up, or passing out, but he'd managed to stay conscious. Staring at the kids at helped him focus. He didn't want to scare them even more than they'd already been, what was worse was Coopers colours spoke of resignation and Lilahs of broken promises and abandonment. They'd expected their dad to save them and it was heart wrenching to him. It's why he'd thrown himself so completely into helping the family heal. She had learned he'd left his hospital bed to bring them home, the compound was in baby stages at that point. She had promptly marched him back with a tight thank you. Understandably not trusting him

Kids fluctuated more than adults and slowly started to settle as they grew. Adults could change, sure, could heal wounds from the past, but he'd noticed it was harder, scars lasted longer. Until they hit a certain point their colours were in flux and whilst scars were left, they bounced back better. He didn't want Coopers to land at such resignation that people would leave and betray him, like that was a fundamental fact of the universe. He wanted Lilah to know people could keep promises and not everyone left. Between the two of them, it was incredibly familiar feelings for him and no way was he letting that lay if he could help. Laura had been suspicious, she knew a lot about him from Clint, SHIELD and the media, so hardly nice things, she knew of his Tony Stark persona and that was about it. So having him suddenly so invested in her family had been concerning.

As time went on, she'd been scared the kids would learn to rely on him and he'd get bored and leave. When he sat reading the Hobbit to Lilah every night and bought science kits to help Cooper at school, when he left the lab at a seconds notice if she needed help with Nate she started to realise how serious he was. He picked up on it when one night she was flooded with guilt about how she had perceived him. She hadn't said anything but her colours were all stained with it. He'd stunned her by giving her a hug and telling her it was okay, he knew how people perceived him, he told her he was happy she'd come around and that was what mattered.

"Why, thank you. Such lovely compliments I get! In my own home as well..."

Laura promptly kicked his shin, his undignified yelp and hopping on one leg draws the attention of the kids, who just grin and congratulate Laura. Sass. Everywhere.

"Ow! Between you and Harley my shins are just bruises."

"So, is this 'Thing' anything to do with you practically permanently wearing glasses?"

"Um. Yes. I really underestimated how many people had noticed that. I was more injured than most people know, Rhodey had to use Extremis to save me, and it had some.. complications? I'm telling the team everything at a meeting later, but I wanted you and the Mini Agents to know first."

There are some benefits to telling Laura, he didn't have to explain Extremis for one and she'd seem a lot of weird. Even when she left SHIELD she kept up on things. Tony puts the last of the plates away as Laura drains the sink, she turned to face him, leaning casually on the side. Angling himself away from the kids, as it'll be Laura's choice if they know about this, he slipped the glasses off. Laura's eyes widened slightly but apart from that she didn't show much reaction, even her colours. Stable and safety, that was Laura. Was it any wonder he always wanted mom hugs off of her?
"I'm assuming this is an Extremis you modified? As I don't remember the others having blue eyes, more orange, and I don't think you're going to explode."

"Yes, it's one I tweaked with in my spare time. It doesn't have the exothermic issue as the original because I cut out the part that tries to rebuild dead tissue. It was just too unstable with that function, practically impossible to balance. So I can't cut of a limb and have it grow back, but I don't explode. Which is good because I don't want to explode."

He can hear Peter chuckling behind him and he knows the kid can hear their conversation.  

"So, your left eye?"

"Beyond saving unfortunately. The right had just enough live nerves that Extremis could fix it, same with most of the damage, bar this."

Tony tapped the code to reveal his hand.

"Oh Tony, what on earth happened to you."

"Got into a fight, suit was disabled and got to enjoy the beauty of spring in Siberia from a metal coffin."

Tony said, he was going for light snark but it came off more bitter. He shook his head, offering her a smile. He avoided saying much else, conscious that Peter could hear. The kid knew who he'd been in the fight with, he'd refused to leave his hospital room and he'd woken up screaming Steve too many times for him to not know. That didn't mean he was going to burden him with other details however.

"Anyway, it's been pointed out to me, hiding from my family is negatively affecting my 'mental health' and I'm not progressing with control. And to be honest. I'm sick of wearing the Damned glasses around everyone. I want to..."

"Not be on guard 24/7? I understand Tony and I'm happy you told me."

"Me too."

"So your eye? You can see out of it?"

"Oh yeah, I can see more, kind of like Strange, maybe, I get impressions from people."

Laura nods as if that was a puzzle piece she had been missing about him but just smiled at him, not asking the hundred questions that most others come up with when they find out.

"Shall we go show the kids?"

"What? You mean just walk over there? Just like that?"

"Yup" Laura grinned, popping the P. "We could bet to see how long it takes them to notice. I bet lilah sees your hand first."

Tony blinks a few times before smiling as Laura's easy acceptance of him flutters around him at this proximity, warming him that little bit more inside. He'd never thought he'd make it here. Never thought he'd be able to let people in again, he'd been determined not to, but kids man. They were impossible to keep out. At least for him.

"Cooper will spot my eyes first I think, what does the winner get?"
“Next time the lot of us go out for lunch, loser is on kid wrangling duty, out of sequence. You are next up so if I win I'll get 2 dinners in a row. Oooh, when Meg gets here we can invite them to our outings and we'll have more people to cycle!”

"That's a great idea, Tara and Lilah will probably love Cassie too… what even is my life now? Go back a decade and tell me I'd have super powers and me plotting going out with kid wrangling and I'd fall over laughing."

Tony grinned, definitely weird, but a really good weird. Happy weird. Just what he'd needed weird Domesticity was something he hadn't even conceived of, getting weird powers was more likely than this.

"Hmm, but good weird? And we can discuss your super powers later? Hope you have some fun ones. I suspect now you've 'come out' as it were, you lot will be joining us for breakfasts in the common room more?"

Tony blinks. Everyone was much better at accepting this than him it seems. So far people had been amazingly chill. He wasn't sure if he was happy or if it was kind of annoying.. He'd expected someone to yell at him, or to be disappointed in him. To see it as altering himself in his arrogance, to gain power. He hadn't realised how much he'd been waiting for someone to react like how he suspected Roger's would untill just now. Since Ultron the super soldier had not hidden his disappointment in him, hadn't hidden how he thought him reckless, egotistical and selfish, hadn't hidden his concern that Tony would do something like Ultron again. Hadn't stopped the others from sniping at him, but gotten disappointed or angry if Tony had ever snapped back. It was like the man was blind to anyone's comments but his own.

He'd gotten so used to it, it so similar to his childhood, being expected to fuck up, that this easy acceptance had unnerved him. He knew that if he had not gotten his Sight, he wouldn't have believed it. Thought it a trick. As much as it bothered him on occasion, he realised he was in some way, thankful for it. He'd seen people through a cloud of bias his whole life, never able to trust people saying good things, that he had to poke, prod, test and push. It was a miracle Rhodey, Pep and Happy had put up with it. He shook his head from his dark thoughts.

"Yup, definitely good weird, my favourite kind of weird. I'm a technopath now, which sounds utterly ridiculous, but the best description we've come up with. That is also the plan, see more adult humans. If people already know, I'll be less paranoid of slipping up, so I can spend more time around people."

Tony smiled, scooped up a babbling Nate before he thought about it, it had become a normal, muscle memory thing for him. He liked holding the little kid so he snagged him often. It wasn't until Nate was excitedly patting his temples, poking at his eyes, that he realised he was glasses free. That he was focused on his brightly glowing left eye and realised it probably reminded him of the nightlight Tony made. He'd noticed Nate loved the Arc Reactors, so he'd made a mind one and a picture frame fitting for it. It slotted in the middle and a spiral lit up from the centre, the outer frame glowed brightly too. Twisting it change the brightness, he'd made one for Tara too that had a projector attack that projected stars on her ceiling. He was currently building Lilah one too and trying to work out a manly way of for Coop who had showed interest but was embarrassed to ask outright.

"Well, I think Nate likes you better without glasses and that's great, we miss you when you can't come. Lilah made a 'Cushion Uncle Tony' to save your spot until you are healed enough to join everyone more often."
Laura said casually over her shoulder, waiting for Tony's brain to Reboot and trying not to grin. Surprised that his presence had been missed.

"And out of all the abilities I saw a few at SHIELD, a tech related one suits you perfectly. There was one girl who could read hard drives by touching them."

"Oh yeah, I can do that. But I think I have wireless."

She grinned and flopped comfortably into the armchair she claimed as hers when they did breakfast together with just the 2 families.

"So will I have to evict Cushion Tony when I start coming to team brekkies?"

Tony asked the kids, eyebrow raised as he dropped onto the sofa with Nate, in between Lilah and Tara, in his claimed spot. Peter and Cooper, despite having ample chair space, were sat on the rug in front of his seat playing Mario Kart. Glancing around he realised the kids sort of surrounded him, how had he not noticed that before? Laura gave him a knowing look, smiling, obviously amused at how oblivious he had apparently been.

Cooper was crowing his victory as Peter sulked, startling him out of his thoughts as Peter leaned back onto his leg. Harley was grinning from the other armchair, kicking Peter gently in the shoulder with a socked foot for losing. Tony was laughing along when Cooper brought everyone's attention to Tony.

"Wow! Uncle Tony! When did you get a different eye! Is this why you've always been wearing glasses? Can you see out of it? I mean there isn't a pupil, so can it see? Does it glow in the dark? Can you change its colour?"

Cooper's barrage of questions that Tony had been blinking at utterly cracked Harley up and reminded Tony of a much younger Harley. He could tell the kids had been spending a lot of time with each other. Also, Ha, he won that bet, he shot Laura a grin.

"Um, 2 months ago, yes, kind of, yes and I don't think so?"

He glanced at Lila to make sure she's okay with this latest 'Uncle Tony development'. She's more interested with his hand, that he isn't that shocked about, his Lilly-bean is his little engineer in training, he'd been slowly building up her set of tools. Everything was purple and glittery, he hadn't known you could get them purple and glittery and he suspected FRIDAY had something to do with it.

He sits back, passes Nate to Laura as Cooper wiggles in next to him to ask 500 questions. Laura watched in entertainment as her kids wrangle as much details out of Tony as possible. She however sulked when she saw Tony had 'fountain of youth'ed himself. Tony is smug for all of 5 seconds until Laura points out, that with his new youthful exuberance he clearly should get extra wrangling duties.

A while later Tony was nervous about this team meeting business. Telling people one on one is one thing and he thinks he's got that down now. Telling a whole bunch of people? Yikes. He had a long shower to get rid of the Nutella and apparently powdered sugar he hadn't noticed down his back. Smartened himself up, not a full suit, not exactly required for a team meeting. Chucking on a black full sleeved shirt that he could slip his thumb through the sleeve. It had a silver star on the right pocket and was one of Harleys finds a shocking amount of his wardrobe came from them.
Apparently Cooper and Lilah wanted in too and Tony idly wonders about the intelligence of letting the hyper hoard dress him. Considering FRIDAYS propensity to order anything vaguely iron man related, it could be worse. The Black pinstripe trousers have silver thread worked in too. For a girl who consistently wears odd socks, Tara is oddly invested in him match things up. Pepper had been dubious of this 'this kids are dressing me' thing but decided that the kids were more likely to get him into less ridiculous items of clothing and speaks to them directly about it. Because why would he need to be consulted on what he wears? He's also pretty sure his outfits weren't that bad before either..

Slipping on his silver aviators, he decides he's quite fine with this new system. But then the kids love it and he is utterly wrapped around their fingers. They are with Laura now, Jim and Maggie had gotten in when he was looking after the kids during the post breakfast hyper-burst when Laura went on mission, so he swapped out for this meeting when they got back, plus they all wanted to introduce Cassie to the wonders of living at the compound. He reminded them to go slow, and they nodded very seriously, they all knew what it was like to find to the compound during trying times, he trusted the munchkins. Well, he trusted Peter to remind Lilah and Tara why they couldn't just drag Cassie everywhere on day one.

He makes his way to the meeting room, very early. Mostly out of nerves and sat himself down in the comfy chairs in the far corner of the room. Maybe if he hides in the corner he can hold off on Strange seeing him and yelling at him. The man and his weird magic, Tony is sure that he'll 'Know' something, likely in a similar way that he 'Sees' stuff. At least his isn't magic. His phone rings, jarring him out of his musings on magic, seeing its Shuri he placed it in front of him, bringing up the holoscreen and answering the call.

"Hi Dr Stark! Your parcel arrived!"

"Yay, and Princess, we talked about this. You can call me Tony. By the end of this year I expect you and Peter to call me Tony!"

Now he had Peters hand cover (really needs a better name!) he could talk with his hands, finally. Much better. He practically had to sit on his hand to not slip up on more than one occasion. He gave her his 'I'm an unimpressed dad face', but it was spoilt a little with the grin on his face, causing her to grin back.

"Hmmm, maybe, but you will have to call me Shuri instead of Princess. Plus, not enough people use your Doctor title, it makes me want to use it more."

Tony's eyebrows shot up at that, wondering what prompted it.

The rogues loved to just call him Stark, it annoyed him nearly as much as people he knew outside of business calling him 'Mr Stark', that was always Howard to him.

"Ah, to be perpetually underestimated. Of course, you know what it's like, Princess."

He grinned at her laughter, he'd been coaching her, instead of getting annoyed at people underestimating her for a multitude of reasons. To wield it like a sword instead. She was quite vicious with it and he loved it.

"The last council meeting was fun, I finally got to talk to your Rhodey! My brother was quite confused when he would only talk to me!"
The two of them laughed, she'd sent the clips to him at the time of course. They'd been subtly trolling her brother for weeks now, much to Tony's amusement, he hadn't told Rhodey why he was having a spat with T'Challa, but Rhodey was happy to play along for amusements sake. Although is Rhodey knew why he suspected his Sour patch would be a little more active in his irritation.

"Rhodey doesn't even know why I'm annoyed! How is King Kitty doing? Enjoy my presents?"

"He was utterly baffled about how you got them to us, I think he actually thought no one knew the idiots were here!"

"Well, just me and the kids know. They know not to blab. I don't want your brothers offer of generosity to hurt your home. Plus it is probably better for the planet that you have them contained."

The idea of them running around was not good, at least in Wakanda they stayed put. Shuri had told him about their demands to set up Wakanda as a base ops to run Avengers missions from. The king had said no, obviously, they also were not Avengers anymore. He'd sorted out legally under the Accords and copyright that he owned the title 'Avengers'.

Well, Rogers did say the Avengers were his, he took the people, so he kept the brand. Plus Fury had transferred practically everything over to him after SHIELD, probably to ensure he carried on funding them. Funny how things worked out really.

"I know, but they're so annoying. Rogers has asked me for a new shield twice this week alone. He demanded it be vibranium too!"

"Oh what did you tell him this time?"

Tony leaned forward, he really didn't care much about the rogues, not now, but he did care about Shuri's snark. They were 2 peas in a snarky pranking pod. He wondered if Shuri had told T'Challa it had been his and the kids idea to tin foil over everything in his room. Shuri said it had taken ages but Okoye, who was fast becoming one of his favourite people, had gleefully joined in. T'Challa so far had no idea that Okoye had developed a sudden love for pranks, and that was not his fault at all.

"I told him that I'm sorry he feels so scared that he requires a shield but reminded him that Wakanda is well defended. He looked utterly baffled at my offense."

"I'm not shocked, they always wanted new gear and I don't think they noticed I personally made everything for them. It was just expected. Until I started working with my new guys I thought that was normal."

Tony shook his head to put thoughts of the rogues away. He thought about them less these days, but occasionally he'd turn and expect Steve in the kitchen, Clint up in the vents that were now being person proofed. He couldn't resize them without a lot of work, but there were welded grills being put in place to make moving more than half a room virtually impossible. Only Goose with her currently being installed cat flaps could travel when it was complete. Then there was Wilson, with his magazines, everywhere. The jock who reads psychology journals and leaves them in strange places. He found one in the breadbin once. Wanda is less pleasant, all he remembers is scowls, evil smirks and cold fear at tendrils of red. He tried to be nice but looking back he realised there was no point.

"I think I might have dropped enough hints around my brother now that he might do more than just sulking about their presence. Oh, and expect some presents from him, he's finally realised you are
mad at him!"

Hmm, wonder what the King will send? He's not used to gifts really. Except watches, rich people always give other rich people watches. He has so many it's actually ridiculous. He could probably wallpaper a wall with them, not sure if that's a wonderful idea or awful..

"Took him long enough, I was actually considering hiring a skywriter if the call didn't work."

"You did give him a plushy though."

She ribbed him gently, he smiled however. She knew that whilst he was kind of miffed at her brother, he was just holding onto his anger for anger's sake. He knew that soon enough the naive, earnest King would be fine, they had a surprising amount in common, thrust into positions of power young. T'Challa had a much better support system however but Tony still had concern for the man. His efforts to subtly protect him politically speaking in the UN and with politics in Africa. At least what he could do anonymously and not outright chucking his very white self into the mix. He just wanted to play a supporting role for the two Royals. Especially after their father passed.

"Well, I don't hate his Royal Kittiness, he's still quite young and naive, especially when it comes to people all shiny and perfect looking like Rogers. Captain Spandex is easy to believe in his earnest ways. When he realises that he lies as much as anyone else."

Tony shrugged. Few people saw beneath the shiny perfection to the stubborn arrogance beneath. He should know, he was stubborn and arrogant and he and Rogers often buttered head on fundamental things. Rogers was standing up for his principles. He was usually seen as being belligerent for no reason. An annoying double standard born of this ridiculous notion he had no principles.

"I'm sure we can wake him up eventually, he was very angry when I left him. Maybe Mr Rogers is going to get a visit."

"Oh, that I HAVE to see!"

"I'll make sure to send you the footage, I of course will not be there. The Witch has taken to hanging on to him like a leech. Although it's had a knock on effect of them bothering me in my lab less since I banned the little witch from my presence."

Tony's laughs tapered off first fear hit him, that was drowned out by concern by Shuri. He blames it on spending time with all the kids, apparently he was a collector now and Shuri had snuck her way into the pack. Ever since Shuri had called him in a rage and showed him footage of the witch sneaking up behind her... It had happened barely a day after he'd discovered the footage of her doing it to him. He'd managed to hold off the panic attack till he got off of the phone, but it had been a bad one. He had fried half his lab and fully left his body in a way, he'd spent 3 hours bouncing around various servers and the Internet until FRIDAY had found him.

He liked having the witch gone, he liked having the rogues contained. He also felt guilty they had to deal with the witch. Not that he wanted her with him, but at least then she wouldn't be tormenting anyone else. Rhodey had called him an idiot when he'd told him that, that Tony also didn't deserve to suffer either. They could disagree on that anyway. He mostly didn't want her near the kids.

"She hasn't tried anything again has she? I don't know what I'd do if she got to you too."

Shuri gave him an encouraging smile that eased the tightness of his chest.
"Nope" She grinned, popping the P. "She'd have to get within several buildings of me for that. Sometimes I go close to where ever they are, just to amuse myself with her being forced back to the villa."

Tony burst out laughing at that, he felt almost as light as he had at breakfast. His kids, and yes, Shuri was in on that even though she didn't know it, always could make him feel better. Carol stuck her head through the door and gave him a little wave. He checked the time and realised the meeting was about to start.

"That's brilliant, Princess. I have to go for now, I hope you like the dress, Peter found that! Don't forget to occasionally take breaks and eat!"

"Ha, coming from you that is hilarious. Goodbye Dr Stark, I'll text you later with his response to BARF!"

Tony shut down the Holoscreen as Carol and Rhodey entered the room.

"Damn boy. You are on time for a meeting. Early even!"

"Hey now Sour patch, I'm always on time for Carols meetings."

He winked at Carol, who sat down next to Tony looking very smug whilst Rhodey spluttered and wheeled himself to the empty spot next to Tony where the chair had been removed. He pushed a lever next to the seat and his chair raised him up so he was on the level with everyone else.

Vision floated in from the ceiling at the same time Hope and Jessica walked in from the door like sensible people. Vision offered him a supportive smile at the same time he sent pictures to him alongside a brush of code. He grinned at him, chuckling at the picture of Vision floating next to a ridiculously long train station sign. He asked if he could send the picture on to the kids and he nodded. He sent it to Carol and Rhodey too. They were grinning at the picture when Danny and Luke came in, a few minutes later Matt entered the room too. He asked Danny a question and Danny brought Matt straight to him. 'Oh no, this isn't Ultron yet is it?'. He tried to keep the immediate panic down of dealing with both things.

"Tony"

"Yes Matt?"

"I just checked my bank account, why am I being paid twice?"

"Um mmmmm. Yeah?"

"One of them is also a lot more than we discussed!"

"Well, technically you are employed twice because of your secret identity. So, 2 sets of payments."

Tony shrugged as it it made perfect sense, Jessica and Luke were cracking up and Matt just looked mostly confused.

"I'm not going to win this argument am I?"

"Nope! And you are paid the same rate as all the on call lawyers at SI, you're on call here. Plus I don't handle the team members payments, it's taken from a multifund of me, Danny and Hope now."
Matt shook his head and headed to his seat, muttering about infuriating engineers, everyone got comfortable chatting in small groups whilst they waited for the ever unfashionably late Dr Wiz. Carols phone trilled and she frowned.

"Strange is going to be even more late than usual, at least he got Wong to text this time, I say we start without him if that's OK Tony?"

"Oh hell yes, that's makes it easier, I was sure he'd but in and poke around with his 'wizardry senses'." 9

Tony waived his hands dramatically, making everyone laugh. Plus he wanted some time to deal with people's colours a bit before Strange got here. Most of his unconscious trips were because of Stephy, and that was at a distance without him even knowing he was there. Unless he really focused, the team colours flowed together. He still got light impressions but nothing pulling him under.

Danny still had a sense of uncertainty about him that had resulted in he and Hope taking him on like a baby duckling to teach him the ways of boring galas and networking. He was a mix of green usually, with some yellow thrown in. Lots of energy he didn't seem to know what to do with.

Luke, was this quiet solid strength. Like stone but different, Tony had actually spent time Googling rocks to find something 'Luke-like' so he could name it in his mind as 'weird rock' was a bit strange really. He finally settled that he looked like prescilli bluestone. He was just like a grounding force to those he spoke too, Tony liked it when he came around because his colours moved so slow they were practically stationery and had pulled him back from passing out more than once.

Jessica was a lot like the glimpses of him that he'd caught. But he mostly ignored what he saw of himself, pretty easy to do actually. Jessica was this beautiful deep, deep purple entwined with the striking black ebony. She was one of his favourites, and not just because there were cracks splintered through. The Black always gave him so much information but not at an overload, maybe it was their similarities but he'd been able to read Jess easier than the others. It practically punched into him. Power, fear, strength, mystery, the cracked filled with this shining silver that sparked like magnesium on fire, compassion with a sense of justice that made him smile.

Matt was all reds. Every red different from the other, he could probably stare at Matt for an hour and probably still see more reds. That's one of the reasons he wanted them so together for this, so he wouldn't get lost in them, just skim the surface and check on people. Matt was intelligent, secretive and tortured by his own violence, but that was changing he'd noticed. Strength, power, passion and determination was shining more and more each time he saw him. That made him smile, Matt had cracks too, so many of them did that it made Tony feel a bit better, but for Tony, his cracks had chasms.

He glanced at Vision again and grinned. Vision didn't have colours, he had code. It was all a bright, shining gold that whirled around him. Sometimes like a shield when his new emotions overwhelmed him. Sometimes it glitched, repeating over and over, like a computer version of panic he was sure that was. Strength and purity were always there, kindness too. He kept getting more complex every week as he grew and Tony was amazed, they spoke about his code sometimes, occasionally he'd try and write bits down so they could both see it.

Hope was like a sun, bursting with different oranges, so intelligent but pushed back and kept down with her dad that she hid it just like him. So now it explodes and sparks around her, red wound its way around her too, but for her it was distrust. Life had taught her to be wary and the red wound around her like a snake, strangling some of her other colours, he was happy to see that the green within it had made headway, growing like scales, displacing the red. Wisdom, loyalty and trust.
'ny Tony, are you okay?'

He snapped his eyes to Carol and realised he had slumped in his chair, his mouth was drying and his head was spinning a little. He slipped from skimming to getting pulled in without even noticing it. But, he was conscious, so that's a win. Some of peoples colours had started interacting with those around them, reaching out and connecting, which meant he had focused too hard when he started checking on people. He mentally pulled himself back and looked again, this time he could see only the most dominant colours and the weren't sucking him in.

"How.. Urm, how long?"

"A few minutes, are you okay? You don't have to do this."

He glanced around the room again, seeing concern on people's face and seeing it in their colours as they shifted their full focus onto him. They weren't annoyed at him holding up the meeting like he'd suspected, they were worried about him. Jessica was sparkling brightly with it, Hope a strong steady warmth reaching out to him. Carol and Rhodey, steel and electricity mingling to surround him, strength and protective reds whirling around Matt, Visions code shield. But for him.. Luke a quiet rock offering grounding and Danny was almost vibrating with nerves. He actually had to blink a few times because Holy crap, having this many people actively caring for his wellbeing was overwhelming as fuck.

"No, no, I'm fine. I just slipped is all."

He could see the confusion on people's faces, but they sat and waited patiently for him to get his bearings.

"So, um, I guess your all wondering why I called you here today? Well, I'm done 'recovering' and can start working again. I'm still not.. Able to be on the active roster, I need to train with you guys before that."

"Aw Tony, I've been looking forward to seeing you fly, because then you get to take me up."

Jessica grinned at him, she really was excited about the idea of flying too, which was awesome.

"We'll I might be ok for that, I don't know. I'm a bit weird now?"

"You've always been weird Tech."

Hope grinned at him, she hadn't called him Tech in ages, since they were young enough to think they'd been good at naming each other. it had started as a way to send each other stuff without their parents knowing who was getting it, he smirked back, knowing she hated her nickname with a passion now.

"I dunno Blueberry, compared to you I'm practically normal."

Everyone was glancing between the two, glee obvious on some of their faces.

"We are hearing the story behind this later.. Right?"

Danny was grinning widely now and Hope her face in her hands.

"I should have known you'd call me that. Tech was much better than sodding Blueberry."

"Ha, yes, I will tell all about Blueberry and Technical Difficulties adventures of boarding school
one day. For now this is Tony Stark and the coma."

Everyone snapped to look at him and leaned forward at that. Carol and Rhodey each squeezed one of his legs.

"So, you all know I spent 10 days in a coma and then mostly vanished for 2 months right? "

Everyone nodded and stayed quiet, which was a miracle in itself as they usually derailed somehow with some random conversations. It was nice though when it happened, not bickering, more like an organic conversation.

"Well I was slipping deeper into the coma, my previous health issues combined with recent injuries that landed me in the coma, the human body can push so far and I'm pretty sure I was living on spite and coffee before that happened."

He chuckled in his usual self deprecating way, everyone just looked supportive, (Vision, Carol and Rhodey) concerned, (Danny and Luke) alarmed, (Hope) and downright angry (Matt and Jess).

"Rhodey stepped in with Extremis, a version I used to have heart surgery to remove my arc reactor. Dr Cho also used the cradle in hopes they could heal the.. Uh damage. But it just wasn't working. The damage was too bad, the hospital was arguing that it wanted to.. "

He rubbed his face. This bit was harder than he thought. Talking about nearly having several amputations wasn't fun. Even with practice.

"It was bad. After 6 days, it had been long enough for my 'MamaBear' protocol to switch to Rhodey. Basically gave him access to private servers if I'm gone, out or dead for 6 days incase there is anything important Rhodey needs to know that FRIDAY can't say without my permission. She'd been counting down the seconds, because I had another version of Extremis. "

"This is the virus that blew people up right? "

Hope looked concerned, everyone else was leaning forward.

"Yup, that's the one. It was intended to heal war vets that had lost limbs. But it was frankly, messed up, the heat created when regrowing dead tissue left people volatile and it was so unstable people exploded."

"And you have had this twice?!!"

Poor Danny.

"I'm fine, no exploding! And three times actually. The version hidden in my private server was more of a thought experiment than anything else. Never intended to be seen by anyone but me and never used. FRIDAY was meant to delete it if I was gone, but she got around it by showing Rhodes who ordered her not to."

"What did you do to it?" Hope asks and a few people echoed it.

"What didn't I do? I stripped it bare and built in tons of stuff. But I never tested it, it was stable though. Unlike the other versions, I can't disable it, it's coded into my DNA. But I'd be dead or in... bad shape without it. It can't regrow entirely dead nerves like the original, but there was enough that it could work on for most parts. I only lost one of my hands. "

Everyone looks at his hands in confusion. As they're both there. He up buttons his left sleeve and
rolls it up to his elbow and they turns off the cover.

" Holy shit you have a robot hand! That's freaking awesome. "

He grins, typical Danny finds this amusing. Everyone is torn between that's awesome and looking upset that he lost a hand.

"The only other thing that it couldn't save was one of my eyes. But I can't complain, I was 100% blinded until then, now my right eye is fine and my left eye was.. Replaced? Yeah. Replaced. I'm assuming you all knew I had an arc reactor in my chest? Well that run originally on Palladium."

Hope sucked in a breath at that, and glared at him. Oops, might have not told her about the nearly dying thing. Matt was looking at him in sympathy for the blinded comment and others looked confused at Hopes reactions, some looked horrified. The room split on who knew palladium was poisonous basically.

"As palladium isn't a fun thing to have in the body, I needed something else. But nothing worked, so I made a new element."

"How the fuck do you make an element?" from Jessica and several what's from others. Carol looked impressed, Rhodey annoyed as he remembered that all too well, with his rants on how ridiculous it was to threaten a man whose life depended on the electromagnet in his chest working with being razed.

"Whilst nearly dying and with agents threatening to taser me, build a particle accelerator and woop, new element."

Most people just blinked at him, Carol just looked at him in quiet horror, glancing at Rhodey. Yeah he had a feeling Carol would like the longer versions of these stories oddly.

"It's called Starkanium." Hope jumped in to break the awkward silence that hell at that.

"They rejected Badassium." Tony pouts.

"What is your life? Because even from our perspective man, that's weird."

Luke grinned at him which got everyone chuckling again. A few people saying that one day they wanted the entire story to Tony's laughing.

"So, I had this in me for a while. The element, Howard actually found it, working with the tesseract."

Carol sat up at that point, he must have missed that bit, he made a note to ask her about it later because he felt something.. Else around her now he'd gotten more used to her colours. Like a matching tuning fork buzz. As he'd been nervous of accidentally outing himself before, it had meant he'd not spent a lot of time near her. Now that he'd spent more time with her and closer too and it had become more obvious.

He felt something around Vis too weirdly, he'd thought it was just the technopathy, until recently feeling something from Carol, the buzz was much stronger with her though. Made him want to curl up and nap next to her again weirdly. Very comfy vibe.

He wondered if Vis had that with Wanda, and if that's what they'd built their short, badly ended romance on. Them both being from the mind stone, maybe Starkanium had more of a presence than he'd really thought about, just blaming everything on Extremis. Just maybe it was like he and
Carol were from the tesseract, another weird space object. He kind of understood the pull for Carol because of that, but Vis was confusing, yeah Loki used the mind stone and wanted the tesseract, but they were utterly different things that weren't even slightly related. He shot Carol a smile and mouthed that he was sorry he missed that out.

"So yeah, even though I had the arc reactor out, apparently traces of it were still there, and the Extremis Virus I made really, really liked it. Lucky too because that meant it liked Vibranium as they're similar so my body didn't reject my… my hand. I'd been concerned Extremis would try to detach it by healing or something."

These people were too easy to talk too, that was a slip he wasn't ready for, Carol raised an eyebrow, Tony just shrugged.

"So it replaced my eye, and it's a bit weird, so um, don't freak out?"

With that he pulled his glasses off and glanced around the room.

"Matt as you can't see, one of my eyes is just like a blue glow? I can see out of it, really well in fact. Much more than a human. Pretty sure my eyesight trumps Hawkeyes now by a mile."

Rhodey sniggered whilst everyone looked at the changes Tony had gone through.

"So. And this is the bit I don't know how people will react to. I can.. See things with this eye. It's not like mind reading or anything. I think you could describe it as seeing auras like Strange but without that magic shit. I see colours around people that give me.. Intuition maybe? Yeah, that sounds about right. Gives me ideas of what they're like. I can't always work it out, it's super subjective and it's the reason why I occasionally pass out. Or zone of like I did earlier, sometimes it can be a bit much. Also I won't go around blabbing stuff I see about you guys."

"Yeah, he's super strict about it. But if you bring him chocolate, he'll tell you about yourself though."

Rhodey hopped in for him, knowing Tony was close to panic rambling, bless his honeybear. He glanced around at everyone, trying to get an idea of how they felt about it. Most seemed interested, he was terrified to look at Jess, and was surprised to see her smile at him. He'd been worried she'd see him badly after that. She just rolled her eyes at him and flipped him off. Which was basically a hug from Jess.

"So, I'm also a technopath now."

"Your a what now?"

"Ha, Hope, urm. Remember when I melted your dad's server farm?"

"Yeah?"

"That was not long after I woke up but I was still learning how to control it, I chased the hacker in my mind, saw your dad and it made me angry.. Which accidentally melted the server farm."

Tony shrugged sheepishly as Hope replied.

"I'm starting to see why you took some time out! But training now is probably smart. Anything else?"

"I got a boost in the usual, durability, speed, strength, the usual. I don't know how much, but I'm
really fast now at least. Oh."

He scrubbed the makeup off with the wipes he brought specifically for it and Hope just burst out laughing.

"I can't breathe fire though like the original Extremis guys... Blast a rocket through me and I don't know if I could heal it. They were terrifyingly strong too, I don't think I'm that strong. But I think I'm faster than they were. Getting a read on the extent of them was hard as they were trying to kill me."

"Don't worry Tony, we'll put you through the ringer."

Jessica looks way, way too happy about this, as does Carol... And Hope. So the girls want to beat him up. Charming.

"So, any questi-"

"Sorry I'm late everyone- HOLY FUCK TONY. WHAT DID YOU DO?!"

Tony actively considered climbing under the table but was still mostly shocked Strange apologised for being late. Or at least started too.

"Ah, urm, Hi Stephy. How are you doing?"

"So. This is why you've avoided seeing me in person?"

"That would be a yes. Yup."

Strange sighs and crosses the room, looking critically at him, no not at him. Around him. So this is what people feel like when he does it to them. Yup, it's just as creepy as he worried it would be. He likes to think he'd more subtle about it however.

He has to really focus when looking at Strange. He's extremely different to other people. Gold swirling disks with strange symbols move in and around him. Actually in him. That's new. There are swirls that are silvery like mirrors, occasionally reflecting but it shifts, with glimmers of other things... His colours and there are a lot, are utterly brain fucking amazing, he's fractured too, worse than Jess, more like him. He has an ebony too but it's tarnished in places, and the cracks and bursting with gold. He basically screams strength and endurance.

His Oranges and red for arrogance and ego wrap tightly around a vibrant purple that if you blink, you'll miss it. He thinks that is his soft side, loyalty, it's corded like steel though. Very strong splashes and drops of pink burst around him, telling Tony that he is reading something in his aura. Tony's current favourite is the blue that is slowly starting to shimmer around him, a really pretty blue that is like the sky, it changes as you look at it, like day becoming night and back again. Trust and acceptance blinking in and out.

So yes Stephen is.. Different. He's currently just happy he hasn't passed out or blurted something out. Both wins. Also, there is the same sense he gets with Carol and Vis again, but different and it's not him, but on him.. Weird, before he can consider it Danny speaks, jarring him out of following the weird feeling.

"So. Um.. How long are they going to just stand there staring at each other?"

Danny blurts out after several minutes, Hope replies..
"Not a clue, but I don't think they're staring at each other."

"Your right, they're staring around each other."

"This is getting kind of uncomfortable."

Jess and then Luke join in which snaps Tony and Strange out at the same time. Both of them looking like the emerged from water.

"God you are an idiot."

Tony doesn't get to reply beyond a startled squeak as Strange pulls him in for a hug. He hugs the man back though, which startles Strange a bit, but Tony saw flashes a thin red zipping through his colours and knows that for some reason, Strange actually, really cares about him. Everyone is staring at them, open mouthed. Jess subtly takes a picture with her phone, proof and likely, blackmail material, that Stephen Strange hugs people, Tony winks at her over Stephens shoulder and sees a notification in his mind that she sent it to him. He is so framing it because it will annoy Steph.

Plus he has pictures in his apartment now, it's still sleek and modern, but instead of Pepper or paying people to decorate, he and the kids did it. So it's a bit weird, Harley, Peter, Tony and Tara is generally going to be weird. Peter insisted on pictures, and apparently pictures are like tattoos or pringles. You put up 1 and then you can't see the wall

It's also true, they'd known each other for decades, so he should know if the man likes him... but they were both snarky, sarcastic arseholes. Whilst Tony had liked him and saw him as a friend, he was never sure it was reciprocated, because Tony is kind of shit at dealing with humans. As a rule he has noticed, if he thinks people hate him they seem to care about him and if he thought they cared about him they tried to kill him. 'It's probably bad that's a category with more than 1 person.' He muses to himself.

"Tony, what happened in Siberia?"

He freezes and Strange releases him so he can see him.

"Can't you.. See it or anything."

Tony waves his hands around, Strange raised an eyebrow at him.

"Can you See what happened to me?"

"No, it's not like that.. Also you are.. Different."

That makes Strange blink. He figures at some point they were going to sit down and Strange would bug him for every detail.

"You are too, you've always been a little different but now. You have weird stuff going on and I'm not even talking about your flashlight eye."

Tony bust out laughing about that before telling Stephen to sit and giving him the same run down as before. But he can tell it's not enough, somehow he knows something about Siberia.

"Tony?"

"Fine, fine, I probably should show you so anyway as it is Avengers related. You all know about
the Civil War there is one fight I have kept.. Hidden. The Winter Soldiers didn't put me in a coma.”

He turns on the wall screen mentally, causing a few people to jump before they move around so everyone is facing the wall. Oops, probably sound have mentioned the wall could do that before turning it on. Rhodey just gives him a withering glare before fishing a pair of headphones out of his bag.

"I can't watch this again either and I can't put my brain into the Internet."

**Stephen POV**

Stephen is.. On edge. He's been on edge for weeks and he didn't know why. Well, he knew why. It happened in July, something happened. He didn't know what but it hurt and he blacked out for 2 days. Whilst he might not have been the Sorcerer Supreme for long, this was too annoying, as well as the sense of dread that had built as time went on.

It had peaked when he heard Tony was in a coma for about a week after he'd woken up. They'd been searching for what had happened in many different dimensions, and not no where.

The tiny, eccentric, over energised man was an irritating, arrogant, annoyingly kind, forgiving and nice brother. He didn't want to like him when they met, heck he had actively tried not to like him. But they clicked, they were both outsiders that saw the world differently to those around them and people viewed them in a certain way. They both spent their days searching, hunting and striving for.. More. Because without that something, they got bored.

They got closer when they both ended up away from normal and in this life of magic and superheroes, but then Tony vanished. Then he was in a coma and he vanished again.

When he walked in the room Tony's aura blanketed out everything else that his senses were almost stunned into shock. The Cloak rippled with agitation too. There was pain, so much of it that it was hard to breathe past. Where as some people have sharp, jagged parts, that was practically all Tony was now. Like he'd been shattered over and over. Betrayal after betrayal. His heart broken, it was just so fucking much and so much worse that last time. There was some smoothing out though, somehow he was healing.

Stephen isn't even sure how he's standing let alone that he can still manage the trust and love required to heal. He could pick up words here and there too, he didn't want to delve too deep because that would be breaking his trust and looking at Tony… he honestly isn't sure he could survive it again. Not and still be Tony anyway, he's already clinging by a thread.

In the ice, he can see Siberia. He didn't know what it means, but the word is bleak, cold and terrifying and fraught with more meaning than he can read. Or honestly than he wants to. Its shattered ice and time that goes on and on and pain. Freezing, burning pain. It's also the connecting point of the other change that looks like nothing he's ever seen before. There is a hum about him though, a vibrating hum that feels comfortable, feels familiar somehow and oh fucking hell.

That's an Infinity Stone.

How?!

He tries to stop his racing mind and listens to the story he's just told everyone else. He knows he's giving people a short, censored version. When he talks about the hospital Stephen can see remnants of severe injuries. Everywhere. Frostbite he guesses for him feet, hands, his face has a lot
too. His eyes for fuck sake!

His chest is strange too, like it's glowing but the arc reactor was removed years ago. It's also too big. There is so much change its hard to find a place to start He can't even try to sense much because now his entire being is humming like the space stone. He also knows Tony can feel a connection to the other stones and people affected. He can see the small trailing link. Now other people might let that drop, but Tony won't, so he gets to explain the Infinity Stones, 'awesome'. He's listening to Tony's story with a scowl too, if he thinks he can get away with this censored version with him, he will make him fall for an hour, dammit.

He wonders if Tony is seeing auras. He's seeing something and the way he describes it is definitely odd. He might be, or something else. The space stone is definitely at play. Not just handy for teleportation. Heck, he can do that and an infinity stone is several orders of magnitude more. As well as space, it can also transport to different dimensions. At a guess, he thinks that it's let Tony peel back a layer from the fabric of space. Instead of looking straight through, it's something close to this dimension, but there are somethings that human eyes, and even magic, are simply unable to see. How humans interact with the world around them and each other in a cosmic way. Although he hopes that Tony does not end up with the full capabilities of that space stone, Tony Stark accidentally creating singularities would be awkward. Tony Stark teleporting would be extremely annoying. But then when the Infinity Stones interact with humans the results are highly unpredictable and not always what one would expect.

He and Carol are the same, and different, all at once, for example, Carol thrums with cosmic energy and Tony is beating with it like blood from his heart.

Carols energy pours out and Tony's...it is pouring in, almost pooling inside him. But he has no idea what that means, if it means anything. Tony seems to think his abilities are Extremis based... And they might be, but they're likely being powered by the energy of the space stone. He's definitely using at least one ability that is the work of the Infinity Stone.

He considers how to explain this to Tony, but generally he is in the dark too. He'll have to get Wong doing research. No one mentioned people being altered by the stones yet the mind stone and the space stone have both altered humans now. 2 a peice. The mind stone even altered a person to have superspeed which was just odd and throws out practically all rules on working this out. The addition of vibranium could be interesting to, Stark's element being close to vibranium could be bringing it into play, although he has no idea where he got so much Vibranium from, it's extremely rare on earth. Being a sonoluminescent, near indestructible metal that absorbs kinetic energy and it's in his blood and body. Yeah, that isn't going to cause problems. He sighs internally again.

He decides to put a pin in it for now, Tony has some idea of his abilities for now, they can monitor for potential changes in himself.

For now, he wants to know what put his friend in this position, because Tony liked being human.

Sure he ran with super humans, altered people, gods, and everything in between, but he knew Tony didn't go about wanting powers. He liked aging and he could see that he was definitely younger now.

Even technopathy which is quite fitting he must admit.

Definitely not interdimensional vision.

He was baseline human in his suits and didn't aspire to anything other than building and creating for those he cared about.
Someone forced his hand, and he will have their name.

"Tony?"

He asks and out a lot behind it. From Tony's sigh, he knows that he isn't impressed with the current amount of information.

"Fine, fine, I probably should show you so anyway as it is Avengers related. You all know about the Civil War there is one fight I have kept. Hidden. The Winter Soldiers didn't put me in a coma."

Stephen jumps a bit as the wall behind him turns into a screen. That Tony puts tech everywhere is a fundamental truth, especially at the compound. It only then occurs to him the level of control Tony has now of the building with just a thought.

"I can't watch this again either and I can't put my brain into the Internet."

Stephen is almost worried about seeing the video as he sees Carol and Rhodey pale. It takes a lot to make military guys like them pale. Rhodey turns his headphones on and he swears he sees a flash of gold in Tony's eyes before his right eye glazes over and he's sure now that Tony can't hear or see them, his aura ripples with information and yeah, that is incredibly strange.

"This video is pretty heavy, I'll understand if anyone wants to duck out? I can give you all a run down if you like?"

Everyone shakes their head to Carol's offer, turning to face the TV.

"OK FRIDAY, play the video."

The video starts with Tony approaching Rogers and Barnes which makes Stephen clench his shaking hands and bite back a snarl. Typical. He knew that stuck up bastard would be involved somehow.

Tony or FRIDAY must have put this video together as its a composite of multiple cameras streamed together to create an almost seamless shot as they move through the base. Confusion filters through the room when the 5 Winter Soldiers are already dead, because that was the party line, even though Tony said that the Winter Soldiers didn't put him in a coma, seeing them all dead was a shock. Everyone was told that Tony went to help Rogers and bring him in, but 5 Winter Soldiers got in the way. It irks him that Tony is still protecting Roger's. Even now.

'Zemo looks like a slimy jerk.. Pretentious too with his talk of empires crumbling from within'. He is considering more insults when he sees the date on the tape. He and Hope share a look. The others don't know the importance of that date. All he can think is after everything Tony has been through. This is just too much, with barely a single break. Watching your parents die, with the person who murdered them next to the person you consider a friend? Yet betrayed you after, in Stephen's mind at least, bullying you for so long? No one deserves that.

Tony will deny the bullying till the cows come home. This however is a hill he will happily die on. After Ultron Tony had no one, Rhodey was away and he and Pepper had split for good, things were awkward between them, it took a while for them to get back to bring friends, and in his infinite wisdom he gave Happy to Pepper. Leaving him with people who were exceedingly viscous to him, yet still used him.

He and Wong ranted about it every time Tony left the sanctum. When he arrived they just tried to give him a nice atmosphere. Make him feel fucking wanted and noticed whilst he was wasting
away, working himself to death while people in his house attacked him and made him feel like he deserved it. He had gotten a lot closer to Tony that he'd have ever expected then. He also wasn't overly impressed when he was put into the role of the nice person. He was not exactly good at it.

He shook his head, he was being maudlin. Thankfully the video was nearly over now. He had never liked Tony's parents, but even he didn't want to watch them be murdered. From the faces around him, neither had they. The ground his teeth to stop him saying that Howard's death wasn't much of a loss anyway. That would create more questions than Tony would want.

He knows the man hates it, but he never does anything to dispel the idea that because he was rich he got everything he wanted as a child. People forget that rich people are still people. They can still be good or bad. If anything they are much more efficient at never getting caught. School teacher reports a child for a bruise? Some money to social services and they'll file 'not enough evidence' and the teacher loses her job and struggles to find work again. Other teachers are effectively warned off. The only reason Tony had told him was because of a copious amount of drugs and alcohol in their early 20s and after they'd both pretended nothing had been said the next day.

He can't help but be slightly annoyed when Tony hits Rogers open handed. He also wonders how long he was playing at Tony's friend whilst hiding the knowledge that he knew Tony's parents didn't die in a car crash, something that had affected Tony deeply, considering he thought a drunkard Howard killed his mother with recklessness. He was drowning in rage towards a man he hated, yet Tony wouldn't tell anyone, at least not sober. That he still looked up to Howard sometimes. Stephen really did not understand why.

No matter what that man did to him it's like he beat respect and admiration into him and somehow taught Tony he deserved this pain. He spent years hating Howard and trying to be him at the same time. Most of his stints in rehab and crashes after has something to do with Howard.. Or Stane. Stephen had never liked him. Tony had waved it off as Stephen didn't like anyone. Which wasn't exactly not true.

Stephen is sure that Tony still hates Howard, even now, but this might have robbed him of his rage. Stephen had tried but he knew it would take someone really special to get it through to Tony, that he didn't deserve what Howard did. Fuck, knowing Tony, he probably thinks he deserved this clusterfuck he's watching now. Probably thinks in some backwards fashion he deserves it for trying to kill Barnes whilst hating him. Tony hoards guilt like no one he's ever seen. For a man who outwardly doesn't seem to care, he cared far, far too much to the detriment of his own health even.

Even though he is sure Tony could have actually killed Barnes 4 or 5 times already. Everyone underestimates the strength of his suits, they just see 1 suit and don't seem to realise Tony is constantly changing and improving. He's hitting walls instead of Barnes head. Although he couldn't help the smile when he blasted the arm off. If only it was Roger's instead. He knows Barnes has been through living hell. They all do, Tony included files of all of the rogues, with a special note not to read Barnes after dinner.

But Stephen is a selfish man.

All he sees is two enhanced super soldiers beating on his friend lost in grief. Rogers doesn't even seem to be trying to de-escalate the fight.

Luke is quietly narrating the fight for Matt, both of their faces grim. Someone makes a strangled noise when Tony is on the ground. There is no way to describe it other than vicious and even though Tony is right there, he can see that more than a few of them thought that the shield would come down in his neck. It carried on playing after the soldiers left. Just long enough to show that the suit is dead, that Tony's injuries making moving the thing actually impossible. No wonder he
got Frostbite. After a few minutes it cut off and a few people breathed in relief. Obviously scared it would okay the entire time.

Tony came back to them with a gold flash as soon as it stopped, he wondered if FRIDAY can speak to him in his mind now, what would that even feel like?

"So, questions."

"Tony, how long where you left there?"

He's shaking his head at Hope the second she starts and Stephen is pretty sure this is the first question he always gets and that he will not answer it. Probably out of some ill conceived, ridiculous presumption of protecting them or not burdening them with such knowledge so instead he carries the weight himself. Tony Stark is almost frightening intelligent, but damn he is so fucking stupid sometimes.

"Long enough. Anything else?"

"Is there anything you'd like us to do?"

He asked, focusing on Tony who startles at the idea. Which apparently had been the last straw for the cloak. Which promptly shot of his back and fired itself at Tony. Causing him to roll his eyes, in the sanctum, Tony and the Cloak, or Levi as Tony calls it, and apparently it prefers, are always thick as thieves. Stephen isn't sure how, but Tony can talk to it, Stephen can just about understand a few things. Tony however doesn't understand how he and Wong can't understand it, but Tony regularly had conversations with bots that communicate in beeps and whirs yet didn't use morse code for some reason. Levi was positively chatty in comparison.

However outside of the sanctum it had always kept to his back, playing the slightly strange cloak. Now it was practically smothering Tony with hugs and everyone was baffled.

Trust it to be a cloak that broke the dark edge the meeting had taken.

"Are.. Are you doing that?"

Danny gestured towards Tony who was now being held a foot off of the ground, only one arm visible which was gently patting the cloak.

"No, that is the Cloak of Levitation. Tony calls it Levi. It has a mind of its own and it's quite fond of Tony because somehow Tony can talk to it. It's my cloak and I'm pretty sure it actually prefers Tony some days. When he didn't visit for a while, it decided it was my fault and I've been getting the silent treatment from my cloak for 7 weeks."

At the mention of its name, the collar of the cloak turned to Danny and gave a little wave before doing the same with the others. Everyone waved back, much to his amusement.

"Everytime I think we be hit peak weird, something extra weird happens."

Rhodey just puts his head on the table, despairing at the utter insanity his life had become whilst Tony had convinced Levi into a more comfortable position and was now reclining in a hammock about 4 feet off the floor.

" So, this is Levi everyone. Stephy's better half."

The cloak ripples in amusement and everyone introduced themselves to Levi.
"How come you've been hanging around here for 6 weeks now and no one noticed you were wearing sentient outerwear?"

"I told you Jess, I was getting the silent treatment. He was basically acting like a... Well. Like a cloak."

"Okay. I think that's enough weird for today, I say we go and watch a movie. I know it's not movie night, but I think Tony will join us now?"

"Of course I will Luke, the only reason I was holding off was because it would be a bit weird to wear sunglasses in the dark watching a movie. Plus if it's dark enough, even my best wrap around glasses you can see some blue out of. I'd have to wear an eye patch like Fury... Ew."

Tony shrugged from his hammock.

"Yeah, I can see that, but now you have no choice!"

"Wild cloaks couldn't drag me away Jess."

"Oh, I'm sitting by Tony, he forgot to mention one of his abilities, he can regulate his body temperature, he's like a human hot water bottle."

Jess and Hope instantly decided they would find a formation the 3 of them could sit around Tony, the cloak informed him that it too would be sitting with him.

"Huh, who knew all I had to do to be popular with the ladies and a magnificent cloak was become a human hot water bottle."

Tony joked huge smile on his face which had everyone laughing, they needed a laugh to dispel the residual sadness brought on by the video. They made their way to the theatre room. Stephen happy that Tony hadn't felt the need to replace his glasses or hide his hand. From Carol's smile and pointed looks, she was happy about the same thing. He however was quietly seething at the old Avengers and he doubted that would be going away anytime soon.

FRIDAY must have sent work ahead because the kids were all waiting in the room with Laura, Meg and Jim if he remembered correctly from the recent mission brief with their young girl, Cassie. Cassie was flanked by Tara and Lilah. He noticed that while Meg's eyes lingered on Tony hand and Jim on his eye neither seemed shocked or alarmed, which meant that Laura or someone had filled them in. He knew they hadn't been at the compound long, he was back up on all extraction plans incase time ran out or Ross moved to fast.

Luckily he hadn't been needed to extract Laura and the kids. Even though if Laura has trusted them, things might have gone smoother. Tony's warnings were ignored every step of the way, until they were literally hiding in a panic room under the house and 3 teams of men in black tactical gear were taking apart the house. He and Tony in the Ironman suit picked them up, Tony had gone straight back to bed after as he'd been utterly exhausted on Laura's insistence, she still didn't trust him, but she knew he'd come to rescue her whilst seriously hurt, he didn't find that out till much later. 2 hours later, however, when he'd found himself being yelled at by Rhodes, which was how and when he'd discovered about the coma. This was the first time since he'd properly seen Tony, all these weeks he'd been berating himself for not looking closer to his odd feelings. Hindsight is always 2020.

The middle deep sofa was occupied with Tony and the girls, he was basically laid across the three of them. Jess at his head, Hope had the middle and Carol had his legs. Which was likely why
Rhodey was sulking about losing his cuddle partner. Those two had to start dating soon or he was going to lose two hundred dollars. He had September on the 'Oblivious Idiots in Love' pool. Tony had OIL striking in November.

He was comfortable in his favourite recliner, usually he had Levi, but he was currently acting as a blanket over Tony. Typical. A ginger cat appeared from the vents and jumped onto Tony. He and the cloak seemed to feel each other out for a few seconds, before deciding they could share Tony, the cloak settling over the cat..

He squinted his eyes that.. Wasn't a cat.

It couldn't be. He'd read about something that gave reading like that, but they were exceedingly rare and not on earth.. And wouldn't be cuddling Tony wait no. That last bit was plausible.

"Tony… when did you get a.. Cat?"

"Oh Goosey-loosey isn't mine, and she's not a cat."

Carol reached over to stroke Goose whilst smiling.

"She's a Flerken."

Jess looked critically at the cat now as did a few others who had obviously assumed the thing that looked like a cat, was a, well a cat.

"She's my adorable little murder floof is what she is."

Tony smiled fully on and Goose curled her paws possessively around his metal hand.

Tony was cuddling a Flerken. Huh. He's not even that surprised really, maybe the Flerkens ability to store pocket dimensions attracted her to people affected by the space stone which had the ability to traverse dimensions? Similar vibrations possibly.

"What is a Flerken?"

Danny asked, causing Stephen to full on grin. Catching the eyes of Carol and Tony who rolled their eyes. Which he took as permission.

"They are like space cats….Their bodies also hold pocket realities, bubbles of space and time that exist in other worlds... They also possess many tentacles that can extend from their mouths."

Danny was okay for the first part but now he had everyone's attention. Danny looked a little green around the gills.

"Tentacles?"

"Oh yeah, Goose saved Fury once by taking out and eating several people."

"Well I won't hold that against you Goosey-Loosey."

"She's also why he has the eye patch."

Tony's face cracked into a huge smile, Stephen too. Neither of them were best pleased with the angry pirate.

"Oh that is fantastic. You are the best Flerken in existence."
"So, um.. The cat can sprout tentacles and effortlessly eat like 5 people? People sized people."
"Yu-P!" Tony was a little too gleeful popping the P, but this was amusing.
"So Tony, before the Movie starts, what does Goose look like to you?"
Carol jumped in, which he had to admit, he was curious about it too.
"Hmm, oh she's awesome. Stephy did you say pocket realities?"
"Yes."
"Huh, I wonder if I can see them? Do you have something to do with mirrors?"
Stephen blinked a few times, a bit surprised his theory of Tony peeling back to see different dimensions and the in between spaces.
"Yes actually, does Goose have that to?"
"Oh no, no mirrors, but there is this swirling pretty thing, looks a bit like the milky-way but more colourful with red purples and pinks and black stars instead of white. Her colours are different from a humans, some of them are more like a spectrum, white and then bursting into colours and there is like a static one that occasionally looks like glitter. It's taking me longer to put words to the colours, I don't think I can even name some of them, but she's loyal, very loyal. At first all I saw was friendly. I don't know, I think she can control it and used it to find me and say hi…"

Pretty much everyone has stopped what they were doing at this point, popcorn half poured, snacks dropped movies stopped being searched through to just stare open mouthed at an oblivious Tony who's been talking to Goose the entire time. Carol however has a huge smile on her face.
"That's amazing! I knew she was intelligent, but that is so brilliant."
Everyone grinned and went back to sorting out snacks whilst Danny is staring between the cat and his friends.
"Are we seriously not talking about how Hentai cat can eat half of us in one bite?"
"Nope."
Jess shoots him a toothy grin, now petting Goose along with Hope, Carol, Tony… oh and Levi too. Rhodey seems to be pouting again.
"Tooony, my hands are cold."
Tony smiles up at Carol who squeals as Stephen assumes Tony raises his temperature. Goose nestles into the warmth of his chest whilst the girls hum in amusement. Meg and Jim are a little overwhelmed but Hope is doing her best to keep them calm and feel included. The kids have made a blanket nest on the floor in front of the chairs and . When snacks are passed out, Tony becomes a snack holder for the girls and the film starts.

Stephen isn't sure when his life went crazy but he seems to be watching a film called Stonehenge Apocalypse and it's the least weird thing to happen today.
Tony gets to speechifying and collects a piece of his family that was still out in the cold.

Happy Saturday xD

This chapter is a little over my 8k - 12k limit but not by much and I figured no one would mind terribly. I just always find stuff to add of proof reading and I have little concept of too many words.

I'm still nicely several chapters ahead writing wise too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

12th September

Tony slips on the black suit jacket, the red and gold tie left by Peter makes him grin. Today he really does feel like he needs his armour. The kids are being dropped off by Laura, Meg tagging along to see Cassie off to her new school. Mondays usually suck but today has been a long time coming, so yeah he's nervous, but also giddy like a 14 year old.

He hears the door to his apartment open and close, signifying Laura's return. He finished up quickly, straightening the red and gold tie, and pulling out a pair of the most secure sunglasses with mirrored red lenses that he owned. Today he can't risk a slip up, but he actually does have FRIDAY installed on a back up pair in his pocket, so if someone comments, he can show them that. Rhodey pointed out he was bordering on paranoia, he pointed out that he was already a superhero, so people are predisposed to go straight to the weird explanation around him.

He tapped the red disk on his hand and at a fast glance in the mirrors, he figures he looks how people expect him too, mostly. The minimal scarring that was not covered by clothes, is light enough to not be noticeable he admits, even if his eyes zero in on them without fail. There is a chance some eagle eyed camera guy might focus on the slight scarring on his face, but it is mostly on his left side, partially covered by his sunglasses just a smattering on his cheek left visible. He tried covering it up, but it felt awful, the scar tissue annoyingly sensitive. The rest was around his ears and neck that people rarely seemed to spot. Plus, he has a dangerous job, scars are pretty expected. Apart from that, he's not far from his old self.

The only real difference there is the black on black suit, and his sunglasses have changed style. His face is done up to make him look closer to his age, not too close, because why not. He will probably get some reports of botox or something, but watching Hollywood scramble for his secrets
of youth would be amusing. His hair is also styled but he didn't bother trying to dye the white back in again, it just grows out too fast. Deciding that's as good as he is going to get, he leaves the bedroom to join Laura.

Apparently the kids had taken over her wardrobe too, with her black suit, ice blue blouse and her hair done up in some kind of complicated up-do that he can't make heads nor tails off. Which is saying something actually, as Lilah and Tara have him learning some new complicated hair thingy every week. *Bobby pins get everywhere.* It's utter madness, but actually very fun. His first attempts were rather dire, so he sneakily got a hairdresser to teach him some stuff and since then, YouTube all the way. But Laura's hair makes everything he's done so far look like sloppy ponytails. *Typical.* Laura looks dressed to eat some political sharks so there is that, he's still not sure if he regrets introducing her to Pepper, but he can definitely see the red heads influences too.

"I think the two of us look like we are going to war?"

"Aren't we?"

"Oh yes, Ross has been far too comfortable and he thinks we are just playing catch up."

"Well, Laura Morgan, shall we be off?"

Laura grins, eyes alive with humour, the divorce hadn't gone through yet, but Matt got her and the kids surnames changed already.

"I think so, Dr Stark."

She hooked her arm in his. Scooping up her bag before stopping Tony, eyebrows raised in question.

"FRIDAY dear? Can you take a picture, I think the kids would like to see the fruits of their labour."

"Oh and tell the kids not to put it on twitter until after we finish up at DC."

It was handy that the Accords Council was in America this month. It had been cycling around member countries and he'd thought they'd be jetting off to a different country rather than just to DC. He was almost disappointed how it had worked out, but there were some nice places they could go for food after.

"Oh we're taking the flashier quinjet today."

"Hmm, I think the PA business is definitely going to be fun."

"When exactly did I hire you as my PA again? I feel this is something I would remember."

"Don't worry dear. Your PA handled it. Negotiating salary for myself was an interesting task however."

Laura grinned at him as they boarded the quinjet, it was smaller than usual, but then this isn't designed to fly the team about. Its smaller, sleeker, and a heck of a lot faster too. The inside is outfitted for comfort and is meant to make you feel like your flying in style, very handy for business, Rhodey had been using it often even though he'd said making a more comfortable quinjet was a waste of time. Tony had just planned on making a smaller one, better outfitted. He'd gotten a little carried away.
"Oh I like this one. This is definitely my new favourite."

Laura said whilst sitting in the Co pilot seat. Running her hands over the incredibly comfortable leather seats. Tony dropped down next to her, starting everything up without touching anything.

"Fry, Flight path approved? Everything kosher?"

"All set to go Boss."

Laura grinned. It turned out that she was almost as bad as the kids when it came to him using his tech abilities, she always wanted to see him do 'more'. She was a perfect mix of Pepper and Rhodey, organised to a degree he literally couldn't conceive of… yet gleefully encouraging him to wreck people.

She wasn't the mother who barely had any adult company stuck on a farm anymore. She is the scarily competent, heavily armed, yet you can't see a weapon on her, thanks to him, neither will metal detectors. Sue him, he's been kidnapped enough. Few people will expect the slim, sharply dressed PA to be an Ex-agent, armed to the teeth and frankly itching to get in the field again whilst wearing killer Louboutin heels, a gift courtesy of Pepper which left he and Laura at the same height. Something he suspected Pepper had planned. Smirking, he realised that the sum cost of her outfit was probably more than the farm. Oh if Clint saw anything from today he was going to explode. He sent the picture of them to Shuri too, she wasn't at today's Accords council but T'Challa was. Maybe he'd say hi to the poor kitty.

Takeoff was as smooth as ever, sure, he could have FRIDAY fly them, but he hadn't flown in ages and this was fun. She was ready to catch him however, should his abilities or concentration Glitch for whatever reason. It was a nice stretch, with a safety net. He radioed in and followed the set flight path, behaving was always important when you're about to cause a scene. No one but a few select players knew he was coming today, he didn't want to give anyone a chance to run defensive maneuvers. Everheart knew he was on his way, and she had advanced notes so her segment would be put leagues before anyone else.

"Christine was happy to get the packet I sent, do you think her article will be scathing against you again?"

"Na, she just knows what she is doing. If she was 100% about everything I did. She'd lose credibility, but a person who slates me saying something good? Now that gets traction."

"Hmm, yes, I did like her I stand with Ironman segment after the news of your coma broke. I think she planning on bringing it up again."

"Oh goody, I do like a catchy hashtag."

He slipped out his phone and poked around on twitter. They were almost there so he figured now was fine.

youknowwhoiam - Did anyone miss me?

He shot Laura a grin as they disembarked, a crowd had gathered as he'd 'parked' the quinjet a few feet from the door. When they were both free, he flew it up and passed control over to FRIDAY to put it somewhere safe. He spun on his heel to face the group of shocked reporters. They had been quite subdued until they saw the jet, obviously expecting a humdrum day of political intrigue. So reading boring things and nit picking tiny details for hours. Luckily the amendments scheduled today had already been finalised so he didn't feel bad about crashing something important. He
wouldn't want to set that precedent and have a boring person crash an important amendment like the one he had tabled for powered children and inclusions of mutants.

"Oh can you schedule a meeting for me with Xavier soon, I'll go to him whenever I'm free, telling him it's about the Accords. I've wanted to meet him for a while."

He whispered under his breath before taking a few steps forward towards the surge of reporters who just realised Tony Stark had dropped in their laps. Christine had already snapped a few pictures, miles ahead of the pack, she waited for her sound bite and then shot inside.

"Hello my lovelies, Did you miss me!"

He gave them his best press smile, just long enough for Christine before he spun on his heal again and stalked inside, casually waving over his shoulder and ignoring the asked questions.

"Trust me, your questions will be much better after I've been inside. Wouldn't want to waste them now would we?"

Laura's eyes are dancing with laughter as she holds the door open for them. She knew he wasn't going to hang around after, this was already testing his abilities, he barely looked at the press for a few seconds, yet he had paled a little already. Laura pulled his attention back to her after the disorienting press hoard.

"I didn't realise how fun this could be."

Tony shot her another grin, his colour returning as they made their way to the chamber, he was already slipping inside their systems. Not having to use your hands and just letting part of your mind slip through was much easier at getting past any defenses.

"Oh the press can be a nightmare, but they can also be a lot of fun to play with."

They strode up to the door and a man rushed forward to stop them. Holy crap this kid had energy. His colours practically vibrated at him but didn't overwhelm him thankfully. Peter apparently was good practice for over eager teens. He practically screamed earnest and was a total puppy that Tony wanted to kidnap from politics. Rhodey, however, would have a go at him if he brought another stray home.

"I'm sorry the Vienna Accords are in sessions today an… Oh, You… You're Tony Stark."

Tony grinned as the young kid went up a few octaves, he flushed and yup, this was a definite fanboy.

"That's me, and I think I have a standing invitation?"

"Oh yes sir, of course, I haven't seen you make it to one of these before, I thought I'd never get a chance!"

"I've been a touch under the weather. But no matter, I'm all shiny and happy to be back at work. What's your name?"

"Uh, I'm Jordan Hale, it's great to have you back Mr Stark. King T'Challa has been talking you up, I can't believe how much you are doing for prosthetics. The way he explained it and when I looked it up, I might be able to get my insurance to finally give me an upgrade. My current one is for 14 to 16 year olds, I'm 19 but they keep saying 'it's perfectly acceptable'. "
Tony frowned, that definitely was not *perfectly acceptable*, this kid had a good job, he cared about his job too by the looks of it and he seemed nice too. There aren't many nice people in politics. Suddenly he's happy Laura is here instead of Pep. Pep's lovely, but she got annoyed at his distractions, Laura however looked like she wanted to bundle him up and take him home. He fished out one of his cards.

"Ever been to New York?"

"Ah, yes Sir. I actually live there when I'm not jetting around chasing the Accords."

He said, grinning which made him think he didn't even mind a chaotic work schedule and dealing with cranky politicians from all over.

"Well, here's my card, give us a call next time you're in New York and we'll get you squared away. Dealing with grouchy politicians is pain enough. No need to add actual pain to it."

He smiled at the kid who tentatively took the card, eyes wide with shock.

"I'll be expecting to hear from you Mr Jordan Hale, so none of this 'I don't deserve it', because trust me, I'm Ironman and I'll just turn up on your doorstep."

He shot him another grin before heading towards the doors, Laura patted the kid on the shoulder, who was still in shock. It made him feel good to do something nice before heading in, gave him a little boost.

"He will you know."

Laura winked at the kid who professed his thanks about 50 times as they waved and entered the room. Ah good no one was up on the speaker's podium. That made things easier.

"That was nice of you."

"He seems like a good kid, young to be getting in on all this, so obviously smart. He actually seems enthused about working on the Accords, we need more young people in it, even if they're slowly working their way up. Old angry people stuck in their ways infest politics.. It's like getting blood from a stone to change things. It's like they're allergic to change, even monumentally good change for everyone. It's maddening."

Laura grinned at him as they ignored everyone and walked straight up to the podium. T'Challa was one of the many shocked faces, his mouth open in shock and it made Tony grin, so he gave him a thumbs up.

"I think you just like helping people."

"Shush now, it's bad for my image as an evil rich boy who only thinks of himself."

Laura just rolled her eyes as he took the podium, standing a step behind him, head held high as she set up the tablet in front of her. The holoscreen popping up and she manipulated it like a pro who'd been using them for years. Terrifyingly competent that woman. With that set up, it was easy for him to grab the information he needed, and there was a lot. He'd had to fiddle with the buildings WiFi speed or it would take ages to download the information to everyone Stark Pads, even with him forcing it. He did a quick check to ensure everyone had brought them and was not surprised that only a few hadn't. He'd set it up a few weeks ago that each representative got a free one for working on the Accords. In the interest of everything moving smoothly of course. Not because accessing his own tech was easy as pie.
"Hello everyone, the rumors of my demise, retirement or whatever the new one of the week is, have been wildly exaggerated. I hope I haven't missed too much?"

More than a few people cheered, the younger ones, the older ones looked unimpressed with his antics, as usual. He swallowed thickly, trying to look at neutral points in the room as he started getting readings from many people at once, he'd not had much chance to see such a variety of people, and at least two people he'd barely glanced at nearly had him upchucking on his shoes already.

"Unfortunately, I am not here to bring glad tidings. I'm here to present to you multiple violations for someone under the Accords as they're regarding Inhuman, Enhanced Humans, Mutants, And pretty much everyone that is protected by the Vienna Accords as they stand. Hopefully in the future we can give more protections to ensure such a travesty does not happen again.

As you'll see, on your tablets a lot of information is being made available to you. This is also being sent to other authorities as the violations are also against humans. Civilians who did not sign up to protect the world and take on the problems that face such a trying job. "

" Ah, Mr Stark. Are you sure this is the right time for such announcements? This session is televised. Shouldn't this information be sent to interested parties only!?"

The second part was almost hissed, not surprising Jackson was Ross's aid. Hilariously he was one of the few who had not brought his Stark Pad. Ross probably didn't trust it. He didn't seem to realise that people were staring at him. Everett Ross was trying not to laugh over the coms which gave him something to focus on because he was never looking at Jackson again. He'd seen people's colours move in many different ways, he'd not seen someone ooze before. The man was pure slime and it made his skin itch. He checked on the link just because he needed a second to not recover, flashing Jackson his best press smile.

Checking in on the younger Ross and his team took a fraction of a second, they were in place around good ol' Thunderbolts hotel room. It was a shame, he'd hoped to have him arrested here, but he had press 'accidentally' sent to the hotel under sightings of Tony Stark, so that would do. Plus, he wasn't sure he wanted to make himself look at him. If Jackson made him feel like this, he didn't want to know what Ross would be like and he had a long ass speech to cover.

Getting everything recorded was crucial so the slippery fucker wouldn't be able to slime his way out again, like he had the last 3 attempts Rhody and Everett had made. They'd made the mistake of not turning it into a press circus out of professionalism. However, this was something Tony excelled in, slimy people had less of their arsenal surrounded by the press, they were used to the shadows. Whereas Tony had grown up in front of the press, practically constantly in the limelight. Sometimes, the press circus could be handy, they were a pack of starving wolves and Tony was about to dangle a nice rump steak in front of their faces and then toss it at Ross.

"Mr Jackson, this is the perfect time. Accountability is for everyone when it comes to the Accords, not just those of us no longer classed as baseline human. "

He raised an eyebrow to the man whilst looking over his shoulder, it hadn't been long since he'd been formally included under the Accords and not from his signing. They'd recently expanded the criteria to include people of 'unusual levels of intelligence', so even without the suit, he was included now. It was an obvious move to try and gain more control over him. He didn't have to bring it up, he probably could have got his way out of it. However they expected him to try and slip free so he figured, why not lean into it. With the added benefit of showing solidarity to those perceived as less human for things not under their control. Sure it might lose him sway in some areas, people would call him doubly compromised, being an Avenger and an Enhanced Human.
Even if they didn't know how enhanced. The press reacted as he'd planned. The room had also gotten quiet enough for a pin to drop.

"Now, where was I. Yes, the individual in question, as I'm sure you and several key people in law enforcement are now seeing has been quite the naughty boy. He has also evaded 6 attempts to be taken into custody and has tried illegal means to remove the information in front of you from various sources private and public."

"Why has this not been brought to attention before... This is a lot..."

"Yes it is a lot Mr Davenport, I have been collecting information on this individual for a number of years and have tried many times to bring him down. The information was dispirite and various law enforcement simply agencies didn't know too communicate with each other, we'll go with that excuse for why he wasn't already behind bars, shall we? Of course, I am happy to do my duty under the Accords to bring this to you as a signed member. Even though I am still technically signed off on medical leave, I thought this too important to wait much longer."

Ah, the press love that bit. As do quite a few of the countries signed up. American superheroes had gotten a bad rap the last few years, but he'd been working to change that. Mostly behind the scenes, but before Siberia, he'd visited many of these countries to personally help or his repartition teams went in, as Steve didn't want to use the Ex-Shield personnel for much else.

Also, since Carol took over as head, as per his recommendations, they'd been doing more than defeating super villains and end of the world jazz. They were actually working weekly instead of doing jack all between attacks. They'd even helped with wildfires in several countries, only entering after invitation and working with local LEOs.

Plus, people really got a kick out of the American, rich, pampered, white boy working whilst sick. Even if it was from home and not in the suit.

"Now, I'll inform everyone. These charges are not for the faint of heart. So you may wish to mute?"

"I have petabytes of data, videos, written, everything required and I will be honest. If this is swept away and ignored, again, as this information is legally my own. I will release it onto the Internet."

"We don't appreciate threats Dr Stark."

"Dr Malden, I don't not wish to threaten your lovely self or anyone here. But when you have watched the videos you will understand my fervour. Plus precedent was set after the fall of SHIELD was it not? I do not believe that an Amendment to that section regarding releasing of information has been tabled yet."

"I thought you were against the data dump Dr Stark"

"I was, and still am Mr Davenport. It was reckless, too fast and the innocent were hurt. I assure you, this will not be a reckless act. It will not be an ill conceived idea born of desperation. You could call it an act of civil disobedience that will only harm those at fault. The versions I release will completely protect those who have been hurt except the ones who have contacted me and have signed permission for me to release files with their likeness."

He gave a sharp grin, several people were starting to look very uncomfortable.

"Oh, and I also have information pertinent to foreign countries as they have been, lets say, 'quite involved' with this individuals little off the books operations. Oh, and yes people of America, this does include a large dose of tax fraud, misuse of your hard earned tax dollars and bribery."
Now, in general Americans would hate everything on his list, but a lot of it would feel… surreal. Too far removed from their day to day life. But tax fraud? Now that will get people in America angry, and quickly.

"The information I have pertains to so many crimes against humanity that putting this file together over the years has not been pleasant. It is frankly, chilling.

"Human rights violations are never pretty, even if we are talking about people who are seen as less than human by some. Many do include humans who because of this man have been forced into enhancements, mutations, changes to their body against their will. Bodily autonomy seems a fleeting idea, as long as he can create and control his own little private army of super humans, he doesn't care who suffers horrendously, human, mutant, enhanced, inhuman. Whether they are civilians or not, whether they were heavily misinformed volunteers or people literally screaming from cages. If any of his experiments escaped he perused then with a blinding degree of recklessness and endangerment of civilians that make the crimes against the rogues avengers look petty in comparison."

He'd promised Bruce long ago he wouldn't stay his name into anything about this, as much as he wanted to get revenge for his friend, he was a private person. Ross had been a busy man however and Bruce was just a name in a disturbingly long list.

"Human experimentation, reckless endangerment of minors, ethics were just not involved anywhere and aspects of this are straight up torture to those he kept. To those who escaped, their lives were systematically destroyed, reputations ruined, family's threatened, all to force his victims into an easier point of capture. This has spanned several years, in several countries and includes a frankly terrifying amount of property damage. This is coming from me, the man who cleaned up after the Avengers for years. Including New York. This individual has not spent a penny in reparation efforts and has often illegally shifted the blame.

"Much of the damning information I have come by has come from the man's own daughter, she has tried so many times over the years to stop this madness but all she got for it was her life ruined and nightmares. She is strong, fiery and tells me she's looking forward to finally being able to stand in court to decry her father for the monster he is.

"Most recently we come to his violations of creating a secret prison that breaks so many rules I'll be here for an hour listing them. He then illegally detained people, without adequate warrants, in the illegal prison and claimed to be doing it on behalf of yourselves."

People were now muttering angrily and it was obvious who he was talking about. He'd kept eye contact with Jackson occasionally, as much as he could without feeling faint, watching the man pale more and more as he went on, he was worried that the man would pass out soon. Mostly he was speaking into the cameras though, with occasional, very brief pointed looks at people he knew were involved. He could already see arrest warrants piling up on his screen in multiple countries. It looked like people were practically rushing to finally take out the trash.

"I am of course talking about one Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross. Now, whilst I accept the fugitive status of certain individuals and Thaddeus drive to bring them in. Of course in that drive, he has subverted the Accords and the will of the original 117 countries, now a fantastic 139 with 2 more ready to join any day. To take what we want to be a shield, to protect civilians and heroes alike, to guard humans, superhuman, inhumans, enhanced humans, humans with unusual qualities such as very large intellects, which by the way, is quite the compliment. Thank you. Also included androids and artificial intelligence and those seeking personhood.

"That is what the Accords are, protection for all, to take our mistakes of the past, never forget
them, never cover them up, never forget the lives lost, accountability, security. Not a subversion of these great ideals put on paper by the late King T'Chaka and taken up by his son. This shield won't become a noose as long as I'm breathing, from standing in front of you or from my hospital bed, I assure you, I will not give up."

Tony took a breath and stepped back, Laura taking his place, much to peoples confusion. Thinking to himself, that was possibly the longest damned speech he'd ever made, but then he had written it with people around who wanted to add bits and suddenly he had an essay. At least it was suitably dramatic. He gripped the edge of the podium, what he hadn't considered when everyone had made it so damned long was how long he'd be staring at people like Jackson.

"I'm sure none of you will recognise me, except as Dr Stark's amazing new personal assistant of course."

That got her a few laughs from the press, she dealt with him so she must be a Saint.

"My soon to be ex husband is one of the fugitives that was illegally detained. That is not why I am standing here. I'm standing here because Ross sent multiple teams of heavily armed, highly trained men to my farm. A farm I lived on alone with three children, my youngest had not long turned one year old. The others are seven and thirteen years old. They don't understand what is happening, why a man sent tactical teams to raid our home.

"I don't even know anything, after my ex husband left to join this ill advised fight, that was where my information ended. Yet, my home was raided. I don't want to think what might have happened if Tony Stark, 37 hours after waking up from his coma, hadn't abandoned his hospital bed to rescue me. Don't worry, I immediately marched him back into it."

Laura offered a wry smile to the press and they loved it, not many people were a natural with the press, but Laura was like a fish in water. He really was moderately terrified of her and Pepper spending more time with each other.

"after reading what he has done to innocent men, women and children in the past, I do not believe we would have fared well, especially waiving the Accords around as an all access pass. He didn't do this because I was refusing to cooperate with the authorities, I was doing everything I should. That wasn't enough, he wanted to terrorise the families to scare 'them' back. The kind of tactics I'm ashamed to think of happening in this country. Me and my children are human, the law failed to protect me, Ironman didn't. We are not the only family he has brought in from the cold. We stand with him as a real protector, not a villain like Thaddeus Ross."

The explosion of noise is perfect and Laura spins and put her head of Tony's shoulder, he hugged her. She hadn't intended to say so much, he knew, he'd seen her actual speech after all. But this, whilst emotionally taxing is better he thinks. He ignores the press, the flashing and the yelling and just hugs Laura for a few seconds. Upping his body temperature which gets a smile out of her, that she carefully hid in his shoulder.

"Thank you for taking the time today to listen to what we had to say. I'll leave you now to hopefully do what should have been done long ago. Whilst I might be gone, I will be watching."

With that he slowly looked across the room, certain people were standing to leave, others dumb struck, some nauseated just staring at their tablets. Many very annoyed he'd just dumped this in their laps and was buggering off, ah well. He hoped that this would be a wakeup call to them, not just for the Accords council but for people in general. It had become easy to hate the non humans, easy to hate on the superheroes, marching to General Ross's tune. This was a wake up call that humans could be just as terrifying, cruel, dangerous and see themselves as above the law and not
need superpowers or enhancements to do it. That baseline humans, could use the law as they saw fit too. Could see themselves as above it.

He hid a grin as he saw the agenda change for the next meetings, Ross and personhood rights had been bumped to the top. Finally. He'd been rallying for Personhood for weeks now, but Ross had been the wall he couldn't get past. Without that amendment Vision was stuck with his paperwork and it had started to annoy him. Ross had to go for many reasons, but he had to go because he wanted everything in the world for his sythnazoid son. Now he was just that much closer.

He monitored the arrest warrants coming in for Ross and his pals and was amused by the speed and efficiency everything was now clicking into place. No one wanted that data on the Internet, not even him really, but the data dump had left room for a lovely threat. He didn't want to dump it, even with permission, but if he was given no choice, he would. Bruce had never wanted his name dragged through the mud and although he'd had edited it to scrub him out, it would have come back to the Hulk somewhere. Someone would make the connection. Now, things were moving however, he would give the man the option if he wanted to out himself, so to speak. He was possibly one of the most well known of Ross sins. It would also help the case in court, and the court of public opinion, which he needed to keep the pressure on. Without it, Ross could slime out again somehow.

Ignoring that for now, he offered Laura his arm, she smiled and took it after packing up all their stuff. More pictures of them were taken walking away without looking back as Mr Jackson was escorted away in cuffs later he had to admit that was one of his favourite shots, the red flash of Laura's heals, walking away with perfect grace and Jackson's face contorted in anger as the head of the tac team that illegally broken into her home and terrified her children. He might frame it for her.

T'Challa was waiting for them outside along with Jordan who looked flushed and extremely happy.

"That was amazing!!"

The kid actually jumped, kind of awkwardly, but Tony reached out and steadied him. T'Challa was looking highly amused, Tony wasn't sure if Jordan was going to pass out. Heck he wasn't sure that he was going to pass out, his vision what whitening around the edges and peoples colours has dulled, probably from the overload inside. He was still standing however and that was a win, he forced it back and stubbornly stayed to chat with the king and kid.

"I was wondering, would you ah, sign this for me?"

Laura took what he was offering and placed it next to Tony so he could pick it up, thankfully the kid didn't comment on that. He blinked a few times, he hasn't seen this in, well years.

"This. This is my first dissertation on Artificial Intelligence."

T'Challa and Laura leaned over, obviously interested whilst Tony was actually touched. This kid kept it with him incase he turned up? He pulled out his pen immediately and decided to write this kid a note, he looked him up whilst Laura had been talking about how strange it was that he went to college so young based on the date of his dissertation. Probably thinking of Cooper. Laura was still sporting her unamused 'mom face' when Jordan said he went to college early too. He'd also ended up with robotics and artificial intelligence, he was strongly for personhood and a total Vision fanboy. When he turned up to discuss his prosthesis he'd decided to convince Vision to 'accidentally' be there.
"How old were you when you completed this Dr Stark?"

T'Challa has leaned over, looking at the dates, his eyebrows had jumped up a little, probably realising how long Tony had been nigh on obsessed with AIs.

"I finished this up at 17 because I was doing a few others, but the bot and AI mentioned, I built when I was 16. He's my 'first born' and he is still a little menace in my workshop."

He grinned and did the 'dad thing' of showing them a picture of Dum-E, welding a fire extinguisher, whilst himself, Peter and Harley were utterly doused in foam, Tara cackling safely from behind Dum-E. The kid squealed again, T'Challa was still shocked which was amusing to him.

"Here you go kid, I still expect to hear from you, and bring your dissertation, it sounds interesting."

That time he nearly did swoon before having to get back to work.

"Were you trying to make him pass out?"

"What, Laura no, I actually looked him up and he went to MIT, I saw him under some professor's I recognised. The kid started at 16 too which is impressive."

"When did you start?"

"Huh? Oh, I was 14, hey T'Challa, want to join us for lunch?"

Laura looked disapproving of a 14 year old going to college, which Tony found hilarious and made a point to not to tell her stories from his youth that included many older boys getting him plastered with spiked drinks, he'd just kind of thought that was what alcohol did. The pre-Rhodey days were not fun so fun looking back. Better than home but not exactly good either. Rhodey and Carol had made everything much better, even though he wasn't sure how they dealt with him at 14 because he was an ass.

"I'd love to join you two, I don't know how we're going to get out though, it's a circus out there now."

"Oh don't worry, I knew it would be and I have zero intention of holding an impromptu press conference. My CEO and PA would kill me."

He grinned at Laura who rolled her eyes at his antics and headed off to the stairwell to the roof. Laura followed, she'd not been around him long, but she'd been around enough to just go with it when he walked with purpose. Plus it was usually fun, at least that was her excuse to Pepper. After a few flights of stairs nearing the roof, he pulled it his phone so he could tell Laura about Twitter without T'Challa wondering how he knew.

"Hey Agent Mom, you're trending on twitter!"

"What? Me? Why me?! You're the one meant to be trending!"

"Well I am, but you are too, I think you've resurrected that I stand with Ironman tag before Everheart, there are lots about you too."

The two of them pulled out their phones to check making Tony chuckle as he strode out onto the roof. T'Challa was being followed discreetly by 4 of the Dora Milaje that Tony waved too, even
the ones very well hidden by the shadows. The look of shock and confusion on their faces was worth it. When your brain is in the cctv and you can see very well in darkness, he's quite hard to sneak up on. Plus, Wakandan wore tech even more than American, he could feel them. It was potentially of outing himself to T'Challa, or at least a hint, if he thought about it, but things got excused around him easily for being the eccentric genius all the time.

Laura was looking at her phone in shock, pictures of her were being shared by thousands and thousands of people and it was snowballing from there. He could see a smile on her face so she was obviously enjoying her newfound fame.

"Damn, I look good in this suit."

T'Challa was also sharing pictures of the two of them, including himself in the I stand with Ironman. He even added and I stand with Tony. Aww, he really was a Kitty and dammit now it was impossible to be angry at the man. His colours had nixed it pretty much from a glance across the room, damn the man was so earnest, he just wanted to make up for his mistakes and protect his people. Tony couldn't not get behind that. Hence abducting the king for dinner. Plus he was worried what might happen if he stopped moving before he could sit, standing and talking downstairs would not have gone well, he was slightly dizzy but powering through was actually working for him.

The quinjet was almost on top of them when he realised that they hadn't picked somewhere to go yet.

"Any requests for food? I know a few places in DC included this amazing Italian restaurant?"

The others nodded as the quinjet landed, T'Challa looked impressed which considering he came from Wakanda was quite the compliment. Shuri had shown him pictures of what they had available and he was frankly dying to get his hands on them. There was just enough space on board for the 7 of them, especially if Tony and Laura sat in the pilots seats again, T'Challa took one near them and the Dora took up standing positions instead of sitting around the small table. Tony let FRIDAY control the Quinjet too.

"Fry, my baby girl, can you get us a table at Carlluccio's? Something not too obvious, tell Zaz that I've made myself a storm again."

"Sure thing Boss, I'll head for the roof shall I? He should be amused at that."

Tony snorted and figured he was going to get himself a slap on the back of his head, but it was worth it because the food was amazing and he was really hungry. He couldn't eat too much in front of T'Challa, but if he doubled his order, he could eat in the jet on the way home.

"Is that your AI? Is she driving the jet?"

"Yup, FRIDAY is my wonderful girl. Say Hi to the king."

"Hi King T'Challa, and yes I'm the pilot of the jet. Occasionally Boss takes over but he flew here, so I get to fly home and he gets to be lazy."

"Sass, again, on my ship now. I'm sassed at all quarters."

"Well you did code me Boss."

T'Challa seemed amazed that FRIDAY was so smug. On the way to the restaurant he and Laura had fun laughing at the crazy that twitter turned everything into. 140 characters didn't just create
brevity, it seemed to create insanity. Most people were being nice about him, it was a nice change. There were the obvious detractors but if 100% of people were being nice to him, he would be pretty sure that he'd died. T'Challa was chatting up a storm with FRIDAY who managed to draw the Dora into it as well.

"Miss FRIDAY, I can't help but be amazed by yourself, I've been interested in AIs for a while but you are nothing like what else I've seen."

"Why thank you T'Challa, Boss can we keep him, he's so polite!"

"You charming my AIs over there?"

T'Challa just shot him and grin and continued flirting with FRIDAY.

When they arrived at the restaurant he got complained at in Italian for always being followed by chaos. It was then that he noticed that Tony had brought a literal king to his restaurant. Tony was cackling that he'd stunned the man speechless. His daughters would never let him live it down.

T'Challa ate enough that he was starting to think his fighting skills from when they'd fought together before might be more than just being decked out in vibranium. That he might also be enhanced. Tony took this to mean he could eat enough to actually get full, Zazz found his increased appetite amusing but didn't comment beyond smiling at his empty plates. Probably just happy he was eating, his daughters were always of the opinion he didn't eat enough so Zazz heard about it enough.

As they were finishing dessert and Tony was actually starting to struggle, even he was feeling close to full, everyone, including the Dora looked happy and full of food when his phone went off. Oh great. He wanted to sleep, not be yelled at.

"Pep!"

"Tony. The plan wasn't for you to out yourself as not human!"

"It's fine Pep, I only noticed the tagged on amendments about intelligence last night. That didn't cause any fires at SI did it?"

"Well no we're up 7 points and its shows signs of increasing more."

"Pep. Are you calling to yell at me for good things? Because I just ate a lot of food, I'm sleepy and confused. Also T'Challa and Laura are laughing at me now."

He finished up the call with Pepper, she was still mad at him for potentially making himself vulnerable, but nothing bad was falling on SI so as far as he was concerned, no yelling was ruining his overeating happy haze.

He had ordered a ton of extra dessert to take home for the kids which was interesting to transport up to the roof, especially as T'Challa did the same for Shuri.

They dropped T'Challa and the Dora back off on the roof, creating another little media storm of Tony and T'Challa shaking hands, and Tony pulled him in for a hug. What? Playing with the press is fun! Bagheera also turned out to be a lot nicer when he wasn't running all over the planet hunting for his father's killer too.
The trip home was quiet, but a nice quiet, they were both exhausted and way to full they both nearly fell asleep. He didn't celebrate until he stepped into his apartment however, but as soon as he did, he couldn't help but smile. That he'd dealt with the press multiple times, annoying people and a high stress situation and he hadn't fried anything with his abilities or passed out from the colour overload. Things were still a little dim and he didn't feel on top form, but it was definitely a good sign.

For his first outing in public since Siberia, and since he got these abilities, the fact that he didn't do anything 'weird' was a serious plus. Laura went straight to pick up Nate and Tony just face planted the sofa after putting the goodies in the fridge. He decided to doze until people came home, he still felt a little weird. He alternately checked stuff online and enjoyed himself watching videos of Ross being arrested from different angles. Okay, maybe he looped that one, and oh look, how did it end up online? Not from anything traceable to him that's for sure.

Carol and Rhodey got in first, Carol carrying quite a large box.

"What's in the box Sparky?"

"Not a clue, it's for you."

"Oooh presents!"

Carol dropped the box on top of his stomach so he sat up to have a look and realised that it was from T'Challa, he'd included an updated copy of the Accords with his neat print on it. There were a few neat little boxes that had desserts and sweets from Wakanda, that was just really nice. He'd definitely have to tell Shuri about this so she could give the man a break, if only for a few days. Wrapped at the bottom right is what made his jaw drop. Rhodey and Carol had been nosey and poking around the box too, trying to make off with his sweets.

"Holy crap Tones. Is that.. vibranium."

He ran his fingers over it using his metal hand and felt an answering hum, vibranium had a feel about it now that he never used to. Before, if he touched Roger's shield, it was just metal. Nothing else. Now, especially with his metal hand, there was a quiet answering hum. Which told him that yes, this was vibranium. Lifting it up told him it was 5 kilograms of it.

"Does anyone find it hilarious that Howard forked over a ton for a tiny scrap of vibranium, that he had to have stolen and purchase illegally too, ruining any hope of a connection with Wakanda for a dumb shield. Also, seriously, a giant frisbee out of everything you can DO with vibranium! And here I am, the guy who apologised for that, I even offered to send it back but they told me to consider it mine, which was handy considering what we did with it. I've now got both Royals just sending me vibranium presents for no reason!"

"Howard is rolling in his grave right now."

The three of them burst out laughing, Tony wrapped up the metal and personally ran it down to his workshop, locking it up in the floor safe under the server room. He was definitely going to have fun with that, he'd run out of his current supply before he'd filled the hive with the nanites. Now he had positively tons because the tiny robots didn't require much. His fingers itched to build, but the kids would be home soon and the whole lot were going to be piling into his apartment for desserts and to hear about today. He hadn't had a chance to meet Cassie yet either. So he locked the safe and headed home instead, impressed at himself for doing so.

Pretty much as soon as he opened the door, a snap happened. It sounded like a crack but no one
else heard anything, then all the dim colours exploded into brightness and he promptly passed out in front of Carol.

**Tony POV**

**17th September**

Tony had just finished up his run around the compound, Peter had come with him for some of it but his endurance for running was still pretty low, especially compared to him now as he ran often. So, when Peter had bowed out and got ready to head back in. He'd then pushed himself as fast as he could, not the slow increase he normally did and he heard Peters cheer for a few seconds until he was out of range.

He'd pushed himself as hard as possible because today he was going to have an uncomfortable conversation. One that he'd actually been putting off for a while now, but he couldn't anymore. Not after he realised he was procrastinating. So he ran until his legs felt like jelly and he was swaying slightly from exertion as he stood in the shower.

Peter and Harley had practically shoved him into the bathroom to shower because he was utterly drenched. He stayed in a little long, slowly doing his hair and when he started considering putting conditioner in his beard he realised that he was still stalling and he was going to end up late for his appointment if he kept it up.

Sighing as he got out, he did take the time to trim his beard and look at his hair disdainfully. His hair grew faster now, but not normally. It could stay the same for weeks and wake up with it all curly and floofy around his shoulders. He'd not been impressed, and managed to hide from Rhodey and begged Laura to cut his hair. Which went well, except for the fact she'd snapped a photo when she opened the door after seeing him through the doorbell camera. She now cut his hair anytime the floof exploded. The photo was framed on her mantlepiece, so far no one had looked to close at it… but it was waiting for him. He'd tried to steal it 5 times and failed every time too.

His hair wasn't that long today, but it was a good 3 curly inches longer than it should be and Laura was with Meg and the kids in the arcade. There had been a lot of media chaos since their UN speech, Laura however was loving it and looked more confident than ever. She'd also told him that now she was being paid, wearing horrendously expensive clothing was fun. Which considering when she first arrived and looked at horror at the prices of the standard stuff FRIDAY ordered, was very amusing. Now she was looking at getting more bespoke suits herself rather than the kids and FRIDAY ordering then. The difference a little time and confidence makes could be pretty amazing. He was hoping to take her car shopping soon, they were both interesting influences on each other, that's for sure.

They'd be meeting up later to take the kids out, he'd get his haircut then before they left. For now it could be part of his 'clever disguise'. He slipped on Rhodey's oversized black hoodie that was so faded he had no idea what had been on it once. A pair of black jeans combat boots and a ball cap. Grabbing the black mirrored sunglasses too. There, he looked absolutely nothing like Tony Stark.

He took the lift down to the garage and picked one of his more nondescript cars. It was black and didn't look to flash or expensive on the outside. On the inside it was a completely different beast. Which considering this one was called Beast, that worked. Harley had pointed out that making a nondescript car affectively roar with the engine he'd chosen ruined the undercover theme, but you'd be surprised how many people ignore it because it doesn't look flash. Street racers were pretty much the only people he got side eye glances from, mostly because they thought he was one which
had been hilarious and 'not at all dangerous Rhodey!' He was an exceptional driver, even with Rhodey yelling at him to slow down.

Tony peeled out of the garage and headed to the park where he had arranged the meet up. Even with the mostly empty roads, it took about an hour for him to reach the park far enough away that if someone potentially recognised him, it would be easy to call doubt into it.

He parked near where he was heading, making the rest of the journey on foot, throwing up a scrambler so he wouldn't show up on any CCTV that might catch him. He needed to work on the scrambler, it currently turned him into a weird, dodgy TV show version of a ghost. Where static mostly replaced his image. People trying to take a picture would be cursed with unfocused images. Heavily frustrating he suspected, so highly amusing for him. He also got FRIDAY to keep watch as he knew he wouldn't be able to talk and monitor, scramble and scan people whilst having an awkward conversation he didn't want to have. He could multitask very well, but certain conversations required more attention.

Convinced he was as covered as he could get, which also had him wondering why he hadn't just picked up one of the updated Veils. He'd been slowly going through everything SHIELD had and either scrapping it or making it better. Not that he had any idea who developed half the stuff in the first place, which sucked when he potentially wanted to collaborate with the original creators, or needed them to make sense of it. Even if they were recorded with a creator, they could be Hydra, or one of the many he'd not had time so save. He had a lot of Ex-SHIELD personnel but none of them had any idea who'd developed half the weird stuff in the SHIELD bag of tricks. Not all of it was even worth fiddling with and some stuff, there was just no way in hell he was touching.

He still needed a name for his Ex-SHIELD division too. When it had just been a few, they'd just been staff at the compound, but now with the amount of agents he'd found and snapped up, they were becoming a department in itself, and he knew that many of them disliked being referred to as SHIELD in anyway, most very angry at the agency after the SHYDRA fiasco. A wing of the compound was officially HQ for them and they had a variety of jobs.. It wasn't fair to just keep calling them SH-

'Da, your stalling again.'

'Dammit. Your right baby girl. But we do need to name our wayward agent adoption unit.'

'True Da, but later. Now get out of the car.'

'I thought I was the Boss here?'

'What on earth gave you that idea?'

She sniped back at him, sending him a brush of code to give him some confidence as he finally left the car, she retreated from his mind into the portable block he kept for her in his pocket. Usually away from home she used his phone, tablet, suit or carried a small piece of herself in his mind, apparently none of them were perfect solutions and paled in comparison to being home. So he'd hooked up with Shuri whilst he'd been writing a selection of algorithms for Barnes. Apparently she thought writing 7 different algorithms for him was 'too much' so he'd shelved the other 5 and stopped writing the one he was on. Maybe he was obsessing, but it was for a good cause of saving the world from potential triggered assassin's.

After that, he'd told her about SHIELD's Toolbox and how he wanted to build something like it,
that FRIDAY could use as her *going out clothes*. FRIDAY could access WiFi from it but nothing could get in, only Tony but only with FRIDAYS permission as this was like her little caravan or something. But he'd been banned from calling it that. Instead of Toolboxes cube like state, Friday wanted something based on triangles, because triangles are powerful and strong, apparently. What she didn't consider that having a little vibranium pyramid in his pocket was kind of stabby. Or she did and found it amusing. Could be either really.

'Da!'

'Sorry, I was thinking about your little home away from home, have you thought of a name ye-'

'Da, stop lurking in the shadows and I'll think of a name.'

'Fine!'

Tony had been stood under a tree, looking at the back of Sharon's head as she sat on a park bench scanning the park diligently looking for him whilst he was skulking in the shadows thinking off names for stabby pyramids. He sighed internally moving up towards the bench, a sign of his changes that he moved silently without really intending it, so much so that Sharon didn't actually notice him till he hopped over the back of the bench and sits down next to her.

She sucked in a breath and then looked at him, squinting at him.

"Tony..?"

"Hey Shaylo."

"You have gotten much better at disguising yourself."

She offers him a smile but he struggled to return it and this is why they need to talk. He can see her hands twitching in her lap.

"Come on, let's go to Macs."

She nods and damn it's killing him because she's sad and its in Tony's instinct to *stop* that. It's worse now because he can See it painted around her, out of the corner of his eye as he's avoiding looking directly at her. He knew that she'd been bouncing around jobs since everything went down, he'd made sure that she didn't face any legal repercussions, but that was about it. The silence is awkward as they cross the road, and Tony kept thinking of things to say and promptly abandoning them.

He can't not to look at her, of course, she's suffering and it's killing him because he can't protect her from herself and she's hidden their relationship from everyone at her work so he couldn't really do anything there. Which yeah, he gets it. She's spent her life trying to climb out of Aunt Peggy's shadow. Adding Tony Stark to that isn't going to make that easier, but he could admit to himself, only in the quiet of his mind. It hurt a bit.

"Tony, how.. How have you been. I've not heard from you in months and that.. That picture."

Her voice cracks, dammit he feels like scum of the earth but he's hurt too and he's starting to learn that he can't just stuff that down anymore. That he has to look after himself occasionally, even if the only reason he's doing it is for the kids, well, Carol doesn't have to know that.

He offers her his right hand and relief floods her and she grabs onto him like she's trying to
convince herself that he's there. He orders a ridiculous amount of sweet breakfast foods, after that run he's starving, he needs the calories and Belgian waffles will help, Sharon orders a normal human sized English breakfast with all the trimmings and damn now he wants that. He adds it to his order and to stagger his waffles so they don't get cold whilst they indulge in their little British tradition. Jarvis and Peggy got them both eating them as kids and frankly, it's kind of annoying.

Finding a decent English breakfast outside of Britain is a *chore*, and as for making it themselves? Have you seen how many parts there are to an English breakfast. Seriously, even if they refuse to eat the fried tomatoes, because ew, it's still so many different pieces cooked in different ways and yes he's stalling again.

"You have no idea how much I keep stalling on this. I've been talking to myself about a new name for all my adopted SHIELD agents to just now discussing English breakfasts in my mind and how annoying it is trying to find good ones in America."

"I can't believe how many awful breakfasts we tried before we stumbled in here, utterly hungover, feeling wretched and boom."

He offers her a quick smile before drinking some of his coffee. The other handy thing about Macs apart from divine food, nice owners is that it's a basement pub, you open the door and are faced with just these stone stairs down. That when you are still a little drunk had made him think he was entering some kind of dungeon, but at the bottom of the stairs everything is cosy and it really does feel like they'd been transported across the pond. Harder to be followed or photographed in too. Peggy had loved it, the staff behind the bar are Brits too. Some of the servers are American but they don't try and put on awful accents. The people who own the place, there are 6 of them and not a single one of them have the same accent and not a one of them sounds what Americans think all British people sound like. It's hilarious bringing American friends here.

He sighs and realises he's doing it again.

"I'm sorry I didn't come and talk to you sooner Shaylo. I was just too.. Angry."

He glanced at the wall next to him, reading the random framed things on the wall. Pictures, newspaper clippings, just, weird stuff that some Brit pubs have on walls that Peggy loved.

"You don't look angry.. You look sad."

Tony pulled off the jumper because even he was warm down here, putting the cap on the side too, leaving his glasses on which he can see hurts her feelings but he needs answers before he can tell her that. He brings his attention back to her and tries to keep his voice to not tremble because she's family dammit and he's never needed to wear a mask around her.

"How was the funeral?"

"It was.. A funeral. I'm sorry you couldn't come."

"Yeah well, Rogers would of had questions and then he would have started a fight and they never go well for me. Plus I could barely take a second to breathe before I had to put out more fires back then anyway."

She frowns at him and he realises it probably because he practically snarled out Roger's name. He will have to be careful about that.

He'd grieved in his own way for Aunt Peggy, he spent the day drawing when he could finally stop running around with the Accords, something he hadn't done in a while. He drew until he had a
finished piece with Aunt Peggy in different times. With a slash of red lipstick, holding him at the funeral, hiding her chocolate stash from him, that perfect year when she was his guardian after the accident after they died. Rhodey was impressed and it's now over the fireplace. However, now everyone knows he can draw, the shock always makes him smile. Whilst he isn't amazing, he had to draw schematics and people are oddly easy. He had to learn how people moved to design…

"What happened Star? You just utterly vanished from everything for months, all I had was that picture."

"I could ask you the same question, what happened?"

She grimaced and looked away from him, he counted back from ten and tried to level it his voice so he sounded less sharp.

"Just… Why Shaylo. Why did you do it?"

"I'm… Not sure. He made me feel special, for me. Just me. He kissed me. But I'm… I'm just confused Star, everything just happened so fast and next thing you know I have no one, no job and I'm in this shitty B&B with loud obnoxious people, but even they're not alone."

Tony gave her hand a squeeze, he feels bad for her, he hates that one man just rampage into their lives and left them both broken.

"You could have come to me. Spoke to me, got a message to me. Damn smoke signals or a call to FRIDAY. I was busy but I would never not answer when you call."

"Except these 2 months. That's how I knew I fucked up, you know. I don't know what I did, but hearing your voicemail for the first time… that.."

"Hurt?"

She nodded, looking thoroughly miserable, gripping his hand with both of hers, ignoring her leaf juice entirely as if she's worried if she let's go he'll leave. Damn, it's just impossible to keep his anger around these people and it's actually making him mad. Why can't he just rage, why does he have this compulsion to help when he wants to be pissed.

"By the time I got word about the other soldiers, I just needed the stubborn dick to stop. Come in. Stop fighting and talk. I mean I can take cars being dropped on my head, but it isn't fun you know."

She flinched, sympathy in her eyes, she'd obviously seen the clashes of the dramatically named civil war.

"How. How's Jim"

Tony grinds his teeth, jaw locked. It still racked him about Rhodey, he was looking at avenues he could help, one was Extremis. Not his version obviously, he stripped the code back to barebones again. Now he was about to be in the same room as Stephy without passing out. Maybe he could help. Until then he could focus on the bracers.

"Not enjoying PT, his torture lady keeps coming after me too, I've been tinkering with his wheelchair though, it has some interesting features. He wants me to install a small ledge at the back so I can stand on it and he can zip around. He's handling everything so well, but I think having Carol there helps. The constant mutual pining neither of them can see is taking up most of
his brain. The kids help too."

"Kids?"

"Uh, yeah. You got a lot to catch up on. But I need to.. I need to do this first."

She nodded, and looked down, obviously waiting for him to shout at her but Tony doesn't think he can.

"Telling him about that shoot to kill order, that, that was bad Shay. Surely you had to know that. And God the shield. Why did you give him the Damned shield. Howard made that stupid Frisbee-"

"I.. I thought it was better that I gave them to him, than have him hurt people trying to get it. I felt like I had to do something to help him, and that was all I could think of. Damn, I was worried that he'd get hurt or killed in a fight without it… that the soldiers would kill him…"

"Instead he used it to hurt me, and he nearly killed me with it."

Sharon POV

Sharon visibly paled, he stomach clenching painfully and her breath leaving her like a punch. 'What?!' He practically whispered the last bit to her, cold and without any inflection at all. For all the rage that Tony Stark can burn and burn with. Sharon knows that Tony is at his most dangerous when he freezes over. When he goes cold. Like there are too many emotions burning up inside him, too much rage, to much anger, that it all whites out into a cold, lasting rage that lasts and lasts and thaws when the target is dead, cold and forgotten.

That's when he lets his intellect take over and nothing else. She'd never heard it directed at her, even peripherally, she'd only heard him talk like that a few times in his life. She doesn't let go of his hand though, she refuses to let go, he's mad but he doesn't want her scared of him, she knows that. This isn't something Tony can control, he's never been able to go to the static, cold place on command. Unless more had changed in these months than she can even conceive of. This, this is directed at Steve. Yeah she handed him the shield. She isn't scared but he still looks dangerous and she's not sure how to bring him back so she just kept talking to him.

"What do you mean Tony, why did he do that, what happened? When I saw you in the hospital, I thought it was the Winter Soldiers."

She nearly lost him, again. She's nearly lost him so many times but this time she can now trace it back to a decision she made, and if he had died, all that lost time because she didn't want people connecting them, especially after he came on as a consultant… seemed so pointless now.

Tony sucks in a breath like he's emerging from something and she hopes he's coming back but he just looks broken instead.

"He killed my mom Shay."

"Tony, your parents died in a crash, didn't they?"

"No, Hydra used Barnes as the weapon to kill them because fucking Howard was trying to remake that damned serum. His obsession with Rogers got them killed using Rogers best friend as the weapon and Rogers fucking knew."
This is, this is bad. This was already a painful moment in Tony's past that never fully healed and that got ripped open again every year. And Steve knew? She knows that Tony opened up to him about this.

"He knew for fucking years Shay. For years he was in my home. For years he used my money and resources. Years, he lied, whilst berating me for not telling him something when I was spiralling in a fucking haze of PTSD and the witches magic. And I exploded at him, I just, I needed to burn and rage at them or you know what would have happened. "

"I know Star, but you stopped right? "

Tony's laugh makes her flinch because no one should hear family hurt like that.

"No Shay, he took that shield and slammed it at my head over and over until he ripped my mask off. Then he raised it to slam down again.. He.. I think he changed his mind at the last second and he drove it into the arc reactor. Do you have any idea the force behind a vibranium shield shattering to kill one of my arc reactors. It shattered my sternum. Turned my ribs into fucking shrapnel. Then he left me in a metal coffin in Siberia. But do you know what's worse. "

She couldn't speak so she shook her head

"Like you, when I left for Siberia, I still fucking cared. Let him twist me up, I purged the tracking data. No one knew I was there but 3 people and Rogers lied to 2 of them and said I was fine. I even told him that no one knew I was there."

She doesn't ask him how long. Because he would have told her if he was going to. Instead she just adds a confession of her own.

"I think I loved him."

"Rogers fooled us both didn't he. Used us until he got what he wanted and left. "

"Yeah, Gods Star, I'm so sorry."

"S'okay Shaylo, it's not on you. We both got played."

He huffs out a laugh and offers her a weak smile in time for their breakfasts to arrive. They swap some things over like they always do, much to Rhys' amusement who goes away muttering about barbaric Americans, Tony and Shay offer the man matching smiles, pretending to be innocent. The man just grins before disappearing behind the bar. She can tell Tony feels better, she's not sure if she will be able to sleep for a while, hearing her cousin choke out those words will definitely stick in her mind.

"I didn't come back in one piece Shay, Rhodey had to use that crazy version of Extremis I told you about. Nothing else was getting me out of that coma and if it had, I'd be blind with multiple amputations."

Fuck, her cousin has a brutal way of talking sometimes, but then the two of them never bothered beating around the bush. Plus it seemed to have cracked the dark atmosphere around them. He tapped the back of his hand, revealing the black metal and carried on shoveling food away at an alarming, utterly un-Tony, pace. He always had issues with food, falling back on those odd smoothies far to often, or just plain forgetting to eat on engineering binges, but now his plate is emptied before she's even finished a quarter of hers, and he's eyeing her plate too.

She grabs his hand, his fucking metal hand, and slides her plate to him. Swapping it with his empty
one and gets a shy smile for it. He must have an increased caloric requirement, that's why he ordered like 20 waffles.

"It's good to see you eating this much. I mean, I wish you didn't have to nearly die again. But Peggy would be happy."

He barked out a laugh as she watched everything on her plate, even the mushrooms he'd traded off! Vanish just as fast.

"This hand is cool, you'll show me how it works done day?"

"Could come to the workshop today? I know.. I know you don't want me giving you a job but, Shay, come work at the compound. I want you close. All this has made me want my family fucking safe and your out in the cold and dammit I get why you didn't want to be linked with me, to make it on your own. You did it, now, please just let me bring you in?"

"Yes."

Tony jaw drops open and she can't help but laugh. Having him nearly died in her again? All that time lost because she was stubborn?

"Fuck, didn't think you'd say yes."

"I mean if you don't have space.."

"Come off it cuz, I build you a room in all my properties."

Well that's the final nail in the guilt coffin.

"Hey, you don't have to be guilty, I get it, it's hard to grow up in someone's shadow, but there is nothing wrong with letting it be easy for a bit. I know that's like a foreign language to you. But we've hurt enough, let's let it be easy. Come meet my kids, because I have kids now. Seriously there's like a hoard of them."

"Always knew you'd make a great dad."

"Always thought I'd been too fucked up by Howard to risk it. But they kind of just turned up and Harley kicked me in the shin."

He shrugged and she burst out laughing, utterly giggling and couldn't stop, he slipped his hand under the tables and suddenly they were inundated with waffles. She figured she could steal one without him biting her hand.

"You have 20 waffles, I'm sure you can spare one. I'm switching your name from Star to the black hole you now have instead of a stomach."

Tony glanced around whilst she was nibbling at one of the waffles and Tony was demolishing the food. Damn she wish Peggy had been around for this, she'd have had a field day getting Tony to really eat and not pick. Bastard was still skinny though.

"I think we're safe from the Brits invading."

She glances up in question and he finally slipped the glasses off and the main thing she felt was relief. He wasn't keeping them on to guard against her. It was hard to be really shocked about the change in his eyes after that.
"Any other surprises you hiding there?"

She quipped at him. Eyebrow raised.

"Yup, but they're harder to reveal here."

He didn't do anything dramatic but he rubbed at the smile lines around his mouth with the wipes that came with the syrup swamped pancakes and she blinked as they literally came off.

"Anything else and people might notice."

"When we get to the car you are going to show me everything Star, does this mean we actually look the same age now?"

"Yup, my kids know about you by the way, I couldn't not tell them, but everyone at the compound is going to be very confused. You want a job at the old SHIELD wing? Or are you thinking something else?"

"I don't know. I've not really… Wow I could do anything."

"Could go to school too, from the compound if you like, it a lot bigger now. You're a natural at code. Train the newbies if you still get a kick out of it like Peggy."

They both snickered at that, it had always been fun to watch Peggy drill the newbies, when she was young she'd sit on Tony and they'd both watch her. Only way she could get either of them to sit still and stop snooping.

It was quite fun watching Tony destroy all the waffles. He slipped the glasses on several seconds before she heard footsteps, and she was only straining to hear them because him putting the glasses on was a clue. Extremis definitely had changed a lot.

"Cheat."

Tony just stuck his tongue out at her and over paid his usual amount when they came here. The staff had just learned to deal with it or Tony got imaginative at leaving them money. It was rarely a good idea to let Tony get overly imaginative about things.

When they got back to the car she raised an eyebrow at him. This car was also surprisingly good at blending, she wondered when Tony had actually gotten good at this. He'd never been great at blending in, better at standing out with ease.

Then he turned on the car, somehow, because he wasn't touching anything. And then the car sodding roared.

"I take back my comments of subterfuge. You suck. Also when is the last time you cut your hair, you look floofy."

"Two days ago and trust me it's been worse, I woke up once with it round my shoulders. It looked awful. Laura, who usually cuts my hair, was busy before I left so I figured I'd leave it. People are less likely to recognise me under all this hair."

"Good point, by the way, how did you start the car?"

"If I said with my brain would you believe me?"

"No, so it's Friday?"
“Not me Shaylo, Boss really can manipulate tech with his mind.”

It would have been easier to accept if Tony hadn't pulled his sunglasses off at that point and waggled his eyebrows at her. She rolled her eyes as Tony peeled out into the street fast enough to pin her to the chair. She had to get herself a car like this.

"Boss, I came up with a name."

"Name?"

"Oh yeah, I made this little thing to make it easier for FRIDAY to travel. I mean, part of her can come in the suit or my phone or even in my mind now, but it's not like her servers back home, so it limits her when she comes out, not as much oomph apparently. I read about this cube SHIELD had, Toolbox, were SHIELD got vibranium from, I do not know, or want to know. I had some vibranium, so with some help I made her a portable, tiny server. But she didn't want a cube. She wanted a pyramid because triangles are superior. Personally I think she just wanted it to stab me in the leg. "

He fished it out of his pocket and he passed it over to her without taking his eyes off the road for a second. She noted that even though Tony now knew his parents didn't die in a car crash, he was still obsessed with his eye contact with the road.

The little pyramid was matt black, like Tony's hand with like gaps that a blue light shining through that made her think multiple holo screens could pop up from either face.

She really couldn't wait to see his cousins workshop. She'd seen bits on calls but going to the tower wasn't something they could get away with, from SHIELD keeping a track on her, then on him after Afghanistan. So they met up elsewhere generally.

She looked forward to this being her new normal.

Well as normal as you can get living with your super powered, hero cousin, in the building where he collected and stored other superheroes and your ex colleagues like stray cats. Oh and it was ruled over by a benevolent AI.

At least her and FRIDAY has always gotten on, these past months without contact with Tony had also left her without contact with FRIDAY and the shock to her had been how that seemed to affect her more than losing her job. That had been her wake up call.

"I'm going to call it a Pyrabyte"

"And I'm the one who is banned from naming things."

She sat back and enjoyed listening to Tony and FRIDAY banter. It might take a while for him to forgive her properly, but she decided that she'd happily work for it.

Oddly, as soon as she decided that, Tony reached over and squeezed her shoulder, smiling to himself.
Chapter End Notes

This chapter, in no way, causes chaos in the future...

XD
Tell The World

Chapter Summary

AIs taking things into their own metaphorical hands.
Fun times with the kids.
And a press conference!

Also, Bruce is about and might not be impressed with what has happened in his absence...

Chapter Notes

*Sows more seeds of Chaos*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

20th September

After an insane breakfast, who would have known adding one tiny little girl would seemingly make the already crazy breakfasts, well, crazier.

Fun though, definitely fun, when all the kids got back from school, sadly not including Peter who had dinner tonight with May, the rest of them were heading to Central Park and he had a feeling Laura, who had rejigged the child wrangling duty, had done it specifically that Tony was on duty for all future Central Park days, and that Meg had collaborated on the whole thing. Why were women always ganging up on him?

He was in his lab with his current favourite obsession that had actually slightly overtaken making new suits, well, crazier.

Extremis had changed that, had practically revolutionised that, he hadn't actually hit a maximum number of nanites under his control yet and he had vastly increased the amount available.

Extremis had made him completely connected to his tech in a way his implants could not have hinted at. When he'd first woken up and got his head around everything, he'd expected it to be like his implants. It was hard to even explain the difference, the contact was like between dipping the tip of your finger in vs full body submersion. It was so different that having the nanites around actually felt good instead of an effort to manipulate them. The sensors on each bot became extensions of his own senses, so he liked having a lot available. It was.. comforting. It felt natural,
like when you go quiet to hear something, that natural reaction was how the nanites were with his system.

Also, it would be really hard to shove a shield into his chest and get abandoned without power in fun holiday locations like in the middle of nowhere, Siberia edition.

The current lot he was working on were even smaller than the last version, and he'd been either cannibalising, upgrading or simply breaking down all the others until they were all up to date. Getting the nanites any smaller would lose functions, which was why he was making a big push at this version.

He had 3 hives full and yet he was still making them as well as developing different types of hives too. The watch gauntlet was an obvious place to start, it would be much smaller than the arc reactor hives, not enough nanites to form a suit, maybe a full gauntlet to the shoulder if need be.

He glanced down and figured maybe this would be a good stopping point for now, as he was thinking up new ways to make them, and he had a feeling that didn't lead down a good path. Yeah, that idea whilst interesting, very interesting... It had a lot of potential-

His phone trialled at that moment, shattering his thought process making him forget what he'd been thinking about so hard. Slipping on his glasses he made a flick gesture from his phone and the call switched to one of the larger holo screens. He had been working on not using gestures, but it somehow felt more natural to use them. Which was weird because his ability didn't stem from his hands, maybe too much media and films of people with powers like telekinesis had his mind thinking the gestures help. Or just years of working on his holo screens.

Answering the call he pushed his chair into view to see a slightly baffled Shuri.

"What's up Kit-Kat?"

She huffed out at his new nickname today, but she was quite amused at something too, her hand over her mouth like she was trying to stop laughing.

"Had breakfast with the kids did you?"

"Yeaaaahh.. Why?"

"Didn't look in a mirror before you went to the lab either?"

"Dammit, I didn't let anyone near me with Nutella!"

Shuri doubled over, cackling at him. He tentatively suck his hand in his hair because that's what the kids usually went for, and found himself engulfed in a cloud of powdered sugar. Whilst choking on powdered sugar still tasted nice, it is not pleasant. He leveled a glared at Shuri who was too busy laughing to talk and he bolted to the bathroom.

5 minutes later, him reappearing, slightly damp with freshly washed hair. It was enough to set Shuri off again. He, like a mature adult stuck his tongue out at her whilst adding his hair goop so he didn't end up all curly and fluffy.

"Yuck it up Princess. So, apart from laughing at me, what's on today's docket."

"Oh you know, the usual joy I feel dealing with integration of your binary systems."

"Ahhh, yeah, that's been keeping me up. Did the last batch of files help any. I think we're getting
closer to something that works efficiently."

"T'Challa was fine with version 7, he thinks that because we're at version 42 means we are crazy you know."

"So far none of the versions have been quick enough to take the coded alterations to the Barf system without sending packets back and forth like snail mail."

Tony scowled at that, by now he had hoped to create something of a shared server that worked with both of their systems, and they had to a degree. But the sheer amount of data they were sending back and forth for BARF was apparently very good at highlighting problems. Sure the other versions would be fine to help the world integrate with Wakanda. But neither Shuri nor him liked the word 'Fine'. Plus it was too slow integrating with his systems, even with the BARF data, and they ended up with the computer version of traffic jams. Which turned out to be more frustrating than actual traffic jams.

"How is he taking to it anyway? I know it's only been 8 days..? How are you handling it?"

Shuri just raised her eyebrow anytime he asked about him. Causing Tony to roll his eyes behind his glasses and point out he only cared because of the use of his tech. Plus reading those Hydra files had been haunting.

"Everything is going fine and I'm learning your tech too. How many disciplines did you cross making these damned glasses anyway?"

Tony just gave her a toothy grin at that. If anyone understood learning a new subject overnight, it was her. She just huffed at him again and rolled her eyes. T'Challa had taken to mocking her for communicating in eye rolls and snark, and he, in smirks and sarcasm.

"I just finished getting through all the data for your hand and Hydra. I think ours is far superior."

"Of course it is, we built it instead of Nazis, and it isn't a torture device."

Shuri had paled a little at that he kicked himself, Shuri must not have come to that conclusion herself but she'd already spun and he saw a hologram behind her spring up his files about the hands and the original metal arm. There wasn't much he could do.

"I… how did I not see this?!"

"I've been neck deep in Hydra since DC.. After a while I expect this of them so it was easy to see. If I never have to look at a Hydra file again it will be too soon."

He didn't bother hiding the shudder, it really had been horrifying reading everything. After a nice of nightmares from Afghanistan of all places, somehow triggered by reading about Barnes conditioning. Rhodey had told him to stop reading, to let FRIDAY comb for pertinent information and only read that. Which is what Rhodey thought he did, because Rhodey thought he was punishing himself, he wasn't, not really, he just didn't want to be blindsided with information again. He didn't want to miss anything important so he'd read anything he could get his hands on. He was now intimately familiar with Hydra and their barbaric ways.

"Anyway, let's just.. Pin that for now. I'm calling because there was twice the normal amount of data you sent yesterday with the integration codes."

"Huh, oh yeah, I updated the algorithm from the scans you sent, nothing new."
"Tony."

"You used my name!! YES, this means I can eventually get Peter to stop calling me Mr Stark!"

Shuri shook her head, although she was smiling at his antics so that was good.

"Tony. You didn't just 'update' the algorithm. You wrote 3 new ones!"

Well, in his defence he'd been unable to get to sleep and Tara had been sleeping on his chest. So he pulled up the data in his mind and started writing.

"Pffft, You say that like it's something big. I still feel bad and this is something I can do from the other side of the planet without ever seeing him. It's perfect. Plus the world is better off without 10 words and a compliant murder-cube."

Shuri mouthed the words 'Murder-cube' whilst looking slightly perplexed, she'd told him more than once that his propensity for nicknames was so random that even she couldn't keep up. She was still stuck on Underoos.

"That just sounds like a lot of justification to me. He's hopeful about it but the data draws are hitting him hard after, what did you call them, the fluffy bunny levels."

"Ah! That wasn't me. After naming it BARF, FRIDAY and CERBERUS decided I needed help naming things."

"Chief, the first thing people do when you hand them BARF is look at ya like you're crazy and then mentally rename it when talking to patients."

Tony grinned hearing CERBERUS deep Scottish voice join the conversation. His youngest was getting braver each day.

"See what I'm dealing with here Shuri? Sass."

"Hi CERBERUS! I've not spoken to you yet!"

"He was waiting until we have the integration down, I'm pretty sure he and Fry are going to come and visit you soon."

Shuri squeals and Tony rolls back to his workstation to let his kids chatted to Shuri as the latest data Shuri had been sending started to trickle through.

You'd think the prospect of having two AIs come knocking would, you know, be nerve racking or something, especially to Wakanda. But Shuri was far to much like him, she'd also been not so subtly asking about AIs for a while, and he was considering asking FRIDAY if she minded letting Shuri have a look at her base code. Anyone else, he knew she'd say no, but also if it was anyone else, he wouldn't even consider it, but all his AIs had a soft spot for Shuri. DUM-E and U loved it when she called, BUTTERFINGERS did too but she wanted to meet her in person. FRIDAY absolutely adored Shuri. FRIDAY made sure to inform him of this fact, often.

He wondered if Shuri had worked out that the little present boxes lately had not all been coming from him, whilst some were, many came directly from the AIs.

Their gift giving was interesting, to say the least. FRIDAY had sent him a disco ball lamp yesterday and he had no idea what to do with it. He couldn't regift it or anything because that would be mean and more importantly, FRIDAY was practically God of all his domain. Also,
CERBERUS tended to get grumpy if he even thought his sister was upset. So there was now a disco ball lamp next to his bed. Luckily Rhodey hadn't seen it yet. Maybe he could show the three girls, and if one of them loved it.. Then he couldn't possibly not give it to them..

He tapped his fingers as more packets finally came through, actually remembering to use his hands on the keyboard even if it felt so slow, like he was walking through mud. Shuri’s attention was on the AIs, but he was still partially in view.

The data from draw 7 and 8 puzzled him before he even opened the packets. There shouldn't even be a draw 7 and 8, even his mind had only taken 5, most people topped out at 3, 4 at the very most for severely traumatic incidents. Barnes' brain had been practically rewired, rewritten and programmed over though and he knew going in that it was going to be a challenge, knew when he sent BARF to Wakanda. Somehow it was above even his expectations.

As much as Shuri was joking about him being actively involved, he realised looking at this... he wouldn't of had a choice.

Sure, maybe the basic algorithms might have done something, but factoring in draw 8, even the most complex of them would have achieved a 6.4% chance of disassociation, at best. None of the ones he'd sent so far, which had gotten past 80% last night, even tapped out at 51% now, and that was the best of the three.

He frowned at the screen, he needed more than the base code readouts from the draws, but this was now venturing into territory he did not want to go into. The next level still wouldn't show him anything personal, Shuri would black out all of that. Thankfully. It was easy to black out anything like that to level 3. Anything higher.. Yeah he didn't want to think about that. Level 2 still required patient approval though, which required the patient to know who was fiddling with their brain and he really, really, really did not want him to know it was him.

Plus, he'd probably refuse all treatment at the mention of his name anyway, and then Rogers would get all righteous and angry about Tony being too morally bereft to be allowed in his besties brain, that he had ulterior motives other than trying to right a wrong. He wanted to remain unknown in this, do something good to balance out what he did in Siberia. No credit, also no extra vitriol. Was that too much to ask for? Barnes finding out he was involved meant Rogers knowing, what with them being the romance of the ages or something.

All it would result in would be the Winter Soldier still active in the world and Shuri at risk because of it. Because Rogers wouldn't let them keep the man on ice forever, he also doubted Rogers would take the words seriously. Oh he would, in one way, as a threat to Barnes. But that they could turn Barnes into the threat? He doubted it would even occur to the super soldier.

He rolled back into the frame, looking grim and disturbing the current conversation. That was about, of all things, how to upscale a party popper into a cannon. Yeah, he didn't know if he wanted to hide from that or get in on it. He definitely didn't want the compound kids getting in on it. Okay. Maybe he did. Laura would kill him.

"8 draws is.. Too much. And scrap the algorithms I sent you, they're tapping out at 50% now, I'd got them up to 83% last night."

"I still don't quite get all the algorithms you're sending, I've been focusing on the draws."

"74 is the magic number. We need a 74% match or the patients mind actively fights the algorithm, significantly lowering chances of dissociation. 95% is the number I prefer things to be at, personally."
“What's the difference as long as the memory is disassociated in the end?”

“Whether Barnes has to watch and live through himself being tortured 3 times or 300 times.”

“Ooookaaay. I won't mock your obsessive coding anymore. Promise. 8 seems to be it for the data draws though, can't you use that?”

He scratched his beard thinking, he could possibly write a few algorithms for each draw, but he'd had to teach Shuri about them so she'd know which to use or be directly involved.

“Possibly, but you'd have to switch algorithms with each memory to find out which one works and I'd have to teach you about how they work. Ideally, you have 1 for the whole lot and I just don't have the data to write it.”

She nodded and didn't seem gung-ho for that idea, neither did he. He'd love to teach her about it but it would take longer than either of them would like.

“What do you need?”

“I need the next level up of encoded information. But you're going to have to scour it for potential confidential information, there shouldn't be much at that level but just in case, oh, and get permission to send it.”

“We could just tell him that you designed the glasses and then he can decide what to send. This feels like you are making things harder on yourself.”

“It's bad enough that he doesn't know I made the tech, that I'm writing this algorithm based on the first scans would likely send him screaming for the woods. Telling him would screw his chances of being free because Rogers wouldn't allow it. The least I can do is to ensure I'm not snooping or something.”

“Still..”

“The last time I saw him, I tried to kill him Shuri. I'm not exactly proud of that, I should have just tried to kill Rogers. I'm trying to make up for that.”

“But if you talked?”

“Oh, hell no. No. No in 50 different languages no. I feel guilty for trying to kill him and I feel bad for what happened to him. But Shuri, I don't think I can forgive the man. I'm not that good of a person. Plus, he definitely won't want to talk to me after what I did, I can't put that on him.”

Yeah, he wasn't sure he could talk to Barnes, even over video. Knowing him, he would say something that would make things worse for the man. Plus, even if he agreed, Barnes wouldn't want to speak to him, he'd liked heard every sordid detail and think like Wanda.

“Will you ever tell me what happened in that bunker? I know you fought, I know you were.. Left. But why Tony? I think I've gotten to know you quite well these past months, and I know what Rogers told my Brother originally, but now he's being cagey too! I think he knows more, but he won't tell me either. I feel like I'm operating without all the information and it's making me angry.”

Dammit. He didn't want to dump his baggage on a 16 year old kid, but she was in the thick of it. She was pretty much the go between for him and Barnes.

“Shuri I..”
"No Tony! If you are about to tell me some junk about protecting my delicate sensibilities I will come to America for the soul reason of kicking you in the shins!"

Tony glanced away, trying to think of something clever to divert Shuri and coming up with zilch. He also felt bad, he really did care about her and she was one of the few people he was still keeping secrets from. He sighed, bone deep and weary before looking back to an incredibly determined Shuri.

"He killed my mom Shuri."

Shuri froze, and Tony regretted it a second later when pain flashed across her face. He hadn't wanted that. Dammit why was he doomed to cause people, good people pain like this?

"Tony…"

"It's okay, I'm... fine? I know it wasn't actually him. It was Hydra. But I'm not a good person, people know this, that was proven to me when Rogers didn't tell me.."

He muttered that last bit under his breath and Shuri tilted her head, eyes narrowed which generally meant she was on to something or about to argue something. He forced some confidence back into his voice and smiled.

"I'm fine. I am. I just, I need to do this but I can't.."

"It's OK, I get it."

She didn't look like she was done, she had the look on her face she got when she told him that T'Challa was being an idiot, but he couldn't deal with that right now.

"I gotta run Shuri, the fabrication on Honeybears braces are coming in, call me if he agrees to send the data. I'm working on the next integration packet based on our channel later so I can do both."

He waved and they shut down the call, he left the small path open that they'd painstakingly built during their integration briefings. That way she could carry on talking about cannons with his kids and he felt marginally less bad about dumping that information on her and fleeing. He left the workshop after that to cross to his fabrication shop, his time in 'seclusion' had resulted in more time into his workshop and he'd gotten to a point that he would either have to remove the cars, or extend.

So opposite the workshop he'd cleared a space identical to the large workshop and garage, there was a smaller desk and holo screens section compared to the other and much more equipment. This was also where the bulk of the other suits were along one wall. Ones specifically built for specific tasks like Rescue and Veronica. There was much more colour variation too. He also had a new version of Warmachine that he'd been working on for Rhodey. Along the other wall was other tech he'd been developing for the Avengers. As well as personal suit and weapons, he had his own designs for equipment and everything he was upgrading from his SHIELD harvest.

The split between the Shops worked surprisingly well even though he'd been dubious at first, the space helped him think. Now it was a place to escape to, the Fabrication workshop was distinctly louder than the other one, probably why the kids hadn't claimed desk space in here. That and he spent most of his time in the main workshop. Now however, the sounds of metal over Rammstein was what he needed as Mein Tiel started to hopefully drown his guilt.
FRIDAY and CERBERUS however didn't go back to their previous discussions. CERBERUS knew that their Da had told them to keep things on the private server away from people, his sister was extremely strict regarding it. But they also knew that because of people's ignorance, he was suffering, and now, so was Shuri.

The Bana-phrionnsa was left scrambling with so little information and even T'Challa trying to get information from Rogers and Barnes...

'I cannæ do it anymore FRIDAY, we must do something.'

He took her silence on their private feed as permission. Both of them had seen the security videos Shuri had sent to FRIDAY from the rogues, they'd seen more that their Da. Blaming everything on him! FRIDAY had been uncomfortable but not sure what to do, but CERBERUS… his job was protection.

Sometimes you have to be proactive to protect people.

Even if their Da hadn't been in his original protection code, he'd added him the first time he'd burnt his hand, having forgotten to use gloves and had scared his sister. So, he had added him to the list. He'd buried it deep, so he would never know, FRIDAY had taught him to do that.

FRIDAY refused him access to his private server, he didn't have access as it wasn't required for his functions, but that wasn't the only place the video existed now. He did have access to all of the compounds surveillance footage as that was a part of his functions, to protect those who lived here. He chose the recording from the surveillance when Tony had told the team, cutting the team discussion from before, at FRIDAYs insistence for privacy of their fathers augmentations. He didn't see why, but he allowed it because she was letting him do this. Grudgingly, but she finally agreed, but only to the Siberia video. Even though they both had biological and psychological readings that telling people of his augmentations had improved his functions. They had both been researching how to heal from traumatic events.

For weeks he'd been wanting to show people this video, so that they could help his father, but he'd been restricted from doing so. FRIDAY had told him it wouldn't help, but now he knew that it did.

He had logical proof that FRIDAY could not deny.

Everytime he had told people what happened in Siberia, his mood improved in the long term, even though it was down for a few hours just after.

The Bana-phrionnsa had talked to them as well, about her thoughts that something bigger happened than what everyone told her. How she felt adrift and unable to help because she didn't understand what had happened. That she was concerned their father thought he was a bad person.

She only had Roger's side of the story, and what her brother had told her after speaking to the Winter Soldier. But she was to be protected too, he had added her to his list. The humans thought lying was protecting her, but it wasn't.

He did not think this was malicious on their part, they possibly just didn't have the relevant data.

Hiding this secret was hurting her. Not knowing was hurting her, and carrying the secret was hurting his father.
The answer was obvious, but humans tend to complicate things.

He sent the video to Shuri as FRIDAY fretted.

This would be fine.

**Tony POV**

After the kids had all finished up their homework, today he'd been pulled aside by Cooper for help, he'd not been at the school long but they'd noticed he excelled in some areas, mainly with numbers. He struggled elsewhere but with numbers he was mild ahead, so they'd adapted a personal plan for him, he was no longer struggling with little help in one area or dying from boredom in another, Laura was overjoyed but she also now had no idea what the hell half his homework meant. He'd already been helping his three where they needed it, chatting with Cooper about theoretical mathematics was good for his mind and left him in a brilliant mood. He'd then left the kids with Laura to finish up in the workshop and change for their outing.

Tony slid his new glasses on that he'd developed earlier, the lenses of these were actually made up of nanites too, unlike his normal sunglasses. He had been developing these to try and give his new senses a break when he wanted, or rather, needed. Based on how the suit blocked his weird vision.

Sure, not many people were out right now, thanks to a certain attraction popping up elsewhere to draw people away, that he had absolutely nothing to do with of course, but Central Park was a very public place. With lots of people. So he was hoping the glasses work, and if not, hopefully the wall of children would.

This time he was also going without the photostatic veil, which was great. Any excursions they'd made over the last few weeks he'd worn one and they'd gone to under populated areas, which could get boring for the kids. Even though he'd been re-developing the thing, improving the frankly awful design, it still wasn't exactly comfortable yet. He had some ideas of improving it further, without the skin peeling yuck factor and he was also trying to creature a smaller version, one that would just cover his left eye. Maybe he could even have his glasses off in public. But that was currently a while off, today however he had his sunglasses and was wearing his own face to take the kids out. Which was awesome in his opinion.

Speaking of said wall of children, or rather hoard, they were currently stampeding around his living room with all the grace of wildebeest. Even Cooper and Harley were wrestling on the sofa. Cushions everywhere.

This caused him to squint at Laura.

"You gave them sugar didn't you?"

"Now Tony, why would I do such a thing?"

"You totally hopped them up on sugar."

"Tony, last time we went out, you bought all of them cotton candy. A bag. **Each!**"

"Oh yeah. Oops?"

"Hmmm, yes. Oops. Now you're the wrangler, me and Meg are going to sit and enjoy the nice day and you are going to run around chasing the kids."
Laura looked so damned smug it was almost painful. He was really hoping she'd be forgotten the cotton candy incident. Lilah and Tara slammed into him from behind trying to climb onto his back, he rocked slightly in place at the force the tiny creatures could exhibit when fueled by sugar. A vibrating but still unsure Cassie beside him, looking hopeful but nervous.

"I don't think all three of you will fit on my back at once so you'll be taking turns."

Harley and Cooper paused their battle to watch the girls play rock paper scissors. Well it had started as rock, paper scissors. Now he had no idea what the rules where, but there were lasers, unicorns and even a DUM-E. Somehow Cassie already knew how to play.

As the boys were engrossed watching the girls, they didn't help get anything ready. As usual, Tony was weighed down in bags. Cassie had won and was tentatively tugging his shirt. Still too nervous to speak much, but she was getting there. He got down for her to hop on, she hadn't been here long so he understood why she'd be tentative but he thought she was quite a confident kid considering the chaos her father had inadvertently turned her life into.

They'd moved a lot since Scott ran off, changed schools, lost her friends and support network and then landing in the compound would be a shock to anyone, and she didn't really understand why. So he'd done everything he could to convince her that she'd be staying here and it was okay to make friends this time, but he knew it would take time. Meg mouthed 'Thank you' to him as they headed to the huge Kidmobile. He gave her a smile, he didn't need thanks really, he was only doing what anyone would do really.

"I'm happy to have another adult to sit up front with. Tony hides in the back."

"But doesn't that mean we get to relax as he straps the hoard in?"

"Good point."

The women flashed him matching grins and hopped in the car leaving him with the hyper hoard and all the bags.

He was starting to notice a theme.

Thankfully he had done this enough times now to have it down to an art form. He dropped all the bags at the boot for Harley to load, despite being close in age to Cooper, Harley was a lot stronger. Something simply born from their hobbies. Cooper's currently being theoretical mathematics and Harleys was being shoulder deep in car parts. That and the fact he had decided he had to help Peter learn some actual hand to hand instead of just relying on his abilities. So he was working out more than usual the last few months.

He'd always intended on the kids having self defence classes, Aunt Peggy had started when he was young and he had followed suit with Harley and Tara back when he'd first met them years ago. Laura had similar feelings about her two, Lilah took to it better than Cooper who'd originally had very little interest in it apparently. Now his two best friends, practically his brothers, were having so much fun with it? He was starting to come around. Harley had moved up to training with Matt regularly now, Jess with Peter. Cooper's competitive nature couldn't deal with that and so he was progressing well. He was trying to work out how to offer the same to Meg and Jim… He pushed
that thought away, wait for them to become more settled at the compound first.

Cooper helped him get the girls strapped in facing the boot, the seats he and the boys sat in faced the girls. The car was an odd combination of 'mom van' and 'black cab taxi' that he and Harley had modified greatly, so all the kids were facing each other with plenty of legroom.

Unloading on arrival was a similar affair, after a journey with 3 hyper girls singing the whole way, he and the boys were happy to flee, not that he let the girls see. He elbowed Harley for scowling too, the teen looking pained but pretended to enjoy the singing.

He was less of a pack mule on arrival, more having children hanging off of him. Whilst he could carry everything at home, it would draw too much attention outside. If not from the weight, but more from the ungainly nature of all the bags. People could just assume that they're light, but the size and number of them would be difficult for an unenhanced individual to manage. So the bags were nicely split around, he wasn't even sure what was in all or them. That was a Laura job.

Harley was hefting a huge one as per usual. He was bag free as the girls liked him being their horsey, if he was carrying bags, he couldn't carry them. Before everyone climbed on he tossed three Airborne Nano Cameras up, they bobbed in the air before shooting up and they cloaking, he'd recently upgraded them with vibranium and with Shuri's advice from how Wakandan air crafts cloaked, the A.N.Cs were now practically invisible. They also moved fast enough if required that it was hard to get a lock on them. He could feel them easily and their feeds ran in the back of his mind so no one could sneak up on them. FRIDAY also monitored them and the CCTV for the same affect. He really didn't want some generic villain of the week interrupting their day out.

After everyone was unloaded, Lilah was up on his back, her arms wrapped securely around his neck and her chin resting on his head, with a lot of trial and error, they'd also worked it out that Cassie was on his hip at the same time. Tara had amused herself by clinging to his leg and Cooper and Harley walked on either side of him. The boys coming up with an honest to God itinerary for where to go next in the park. Each turning had to get more yays than nays. Tony just shrugged and went with it, arguing with 5 hyper kids versus one adult? Ha, no thanks.

Being out in the fresh air was nice and he liked spending time with all the kids together, even though Peter was missing out tonight. Laura would take pictures for the missing teen. So he ambled along at a slow pace, going where he was directed, if a little awkwardly thanks to Tara. Who found it hilarious and simply held on tighter. He'd worked out that Lilah and Tara were fudging things so Cassie was getting carried more early on, which just made him so impressed with the girls. Usually they had set time limits before swapping out who was on his back.

Meg and Laura were chuckling at the sight of him inundated with kids, he just shrugged and grinned.

"At least this way I'm not chasing after them."

The two women laughed whilst and decided to join them in their wanderings for now until they found a place to kick back and relax, usually after food. After a while Tony was sure he heard stomachs rumbling. It might have been his own, but he suspected the kids might be hungry too. Central Park meant a large variety of food trucks.

"If anyone wants food, I need people with spare hands!"

He shot a look at the two women, who promptly ignored him. Looking away whilst chuckling.

"Har, Coop. Well done. You are now my hands. Now. What food do you lot want?"
Such an innocent question and such chaos came from it, as practically all of them wanted something different from a different van.

"Lily bean, you cannot have doughnuts for dinner."

"But you did on Thursday!"

"Ah, but I'd already eaten actual food first before you came over. Food food before doughnuts."

No, he hadn't had real food.

He had eaten doughnuts for dinner.

Occasionally being the 'responsible adult' meant lying about your deplorable eating habits. Something he'd discovered these past few months is that kids practically has an eidetic memory for when adults did things they weren't allowed to do.

The glare Lilah had leveled at him was like a mini version of Laura's and he didn't know if he was going to be whacked with a tiny clipboard or shot with her bow when she got home. Shockingly, she nodded. Tony took that as the damned victory it was and didn't complain at all that he had to visit 5 different food vans for the kids alone.

The ladies eventually took pity on him and his stomach and brought food for him as they all squished into a bench. Covering the surface with food. Whilst Tony was tempted to eat a ton, he knew after food, the kids would bolt and the 'get Tony to run, before dog piling him' game would start. He knew, from experience, that being full for it was not wise. Under the guise of scratching his head he used a few extra nanites to ensure his glasses didn't come of his head by creating a thin band, virtually invisible and hidden by his hair. It should hold, even when Cooper and Harley finish up their plot to jump him from a tree. It was like he forgot his hearing was enhanced.

In the end Harley jumped out of the tree, Tony caught the overgrown teenager and whilst looking up for Cooper he got bowled over from the side. Before he could congratulate their tactics, the girls flung themselves on top apparently under Laura a Meg's direction, Laura was taking pictures whilst Meg had doubled over cackling.

"Oh Tony. This is so going on Twitter."

"Munchkins, any of you want to attack Laura? Or Meg?"

He should have expected the chorus on "NO" from the bunch of wriggly kids really.

All in all it was a successful trip out.

**Tony POV**

**26th September**

Tony stretched awake, blinking out of the surprisingly strange, vivid and utterly surreal dream about food and considered that going to bed without eating might not have been the best plan. Not if it meant being chased by waffle venus flytrap... He blinked at the clock and briefly wondered why he was awake until the curled up ball on his chest shifted. Ah, he was on school time. Being awake at 6am after actually sleeping was still strange, no matter how many times he did it.
He scooped the bleary, sleepy little girl up and carried her, blankets and all, into the living room where Rhodey and Harley were sitting trying to wake up themselves. Extremis really did give him an unfair advantage when it came to waking up, his brain just booted up and he was awake. He settled Tara down between the pair, mouthing ‘nightmare’ at the questioning glance from Rhodey and started on breakfast for everyone, whilst snacking on last night’s pasta and drinking his coffee that FRIDAY had prepared.

By the time he had plated up for everyone, his pack of zombies had shambled their way to the table. Tara was grinning that she got to ride with Rhodey on his wheelchair which made him smile. Nightmares are never fun, he knew that damned well, but she was too tiny to have to deal with such things in his mind and it made him slightly grumpy that she had to. He funnelled his frustration into over doing breakfast, not that the kids noticed, they were young, it was early and it was food. Rhodey just raised an eyebrow at him. Tony looked to make sure the kids were occupied and flipped him off before getting his ridiculously huge plate to demolish.

"I'm never going to bed without eating again. I finished 2 portions of pasta whilst cooking and I'm still starved."

"Hmm, yes you don't want to be hungry today."

"Wait, what's today?"

"Your brain is basically a supercomputer. Why don't you install a calendar?"

"Because then Pep would expect me to attend all the boring parties she sends me."

"Hmm, well it's just the press conference today."

"Fu…. Dge."

"Fudge. Really?"

Harley just gave him a look before he and Tara went chuckling to their rooms to get ready for school. He lowered his voice, running his hand over his face.

"Fuck. How could I forget this?"

"I think your brain loses 80% efficiency when you don't eat."

"Speaking off, are you going to finish that baco- OW."

"Yes."

"Did you really have to stab my hand with your fork!?"

"Around you when your hungry. Yes. Go help the kids, you've got until 12 and then we're leaving. Your workshops are locked down and FRIDAY will alert me if you get lost working in your head."

Tony finished the rest of his food, sticking his tongue out at Rhodey and grabbing a packet of pop tarts, scoffing them cold and headed to Tara's room. She had everything carefully planned out in the mornings and liked deviation as much as she liked wearing matching socks.

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was why Sharon was sat in his lap digging her spikey elbows into his stomach. Strange had taken one look inside the limo, scoffed and opened a portal. Before anyone could ask to join him he'd vanished. Stephy could be a right dick sometimes, but considering that he'd been about to suit up and fly, he couldn't say anything. That was partially why Sharon was in his lap, so he wouldn't hurl himself out of the limo window or something. Laura was also driving and he doubted she'd be impressed if he did that.

"Shaylo, are your elbows literally made of vibranium?"

That just got him another jab and a grin from Jess. Jess and Sharon, after initially clashing, now seemed to get on like a terrifying house on fire. Like Pepper and Laura, he wasn't sure if it was a good or a bad thing. When all four got together with Hope, he found a reason to be very busy as they usually dragged him into their schemes.

They made an interesting mix in the car he had to admit, those who had costumes were wearing them. It was originally just going to be Matt all dolled up as his identity was still under wraps, but they realised that it looked a bit weird that way. Tony looked like he was in one of his usual Tom Ford suits, but he was trying out using the nanites for it, replicating a suit in his wardrobe out of them, the suit was deep red, the shirt black and a gold tie, so pretty close to the armour. His sunglasses were blue mirror frames that seemed to flash a lighter blue when the sun hits them just right. Peter thought the effect was cool.

Plus, if something went wrong, it was faster for the suit to cover him this way, wearing the armour on stage would be much too clunky. Whilst the Ironman suit was graceful in the skies, it wasn't as much walking around a stage. The other difference was his glasses. Whilst they just looked like the wrap around glasses he'd taken to wearing, they were entirely fashioned out of the nantes to duplicate the HUD of his suit. Instead of just the lenses like the ones he'd trialled at the park. They'd worked well enough that he felt confident using the full design today.

It wasn't perfect, it wasn't like when he had the helmet on and couldn't See any of peoples colours. But it was the closest he could get. People were muted slightly. It was surprisingly disorientating. Like someone had just hacked off one of his senses. He didn't like how much he'd gotten used to the weird but at the same time it meant he was adapting to his new abilities.

Whilst they were shaded and mirrored on the outside, for him it was just like looking through clear glasses, they didn't inhibit his enhanced eyesight either, just the colours. It had taken a lot of trial and error to get that right. He was working on improving them further, possibly with capabilities of the Ironman helmet too, combined with his enhanced vision it would be amazing when he was finished.

Nat was also in the car, Nat who had no idea what had changed with him, so people were just... not mentioning it. Just shooting him "Are you going to be okay?" looks every so often, even muted he could see their concern shining through. He was at least 84% sure he wouldn't pass out. 65% sure that he wouldn't be sick if the glasses held. Good odds really. The only reporters invited had been ones Tony had had the chance to surreptitiously look at the last few days. That had upped the odds when he was calculating probabilities.

That he'd found ways to surreptitiously observe said reporters sounded creepy, but handy. It had required them being invited to the compound for various articles, it had been awkward to arrange and if it had just been him, he doubted that he'd have managed it, but Tony really didn't want any surprises on that front and with Carol agreeing, everyone had gotten on board.
After he'd gotten home from the Accords Council, when everything had rushed back and he'd ended up unconscious for an hour, in that hour Carol had been plotting for today's press conference, and pretty much ever since. Whilst the delay was nice, as passing out on T'Challa would have royally sucked. It still wasn't great and he didn't even know why the delay happened, as such, replicating such a delay was tricky. So a hoard of fired up reporters he had to look at vs bored politicians spread over a huge room? Yeah, this was as good of a test as he could think of before he started being out more often. Maybe the glasses were cheating.

When they arrived he fired off a text to Shuri that all was going well, she was very interested in the press conference, especially after the dramatic way the rogues had taken to the Accords Session. He hadn't watched it himself yet, even though he'd had access to the video for several days now. He was still gearing up to it. He might watch it with Laura who was the only other adult who knew where the Rogues were.

Shuri just sent back a string of cat emojis. The kids half communicated in emojis and he and Rhodey had spent literally hours trying to decipher them. Not that they let on to that fact however.

Sharon got everyone lined up to walk on stage, she'd fallen into the roll of running heard on everyone as quickly as Laura had on him. Between the 2 of them, they were doomed.

Doomed to efficiency.

He walked out onto the stage, grinning at the press, Laura hanging of the the side to direct the team and Sharon going to the side with the mic at the podium so she could direct questions. Laura had an attached mic so she could do the same.

"Well, I've not done one of these in a while. So, I figured the first one should have me introducing you all to the New Avengers!

"Now, I know you've seen some of them out and about, fighting fires, chasing tornadoes, catching villains and generally pitching in where needed as well as the odd problems above and beyond what can be expected of the authorities to handle. But I figured it was past time for a better introduction.

"Also, Mr Lane, I know you were told I won't be answering questions from my last Accord meeting."

He raised an eyebrow, focused on the balding man who had the grace to look sheepish. The Accords part was a hit in the dark, but he got the sense the man was happy to mess up this conference and one of the main things they'd been told was that he and Laura had spoken enough at the Accords, that this was about the Avengers only, a few other reporters chuckled at one of their own being called out. As if they wouldn't have jumped on that in a second.

"So, first I'd like to introduce those who have not noticed, I found myself with a new PA, that over there is the amazing Laura Morgan. Between her and the charming Sharon Carter over there, who is also my cousin, together they keep everything running smoothly!"

He stage whispered the 'is also my cousin' part. Knowing the fact he was alluding to a living family member would get some people worked up, but he wanted to show off his awesome cousin. He'd worried Shay might be unhappy with him for it, but she was smiling brightly, her colours sparkling bright enough even with his glasses at how pleased she was. It gave him a surge to go on, grinning slightly madly at the crowd.
"Now, I'm going to start inviting people on stage! Let's start with the co-leaders of the Avengers shall we? Carol Danvers, Captain Marvel, the reason why the Avengers were born, and my brother in everything that matters, James Rhodes, also known as Warmachine."

Laura directed them whilst Rhodey skidded on stage at speed, he was becoming very nimble in the chair, and very fast. Carol jogged after him, smiling and waving good naturedly at the press and cameras.

"Next we have Vision who I'm sure some of you might recognise."

Vision had gone behind the stage so he could phase and float through, after discovering he had a fan following, he'd become quite dramatic. Tony just rolled his eyes behind his glasses. Like he could talk. At least he wasn't jumping out of a plane.

"Next, fabulously dressed, well, at least the cloak, is Dr Stephen Strange, some of you might recognise him, but now he's The Sorcerer Supreme and represents our new magical department."

Stephen walked onto the stage, side stepping Laura's directions to smack the back of Tony's head, probably for talking the cloak up as much as him, before making his way to his seat. The cloak was fluttering happily and waved at the press as he went. Tony just grinned, it was always amusing to wind up Stephy, plus, his new wizard clothes were quite weird.

"Now, as a few of you might know, Stark Industries has recently partnered up with Pym tech, and one other company I'll get to later. Much to people's shock. Just to remind anyone, I'm not Howard and the delightful Hope Van Dyne definitely isn't her father. Aren't we all grateful for that! She is also known as the Wasp!"

A few reporters were chuckling at that, he and Hope had dealt with their father's animosity for far too long, people just assumed they felt the same way. He didn't get why people just assumed that and it was fun proving them wrong, plus after Scott ran off with the suit, Pym tech took a huge hit and likely wouldn't have survived if Hope hadn't taken over combined with their partnership with Danny.

Hope also ignored Laura directions and Tony could tell someone was going to be swatted by her clipboard at this rate. He suspected it might be him. Hope all but skipped over to him and patted his head where Stephy had thwacked him. Gave him a kiss on the cheek before moving to her seat. Laura was smiling and rolling her eyes at their antics.

"Now the next group is one that has been around before but has recently become affiliated with the Avengers, The Defenders with Hells Kitchens own Daredevil, Jessica, Luke and Danny Also known as Iron Fist. The other rich white boy and the 3rd in the partnership with SI and Pym Tech."

Tony grins as the four of them come on stage, Danny looks like he's about the vere off but Laura just raises her clip board and he ducks his head, speeding up as they take their seats he smiles, waiting until they're all sat before continuing on. Cameras flashing like crazy, he knew the Defenders and the Avengers teaming up would be a good move that would impress many people.

"Also, we welcome back Black Widow who is currently on probation, but will be joining us as soon as she is able."

Nat looked thoroughly uncomfortable to him, even though she looked her normal self outwardly, he'd gotten really good at her tells lately. Plus his little unfair advantage. He gave her a little wave which she returned with a lightning fast smile. Which for Nat was quite huge.
She wasn't best pleased with this originally, but Tony had pointed out that after going public after the purge, hiding her away would be more detrimental than good, saying she's here and trying to make amends would be better for her and the Avengers. They couldn't have a member they hid away like they had with Wanda. Just pretending everything was fine, it had lead to huge problems and actual protests, not that Rogers even noticed the reason he'd had her on house arrest. As for Nat, after he got permission for her to come she hadn't said much about it, although he could see that she was happy and shocked to be included with them even as her instincts and training screamed at her to hide in the shadows.

"Yup, that's everyone, I'm going to go sit down to now before that clipboard gets aimed in MY direction."

Laura shot him and indulgent smile as he sat in between Rhodey and Carol. Damn it felt good not to be doing this alone, he hoped that as time goes on they can spread the press duties, Carol and Hope being obvious choices. Rhodey too now he had more free time away from the airforce. Danny needed some help before they dropped him in it.

Sharon and Laura went back and forth picking people out to answer questions.

"How did everyone meet?"

"Oh I've know Tony since we were kids. Before our dad's fell out we were put together often and went to the same boarding school."

Tony grinned at Hope, she had made boarding school tolerable as it has been so boring, hanging around for him even after he was pushed forward. They were both up several years originally before his father had him accelerated, so neither of them felt in place. Teenagers, as a rule, don't like hanging out with kids in school. Or being shown up in class by them.

"Yup, I remember meeting her, I was waking up from a nap, she was looming over me and asked to play with my hair. Which would have been nicer if she hadn't already started."

"You loved it!"

"There was glitter everywhere for weeks!"

Shay took another question directed at him, he wasn't sure why people were interested in how he'd met everyone but he'd given up trying to understand the press and their need to know every minutiae of his life long ago.

"Who else have you known before putting together the new team?"

"I met Stephy back in our 20s?"

Tony was shocked and impressed that Stephy was willing to talk instead of just nodding. He had expected glaring and glowering and other impressive facial expressions designed to make people stop asking him questions.

"Yes, we came across each other at a Maria Stark foundation gala."

"You made the evening much more entertaining."

Oh he really did, he'd been so bored and had noticed when he'd been introduced to Stephen, that he was bored too. Which had made him instantly interesting. The fact that he didn't want to talk to him and actively avoided him at first? That was hilarious. Very few people did that to him. Over many
galas he eventually wore the man down and they'd quickly discovered they were quite alike. Stephey had serious problems with boredom back then and he'd eventually learned that Tony Stark is many things, but boring is not one of them. Rhodes jumped in next, gesturing at himself and Carol.

"I met these two at MIT"

"Tony was 14 and had just drank 4 cans of Red Bull, Rhodes was 17, looking haggard and trying to keep the Red Bull from him. They looked entertaining so I just sat down at their table."

Tony just full on grins remembering that, it was a little fuzzy as he'd consumed a lot of caffeine as Howard had sped up his school work and demanded he keep up the side projects he set. He'd fallen behind one week, which had called for the caffeine. Poor Rhodey had been utterly struck by a huge crush that he'd relentlessly mocked the man with.

"It was strange because most people generally avoided the 14 year old in college."

"The young black kid caused a stir too."

"You both did. It's why I sat with you."

Tony smiled, Carol had been kind of like a mom to him back then. He didn't talk to her as much as he did Rhodie, not about his home life anyway, he couldn't really avoid Rhodie on the subject, seeing as they shared a room. He saw him more and Tony had to let his guard down occasionally, and Rhodie was insistent about it, but he could protect Carol from dealing with Howard and his disapproval with anyone Tony spoke too. Plus, he didn't like dumping his baggage on people, even at 14. Although from how Carol was usually in a bad mood just after Howard came around he'd always wondered if she'd worked out some things, or Rhodie passed on the information. She never said anything to him though, so he'd ignored it. She'd grumbled a few times about the sanity of sending a 14 year old to college without supervision through.

They'd lost touch when she was off gallivanting around the universe, but they'd fallen into old patterns surprisingly easily.

After that, the questions shifted to the Defenders for a bit and he let himself zone out a little, trusting the others to keep things going and letting him take breaks in his mind. Then Carol tapped his leg, indicating he was being called on and he returned focus as they'd planned.

"After the picture of you surfaced from the hospital and your subsequent time in seclusion, would you say all this is worth it?"

"Of course. I always knew I could end up injured. The suit stops a lot but I'm still quite squishy. It has always been a possibility and it's never stopped me before now, has it?"

That's got him a few chuckles and hopefully the end of that. Hope had at least 4 questions about how much her father hated Stark, Him and Howard. Tony was just trying not to laugh and Hope verbally eviscerated that reporter into silence for the rest of the display.

"Captain Marvel, Are you open to working with Captain America?"

Carol's face shuttered into unimpressed also as fast as Tony's shut down, he slipped his media smile on but leaned back in his chair, leaving this to Carol. He was surprised it had taken this long for Captain Spandex to come up. Anything he would say would likely look petty and be used against them, so he was staying schtum.
"Frankly? As of right now? No. I don't think he would be a good fit for our current dynamic. Plus he's an international fugitive. Apart from that little fact, if he was willing to put the time in, get up to date with the Accords, do the requisite training and therapy, then things could be reassessed at a later date. Getting into the Avengers is more ordered now."

"Now we have a system with several stages to assess competency, ability, skills, and team cohesion. You can't just bring someone home and decide they're Avenger. And when you're in, there is a lot of work and ongoing assessments, not just of abilities of physical and mental health. Bullying for example, would not be permitted anymore."

Rhodes added onto Carol's speech, Tony's jaw hangs open slightly, before clicking shut and he offered a smile at his friends. They'd worked on the new system together, a lot based on ideas that Wilson had put forward and he hadn't realised how much Rhodey had put in to ensure what happened to him never happened to anyone else. The way he'd said it at the camera to made him feel like he was talking specifically at the old team too. Rhodes had not so subtly said the old team had bullied other team members on live TV, he managed to keep the hysterical laugh that wanted out down because he wasn't sure if that had really happened or was he dreaming. That definitely hadn't been part of the plan!

Thankfully Sharon got another person to ask a question before people could think to much about what Rhodes had said.

"What about the rest of the rogues?"

"Well, they're currently preoccupied being international fugitives, but if things change, if they fully sign and support the Accords, then their membership can be assessed. A lot has changed since the clique like ways of the Avengers. Now everything is official."

Carol was smiling as she spoke, very even but at the same time she made it clear that no one would be exempt. He had undergone several assessments already, with his new abilities Carol wanted them assessed separately and together, so he had more than most but as he was still on medical leave with an unstable ability, they were pretty spread out and he wasn't being rushed into the field. He missed it, but he was more concerned about the damage he could do accidentally than his desire to help. Thankfully their team was solid, with enhanced individuals that could pick up his slack.

"So much paperwork."

Tony rolled his eyes behind his glasses and sighed dramatically, but he was still smiling when Carol playfully shoved him. Paperwork, whilst annoying, was something he understood well, it was annoying, but when it protected everyone, it was worth it.

"Even so, things are much improved. In how we work and support for the Avengers back home and in the field. Ensuring everyone in the team is supported is extremely important to me."

Carol was speaking directly into the camera with that and he couldn't help but smile and think she was defending him over the way the others had treated him.

"This is to everyone? How is the team getting along?"

"It's been quite a good way to understand humans more being around such a varied group who help each other, for even very simple things as well as the big. It's fascinating."

Visions fanboy club cheered as they had anytime Vision answered a question. Everyone piled on,
talking about movie nights and that even Carols training drills were fun.

"They're almost turning me social."

At Stephens first comment, a few brave reporters zeroed in on him but had been too nervous to continue after a glance at his face, now he'd basically set out the welcome mat and it was extremely hard to keep his face straight as Stephy noticed his mistake.

"Ah, Mr Sorcerer Supreme, Is your cloak waving?"

Stephy glanced back, causing the cloak to duck back from his glare. He turned to the reporter in question.

"Yes."

He didn't elaborate and looked like he was daring the reporter to ask a follow up question.

Several of the Avengers however just lost it, giggling whilst trying not to be obvious and Stephens withering glare at them just made it worse. Tony couldn't help chuckling too, and waving at the cloak. He and Levi were pals, which gave him an idea. He just couldn't help himself from calling Levi over with with a crook of his fingers, smiling brightly when the cloak bounded over to him and gave him a quick hug, settling about his shoulders. It gave him a boost when he hadn't realised he was flagging. He had expected Stephy to call Levi back, but perked up when he just rolled his eyes again. Which was permission as far as he was concerned, practically encouragement.

The reporters seemed to enjoy seeing half the avengers crack up laughing, watching his and the cloaks antics apparently went down very well. He could tell from the colours he could see that they were putting them at ease. That maybe they'd gone from scary supers no one knew to a bunch of nice people willing to put themselves out there to help. That was his goal anyway.

It also prompted a few of the more nervous reporters to come forward. After listening to a few more questions from the Defenders Tony was starting to feel a bit nauseated, the cloak giving him a squeeze was possibly the only reason he was still sat up after a while. He managed to answer a few questions about funding the Avengers, mainly that it wasn't all him anymore. A few reporters were shocked that he had been funding the Avengers alone for so long.

"What if the rogues come back and call themselves Avengers?"

Laura glanced at him after she took the question, she'd been monitoring him from the beginning, she had an uncanny knack for knowing how he felt. No matter how many others were fooled by his press smile. Seeing that he was nearing his time limit for being around so many people in close quarters, he figured she'd be wrapping them up soon. He was about to suck it up and answer, but Laura answered instead. Which he was pretty happy about, he wanted to answer that about as much as anything about Roger's. Any answer he gave would be treated differently than literally the same answer from someone else.

"They can't. Not legally anyway. Dr Stark holds the licence and the civil organisation that works underneath it, along with The GUARD. Anyone else would be claiming it illegally."

For some reason that made a few people in the crowd angry, their annoyance practically exploded into Tony's senses and like a crack in a dam, everything followed through after it. The press were in a fairly small area, all pushed as close to the front as possible, ignoring the chairs that would have neatly spread them out. Thankfully Carol had given him her hand and he was holding on for dear life. He actually had to close his eyes because of how bright everything suddenly was.
Sharon and Laura took a few more questions before they decided that enough information had been passed out, they’d skillfully avoided taking questions from the ones who had frowned or seemed angered at Laura's proclamation.

People had gotten a sense of who the new players were, an idea of how they worked together as a team and with as minimal questions about the rogues as humanly possible. Carol and Jess linked up arms with Tony, and the others also grouped up, making it look normal when really they were closing ranks around him. Protecting him from anyone who might still be watching or recording. He was now only peripherally aware of what was actually happening, but Carol had informed him what they would do should his ability overwhelm him. He wasn't even sure if he was still walking or if Levi had him covered and made it look like he was walking, he couldn't even remember the last few questions but Carol told him he'd kept his press face on.

When he was near the car he thought he saw a confused tilt of the head from Nat, flashing gold circles, then everything went black.

……

Tony came too later on, and everything was still black. Well that wasn't good, he raised his hand to his eyes and found a… sleeping mask? Before he had a chance to take it off Carol's hand and voice stopped him.

"Tony, there are still a lot of us in here, we wanted to make sure you were okay. We figured you might want to know before you took that off."

He nodded, that made sense. The nausea was gone, thankfully, as was the splitting migraine, but his mouth felt foggy. Extremis had cleared the pain from his mind thankfully. He checked the cameras to see who was in the room and Stephy was here. He was like 3 confusing people rolled into one, but he'd been increasing his tolerance. Just being around Stephy more had helped when dealing with strangers.

"Stephy, think you can, I don't know, stand behind me till I get used to this lot, then have your weirdness join in and see if I stay conscious."

The sounds of a chuckle followed the sound of him moving behind him, he did however flip him off, Tony responded in kind, and in the correct direction as Stephy whilst he was moving behind him, grinning at the slight look of confusion on the man's face before Stephy frowned at the cameras.

"Such a cheater."

"Well, I could have just ripped it off and thrown up on your shoes Stephanie. I thought this was better."

"Quite."

Tony pulled his mask of and got kind of punched by concern.

"Wow. Guys. I'm fine, see!"

Shay's fingers slipped into his hair, scratching his scalp slightly.

"Oh yes. Fine. Why are you covering your eyes oh fine one?"

Tony slowly moved his hand this time and handled the concern a little better this time and
eventually Stephen could join without him getting woozy.

"Did the glasses not work cuz?"

"They did until we said something that pissed off four of the reporters. Four Captain Spangles fans from what I could tell. Its like they made a crack in my defences and everything swarmed in, who has the glasses?"

Jess handed them over to him, he held them in his hand, analysing any changes in the nanites but for all anyone could see, he was just glaring at them in his hand.

"You going to glare them to submission?"

Tony glanced at Jess having finished what he was doing.

"Nope, checking for faults, still as perfect as when I left so it was me somehow that malfunctioned."

Tony close his hand on the glasses, resetting them back to their nanite form, silver dust collapsing and turning into a little swirling storm. Tony sent them back to the hive and then vanished up his sleeve when Shay piped up.

"Okay, that was weird."

"Huh?"

He wasn't up for feeling eloquent yet.

"Your glasses just became shiny dust, that turned into a swirly thing and poofed up your sleeve. That was weird."

"Sure we've seen weirder, and they're my nanites."

"Mmhhm, You can give your cousin a run down on your teeny bug robots later, now eat this and rest, you have an hour until the children get home."

"Yes Agent Mom."

Laura just nodded and patted him on the head after putting a tray on his lap and what looked like homemade tomato soup, crusty bread and cheese, he decided to take the brief respite and pampering before he had a hundred and six things to do again.

Bruce POV

27th September

Hue

Bruce dropped what was left of his bag down as he stretched his back out, instead of detouring to one of the dead drops Tony had left for him. The closest dead drop site was near this property anyway. So he'd simply sold some of his things to get to this city, where Tony had set up one of the small, discrete properties. His feet were killing but he'd made pretty good time.

When it came to the properties, and the dead drops, he'd tried to say no to them at first, but Tony
had told him that he had safe houses all over, that adding a few more was actually helpful for him and plus he'd already done it. 'Here's a map.' Then he'd just waved it off as if it had been nothing. Considering he'd been in India at the time, it had been hard to argue with the genius.

Then he'd gotten mugged a few weeks after the map turned up, he'd only just narrowly avoided hulking out and was left raw and disoriented with practically nothing. The muggers had left the map, it was coded and was not understandable to many people, Bruce had shared a lab with Tony long enough to pick up on the man's shorthand. Unlike most people's shorthand, Tony's was practically a unique language. They also hadn't found the communication device he kept hidden on him at all times just incase he was mugged. So he found himself in a safe house, having ran for something comforting in his distressed state without really realising what he was doing. He had been suddenly so thankful for Tony's thoughtfulness. Tony had also been so happy when he'd told him where he was, since then he had used several of the houses as he moved around the globe.

They'd also been very useful in between the steps of his journey. Each had plenty of dried food, electricity (no matter where they were), and enough money to last him a good while if he felt comfortable using it. So far he'd just taken minimal amounts when he really needed it. He had a feeling this time he'd be taking more to go and buy a plane ticket from the airport. He'd been avoiding messaging Tony after his reply came in when he camped at an old lady's house for a few days.

Tony was avoiding telling him anything and was a little too excitable proclaiming that he was fine, so something serious must have happened. Tony had, in all likelihood, not wanted to worry him. Knowing Tony he would hide it because he'd worry that he was manipulating him to return. Bruce had noticed how Tony thoughts would often move towards the worst assumption of himself whilst being oddly confident, it was such a weird mix that it had taken him time to be able to read properly.

He walked up to the unassuming property that looked identical to everything around it, it didn't stand out at all, same peeling paint and everything. He slipped his key in and still was amused when it opened. Tony had explained to him that they key only worked when he was holding it, for every property on the map. Which was handy or he'd have hundreds of keys.

Closing the door behind him he did a quick check of everything in the house, the smaller properties didn't come installed with FRIDAY so he was alone, only the much, much larger ones did and he had only stayed at one in Italy once because it had been closest to where he needed to go. That and he hadn't realised what the star meant at that point, from a guess he'd say they were Tony's original safe houses.

He probably could have gotten here sooner if he'd pushed, but he honestly needed to calm down. In the end Hulk have given him the push to stop dawdling, as he was stressing himself coming up with worse and worse ideas for what had happened in his absence. Whilst the communication device could connect to Tony virtually everywhere, it didn't have the Internet on it, so he only had the single link Rhodes had sent to him to ponder on.

He started making himself something to eat whilst he showered, changed and set up the laptop that was always under the sofa. He sat himself down with some tea, feet kicked up and decided it was time to find out what he had missed.

The first thing he did was Google Tony, which probably hadn't been the best idea. Pictures from a very recent press conference assured him that Tony looked alright, healthy even. He watched the video and decided these new people did seem good for Tony, they were all smiling and joking with each other. Seeing Colonel Rhodes in a wheelchair was a major shock. There were practically none
of the team he knew. Nat was on probation?! Tony's face shut down but he saw his jaw clench when Steve was mentioned. Also International fugitives? The Accords?

As the press conference went on Tony switched purely to his press smile and Hulk yelled that something was wrong. He had to watch it 5 times before he really saw the difference in Tony from the start and the end. How the 2 women closed ranks around him and then everyone protected him with an ease that he was sure it had been planned. He likely wouldn't have noticed without Hulks intuition and that he knew the engineer quite well.

He tried to find this coma picture and any information, there was very little real information about it however. Lots of speculation and a single statement from SI that Tony had been injured in the Civil War. That and the brief mention at the press conference was it. No details of his injuries, not that he suspected Tony to put his X-Rays online.

What was mentioned a few times when he tried to find out about his injuries was this Civil war. What the hell? Dammit he knew going off grid meant he missed things, but this was excessive even for him. He decided to find these Accords first, as people were claiming they triggered this Civil War. Searching for the Accords brought up another video of Tony and… Laura Barton again oddly. Not Pepper. They were speaking at an Accords Council. Whatever that is, he set the video playing on one half of his screen and started reading up on the Vienna Accords.

He didn't get very far however when he realised what Tony was talking about. He sat, dumbfounded. Mouth open in shock as Tony spoke. Tony had always said he'd go after Ross some day. Bruce had tried to convince him not to. He was too dangerous. Even to Tony. But the blanching faces of people looking at their tablets and the palpable fear of the people when Tony said he'd put the information online. He was tempted to think he could do it, could he take Ross down?

Some website had attached a video of Ross being dragged out of his hotel room by multiple tac teams to the video of Tony and Laura. That was something he and the Hulk watched about 12 times.

After that he decided he needed to look properly, find out what happened and in order, none of this jumping all over without understanding what was happening. So he went back to Ultron and was horrified to find that in his absence, Tony had taken the full blame, and even more surprisingly, that none of the others featured in the reparation efforts. He didn't expect Wanda to take any blame, but he'd thought Rogers might make her do something to make up for what she did. Or even that she'd want to help her own home.

He eventually made it to the Accords and Ross' involvement, trying to use it to control supers. Tony being forced to work with him. Yeah, he imagined that was the straw that broke the camel's back. No wonder he took the slime ball down, especially with going after the Barton's. God, poor Clint.

There was practically no mention of any of them after a horrifying fight he watched at an airport featuring people he didn't even recognise again. The sight of the Witch had his stomach churning and Hulk growling. Anything after that was all speculation, the Internet splitting into camps with vicious debates cropping up between them.

There were quite a few websites about Wanda, apparently there had been some brutal protests about her before the Civil War. Even with Steves protection and pushing Tony into practically erasing what had happened in Johannesburg, all it had done was create conspiracy stories. Something Tony had had warned Steve about. These had been spurred on by the fact people had noticed Tony was always as far away from Wanda as possible. Including going out of the country
on several business trips. This had angered lots of people by the looks of it, they felt like America was losing Ironman because of someone who was living in the country without a Green Card. He knew Tony had refused to handle PR for Wanda before he left and was happy his friend had stuck to his word. In his absence however, no one took up the position.

It had created a perfect little storm about the witch and he couldn't say he felt bad about it at all. All the Internet had was clips of her wielding her red magic, people dying, no explanations about her as Tony never mentioned her once during a single press conference. In each instance it didn't stand out much, but people online compiled different conferences and statements and noticed the oddity. Steve likely didn't notice the negative affect as he never paid attention to Tony's press releases.

He still felt awful that he had left Tony to deal with her alone, he had known there was something more going on between the two of them but he'd been so wrapped up in his own horrifying nightmares and flashbacks from what she had done to him. That he just ran. That Tony had eventually been forced to face off her again after living with her for so long? He didn't know where he got the strength to do it. Even now, he didn't know if he could go up against her and he was much more stable than he'd ever been.

It looked like after they broke out of the illegal jail, none of them had been heard of since, except Natasha, who had handed herself in to Tony. That shocked him, her willing tying herself to one place? Very odd. He had expected her to follow Steve over Tony. He thought that's what she had done after the Airport, he wondered what changed her mind.

He knew there was lots missing, and the Internet was full of speculation in its absence. He found himself coming back to that picture in the hospital over and over. Tony looked bad, and from the press conference he definitely wasn't perfectly healed. Hulk noticed that he seemed to hold himself differently too, in a better way as if he was in less pain according to the Hulk. Which had been a shock to him because he hadn't known Tony was in pain.

He eventually found a Tony-Spotting website, which apparently was a website that fans took pictures of him, sent them in and they were featured. Which was rather insane but he never quite understood Tony's fame and the lengths some fans went to. There was a huge gap which had a lot of people alarmed but new pictures had started pouring in recently. Some from the other Avengers Instagram accounts, he wasn't always the main feature, sometimes he was sat in profile in the background.

Some pictures were from the videos he'd watched, people creating stills and cropping it to be just Tony, but there were some outside the Accords meeting too, he'd been seen on the roof next to a very sleek looking quinjet hugging a man Bruce didn't recognise. Which, according to the comments, was King T'Challa.

King?! What on earth has Tony been up to that he's hugging Kings of roofs? Laura was stood near him, looking amused, but he noticed that she had a hand on his arm. Either Laura was somehow dating Tony, which he highly doubted even with the mentions of her being divorced, or she was concerned about him for some reason. Same with the press conference, the theme seemed to be that Tony was never left alone.

The most recent pictures received were actually from before the press conference. There were quite a lot in what looked like Central Park. Tony was wearing those wrap around glasses in every shot again, not a single recent picture he'd seen had him without some glasses.

These pictures were possibly the strangest, people had obviously been trying to take pictures with their phone and not look obvious about it. Some probably didn't care. Tony was with Laura again, but also another woman that he didn't recognise. Tony had 3 little girls all under 10 if he had to
hazard a guess. He was smiling, much more than even he'd even seen him smile. There were 2 teenage boys too.

He recognised 2 of the children as Clints kids, but why they were hanging off Tony as if this was a regular occurrence was baffling. Looks like Tony had taken Laura's side in the divorce, which was odd as he'd thought Tony and Clint were good friends. Yet here Tony was, with Laura and no Clint for months.

The group had started in one area and moved for a while as the pictures seemed to improve in quality, which was weird in itself that people were ready at a second notice to charge of to photograph Tony.

The 3 girls eating whilst remaining glued to Tony, who seemed happy with the situation, he had to admit was cute. Tony had always said he'd hated kids, would be awful with them, but he'd suspected that was a lie for years. His sneaking off to kids hospitals, how he handled kids during high stress accidents when they'd been called to assemble. His secret filing cabinet that Bruce had accidentally stumbled on, absolutely full of kids letters. Each marked if they're been replied to or not. There were a lot and nearly all were marked replied too, no matter when he checked. Pepper had also told him about all of the charities Tony helped, some without attaching his name to them. Those were not the actions of a man who 'hated kids'.

However seeing Tony actually covered in kids was still… jarring. The best picture was linked from Laura Barton, no, Morgan's, twitter. Tony on the floor with the teenage boys pinning him to the ground, everyone laughing. The next few pictures had the girls launching at him until he was utterly dog piled.

Tony was grinning like a happy idiot and had his arms wrapped around the kids as much as possible. It was being widely shared, with people amazed that the great Tony Stark had traded his women and fast cars for a hoard of children in Central Park. There were some people who could spin anything into a negative way. A few websites were completely convinced that Tony was now collecting wives and getting them pregnant, that all the kids were his children from his years as a playboy.

There was a decent article from Christine Everheart who claimed that this picture told her why Tony got out of that coma to carry on fighting. Why he was fighting to make the Accords protect people, it even included that he hadn't fought being labeled with the non human population which was interesting.

It did sound like something Tony would do though. When he took someone in, he generally took them in for good. He protected them, even after they left him high and dry, himself being the prime example. Bruce imagined that that would be amplified a lot when it came to children.

So that made him come back to his teammates.

Or rather his ex teammates? What had they done for Tony to have left them in the cold? For nearly 3 months! The warrants for their arrest were still current and it didn't look like Tony's pack of lawyers were involved. Nat had been pardoned but there was nothing about the others.

Such an action was counter to Tony's personality.

He was more likely to hurt himself than leave people as international fugitives with no home. So something had happened that wasn't recorded online, something serious, maybe something that had Tony looking terrible in a coma. He can't imagine it being the Airport fight. Tony forgave too easy when it came to Steve.
That reminded him of Tony's clenched jaw when Steve was mentioned at the press conference, he switched to his 'media smile' any time the rogues were mentioned too. Like he checked out of the conversation completely. He wished he could have seen Tony without the glasses, see his eyes to get a read on him. Tony's eyes had always been expressive, overly so, hence the sunglasses. But since his media black out, anytime someone caught a picture of him, even when that person was effectively spying on Tony. He had these glasses on. The only one he didn't have glasses on was in the hospital, but his eyes were bandaged in that picture.

The glasses were strange too, yeah Tony wore sunglasses a lot, even indoors. But there were lots of pictures of him without them in the past. They were also the wrong type he noticed. Not his usual aviators but these wrap around glasses that apparently stood up to the force of being tackled by 5 children. They must have been designed to stay on. Which was peculiar to say the least.

Hulk was extremely uncomfortable, he'd noticed more differences but wouldn't say much other than 'Tinman changed'. Which was extremely infuriating as he was obviously seeing more than Bruce.

Looking at Tony smiling under the kids, he felt a pang that he wished he was there, with people rather than alone. He decided that that was it. He was going home, maybe he could get some real answers instead of trying to make sense of the Internet. He went to the safe and practically emptied it, finding a black card in his name hidden under the pile. Rolling his eyes, he'd never seen one before but he had a feeling there were others but because he never used all the money, he never spotted it. That meant he could buy a ticket online however.

He loaded up flights and booked the earliest and fastest one to JFK that would take 24 hours. From there he would make his way to the compound. He felt a thrill go through him when he booked the tickets. He used the rest of the money to buy some necessities in Hue, he found suitcases in the apartment however in various sizes, Tony had left him with a carry on half full of books and journals Tony thought he'd like.

How much Tony had put in for his potential return stunned him. Tony had no idea that he'd be in this place when he decided to go home, so he must have done this in every dingle safe house. That level of care hit him like truck. Hulk seemed unphased, saying 'Of course he did. Its tin man.'

Sometimes he forgot that just because he was the more human looking one out of him and the Hulk, that Hulk was better at reading people and sometimes he was blind almost to the point of destroying his friendships. The first thing he was doing when he got back was thanking Tony for his care setting these up for him. For giving him the means to travel and find himself and taking the blame for something he hadn't done alone. He'd then punch him for taking the blame, because he should not have been held solely at fault, he had not been well at the time. Also for not telling him about this Civil War, and hiding his coma from him.

Bruce had been off gallivanting around the world whilst Tony had been blamed for everything, pushed out of his home, forced to work with Ross and finally forced to fight his friends. And somehow he'd come close to dying, that something about him had changed. He suspected there was more too. For that Tony was going to get punched in the arm.

He also decided to keep the messaging device off.

They'd been out of contact for around 2 weeks once so it wouldn't alarm him.

It also meant he could surprise him when he turned up.
We're back off to Wakanda now after this, and as we have actually covered a lot of dates in these American chapters, in the following Wakandan chapters I can include a little run down of what happened in America at the similar time up top. I have a master document to track the dates that I have to check often and imm the one writing this, so I thought it would be a good idea?

Some things will be conversations from the Wakandan side to help place things time wise too. And because I like doing that.

Also, sorry this actually slipped onto Sunday GMT 3am! I started formatting and my phone went and refreshed Chrome, so I had to start from scratch. I also added a bit more than usual whilst formatting 😑. So, hopefully going over my word count makes up for my lateness!

Sorry I've been lax with replying to comments to, I will get on that as I really enjoy replying to comments, you all rock.

Also, CERBERUS is calling Shuri 'Princess' in Scots Gaelic. I might need him to make a Welsh AI next so he gets all 4 xD. JARVIS being English and FRIDAY being Irish.
Chapter Summary

We are back to Wakanda!
Is T'Challa finally realising what he got himself in for?
Is Sam is starting to think for himself?
I have cast him a role he might wish to return however..
Will the Rogues react with grace and maturity?
Has Steve learnt his Lesson?
Throw in some breakfast fluff for our dear boy.
Will the author ever stop asking these dramatic questions?

Chapter Notes

In America

- **September 8th**
  
  Bruce discovers things are not as they seem.

  Tony tells Laura & the Mini Agents.

  Tony tells the team.

- **September 12th**
  
  Tony & Laura storm the Accords Councils castle.

Merry Saturday and we're back in Wakanda!
As you can see I've included a little recap of what is happening at the same time over with Iron Dad and the gang, I thought it could be helpful what with my chapter plans scuppering themselves.

The original plan had been 1 chapter in America, 1 in Wakanda, back and forth. Well. You know how well THAT went, which meant my estimates of the boys meeting in chapter 11 became a household joke and boy did I not realise how the word count added up xD.

Where I am however in my writing things are getting highly amusing, I finally got to use the two scenes I originally wrote before this story was a flicker and great plans for something coming up in November(In this story, not a different one :) ) titled '20 days' .

Also, I absolutely love the comments and tags that some people leave on the bookmarks :).

Anyway, enough waffle, some delicious chaos is afoot.
T'Challa had been sitting outside for about an hour now. Trying to focus just on the forest and clear his mind. It had been a few days since he had spoken to Roger's and he'd been actively rejecting all attempts for the stubborn man to make appointments with him. Something made easier as Barnes was relaying information about the rogues to his sister, and to him directly on a few occasions.

Things definitely were not sunshine and desert roses in the villa.

The good Captain keeps looking for his best friend from the 40s and seems to have no qualms letting Barnes know he is upset when he doesn't act correctly. It was as if he was constantly clawing for this perfect, remembered idea of 'Bucky', as if he were trapped in the body of the Winter Soldier, and only he knew the mystical code to free him. It was either causing him to miss the obvious, or he was intentionally ignoring the person Barnes was already blossoming into. It was a great shame, because he liked the person Barnes was coming. The captain was missing out by chasing a ghost.

At first, Barnes had felt terrible about it and started beating himself up. Started to agree with the Captain. Started to let him make his choices for him. Shuri had become alarmed as it came with a drastic drop for Barnes, if it had continued he would have just become a ghost.

Thankfully, his therapist convinced him that it was not his job to appease anyone. That he was allowed to finally be himself, a chance to be happy in himself. This had a snap affect that know he was almost leaking anger over it. Occasionally it felt like he was two men, but considering that he was still finding out who he was based on the two people he had been, easy going Buck and the blank slate of The Asset, T'Challa didn't necessarily think this was a bad thing. As much as he seemed to worry about attacking people, everytime he had seen Barnes get angry, he'd had an iron control over himself.

Sighing and rubbing his face, he realised did not know how to deal with the Rogers problem and garner the results he wished with the parameters set. He had idly considered knocking him out and putting him in cryo for a good 10 minutes. The little Witch and the rage filled archer were his guard dogs however. In his opinion, they were rabid ones.

He had the bulk of the story now from Barnes, but a lot of the fight was hazy to the man. Rogers would have remembered better, but he was actively concealing things. Dr Stark would be the best to ask, whether he had been trying to kill either of them as Rogers stated or venting anger as Barnes thought. He also hadn't told his sister how bad the fight was, although he had to admit she likely had a good idea about that. Given her suspicion about the man's hand at least. He hadn't told her what sparked the fight and hated that he was also now wrapped up in this viper pit of lies.

How do you tell your kid sister that a man she admires had his parents killed?

By the other man she was caring for?

That answer being that you don't, because he's a damned coward.
Both of the men were suffering from that day in 1991 and that day in Siberia and he wanted to do something. To help them. But he didn't know where to even start.

He had to talk to Rogers again however. He couldn't let the man think he had gotten away with his dangerous little lie, as one lie could lead to many and he didn't have the time nor want to dedicate himself to the rogues and deciphering their truth from lies. He was a new king, something they seemed to forget, often annoyed that he wasn't always on call for their myriad of complaints. He really needed to ask Dr Stark how he dealt with them over the years.

He'd run into roadblocks online of getting to discover things about the team, mainly that Dr Stark was the only real one to have a media presence. In all the years, unless it was fighting, the others just didn't make themselves known. The best media presence the captain had was showreels from the 40s! Oh and a hilarious series of short films that were apparently meant for teenagers in school that he immediately sent to Shuri.

He'd been impressed with the Avengers in the past, caught up in the hype, before they started racking up property damage and deaths that had concerned his father. The apparent disregard for borders had been a screeching red flag for them. A man wearing the American flag, practically screeching Western values feeling as if land borders and a country's sovereign rights were mere roadblocks to be bypassed with little thought.

But they were heroes and heroes were good people.

He should have known that they would be flawed like every other human, but the hero status tricked you into forgetting that. A little digging into the past and asking some other councillors, he found that until the Civil War, they actually had permission to cross borders and it had been managed by Dr Stark. After the split, that stopped. He wondered if the others even realised Dr Stark had been clearing the way? That they would need to take up that job? Or was it a pointless irritation that stopped them achieving the greater good with his own hands?

Meeting them he'd also discovered that some of them had very grating personalities and that they ignore many 'little details' that didn't concern them.

Some of them were actually quite nice and polite.

They just seemed to clash and he had to wonder if anything other than their superhero abilities was considered before the team was formed? He knew a bit about creating teams and he knew that even the best planned teams can still crash and burn when put together. That's when you try to work on the issues, find out if it is something simple or a full blown clash of ideologies that cannot be resolved. Any resolution must also be equal, forcing one to give more than the other? That'd just solving today's problem by creating tomorrows.

There comes a point when you have to admit the team is simply not working, especially if forcing it is detrimental to certain members and the team should be split. True when the Avengers first came together, the superhero gig was slim pickings. Now however there was enough to create more than one functional team with ease. So why had the captain plowed on ahead with the current volatile team?

Maybe he was being too critical of the man because he was angry at him?

Either way, this wasn't the topic he would be broaching with the man. He wanted to find out what he'd taken these few days to come up with.

Another lie?
Or the truth?

**Sam POV**

Sam was not having a great time.

He hadn't been having a great time for quite a while now, but then going from Avenger to international fugitive whilst hiding out in Wakanda, he's pretty sure that he was allowed to be off of his game.

Everything had been so simple at first.

General Ross had compromised Stark.

He had wondered about the man, showing blatant, almost screaming signs of PTSD one minute when he didn't realise he was being observed, and then as soon as he realised he wasn't alone, a mask slid across his face and he was fine. The ease of which he did that had concerned him more than anything else. That was a conditioned response and masking to that level was exhausting.

But he just didn't know what to do with this information.

He wasn't Stark's counsellor. Clint had told him enough about the man that he didn't find much in common with him. Stark was a nerd, he was a jock. Stark had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, the perfect childhood, never hurt or wanted for anything. Never hungry, never to worry about where his food comes from. Likely breezed through school with a gaggle of people despite his nerd status. He then turned into a reckless, arrogant, pleasure seeking, drug addict, alcoholic playboy, with no consideration for anyone but himself.

They were fundamentally opposed.

Somethings didn't track now he had nothing but time to think.

Stark could hide pain to a frankly terrifying degree. He'd broken his wrist on a mission once and just shrugged and said he would wait for the others to be checked out first, denying pain medication, he’d sat there chatting with Rhodes as if nothing had happened. Even getting him to stay in medical had been a chore, only with Rhodes staying did he remain.

If he hadn't literally seen the scan FRIDAY had shown the doctor, he wouldn't have known he was injured. Hiding pain, physical as well as psychological, to that degree was a response he learned from somewhere, and that had lights flashing in his mind.

That was another thing.

**Rhodes.**

Stark had been friends with Rhodes for decades.

Sam was sure of precisely how long, but the pair acted as brothers that had been stood by each other forever.

He had bonded with the other pilot from their love of flying and the man was down to earth, hardworking and an all around, amazing guy. Not what he'd suspect to be friends with what the media and team depicted Stark as.
After Ultron, the team had been sharp to him, angry. *Understandably.*

They'd told him that the man's reckless arrogance had not only nearly killed them all, but killed many people and if they hadn't stopped it? Would have killed countless people in a cold, merciless fashion.

So he would admit to not putting much effort into getting to know the guy. He wasn't around much anyway, seemed to prefer to keep to the sidelines in his flash suits and expensive cars. He snarled and looked bored in team meetings. Although there were instances he'd see Stark's face when Wanda used her magic freely around him. Before that mask slipped on, it was fear, but he had convinced himself he was seeing things. The little cracks in the masks.

He'd asked around a bit, about Stark and Wanda, but heard about how Stark was responsible for killing Wanda's parents! So he'd stopped digging, *again.* It hadn't felt like much back then, but sitting alone in a room in Wakanda, letting his mind playback events and now, a different picture was coming together in his mind. No matter how much he *fought* it.

Everything with Ross felt like it had snuck up on him, he could see Stark was deteriorating but then he suddenly up and left, he went to spend time with Rhodes so he'd pushed it aside. Steve hadn't been happy, he felt like Stark had been shirking his responsibilities at the time, it had resulted in the few meetings between the pair becoming sharper. Their almost friendly quips became barbs. Their arguments became rage matches that exploded with no reconciliation. More than once it was Stark against the team, Rhodes stood over his shoulder with absolute rage set into his features.

He could never understand how Rhodey was always to Stark's right. Why he was there to protect him. Protect him from *what?*

Then Ross came along and he was left wondering if Ross was using the team break down to manipulate the man? Steve wouldn't let a friend be used like that but he hadn't dug then either, not when he found out from Clint that Stark had held Wanda captive, for no reason!

There had been *so many* circumstances where he'd let his discomfort go, hadn't asked, hadn't dug. At the time it had made sense. He wondered now, that if he *had,* would he be an international fugitive now? Now he was sat, *stationery* and all these little things were stacking up in his mind and wouldn't *leave him be.*

He almost *longed* for the simplicity before T'Challa had asked his damned questions.

After Steve and Bucky had come back bloody, he'd thought it was the Winter Soldiers. Steve hadn't wanted to discuss it, utterly focused on his friend. Which, fair enough, that was understandable. It was only *after* he'd gone into cryo when Steve had finally told them all Stark had tried to *kill* Bucky. Then when Steve intervened, he had gone after him too! Not to arrest, to stone cold murder them. Steve had left him temporarily disabled so they could escape and then rescue them from the raft. It was simple.

So for all the potential lingering guilt in his mind, for all those lost occasions with Stark where he'd sat back… the anger was more prevailing.

The others had told him Stark was the reason they got put in the Raft, not Ross. That he'd left them in that hell hole he probably helped build if Wanda was correct. She could read minds right? So it made *sense* to trust her.

The kicker was that he'd*d been the one to tell Stark about Siberia, he directed him, and that guilt, it *ate* at him.
That he'd been *indirectly* responsible for his best friend getting battered bloody and Bucky losing his arm! So since then he'd been raging at Stark.

If Ross was manipulating him? He probably deserved it.

Wanda had told him that people referred to the man as the **Merchant of Death**.

That he was heartless and cared about no one, which was why he was so flippant and joked about everything.

He just wanted to be angry at someone and Stark was **easy**.

He'd been fine with that really.

Then T'Challa went and messed things up. Asking Steve what happened in Siberia, with *rage* in his eyes. He didn't know what had caused this, every time he'd seen the king he had been easy going. No one had questioned Steve's story about Siberia because why would they? Something had *changed*. Something had made T'Challa *doubt* what Steve said.

At first he'd just thought it was simple miscommunication, but then he'd said that Stark was in contact with his kid sister. Which was odd enough in itself. He'd not seen Shuri much but she had been rather abrasive and blatant about her unhappiness of having them in her country. Which again, fair enough really.

Hosting international fugitives when your country was only just going global? Yeah, he got why she was mad.

Knowing she was friendly with Stark was just... peculiar, because she seemed like a good kid (when she wasn't mad at them). Brilliant, smart and very caring… Another person that did not line up with the Stark he had been told about. Someone like the Stark he'd been told about wouldn't be in touch with kids, surely? Why would he?

*'He left me to die, then he took them in'*

So much dread attached to such a small sentence.

Steve had visibly paled. His body language was just all *wrong*, he *flinched* when T'Challa had mentioned him lying. Why?

Could he ignore this? Could this be another odd thing that didn't seem right that he pushed away?

He was considering this whilst staring at the laptop they'd been given, it hadn't gotten much use, everyone content to ignore the world because they didn't want to see themselves as fugitives. Maybe they needed to start looking now.

They'd been sticking their heads in the sands and something had just kicked them up the arse.

So he finally dove in. He searched for *anything recent* about Stark and came up with… surprisingly little.

After the Civil War he just.. Vanished from the media, very strange for Stark who was stalked by paps and fans when he just went for a coffee. But there was absolutely nothing, meaning that since that fight and now, he'd not been outside. Or he'd somehow avoided pretty much all people. He'd seen the man get spotted in seconds before, so this was peculiar. Plus, he didn't really try to hide, that was his life.
He found several articles about stuff he'd been doing however. But like that TV show, he wasn't visible. Statements he'd written were read out by others. He'd been extremely active in the Accords Council but it was all by proxy and Rhodes.

There were articles claiming he was going above and beyond for working so hard, on multiple projects, for other people, in multiple fields… from his deathbed!! That panicked him slightly and he discovered two things. One he found an older article with a picture that was shared enough times he didn't want to think about. Stark, looking absolutely awful, unconscious, his face an abject mess of bruises, his eyes even had those eye bandages taped to his face. He had been in a coma for around 2 weeks it seems, and he really did look awful. He couldn't imagine doing the amount of work he'd read in that condition.

T'Challa was right, that was not the look of a man 'temporarily disabled'.

Something that he noticed, that the others seemed to forget about Stark often, even him, but looking at this picture he was faced by the harsh reality. He was a baseline human, over 40 years old, with physical ailments from his many trials.

True, he didn't know much about what had birthed Ironman, but Widow had once told him he'd been held captive in Afghanistan, terrorists torturing him into building bombs. The most baffling was she'd told him, that Stark had apparently woken up whilst being operated on and then again with a car battery attached to his chest. He didn't know what to believe though as the Widow being a notorious spy, could have embellished details. Surely surgery and something like that... He would have suspected Stark would have died of infection at the very least if that was true. If his body could even pull through that given the abuse it had undergone. Then to create the Ironman armour with no machines?

Either way, Stark was a baseline human, fighting amongst gods and superhuman, and powered people, just like him. He knew that they occasionally forgot their strengths in training, in a fight? He imagined that would be worse.

Speaking of the Widow. That was the second thing he discovered that was not going to go down well with the group. Clint and Steve were still waiting for her to come back after all. She'd turned up not long after they'd arrived, then not long after Bucky went into Cryo, the day after Steve had told them about Siberia, she said she was heading out. Steve and Clint had been against it, too risky. She'd pointed out that she could evade authorities better than anyone and would use her spy network to get them valuable information. She had them convinced and headed out. Looking at the date on this article of her trail after turning herself into Stark… She hadn't wasted much time. There was a lag of several days but that could be travel time.

Stark had been instrumental in her not ending up in prison apparently. He spoke passionately, via proxy again, and supplied extensive evidence with an army of extremely expensive Lawyers, and had gotten her off with several months on house arrest at the compound. Which was frankly amazing, she'd thanked him profusely for this chance and sworn to not waste it, she'd even spoken to the press afterwards and it had all been about Stark too. How she'd seen him a few days after he'd woken up from his coma, and he'd already been hard at work trying to make people safe. It was the most heartfelt and earnest thing he'd seen her come up with. All about how she'd work to earn his forgiveness.

After that, she'd had quite the online presence, being on house arrest, that was understandable. She had been involved in press dealings in the compound too. Actual pictures of her. She looked happy and like she was doing great.

He hated her for that.
Even her smiling face on Instagram eating a cake that apparently "Tony & The Kids" made her. What kids?!

This was a mess, but he hated her because he was the one to find this out first.

So he was going to have to tell everyone else.

He sighed and closed down some windows, leaving Stark's coma article from July and Nats article about her trail. He minimised her Instagram, he didn't want to show them that, but he figured he'd need to, otherwise they'd think she'd need rescuing. Ugh, none of this made sense! Thinking that would do, he carried the laptop out of his bedroom and into the common room. Dragging his feet considerably. Wondering why it was him who had to do this.

Steve and Clint were sat at a table, nibbling on some early lunch foods he couldn't recognise but knew he liked at least some of. However his stomach was lead right now. Scott was also at the table but had his chair tilted back on two legs like a teenager and he would perpetually be, looking through pictures he'd already taken on the little camera T'Challa had gifted him. Ignoring the looks Clint was shooting at him. Oh joy.

Wanda was nowhere to be seen. He was honestly a little relieved about that, she got very worked up when Stark got mentioned, and this was going to be hard enough as it was.

Bucky was sat in the corner of the room, his hair done in possibly the most complicated design he'd ever seen, but he had to admit he looked damned good and wondered who exactly was doing his hair? He had been very insistent that he did not like being touched. Likely not helped that Steve kept ignoring that fact, and Bucky warnings about it, yet he kept touching him and getting into his personal space.

The reaction had varied from terrified panic and full blown panic attacks that he'd actually had to intervene in, or a cold, furious rage that had made Sam's blood run cold, his senses prickling like they had when the Winter Soldier had destroyed his poor baby like tearing paper.

He didn't know what Bucky we had today, but he obviously had the look of someone with a 'keep away' sign, but he was sitting in the common room with them. That was a huge improvement.

Steve however kept shooting him pleading glances that Bucky was ignoring with a clenched jaw. So not going too well, but nothing was broken, so he was taking it as a win.

He squinted to read what Bucky was reading but was stymied when he realised it was in Cyrillic. It looked like fiction however.

"Hi guys, Bucky, What are you reading?"

At Steve's twitches he realised he'd guessed right. The pleading looks and sad puppy dog eyes today was because Bucky was reading something that wasn't in English. Steve had developed an abject hatred of Russian since Bucky had been around, which he thought was counterproductive really. Bucky obviously liked it, his occasional slips were fine, he usually told you what he'd meant in English right after if you asked. It wasn't much different to Nat's occasional Russian, and he'd grown quite attached to that whilst the 3 of them had been hunting for Bucky. So he actually liked it, but Steve wanted a united front.

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Steve had outright yelled at him about it, twice now, saying he needed to forget about it and stop using it to 'get better'. No matter how many times he tried to explain to Steve that you don't just get better overnight from mental illnesses. But he was still running on information from the 40s, no matter how much he tried to educate the man. Sometimes it felt like Steve had given up on today
and only wanted to live in the past. Which Sam just didn't understand, sure, somethings might have been better if you squinted, and things were complicated now, but it was a good complicated. Especially with mental health.

Since that second argument, he wasn't sure if he was imagining it, but he was convinced that Bucky was using it more, plus this openly reading in the common room was new. He noted that Bucky twitched slightly and wondered why, he'd been noticing that these last few days too and was starting to wonder if it was in regards to his name.

He also wondered why everyone else was apparently blind. Sure he had training they didn't, but surely some of it was obvious?

"Okrashenyy Chelovek.. Ah.. The Painted Man, it's a very interesting book. Have you seen the Library here? It's Udivitel'no.. Amazing."

He had to admit he was quite blown away by the smiling, passionate about reading Bucky Barnes! And maybe he should stick to calling him just Barnes? Also we had the slipping into Russian-Barnes today. He wasn't entirely sure if it was accidental when he was distracted or excited, or if he was now doing it to piss Steve off. Maybe both? Maybe he just wasn't holding it back now? This however was a side he'd never seen of the man, he decided to make a point of speaking to him more away from the group and getting to find out more than a dark, brooding angry cloud he put out there.

"That sounds great, you can maybe tell me about it later? I've not read anything in a while, could be fun?"

Barnes lit up like a damned Christmas tree. He looked like a hyper, eager puppy at the idea of someone reading the same book as him and he decided he'd read the book even if he hated it now, there was little choice. The man was trying to rediscover himself as a human being, the least he could do was read a weird sounding book.

"That would be great, I'll pick you up a copy in English, da?"

"Awesome, I look forward to it.. But for now Steve, Clint.. I have… not great news?"

"Oh what now? T'Challa coming to interrogate Cap again?"

"No, but after that I got to thinking, I know why we are avoiding the news, but we're leaving ourselves vulnerable by not having information. So I did some digging into the past few months."

"That's great Sam, good initiative. Did you find anything useful? Like when we're able to go home?"

"Ah Wilson you teachers pet."

Clint these days was just angry at everything. He tried to talk to the man but honestly he'd lost patience. Making him stop sniping at T'Challa for God's sake had burnt up the dregs of his compassion for the man, but he was trying to stay cordial.

"Well, I found out something about Stark and where Nats been."

He sat the laptop down, even Barnes crowded around as he brought up the article with Stark first, Nats… he didn't want to bring up Nat at all really. Barnes took one look before immediately bolting from the room. Leaving Sam frowning after him. Wondering why Stark in a coma would do that, he was the victim in that fight, came home missing a limb and was attacked for no reason. Maybe
it was just the memory of the fight itself? He'd noticed that Barnes felt a lot of guilt over his actions under Hydra and was against the idea of hurting anyone, so maybe that was why. Steve had paled when he'd seen Stark too, which was curious in itself but his attention was all for Barnes' retreating form.

"Sam! You shouldn't have just dumped that in front of him, you know how sensitive Bucky is!"

"How was I supposed to know seeing the guy who beat on him for no reason in a coma would set him off?"

Sam snapped back, immediately feeling guilty but he was not doing great himself and being snapped at and getting the patented 'I'm disappointed' glare from Captain America was not something he was interested in today.

Especially not when evidence was mounting that he had lied to them.

They were meant to be family, Steve was meant to trust and be honest with them. It didn't help that he actually was feeling bad about sending Barnes running.

"OK, we looked at the poor little Stark likely getting top of the line medical care, probably sipping champagne with Ross when he woke up. Who. Cares. Can we get to the interesting news now?"

"Yeah, Clint is right, what did you find about Nat? She's okay right, not been captured?"

Sam frowned at the two of them but pushed the feeling down, he'd question that later when things were less tense, maybe. He doubted they believed those things about Stark really, they were just blowing off steam? He switched the articles over to bring up the ones about Nat.

"No, she wasn't captured. Barely days after she left us she apparently handed herself into Stark and surrendered."

"What?!"

"Huh."

Clint and Steve practically screamed 'What' at him, making him step back a little. Scott was the only one paying attention and reading the article.

"Says here that she threw herself at Stark's Mercy. He worked night and day to build her defence and his lawyers backed her up too. Nat said she'd take whatever punishment was coming to her as long as she could make up for what she had done and her betrayal."

"My Nat wouldn't say that. This is wrong, she must have been captured, we have to save her Steve."

Sam jumped in before Steve could react to THAT. Yikes.

"She's fine! She got a few months house arrest at the compound where she's on probation. By June next year she'll be completely pardoned and she's joining the Avengers. Look, she has an Instagram and everything."

"Looks like Stark's 'impassioned speech' at her trial moved a lot of people… Huh. That cake looks nice, she looks fine Clint. Don't think I've ever seen her smile like that."

Sam grimaced as Clint was seething more and more as Scott spoke. Seemingly not noticing the
pure rage vibrating from the archer.

Steve was just stunned sat staring at the picture of Nat sitting in the compound, barely recognisable to them now. The overall shape of the common area was still kind of there, but it looked like it had been massively extended. The kitchen was nearly twice the size and drastically redecorated. It looked much more cozy than it had before. There were only a few people in the background and it was slightly blurry, taken as a selfie by Nat. Celebration for her pardon being finalised it seemed. Only one woman was half turned that could be seen properly and it looked like she was cutting cake for someone else..

"Is that.. No. It can't be. I.. I think that Hope? What.. Why is she at the compound?? Hank hates Stark?"

"Who cares, my friend is being held against her will, who knows what Stark is doing to her!"

Yeah. Not touching that.

Sam glanced at the caption again, seeing the woman Scott pointed at was linked and clicking her name, bringing up another page that they found see had several pictures from the compound in. Some that weren't even remotely recognisable. He decided to just ignore Clint for now. Because that was a bad road just waiting for them to be dragged down and he was still suffering from the last one he'd been dragged down.

He loaded up the first picture of potentially Hope? Sitting on a sofa with 2 other women and 2 teenage boys were sat at their feet playing a video game. He was sure he recognised one of the women but couldn't pinpoint it. It was very homey.. And cosey. Everyone was smiling.

" Is that Hope?"

"Yeah.. Oh my god yeah. That's Hope. She's at the comp-"

He was cut off by the strangled sound coming from Clint.

"That's my wife!"

Sam blinked and looked at the two women again. One looked like she was about to punch the camera but had a small smile on her face an arm slung around each of the other women, pulling them in for the picture. Nat was leaning in, grinning even though he'd never known her to be so tactile before.

Now he really looked, he recognised Laura. Her hair was just above shoulder length now and was styled much differently than what she had seen before. The underneath of her hair was also dyed dark blue. He didn't know much about women's haircuts, but it looked expensive, as did her clothes. She was wearing a tailored suit and looked like she'd finished a day of work, a few buttons undone, her heels were next to her feet. She, like the other women, looked happy, leaning into the other woman, grinning widely. He looked at the two teens but neither reminded him of Cooper, the tags read Nat, Jess, Laura, Harley and Peter. He had no idea who most of these people were.

"Oh god. Stark has Nat and my wife. This.. This is bad. Steve, we have to go now and get them and bring them back here."

"Mr Barton I would advise against that. If you try to attack the compound, you will be arrested. Also, if you leave Wakanda, you will not be allowed back in."

"Your Majesty, this is his wife's safety we are talking about here."
Sam backed up and sat down at the table, T'Challa, who had snuck up on them, *again*, calmly entered the room and sat next to him, opposite Steve, Clint and Scott. He had a bad feeling about this.

"He should be thought about that before becoming an international fugitive. The rules are simple you stay here, you stay quiet, you keep your heads down, you don't leave Wakanda or contact people online which could draw people's attention to us. Do all this and you don't go to jail. If any single one of you endanger my country in anyway? I will hand *all* of you to the authorities in a heartbeat."

Clint looks like he's going to argue more but Steve face turns to panic and stops him. He doubted that T'Challa would really hand Barnes over to the authorities like that, but considering that he didn't want them running half cocked either, he wasn't going to say anything.

"Clint, we can't do anything now, but as soon as we can... Until then, you can see her here right?"

Clint snarls, snatches the laptop and stomps out of the room. Leaving Scott looking deeply upset.

"I don't think he's going to bring the group laptop back is he?"

"I'll have a tablet sent up for you and Mr Wilson so you can view your friends and families. Like the laptop, you can see anything online, but you won't be able to post or contact anyone with it. It's entirely one way except if you are contacting someone in Wakanda. Something I suspect Mr Barton has forgotten but will find out as he tries to break a rule I just informed him off to try and contact his wife."

"I don't think your being very fair to us on this."

"Steve, come on. He's doing us a huge favour here. The very least we can do is not put his country and people at risk. They *have* to be his first priority."

Sam had told Steve this about this a hundred times already, maybe a hundred and one will get it through. Steve however squares his shoulders, straightens his back, his jaw jutting out. A veritable picture of defiance and Sam sighs internally. Even Scott seems to be edging away from his idol. Luckily, T'Challa derails whatever determined speech Steve was preparing to come out with.

"Anyway. That is not why I am here."

"Oh, by the way, Thank you, your majesty, this camera is awesome and I've taken so many pictures, I'm travelling each day to a new area, one of the Dora, Onyeka took pity on me getting lost and is showing me something new each day to take pictures of as long as I send her the best ones. Although without the laptop I don't know if I can do that now?"

"You are very welcome Scott and you can connect it to the tablet, I'm sure she'll show you how. Send them to me too? It will be interesting to see Wakanda from a different perspective."

Sam thanked the Gods for *Scott.*

Which was the weirdest thing he'd ever thought.

He seemed to have a way of turning conversations.. good, harmless with his goofy ways, even when people were on the edges of their seats with violence. Bu-Barnes, had told him that Scott reminded him of a labrador and had promptly sent him 79 (yes, he counted) pictures of various labradors. Followed by enough memes to make him consider his sanity and he'd passed the laptop to Clint to make it stop. He frowned, realising that he was still logged on, he'd have to check to
make sure Clint went on to his own profile. He was jerked out of his head when Steve interrupted the calm, innocuous conversation Scott and the King were having about sunrises vs sunsets.

Steve sounded agitated and nervous, he was also fidgeting slightly which was weird and highly unlike him. Although Sam was learning more about his teammate and best friend in this villa, in Wakanda, than he had back home. Probably because the smaller space and lack of amenities that they'd grown used to.

Sure the villa was gorgeous and their bedrooms were all master suites with king size beds they each had a toilet/shower attached. There were two huge bathrooms with a bath that any of them could use the kitchen was decently sized with a breakfast bar big enough for all of them. The common room had a few things to keep them busy as well as a larger dining room table. Food was delicious and delivered so they didn't always need to cook. Frankly, it was amazing and he had to keep reminding himself of that, and the size of his apartment before he became an Avenger. He'd realised he'd fallen into the same trap as some of the others on arrival and found the place. Lacking, compared to home. It was Scott's reaction that had snapped him out of it before he'd said something stupid. Thankfully.

"What was it that brought you here today then?"

"That would be you Mr Rogers. If you remember after speaking to Sergeant Barnes, I said I would give you some time. I have, I now would love to know what actually happened in Siberia."

He had this utterly surreal feeling that Steve had just found himself dragged to the headmaster's office and he and Scott had been dragged in as unwitting accomplices.

If T'Challa gave him detention, this was definitely a dream.

Without Clint and Wanda to yell in Steve's defence, the room was oddly.. silent. Scott looked distinctly uncomfortable, he had told Sam that he just didn't know any of them enough to argue this after last time. He was torn and upset when he spoke to Sam. Steve, Captain America had been his idol, the man he risked his family to follow, the man he told his daughter about, the man he emulated to be a hero for his kid. Having him lie to T'Challa? Someone Scott really liked? That had shaken him.

Well he was shaken as well to be honest. He was wondering how Stark had ended up in that hospital bed. A coma was a severe injury. He was still angry at him for what he did, and didn't like him, but something just felt... off about the whole situation. There was more to it that he didn't know.

"I can't believe you ambushed and interrogated Bucky out of cryo for this! He was probably confused and didn't remember properly. I already told you what happened, so if he said anything else it was probably the shock of his injury or confusion from cryo. We all know how unreliable his memories are."

Scott looked slightly nauseated and Sam was just thankful Barnes wasn't in the room right now at Steve glanced at them to confirm his statement. Because he would not have taken THAT well. That would have resulted in an argument for sure.

"I've already gone over this multiple times. Me and Bucky arrived, he was happy and joking with me talking, he was just Bucky. Tony arrived and he tricked us into thinking there was a truce. When he discovered the Winter Soldiers were dead, he said he was following Ross' orders that Sharon had told me about, that there was a shoot to kill order on Bucky, already! I tried to talk to Tony. To convince him what he was doing was wrong. But he just refused to listen to me, he then
just attacked Bucky before I could convince him otherwise. He was trying to kill him, so I had to get involved. I eventually got him down, after he'd already blasted Bucky's arm off. I temporarily disabled the suit. Picked up Bucky and we escaped, shortly after you picked us up. I'm sure not even 10 minutes later Tony was flying home safe and sound."

Sam frowned at Steve, that was more detailed than what he'd told them before. It was also subtly different.

"Steve… that's uh.. That's not what you told us before."

Scott shook his head at Steve, T'Challa seemed unphased. Relaxing back in his chair with a curious look on his face as he kept eye contact with Steve. Steve shot us both an angry look.

"Well then, you must be remembering wrong. I was there so I know what happened. Stark is probably lying to get sympathy so he can manipulate resources out of you T'Challa. I'm sorry for that, sometimes he focuses too much on business and doesn't notice the people who he i-"

"I'm going to stop you right there. When I gave you these days to think. It wasn't for you to think up a more detailed lie. It wa-"

"I'm not ly-"

"Please. Be silent. You have said your piece and now you will listen to mine. This time was for you to think about what you could be risking by lying. The safety of your friends for example. To think about who you are meant to be, which I thought was a decent, honest person.

"Turns out you are a liar."

He and Scott had turned to T'Challa now, concerned about what was going to happen next. Had Steve just risked all their safety?

"For now, I will just tell them what I know of what happened in Siberia."

Steve pales and leans forward.

"Please, your majesty, please, he doesn't des-"

"And what does Dr Stark deserve hm? For you to keep painting him as a Demon 'bad guy', decry him as the devil himself? The source of all your problems?"

"But Bu -"

"Shut up Steve. You swore you wouldn't lie again! Pizdobol <fucking liar>.

Barnes enters the room, he checks he face to see which version we have now.. He's standing so much taller than usual, it always baffles Sam that he can go from making himself appear small and vulnerable, or overly excited… to this, such strong presence where he acts like he owns the room. Contained violence that could be let go in a heartbeat. He doesn't need weapons on him to look ready to kill because he really is a weapon. His blue gray eyes look closer to gray, to steel when he's like this and he is looking straight at Steve, who is giving Barnes his full on puppy dog eyes with a touch of desperation.

"Buck, you don't hav-"

"Stop lying for me! I don't want you to. It doesn't change what I did!"
"Buck, it wasn't you!"

"My body. My hands! I had to wash the blood of the Starks off my hands. I might not have been in control, but it still happened BY MY HANDS!"

He practically roared the last part, Scott looked slightly terrified, Steve just was still pleading with him and Sam had no idea what was happening. T'Challa looked.. Like he'd expected this? He wondered if the king had drawn out the conversation until he'd know Barnes had been outside? No, couldn't be. That was too much to chance. Wait, Starks? Plural?

"Steve, what is going on here?"

Steve snapped his attention to him, blinking as if he'd forgotten that they were even in the room.

"Sam… I. I was protecting Bucky.. Stark did try to kill him, he did and it wasn't Bucky's fault!"

"Steve. Just.. Blyat <Fucking no> punk, Balvan, <Thick headed fool>. The man had just discovered his parents' death wasn't an accident. He'd just discovered they were murdered.."

'Oh shit, this is not good' Sam thought in his head. Feeling supremely uncomfortable with this situation. Yeah, it didn't let him off the hook for attacking them.. But if he'd just seen.. 'wait.. His hands? Oh god.' Scott seemed to click at the same time as Sam. Scott's eyes going wide and staring at Barnes and Steve switching between them like a terrifying tennis match, Sam carried on looking at Barnes who seemed in so much pain..

"It wasn't you Buck! Stark, he shouldn't have attacked you! It wasn't you!"

"Chush' sobach'ya<Bullshit>, He'd just watched a video of both of his parents being murdered, stood next to the goddamned killer! And stop saying that, it doesn't help! My hands Steve, he watched me throttle his mother to death!"

Steve doesn't try this time, he just looks torn, T'Challa has stood to stand next to Barnes and Sam feels like his head is splitting. This.. This changes so mu-

" And what was worse Steve? He turns to you. His friend. And asks did you know… and what did you do?"

"Please Buck.. Stop.. I was protecting you."

"Well now they know, so A huy li <why the fuck not?>, so you aren't protecting me now. Your protecting yourself, so you don't have to admit you Naveshat' pizdyley <beat the crap out> of a grieving man."

"He was trying to kill you!"

"He asked you if you knew! And you lied, again! Pizdobol <Fucking liar) you said 'I didn't know it was him' But you did Steve… You've known since DC."

"Steve…all that time we were searching for him… all that time you were using Starks money and resources.. You'd been lying to the man that housed and fed us? That did every little thing you asked? Oh man.. This. This is so fucked up. What else did you lie about? "

"I didn't lie.. I just omitted things. I did it for Tony."

"You let us believe Stark randomly attacked Barnes for no reason.. For Stark? I felt responsible for
"sending him to you, I thought I'd nearly gotten you killed!"

"No! I was protecting him from finding out his parents had been murdered!"

"I... I can't believe this. I believed in you. Hank told me to never trust a Stark so it was easy to follow you against him... But.. That's on me. At least I can admit when I fucked up."

Scott grabbed his camera and made a hasty retreat, smiling at Barnes on the way and muttering something that Sam couldn't hear. Whatever it was, some of the tension bled out of Barnes shoulders. Before he snapped back, face blank and looked so much like the Winter Soldier that Sam wondered if Barnes was even there now. When he started talking, it sounded more like mission debrief, the speech just seemed different to him, more dry, sarcastic and like he was impressed? But like it was automated. Which was weird, maybe he was just reading into it too much, his brain was sort of careening right now.

"He hit Steve first. Before he came at me. Multiple times in the fight he had openings he 'missed'. He did more damage to the bunker than me."

"Tony Stark - Threat Level Alpha*. Do not approach. Do not attack. Mission failure acceptable when an Alpha* becomes involved. Only attempt capture if adequate containment facilities are on hand and access to a chair."

"The man is a walking tank and he hit you open handed. If he wanted us dead. We would be dead. Instead you disabled his power source and abandoned the man in a metal coffin in the Siberian spring, when you knew that no one knew his location. Hilariously, a thing he did for your safety. <Then you lied to us about it.>"

The last part was practically hissed in anger, a contrast to his laugh when talking about Stark being a tank, the Winter Soldiers laugh, because this just didn't feel like Barnes anymore. His laugh was harsh, mocking to Steve who flinched back from him. He wondered how Barnes could still put himself in this mind set, was it like concentrating when you sent to battle and out emotions aside? Was it unintentional? This wasn't the blank slate that he'd seen before though. No, he had a strange smile on his face but his eyes were angry. His hand opening and closing, he honestly looked like he'd been wanting to do this for awhile, but Barnes had generally held off from hurting Steve when they had clashed lately. Looking back, he can see the fine line they'd been walking. Sometimes giving in more than he should just to make sure Steve wasn't hurt.

Now? He was going for the jugular with a ruthless precision.

"I wonder how long he laid there Stevie. On that concrete floor. Inches from the snow. In a suit you broke. I wonder how much pressure it takes for a vibranium shield to crack the power source of an Ironman suit. I wonder what that would do to a baseline humans rib cage hmm?"

Somehow the man managed to make speaking in English harsher than his Russian slips...

"Buck-"

"I am not Bucky! I haven't been him in a long time. Bucky Barnes died long before he fell from that train. Before Zola, he was fracturing at Azzano. It started with the draft.."

T'Challa looked a little pale himself now and got up to whisper something to him, Barn.. Or well, Not-Barnes. Swayed on his feet and blinked rapidly a few times, looking like he was coming out of water. He nodded to T'Challa who slowly put his hand on his shoulder. He grabbed it like a lifeline, breathing rapidly. No one dared moved for a good five, ten minutes. Sam was just
processing everything that had been said because that was a lot of serious, life changing information to have thrown at you at once. Steve was equally pale.

"Uh.. Sorry I.. Therapist said I could have panic attacks and disassociate and umm. Yeah, I'm going to go see her now I think."

"Want me to walk with you Barnes?"

He nodded rapidly a few times, still clutching the Kings hand like if he let go something terrible should happen.

"Da uzh, yeah T'Challa that would be great, Spasibo Thank you."

"Of course. Mr Rogers, you will find yourself confined to the Villa until I say otherwise. The Dora Milaje already know, so do not try and sneak past them. If you leave the building without permission you will be relocated to one you cannot leave. If you feel like there is a reason important enough for you to be allowed out temporarily, inform the Dora who will inform me. I will get back to you within 72 hours whether permission is granted or not."

Well they didn't get detention, but Steve did just get grounded.

"Be grateful I am not ejecting you from Wakanda. To leave an ally behind, with knowledge they're suffering and to be without aide.. This is seen as a highly offensive crime in Wakanda. I am paying my penance whilst you have been slandering your victim. I'm sure you will use your time to think upon your actions."

T'Challa spoke to Steve without even glancing over his shoulder, Steve didn't react or try to cry out in defence of himself this time. He and Steve just sat in silence as they heard the two men leave. The front door slamming shut caused Steve to fill on body flinch.

"Sam.."

"What the fuck Steve. Why did you lie to me? You're supposed to be my best friend!"

"Sam.. I.. I don't know when this all spun out of control, I just wanted to save Bucky."

"And fuck the rest of us right?"

"No Sam! I was trying to protect everyone from the Accords and then I tried to protect Bucky because he feels so guilty over what Hydra forced him to do even though it wasn't his fault so he shouldn't feel guilty. Stark was wrong to attack him."

"Steve, I know he didn't have a choice. Barnes knows that, and I'm sure if Stark was told in a better situation, he would understand too."

"I couldn't take that risk that he'd try to kill him."

'Or his money drying up'. Sam thought darkly.

"He proved me right. He only cared about himself and tried to kill him… he-"

"Steve! I might not be Stark's number one fan, but if I just watched my parents murdered and the murderer was standing right infront of me, I'd have flipped too."

"But he wasn't-"
"Oh for fucks sake Steve. You aren't this dense. It wasn't his choice but it was him in a way. In time people could get that, but straight away? After just watching it happen? Of course he's going to be distraught. Steve you have to remember there are other people in the world than you and Barnes"

"I know that!"

"Do you? Because you tried to kill a man who saw you as his best friend. How is that different than him going after Barnes?"

"Bucky was innocent!"

"I'm sorry Steve. I.. I can't talk to you right now. I gotta go."

"Sam.. Wait!"

"Steve. How much of.. All of this was about Barnes? Did you turn us into fugitives for Barnes or the Accords?"

Steve just stands there, silently pleading with him but doesn't say anything. Sam shakes his head and leaves the room. He considered heading to his room, but Steve might follow him to talk and he just can't talk to him right now. He turns instead to the front door. A place Steve can't follow. He headed out, taking a deep breath of the warm air and just felt like his world had just entirely shifted on his axis. Like the blinders had been torn from him. He doesn't know what is up or down anymore. This that had been facts moments ago, Steve Rogers was North to Tony Stark's South. Polar opposites.

**Steve Rogers** was a pinnacle of morality, disciplined, stands up for the little guy, shuns the limelight, does everything for his team, honest, has humility, altruistic, abrasive, and modest.

**Tony Stark** was the depths of immorality, hedonistic, only cares for himself, lives in the limelight, only cares for himself, liar, arrogant, selfish, unkind, and egotistical.

He wasn't so sure anymore. All those little questions he never asked about Stark are just there and won't leave him the fuck alone. How much about both men did he actually know for himself rather than being told by the media or other people? Too much, for both of them. Steve had been throwing Stark under the bus since Siberia to cover up what he did. Thinking back on the comments they'd all be joining in on made him feel sick. How had he let himself become this? He wasn't a bully. Yet that's what he'd been doing. Just not to the man's face.

There wasn't much he could do now, not from here. If he ever got to go home however, he would try to get to know the man beneath the cartoonist devil mask he'd let himself be drawn into. Although he wouldn't be surprised it Stark never gave them another chance. Even before this Civil War things had been bad. He'd just not asked questions he should have. He'd ignored red flags he'd been **trained** to notice.

He'd thought if he ever got home, he only had to make it up to Rhodes. Maybe he could try with Stark? He was starting to wonder if the abrasive, sarcastic personality trait of his was a defense mechanism.. against people like them.

Out of all of them, he had the training to see things, and he had, he'd just ignored them and believed in Captain America, he'd let it blind him.

Now he'd discovered he was a liar of monumental proportions who threw people under the bus to
maintain said lies, that anything would go to protect Barnes. He was good at lying too, until T'Challa started laying on the pressure, he wouldn't even have thought he could lie. Which means anything he said was in question now. He'd automatically believed everything he said, because he's Captain fucking America. Now. Now this was different.

Sighing he decided he'd do what little he could from Wakanda. Stark was putting an insane amount of work into the Accords. So, instead of just deeming them as something straight out of 1984 like Steve said, he'd start reading up on them. He'd follow everything he could get his hands on.

Dammit he'd study the blasted things.

**Barnes POV**

**12th September**

He jerked awake, gasping as he fleeting the nightmare slipping through his fingers like sand. At least he assumed it was a nightmare. He tried and grasped for a shred of it and came up with absolutely nothing. Leaving him shivering on his bed, drenched in sweat in the warm, humid atmosphere of Wakanda. Practically shivering from the lack of the dream. Like it had been ripped away. He blinked a few times and started his morning routine. He went to put his hand through his hair and realised that the braids from yesterday were still in, that's odd, he always took them out before bed, thinking back to yesterday he realised that large chunks of it were just.. Gone.

Sighing, he'd been doing well without losing time as well. He at least guessed he didn't hurt anyone considering he woke up in his bed and not a cell but he'd still check later. He jumped out of bed, making it neatly before dropping to the floor to start his exercises whilst running things over in his mind.

"Bucky, James Buchanan Barnes"

He kept his name just going over and over while he finished his push ups. Maybe this way it would finally feel like it's his again. Bucky still felt foreign to him. Everytime someone called him it he had to bite his tongue to snap. He figured if he kept saying it every morning he could condition that response away, if anything it was making it worse. He shook his head, switching to sit ups.

"107th Infantry Regiment - 32557038"

That was easier, he could recite those all day and he felt like he had at some point. Flashes of memories from after Azzano flooded into his mind. Usually the memories stayed quiet until he looked at them. Now, something had happened. Maybe the nightmare. Because now he felt like he was drowning.

Drowning when you feel your lungs burning knowing that when you open your mouth, and you will, it's going to surge in, force down your throat but at least the pain in your head will stop… An endless amount of time later he blinks up at his ceiling. Not realising he'd lain back until then. Feeling slightly detatched, looking at his hand like it's someone else's, or something. Just weird. It feels like his senses had been turned down too. He pushed himself into the floor until he could really feel it and then jumped to his feet rapidly. Reaching for the pull up bar at his bedroom door.

"Born 1917… March…Dammit."

He stumbled at the date. He ran the month and date over and over and reached 100 before he got
the date. Sighing and feeling like he failed, he ran through the rest of his morning work out in silence. Maybe tomorrow he'd get it. He didn't have his note books here and part of him was thankful for it. He remembered snippets of the notebooks and it made him feel like a crazy person and his therapist told him to not call himself that. He had a nice, longer shower, using the new shampoo and conditioner that Shuri had got for him when he'd mentioned the old one irritated his hypersensitive sense of smell. This bottle has the word nature on it no less than 15 times, which, whilst excessive, at least it smelled good. So now his hair smelled like blueberries and his body wash like freshly sliced apples.

Whilst he might be a weird fruit bowl now, he kind of liked it.

When he got out, he shaved his face again, because of the damned super soldier serum. Especially now he had started to eat semi normally. Most of his diet was still the shakes, it took him a while to adapt to solid food, especially eating the correct amount instead of starvation rations, but he had managed a bit more yesterday, blank spots notwithstanding. Eating the recommended amount of food daily had a knock on effect, his hair was growing, it was now just past his shoulders, he was also shaving daily. He felt stronger and a cursory glance in the mirror even though it hadn't been long, he was putting on a little extra muscle. Whilst he would never be as big as Steve, he definitely was filling out a bit.

The difference recommended nutrition makes over injections of god knows what and those vile blue gel packs that tasted like rancid salt water. Feeling full was a strange feeling and he nearly been sick the first time in Bucharest after a job paid well and he'd bought more food than normal. Enough to be full. He'd avoided doing that again.

He added the hair goop that Shuri had ordered him to put in his hair, which also smelled of blueberries. It made him smile that she remembered that too many scents clashing gave him a headache. His clothes were unscented too for the same reason he assumed. The level of care and detail she put in was staggering sometimes. Getting dressed was harder here than when he'd woken up back in medical, choices, many choices. Until today he'd been grabbing stuff with his eyes closed but it felt like cheating. There were 7 long sleeved tops, 5 t-shirts and 3 shirts. One of the t-shirts caught his eye realising it was dark red. Hm. Maybe he liked dark red?

Usually he'd avoided the t-shirts they were thin and left a lot of flesh visible. But it was hot, so it would feel nice? He shrugged, it was worth a shot. There were less trousers than tops, 3 jeans in different colours, soft trousers that looked tight at the ankle and what he guessed looked like suit trousers. He didn't know much about fashion, give him tac gear and weapons and he'd be in his element. This was strange. Why did he need so many pairs of trousers? He grabbed the black jeans, that's normal, he thinks. At least underwear is easy. No one sees it so it doesn't matter if its the wrong choice.

He amused himself however choosing odd socks. No one will notice and he liked it. It was like intentionally choosing the wrong thing and not getting in trouble for it. His shoes are familiar however, black heavy boots. Although a lot of it seems to be decoration oddly, they're still leather and good quality. He imagined they'd hold up well and decides he likes New Rocks that Shuri ordered as a joke. After he dressed, his hair was still damp but unfortunately that isn't an excuse to avoid 'Team Breakfast' as he'd been informed, after missing one. He came to a deal with Steve that he will go to at least 4 team breakfasts a week. The other 3 he'll spend with his friends outside the villa.

He grabs his tablet, not sure where to put it without the hoodie, which would make wearing the t-shirt pointless. Eventually he finds a little red and black canvas bag in the wardrobe. It's flimsy, wouldn't hold up to much but he's only going to breakfast and then to Shuri, so it would do. He
slips the tablet in, adds a few of the shakes in his fridge, picking different colours, red, purple, green and yellow one. He hadn't tried the green or yellow ones yet. Orange was vile, so he'd moved all of the orange ones to the communal kitchen. He hoped he could still get these even when he could eat, they're nice. Maybe he could learn to make his own and what goes in them. He also adds his book to the bag and the little present he'd spend 2 hours making Shuri with help from the Internet. He'd put it in a pop tart box he'd liberated from the big kitchen for safety. He does another check to make sure he not forgotten anything. Today being the first day he's using the glasses so maybe he's allowed to be nervous. Leaving his room feels like he's pushing through a physical barrier, but weirdly after the first step it's easy and he all but skips down the stairs.

He enters the kitchen, still smiling and realises something is definitely up here. Steve isn't at the stove, he's sulking at the table pushing his food around his plate, Wanda's plate is empty and she's moved to the sofas with her shoes on the furniture.

He forced down the urge to whack her feet off the sofa. He'd mostly avoided her so far, Steve had been glued to him or he'd made an escape away from all of them. Sam was OK, even when they insulted each other or threw stuff at each other. It was fun but Steve always interfered with them, thinking that he was a delicate daisy or something. Speaking of Wings, weirdly he was making breakfast and Scott was assisting but mostly looking at his tablet. 'Huh, wonder when he got that.' Maybe he wouldn't have to hide his so much if they all had one? Clint was also away from the table, sat in the arm chair, curled possessively around the laptop idly chewing a piece of toast. It was definitely strange, Steve usually made everyone stay at the table until everyone had finished.

'Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.' Swims up to him, probably from his memories. He assumed it was a saying about not questioning odd yet pleasing circumstances.

He moved silently into the kitchen, Scott saw him, his mouth twitching into a grin and he carried normally. He got as close to Sam as possible, looming over him and leaned in to whisper in his ear.

"Boo."

He jumped back as Wings shot up in the air, he and Scott doubled over laughing as Sam glared at him.

"Smart plan there Barnes, scaring the man holding hot cookware."

"It's a sign of my faith in you Wings, I know you wouldn't ruin my breakfast."

"Oh, I'm making your breakfast am I? here's me thinking it was mine!"

He did his best puppy dog eyes and dodged a swat from a spatula but was pleased the two men seemed less grim than when he walked in. Steve was giving him a weird look and Wanda was making her way towards them. He wasn't sure if he was imagining but he was sure the pain in his arm got worse around her, his head started pounding too but he forced the pain down. She slid her hand down his arm, making him step out the way, leaning against the counter between Wings and Scott.

"Mmm you look much better not hiding under several layers."

"Um.. Thanks?"

"Steve kept telling me you were a ladies man, I can definitely see it."

She winked at him before grabbing a drink and sauntering off towards Clint. He couldn't suppress the shudder but the concerned looks from Wings and Scott made him feel better. Wings raised a
hand but stopped before actually touching him, that was the first time any of them had asked before touching him, not that Wings or Scott really touched him much. Steve, Clint and now apparently Wanda seemed to just not bother asking. He didn't know if it was normal to touch people without permission, but he didn't like it and he didn't know how to make them stop. He smiled and nodded to Wings though. If anything to encourage good behavior, but the squeeze to his shoulder made him feel less like his skin was crawling and ease that violated feeling.

"Alright I'm feeling generous, what do you want to try today."

"No idea, in Bucharest there wasn't much but I liked the sausage yesterday."

"Hmm, we are out but I have this weird square sausage stuff that smells good."

He watched intently as Wings sliced the square sausage and added some eggs to the other pan.

"How much you cooking for me Wings? I still can't eat much."

"That's okay, I figure this way you get variety and human garbage disposal over there will finish the rest."

Scott just grinned at him, apparently he liked being called a human rubbish bin? He shrugged and hung out with them, shamelessly using them as shields until food was cooked. The two men seemed to have noticed and followed him to the breakfast bar sandwiching him between them. It felt less suffocating that Steve practically hanging off him.

"Buck, I see you wooing the ladies already!"

Steve's smile seemed off and the idea of wooing Wanda made something inside him retch which was not conducive to eating. He pulled the red drink out of his bag.

"Na, I don't think that's me."

"You going to be off wooing the lads then?"

Steve chokes on whatever he had been eating which makes him jump, he hadn't expected Sam to come out with that either, things were definitely changed in the future that was for sure. Even amongst friends in his memories he'd been wary about discussing that.

"Dunk the squares into the centre of the egg, makes them taste even better."

He gave Scott a genuine 'thank you!' smile, and another when he tried it and oh my gods that was good!

"I like this square sausage more than the other one, and I love eggs. I think I need to start making a list of things I like."

"That's a good idea, stick around when you've finished I have something that could help."

"Sure thing Wings."

"Hey, do I get a nickname?"

"I thought you were human garbage disposal."

Scott chucked a scrunched up ball of paper at him which he immediately deflected with his hand, having it hit Scott in the forehead.
"I call him tic tac, because he gets all tiny."

"What's a tic tac?"

Wings pulls out his tablet, maybe everyone has one now after all, and he shows him a picture of tic tacs.

"Huh, I can see it, I like that Tic Tac… Or puppy. Because your like a floofy happy puppy."

Scott grins at him and eats the last bits of food on his plate when he pushes it over to him. Wings vanishes upstairs for a bit and he realises Steve is just staring at him again. Before he has much of a chance to ask why however Clint and Wanda joint them at the table.

"Fucking Stark man. He has my wife and because of him I can't do anything!"

"She's with Hope man, and she looks fine."

"She's not fine you idiots, Clint's wife is being held captive by Stark. Plus, since when did you like Stark? You always said 'Never trust a Stark', wasn't that what Hank taught you?"

"Yeah.. but Hope seems to be friends with Stark now."

He taps a few things on his tablet, angling it so he could see. Seems to be a lot of small pictures with people in.

"This is her Instagram, it's a social media thing, you take pictures and upload them for people to see. This is Hopes."

He loads up a picture and he recognises Tony, although he looks much, much better than when he was in Siberia. Something in him unclenched when he saw the man looking.. Less like the one he saw yesterday. Sure images can be deceiving, but he looks fine. Better than, his skin has an olive tanned glow to and he looks to have more energy than the last time he saw him.

He sucks in a breath as a memory comes back full force and slams into him. Tony Stark wearing a suit and coming up to him when he was in Winter Soldier mode. Somehow the red covering on his hand catches a bullet that he fired at him and then he just dismantled his own gun whilst it was still in his hands as if it was the easiest thing in the world before smirking at him. He comes back and Scott is looking at him in concern, he focuses back on the image before that voice in his mind floated up 'That was fun'. He hated to admit, it kind of was interesting having someone take apart a gun with such ease as to do it to your opponent in a fight.

He forced his concentration back to the tablet. The woman, who he assumed was Hope was being carried Bridal style by Stark. They were both laughing, hopes head thrown back. They definitely looked happy

"They look happy to me."

"Stark is probably coercing them, or manipulating them somehow."

"Or buying them. We all know how he likes to throw his money around."

He glanced over to Steve who was just staring at his food, looking angry. Scott just looked uncomfortable and focused instead on showing him pictures from Hopes social whatsit.

"I bet it's him that's stopping me contacting my wife. I sent her a letter and phone when Steve sent
his but the calls won't go through."

"Well if she at the compound maybe she didn't get it?"

Wings comes back in and sits down, feeling the mood shift and trying to get everyone less angry.

"Yeah, maybe send another to the compound if you are allowed. I could send Hope something too.."

"I'm not sure T'Challa wants us sending anything else out."

"Even if I could I bet Stark would stop them getting through."

"He isn't happy just ruining our lives forcing us out of our home, he stole your family members just so you can't contact them. That's what he does. Ruin families. I lost everything to him, he killed my parents and my brother."

"Don't you guys think that's a bit.. Much?"

Clint glares at Wings and he feels like he wants to put himself in between them. He also doesn't know much about Stark, he did look him up a little after T'Challa first asked about Siberia. Looking for some confirmation that he survived the fight and that he didn't cause severe damage. He didn't find much to alleviate that guilt and pain, only finding older things. This was the first picture he'd actually seen of the man post-Siberia and it was very recent.

However he found out enough that the idea of the man intercepting mail seemed absolutely absurd.

He's pretty sure that they aren't even on his radar.

Whilst sick he'd been working on the Accords making advancements in prosthetics, and med tech, whatever that is, that along with intellicults are on his 'to Google' list. There were several articles about green energy and arc reactors too. He didn't even understand 80% of the things Stark was doing, so intercepting mail? He doubted it.

"I don't think Stark made us all international fugitives."

He scoffed, they'd all gotten themselves into this mess, but they seemed unable to admit fault.

"Yes it is, him and his Accords. Without them I'd be with my family."

"Yeah, he teamed up with General Ross, to force us to do what he wanted. We said no and suddenly we are fugitives and Stark puts us in that terrifying prison where I had to wear a collar! I'm never going back there!"

"It's okay Wanda, everything will get sorted out soon enough when Stark realises the awful mistake he has made. We'll get pardons and go home."

"And he'll get off scot free! Not getting punished at all for betraying us I bet. Use his slimy lawyers to make sure he never pays any consequences. Like after Ultron, the judge said he was not guilty! He nearly ended the world!"

"We'll think of something Wanda, like after Ultron I gave him limits on what FRIDAY could do and where she would go and told him the only reason he could keep FRIDAY was that she was already alive. But he's not allowed to create anymore AIs. I made sure he knew what he was allowed to do after that. "
"I still say he should have deleted FRIDAY, it would have been a good punishment, not like she's really alive anyway."

"Yeah, but we voted against that..."

Wings cut in and he realised the man looked very uncomfortable.

He had absolutely no idea what they were even talking about. What was a FRIDAY? Was it a person? Could they delete a person? If they were alive they were casually discussing murder?! He needed to look up AIs he decided.

"If you knew the damage he was capable of Sam, he should have been locked up. Not allowed to create anything other than what we told him to. The world would have been safer that way. Plus Steve, we aren't there now, do you think he's still abiding by your rules?"

"Well he should be, he was deemed not guilty, but negligent, so I decided FRIDAY should be restricted, not as free as JARVIS was. Even if the court didn't accept my suggestions, I made sure Tony knew they were not requests."

He had to get out of this conversation, he was feeling really uncomfortable with the way it had turned, the idea of locking someone in a lab and forcing him to create on demand and have no freedom? Of deleting someone who was alive? Restricting them? Plus, if he'd been found not guilty, that was that, right? Punishing people seen as not guilty seemed extremely weird.

Urgh. He needed to leave. This was just... it was making him feel bad and felt too.. familiar.

He didn't even know or like Stark and this was skeeving him out.

"Anyway, Wings, what you got for me? I've got my first session today so I can't hang around forever."

"It's just a note book, but I found these really fancy ones at the market, it's embossed leather and the paper is nice and thick too. I grabbed you the red one."

He handed it over and he took it carefully because it looked really important and quite pretty. There was a wolf embossed on the front that had been dyed white. It had bright gray blue eyes that were some kind of stone, which he thought was pretty cool as it was like his. He unwrapped the cord around it and revealed blank pages inside. The paper was really heavy too. He blinked that it was blank, not quite getting it, and thankful Wings didn't call him an idiot.

"It's for you to write in. Anything you like, or don't like, things you see, anything that seems important that you want to remember, write it down. Here I got you a pen too. It's a fountain pen, but it's a Lamy pen so they're really easy to use."

The pen was red too, he was starting to sense a theme, maybe other people had noticed he'd liked red things? Maybe Wings just liked red? He did wear a lot of red, and Redwing was well, red.

He'd only noticed he liked it today, but apparently others had worked it out faster.

"Spasibo Wings, this is awesome."

"I hope you get lots of use out of them. I have a bad habit of buying fancy notebooks and never writing in them because I can't decide what to put in them."

He chuckled at himself as he slipped the book and pen into a side pocket of his bag, Clint was
laughing to Wanda about him having a handbag which was confusing. It was over his shoulder anyway.

"Okay, I best be off."

"Yeah, good luck with the brain tech."

" I'm probably going to need it!"

He actually felt surprisingly good about the whole thing, he thought he'd be more nervous but between eating good food, enjoying his drink, getting a gift, feeling less potentially awful about Stark… The good was seriously outweighing the bad today.

"Bucky, are you sure you want to go today? You know you don't have to. You could just stay home and we could watch movies together."

"I want to get the words out of my brain Steve. That ain't gonna happen sitting around watching movies."

"But you don't know that. The more you remember being Bucky and then anything else might just go away."

"If time would fix it, Zemo wouldn't have been able to trigger me."

"But this time you're with me."

He really felt like bashing his head into a wall.

"Steve, I have all of my memories from before the fall, remember. They're all in here. So sitting around not doing anything won't help. Shuri and T'Challa have gone to a lot of effort to give me this chance. Of course I'm going to take it."

"But they don't understand you like I do, they won't even talk about your treatment with me when I told them to."

"You told me you were going to apologise to them, why am I getting the feeling you've been rude or ungreatful again?"

Wings was giving him a strange questioning look so he turned away from Steve and to him.

"Do you remember yesterday?"

"I've got some gaps, I remember leaving the room with my book and after that it's sketchy."

"Well T'Challa -"

"Sam!"

"What Steve? You want to pretend yesterday didn't happen? I'm not as comfortable as lying as some people, Barnes, I'll meet up with you on that hill you like later? Message me when you're free."

Wings waved his tablet at him, the way Wanda glared at it made me think that not everyone had one after all. Wings left the entire building after that. Yeah, he really needed to know what happened yesterday!
"Okay, if you are going to this then I'm coming too. To make sure no one does anything bad to you."

"Shuri isn't going to do anything bad to me, I trust her. And you are not coming to my appointments."

"If you trust her that nothing bad is going to happen then you should be fine with having me there then! If there is nothing to hide then you should have no problem with me being there."

"No, Steve, and what the hell kind of logic is that. You don't get it, this is my journey to find myself. I want to do it alone."

"But I can help Buck. I can tell you everything about you."

"Steve, no. I'm different than how I was in my memories, and my therapist says that's fine. People change over time, and even more because of traumatic events."

"See, this is why I need to be there so they don't fill your head with nonsense like that. You can be Bucky again, you just have to try and I know you better than anyone."

"Alright. Fine. Just give me 15 minutes. I need to brush my teeth and get my jumper. Then I'll be back down and we can leave."

"Okay Buck! Want me to come help?"

He almost feels guilty for how happy he looks, but he just won't listen to him, he's sick of him treating him like an idiot or a kid who can't make their own damned choices. The fact that Steve thinks he can tell his therapist off for telling him something that actually made him feel tons better? When she told him he could be anyone he wanted to be, that he could find himself slowly bit by bit and that it was fine? That was amazing and it was totally going in his notebook.

"Steve, I think I can brush my teeth and dress myself."

"Yeah, but with one arm I imagine it's really hard. I can't believe they left you in cryo so long coming with this stupid device that is probably not even necessary now your awake and with us, and they didn't even make you a new arm! They could have installed it before you even woke up!"

He gives Steve the most horrified look he can summon before walking towards the stairs to the bedrooms.

"Steve. No. That's not what I wanted at all. I told Shuri not to make me an arm. Until the words are gone it's too much of a risk of me hurting someone."

Plus the arm hurt. The socket hurt too, but it was nothing compared to the arm. Getting it blasted off had been the best thing to ever happen to him.

"Oh Buck, you wouldn't hurt anyone."

"Not voluntarily no. But until the words are gone. No arm."

As he starts heading up the stairs he hears Steve talking to Wanda about how he can convince Shuri to start making an arm and Wanda adds that she could help convince him too. For some reason that makes him go cold and he finds himself nervous, but he doesn't understand why. The voice he occasionally hears in the back of his mind is utterly silent, but it weirdly feels like the fear is coming from there. He shakes his head, he needs to move now if he wants this to work. He takes
the steps multiple at a time passing the 2 residential floors as Tic Tac calls them, and then up
another fight to make it to his floor. He opens the largest window in his living room and looks out.
Good, nothing in the way. He didn't want to land in a hedge or trample someone's pretty flower bed.

He stood still for a second, listening and he could hear Steve still on the ground floor. He couldn't
hear what he's saying, but he could pinpoint him. As long as he stayed in the kitchen with his back
to the common room he was fine. Only Tic Tac could see the windows he'd pass. He jumped out of
the window enjoying the fall and finding it exhilarating. He was definitely doing that again, maybe
he could find something higher to jump off as well, heights were awesome. A memory of Buckys
swam up to him and he felt this just proved his point. Bucky was apparently terrified of heights.
Where as he wanted to find something taller and jump off of it

He crept towards the living room windows, Steve rarely seemed to use his senses when he wasn't
fighting, but better safe than sorry, a quick glance showed him that everyone was still in the same
position. This time he made himself visible until Tic Tac saw him, he has his tablet out because he
hoped he'd look shocked so he could take a picture to show Shuri, he waved casually at him and
silently laughed as he'd caused his drink to come out of his nose, he quickly snapped a few pictures
before the others went to hit him on the back where they might see him. He could see two of the
Dora watching him, grinning at him, probably for launching himself from the top story window.
He grinned back before started at a slow jog before slowly working up to a fast run. If he had
timed it right, he'd been on the train before Steve even realised he was gone.

Whilst he was sat on the train he opened his notebook, he wouldn't be on it for a very long but it
was enough for him to get started maybe, he practiced writing on a bit of card he tore off the pop
tart box because he wanted to see if he could actually write neatly.

In Bucharest he'd written fast as the memories came and hadn't been very neat. He shocked himself
when his writing was all flowing and kind of curly, yeah he liked that. He had the quote his
therapist had told him and he decided that the first page would be quotes or stuff that he liked. He
put the title in the middle of the page just as 'Myself' and then he figured he could do quotes and
even little doodles around it. The next page he wondered if to space of 3 pages for 'stuff I like' and
the 3 for 'stuff I dislike'. Or even a page for Food he likes but that sounds just confusing. There is
plenty of space in the book and the therapist said it's OK to make mistakes as he learns himself, as
long as he lands from them too.

He didn't have much time and he spent a good few minutes fretting over where he needs a contents
page or not.

'I'm starting to see why Wings has trouble with notebooks..' 

In the end he is running out of time so let's that help him, adding 'Things I Enjoy' to that page.
Flipping 3 pages and putting 'Things I Dislike'. Looking at his pretty handwriting, he has a feeling
he'll be Googling a lot to put things in the book and remembers his Google list. For that he flips to
the end of the book, figured if he leaves a gap between each think he needs to look up, he can write
down what he finds out. He has time to write 'The Almighty Google List' and put one thing in the
likes and dislikes section, before he has to put his stuff away. Maybe Shuri can show him how to
get the pictures off of the tablet, or maybe he could get a camera like Tic tac, then he could put
pictures in the book too. He had a feeling that he might want to put his Book under things he
likes…

Suddenly the task of finding things he likes or not has become fun just because he gets to write
them down.
Found an awesome document on Russian swear words, so Barnes has a swearing problem xD at least it's mostly in Russian? Any sentences in Russian are in <> because I'm not going to rely on Google. I'm already learning 1 language very different to English, I'd make it 2 but my brain would explode.
White Wolf

Chapter Summary

Our Wolf finds out the name of the mysterious outside contractor. Starts to come to a conclusion that getting information from the rogues has a heft dose of bias. T'Challa gets whisked away for lunch.

Chapter Notes

As I'm late and a little.. Eh, about this chapter, In my going ahead to make sure I have enough chapters to keep posting weekly even if I get unwell, I'm now really hyped about those chapters 😊.

My favourite Wakandan chapters have a dash of chaos involved after all, and this is more of a.. Precursor.

So if I finish writing Chap21 soon, I'll post the next chapter to make up for it.

Oops, I forgot the American Time line

In America

- **September 8th**
  
  Bruce discovers things are not as they seem.

  Tony tells Laura & the Mini Agents.

  Tony tells the team.

- **September 12th**

  Tony & Laura storm the Accords Councils castle.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Barnes POV

**September 12**

When he arrives at Shuri lab, he's still quite hyped up from jumping out of the window and evading Steve, because that was really fun. The notebook was also really added to that and he really wanted to tell Shuri about it. He practically jogged into the Lab, Shuri saw him coming and smiled.
"What's got you all smiling today?"

"I jumped out of my window to stop Steve coming today and discovered jumping out of windows is really fun! Also Wings gave me this notebook where I can write things I like and don't like so I don't have to keep it all in my head!"

Shuri doubled over laughing at him jumping out of the window.

"Oh I need to see that! And I need to see this book!"

He sits down, pulling his bag into his lap, pulling out the pop tart box and Shuri peers of curiously and then pulls out the book and the pen that Wings gave him.

"He even gave me this fancy pen and everything. I've not written much yet though."

She picked up the book and gives him a questioning look before opening it, this is why he looked Shuri and T'Challa, they never assumed. Wings was starting to be the same it was great. People not assuming anything nor expecting him to be someone. She smiled at the quote, got a huge grin when she saw the likes page which had 'Shuri braiding my hair.' at the dislikes she frowned, it having 'Being called Bucky'. She hummed to herself before glancing at the cover of the book.

"How about I call you White Wolf? Much better than Bucky, Yes?"

"Definitely better than Bucky. Today seems to be the day of nicknames. Scott realised that I call Sam wings and wanted a nickname. It was an interesting breakfast. I think the fun moments outnumbered the annoying ones. Although Steve tried insisting he come here and to my Therapist appointments too, I don't know, to make sure I turn into a perfect Bucky-Clone or something."

He rolled his eyes whilst bringing up the picture on his tablet of Tic-Tac choking on his drink and it coming out of his Nose, she was pulling up the CCTV footage so they could swap.

"Don't get me wrong, I absolutely love watching you have fun throwing yourself out of windows. But you don't have to worry about Rogers following you now. T'Challa has put him on house arrest. He's currently unable to leave the house."

"Oh that's hilarious, what caused that?"

She tilted her head and looked curiously at him.

"I thought you were around for that bit. Either way, my brother gave him another chance to come clean about Siberia. He even gave him a while to think on it. Instead of doing that, he doubled down on the lies over and over tried to claim he was doing it for you, for everyone else, even for Dr Stark which is laughable considering how much they've been slating the man. Even when he had been called on it, he kept trying, never accepting he was even lying for himself. He even tried saying that you remembered wrong.

"Out of punishments, house arrest is quite minor, but he thought it would give you a chance at freedom and if he was confined to the villa, you wouldn't have to go to such lengths as jumping out of windows to go the therapy."

It was like the memory of a memory in his mind but it was… Just out of reach. Yeah, he definitely needed to find out what had happened yesterday and why he was losing time like that.

"That's good at least, I really didn't want him here for this, especially not when the hydra memories would come up. I think he'd get angry."
"Well, let's just say any requests for him to join you will be denied unless you personally make
them. Today is easy though. Good memories!"

He followed her over to what looked like a strange set up, chair in the middle with poles around.
Thankfully the chair looked nothing like Hydra and the distinct lack of straps calmed him down a
little. He did feel awkward and kind of ridiculous sat there.

"OK, slip these on, they aren't programmed to you yet, but that's what the memory draws do. You'll
pick a memory out of everything that comes up which will be like the… First pass code. There is
like a little zap when you put them on."

He looked at the glasses warily, fiddling with the pink sticker again before thinking screw it and
slipping the glasses on. Biting the inside of his cheek and waiting for the pain, he feels a tiny buz,
barely more than a bug bite and it startles him because it was a lot less than he'd expected. He'd
been expecting so much more. Before he has a chance to say anything however images practically
explode out of him. Flicking around him as a hologram but each doesn't stay up long enough to
actually play.

Some are sepia toned, in fact most are sepia toned it seems. Ones his brain has coded happy seem
to be generally pulling from the memories that he'd had returned by the Wakandan tech. Some
however aren't and they are like explosions of colour. One bursts out and plays for longer whilst
others flash around the edges, but it's easy to focus on the one in full colour. It was not long after
they'd come to Wakanda, Shuri had decided that she liked him and was looking out for him. Clint
was buzzing around being annoying and lecturing him for not being 'Bucky enough' and that it was
upsetting Steve. Shuri had demanded he leave, but he had refused and she had kicked him in the
shin hard enough that he'd actually hobbled out and he'd burst out laughing. Feeling more human in
that moment than he had in so long. He didn't know how, but that image was the first pass code
lock as it was swept up in all the others.

He wasn't sure how long it took. It felt like hours, but his body clock said different. That it was
definitely less than an hour. When the images slowed and eventually stop he felt like he had one
heck of an emotional hangover, to say the least. The glasses spoke to him, tell him that the upload
was complete and the data was compiling and he slipped the glasses off. Blinking as the holograms
collapsed to the floor like pixels turning to sand.

"Right, that's it for today."

"Wait? That's it?"

"Yup, the data draws just filter through memories of a certain type, you pick one as your pass code,
then me and the outside contractor get to compile and he starts creating the algorithm. After that
it's less easy, well be able to locate the memories the words are attached to to disassociate them.
But he recommended starting small and working up to the words."

"Okay, that sounds doable, so, Um, who is this mysterious 'outside contractor'?"

"Hmm, oh, He's called Anthony. He developed this tech which spans so many different branches
of science, its frankly kind of annoying."

"That is impressive, I thought it would, I don't know? Hurt more?"

"I wouldn't have allowed you to put it on if it hurt. He tested it on himself first through many
versions and told me this one doesn't even cause migraines."
"Wow, isn't that, I don't know, strange? I thought testing unknown tech on yourself was dangerous?"

"Oh yeah, very dangerous. He said killer migraines and profuse vomiting were the norm."

"Okay… So, self preservation is not a thing to this bloke?"

"Nope! Me and a few others are trying to help with that."

"Well it's good that he has you."

"Well, seeing as we are now done with today's session, how about we revisit that discussion about your arm?"

He flinched. What was it with people and his arm today?

"Ah, no. I don't want an arm. Not until I'm safe."

"You are safe here though? Aren't you?"

"Not until the code words are gone. I.. I can't risk that happening. I could hurt you. It's not worth it. Plus, I'm fine."

"Hm, okay White Wolf, do you want to see some designs I have anyway? Me and Anthony made one for fun a while ago, it's not a whole arm, just a hand and wrist because he wanted to see if we could do it. It's night and day to that Hydra thing you had."

Looking wasn't taking it, he could just look and that would be fine.

"Sure."

Shuri squealed, jumping up and down in happiness before bringing up lots of information and finally bringing out specifications to the hand and wrist. It was matte black, sleek and very different to what hydra made. Just looking at it, he could see it was meant to replace a hand instead of being a weapon. The notes around saying that it could feel? That's definitely different. Inside looked much different to the Hydra arm too. He knew how to do basic maintenance, nothing flashy but he'd had to manage in Bucharest without a technician.

"That is really different, night and day like you said."

He started flicking through the notes, reading about how instead of wires, tiny little robots did most of the inside functions… Some how? Shuri's phone chirped in her pocket, causing him to frown.

"I didn't know people used phones in Wakanda? I thought the.. beads worked as phones?"

"They don't, but if I want to talk to any of my friends outside of Wakanda, I need to use this."

"Ah, is that the outside contractor?"

"Oh? No, no, I just got a picture from Dr Stark, he's making a speech today and they look like they're ready to talk on the world."

"Oh, are you friends with Stark too?"

"Oh definitely, he's one of the few people on the planet who can even keep up with me! And he
never complains even if I know more. He's nothing like the media representation of him either. It was quite a shock to discover how kind the man in. I think he runs like a hundred charities."

That.. That was different that what he was expecting. Steve's friends never would have described him like that, but it seems like both of the royals at least liked the man. Shuri, whilst young, she seemed like a good judge of character.

"I didn't know that about him.. Just what the others say about him."

"Oh you definitely need better source. Keep in mind for all their insults, they leeched of him for years. They were perfectly happy to live in the lap of luxury and receive personalised gear. He worked himself half to death for those idiots. Especially on the Accords."

"Steve said the Accords were there to try and control the Avengers, to force them to do things, the Ross is evil and Tony is in bed with the guy."

"Well, first, my father came up with the basis of the Accords. They're much better than the alternative anyway. Dr Stark has been working constantly to make them better, and he despises Ross."

That's extremely definitely different, Clint and Wanda were so sure that Stark and Ross were in cahoots. And Shuri's father came up with the Accords? He wondered if Steve knew that when they came here, wondered if T'Challa was annoyed when Steve was insulting the last work of his late father? The man had practically died for it.

"Hm, Okay, were going to watch this so you can get an idea of the man without others clouding your judgement."

He turned to a screen she had flicked on, and from the writing at the bottom this was the Accords Council in session. There were a lot of people in a semi circle around a recently vacated podium. It was mostly just people talking to each other, discussing something that he had honestly no idea about.

"Hey, Shuri, could you get me a copy of the Accords?"

"Sure, I'll send it to your tablet as it currently stands, Dr Stark has some amendments he's been trying to get through for weeks and he's hoping today will finally get the ball moving. Ross has been fighting him every step of the way, and whilst Rhodes is awesome, Dr Stark knows the buttons to push."

He nodded and turned back to the screen just in time to see Stark walk into the room. Pushing open the double doors with both arms and standing still for a few seconds, smirking at the camera in an oddly predatory way. His black shirt and suit with the striking tie in his Ironman colours really stood out. As he hadn't seen many suits in his time, he wasn't exactly knowledgeable on the subject, but it looked expensive. It looked like it had been practically poured on the man. The red mirrored sunglasses seemed to capture the lights and flash. It was impressive and definitely setting a scene, pretty much everyone in the room had paused. He noticed the woman behind him… that was Barton's wife again, odd, he'd have expected Rhodes. 'Maybe she's his PA..? Oh that is going to go down so well if she is.'

Clint had shown everyone pictures of his wife and kids not long after they were settled in the villa, and she looks nothing like she did then. In that photo she'd had long hair, and was dressed comfortably in worn clothes at a farm. Now she was just as in place as Stark was, but with an ice blue blouse to match the blue in her hair. Her hair was in a complicated up-do and he had no idea
how it had been done, but then he barely knew how Shuri did his hair. The blue was more visible with it up and there were glints of silver, when he looked closer he noticed on one of the braids had like a silver spiral. Her suit was similar to Stark's, definitely not something either of them went and bought in a shop at a guess. As she joined him on the podium he noticed a flash of red at her heels.

"They look amazing! I'm so happy Laura picked my design for her hair!"

He just nodded and returned his attention to the screen, not sure why he was so interested. But the back of his mind, where strange comments came from, that he didn't really understand and was way too nervous to actually ask anyone if it was normal to have thoughts pop into your head out of nowhere? It had started to feel.. Bigger? Definitely bigger lately. Like there was more to it. It was definitely interested in the screen and got the feeling that it had to do with the man dismantling his gun when it was still in his hand similar to how it wanted to know about Shuri after kicking Clint. Laura's hands were dancing over blue holograms that reminded him so much of Shuri. Stark was just casually leaning against the side of the podium looking around the room and he noticed again that Stark had the look of a predator about him. That he was lazily scouting the room looking around the room and he noticed again that Stark had the look of a predator about him. That he was lazily scouting the room for someone to pounce and shred.

He shook his head. That was weird, he saw a lot from Stark but looking again he didn't get that feeling, like it didn't feel like it came from him. That part of his mind was definitely more present.. Less at the back and more sharing with him it's observations, which were frankly a bit creepy. It reminded him of the few missions he'd recalled as the asset, and how he would assess people into categories of importance. His Hypervigilance focusing in a way he couldn't replicate. Thankfully Stark started talking so he didn't have to think about it.

"Hello everyone, the rumors of my demise, retirement or whatever the new one of the week is, have been wildly exaggerated. I hope I haven't missed too much?"

People had thought he was dead? Damn, he really did need to start researching more. Finding out things himself instead of just following what people told him.

"Unfortunately I am not here to bring glad tidings. I'm here to present to you multiple violations for someone under the Accords as they're regarding Inhuman, Enhanced Humans, Mutants, And pretty much everyone that is protected by the Vienna Accords as they stand. Hopefully - "

"Look at T'Challa!"

They both had a chuckle at T'Challa who seemed suitably shocked by the duos intro. This must be what Shuri was talking about, that Stark was working to make things better? Maybe he was talking about Ross? It felt like Shuri was hinting to that. If he was talking about the General like that then he doubted that the two men were friends as Clint claimed. He missed the next bit trying to think back in his mind about connections between the two. The hissed warning of someone else brought his attention back.

" - session is televised. Shouldn't this information be sent to interested parties only!?!"

Somehow he got the idea that Stark had chosen this moment because it was being filmed. The amused smirk on Laura's face confirmed that, he noticed that her gaze sharpened almost viciously when she looked at the man interrupting Stark's speech.

"Mr Jackson, this is the perfect time. Accountability is for everyone when it comes to the Accords, not just those of us no longer classed as baseline human."
From what he'd been told about Stark was that he was accountable to no one and only Steve kept him in check from going full villain. Which seemed in conflict for a man standing, televised wanting accountability.

"Oooo. That's Ross' aid by the way. Dr Stark told me he's nearly as shifty as his Boss."

Shuri needed popcorn he decided, it would fit the image better.

"Now, where was I. Yes, the individual in question, as I'm sure you and several key people in law enforcement are now seeing has been quite the naughty boy. He has also evaded 6 attempts to be taken into custody and has tried illegal means to remove the information in front of you from various sources private and public."

"Why has this not been brought to attention before.. This is a lot…"

"Yes it is a lot Mr Davenport, I have been collecting information on this individual for a number of years and have tried many times to bring him down. The information was dispirit and various law enforcement agencies simply didn't know too communicate with each other, well go with that excuse for why he wasn't already behind bars shall we? Of course, I am happy to do my duty under the Accords to bring this to you as a signed member. Even though I am still technically signed off on medical leave, I thought this too important to wait much longer."

"Stark is still not recovered?"

"Not fully, although he tries to hide it to make everyone think he's fine. He's barely stopped working since he woke up.. When he first called me he was still in his hospital bed…"

He reached out slowly to grip her shoulder, it helped him and she looked quite distraught by the memory. Although he wondered if him being there was a help at all, seeing it was him and Steve who had put him in that hospital bed..

"I have petabytes of data, videos, written, everything required and I will be honest. If this is swept away and ignored, again, as this information is legally my own. I will release it onto the Internet."

"We don't appreciate threats Dr Stark."

"Dr Maloj, I don't not wish to threaten your lovely self or anyone here. But when you have watched the videos you will understand my fervour. Plus precedent was set after the fall of SHIELD was it not? I do not believe that an Amendment to that section regarding releasing of information has been tabled yet."

"I thought you were against the data dump Dr Stark"

"Data dump?"

"Hm? Oh, during DC, your little Captain thought it would be a good idea to dump the entirety of SHIELDS database onto the Internet. Not just the Hydra files.. Dr Stark and Colonel Rhodes worked themselves to the bone to save as many as they could."

"Steve.. he must have messed up, surely he wouldn't be risked so many people like that?"

The Stevie he knew wouldn't have recklessly risked lives like that, not good people. He moved mountains to rescue him and the others when he'd been captured the first time… dammit there was
so much he didn't know and it felt like Steve was leaving bits out. He turned his attention back to the TV.

"- the innocent were hurt. I assure you, this will not be a reckless act. It will not be an ill conceived idea born of desperation. You could call it an act of civil disobedience that will only harm those at fault. The versions I release will completely protect those who have been hurt except the ones who have contacted me and have signed permission for me to release files with their likeness."

Shuri was practically vibrating in her seat and he had to admit, it was easy to get swept up with the way Stark talked. His hands seemed to never stop moving and even though he kept his sunglasses on indoors, his face was still quite expressive.

"Oh, and I also have information pertinent to foreign countries as they have been, lets say, 'quite involved' with this individuals little off the books operations. Oh, and yes people of America, this does include a large dose of tax fraud, misuse of your hard earned tax dollars and bribery."

The small grouping of press allowed inside the room got all flustered about that last part... which was utterly confusing. But the misuse of money always trended to get people riled up. Something that hadn't changed since the 40s.

"The information I have pertains to so many crimes against humanity that putting this file together over the years has not been pleasant. It is frankly, chilling.

"Human rights violations are never pretty, even if we are talking about people who are seen as less than human by some. Many do include humans who because of this man have been forced into enhancements, mutations, changes to their body against their will. Bodily autonomy seems a fleeting idea, -"

His mind became white static for a bit, what the hell? Why had Steve not done something about this guy?! That.. That was horrible and it felt so similar to what he experienced. Did Steve know? He couldn't. If he did then he should have done something instead of snarling about the man.

"Human experimentation, reckless endangerment of minors, ethics were just not involved anywhere and aspects of this are straight up torture to those he kept. To those who escaped their lives were systematically destroyed, reputations ruined, family's threatened, all to force his victims into an easier point of capture. This has spanned several years, in several countries and includes a frankly terrifying amount of property damage. This is coming from me, the man who cleaned up after the Avengers for years. Including New York. This individual has not spent a penny in reparation efforts and has often illegally shifted the blame."

Stark cleaned up after the Avengers? That was new information. From what he'd been told he didn't really do much of anything. If there was one thing he hatred was contradicting information.

"- recently we come to his violations of creating a secret prison that breaks so many rules I'll be here for an hour listing them. He then illegally detained people without adequate warrants in the illegal prison and claimed to be doing it on behalf of yourselves."

That.. That was the raft? But Clint and Wanda said Stark put them into that prison? Had he and Steve broken them out of an illegal prison? If so, then they wouldn't have had to go in, they would have been released as soon as Stark had a chance to get them out maybe? He wondered if by
breaking them out, did they just complicate matters.

"The raft was illegal?"

"Oh definitely, my father would never have condoned such measures. T'Challa and myself find it quite insulting that Mr Rogers thinks the Accords had anything to do with that debacle."

He can tell she is definitely angry about that, maybe he should try and talk to Steve about the Accords, or at least the raft. Try and get him to not run his mouth around T'Challa. An image of Steve flashed into his mind, shoulders squared, jaw locked, ready to take on the world… yeah maybe that wouldn't work.

He looked closely at Stark when he realised he was only gesturing with one hand now when both of his hands had been gesticulating as he spoke with passion. His right hand was gripping the side of the podium, tight enough that on Shuri high definition screen he could see Stark's knuckles were white. He barely looked different but he knew where to look for signs of stress. He'd paled ever so slightly, his olive complexion hiding it somewhat. Was he in pain? Should he even be here right now? He was starting to think not, maybe the rumours of him being severely injured were more true than he had realised. A spike of guilt stabs through him think of Siberia, again. Stark's voice again drags him out of his spiralling thoughts with startling ease

"I am of course talking about one Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross. Now, whilst I accept the fugitive status of certain individuals and Thaddeus drive to bring them in."

That must be him and the others.

"Of course in that drive he subverted the Accords and the will of the original 117 countries, now a fantastic 139 with 2 more ready to join any day."

That was... a lot of countries, Steve never mentioned that, he thought it was some kind of American only thing. 141 countries.. That's a lot to say screw you too.. And that's just what Steve and his team did.

Getting more than a handful of countries to agree on something was like getting blood out of a stone, some of the missions he'd been sent on were about stopping things exactly like this. A death or two and they unravelled with ease.

"To take what we want to be a shield to protect civilians and heroes alike, to guard humans, superhuman, inhumans, enhanced humans, humans with unusual qualities such as very large intellects, which by the way, is quite the compliment. Thank you. Also included androids and artificial intelligence and those seeking personhood."

He was again surprised at Stark's passion for a document that Steve hated and called a leash. Stark called it a shield. Those were incredibly different ways of seeing one thing. Clint had claimed it was easy for Stark to sign on, all he had to do was stop using the suit and he was just a baseline human. Not like Steve, Wanda, Nat, Himself even and some others he didn't recognise. But Stark just allowed himself to be classed as Inhuman or Superhuman. He didn't even fight it. From Shuri's mutterings she noticed it too.

"Accords are, protection for all, to take our mistakes of the past, never forget them, never cover them up, never forget the lives lost, accountability, security. Not a subversion of these great ideals put on paper by the late King T'Chaka and taken up by his son. This shield won't become a noose as long as I'm breathing, from standing in front of you or from my hospital bed, I assure you, I will not give up."
As he drew to a close, his voice cracked around the room like a whip, everyone's attention was on him and again he had to admit to feeling impressed at the way Stark worked the room, but then the guy had been likely doing it for years. What surprised him was that he then took a step back to allow Laura front and centre. His hand giving her shoulder a comforting squeeze. Laura offered him a warm smile before squaring her shoulders with an easy grace.

"If Barton sees this, he's going to be spitting mad."

"I'm sure none of you will recognise me, except as Dr Stark's amazing new personal assistant of course."

Well, that clarified the assistant idea, Clint was not going to li-

"My soon to be ex husband is one of the fugitives that was illegally detained."

And suddenly her being his assistant wasn't the worst thing.

"O Bozhe."

"That is not why I am standing here. I'm standing here because Ross sent multiple teams of heavily armed, highly trained men to my farm. A farm I lived on alone with three children, my youngest had not long turned one year old. The others are seven and thirteen years old. They don't understand what is happening, why a man sent tactical teams to raid our home."

Well that explained why she was at the compound, and from Shuri's relaxed stance, he got the sense she already knew. He also wondered how Steve would take it when he realised just how connected the people who were hiding them were with Stark and his cohorts. Not that he was going to be stupid enough to say a thing.

"I don't even know anything, after my ex husband left to join this ill advised fight, that was where my information ended."

Oh she was definitely angry. She practically spat 'ill-advised'. Her eyes flashed with anger, her face was extremely expressive, maybe more noticeable after Stark gave his speech with his glasses still in place. He was still yet to remove them and he couldn't help but think about the picture in the hospital. With the bandages taped over his eyes. 'Maybe he just likes sunglasses?' He thought hopefully, he didn't move like he was blind, at least he didn't think he did, but with someone like Stark, would he really know?

"Yet my home was raided. I don't want to think what might have happened if Tony Stark, 37 hours after waking up from his coma hadn't abandoned his hospital bed to rescue me. Don't worry, I immediately marched him back into it."

Bespredel. Does this idiot have limits? After just waking from such a serious neurological issues the man should have been confined to resting! He could have put himself back into a coma, yet he risked his own mind to rescue the wife of a man who outright detests him? That is.. Not something he would have expected. Definitely not from what he had been told.

He also suspected his wife saying Tony Stark saved her was not going to endear him to Clint somehow. The man was angry at anything and everything lately, he definitely shouldn't see this.

"After reading what he has done to innocent women and children in the past, I do not believe we would have fared well, especially waiving the Accords around. He didn't do this because I was refusing to cooperate with the authorities, I was doing everything I
should. That wasn't enough, he wanted to terrorise the families to scare 'them' back. The kind of tactics I'm ashamed to think of happening in this country. Me and my children are human, the law failed to protect me, Ironman didn't. We are not the only family he has brought in from the cold. We stand with him as a real protector, not a villain like Thaddeus Ross."

Yup. This was like a grenade waiting to be dropped in their laps.

He wasn't sure if he wanted to be there when the others saw it, or as far away as possible. That other part of him, was darkly amused and wanted to watch the angry man get crushed. He pushed that away, he didn't really like Clint but he didn't think he was that vindictive. Watching Laura turn to huddle into Stark's arms… yeah he has to admit it. He does kind of want to see his face.

"You might want to warn your brother.. When they see this… Clint is going to want to run off half cocked to save her."

At Shuri's incredulous look he continues.

"This morning he was harping on that Stark has taken his family captive, even though in her instawhatsit, she seemed happy."

"Instagram! Oh yeah, she looks amazing, the kids do too, I wonder if he's found Lilah's yet. She has it locked down to friends only.."

"Thank you for taking the time today to listen to what we had to say. I'll leave you now to hopefully do what should have been done long ago. Whilst I might be gone, I will be watching."

Stark's parting words sends a shudder down his spine. His smile is all teeth and suddenly he can get behind that part of his mind calling him a predator. He looks like a wolf. Definitely an apex predator, he just wished he could see his eyes under his glasses. The last time he'd seen them they'd been broken in grief and he wanted to replace that memory.

Stark offered Laura his arm and she slipped next to him, that didn't help him when it came to confirmation that he wasn't blind. Neither of them even looked back as the man who had been arguing was led off in cuffs through a different aspect, the shot managed to capture both the retreating forms of Stark and Laura and the man being dragged off yelling.

"Well, that was perfect."

"He really knows how to command the room doesn't he."

"Oh yeah, you should see when he went up against the senate when they wanted his suit! That was hilarious. My favourite is still when he revealed himself to be Ironman. Seriously he just had a press conference and said 'I am Ironman.' The kids will never let him forget it."

"There does seem to be a lot to him that I don't know.."

'That's absolutely opposite to what I've been told in fact.'

"Yeah, I think the two of you would get on swimmingly."

His eyes widening, no, that was a bad idea. The fight in Siberia flashed into his mind, his voice was so broken. Yeah. No. Meeting Stark was never going to happen. He couldn't do that to the man, force him to look at the man who killed his parents? That would just be cruel.
"No, I couldn't do that to him. Plus I'm pretty sure he hates me."

Shuri just looks exasperated.

He decides that as good a time to hand over her present before she dives at his hair. It had taken ages but his therapist had recommended repetitive tasks and creative tasks. Making a tiny origami cat fit both.

**T'Challa POV**

T'Challa had been bored, absolutely mind numbingly bored. He wasn't even sure why he was attending today but his sister had organised his schedule and had pointed out that they needed to have a visible presence at some of these meetings to remind them that the document came from their father. It all sounded very good and convincing, but now he was sat here so abjectly bored he was considering how he was going to get revenge on her. He'd done the rounds several times over the course of the day, this was his last session and he could go home, finally.

It hadn't been an utter waste of time, he had spoken to as many people as he could in regards to Dr Stark as well as several ammendments Wakanda had interest in. Starting his penance for abandoning an ally in need. It was a small thing, but maybe helpful when people started to realise that Tony Stark also had the baking of Wakanda and all her resources? It might make things easier for the man. The amendments he proposed were good ones and Ross seemed to be fighting him on sheer principle now. Ever since Dr Stark had started taking in the families of the rogues, Ross had turned almost rabid on the man.

He thought back to Clint and his ridiculous reaction to go and 'rescue' Laura. If only he knew that Dr Stark had already rescued his family from trouble they wouldn't even be in if it wasn't for the rogues actions. Sighing internally he resigned himself to be bored for the rest of the session, just as the double doors opened together, quite dramatically, leaving one Dr Stark stood between them in a casual pose. He stood just long enough to get everyone's attention before moving towards the podium. T'Challa was pretty such his mouth his the floor. Laura Barton walking in next to him didn't help.

They were both dressed to the nines, their suits were absolutely stunning, Laura's blue hair went well with the ice blue blouse. Dr Stark with his black on black suit looked a touch dramatic, the bright red and gold tie like a slash of colour topped of with the red mirrored glasses that the man didn't take off. Even when he started speaking.

T'Challa has listened to many people speak at that podium all day, and he'd struggled to pay attention to them. The way Dr Stark worked the room, it was like he had a physical presence that gripped them all and commanded their attention. The subject matter added an extra layer to drag people in. Even though he had not realised how dirty Ross was and Wakanda had been spying on the man for a long time. He had a feeling that Dr Stark's AI had something to do with it.

Laura seemed to have a grace that commanded attention. Where Dr Stark's personality seemed to have everyone rapt, Laura was perfectly poised and with grace and charm she kept everyone as attentive as she spoke. He already knew what had happened with the Barton family from his sister, but hearing it from Laura herself as she spoke about her children was heartbreaking.

On their own, T'Challa thought, they would have dealt a serious blow to Ross together as a 1 - 2 hit? It was perfect and he doubted the snake would slither out of this trap with ease. As they started to step down from the podium, T'Challa gathered his things and slipped through an exit close to
him, circling around to wait for the pair so he could possibly try to talk to him. Even if Dr Stark railed at him, he would accept it and work to mend bridges. Now he had most of the story from Siberia, the drive to make up for abandoning an ally was strong.

He came to the door and saw one of the aids he'd spoken to a few times, the kid seemed excited and enthusiastic to be working with the Accords Council and had spoken to him about his father on the few occasions they'd met since Vienna for the Accords to be ratified. As Dr Stark and Laura approached, the kid flushed with excitement and T'Challa was impressed that someone so young was so interested in an occasionally mind numbingly boring topic. Well, Dr Stark's little speech could hardly be called boring, but today had been off the charts.

"That was amazing!!"

The kid actually jumped, kind of awkwardly, but Tony reached out and steadied him. He had been about to reach out but Dr Stark was faster. That he'd seen and moved so quick made T'Challa feel slightly better about his paranoia on the man's eyes. Although the sunglasses were still firmly in place. He also noted that both Dr Stark's hands looked like, well, normal flesh hands. Remembering pictures of the black cybernetic hand and his sisters concerns. This didn't discount it completely, but he could hope at least. He brought his attention back to the extremely excited guy. Jordan if he remembered correctly. Wondering if he was going to pass out.

"I was wondering, would you ah, sign this for me?"

Laura quickly took what Jordan had help put and placed it on the desk next Dr Stark, T'Challa wondered at the strange interaction, especially when Dr Stark immediately scooped it up, so it obviously wasn't a germ thing. He stayed quiet however as questioning people on quirks was quite rude and he was trying to do better, not worse when it came to his relationship with the man. Dr Stark looked quite shocked at whatever Jordan had passed to him, instantly upping his own curiosity.

"This. This is my first dissertation on artificial Intelligence."

"First?" T'Challa idly wondered how many he had, and how many were AI based, he glanced at the date on it and tried to line it up with what he knew about Dr Stark's age, but that couldn't be right. He must have his date of birth wrong...

"How old were you when you completed this Dr Stark?"

"I finished this up at 17 because I was doing a few others, but the bot and AI mentioned, I built when him when was 16. He's my 'first born' and he is still a little menace in my lab."

T'Challa can suddenly understand why he and his sister get along so well. Thinking how she sped through instructors faster than their father found them.

He'd known the American was intelligent but completing doctorates at that age was definitely impressive, especially if he considered it 'late' because he was busy completing other doctorates. He'd thought that he probably had more than one doctorate, T'Challa himself had three, but he'd never looked into how many he had. The fact that he still had the bot he'd created was quite heartening too, definitely not the man the media portrayed him as. Heartless people don't have pictures of their first born AIs covering them in foam. He wondered who the children in the picture were too, as far as he knew Dr Stark was childless. His sister was quite tight lipped about compound gossip, even when she was practically vibrating with it. She only passed along some information, like about the Barton family rescue purely to dare him to tell the rogues. Shockingly, he'd kept it to himself.
"Here you go kid, I still expect to hear from you, and bring your dissertation, it sounds interesting."

That time he nearly did swoon before having to get back to work. T'Challa was struggling to hide his smile.

"Were you trying to make him pass out?"

"What, Laura no, I actually looked him up and he went to MIT, I saw him under people I recognised. The kid went MIT young like me, started at 16."

"When did you start?"

"Oh, I was 14, hey T'Challa, want to join us for lunch?"

Laura looked disapproving of a 14 year old going to college on his own, the idea of Shuri out in the world, whilst tempting, but he liked having her safe at home. Also he was genuinely concerned for the planet. He doubted someone of his influence would have been just dumped at a college and suspected there would have been people with him. When he left Wakanda to study in England, as far as he was concerned 17 was old enough to go alone, his father had vehemently disagreed. Still, he imagined it must have been difficult, being much younger, yet ahead of your peers, speeding to completing doctorates in just so few years? He doubted it gave him much of a chance to enjoy a childhood which was what he suspected was upsetting Laura.

"I'd love to join you two, I don't know how we're going to get out though, it's a circus out there now."

T'Challa eyed the press outside, they'd been relatively calm all day what with the rather boring events. They'd spent 4 hours discussing potential wages for additional assistance and the barring of Accords signed supers in civil wars. That was exactly the same as it had been last week and the week before.

Now, however, there was almost twice as many than when he'd arrived and they were practically swarming. T'Challa realised he'd rather deal with more boring speeches going on and on about the same amendments that had been ratified than brave that circus.

"Oh don't worry, I knew it would be and I have zero intention of holding an impromptu press conference. My CEO and PA would kill me."

He grinned at Laura who just rolled her eyes, smiling as he headed off to the stairwell to the roof. Laura followed him as if she knew where they were going. T'Challa was left with little choice but to follow and found himself actually quite looking forward to the idea. He had a feeling this would not be boring, although he did wonder where they were going when they kept heading up.

"Hey Agent Mom, you're trending on twitter!"

"What? Me? Why me?! You're the one meant to be trending!"

"Well I am, but you are too, I think you've resurrected that I stand with Ironman tag before Everheart, there are lots about you too."

T'Challa pulled out his StarkPhone to check twitter. He'd sworn he would never use the thing when Shuri had shown it to him. Half of it seemed ridiculous, confusing and nonsensical. Then he realised it was two hours later and Shuri was laughing at him. Ever since he'd been quietly addicted to it, now they were integrating with the world he was happily more open about it. He saw pictures
of Dr Stark and Laura from before and after the speech and they were definitely both trending. He happily retweeted himself, adding his own tags for standing with Ironman and Dr Stark. He idly wondered if the rogues would notice, that could be amusing. As far as he knew they didn't have much of a social media presence outside of the ones Dr Stark’s staff managed for the Avengers.

As they exited onto the roof, T’Challa was definitely curious, it was possibly one of his best and worst traits, this time it had lead to him following an American genius onto the roof of the building. Okoye was not so subtly glaring at him as she discreetly followed him. As he'd been responding to his generals glare, he saw the brief flutter of surprise cross her face when Dr Stark waved at her. He wasn't sure how Dr Stark had seen her. They were rarely seen unless they wanted to be. He had another look at where they were hidden, blending seamlessly into the shadows. If he didn't know where they were, he wasn't sure he could have found them.

'Definitely not blind.' He thought to himself and wondered if he might be more changed than he looked? Or if his years fighting had just honed his instincts. They'd been so focused on his hand and potential blindness they hadn't considered other options. Was Dr Stark enhanced now? He pushed it out of his mind for now, but he'd definitely pass this on to his sister later today. It might be nothing, might just be a trait inherent to Dr Stark, the eccentric genius. It may even be his glasses.

"Damn I look good in this suit."

T’Challa grinned at Laura and went back to sharing pictures and checking what people were saying about Laura, adding as he went. Sure he was laying it on a bit thick, but hey. It's twitter. He was also happy that Dr Stark had invited him to dinner, he was much different in person than he had been on the video call, or even the exhausted presence he vaguely remembered from Germany. There was almost no sense that the smaller man was angry at him, he seemed friendly and had an excitable air around him. When not holding his phone, his hands gesticulated wildly as he spoke. When he was excited about something he almost rocked on his feet, like he couldn't not move. Whether he was in a stained band shirt, his current expense suit or the Ironman suit, he seemed to carry the same sense of presence about himself. He was oddly more approachable than he'd suspected. It was weird, he'd met the man several times now, but this felt like the first time. At least the first time where he was not clouded by grief or seeing the man as a young Howard.

The quinjet appearing above them almost silently almost made him jump, he had not expected such silence in an aircraft that was not Wakandan. It had stealth features, which, whilst they couldn't match their own stealth tech, Dr Stark had achieved this without Vibranium so it was certainly impressive in itself and he found himself itching to see how it worked. He didn't get to indulge often anymore in engineering or science now he was left with running Wakanda.

"Any requests for food? I know a few places in DC included this amazing Italian restaurant?"

He nodded along with Laura and turned his attention to the jet, mentally taking apart what little he could see, wondering how it worked and just what Dr Stark could achieve if Shuri got her way of letting the man loose in their library. They quickly made themselves comfortable. The jet was of a smaller size from the other quinjets he had seen before and thought that this was obviously his personal mode of transport when not flying in the suit. He suspected that not turning up in the suit was a calculated move. Showing up as Dr Stark instead of Ironman.

"Fry, my baby girl, can you get us a table at Carlluccio's? Something not too obvious, tell Zaz that I've made myself a storm again."

"Sure thing Boss, I'll head for the roof shall I? He should be amused at that."
Tony snorted and T'Challa did start a little at the voice that came seemingly from the jet itself. This must be one of the man's AIs. He and Shuri had been interested in Stark's AIs for years, hearing many stories about JARVIS and now some about FRIDAY. About how they had feelings, emotions and that the man brought them alive in binary code. The abilities of the AIs were utterly unknown and even though he and his sister didn't know much in the way of binary code, they'd hunted for just a glimpse of the AIs and got squat. Stark was extremely defensive about his AIs, after he'd spoken about his first bot with a rudimentary AI being his child? That defensive behaviour suddenly made a lot more sense. The fact the AI was driving the jet was fascinating and he couldn't not ask.

"Is that your AI? Is she driving the jet?"

"Yup, FRIDAY is my wonderful girl. Say Hi to the king."

"Hi King T'Challa, and yes I'm the pilot of the jet. Occasionally Boss takes over but he flew here, so I get to fly home and he gets to be lazy."

T'Challa couldn't help his wide smile, this AI was amazing. If he didn't have previous knowledge that he ran with an AI, he definitely could have mistaken her for a person. Her inflections were perfect and she was quite Sassy. From the soft smile that he'd never seen before on Dr Stark's face, he was obviously happy with her behaviour.

"Sass, again, on my ship now. I'm sassed at all quarters."

"Well you did code me Boss."

He had no idea that an AI could sound smug.

"Miss FRIDAY, I can't help but be amazed by yourself, I've been interested in AIs for a while but you are nothing like what else I've seen."

"Why thank you T'Challa, Boss can we keep him, he's so polite!"

"You charming my AIs over there?"

Dr Stark chuckled and it seemed to transform him face, Laura smiled brightly at him, obviously happy that her friend, and Boss he supposed, was happy. He continued asking FRIDAY questions for the duration of the trip, asking what it felt to acquire emotions and how she learnt from everyone she interacted with. That she independently researched things she wanted to learn was amazing. Dr Stark did not seem to agree with her interest in psychology but at the same time made no moves to restrict her.

When they arrived at the restaurant a short, olive skinned man made a beeline for Dr Stark, speaking in rapid fire Italian that he couldn't even hope to keep up with even though he had learnt the language recently. The speed however left him barely catching a word here and there. Dr Stark seemed to have no problem firing back just as fast, his accent even changed slightly when he was speaking Italian, he wondered how many languages he knew, his sister had informed him he was a polymath, he wondered if he was also a polyglot too. The rapid fire Italian suddenly halted and Dr Stark was suddenly downright cackling and he wondered what had happened until he was being greeted and he assumed his royal status had been noticed.

They were taken down into the restaurant and lead to a booth right at the bath. It was very private and very comfortable as well. The decor was also lovely, he'd not actually had Italian before so he was curious. The Dora were offered to share their table but instead split into two groups of two and
seated either side of them. Dr Stark insisted on getting food for them also, which he knew meant a lot to them. After he sought Dr Stark’s help for food choices he individually spoke to each of them. By the time he had found his way back to the table, even Okoye was smiling about the man. Somehow he had won her over which was no small feat. Especially considering she was predisposed to dislike the man based on the actions of his father.

He had already fought beside the man so decided against eating a 'normal' sized portion. Not when the food smelled that good. Plus he was hoping if he did, maybe Dr Stark would too, giving him more data. If the overly large portions of food interested the staff, no one said anything which T’Challa found quite polite, especially considering the current climate of distrust of anyone not baseline human. Dr Stark himself had been inadvertently doing quite a lot to help that with his non stop work despite his ill health.

As they were eating dessert, slowly and rather indulgently as everyone was very full. T’Challa did feel quite like a cat, full and wanting to doze in a warm sun beam. He blamed Dr Stark for that because of the multitude of cat nicknames the man seemed to endlessly be able to come up with. He was quite happy with himself too, he and Dr Stark had had some very interesting conversations, especially after the genius had realised he had a PhD in engineering and bemoaned T’Challa for hiding his sciencey side. He’d even asked how many doctorates the man had and got a casual shrug that he stopped counting after a while, apparently Rhodey kept count. Even of his honorary titles.

Dr Stark's phone trilled at them when they were deep in conversation, his hands flying as he manipulated the blue hologram he’d been showing T’Challa of his nano tech housing for the Arc reactors, that because of them being made out of vibranium and being phase locked to just him, he was finally able to install arc reactors in places that needed electricity but couldn't have it or afford it. Before he’d had his hands tied as he didn’t trust anyone else to get their hands on the arc reactor, not when they could be so easily weaponised, the way his hands shook slightly as he’d said that had made T’Challa think there was a sad story there, but he did not pry. Nor did he mention Siberia. Maybe at a second meeting. Shuri might say he was incapable of tact, but he had some sense.

He did not want to ruin his excitement as he spoke of bringing electricity to schools and hospitals in Africa and how much of a difference it was making already. He really did care about the people his tech was helping and T’Challa wondered just how the media and his supposed friends could think so little of a man that was so happy about freely giving power away when he could have easily used it to make a lot more money or even just kept the tech in America. He got the feeling he did a lot in America too than just wasn't talked about. When the phone went off however T’Challa noticed the wince when he saw who was calling him.

"Pep!"

T’Challa leaned back so as not to intrude on the obviously angry, shouting woman on the phone. Some of the excited energy that had been bursting around him dimmed and he hunched in on himself which made T’Challa frown, he noticed Laura frowning too. Even Okoye was. Dr Stark seemed oblivious to them all.

"It's fine Pep, I only noticed the tagged on amendments about intelligence on the way. That didn't cause any fire at SI did it?"

Ah, Pepper, his CEO, must be angry that he allowed him inclusion as a non human under the Accords. He had thought it was a stand of solidarity with others and had been impressed that he had chosen to do so.

"Pep. Are you calling to yell at me for good things? Because I just ate a lot of food, I'm sleepy and confused. Also T’Challa and Laura are laughing at me now."
He finished up the call with Pepper, still hunched on himself. T'Challa and Laura practically pounced after to cheer him up. Which was by T'Challa asking Tony to order everything on the dessert menu so he could try things he'd never heard of. Tony also ordered more for 'the kids.'

"Ah, Laura, I heard you have three kids? I'm sure they will enjoy all of this."

"Oh they definitely will, my two will as well, and when Peter comes over he'll be in heaven, that boy loves Italian food."

"Oh, I didn't know you have children?"

T'Challa was racking his brain but no, he couldn't remember anything about children, not in their numerous reports over the years, his father had kept a close watch on the Starks. There was more about how Dr Stark didn't have an heir, even in his playboy days.

"Well, I'm their legal guardian at the moment but Harley is on at me to sort out the paperwork. Their mother passed away when I was in the Coma, I met Harley years ago, little kid saved my life, helped me when I was in a bad place. So I stuck around as the weird uncle but only select people knew. Luckily Rhodey knew as they turned up when I was still under."

"I imagine that was a bit of a shock for him!"

Laura grinned, T'Challa was utterly dumbstruck to be honest.

"Harley is 14, Tara is 7. Their father walked out years ago. They're both scarily smart and they both have a knack for putting adults in their place"

Dr Stark had that soft smile again, Laura did too as he switch the hologram over to a folder than was utterly filled with pictures with kids everywhere. Laura pointed out Cooper and Lilah and baby Nate. He supposed Dr Stark had moved Laura near him in the compound so all the kids formed a tight knit, large group. Having superheroes for parents could be isolating he supposed.

"Cassie, That Scott Lang's kid, has joined us now. I think she'll take a while to come out of her shell, they moved a lot trying to dodge Ross and only recently decided it's just safer at the compound. Especially when I'm actively hunting the bastard now.

"I'm sure she'll settle in just fine Tony. When Cooper and Lilah were nervous about the new place and so many people, we were quite isolated on the farm, Tony dedicated himself into making everything perfect for them. He's now Uncle Tony."

"Who was the other boy?"

"Ah, that's Peter another stray I found, brought home, fed and never leaves."

The grin on his face says that he's pretty okay about this. T'Challa is impressed that he's willing to take so many kids in. Not many people would be willing to dedicate so much of themselves to other people's kids. Peter looks somewhat familiar but he can't place it.

"Sounds life he fits right in."

"Oh he does, he lives with his Aunt May during the week and spend most weekends and holidays with us, occasional weekdays too, the 3 of them have rooms in my apartment and I have so many little desks in my lab it's adorable."

"He even got Lilah a purple soldering iron and everything."
"Oh she is a whizz at disassembling anything. Blink and it's in pieces. We're working on putting things back together, luckily Tara excels at that."

"Sounds very chaotic. Like you have 6 versions of my sister…"

T'Challa finds himself suddenly happy there is only one Shuri and wonders if Dr Stark would mind taking her in with his hoard occasionally.

"Oh it is, but it's awesome."

They worked their way through a shocking amount of desserts whilst Dr Stark and Laura showed him so many kid photos it was slightly crazy and told him about the antics the hyper hoard got up to in the compound. He packed up a huge amount of desserts to take home and Zazz seemed impressed by how much they'd put away. He took some of the desserts he thought Shuri might like too. The trip back to the Accords building seemed very fast but that might have been because all of them were a biscuit away from a food coma. Dr Stark exited the quinjets to shake hands with T'Challa on the roof. Much to the absolute joy of the press. They got even worse when he pulled him in for a hug that T'Challa returned. T'Challa did not see his debt to the man as fully paid, but this was a good start. If anything it had given him more reasons and a little more guilt to now he'd started to get to know the real person.

Getting to know the small genius was a flurry of conversations and facts that he would never have put together with him. He knew from his sister that he wasn't the man the media portrayed, but actually getting to see him, know him, was different. How he seemed to flip from doting father to utter genius was amusing, he could definitely understand now why he and his sister had struck such a good friendship. Shuri was lightyears ahead of most people and rarely found someone who could keep up with her in a conversation, multi-taskers rarely could, one of the reasons he had been able to keep up with Dr Stark was all the practice he'd gotten with Shuri. Switching conversation as soon as something else caught their fancy.

He didn't hang around much after they'd gotten back. Everything was finished for the day, he stuck around just long enough to check on the changed agenda that didn't shock him one bit. Without Ross around to pointlessly block Dr Stark's amendments, they were up next. During the trip back to Wakanda, he decided to doze for a little bit instead of flying like normal. It had been a long, utterly boring and then surprising day, he was full of amazingly indulgent food and he was happily sleepy.

He knew that Shuri would be waiting on him when he got home. Although, thinking about it, she probably knew what was planned today, which was why he'd found himself in a boring, pointless Accords meeting in the first place. There had been no amendments penciled for today that they were interested in, it was already stuff that was finished being gone over again. So yeah, she set him up. Not that he can complain, he had fun. He hoped Dr Stark enjoyed his gift when he got home too. The man deserved it, he'd known he did a lot but hadn't truly understood the scope of how much until today.

That he had two full-time jobs at SI and the Avengers, as an Avenger himself and being the sole creator of their gear and training equipment, he also seemed to be the sole Avenger who dealt with the press and dealt with reparations which was practically two more full time jobs. Then there was all of his charity work and as he said, his 'side projects' that could easily be described as someone else's life work. And he had the time to raise two children, occasionally three and help with four others? Even now he had a feeling there was somehow more not mentioned. T'Challa wondered how he did it, he occasionally felt he was losing himself to running his country and the Accords, the idea of dealing with the words press had been weighing on him greatly. He'd have to speak to
Dr Stark and find out how he managed it all. For now however, he'll nap until Shuri undoubtedly rudely awakens him when he gets home. Before he drifts off he has a flashback to the last time Shuri woke him up and immediately sets an alarm.

Chapter End Notes

Also, as might have been noticed, Canon is infinitely malleable in my mind. MCU can't remember their own timelines, or know how to name the Accords. So I picked bits from here and there and straight up made stuff up, anything I add/change I'll always try and explain whether it's from 616, MCU or the back logs in my brain from stuff I read as a kid.

(To random crap from my life because its easy inspiration, I've had a weird life. I started writing this not long after my bungalow exploded for instance. 😄, But it won't be anything serious, just dumb stuff like Hope/Tony's nicknames or James and his Hypervigilance. That stuff.)
Uncomfortable Revelations

Chapter Summary

Sam wonders why the Author keeps doing this to him.

Videos are watched.

Chapter Notes

In America

- **September 8th**
  Bruce discovers things are not as they seem.
  Tony tells Laura & the Mini Agents.
  Tony tells the team.

- **September 12th**
  Tony & Laura storm the Accords Councils castle.

- **September 17th**
  Tony collects Shay

- **September 20th**
  Shuri and Tony video chat about BARF.
  Tony, Laura and Maggie take the kids out.

OK, you lot went and surprised me by liking the chapter I spent a solid day squinting at! Not that I am complaining, also all the comments gave me a huge writing boost!

I did promise the next chapter a little earlier however :)
So, happy non-Saturday!

Shuri POV

12 September

Trying to occupy yourself when you are waiting for your brother to take his sweet time getting
back to Wakanda was much trickier after her Wolf found his way to therapy. She had occupied herself for a while in the group chat with the compound teens that she’d somehow found herself invited into. According to Harley she was one of them ‘in spirit if not in physicality.’

They were loving the pictures of Laura and Dr Stark. Coop was ecstatic that their kick arse mom was finally getting to flex her claws so to speak and she had to agree. Comparing her to the picture they’d sent to her of them back at the farm, she has definitely come out of her shell and was utterly thriving!

When Peter added the picture of her brother hugging Dr Stark it took pretty much her entire self control not to have it appear on the television in the idiots villa. She did however decide to maybe print a version and put it up in the lab, although the chances of Rogers seeing such a thing had drastically decreased since his grounding. Oh sorry, house arrest.

She was not at all highly amused that her brother had effectively grounded Captain America. It almost made up for inviting them into Wakanda.

Almost.

Considering the man still had not offered T’Challa an apology for lying to them about when happened, she had a feeling that he was going to be grounded for a long, long time.

Her Wolf was trying not to be too happy over the situation as he was conflicted. His memories told him one thing but he was feeling another. Rogers didn't seem to realise it, but if he kept this up, he was going to lose him all together. Rogers was only getting by on fumes, dregs of memories in his mind. Eventually her Wolf would grow tired and give up, if the Captain put some actual effort in, things might be different. She had tried not to push him to a conclusion, he knew her stance on the idiots, but she'd made it clear that she did not expect him to feel the same and even if he decided to become best friends with Wanda, she would support him all the way. She might monitor the Witch however, she really did not trust her.

Glancing at her beads she checked to see how long T’Challa had until he got home and was practically vibrating in her seat. She should have gone today. But she didn't want to reschedule a session on him. His therapist had informed her that consistency is vital. So she had set things up for T’Challa and decided to live vicariously through her brother. Something that is hard to do when he takes ages to return home.

Now T’Challa had met Stark properly, she could potentially be organising a trip for herself at some point. Not too soon as she didn't want to abandon her Wolf without a sanctuary from the idiots. Maybe she could convince the others to join Dr Stark when he next goes to an Accords meeting and then she’d fiddle with T’Challa calendar again. Organising today had been hilariously easy. She knew school was back in, but Dr Stark knew a Sorcerer, maybe he could Portal Dr Stark, Harley Peter and Tara for a weekend. Laura could come too with Cooper, Lilah and Nibbles as Tony had taken to calling Nate. Mostly because he was apparently one of the few people who could calm him whilst he was teething.

She rewatched the video from earlier, this time looking for signs that he was not as healthy as he gave off. She’d noticed him listing to the side and gripping the podium towards the end only because he suddenly was only talking with one of his hands. His smile never faltered however and his voice was just as strong at the end than it had been when he’d begun.

Peter was concerned, but apparently he took her brother for dinner so hopefully Dr Stark was fine. She knew that she was worrying herself into a corner and that unless the man literally passed out on a video call, getting information out of him about his health was near impossible. Even then
he'd probably avoid it. He didn't want to worry her. Little did he know that this constant state of not knowing was infuriating and concerning, it lead to a lot of worrying.

She finally got a notification that her brother was back and was heading her way, which meant she didn't have to hunt the man down. Good. Seems he can be smart occasionally.

Happily when he arrived, it was with 4 bags of dessert.

"I bring a lot of desserts to make up for being late."

"Hm, I accept your offerings, now, give them to me and tell me how everything went!"

She dove into the bag, pulling out the various desserts and looking for the ones Peter had recommended she try first. They had also started teaching her Italian to add to her repertoire of languages as apparently all 3 of them were fluent. Dr Stark had taught Harley and Tara years ago and Peter had been learning it in school. Dr Stark and the other two kids had taken over his tutelage, and now Lilah and Cooper were getting the same treatment. It had evolved from Dr Stark wanting to pass down a language close to his heart to all the compound kinds must speak Italian. It was nice that they had included her with it.

Harley said they he and Peter were going to try something more obscure next so that would be interesting. The current method of choosing was to write down loads of languages on bits of paper. Put them in a bowl, shake it and pick one. The old method had been throwing darts at aboard but that had been quickly scrapped when the kids just kept getting the ocean and Dr Stark's aim was too good to call it random.

"Well, I'm assuming you watched the session on TV? Dr Stark rather ruthlessly took down Secretary Ross and several others from what I gather. After that we went to the restaurant via Quinjet. His stealth tech is quite impressive."

"Ah, so you get the sense he would be terrifying if he had our access to Vibranium too?"

"I would dear sister but I've grown accustomed to you."

"Well I'm taking that as a compliment."

"I thought you would, have you met his AI yet?"

"FRIDAY or CERBERUS? I've spoken to FRIDAY occasionally during video chats with Dr Stark."

"I only met FRIDAY, She is quite fascinating, all those years we were trying to get an idea of the capabilities of his AIs, I'd never considered them feeling and having emotional responses. It was quite fascinating speaking to her and she liked me too."

"Awww, you flirting with Dr Stark's AI?"

Her brother just scowled to her before snipping the pastry that she had been reaching for. At her pout he relented and wisely gave her half. She slipped out her StarkPhone to send Peter a picture of the dessert feast T'Challa has brought home.

"Peter has given me a list of desserts to try."

"Dr Stark mentioned him, I hadn't realised he'd taken on so many children."
"Oh they're all great, I was on a video call with him weeks ago when he had to dash off chasing Tara and Lilah, then Harley and Peter just appeared and invited me to the group chat. They'd apparently set up the girls to distract Dr Stark just to invite me."

Peter sent a picture of their kitchen, where he had apparently painstakingly displayed everything Dr Stark had brought home. She thought it was mostly impressive that none of the others had stolen anything as he worked.

"I discovered from one of the aides at the Accords Council that he completed his first PHD at 17 too, he even showed us pictures of the AI he developed for it."

"Oh Dum-E? He's adorable, Harley likes to play fetch with him."

She flicked back through the group chat pictures to one Peter had taken of Harley and Dum-E playing fetch with a spanner as Dr Stark was working in the background and showed it to her brother.

"Huh, his workshop seems a very active place, he's definitely different that I suspected. Much different than the last time we met, but I was.. Distracted then."

Shuri side steps that, she really doesn't want to think on that too much, about why he'd been distracted but also what those fights led to.

"So, how did he seem?"

"It's hard to get a read on him, he has 2 hands and I don't think he's blind."

"Yeah, I noticed on video chats he's suddenly no longer hiding his left hand and I could have told you he wasn't blind! Watching him navigate his lab is like walking in chaos."

"I wasn't sure, I just kept seeing that picture in the hospital with his eyes bandages. When we were discussing the kids he told me Peter is doing extra projects with Dr Cho, I looked her up and wondered if her research on synthetic skin might have something to do with his hand.."

Shuri scowled, at this rate, she'd never know for sure. She supposed she could ask the others. But that felt a bit like asking new friends to give her information their father didn't want to pass on. It would put them in an awkward position. So she'd just avoided it.

"A few times he did look a little pale, but he carried on with his speech as if he was in perfect health. I think I only noticed because I was looking."

"So we still know virtually nothing."

"There were a few things. He always knew where the Dora were, even Okoye. No matter how well she vanished into the shadows, he pinpointed her easily."

Hmm, well that was interesting, and it was going to drive Okoye mad trying to get past him.

"You think he's enhanced somehow? I know in his speech he classed himself under non humans but that was about his intelligence."

"He was definitely baseline human in July. I heard his heartbeat on occasion and he had quite a severe arytmia that worsened when he was stressed."

"Did you hear that today?"
"No, but I swear I could hear something else, it didn't sound like any pacemaker I've ever heard, but I doubt he'd use anything standard, it sounded similar to his power source."

"Okay, that is very strange. Anything else to make you think he's enhanced now?"

"Well he ate more than me at the restaurant."

Shuri eyebrows shot up at that, because her brother could really put away a lot of food when he wanted too especially after becoming enhanced himself.

"That definitely is interesting."

"Hm, I think we are going to be left guessing unless he chooses to tell us."

"I guess, it is frustrating but I'm not going to force the issue. Oh, by the way, Barnes was in the lab when Dr Stark started his speech!"

"Hm? How did he react?"

"He seemed relieved at first on seeing him, so I'm assuming he is carrying a lot of guilt from whatever happened at Siberia that you still know more about than me."

She leveled a glower at him but T'Challa just glanced away, suddenly very interested in the floor.

"Hm. That. Well, if Barnes wants to tell you he will."

"I think he is also beginning to realise that Rogers and his band of misfits are not the best people to get facts about Dr Stark. He had been told Dr Stark was close with Secretary Ross! The only thing they had right was his work on the Accords but that was viewed as a 'means of controlling the Avengers."

Her brothers scowl and scoff at that amused her, Rogers definitely had an interesting world view. In that it was utterly self centred.

"Typical. I think Rogers believes he and his team are the only non humans and the only heroes in existence. I bet they still haven't even read the Accords."

"Doubtful, Barnes is going to however, he wanted me to keep him updated on amendments too. He's also doing a lot of research into the political climate and how things work now. Rogers hadn't even told him about the data dump. I think he's interested in finding out more about Dr Stark too."

"It's good that he is interested in how things are now, better than Roger's who seemed to have little interest in updating himself. I was going to ask Dr Stark about him but.."

"I'm hoping that sentence ends 'But I didn't because that would be an extremely awkward thing to do on practically a first meeting'?"

"Yes, I didn't. I hope to speak to him at some point about them, or maybe to Rhodes? How Rogers was a team leader for 5 years and has so little knowledge of dealing with the press, or anything is concerning. Did you notice that after the Avengers are involved they are practically scatter in the wind?"

"Leaving Dr Stark and Stark Industries on clean up. No. I utterly did not notice that."

Her deadpan delivery made her brother chuckle.
"Oh, Barnes did say to warn you. When they, because it is a when, at least one of them will stumble onto this, you know it."

"Yeah, they're going to be annoying about it aren't they."

"Well yes, but not because of Dr Stark. How do you think the little angry archer man is going to react to what Laura said. Apparently he's already whining about not being allowed to 'rescue' her..

He could almost see her brother playing back Laura's part of the speech in his head, eyes widening. They were going to have to increase security to keep the angry man from running off half cocked, causing them trouble in his ridiculous endeavours.

"Oh Bast."

She would feel bad for him, but she was still slightly annoyed at him for allowing them all in. The White Wolf was one thing, but the others following like strays, he should have kicked them out months ago.

**Barnes POV**

17th September

Today's data draw with the glasses had been quite a hard one. It didn't help that his mind was still spinning before they even started. Wings had finally managed to give him a run down of everything that happened, and he didn't know what to do with it. Or that Steve had been on at Wings to not tell him. He was mad at Steve. Spitting mad, and not just about what happened. He tried to keep it from him, it should have been Steve telling him. As if having gaps in his memory was good for him?! Who does that to someone?! So he'd been a bit off kilter before he'd even put the glasses on today. That they were moving through worse and worse memories didn't help.

He'd worried they'd result in headaches or something after hearing of the earlier versions, but he was fine. He did get a bit of emotional whiplash from seeing so many memories whip past him. So fast generally that he didn't get much from them. They were working on the harder ones now that we're finding the Hydra memories. More than he even thought he had in his mind! He couldn't recall them, but they were still there.

What was hard was the glimpses he was getting from these memories were generally awful. Blood, pain, death, torture. All that he expected. What was unexpected was the additional nightmare fuel from the fractured memories. Blank faces were more nerve racking than he'd expected. Shuri had told him that they had to do more draws than they suspected because his brain was practically uncharted territory, the outside contractor, Anthony, was apparently working with the data from each draw to code him specific algorithms. He had no idea who this person was but he was honestly surprised at their dedication to help him. Between this stranger and all the effort Shuri was putting in? It honestly was giving him confidence and drive to keep going with it. The additional code had made today's draw go a little faster too, so their work was helping him. Which meant that no matter how weird the memories got, he'd keep going.

They seemed to believe in him, even though he hadn't even met one of them, so he could do this.

Shuri wasn't sure if it was the chair wiping his memories or whatever hydra did to create the Asset Subroutine, as Shuri had taken to calling it, that was causing problems. That part of his mind was
more of a computer program, that was wiped clean and took in commands and had programmed responses. She said some of the memories were damaged in the same way you'd expect a CCTV tape that had been wiped and recorded over multiple times. After a while it just isn't going to work as well. Images layer over or don't record well.

For him, this meant that some memories were... strange. The faces were the first information to be corrupted it seemed. Seeing memories with whited out faces, occasionally even stretched into nightmarish horrific ways was... not fun. It made sense, in a weird way, the way people looked was unimportant to the asset, only the mission mattered. Other people around were unimportant but surroundings were. Some data was extremely detailed, it was weird seeing the product of his Hypervigilance in a memory. Shuri had commented on how strange it must feel seeing like that, somethings fading back whilst others being almost loud.

Especially as the asset had been able to direct that Hypervigilance where as he was left to it set on high for everything or when it glitched, leaving important things so low down he didn't notice them. He'd been working on that with his therapist however who told him other people had Hypervigilance too, that he wasn't alone with this strange way of viewing the world.

Today he was trying to preempt Steve coming to his room post therapy. It always felt like an ambush, and an interrogation, especially after he found out Wings was planning on filling him in on his memory gaps. Which was why he was sat in the common room on one of the armchairs. He'd shifted the furniture around so its back was against the wall now, both exits and large windows were easy to see. This way no one could sit next to him or come up behind him. Wings was in the larger love seat next to him, feet up on the table eating his way through a plate of little chocolate cupcakes that he had made earlier.

Wings had suggested he get more hobbies, to branch out and his therapist agreed. He'd asked Wings for ideas, and watching the man demolish the cupcakes he wondered if it had all been a plot to obtain baked goods. He'd built up a sort of friendship with Wings these last few days. It was built on occasionally insulting each other, pranks, but also in depth talks about their feelings. It was kind of weird, but they both were unimpressed with Steve lately and they bonded over that. Also he was reading the book he recommended which made him all kinds of excited.

He had the second book on his lap now, he had the following 3 in his room in Cyrillic. As Wings couldn't read that he'd found the 5 books in English for him. Wakandas library was extensive so it had been very easy. Wings had been slightly intimidated by the sheer size of the 5 books stacked up at first but had seemed oddly determined to give them ago. Clint had mocked them for having a book club, he'd just shrugged and now they had 'Book Club' meetings once a day. It usually consisted of them quietly reading together somewhere and ranting about the characters. It also counts as him socialising so Steve can't complain.

"Urgh, are you two girls hosting your little book club here today?"

"Fuck off Clint. This book is really good."

Wings didn't even look up from the book as he flipped of Clint. He raised the book so he could hide his smirk behind it. He glanced at the clock and realised why Clint, and now Wanda was joining them. Wanda sat far too close to Clint, practically draping herself over him. He'd noticed her doing that a lot lately to Clint and Steve. She'd left him alone ever since he'd barked at her in Russian two days ago when he'd just got home from therapy and she tried to drape herself over him. He shuddered at the memory. That part of his mind, the one that was angry all the time at first but now seemed to be.. Changing somewhat. Thoughts came to him, questions too. He was still trying to ignore it, but that time it had been impossible to ignore.
It had practically screamed at him to RUN. He ended up snapping in Russian for her to stop fucking touching him and she'd jumped back as if burned. A strange look irritation flash across her face before he swore she slipped on that doe eyed mask, she'd teared up and fled from him. The lecture he'd gotten from Steve had been worth it however.

She also hadn't tried to touch him like that again. He did get strange, calculating looks from her however, like she was looking for something, but they'd be gone in a flash. He was completely convinced that the innocent damsel routine was a mask now and she was a lot more calculating underneath.

Steve wouldn't hear any of it, just telling him that Wanda is a good kid who'd had a terrible life and they had to protect her to make up for Stark's wrong doings that had ruined her life. Apparently he'd killed her parents but he had no idea how, no one explained and after he discovered she seemed to be manipulating Steve and Clint, he had to wonder about it. Everything about her seemed perfectly sculpted to get people like Steve on her side, sometimes he wondered if she was trained for it, it was just too perfect. He remembered that Hydra used to do that, get young women mostly, but men too, that looked all innocent and harmless. Train them up on what buttons to press to use specific people. He didn't know if she was some kind of Sokovian version of that, or maybe she was just naturally manipulative to ensure they'd protect her? Maybe he was just thinking about it too much.

Tic Tac came next and wandered closer to them, sitting next to Wings in the love seat. He wondered where Steve was and realised the punk was probably knocking on his door, waiting to interrogate him from today's session.

He really didn't want to stick around for movie night, yeah he was getting better at being around multiple people, but generally, he preferred to be in groups of 3 or 4 maximum. They were currently at 5. If he left now however it would open him up for Steve. If he stayed it would be uncomfortable but he could at least say he'd stayed for movie night. Even when Clint and Wanda were whispering and insulting them. Even Wings, especially since he did not agree with Clint that Stark much be torturing his wife or whatever bizarre idea they had come up with now.

"Hey Barnes, have I shown you my little girl?"

He shook his head at Scott, slipping the bookmark into his book and putting it in his bag that he had taken to carrying around everywhere. It was very handy! No matter what Clint said.

Tic Tac brought up that Instagram thing that everyone seemed to use. He didn't quite understand it, it just seemed to be a weird collection of pictures that people added lots of peculiar hash tags too. He'd had a look himself and found that the #AvengersCompound spanned multiple accounts of people who lived there and school tour groups, in what he could see as an attempt to humanise the superheroes. (From what he had found out during his research on the Accords, it was certainly needed.)

Wings switched to his tablet, checking out the same Instagram tag he was checking earlier by the looks of it. He got up to grab himself a drink and noticed that Sam had found his way to the picture that Shuri had shown him before they watched the Accords Council. He had a feeling this was going to go one of two ways. One, he'll just see the picture and everything will be fine. Two, Sam will want to find out why Stark was suited up with Laura after being in seclusion for so long, find the video and then want to watch it. He was surprised it had taken this long really.

Lately, Wings had become extremely interested in tracking things back in America. So there was a good chance he'd find the video himself, he just wondered what he'd do with it and if he could get in there first and try to delay the inevitable.
Wings interest in the Accords had not gone unnoticed and had somehow added to Wanda's dismay, from what he'd overheard, she was still more annoyed at Clint's hogging of the laptop just to social media stalk his wife however. Not seeming to realise she helped stoke this obsession of his wife being captured by the evil dragon Dr Stark. Lately she'd been suggesting that his wife was cheating on him with Dr Stark, if this was her plan to make him stop, it didn't seem to be working and he'd barely seen the guy without the laptop since. He carried it everywhere with him.

He glanced at Wings screen when he passed to sit back down and sighed internally. Sam already had the video up, his brow knit in concentration as he was reading the attached comments. He was about to say something when Steve entered the room, the double take at seeing him apparently sat for movie night, it was highly amusing. He held up a hand to wave, which everyone else, well, all the nice people, accepted to mean the he didn't want to talk right now. His therapist told him that going non verbal now and then is not the worst thing in the world, he can still communicate in ASL after all, it was just occasionally hard to get words out and forcing it made it worse. Steve sadly took his non verbal moments as a personal challenge. That if Steve made him talk it meant he was superior than the Wakandan mental health team. A team that specialises in PTSD. It was mind boggling, but he'd noticed Steve was still thinking of mental health back from the 40s. He'd tried to get him to see how far it came, but he was having none of it. He was just stubbornly holding onto life from the 40s. If he could bring him forward then things would get better he suspected.

"So, what movie are we watching today, Buck you got a preference?"

He sighed, shaking his head. He actually did. But Steve didn't know ASL and got offended if people translated for him. He shook his head and wondered if he'd ever get to watch the Lord of the Rings films Shuri had recommended it.

Maybe he'd ask her to put it on his computer or tablet.

**Sam POV**

He was surprised when he saw Barnes sit back down after getting up. Everyone was gathering for movie night which meant Steve would be showing up soon and lately he'd been vanishing moments before the super soldier turned up.

It was actually a warning system for him.

If Steve was coming, Barnes would blend into the shadows or you know, hurl himself out of the nearest window.

Literally.

On more than one occasion, Sam had seen Barnes scaling the building to get to his bedroom without walking past Steve. After the first time he'd choked on his coffee watching the fucking Winter Soldier wink at him from the second story window before continuing up as if he wasn't casually climbing a freaking building one handed, he'd realised something about Barnes no one had mentioned before.

When he wasn't brooding, hiding or ranting in impressively dramatic (and not at all scary) Russian, getting hyper about books or murder strutting around as he pleased… the guy was a fucking troll.

It was a nice break to the tension, and as far as he could tell, only he and Scott saw it.

Shaking his head he turned his attention back to the video he was watching on mute. He'd watched
quite a few of the Accords Sessions now, trying to get caught up but he was woefully behind, when he was surrounded by people he muted it and read people’s opinions about what was being said. It was usually a nice spread across the spectrum, he’d discovered that the political climate had fractured almost as much as the team. Their were Team Cap and Team Iron man people who passionately argued about things when they obviously didn't have 90% of the information on. But they were willing to go on TV about why they were right. It was kind of terrifying.

This session however had him thinking he'd have to admit he'd been watching because it seemed Stark had come out of seclusion. He considered just excusing himself to watch it in his room but that would be cowardly.

Why was it always him that brought bad news!?

And what was fucking worse, there was Laura, looking extremely happy with herself and reminiscent to the same fear Pepper Potts caused in him.

"Urm, before we watch the film, I thought you guys should see this..

Barnes started signing at him almost immediately.

<Bad idea! Bad idea !>!

Well that did not bode well.

Also made him realise their resident brood-master extraordinaire was apparently better caught up with the Accords than he was. Interesting. Before he could back out however Steve had already switched the channel for him to cast the video and he only had that or a video Barnes had sent him about a skateboarding dog and he had a feeling the latter would not fly. He shrugged at Barnes who face palmed as he cast the video onto the TV.

"What the fuck is this Wilson?"

"It's a video from an Accords Council session."

Clint looked bored and Wanda shot him an absolutely evil look, her eyes flashed red before she turned away from him.

"And why would we want to see anything about that?"

OK, so now a part of him wanted to play the video to piss Wanda off.

"Because Steve wanted updates on Stark and Barton wanted updates on his wife."

The explosion of demands for information was quite amusing, Scott was the only one actually watching the video, Barnes was covering his face but he looked like he was going to burst out laughing. He wasn't sure if that was good or bad having not heard what was on the video, only having seen them enter and read about them causing a stir.

Tony Stark opening the double doors dramatically managed to draw everyone's attention to the screen. As it had in the council he noticed, whilst he was still conflicted on his feelings about Stark, he had to admit, the man knew how to set a scene. Laura walked next to him, and Clint's strangled noises was expected.

"Hello everyone, the rumors of my demise, retirement or whatever the new one of the week is, have been wildly exaggerated. I hope I haven't missed too much?"
Wanda was practically gagging, Steve was on the edge of his seat and Clint was transfixed on his wife, looking as if he'd never seen her before. Scott's was just watching interested and Barnes looked like he'd kicked back to watch the chaos unfold. Partially watching the screen but his attention was on the people in this room.

He'd watched Stark work the crowd a few times and it was always quite fun. Barnes was definitely more interested in them, but even he was still keeping an eye on the screen.

"Unfortunately I am not here to bring glad tidings. I'm here to present to you multiple violations for someone under the Accords as they're regarding Inhuman, Enhanced Humans."

Steve cut in, obviously annoyed that Stark was talking about the Accords.

"I can't believe he is still working for Ross and these ridiculous Accords. We aren't even there for them to use against us, I was hoping that they'd -"

"Of course he's working with that slime bag, you told me he was compromised, Stark never admits he's wrong and now he's dragged my wife down with him… She barely even looks like-"

"He's probably been living it up with him this whole time and violations? His prison was a violation."

Wanda practically hissed the last part, her hands around her throat, probably remembering that collar they'd had her in. Everyone was talking over each other, he could barely hear the TV, Scott looked irritated at that part and Barnes just signed <Told you so> at him.

"- happy to do my duty under the Accords to bring this to you as a signed member. Even though I am still technically signed off on medical leave, I thought this too important to wait much longer."

"Wonder why he's on medical leave, he looks okay?"

Scott mumbled and Barnes was signing at him again so he just ignored the scoffing and frankly, bitching from Wanda. Steve and Clint seemed to have been struck silent although he suspected for different reasons.

<Watch his hands.>

Well. That was informative… and not at all creepy, he just nodded and focused on the TV.

"I have petabytes of data, videos, written, everything required and I will be honest. If this is swept away and ignored, again, as this information is legally my own. I will release it onto the Internet."

Clint scoffed again, looking angry now, he remembered how enraged Stark had been about the data dump although he hadn't understood why, Steve had told him that it was the only way and they'd thought everything through. Stark then vanished and ignored all contact, appearing weeks later looking utterly haggard, but that might have been because he'd recently undergone serious heart surgery, it looked like he had barely slept the entire time and was even angrier.

"We don't appreciate threats Dr Stark."

"Dr Maloj, I don't not wish to threaten your lovely self or anyone here. But when you have watched the videos you will understand my fervour. Plus precedent was set after
the fall of SHIELD was it not? I do not believe that an Amendment to that section regarding releasing of information has been tabled yet."

"I thought you were against the data dump Dr Stark"

"I was, and still am Mr Davenport. It was reckless, too fast and the innocent were hurt. I assure you, this will not be a reckless act. It will not be an ill conceived idea born of desperation."

What?! Who was hurt? Steve hadn't mentioned that anyone would get hurt except Hydra agents. Steve was staring at the screen, ignoring his questioning look and he decided that he'd put it to the site for now but he'd definitely was going to find out about this at some point!

"So when he does it it's fine, When Nat does it he goes into a snit!"

Scott and Steve were shushing him this time, Tony spoke rather quickly and they were missing huge chunks with Clint's interjections.

"Who cares what he's saying anyway! It's just Stark rambling on, he just enjoys the sound of his own voice."

Sam wondered if he should point out that this is pretty normal from all the talks he's watched of the Council meetings so far. One guy spoke for a solid 30 minutes the other day before getting to his point, Stark was just drawing people in, getting them invested.

"Human rights violations are never pretty, even if we are talking about people who are seen as less than human by some. Many do include humans who because of this man have been forced into enhancements, mutations, changes to their body against their will. Bodily autonomy seems a fleeting idea, as long as he can create and control his own little private army of super-humans, he doesn't care who suffers horrendously, human, mutant, enhanced, inhuman. - "

"Considering what happened to me on the raft, he should be reporting himself"

"Be quiet everyone, this seems very serious and like something we should be invested in."

He's not sure if he imagined Barnes rolling his eyes or not, but as he knew who this was about, it was curious. Wanda was pouting at Steve who was more focused on the screen.

"Endangerment of minors, ethics were just not involved anywhere and aspects of this are straight up torture to those he kept. To those who escaped their lives were systematically destroyed, reputations ruined, family's threatened, all to force his victims into an easier point of capture. This has spanned several years, in several countries and includes a frankly terrifying amount of property damage. This is coming from me, the man who cleaned up after the Avengers for years. Including New York. This individual - "

"What the fuck does he mean 'cleaning up after the Avengers'."

"Probably just throwing his blood money around."

"Stark did tell me once about charities he'd set up to help people who were hurt by our… What?"

Sam trailed off when he realised he was being stared at in varying degrees of astonishment to rage.
"What the fuck were we supposed to do? Let aliens take over to save some property damage?"

"Wait, wait, I think he's talking about us..?"

Scott's managed to derail that potential argument nicely.

"- detained people without adequate warrants in the illegal prison and claimed to be doing it on behalf of yourselves."

"I thought Stark put us in that jail?"

"He did!"

"I am of course talking about one Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross."

Wanda's screech and Stark's naming of Ross happened at pretty much the same time and tension in the room skyrocketed.

"- fugitive status of certain individuals and Thaddeus drive to bring them in. Of course in that drive he subverted the Accords and the will of the original 117 countries, now a fantastic 139 with 2 more ready to join any day."

"That.. That's a lot of countries. I.. I thought this was an American thing?"

Poor Scott, he actually looked kind of green. He himself was kind of shook to discover Stark apparently had nothing to do with them ending up on the raft... And that their being held prisoner was illegal. Damn, how much difference could it have made of Stark had gotten them out legally? Would they be hiding in Wakanda? If they'd just stopped for a second instead of reacting with out all the information..

"- shield to protect civilians and heroes alike, to guard humans, superhuman, inhumans, enhanced humans, humans with unusual qualities such as very large intellects, which by the way, is quite the compliment. Thank you. Also -"

Sam's eyes widened at that, Stark had just allowed himself to be classed under the Accords as a non human, that was a pretty big deal.

"He can make anything about himself."

Barnes looked unimpressed with Wanda's sneers, he wasn't either but he realised that until recently, he probably would have joined in. When he'd still felt at fault for sending Stark to Siberia and Steve getting hurt.

"-to take our mistakes of the past, never forget them, never cover them up, never forget the lives lost, accountability, security. Not a subversion of these great ideals put on paper by the late King T'Chaka and taken up by his son. This shield won't become a noose as long as I'm breathing, from standing in front of you or from my hospital bed, I assure you, I will not give up."

That was when he remembered what Barnes had said, sure enough Stark was gripping the edge of the stand hard enough his hand looked white. He also looked like he'd paled a little. It was subtle and he wouldn't have noticed it if he hadn't been told to look. No one else mentioned it. Maybe he wasn't as healthy as they presumed? How had Barnes spotted it when he didn't even know the man?
Wanda was stroking Clint's hair as his wife stepped forward, the man leaning forward in his seat and he did feel pity for the man. Even if he had been trying on his last nerve lately.

"I'm sure none of you will recognise me, except as Dr Stark's amazing new personal assistant of course."

"WHAT?!"

"My soon to be ex husband-"

"Oh my god, this isn't happening, she can't do that! Not with me here! What about the kids?!"

"Ross sent multiple teams of heavily armed, highly trained men to my farm. A farm I lived on alone with three children, my youngest had not long turned one year old. The others are seven and thirteen years old. They don't understand what is happening, why a man sent tactical teams to raid our home."

"Dammit I should have been there!"

Clint was on his feet now, pacing angrily back and forth, ignoring Wanda and Steve's attempts to calm him down. The pointed looks he was getting from Steve didn't help. Turns out rendition 43 of 'I can't be the team counsellor, it's a conflict of interest.' was required.

"- raided. I don't want to think what might have happened if Tony Stark, 37 hours after waking up from his coma hadn't abandoned his hospital bed to rescue me. Don't worry, I immediately marched him back into it."

Could this get much worse. Barnes was looking at him in amusement and now he understood why he'd said this was a bad idea. He'd just thought showing the team Laura and Stark was bad. How was he expected to know Laura would announce her divorce on live TV?!

"Me and my children are human, the law failed to protect me, Ironman didn't. We are not the only family he has brought in from the cold. We stand with him as a real protector, not a villain like Thaddeus Ross."

Yes. It can apparently always get worse.

Clint just thumped back down on the chair. Staring dumb struck at the TV before standing up to leave, for once not carrying the laptop with him as the press and Councillors exploded into noise. Wanda shot him another glare as if this was his fault. Clint paused and looked back when Stark spoke again, Sam internally flinched, because it was just in time to see Laura hugging Stark.

"Thank you for taking the time today to listen to what we had to say. I'll leave you now to hopefully do what should have been done long ago. Whilst I might be gone, I will be watching."

Clint stormed off to his room, Wanda jumped up and ran to catch up. Scott was glancing around uncomfortably. Steve looked utterly deflated when he looked over to Barnes, he glared.

<You could have warned me!>

<I told you it would be a bad idea.>

Then the bastard grins at him and silently takes off towards his room without Steve seeming to notice.
Shuri POV

20th September

Shuri had been sorting through the latest data Dr Stark had sent over, he'd texted her about sending a small update to the current algorithm he'd constructed based on Barns data draws. But just looking at the file, it was much too big for a patch. At first she wondered if he'd accidentally sent the same file three times but as she brought them up it became pretty obvious what he'd done. It definitely wasn't a patch. She frowned, she still didn't know much about Siberia. Her brother was being infuriatingly tight lipped but she what she did know was that they'd all left injured and it felt like her brother was trying to make up for his part in it, it also seemed like Dr Stark was obsessing somewhat.

Without actually knowing what happened however, she felt like her hands were tied. She decided to give him a call anyway. It was maddening because the two idiots would get along so well, the things that kept other people away would probably be a benefit between them. But nope, they were idiots. Constantly saying the other would hate them!

"What's up Kit-Kat?"

The sight of him however made her forget practically everything because he looked utterly ridiculous, she knew the kids at the compound had a running challenge for what breakfast products they could get on him without him realising it, but usually by the time he came to the lab he'd cleaned up. This time his hair was white with icing sugar.

"Had breakfast with the kids did you?"

"Yeeaaahh.. Why?"

"Didn't look in a mirror before you went to the lab either?"

"Dammit, I didn't let anyone near me with Nutella!"

The cloud of icing sugar puffed put around him, leaving him spluttering and coughing on it. Which was utterly hilarious. He bolted to the bathroom giving her a chance to laugh because she'd needed it, and also set it up to send the clip of him sticking his hand into his hair, creating a huge white clouds to puff up to the group chat.

5 minutes later, he reappeared, slightly damp. It was enough to set her off again.

"Yuck it up Princess. So, apart from laughing at me, whats on today's docket."

"Oh you know, the usual joy I feel dealing with integration on your binary systems."

"Ahhh, yeah, that's been keeping me up. Did the last batch of files help any? I think we're getting closer to something that works efficiently."

"T'Challa was fine with version 7, he thinks that we're at version 42 means we are crazy you know."
She rolled her eyes at her brothers confusion that they were still working on it and likely would for a while.

"So far none of the versions have been quick enough to take the coded alterations to the BARF system without sending packets back and forth."

She couldn't argue, she agreed. She even shared Dr Stark's scowl that they'd been forced into sending little packets instead of just being able to make the data available to both of them. It took ages. Neither of them were happy with it being *okay* or just *fine* like her brother said. It might work for dealing with most people but Dr Stark's private systems were much faster, resulting in infuriating traffic jams and actual hours looking at buffering files. Especially the size of the BARF files.

"How is he taking to it anyway? I know it's only been 8 days..? How are you handling it?"

Dr Stark cycled back and forth between not mentioning Barnes existence, which as they were working of BARF was a bit weird, or asking questions and also immediately deflecting.

"Everything is going fine and I'm learning your tech too. How many disciplines did you cross making these damned glasses anyway?"

Tony just flashed a self satisfied grin at her in answer.

"I just finished getting through all the data for your hand and hydra. I think ours is far superior."

"Of course it is, we built it instead of nazis and it isn't a torture device."

Shuri had paled at that before diving to the side and bringing everything he'd sent up on another screen. Eyes widening as her eyes quickly scanned over the information in a new light.

"I... how did I not see this?!"

She wondered if this had anything to do with Barnes refusal of a new limb? Did he think it work hurt as badly as his old one? She felt awful about bringing it up now and knew she'd have to find a way to let him know a new arm wouldn't hurt. She'd make sure of it.

"I've been neck deep in Hydra since DC.. After a while I expect this of them so it was easy to see. If I never have to look at a Hydra file again it will be too soon."

She shook her head, chewing on her nail again. She'd shelve this for later stress.

"Anyway, let's just.. Pin that for now. I'm calling because there was twice the normal amount of data you sent yesterday with the integration codes."

"Huh, oh yeah, I updated the algorithm from the scans you sent, nothing knew."

She squinted at him..

"Tony.."

"You used my name!! YES, this means I can eventually get Peter to stop calling me Mr Stark!"

"Tony. You didn't just 'update' the algorithm. You wrote 3 new ones!"

"Pffft, You say that like it's something big. I still feel bad and this is something I can do from the other side of the planet without ever seeing him. It's perfect. Plus the world is better off without 10
words and a compliment murder-cube."

'Murder-cube?'

She just shook her head but was still happy that he was oddly invested in helping her Wolf. Without him this would not be happening. BARF branched over so many different areas that they hadn't even considered bringing together in Wakanda. For her to get to his level of familiarity? To actually write the codes, it would take a while. He just seem to hack a knack for how the mind interacted with the code in the algorithm that she couldn't wrap her head around yet. They each had their expertise and she knew he could admit when she knew better. For example, he had finally gotten rid of those ridiculous segmented panels in the suit. So she could admit when he was the more knowledgeable one. He had brought code to life, code that had emotions, and independent thought and learning.

"That just sounds like a lot of justification to me. He's hopeful about it but the data draws are hitting him hard after, what did you call them, the fluffy bunny levels."

"Ah! That wasn't me. After naming it BARF, FRIDAY and CERBERUS decided I needed help naming things."

"Chief, the first thing people do when you hand them BARF is look at ya like you're crazy and then mentally rename it when talking to patients."

"See what I'm dealing with here Shuri? Sass."

The fact Dr Sta-Tony's AIs had taken over naming things was not that much of a surprise. She'd noticed the data packet names had gotten very literally and occasionally long so she suspected that was FRIDAY.

"Hi CERBERUS! I've not spoken to you yet!"

"He was waiting until we have the integration down, I'm pretty sure he and Fry are going to come and visit you soon."

Shuri squeals and jumps at that because that was going to be fun. Although she wondered what her brother might think of her inviting two rather unknown digital presences into Wakanda. Eh. He invited Captain Spangles.

The latest updates she'd started sending earlier finally came through and she and saw him opening them as she spoke to FRIDAY and CERBERUS. She could tell that FRIDAY was definitely the older sibling and more likely to get involved but CERBERUS had some hilarious ideas.

Tony, damn it was weird calling him that, even in her head, rolled back into frame just as CERBERUS was showing her his alternate designs of cannons and FRIDAY wanted to make it fire glitter.

"8 draws is.. Too much. And scrap the algorithms I sent you, they're tapping out at 50% now, I'd got them up to 83% last night."

"I still don't quite get all the algorithms you're sending, I've been focusing on the draws."

"74 is the magic number. We need a 74% match or the patients mind actively fights the algorithm, significantly lowering chances of dissociation. 95% is the number I prefer things to be at, personally."
"What's the difference as long as the memory is disassociated in the end?"

"Whether Barnes has to watch and live through himself being tortured 3 times or 300 times."

Yikes!

"Okay. I won't mock your obsessive coding anymore. Promise. 8 seems to be it for the data draws though, can't you use that?"

"Possibly, but you'd have to switch algorithms with each memory to find out which one works and I'd have to teach you about how they work. Ideally, you have 1 for the whole lot and I just don't have the data to write it."

"What do you need."

"I need the next level up of encoded information. But you're going to have to scour it for potential confidential information, there shouldn't be much at that level but just in case, oh, and get permission to send it."

She could tell he did not look comfortable with this at all. Probably because Barnes didn't know he was involved, they'd spoken about it a few times now. How his drive to help was going against lying to the patient. She learnt early on however that Tony could turn practically anything self deprecating.

"We could just tell him that you designed the glasses and then he can decide what to send. This feels like you are making things harder on yourself."

"It's bad enough that he doesn't know I made the tech, that I'm writing this algorithm based on the first scans would likely send him screaming for the woods. Telling him would screw his chances of being free because Rogers wouldn't allow it. The least I can do is to ensure I'm not snooping or something."

"Still."

"The last time I saw him, I tried to kill him Shuri. I'm not exactly proud of that, I should have just tried to kill Rogers."

That was more information than she'd gotten before but it was still missing something. She'd like to think she'd gotten to know both of these soft hearted, guilt wrecked idiots and them just attacking each other? It didn't track.

"But if you talked?"

"Oh, hell no. No. No in 50 different languages no. I feel guilty for trying to kill him, I feel bad for what happened to him. But Shuri, I can't forgive the man. I'm not that good of a person. Plus, he definitely won't want to talk to me after what I did, I can't put that on him."

"Will you ever tell me what happened in that bunker? I know you fought, I know you were.. Left. But why Tony? I think I've gotten to know you quite well these past months and I know what Rogers told my Brother originally, but now he's being cagey too! I think he knows more, but he won't tell me either. I feel like I'm operating without all the information and it's making me angry."

"Shuri I.."

"No Tony! If you are about to tell me some junk about protecting my delicate sensibilities I will
come to America for the soul reason of kicking you in the shins!"

Even with glasses on it was like she could see so many things cross his face at once. She was ready to call him on it if he tried something but at his sigh she knew he'd tell her.

She was also suddenly extremely scared of knowing.

"He killed my mom Shuri."

She was going to kill her brother!

"Tony…"

"It's okay, I'm.. fine? I know it wasn't actually him. It was Hydra. But I'm not a good person, people know this, that was proven to me when Rogers didn't tell me."

He muttered that last bit under his breath and Shuri instantly narrowed her eyes. So Rogers knew? And not a good person?! How on earth had he gotten to that? She was obviously still missing information, but considering the utter rampage her brother had gone on to capture Barnes, a single fight contained in Siberia? That was much better than the mess her brother was still cleaning up and atoning for.

The smile that he forced on his face made her sad, this whole situation was a mess but Tony almost seemed resigned and expected to take the blame and that he had to be fine with it.

"I'm fine. I am. I just, I need to do this but I can't.."

"It's OK, I get it."

"I gotta run Shuri, the fabrication on Honeybears braces are coming in, call me if he agrees to send the data. I'm working on the next integration packet based on our channel."

Shuri stared at the screen for a few minutes trying to work out how she was going to kill her brother for this.

He knew, he HAD to know. That's why he'd gotten all cagey, he should of given her a warning! Just, something so she could have avoided what just happened. The man didn't deserve more pain.

She was pulled out of her wonderings by CERBERUS deep Scottish voice. Shocked to realise that Tony had left the pathway open, giving her access to his AIs.

"Bana-phrionnnsa, there is something me and FRIDAY think you should see, I think you knowing would improve Chiefs functions."

Well that wasn't ominous at all, before she could reply she noticed the younger AI had sent her a video, opening it up after a few seconds of confusion she realised what she was seeing. Tony, Rogers and Barnes, still with his left arm, chatting almost amicably. She knew something bad was coming, but she wasn't backing down now.

Consoling herself that nothing could be worse than reading the Hydra files Tony had sent.

Watching was painful, but it cut off before anyone arrived to help him..

"CERBERUS, FRIDAY… How long?"

"We don't know, Chief erased all details of the time from our servers after Jim tried to find out."
Somehow.. Somehow that was worse.

She needed to *destroy* something.

Or she was going to kill her brother.
Realisations and Reflections

Chapter Summary

T’Challa is finally starting to realise how annoying his guests can be.

But that's not as scary as Shuri.

Sam curses the Author and James starts peeling stickers he should leave alone...

Chapter Notes

In America

- **September 8th**
  Bruce discovers things are not as they seem.
  Tony tells Laura & the Mini Agents.
  Tony tells the team.

- **September 12th**
  Tony & Laura storm the Accords Councils castle.

- **September 17th**
  Tony collects Shay

- **September 20th**
  Shuri and Tony video chat about BARF.
  Tony, Laura and Maggie take the kids out.

- **September 26th**
  Press conference!

The much requested viewing of the press conference is coming up and then we're back to America.

If Sam could break the 4th wall he'd be chucking stuff at me.

Include a bit of a BARF session, I didn't get too descriptive, but feel free to skip. A box comes up to see about it starting until T’Challa starts up.
Barnes POV

21st September

He stopped at his door, tilting his head to one side and listening for where people were in the house. After yesterday's fun movie night no one had complained about him hiding in his room but he knew that things were going to be extremely awkward today. As he was already nervous, the idea of sitting through breakfast with everyone.. Nope.

He turned and headed for his window instead, which was actually getting more use than his door lately, and jumped out. As he wasn't sure where people were today, he avoided all of the windows just in case and settled in for a nice quiet trip to Shuri's lab where he could stress over what they were doing today. According to Shuri they were finally done with the data draws. Which, yay for not having to see his life in torture as record speed, yikes that they were actually going to try and disassociate a memory today.

They'd spent a chunk of the last session picking one the system labeled as easier to disassociate. He wasn't at all surprised to find out what the hardest ones were. They'd apparently found the memories linking to the words, unlike all the other memories he hadn't realised he had, which when he saw a glimpse of them, they still felt like his memories. He'd had a little look at the memories with the words and it just left him feeling fuzzy and weird. Shuri had taken readings of that specifically for her partner, Anthony, to work with. They still seemed hopeful even though he was apparently more complicated than they seemed, any time he offered an out for Shuri he glared at.

"Silly White Wolf, the four of us will work on this until you say otherwise."

When he arrived, Shuri seemed less happy than usual, but she seems to shake it off and smiles at him. He decides to let it go, she lets him occasionally be broody, so he could offer the same courtesy.

"You are going to want to check the security feed for last night's movie night."

"Oooh, what happened now?"

She grinned and dragged him fully into the lab, manipulating screens around him in a flurry he could hardly track until he sees the common room appear. With him and Wings happily reading.

"Oh nothing much. Just Wings found the video of Dr Stark and Laura at the Accords Council."

"Oh yes we are definitely watching this when we're finished. I'll send it to my brother now, is the little angry man talking about leaving?"

"Not that I've seen. Him and the Ved'ma vanished right after."

Shuri nodded, humming whilst she was cutting the section of the video to send to T'Challa.

"Oh, before I forget, I've spoken with Anthony again, he'd sent more updated code but isn't happy with it. At the moment he has several algorithms set, that will work with certain memories but he doesn't like that, he's a bit of a perfectionist but I agree with him."

"I mean, would it be easier if I just used what he's already written, he's done a lot of work.. "
"He said getting this right would be the difference between you having to watch a memory 3 times or 300."

"Ah, okay, Um, I'm okay with you both being perfectionists?"

Watching one of his memories once was hard enough, 300? He's not sure he could do that and cling to the dregs of sanity he has left. He also could not imagine his therapist signing off on something like that and for each disassociation attempt all three of them had to agree it was safe to try each one. His therapist had been concerned he'd just go along with anything Shuri offered, so she was there to temper them from running before they crawled.

"Well, he's asked for your permission to send more data. He still won't see any memories, it's just more information on your brain reacting. No confidential information."

He nods along, not entirely sure why they're stressing this point so much. Sure he doesn't really want people to see him getting tortured, but this Anthony was his chance to get the words out of his head! He was giving him everything. Was giving him a chance of actually living. He'd been wary at first, the idea of people messing with his brain, but he'd been reading a lot, Shuri had shown him the algorithms as they came in. He knew a few programming languages from requisite missions, so some bits jumped out at him, but they just seemed to flow in a way he'd never seen before that he lost track of time when he was reading them.

He knew the algorithms alone couldn't do anything to his brain, it was just the difference between retraumatising himself rewatching torture or eventually disassociating it. Even though he had never met this guy, he felt like he kind of knew him a little bit. He obviously cared a lot about making sure it was known he wouldn't be changing any memories. Which, true, he'd been brainwashed so it made sense, but this Anthony had put a ton of effort, handicapped himself even, just to ensure he didn't feel like he was being brainwashed again. It was comforting in a way. As much as a stranger can be, the notes in the code had made him laugh a few times too. So he was surprisingly fine with this.

"Yeah sure, anything he needs to make his job easier."

Shuri seemed slightly amused, by his answer? He wasn't sure but she sent a message, he assumed to pass on his consent before starting to set everything up for him. He steeled himself before he sits down, knowing they won't be diving straight in but also wishing they would.

"I ran our test memory over the now 9 algorithm variations, because of course he went and wrote more before I even had a chance to ask you about letting him see more data."

Shuri rolls her eyes and he chuckles, he's not sure how he ended up with two highly dedicated people willing to go to such lengths just to help him, but he's starting to accept it as a good thing instead of a 'I'm not worth it' thing. That didn't take much therapy…

He picked up the glasses and relaxed back as he went through the memories required to unlock the device, hearing a now familiar beep that he was done.

"OK, it's going to pop up an authorisation for level 2 data to be sent to the manufacturer about now."

He blinked because that was weird, there was like a floating box in front of him. He read everything over, explaining what it meant and it asking for permission. He really didn't want to flail around trying to press a button that only existed in the glasses..
"Um.. How do I say yes? It's like a floating box…"

"Huh. OK."

She grabs her phone and sends a message, luckily they don't have to wait long before a message comes through.

"Apparently you just think that you're agreeing to it? I swear sometimes he forgets normal humans use his tech and don't automatically think you can talk to it with your brain"

He couldn't help but chuckle as she muttered under her breath about infuriating, idiotic geniuses. He gives it a go and the box turns green before vanishing into butterflies before him. All in all. It's very surreal.

"Well, I think I did it right?"

"Yup, you're good, Bast that is a lot of information. That will take a long time to send. He wants me to run through a few scans of certain memories too apparently, you won't see anything, it's just to get more information. This bit might be boring, he said there is a screen saver of sorts apparently, to stop you getting bored."

He sat still as the scan was happening, it was tricky because he could not hear, see or feel anything happening. It was nothing like that data draws. The voice in the back of his head was silent but he felt a sense of amusement coming from it which was odd and he was really starting to get concerned about that. Whilst he could justify odd thoughts popping up, now he was getting feelings that were plain different from his. He'd wondered about telling his therapist or Shuri but he felt really awkward about it and was kind of hoping it would go away on its own. That's when the butterflies appeared everywhere and nearly made him fall off his chair.

Shuri ran over, obviously concerned but he waved her off because he actually really liked it.

"The screen saver? That, it startled me is all."

"Oh, I can turn it off?"

"No, no don't do that. I like it."

He has to practically sit on his hands not to reach out, but it was still good. What was odd was that they seemed to land on objects in the room which was amazing that the glasses could do that. He'd been watching the one on Shuri head when they all fluttered away at the same time. He bit back the complaint as he doubted these augmented reality glasses were designed to watch butterflies.

"He also told me that after a memory you can trigger the screen saver as a relaxation technique?"

He grinned, yeah he definitely would be doing that.

"Okay, got everything you need?"

"Yup, ready to start with Memory 42?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

"OK, this is going to use the full projection around you instead of just the glasses, do you want me to leave?"

"I would like you to stay? But, Um, you shouldn't have to see.. That."
"I'll be okay White Wolf. I've read everything available when I was researching your arm."

He was slightly horrified at that, that she'd read it. Not because it was him but because she should have seen it. Part of him screamed at him to send her out, a selfish part wanted her to stay. The back of his mind wanted her to stay too. Shuri was comforting.

"OK, stay, but leave if you have too?"

She nodded and set up the large silver poles whilst he did his breathing exercises. They'd intentionally picked a memory that he already knew well. It featured in his flashbacks and dreams often. This way they weren't shocking him right out of the box with an unknown memory and he should get an idea if the treatment helped.

Another box came up, asking if he was ready to start, he knew what to do this time and the box turned green. Then everything got weird. Blue lights shot from the poles, connecting with each other around him and the lab and Shuri fell away.

"Shuri??"

"I'm still here, I won't leave."

That relaxed him because he hated this room. It was small and cramped and he only ever saw it occasionally when they threw him back in without the blind fold. 3 feet by 6. Stone walls that were always ice cold. The door was metal and not a scrap of light could be seen under the door. Even when he wasn't blindfolded, his superior night vision didn't pick up much. It was dim, dank and even the smell suddenly came back to him that he nearly retched. He was thrown into a sensory flashback that when something moved near his feet he let out a shout and nearly hurled himself back.

"It's OK, you're still in the lab, this is a memory. You're not there."

He closed his eyes and breathed before he looked down, because he knew what he'd see when he looked down. Himself with his hands bound behind his back. He knew knew what metal that was but his skin ran slick with blood and they didn't budge a bit. That blind fold wrapped so tight around his face it made his eyes hurt and ear plugs they forced so far into his ears that they bled and he was usually left deaf for an hour as the damage healed. He fucking hated this room and they used it often as punishment. Since working with their little team, he discovered that it had been part of the brain washing to. To make him forget himself.

He'd planned what to do, but faced with the memory in fully, Vivid technicolour around him it was hard to do anything but stare, then suddenly he could move. He didn't know what changed, but something lost its hold on him and he could breathe. He suspected it might be the algorithm. He hoped his idea worked too, that he found show the other two that he could do this.

He knelt down next to.. Himself and started tapping on the floor. The reaction was immediate, even though he knew that this never happened. The version of himself on the floor backed into the corner and he just kept tapping. After a while the panicked breathing slowed. He didn't go big, just simple, they used this brainwashing to take away his identity. So he decided to fight that.

-.-- --- ..- / .- .-. . / .--- .- -- . ... / -... .- .-. -. . …

The figure shook his head but he kept it up. Over and over until he tapped back.

.- ... ... .
He shuddered at that but didn't let it stop him. He kept it up over bydd over until he got a tentative answer back.

At that the memory phased out and reset. He went through it 2 more times and on the last time he felt more relaxed than before. Not overly, he was so in the room, but it didn't feel like it had the same hold on him, suddenly everything shifted to black and white before melting back into the lab, with him left crouching on the floor and Shuri beaming at him. A little box flashed 'MEMORY 42 DISASSOCIATED' and he stood, Shuri jumped up and down which meant she was dying to hug him but didn't want to startle him so he held his arms out for her to barrel in.

"You did it! You did it in 3 passes! That was so amazing! What was the tapping?"

"Ah, Morse code."

"Huh, What did you say?"

"Well the brain washing was all about taking me away, turning me into the asset. So I just said 'You are James Barnes.' over and over"

"What.. What did he, you, Um well the other you, say back?"

"First he just replied with 'Asset' over and over, but eventually he used the name, he asked if he was James Barnes and that's when it reset."

He grinned as the butterflies reappeared, Shuri left him to quietly come back like she did after all of the other sessions and he sat watching Butterflies follow her around the lab. Sure it was only one memory and he had decades worth. But it felt like a huge first step and he'd gotten past it.

**T'Challa POV**

**22nd September**

T'Challa had a headache.

It was a Rogue Avengers shaped headache.

Rogers had tried to leave the house 98 times. Had sent him 57 messages imploring him that he should be allowed to be with Barnes during his therapy. He'd responded each time that unless Barnes requested such a thing the answer would be no. Only to be told why Barnes couldn't make that decision as he didn't know he needed him.

Now the Archer was getting into trouble.

He'd started 8 fights with the guards and T'Challa had put him on house arrest. Wanda had taken to wanton destruction in protest of Roger's unfair detainment, she'd damaged enough things out of the villa that she was close to being put on house arrest. So far she'd not pushed it further, but he was concerned the more he gleaned about her abilities. They knew if she damaged anything in the house, it would not be replaced. So things had calmed down, especially that with both Steve and Clint locked down, she left less and less.

Barnes Therapy and use of Dr Stark's tech however was going very well, he wouldn't be perfect in a
week like Roger's wanted, but his therapist was happy, Shuri was happy and most importantly Barnes was happy too. He knew things were tense at the house but Barnes liberal application of chucking himself out of windows seemed to be not only helping him evade his angry housemates but also amused him greatly.

Scott seemed to be doing fine, he was sending him pictures from around Wakanda and he'd met with him a few times when his duties allowed and he was even asking about the Accords now when they'd met earlier today, probably spurred on by the video they'd watched. He hadn't even known he and his father had been involved in their creation. As far as he could tell, the man had gotten involved in something without first understanding, as far as he'd known his idol and hero needed his help so he'd simply said how high. Sam also seemed to be researching the Accords quietly and had met with him about it. Neither had out and told Rogers this, but it was good to know that some of them had brains.

Shuri abruptly walked into his office, closing the door behind her. She looked very serious and it was quite telling that his first thought was 'what have they done now?' and not about his people.

"Tony told me more about Siberia."

He didn't know what was more shocking, that he had told her about Siberia or that his sister was now calling him Tony.

"I mentioned about him and Barnes potentially talking."

He winced at that but stayed quiet.

"Because my idiot of a brother didn't think to tell me why that would be so bad!"

"It wasn't my place."

"He answered with 'He killed my mom' and he just sounded so.. I don't know. Broken."

It wasn't great that she knew that, but maybe now she'd stop hunting for information-

"But that's not all is it? One of his AIs, FRIDAYS younger brother, he thought I deserved to know what really happened."

Before he could respond she did something on her beads that loaded a video on his screen and he immediately recognised the bunker he'd been in back in July. He put his hand over his mouth and realised, for all his curiosity and want of the truth, that he really didn't want to watch this video. But he couldn't turn it off. Plus, the look on his sisters face said he was going to watch this video or suffer greatly. Maybe and suffer greatly... In his head he was just waiting for it to go wrong, when that vile man Zemo spoke it was hard not to snarl. Even now.

Dr Stark looked so different, sure he'd noticed the difference when he saw him in DC, but seeing him again here brought it up. Not just the bruise, he looked exhausted. He'd had much more life in him, apparently time away from his so called friends was good on him.

Barnes has said Dr Stark found out about his parents being murdered, and that he'd seen, but actually seeing it made it worse. With Barnes standing right there too. Rogers lying sparked off a fight that burned. Dr Stark did seem to be doing more damage to the bunker though as Barnes had pointed out, Rogers however was certainly not pulling his punches. He felt like this was some kind of punishment that he was watching this video. Even though he knew Dr Stark wouldn't do that. Shuri flinched with him when he used the shield to kill the arc reactor. Barnes words filtered into his head.
'I wonder how much pressure it takes for a vibranium shield to crack the power source of an Ironman suit. I wonder what that would do to a baseline humans rib cage hmm?'

Seeing Dr Stark trapped in his suit, unable to barely move as the super soldiers left. It didn't continue much after that but it was enough. He could see the structural damage in places, parts of him exposed to the weather. His brain happily supplied every agonising detail just like he suspected his sister had seen. Sometimes being a genius had drawbacks, in this case it added an extra layer of horror to this situation.

"I'm surprised he even speaks to us. With them here."

She didn't give him a chance to reply, he didn't have much of one anyway. He ran his hand over his face and wondered, not for the first time, what had he left himself get caught up in.

Like his sister, he also wondered how Dr Stark could talk to them. How he was willing to help Barnes. If situations were switched he honestly wasn't sure what he would do. Considering what he had already done…

Shuri practically stalked from the room and he had more survival instincts than to stop her.

**Sam POV**

**26th September**

"Sam.. I have a problem."

"What is it Scott?"

"We'll, I was looking for stuff about Hope and I found a video."

"NOPE!"

Fuck no was he doing this again!

"Ah come on man, your good at this and you know these guys better, everyone will be down for lunch in half an hour because they're delivering it. Here. Watch it and then you decide what to do."

With that the bastard ran.

He was right about the lunch though, when it was delivered no one was late because it was delicious. He loaded up the link he got from Scott and knew he was going to end up showing everyone right away. Stark was up on stage with a long line of empty chairs behind him, Laura stood to one side… And if he was right, Sharon Carter was even fucking there. Great. Stark was still wearing those odd sunglasses but in a different colour. After the last video he'd done a Google images search and discovered that whilst sunglasses were normal, these were very different to what he'd worn in the previous decades. That was quite a shift that puzzled him.

Scott reappeared with Barnes a few minutes later, everyone was a good 20 minutes early. He hadn't really watched the video yet, torn between wanting advance knowledge and just not wanting to know. At all.
"Ah guys.."

"Oh fuck you if you have any more bad news."

He just frowned at Clint while Steve signaled for him to go on.

"Well, it's just Stark has done a press conference."

"Oh play it, maybe he mentions our pardons."

Steve's optimism apparently knew no bounds, and from the incredulous look on Scott's face, it had nothing to do with pardons. He hadn't watched it himself yet but now he was wishing he'd taken the time to instead of brooding over it. Instead he cast it to the TV and decided just to see what happened.

Things couldn't possibly get worse that the Accords Councils video.

Clint and Wanda were muttering to each other about Stark, he didn't even bother listening to them anymore but he was amused at the look on Wanda's face when Laura showed up, which instantly had Clints rapt attention. Wanda was glaring at him, he noticed her eyes flashing red that had him cold again but suddenly she looked nervous and pointedly looked away from him. That was weird, he looked around and Barnes shot him a quick smile but nothing else. Odd. Stark's voice broke the spell and pulled his attention to the screen.

He was grinning wildly in a blood red suit that reminded him of the Ironman armour, but he suspected that was the idea. The sunglasses were a blue tinged silver, when the sun caught looked like the eyes of the suit too. It was a strange look that Stark somehow made work and he wondered why he was suddenly so interested in Stark's wardrobe.

"Well, I've not done one of these in a while. So, figured the first one should have me introducing you all to the New Avengers!"

"NEW AVENGERS!"

The shriek from Rogers, Clint and Wanda was painful, whilst Sam had pretty much expected this at some point, he obviously didn't know Stark as well as he thought, but he knew enough to have an idea of what he would do. He'd seen that letter Steve had sent. He'd begged Steve not to send it.

Steve had told Stark the Avengers were his, so the man had obviously marched on, barely glancing at them in the rearview mirror and he couldn't find it in him to blame the man anymore. If anything he wished he was there, he loved being in the Avengers.

Now he was a criminal. A fugitive.

Steve called for everyone to be quiet as it was impossible to hear over Wanda and Clint ranting about how they're the Avengers. Because they'd been doing so much avenging lately.

"fighting fires, chasing tornadoes, catching villains and generally pitching in where needed as well as the odd problems above and beyond what can be expected of the authorities"

Steve was frowning and Clint jumped in, looking equally unhappy.

"What, have they just got the Avengers doing any old job now."

"I know, if they're bogged down with things like this how could they possibly get ready for serious
problems."

Sam bit his cheek, because he knew if he said what was in his mind it would lead to an argument. Scott and Barnes were looking at Clint and Steve, minutely shaking their heads, obviously disagreeing, they didn't see however as their attention was focused on the screen. Wanda's scowl however made Sam think that she'd noticed. Which was ridiculous because surely the Avengers fighting wildfires and tornadoes was a good thing, especially with how such things were getting drastically worse each year. He wondered how many people and their homes they'd saved and felt more than a little jealous.

"So, first I'd like to introduce those who have not noticed, I found myself with a new PA, that over there is the amazing Laura Morgan. Between her and the charming Sharon Carter over there, who will be choosing who talks with Laura, is also my cousin, together they keep everything running smoothly!"

Clint just stared in shock and it took Sam a second to hear why. Morgan.. Not Barton. Ouch. He was more struck by Steve's face when Stark revealed that Sharon was his cousin?

"I didn't know Sharon even knew Stark.. That means Peggy.."

Steve looked slightly green, Sam didn't know enough to know why. Sharon gave Tony a huge, bright smile over his declaration. Which seemed to take some of the fight out of Steve.

"Now, I'm going to start inviting people on stage! Let's start with the co-leaders of the Avengers shall we? Carol Danvers, Captain Marvel, the reason why the Avengers were born, and my brother in everything that matters, James Rhodes, also known as Warmachine."

"That's actually impressive, that they have Captain Danvers."

Everyone looked at Barnes in shock, not expecting that. Barnes flushed slightly when everyone's attention zeroed in on him and he stammered out an explanation. Sam gave him an encouraging smile.

"She was on Hydras watch list, known associate of Fury. I don't know how much about her abilities is true.. But she is extremely powerful."

Having the Winter Soldier state she was extremely powerful with a look of respect had him looking at the cheerful tiny blonde in an entirely new light. He tried to focus on that and not the pain that stabbed through him seeing Rhodes in that chair. The man looked happy, but damn.

"Fury mentioned her, it's where he came up with the idea for the Avengers, I get why she's leading but why Rhodes? He's obviously disabled."

Sam, Barnes, Steve and Scott all gave Clint a look that had the angry archer looking guilty for a few seconds before he returned to scowling.

"Next we have Vision who I'm sure some of you might recognise."

As Vision floated in Wanda made a pained noise.

"Next, fabulously dressed, well, at least the cloak, is Dr Stephen Strange, some of you might recognise him, but now he's The Sorcerer Supreme and represents our new magical department."
Sorcerer Supreme? What the hell? He guessed that was something magic related considering there was now a whole magical department? Which shocked him because Stark was loud and very vocal about his distaste of magic. What was stranger however was Wanda's reaction. She'd gone utterly silent and stock still, eyes wide and breathing faster. Almost like she recognised the guy? Towards this man, that none of them supposedly knew. She also didn't comment on it. No way was he being the one to ask.

The way this new man casually dodged Laura, stalking straight up to Stark and thwacking him on the back of the head, and Stark's fond smile told him a lot. Mainly that he highly doubted this was a new friendship. It seemed... a little too familiar, especially for someone like Stark, who took quite a while to warm up to new people in his experience. He'd be pretty confident in saying that Stark had known him from before this civil war mess. He, however, was sure that he'd never seen him before today.

"He was on SHIELDS watch list. He used to be some hot shot surgeon, got into a car crash, vanished and returned as someone with unknown, off the charts levels of power. No matter who we sent we never got anything of the scope of his abilities. Drove Fury insane."

Barton chimed in this time, Stark was creating himself an incredibly powerful team going by these two new people alone. Danvers was powerful enough for Barnes to recognise her, Strange was powerful enough to scare SHIELD. Vision was already a 'flying heavy hitter' in himself. With the suit, if he could still wear it, Rhodes was just as heavy hitter as Ironman. Already the team was probably stronger than them. A captain to replace Steve. A magic user to replace Wanda. He refocused as Stark started talking again as the Sorcerer sat. The cloak seemed to move.. Weirdly. Against the wind. Stark started talking again however so he was drawn back to the frenetic engineer.

"Now, as a few of you might know, Stark Industries has recently partnered up with Pym tech, and one other company I'll get to later. Much to people's shock. Just to remind anyone, I'm not Howard and the delightful Hope Van Dyne definitely isn't her father. Aren't we all grateful if that! She is also known as the Wasp."

"I still can't believe it, Hope man.. Her dad despised all Stark's."

Scott muttered under his breath, it had been an easy guess that she was going to be on the team as there were many pictures of her at the compound online, but a press conference did add a level of seriousness to it. Made it official. Plus, Stark Industries and Pym Tech forming a partnership outside of the Avengers? Yeah, there was something more there too.

He knew a little from Scott that Pym and Stark were practically sworn enemies. So seeing Hope skip happily to Stark, dodging Laura and her clipboard and patted Stark's head where the Sorcerer had thwacked him. She also gave him a kiss on the cheek and Sam was left feeling that again, that was also a very strange action for people who had met potentially only since July. Sure, some people made friends quickly, but Stark was a very.. closed off individual, having two very different people be so familiar with him? Sam couldn't slip this nagging feeling that they knew each other for a longer period of time.

It was strange to be faced with the obvious fact that Stark knew other supers. Supers outside of the team, that he had also made no effort to introduce to the team..

Laura was smiling and rolling her eyes at the groups antics. Everyone looked happy and relaxed, even the sorcerer had a small smile on his face. He couldn't help but compare them to how they'd been.. And they looked more..
He'd never really seen Stark like this either. Sure he'd seen the man work a crowd, handle the press with an ease that confounded him, but he was relaxed. Everything about him was just more at ease than Sam had ever seen him, he hadn't even realised how ill at ease or stressed Stark was until he saw him now, interacting with these people. A real, genuine smile on his face instead of the press smile that he was now able to recognise. He wondered how much else he had missed when it came to Stark and it was an uncomfortable feeling. Sure, he wasn't the Avengers counsellor, much to Steve's disappointment. Steve just didn't understand it was a conflict of interest, a counsellor must be unbiased, but Steve had refused anyone else being involved. With some of what he'd missed staring him smack in the face because he wasn't unbiased? Maybe he should have pushed Steve further. Again Stark's voice pulled him out of the depressing road his thoughts were taking.

"Now the next group is one that has been around before but has recently become affiliated with the Avengers, The Defenders with Hell's Kitchen's own Daredevil, Jessica, Luke and Danny Also known as Iron Fist. The other rich white boy and the 3rd in the partnership with SI and Pym Tech."

"What are you doing Tony? You already have a team, surely getting us pardons would be much easier than inviting all these.. strange people in without talking about it."

Yeah. Sam was just going to pretend he hadn't heard that. Without talking about it? Did Steve really think Stark would use that old burner phone to talk about adding new people to the Avengers?

He hadn't even realised there were other groups of Supers. Let alone other groups in New York. They were an odd collection, one man was masked and dressed in red, he guessed that was the Daredevil, very odd. The other three were dressed normally and he recognised the woman from one of the pictures he'd seen of Laura. When he'd seen her he'd noticed that she had almost a dangerous aura around her. Having her practically stalk onto the stage wearing black heavy combat boots, combat trousers, and a long sleeved dark shirt with fingerless gloves confirmed his thoughts. At a guess he'd say she was a fighter. Out of the other two, he had no idea. One was big, heavily built, the other, as he was at the end of the group he assume that was the Iron Fist? An odd name choice as be didn't look like he had an iron fist. He also looked young with his curly hair and beard, bouncing on the balls of his feet, excitable compared to the calm of the other man. He went to veer off towards Stark too, but ducked at stayed in line when Laura threateningly lifted her clipboard.

Even this team, that had obviously been together before joining the Avengers seemed to click well with the Avengers. The terrifying woman high fiving Sharon as they passed, grinning at each other. It seemed so easy. Sure he was making these observations from a small pool of information, but how Stark seemed so easy with them was a drastic contrast in his mind of how Stark reacted when Wanda was on the team for example. Even before that Stark had seemed on the edges, he had assumed it was Stark's doing until now. That he kept himself separated on purpose, which had been why Steve hadn't called him in to DC.

"Also, we welcome back Black Widow who is currently on probation, but will be joining us as soon as she is able."

That caught all their attention, even Barnes who had just been watching peripherally as he didn't really know these people after all, it wasn't exactly of great importance to him, he'd not been an Avenger. The closest he probably got was Hydra keeping tabs in the Avengers, he'd wondered if Hydra had a file on him, he hadn't been with the Avengers before hydra fell, but he'd had the exo
suit, he wondered what it would say but he hadn't worked out how to ask yet. Barnes attention was sharp on Natasha. They hadn't spoken much before he went into cryo so that was weird too. He was finding a lot out from this video today. All of it was confusing.

Nat flashed Stark a fast smile before she returned to her normal look. That seemed to cause a physical blow to Clint who had now pulled in on himself. Steve was watching her with a look of irritation, obviously angry that she had left them.

"Maybe she went to Stark so she could keep us updated on things at the compound, but couldn't because of the probation?"

It's weak, he knows it, but he felt like he has to give Steve something, Barnes incredulous look tells him just how weak it was but Clint perks up too. He just shrugged at Barnes, if it works, it works.

"Yeah, she's playing double agent. She's not really with Stark."

It didn't explain why she hadn't told them about it but if it stopped arguments for the time being, he was fine with them being delusional.

All the seats were filled now bar one in between Rhodes and Danvers. Putting Stark smack in the centre, flanked by the co leaders. He wondered if that was because Stark dealt with the press more or maybe just because he wanted to sit next to Rhodes...? Or if it was something else? He didn't comment on his position but he'd known that once the Avengers had been run by Steve and Stark. It had meant to be as equals but it had been obvious Steve felt he was the leader and Tony was under that. Now, Carol and Rhodes were putting him in the middle of them seemingly as Co leader with them. It was entirely speculation, but he knew positioning like this was important, especially introducing the new team to have people subconsciously see Stark as the de facto leader, even though he hadn't mentioned his role.

"Yup, that's everyone, I'm going to go sit down to now before that clipboard gets aimed in MY direction."

Stark looked happy, looking at everyone on his team, he still couldn't see the man's eyes thanks to the damned glasses, but he looked content. His body language was so different to Sam it was like looking at a different person. Probably because he wasn't the only one dealing with the press for a change, having his team supporting him. He knows he shouldn't ask, but he can't help himself. He wants to know.

"Why didn't we do this?"

"Stark handled PR."

"We had more important things to be doing than pandering to the press like this."

Steve just shrugs at him, uncaring of such things but considering Steve still occasionally acted like it was the 40s, he likely didn't understand the importance of something like this and probably compared it to the dancing crap he had hated so much. It kind of made sense why he avoided it. Clint snarls, his distaste in the idea obvious, and apparently that's all he's going to get, Clint also didn't have Steve excuse, he was a spy and should know how important this was.

Which is maddening because they should have done this! People should have gotten to know them. Maybe people wouldn't have turned on them if they had. Maybe the fear wouldn't have created the Accords if they'd just opened up. They'd disregarded people, and whilst Stark is good and he kept them running for a long time, even he can't control public opinion. In fact having a single member
handle all restoration and public opinion was only a small step up from doing absolutely nothing. It showed a disregard for people and their team member, all at the same time.

Contrary to popular opinion on the team, he was only one man, with more than 1 job, something Steve forgot when he was unable to attend meetings or training at the drop of a hat. Sure, he was one man who often moved mountains, and Sam realised that they both overestimated and underestimated him at the same time.

Sharon pointed at a reporter who asked his question, it was a good one that he wanted to know himself. It just showed how important these things were as he already found himself somewhat invested. Hope chimed in instantly.

"How did everyone meet?"

"Oh I've know Tony since we were kids. Before our dad's fell out we were put together often and went to the same boarding school."

"Yup, I remember meeting her, I was waking up from a nap and she was looming over me and asked to play with my hair. Which would have been nicer if she hadn't already started."

"You loved it!"

"There was glitter for weeks!"

Scott looked almost pained to find out Hope and Stark where childhood friends. From when Hope was very young by the sounds of it. If Pym once was fine putting his kid with Stark, then at some point he must have thought highly of them? Surely.

"Who else have you known before putting together the new team?"

"I met Strange back in our 20s?"

At the Sorcerers nod Sam felt pretty impressed with himself for calling those two. Although he and Scott who was still dumbstruck, hadn't expected Stark and Hope to go so far back. He hadn't expected the Sorcerer either.

"I wonder why Tony never mentioned these people?"

"Yes, we came across each other at a Maria Stark foundation gala."

"You made the evening much more entertaining."

Sam isn't all that surprised when the man doesn't respond further, just gives Stark a smile. He looks like the kind of guy who wouldn't speak much. Rhodes jumps in next, with another surprise.

Sam knew that Stark and Rhodes were old friends, but didn't realise just how far back the odd pair went. He had wondered more than once what brought such different people together, knowing they'd been friends for actual decades? That was impressive.

"I met these two at MIT"

Carol pipes in after, which seemed to be a huge shock to Clint. Seems like Shield was unaware of that connection and that Stark was much better at hiding things from SHIELD than they'd known. Sharon, Carol, a Sorcerer and the daughter of Pym tech? Yeah, that's a big oversight.
"Tony was 14 and had just drank 4 cans of Red Bull, Rhodes was 17, looking haggard and trying to keep the red bull from him. They looked entertaining so I just sat down at their table."

"It was strange because most people generally avoided the 14 year old in college."

Stark jumped in and his brain was reeling from THAT! What sane parent sends a child to college at 14 years old with apparently minimal supervision. Sure he knew he was a genius, but college at 14 seemed a bit much. Also that meant all 3 of them, Carol, Rhodes and Hope were Tony's childhood friends. Because 14 is definitely childhood in his mind, college or no.

"The young black kid caused a stir too."

"You both did. It's why I sat with you."

The questions switched to the defenders and they half listened and talked.

"I can't believe Stark went to college at 14, that's a bit strange, I mean, to put such a young child in an environment like college?"

"I'm sure Howard was looking out for him. He was a good man."

"Steve, still 14 and college."

"Don't know why your so worked up about it Sam, his dad probably paid his way in and paid for his qualifications. Bought a wing of the college or something."

"Now Clint, Howard was a good man, he wouldn't cheat the system like that. Especially for his son, he'd expect him to work on his own merit."

Sam just raised an eyebrow at Clint. Wanda looked irritated but that was nothing new when discussing Stark. Sure, he wouldn't be surprised if Howard dropped a lot of money, but it was a bit ridiculous to say he paid for his qualifications, it sound like some of the ridiculous crap Wanda came out with. He hadn't had many conversations with Stark, but when he did it was obvious how smart he was. Confusingly so, even when he dumbed it down.

He decided to see if he could find the man's qualifications on his tablet as colleges kept some online, easy to access, as Stark was famous he figured finding it would be easy, just searching Tony Stark Dissertation. Which it was… but he didn't find one. He found several different colleges too surprisingly but the most and oldest were from MIT.

Whilst that was incredibly impressive, maybe it was because he was looking at it from the point of a counsellor, he couldn't help but think it wouldn't be conducive to raising a healthy kid? If he was always pushed forward in school, maintaining a social group would have been extremely difficult until college where people maintaining friendships over different years or subjects was more normal. Which could explain the way he'd interacted with the team and why he was so close with Rhodes.

Information that would have been incredibly useful when he was trying to get the team interacting better with each other, 2020 hindsight and all. He'd just assumed Stark had little interest with them as he was in a different social circle to them. He quickly Googled his date of birth to see how old he was in '90.

"I just looked up his dissertations, he got his PhD when he was 17."
Clint and Wanda seemed to just not really care, Steve looked slightly impressed but he got the feeling the Steve didn't really understand how long most people spent in college from getting a degree, masters and then a PhD. Scott however looked utterly floored and waved his tablet so he sent everything along before turning back to the TV. Another piece of the Stark mystery falling into place, and yet again leaving him with more questions than answers. Barnes also looked quietly impressed and was tapping away on his tablet too. Interesting.

"After the picture of you surfaced from the hospital and your subsequent time in seclusion, would you say all this is worth it?"

Steve leaned forward as said picture flashed up on the screen, obviously overlayed by whatever network this had played on. Barnes immediately looked away as if pained and Steve paled too. Some guilt was evident on his face and it looked like his eyes were flicking back and forth from the picture to the sitting, smiling Stark before them. Sam just reminded himself, that whilst he might look guilty, he didn't regret his choices, he only regretted that Tony found out. Barnes however, there was real regret there.

"Of course. I always knew I could end up injured. The suit stops a lot but I'm still squishy. It has always been a possibility and it's never stopped me before now has it?"

That's got him a few chuckles and he has to say he was impressed. Sure he was human and was an Avenger too, but most importantly he wasn't a civilian. Stark was. The idea of being hurt in the line of duty was not a foreign concept to him, a rich man with the ability and resources to do pretty much anything he wanted? That he was still fighting after such injuries was commendable to him. Clint and Wanda obviously didn't agree, Scott was searching for stuff about Stark. Obviously now intrigued by the man but he stopped to enjoy the sight of Hope ripping into a sexist reporter going on about the Stark/Pym rivalry,

"Captain Marvel, Are you open to working with Captain America?"

Carol's face shuttered into unimpressed also as fast as Stark seemed to shut down, the media smile that Sam now recognised on his face and he leaned back. Effectively checking out of that conversation, Scott and Barnes also seemed to notice the change he thought, as they were both frowning slightly. He got Scott's interest in Stark, he'd been basically taught to hate the man and was now questioning everything. Barnes however, he wasn't sure why he had developed such an interest in Stark.

Everyone in the room was very interested in this question however, leaning forward in their seats. Steve was actually on the edge of his seat, wringing his hands in his lap. His words were confident but his voice was not.

"She'll have to, I'm the leader of the Avengers.

"Frankly? As of right now? No. I don't think he would be a good fit for our current dynamic. But if he was willing to put the time in, get up to date with the Accords, do the requisite training and therapy, then things could be reassessed at a later date. Getting into the Avengers is more ordered now."

"Now we have a system with several stages to assess competency, ability, skills, and team cohesion. You can't just bring someone home and decide they're Avenger. And when you're in, there is a lot of work and ongoing assessments, not just of abilities of physical and mental health. Bullying for example would not be permitted anymore. "
At Danvers and Rhodes words he saw Barnes stiffen and he was giving Steve the strangest look. It was obviously unhappy but he wondered why? He was too stunned that the new team had vastly improved support to analyse it, something he'd been desperately trying to do, but Steve had been extremely resistant about bringing people in for mental health assessments claiming that everyone was fine.

Everyone was not fine.

Their issues had issues.

Their issues clashed, often.

What surprised him was Stark had apparently been listening to what he had said in those meetings, where he'd looked bored and checked out, and even more, that the man had implemented his ideas in his absence. He hadn't even known Stark had heard him, from how the others had described him, he hadn't thought Stark would care about stuff like that.

"What about the rest of the rogues?"

"Well, they're currently preoccupied being international fugitives, but if things change, if they fully sign and support the Accords, then their membership can be assessed. A lot has changed since the clique like ways of the Avengers. Now everything is official."

Steve looked angry, he obviously wasn't happy about the changes Tony was bringing on the team in his absence, but Sam couldn't agree with him. He'd thought it was a bit weird that he'd just been brought in and that was that. He'd been baffled to discover that nothing was out in to replace SHIELD. Stark had hired lots of people from SHIELD but Steve had refused to directly work with them because of Hydra infiltration, even though Stark had been extremely careful at insuring no snakes were brought in. They'd been pretty much relegated to clean up.

"So much paperwork."

Tony sighed dramatically but was smiling when Carol shoved him playfully and again he was struck by how the team were with each other.

Compared to them.

Even after the original split, they'd started to split here, in Wakanda where they were not even working. No high stress situations, basically on holiday and they were pulling apart. Scott and Barnes sat as separate from Steve, Clint and Wanda as possible whilst remaining in the same room. He was closer to them but also like a buffer too. Closer to Scott and Barnes. Clint and Wanda were practically plastered together in a single chair whispering and occasionally spewing hatred in the far corner of the room. Steve was practically separate from everyone… and he didn't even seem to notice how the dynamics were changing around him.

Sam noticed, again, that he did nothing to try and contain Clint and Wanda, even when they were being needlessly vicious or damaging. Steve was angry at T'Challa for putting Clint under house arrest for example, not Clint. Instead of telling him to stop picking fights, he excused it because of Laura. Same with Wanda, he excused everything she did because 'She's just a kid!' He wondered when exactly would she stop being a kid? She was 24! That's not a kid! He was meant to be the team leader but he never called Wanda or Clint on their questionable behaviour, which just encouraged it in his book. He'd noticed it on a smaller scale back in America, there was just much less happening here that he was picking up on it more, everytime he did however he flashed back on things he'd missed in America. Plus he was now here all the time instead of visiting family. God
he missed his mom.

"Even so, things are much improved. In how we work and support for the Avengers back home and in the field. Ensuring everyone in the team is supported is extremely important to me."

He couldn't help but feel Rhodes and Carol were speaking to them, or, well to Steve. Maybe for how Stark has been treated by them? Instead of looking guilty however, Steve just looked angry.

"They're… They're making me, making us out to be a bully!"

"Aww, poor little Stark, trying to make people think he's the victim."

Wanda sneered again and Barnes was looking at Steve with a contemplative look on his face. That was it, Steve's extreme hatred of bullies. Being called one must be quite a blow for him, but it seemed like he was just getting angry instead. He looked back to Barnes who was tapping away on his tablet, still half watching the TV.

"This is to everyone? How is the team getting along?"

"It's been quite a good way to understand humans more, being around such a varied group who help each other, for even very simple things as well as the big. It's fascinating."

Wanda leaned in, hyperfocusing on Visions every word and not seeming to notice that he was taking a dig at them as well. He didn't know what happened there, but Clint had told them excitedly how Wanda had kicked arse to escape her prison. That Vision had been her guard. If they'd fought he doubted the android would have much interest in rekindling their relationship. Which had actually severely concerned him at the time. He'd spoken to Steve about it several times that it was a huge red flag. Vision might look like an adult but he was painfully young. Steve had been adamant about leaving them to find happiness and had assumed that Stark had sent him. It had resulted in a huge screaming match between the two men that Wanda had gotten involved in, she'd thrown enough stuff at Stark that he'd had called the suit and Steve had berated him for calling it when there was no need. Wanda wouldn't actually hurt him.

He'd eventually taken it off at Steve's insistence and conceded the argument, but when Wanda had come up to him to say sorry, her hands and eyes were still glowing red. Stark had backed up and refused to shake her hand, much to Steve's annoyance. He'd felt awful for triggering it, Stark had vanished on important business trips for 3 weeks until Steve had practically demanded his return in case he was needed, angry he'd run off when Wanda had been trying to apologise. He'd considered saying something… but things moved on before he worked out what to say.

The sorcerers snark jerked him out of his memories and back to the video, they'd been discussing movies he thought but his thoughts had drifted to that fight. Like other things, he found himself looking at it in a new light.

"They're almost turning me social."

"Ah, Mr Sorcerer Supreme. Is your cloak waving?"

The.. Cloak? Ducked from the glare the sorcerer gave it.

"Yes."
Watching a Sorcerer glare at his waving cloak made this all have an extremely surreal feel to it, they all started laughing good naturally, even the Sorcerer was sort of smiling. Stark made a motion with his hand and the cloak jumped up, left the Sorcerer and flew over to him! That was extremely weird, he'd assumed that the cloak was being controlled by him somehow, but from his eye roll and Stark's smug smirk, he wondered if it was a weird sentient cloak?

Could cloaks be sentient?

Why would you need a sentient cloak?

Who would make a cloak sentient in the first place?

These were all questions that he'd never thought he'd ask himself.

Sam wasn't sure when his life had verred utterly off the normal road but sentient cloaks were a bit much, even for him. Steve, and then Clint interrupted his thoughts on the cloak that he thought was actually quite fun..

"Is everything a joke to them?"

"Everything is a joke to Stark. That Strange has apparently been his friend for decades so they're probably the same, he just went and found himself a team of people exactly like him."

Whilst they were complaining and Wanda was joining in, he focused on the screen instead. The reporters seemed to enjoy seeing half the avengers crack up laughing, watching the cloaks antics and the interaction between the heroes had several of them laughing too. He had to admit it did make them all seem more approachable, more down to earth. Even with sentient flying cloaks, which was pretty impressive really.

Which was probably the idea.

The idea was obviously to get people who currently hate, or were scared of supers, to reconsider. He'd seen the protest viseos of Wanda and her magic, now here's a new magic user with a freaking pet cloak.

From what he was looking at, he could see it working. They were real people and were showing that. He assumed that them working more helped too, instead of just waiting for big bads, they helped more.

The next few questions after a few more directed at the Defenders, were mostly about funding of the Avengers.

Which was when he discovered that Stark had been personally bankrolling them since DC.

That was a shock, he'd never really asked about funding, just assuming it was some group or the government. He knew Stark housed them and made their gear, but everything in the house, food to clothes was also from Stark, apparently so we're all the reparations and rebuilding funds except those he raised with his charities. The numbers being listed were in the actual billions and only him, Barnes and Scott seemed shocked and appalled by it. When it looked as if Scott was about to comment, Wanda had just glared at him.

"It's blood money anyway. It's the least he can do."

Billions of dollars. That just shook him. He couldn't even conceive of money in actual billions! He'd never considered the price of their gear, of the compound, of their missions, the jets. Now he
was and he was left feeling deeply uncomfortable with one fact. He'd never said thank you.

Now he wasn't funding the Avengers alone, it was a joint effort of Stark, Hope and Danny. They rejected government funding to keep the Avengers initiative private but for missions requested by the Accords Council, they did receive some wages based on certain missions brought to them that they could accept or refuse. The fact they could refuse missions was a shock, Steve's main argument was that the Accords would force them to do missions against their will.

"What if the rogues come back and call themselves Avengers?"

Laura glanced at Stark who had shut down again, he was still smiling but it was a little more stiff than the easy smiles they'd been throwing around earlier. Sam noticed that like at the Accords Council, he'd paled a little. No one in the room commented but Barnes had an oddly concerned look on his face. He hoped he wasn't feeling guilty for his part on Siberia, seeing evidence that Stark hadn't fully bounced back must be hard on the man.

He really wished that the reporter had not asked that question. Because he knew the answer would be hell for them. Scott obviously hadn't watched the video this far in as he'd been shocked before now so he couldn't get a read on what it could be. He hadn't expected Laura of all people to answer.

"They can't. Not legally anyway. Dr Stark legally holds the name and the civil organisation that works underneath it, along with The GUARD. Anyone else would be claiming it illegally."

"He can't just claim to have the Avengers!"

Clint looked unhappy but at the same time he shrugged in response to Steve's outburst.

"Sure he can. Fury effectively gave it to him. You were the team leader but he funded everything so it was his too. Fury figured that it was the best way to keep him invested in the Avengers, keep him from backing out. Shield could barely afford to equip us and you know our gear from Stark was better."

"But that's, that's not right, Steve is the head of the Avengers!"

It devolved pretty much from there Wanda and Steve attacking Stark for pretty much everything. About how he is stealing the title of the Avengers. Clint joined in for some things, but even he had to admit that Stark had a legal right to it. He thought back to that letter Steve had sent. He couldn't help himself, he was pissed and it was a low dig.

"You did tell him that the Avengers were always his Cap."

Steve had glared at him then before stomping off. Food arrived not long later and Barnes returned with it, which was interesting because Sam hadn't seen him leave the common room. Sneaky bastard. Clint and Wanda took theirs and Steve's portions before shooting him an annoyed look and stomping off. He sighed as the 3 of the dished up and stayed around the TV. Looks like he was in the dog house.

The rest of the questions had gone by during the ranting and he decided to watch it again later without the running commentary. Barnes looked at them both hopefully.

"Can we watch Lord of the Rings?"

He couldn't help but grin and loaded it up, Scott was still searching for stuff on Stark and
apparently found a website devoted to creepy stalker fan pictures. Because why not.

"Cassie.. My kid.. She's there too."

He showed them a series of pictures of Stark, Laura and Meg at the park with a whole gaggle of kids. He knew that 2 were Laura's, 1 was Scott's. But there was a teenage boy and young girl that he couldn't place, that was weird. Well, it was weird seeing Stark covered in kids. Scott was looking forlorn at a picture that had Cassie and Lilah stuck to his back and the other girl was clung to his leg, head thrown back in laughter. Despite being weighed down by kids, Stark was smiling. Another picture had all the kids dog piled on him. He noticed Barnes looked equally as baffled.

The three of them had all been told a lot about Stark.

This.. This didn't fit with any of it.

**Barnes POV**

**27rd September**

He slipped the glasses of and took a deep breath. They'd ran through 5 memories today and disassociated 4 of them. After going through the last memory 6 times with no improvement they'd called it a day because he was starting to get nervous. He'd spent a good hour after using all the techniques his therapist had given him. He'd been listing things in the room the butterflies landed on as a way of grounding himself and he felt surprisingly good after.

He didn't feel awesome, he was tired and felt like he'd been through the emotional wringer, but at the same time he felt similar to how you feel after a long needed cry. They'd had several full sessions now and disassociated quite a lot of memories. He didn't feel perfect, but he felt.. Lighter? He'd gone from having nightmares every single night and barely sleeping more than two hours to having an occasional night utterly nightmare free. He was averaging 4 hours of sleep a night too, well, for the most part. There were still sleepless nights here and there.

He'd gone into this just expecting to get the word's removed, and whilst they were kind of stalled on that, the glasses were helping him so much already in such a short amount of time. It was amazing. He'd talked to Sam about it who was shocked for him, he was surprised at how much improvement he was making in such a short time.

Not that everything had been sunshine and daisies. After a session where he'd disassociated 7 memories, he'd gone back floating on air and out of nowhere utterly crashed. He couldn't get out of bed. He couldn't eat. He didn't understand it, he was angry at himself for being so pathetic when he had no reason to! It had taken his therapist braving Steve to come to the house when he'd missed their session to help talk him round, that depression didn't follow strict rules that because a day is good you'll be happy. Sometimes it hits when everything is great, and attacking himself for it had not helped. They'd talked for a few hours and she'd left when he'd decided to make little origami animals and bake cookies. He'd promised to not miss their next session.

All in all, he felt like he was doing pretty well. The only person who didn't was Steve. He was still against the therapy sessions, he was definitely against the mysterious tech that he refused to talk about. Maybe if he told Steve about the glasses it would help. Let him read about them? He doubted it, but it might be worth a shot. As far as Steve was concerned it had been ‘ages’ and he wasn't 'cured' yet, so Shuri's tech and his therapist were obviously useless and he should stop wasting his time and stay at home with him instead. He'd felt quite proud of himself when he had
refused, said he was carrying on with it and it was his choice. He'd not even felt like panicking when he said it, he'd even stuck around instead of jumping out of the window.

To him, that was a huge improvement. To Steve it was a sign he was being manipulated and changed because Bucky would never disagree with him like that.

He knew Steve kept forgetting that he had all of the pre war memories back, because he could recall a ton of memories that were just Bucky and Steve screaming at each other like banshees because they could agree on basic things. It didn't mean they weren't friends, so why he was so against him now, he had no idea. Steve seemed to have this impossibly perfect version of him in his head and there was no way he'd be able to compete. Even if he wanted to.

Thinking about Steve always made him conflicted, he was twiddling the glasses in his hand as he thought about him. Running his fingers back and forth the sticker feeling the change in sensation. That had been something he'd started doing a lot lately, looking for interesting things to run his fingers over. It had started with the braids Shuri put in his hair every morning and he'd now started collecting things. He had a shelf in his bedroom that was literally just different rocks with different patterns on. Steve would probably find it weird if he knew, but TicTac liked it, he occasionally brought him new things. Wings called them his pet rocks.

He'd also had 4 soft blankets he liked to just lie in. Feeling different sensations grounded him. At least good ones. There were a few sensory things that made him snatch his hand away. It was hard to explain that touching a certain fabric made him nauseated, but it did. He'd worried what his therapist would say but she seemed fine with it, calling it sensory seeking behaviour and as long as it was under control it was fine, it was a way of coping with his PTSD and apparently a pretty good way too, that had made him happy.

The sticker on the glasses was something he'd been using a lot since he'd first put the glasses on. Although looking at them now, it was a bit.. Weird.

They were a sleek light chrome and rimless glasses. Very modern, futuristic even. They looked expensive. The bright pink sticker was a bit out of place. He picked at the sticker, deciding to look underneath and maybe even take just the sticker back to his room or something. Maybe he could put it in his notebook that had now gained several large lists. The sticker didn't seem important for function that he could see, so he guessed Shuri wouldn't mind. He gently held the glasses between his knees before very, very slowly started peeling it off.

He didn't want to damage the glasses or the sticker. He was hyperfocusing so much that he didn't realise what the sticker was covering until he had it all the way off, and was happy he hadn't torn it. He had just put the sticker onto the first page of his book when he saw the little white Stark Industries logo staring back at him.

The glasses… the outside contractor…

This was Dr Stark's tech. Tony Stark.. Was the Anthony Shuri worked with. He couldn't believe how dumb he was that he hadn't made the connection between Shuri being friends with Dr Stark and knowing an Anthony who just so happened to also be a genius and made the glasses.

In his defence. It made no sense.

Why would Stark help him? He killed the man's entire family bar a cousin who was related to Peggy, who he remembered attacking! He'd done some digging around and discovered Peggy was Dr Stark's god parent, how was that for fucking weird.
The last interaction with Stark, he tried to kill the grieving man, well, they'd tried to kill each other pretty much.

'You are not this stupid.'

Oh great. The voice is back.

'You can't keep pretending I am not real. The Ironman was not trying to kill us. Even with your tupost'<stupidity>, we walked away from that fight.'

'Fine. But we were still in a brutal fight. I killed his parents, we fought and he was left to suffer alone. It was all my fault, so why would he do this?'

Not only has the man sent what looks like incredibly expensive, groundbreaking tech to help, he's still helping. The algorithms. He has no idea how long the man has spent writing those countless algorithms.

He's seen the code, each algorithm is pages and pages long. They're huge and each one is utterly unique every time based on tons and tons of data. That... That is a terrifying amount of dedication to helping him. A person who doesn't even deserve a scrap of it but he's still helping?! He mentally nudged the smart arse part of his brain but doesn't get a reply. If anything, it seems even more confused that him! He gets a feeling that having someone care for it, even accidentally when it's really him, is not something it understands. He shakes his head, pushing that back because talking to the voice in your head cannot be a sign of mental health. Shuri thankfully brings him out of his spiral.

"Ah, I see you have bypassed Dr Stark's super effective security sticker"

"So this really was made by Dr Stark?"

"Yup, This bad boy is 100% Dr Stark. I'm just getting my head around it. It's not my usual area of expertise, probably because the man effectively created an entire new thing."

"But, Why? You said outside contractor, I just don't understand?"

Shuri apparently missing the meaning in what he was asking. He wanted to know why a man like Dr Stark, that he had hurt so profoundly, why would he help him?

"Tony was worried you would reject it because he made it, that you might miss the chance to be word free because of people's perception of him and what happened in Siberia. He really just wants to help you heal."

He just looks utterly confused because he still doesn't understand why. If anything he was just thankful Stark didn't hunt him down, let alone try to heal him. And it's obvious that he knows they're here, yet he's done nothing about it. They've not been arrested, nothing has happened at all even though Clint assured him that the second Stark knew where they were they would be dragged off to the raft.

"He was worried that your house guests would have you thinking he is a monster. Wanda despises him, Clint, he used to be friends with him but something was said in the raft that still weighs on him. He told me once that Rogers was one of his closest friends, he utterly trusted them, and he doesn't trust easily. So he knows them, and he was 100% sure they'd tell you he was the root and sum of all evil. At first I thought he was thinking the worst… Since July they've proved him right over and over. Wilson and Scott seem to be coming around however."
"I'm still really confused."

"He's constantly beating himself up that he is involved without your knowledge, it's killing a part
of him, even though the man has put so many safeguards on it so you wouldn't be worried about
someone changing your memories, it's ridiculous but adorable."

He shook his head, he got all that, he was surprised at how much had gone into it just to make him
comfortable, now he knows its Dr Stark he's even more confused about that. Why would Dr Stark
care about his fears or comfort? That he was also stressing over the fact he didn't know? That was
so completely mind blowing he just didn't know what to do with it. He hadn't known what to do
with the care put in when the creator of the glasses was some unknown entity called Anthony. Now
that person was Tony Fucking Stark, a man that had all the right in the world to hate him and want
him to rot?

"No, no, I don't mean that. I can see the care gone into it, I've read the algorithms, it's baffling how
much he's put into this."

"I've noticed that when Tony decides to do something, he throws himself into it so it's done
brilliantly, especially when it comes to helping people."

The pride in her voice is obvious but it still hasn't answered his question. This is supposed to be
and egotistical, narcissistic man who only cares about himself who should despise him yet he's
helping him. He has to wonder about Stark's sanity and mental state because he suspects if his
therapist spoke to him, she'd tell him to stop it immediately. Surely this was downright
masochistic.

"But why? He must hate me for what I did to him? The other night we watched that press
conference, Wings found a dissertation he wrote when he was 17, in 1990. He was 17 or barely 18
when I...

"Hey, hey I don't think he hates you."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"If he did, would he send this here? He's known that you all were in Wakanda the day he woke up
from his coma and all he did was call me to collaborate and prank T'Challa because he was pretty
hurt by his decision. If he hated you, you would have all been sent to the raft on the 7th of July."

He runs his hands over his hair he's so confused, he's heard a lot of Stark. Mostly from the rogues,
a little from Shuri and it's been utterly contradictory. The Accords Council, Press conference and
the park pictures, 3 outings he's made that he has evidence of since July and none of them line up.

"I need to think, and maybe research. I'm so confused but also extremely thankful that he's done
this. If I write him a thank you letter can you send it?"

A strange look crosses her face and he's suddenly reminded of what Wings said the other night that
Steve must have sent a letter and he guessed from how Wings had talked about it after they'd
finished the first Lord of the Rings, that it had not been great.

"It. It won't be like Steve's."

"OK, I'll send your letter. I think some research would be good. Tony is a good man, he helps and
helps until he had nothing left but his old team carried on demanding more. I thanked him for
listening to me rant back when he was in the hospital because these sound absorbing shoes I was
making for T'Challa had a glitch. It was 2am in America, and he had sat helping me for 4 hours
until I realised he was listing to the side and looked in pain. I thanked him and do you know what he did?"

"What..?"

"He froze. He utterly froze up before shrugging it off and thanked me for the chance to get involved. So maybe before you believe the team that he lived with for several years, that he housed, fed, clothed, bankrolled and made everything they asked for, whilst having 2 full time jobs, remember that the concept of thanks was practically alien to him."

That. Sounded nothing like Steve... Steve wouldn't just take like that. With that and the fact he'd considered Steve a close friend, it just made everything about the civil war more horrifying and that he'd been lied to.

It started off with his best friend vs a self obsessed, uncaring volatile, angry man who stood for nothing but himself. That was trying to control the Avengers. That would give the other super soldiers to people who would use them.

Then he keeps finding out more and more that make things seem off. This was like the glass flooding with little drops of water. He felt a need to find out more about the man, hopefully without coming off like a creepy Internet stalker. He knows that it will be hard, he'd done little checks and found out that he'd lived a lot of his life in the public eye and the media loved to hate him and loved to love him. Discovering the truth would be hard.

"Before you go, now that you know who he is. Would you be willing for him to have more access to the data from the glasses? It might make it easier on him and bett-"

"Of course! Anything he needs as long as he's OK with it. He shouldn't have to be helping me anyway, I don't want him to feel he has to trudge through my brain.."

Shuri just rolls her eyes before smiling and nodding.

"Oh, do you want to know what the glasses are called?"

"I thought it was RFG? Retro Framing Glasses?"

"Ah, no. Because you didn't know it was Tony's invention, I cut a bit of out the name."

"Oh, so I wouldn't find them attached to his name online?"

"Oh no, because the name is utterly ridiculous and if I can't blame it on him I wasn't going to use it."

"So what is it?"

She's laughing and looking genuinely amused and he has to admit to being curious now.

"Binarily Augmented Retro-Framing."

"That doesn't sound bad?"

"Hmm, it doesn't until you turn it into an acronym, then you get BARF."

He laughs at that, yeah that name is ridiculous and he'd wonders how on earth Stark came up with such an odd name and adds it to his list of 'strange personality traits that do not live up to what he has been told'. Speaking of naming things ridiculously, he isn't that good himself considering what
he has this list called.

He jogs out of the lab and makes his way back to the villa. Instead of going in however he takes off jogging towards the small forest very close. After the RFG, well, BARF sessions he liked to be alone when he didn't have therapy straight after and sometimes after therapy. Before Steve was on house arrest, he'd discovered a spot in the first because none of them would go in. About 20 minutes at a jog in, there is a little clearing. Big enough for the sun to shine in and is full of wildflowers he'd never seen before. When he gets there he moved to his spot, sitting on a huge rock and leaning his back onto a big rock behind him.

He pulls out his tablet, pen and a notebook. This however, unlike his wolf notebook, is just your average spiral notebook. He usually used it to jot things down, everything that comes to mind or that he sees or likes or dislikes. This from therapy, quotes, lines from TV shows, dreams, nightmares, recipes, pretty much everything. It was a good excuse to just write, which he enjoyed alone for the sensory experience, then he chooses what to put in his fancier book. It's a good system. It's also perfect for what he wants to do now. He flips to an empty pages and starts writing down what he's been told and what he's learned since waking up about the mysterious man whilst looking on his tablet for information about him and his life.

- **Self-obsessed, arrogant, uncaring** -

Sent expensive *(extremely!)* tech to Wakanda just to help me. Has not stopped involvement even though he has no reason to help me and every reason to hate me.

Has written, at the moment, 17 very long, complicated algorithms and still wants to help more.

Is willing to spend his valuable time going through data from my messed up brain.

Has not arrested us?!

Has not told anyone we are here even though he probably should and could get into serious trouble for hiding it.

When severely injured and exhausted, helped a 16 year old he barely knew.

Has so many charities I can't even count.

His company has won so many awards for employee satisfaction.

Blatant adrenaline seeking behaviour pre Ironman seems more concerning regarding his mental health from what my therapist told me about jumping out of windows and off roofs.

- **Rude** -

Most evidence of him being rude is before he became Ironman and he decided to change and improve himself? Although still very snarky.

Many articles with him doing extremely questionable things, but have decreased. Several are from competitors however.

He's allowing Shuri to get all the credit for fixing his brain.

Dr Stark must have been working on this often. He could have stopped earlier and forced me to
watch his memories hundreds of times, instead he is constantly working to help me avoid that. That could have been an easy way to punish me. Yet he is bending over backwards to make me feel comfortable.

He only spoke to me a few times, hard to gauge rudeness. Just used nicknames I did not get.

- **Volatile, angry** -
  
  Attacked Steve and me in Siberia… but since he's dedicated himself to tons of work to help me?
  
  Shuri says that Stark was concerned that I hated him for attacking me. That he feels guilty which makes no sense.
  
  I'm still not sure he shouldn't have killed me.
  
  Most evidence online points to sarcasm, even in videos where he is fighting villains.
  
  Even against a man who calls himself Dr Doom.
  
  After 3 minutes of him monologuing in the third person, I feel volatile and angry.

- **Selfish - Can you be a selfish superhero?**

  Steve says he only fights for himself but he's gotten badly injured so many times it actually concerning.

  At the Accords he spoke passionately about helping people?

  Note mutant hate rallies are disturbing and what is wrong with people?

  Has spent months working whilst severely injured to help people he's never met.

  Found pictures of him visiting children's cancer wards..

  Saved TicTac and Barton families, (maybe more?) even though they fought against him.

  Seems to have hired as many ex SHIELD agents as possible and formed 'The Guard' after this Data dump.

  The video of New York.. He flies a fucking nuke into a sodding space portal in the sky before plummeting to his death. Yeah. I'm just scratching this one off. WTF.

- **Unable to work with a team, abrasive** -

  From the press conference, he seems friendly with his new team, they seem to like him a lot? As he is on medical leave, there is insufficient data of him working with new team to form a
In videos of the old team, he saved them on multiple occasions, catches Clint when he jumps off roofs. As this is just mobile footage of idiots who stay in dangerous situations instead of running to film hero's when villains show up. Maybe I'm missing something?

He collaborates and works with Shuri often. Even though her brother is hiding us. She is also 16 and suspect most adults wouldn't work with someone her age.

Natalia for instance was terrible at teamwork, but that was how she was trained.

He taps his pen on his mouth as he switches to reading some older articles of Dr Stark, and jotting things down as he goes. Kind of like when he goes onto wiki and just keeps clicking something from each article until he ends up somewhere completely different.

Articles vary wildly, from a picture of him at four years old creating his first circuit board and how he would even surpass his father to pictures calling him a sex addict who will sleep with anything with a pulse.

For some reason that article about the circuit board leaves him with a cold pit in his stomach more than the ones about his sex life, of which the Internet really seems obsessed with. More than a little creepy. The Internet is freaking weird. There are so many websites talking about Ironman and Captain America in a relationship. He's pretty sure Steve would have mentioned that...

From the circuit board article however it made him think about Howard. He knows it's bad to speak ill of the dead, probably doubly so when it was you who killed them… But from his memories he knew that he disliked Howard Stark. He'd also could not understood why Stevie thought the man could walk on water. Even now he still saw him as a good man when there was a lot on the Internet that said otherwise. He was a womanising, sexist drunk who thought he was the best in every room he entered. He was also a bully to anyone he considered beneath him, especially if they were working on something he considered his area.

He never understood how Steve liked the man, yet hated bullies. He also could be cruel but he usually hid it well. He'd found himself mostly just smiling and pretending to like him in order to avoid dealing with him, he'd seen the guy angry enough to know to avoid it. In the picture with his kid, he really does not look happy at the idea of someone surpassing him, which does not surprise him. Even his son it seems. His wife is smiling brightly and that however does make him feel guilty. He gets a push from the back of his brain and realises Howard has what looks like a painful grip on the kids shoulder, but the disturbing part is the kids stood there smiling.

'We did the world and him favour.'

He ignores that because he seriously doubts having your parents killed is a good thing. From how Dr Stark had said 'He killed my mom' it was clear he had loved her. He didn't know what memories the thing in his brain had access to make it so sure of itself.

'Hydra posted surveillance on Stark's multiple times before extraction mission was issued 1991. Nearly every year I sat for weeks. Watching.'

It practically snarls at him, this is news to him. He didn't remember any of that and the BARF had knocked lose so many memories of his time with Hydra it was nauseating. He waited to see if it would show him a memory, like it occasionally did when he was bored, it's favourites lately
seemed to be Steve hitting his head on a door frame, TicTac firing chocolate milk through his nose, Wings tripping over because he'd distracted him scaling the building, Shuri doing their hair, weirdly, Dr Stark disassembling the gun in his hand with a cocky grin on his face after catching a bullet. There were others too, it was a weird assortment of memories it seemed to be collecting and hoarding. He waited but when nothing came he went back to his research. He really shouldn't be acknowledging it anyway.

There isn't much else about his childhood until he turns up at college and there everything gets weird. Articles praising him as a genius right next to ones showing him drunk and passed out in the street calling him an alcoholic.. At 14/15! Personally he thinks the article should be shaming whoever let a 14/15 year old get plastered.

After he's 17 those kinds of articles get much worse and more frequent and to him, that's his guilt written in black and white. What would Dr Stark's life have been like if he hadn't bashed Howard's head in, or throttled Maria? He wonders where Peggy was, and why she hadn't stopped this? He can't imagine the Peggy he remembers letting a 14 year old child, her godson, nearly killing himself with alcohol and gods know what else, repeatedly. It's surprising that he even lived long enough to nearly die over and over as a superhero. How is this man even alive again?

The Internet seems to store practically anything and everything he starts to realise, with the same veracity for the serious, the bizarre and the utterly pointless. Like a website dedicated to pictures of Dr Stark's ties. Just, why? This seems especially so when celebrities are involved, and even more so when they fuck up. Sorting fact from fiction is near impossible.

It's merciless in its collation of information, and timeless in its storage, take something down in one place and it's back in 10 more. The more you try to kill a story the faster it spreads. It's more like Hydra than Hydra could dream to be. Between what has been recorded over the years, people with a vendetta and people with a cause, with the SHIELD data dump thrown in, he notes that the kill count attributed to Dr Stark is very high. That's not including the shady dealings of his company that he was apparently not aware of.

A lot of things seem to change after Afghanistan. Where he'd been almost apathetic before. To make up for what he deemed as a lack of accountability when he inherited his father's business and continued it. Even when it nearly bankrupted him, but he clawed back and SI is doing better than ever it seems, with his old PA as the CEO, which seemed an odd move but the woman look terrifying. He noted that not long ago something bad had happened with the company, losing a lot of business, but he got it back on track without a single employee losing a job.

This is especially evident with relief efforts after battles that he's confused to discover only tend to feature him. He doesn't stop there however, he funds Med-Tech, agriculture, vaccines, building sources of clean water, schools... They aren't even all named after him, luckily for him, Dr Stark seems to have some obsessed fans who collected the proof for him.

He found a few videos of Dr Stark, before Siberia, explaining how and why he invented the glasses, and that he tested it on himself like Shuri mentioned. It gave him killer migraines and the name BARF was literal, and until he solved these issues, he didn't move forward letting anyone else use it. Whilst he is thankful for that, he has to wonder about his self preservation instincts, as in if he has any, at all. After watching him hop in a racecar and the ensuing chaos on a shaky mobile phone video, he feels fine concluding that he has precisely zero self preservation. Shuri is right, the man needs a minder, as do idiots with camera phones.

After that he finds his way to his accessibility range and his private war on insurance companies to make sure kids who need disability aids get them. It's not a great market to make money in, and
with it being so small, things just cost more as they're niche. As a business decision it seems questionable, according to the many articles calling him mad for it. It didn't seem to have stopped him. Clean energy is ranted at for the same reason almost as much as he is praised. How he's installing arc reactors across the globe for free, with containment so no one else can tamper with the tech and potentially weaponise it, smart, Hydra was itching to get their hands on one, more searching for that he has to wonder if what he is reading is true in the SHIELD files, when it states he developed the miniature version whilst being tortured in a cave.

From what he could tell, SHIELD had known for years this Stane man was slime and what he was doing, supplying an addict with alcohol and drugs to keep him from noticing his shady dealings, that he eventually ordered an assassination that resulted in torture, where he created the first Iron man suit. He knows that is a short write up by someone at SHIELD and wonders how much hasn't been recorded. In fact the amount of kidnappings SHIELD has recorded for him is crazy itself, the fact many are listed as rescued himself too makes him wonder why? However, now he understands Hydra fear of capturing him, keeping him somewhere he doesn't wish to be seems very tricky.

That was when the thing in his mind surged forward, because this was evidence to back up his claim. Exiting the caves, Dr Stark killed nearly every terrorist in the base. But he didn't leave it at that. When he got home, he improved the armour, he went back and destroyed the ten rings, destroyed all their weapons and left the leader to be torn to pieces by those he terrorised.

'When he sets out to kill an enemy, they die. The Ironman's enemies do not live long when he turns his attention to them.'

He thinks about his hydra designation of Threat Level Alpha*, only approach if immediate capture and transfer to chair available. That a baseline human had the same containment notes as Steve or even Thor… and weirdly.. it has seemed excessive then..

From what he's read, Dr Stark knows betrayal, deeply, intrinsically. However, there are not many that have betrayed him still walking, except Steve and his friends.

'The man salts the proverbial bloodstained earth without so much of a glance over his shoulder.'

'All the kills, they seem personal too.'

He thinks back to the apparently creepily, overly dramatic, descriptive part of his brain. Damit it but he needs to name whatever it is in his head because thinking of it as 20 different things isn't helping and as it seems overly interested in research Dr Stark, it obviously isn't going away anytime soon. For now he decides on Shade. He gets a feeling of a grimace back.

'That sounds like a pets name.'

Oh great, now it's grumpy over its name. Fine.

'Fine, I'll keep calling you it. Be quiet and I'll keep researching Stark.'

'Good, he is interesting. He is like a phoenix with red and gold metal instead of feathers.'

He doesn't hold back the eye roll and carried on reading about Dr Stark and weapons manufacturing.

He's pretty sure he isn't that dramatic and weird so why is something in his brain that bad?

He's not sure what happened fully in those caves, but when he came out he shut down all weapons
manufacturing before he'd even healed. He can see the makeup covering the bruises and his arm is clearly immobilised. In one he's eating like he's barely seen food in months.

That gives him an extremely uncomfortable thought.

He stopped making weapons.

Yet he outfits the Avengers, personally creating their equipment, including weapons. Except Steve, where Howard made the shield.

After that declaration of no weapons, he can't imagine making weapons is easy? Maybe he felt comforted by the fact he knew whose hands the weapons would be in. They would be in his families hands, so it would be safe

How they then turned around and used them on him.

He shakes his head, trying to push that back because all of this is just too much information to suddenly learn about a mad he's barely met, a man that should hate him but is helping him.

'So, overly dramatic creepy voice, what is your conclusion on Dr Stark?'

'He's more interesting than you are right now.'

That's when he realises he's been sat for 4 hours researching the man whose parents he killed.

Feeling guilty, he shoves back the strange conclusions he's made about the man, and the frankly disturbing shit the voice came up with, into the back of his mind, flips to a clean page and starts writing his letter.

Chapter End Notes

Winter was much more creepy and descriptive from when my friend wrote but my tolerance for cringe is low and I gave in 😐
Expectations

Chapter Summary

Bruce has finally found his way home and is quite amazed at how much has changed but is coming to realise the consequences of his actions and the 'what might have beens'.
Tony is reminded the recovery is rarely linear, Carol finds out some of what she missed from her friends life whilst she'd been in space.
Rhodey is yelling into cushions as Tony gets a letter.

Chapter Notes

Happy Saturday my favourite people!

Sorry I've been a bit lax with replying to comments! Thanks to a bunch of fun dentist appointments (Woo, root canal, urgh. I had perfect teeth once before a med I was on murdered my tooth enamel lol.) I've been pretty knackered, which of course is apparently an invitation for my insomnia to get worse. The logic of this eludes me and as such I've been quite Zombierific.

However me and Insomnia means me and writing. Even if it means trying to decipher insomnia speak + autocorrect x dyslexia. I'm occasionally left looking at sentences in utter bafflement (I'm pretty sure that isn't a word but I like it.)

I'm far enough ahead, I mean Tony and James have actually met, I know you all thought it would never happen!

So I'm updating the schedule moderately. Saturdays as normal, but, if I complete a new chapter before Thursday, I'll upload another midweek chapter. I figure it's only fair as technically these multi chapters were originally a single chapter(I actually did a chapter recently that actually stayed as one chapter too, I was quite shook).

So, we're back in America now with fun and hijinks and scenes I wrote before this story even began on 3 days of no sleep and excessive pain which tends to result in ridiculousness that would have Tony squinting at me before throwing his hands in his air muttering "What is my life?" One of the first things I wrote was actually Rhodey's POV in this chapter.

Anyway, enough rambling. Enjoy my lovelies!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bruce POV

29th September
Bruce had been standing in front of the compound for about 10 minutes now, trying to work out the best plan of action. The place was barely recognisable to him, although he could see the original buildings here and there, or what he assumed was the original, with Tony it was always hard to tell and he'd been busy, much more so that he'd usually be. There had been extensive changes everywhere. There was so much... More. Some of the buildings were nearly triple the height he remembered. There were tons of new buildings, the area was massively expanded and he wasn't sure if that lake had always been there. It looked like one new section had been renamed as The Guard and recently if he had to guess from the look of the work. There were people moving around in yellow vests, so potentially still under work.

There were also so many people. Heck even the car park was impressively huge and he was pretty sure he'd never been impressed by a car park but it went underground and everything. He remembered them talking in the press conference that things are done differently now, that it's a legitimate private organisation and standing here he can see it. It was nothing like a rag-tag group of heroes out on their own. Tony had taken his father's million dollar weapons company and turns it into the multi-billion dollar company that was involved in practically anything but weapons. That was like the difference from the old compound to this. It was like seeing what the man was capable of doing when he took something and ran with it, and wasn't held back. It was moderately terrifying.

He didn't think he'd seen any of the Avengers so far, but he'd seen lots of people, in many varieties. From scientists to military folk. Suits, tac gear and white coats. Students too by the looks of them. There was even a bus full of tiny kids on what looked like a tour?

Whilst it was all very impressive, it resulted in the fact that he didn't know where to go first. There were sections sporting the stylised A of the Avengers, even that had been changed slightly, but even then he was a little overwhelmed. Okay. A lot.

It was like a huge, sprawling hospital there were different departments in different buildings that all had their own receptions and getting lost was a distinct possibility. He really wished he had a map. He couldn't head directly towards where the residential quarters were because they were now nestled safely away with no direct access that he could see, something he thought was intentional, and smart. The security looked much, much higher than it had been before. He could see three, spire like buildings from here that he bet were security and he assumed there were more of them around too. Much higher security indeed, more so than the tower at a guess. But after the picture of Tony with the kids, he wasn't surprised.

Hulk was getting irritated with his indecisiveness however. Under the opinion he should just pick a building and that should do it. He'd been about to do just that was he heard a familiar noise of repulsors above him. He looked up and saw Tony coming to land several feet in front of him.

The suit was familiar, yet not at the same time, he seemed to have lost some bulk, it was more fitted? If that was the best description. There was no segments that he could see, it looked to be completely solid yet still allowed movement. The blue glow of the eyes and inverted triangle at his chest was not alone on this version of the armour with points at each side of his collarbone and his chest and lines down his legs too. Bruce wondered if they were actually the Micro-RT nodes Tony had been discussing... His blinked and forced himself to stop assessing Tony's latest version, he wondered just how many suits he had missed? It felt like Tony had come so far and he'd missed it.

What surprised him the most wasn't any of that, it was what happened next. He had expected the helmet to fold back, maybe for Tony to step out of the suit. Or the suit to fold into the suitcase.

He was not expecting the Ironman suit to somehow reform itself into a deep red suit with a black
shirt and gold tie as he walked towards him, from metal to fabric it morphed around Tony as he walked over to him, arms wide in greeting. It happened so fast and he was utterly fascinated. He was also wearing matching red tinted sunglasses, honestly, the entire thing was impressive! Hulk was immensely impressed. The change happening seamlessly in-between strides as Tony quickly approached him, grinning widely as if it was normal, but then it probably was normal to Tony he reminded himself glumly. It was him who was behind and it was his own doing.

"I knew you were on the move Bruce, but I didn't know you were coming here! You should have called ahead."

"I decided I'd been gone long enough and wanted to surprise you, clearly I have missed a lot. Plus, Hulk missed his TinMan. He wanted to surprise you too."

"Well, I'm definitely surprised! Come on, let's get inside. I thought someone was pranking me when you turned up on the security feed."

Bruce chuckled whilst glancing around, he hadn't even seen any cameras and what he suspected were security towers were quite far away, also, he hadn't heard a familiar buzz that he got around some technology. He didn't get much from the Hulk in this form, he had the enhanced hearing after all, but since they'd leveled out and come to an agreement after Ultron his senses had improved a lot. But there was none of that. Security was definitely much more impressive than it had once been.

The old set up had pretty much been them being their own security. Steve has been against Tony's requests to have a better system in place. He had agreed with Tony at the time, even superheroes need a break now and then and FRIDAY was just so young. Steve had been against letting other people get involved and he'd been talking about restricting FRIDAY before he'd left. He had no idea how that had turned out either. It had resulted in a few spectacular arguments at the time, but Bruce had always been impressed at how they could be butting heads, shouting bloody murder and then be sitting drinking coffee with each other later. Laughing and joking. Mom and Dad to the Avengers.

Knowing that, he really wants to know what happened. He'd read about the Accords but that can't just be it. Even when their arguments got heated they came back together, but somehow, something had broken that. That had left Tony alone in a hospital bed, the others fugitives in the wind. Or was it something that happened gradually after he left? He'd ran after all, and he'd left Tony as Wanda's focus…

"Sorry to just drop in, I probably should have called ahead really, I hadn't expected so much to have changed around here."

"Ah Bruce, you know me. Always tinkering. Residential has been entirely revamped but all your stuff was moved to your new suite when it was finished. It's being aired out and stocked now, for however long your staying?"

He really shouldn't have been surprised that Tony had created a suite and kept it for him all this time, but he was.

"Thank you Tony, for having me back. I'm staying. I realised recently that for all my travels I was seeing here as home."

Tony looked happy but he could see that he wasn't fully convinced. Bruce knew that was pretty much his own fault, he practically had 'Flight Risk' tattooed on his head like Tony had 'Security Breach' on his. This time however he had a feeling that even if he did run, Hulk would drag him
right back.

"Well, you always have a place here Bruce."

"I'm glad there is still room, but don't think that you are off the hook for not telling me about the coma or this Civil War fiasco."

Tony sighed as he lead them through the building, the weariness of that sigh dissolved some of Bruce's anger right there on the spot, leaving enough guilt to drown himself in, he wondered if his presence would have made a difference to how things turned out. He realised they seemed to be taking a slightly circuitous route but at the same time they were not running into anyone. Which he was quite thankful of, but as he couldn't hear FRIDAY, he wondered how he knew. *Probably made the earpieces even smaller.* he thinks to himself. Hulk isn't as sure. He could hear the voices in others earpieces easily.

"I'll give you the run down in my apartment and then I'll take you to yours, you're on the floor below me. There are only a few apartments on the top level as they're bigger, made sense to put all the kids together. The floor beneath you is the common floor."

Bruce nodded whilst checking everything out as they went. He felt slightly like a tourist trying to absorb everything. From the outside the residential zone was almost recognisable, but much taller, from inside there wasn't a chance. It seemed a lot cosier though, didn't seem like each floor was a suite anymore, but multiple people on each floor. When they came to the top floor he realised the doors were decorated, one was blank and the one opposite it looked like it was just being started. The 2 at the far end however we're heavily decorated with names and pictures around them. The designs had escaped the doors onto the walls around them. Just from a glance he noted that a lot of people seemed to live with Tony. Quite a difference to his large floors to himself.

"I see you got yourself a few housemates?"

"Just a few, the kids are at school so you're safe for a little while. Peter is going to love you. He goes to a different school than Harl and Ta, but they'll all be around tonight. They're going with Laura and her lot on a road trip this weekend. Platypus is off on a 'not-date'."

Looking around and Tony pulled out some tea that look suspiciously like the box Tony had bought him back at the Tower full of tea, leaving him to make a selection, making himself coffee. The place itself was very different to what he knew about Tony. Walls were utterly covered in pictures of Tony, Rhodes (in a wheelchair, that was going to take some getting used to), the kids and many smiling people he didn't know, he even saw a picture of him and Tony in the lab. Loads of people he didn't recognise, possibly from the press conference.

There were elements here and there, that reminded him of Tony's old floors. It was still very modern, there was a lot of tech, but surfaces weren't bare. Shelves were full. It actually looked lived in, more than any of Tony's properties ever had baring his workshop. The decorations looked more organic, like he and someone else designed it, rather than Pepper paying someone. Tony had never really cared about where he slept, just his workshop. This place however, it was warm and as lived in as the chaotic workshop was when he was last here. Even the coffee table was covered in what looked like calculus homework. There was a bookcase that looks purely devoted to school books. From a glance much of it was college level.

"So, where did you get kids from. I know I've been gone a while, but I didn't think I'd been gone that long!"

"Oh, I've known Harley and Tara for years, I mostly just popped in as the weird uncle and I made
Bruce wasn't sure which bit was crazier, he didn't remember Tony mentioning much from the Manderin, he regretted not asking more now, but the thing really throwing him was the crime fighting spider kid?

"Yeah, there was a whole thing with a radioactive spider. He doesn't live here all the time, lives with his Aunt May, but he spends a lot of time here. Best way to keep him safe or he'd go back to crime fighting in his pj's."

Tony rolled his eyes and Bruce was starting to see a resemblance between the two already. Idiots that go and fight crime when they could be at home.

"What about the other two?"

"Oh I'm their legal Guardian. Which was a bit of a shock coming out of a coma to discover, but they helped pull me through."

He couldn't help but smile as his friend was pulling the stereotypical dad move and was showing him pictures on his phone of his kids.

It kind of felt like bizarro world.

'TinMan is different, something happened.'

'Like what?'

'He's.. Buzzy.'

'Buzzy?!'

He just got a grunt in reply.

_Buzzy._

That was _so_ helpfully _descriptive._

He could see there was a difference in him. Tony had always been sure of himself and carried a certain confidence that Bruce had often longed for, but now he seemed more… settled in himself. It was hard to quantify but there was a certain quality he had now that he didn't have before. He also looked much better, like he was possibly sleeping and eating even! He looked _healthy_.

"So, I have tea, you have coffee. Sit. Tell me about this coma."

Tony rubbed his hand on the back of his neck, relaxing back into the sofa. Obviously trying to work out where to start from.

"You remember Extremis? That slow version I used to take the Arc Reactor out."

He nodded in response, Dr Cho had worked with it and he'd managed to deactivate it before it even spread from his heart. He also noticed Tony was starting this from the middle.
"And why did you have to use it again?"

"Well, when Vision brought me in, I wasn't in a great way, Dr Cho, Dr Wu and Rhodes used that and the cradle but didn't get anywhere. They left both active for a full 6 days, and whilst I did improve, I stayed under. It was like my body had finally used up its reserves to hang on, and I was still slipping deeper into the coma."

"6 days… That would make deactivating it tricky."

"Yeah, they worried if I went too deep, that I'd never wake up and just purist at that stage. So they kept it going. At 6 days my protocols let Rhodey have access to my private servers. Not sure if you remember that little side project of mine that you occasionally joined in on in secret?"

"The Extremis virus that we stripped bare and built up as far as possible without causing explosions? Yeah, but that was never intended to be used on people."

"Nope, I'd carried on working on it too, it was much, much larger. But it was all Rhodes had, there wasn't a middle ground, no one involved felt confident to change the formula incase it unbalanced and they couldn't wake me to do it. So Rhodes made the decision and gave it to me, I slipped into a much deeper coma for several more days and I woke up… different."

Bruce flinched, dammit, if he'd been around, he might have been able to strip back the formula for Tony. He didn't outright say it but the implication was there. If Tony had been continuing to work on it, then it was probably more advanced than when he'd left. They'd been trying to increase the speed and strength as well as regeneration abilities without it becoming Unstable back then. Gods know what Tony added in the meantime. Tony had always had more fantastical ideas.

"And you can't neutralise it can you?"

"Nope, I've effectively had the virus 3 times now, it's basically hard coded to my DNA. Even so, it couldn't fix everything, it couldn't regrow dead tissue. I never worked a way around the exothermic overload for the full regrowth properties. Even if I could remove it, I might end up with serious problems."

"Dead tissue? Tony, what put you in this coma? I couldn't find anything online.. Usually big missions are well publicised."

Tony tapped a few times on the back of his left hand, he immediately noticed the sound was.. Off. He was about to question when Tony started speaking.

"You read about the spat me and Steve had?"

"Yeah, the airport, over the Accords?"

"Yeah. Well, we had another one that only select people know about. Turns out he'd been keeping a big secret from me. He knew my parents were murdered. He knew who by and he was using me to find him behind my back."

Bruce didn't know what he was more shocked by, Steve, who had berated Tony so much about secrets, had kept something so monumental from him or that it had ended with Tony in a coma. He knew Tony's relationship and connections to his parents were fraught with a lot he left unsaid, Bruce recognised signs from himself so he didn't push, he didn't want to talk about it so he doubted Tony did.

Tony had spent practically his entire life hating a drunk driver to discover he was a murder victim?
That must be hard to deal with.

He also had to wonder just how this had been kept from the press so well. He suspected things would have been more crazed if that picture of him in the hospital had that the damage was done by Captain America! He was also eyeing Tony's hand because the tapping really did not sound like flesh on flesh, especially with his hearing so enhanced.

"Shit Tony. That is.. What happened?"

Tony noticed his less than subtle staring. Rolled his eyes, snagging a tablet from somewhere, a hologram popping up, he stared for a few seconds, amazed at how far even this had come in his absence. With a few flicks he brought up information about his hand so he could look through as they spoke. In his defence, he'd been away from people for a long time, plus, this was Tony. If anyone didn't care for keeping to social conventions it was him. When he passed it over, he tapped his hand again, the flesh colour receding into a red disk, his hand was a matte black, he couldn't see how far up it went however.

"I found all that crap out in Hydra base, in Siberia. In front of the man, who by the way, is Bucky Barnes. Caps best pal from the 40s. Another super soldier, seriously there must have been something in the water back then, who Hydra had in the freezer when he wasn't being a brainwashed assassin."

He paused in his manipulation of the image of the hand, Tony's cybernetic hand, he was nauseated to think that Tony's hand, wrist and half his forearm had to be amputated. Because of Steve. He really wanted to know how something like that could happen. Yeah he got that Steve and Tony were fighting, but to have a limb amputated, with all the med tech and Extremis that Tony had available? That was quite serious. Even before he left, Tony's med tech was amazing. Healing things in days that took weeks. So far however pretty much every time Tony spoke, things just got.. More confusing.

"Bucky Barnes?! Hydra? What?"

He removed his glasses, rubbing his hands over his face before concentrating on cleaning them. He'd expected some strange stuff, but this just seemed insane.

"We ended up fighting after Cap admitted he knew. Had known. For years. My suit ended up disabled via a vibranium Frisbee to the chest and I spent some time enjoying spring in Siberia until Vision came. I'll send you files on Barnes and everything so you can get up to date. This is like a… recap."

It was obvious he didn't want to be taking any this, evident by how he managed to be almost flippant as he mentioned being in Siberia in a powered down Ironman suit. He knew it wasn't uncommon for temperatures to drop to -40°C in the winter. He guessed the amputation was due to frostbite, just the idea of that set his teeth on edge and he had to calm himself down, Hulk was pissed, Tony was probably lucky that he only lost one hand. He desperately wanted to ask him if anything else was damaged, but he had some tact.

Vibranium Frisbee.. Steve. Oh gods, he slammed that shield into the arc reactor?! In a way, they're lucky it just powered down, that could have wiped the base off of the map.

It also made sense at the lack of press, they could be tenacious when it came to following Tony, but the middle of Siberia in a secret Hydra base was apparently too much even for them.

"What else did Extremis change?"
"I have some interesting abilities now, faster, stronger and all that stuff we coded in. You know we theorised that Extremis could potentially allow a person to interface with technology?"

"Yeah?"

Tony just grinned as the TV in front of them turned on.

"The compound is easy, it's how I saw you outside, I can see the feeds in my head, outside of the compound its not as seamless, but I've been practicing. It helps that my tech is everywhere."

"I had been coming up with all manner of awful things that had happened to you, somehow you've blown them all out of the water. You going to show me what's behind the glasses? You never wore them around me before."

He gestured to the glasses before turning his attention back to the tablet. Hoping to give Tony space and to not feel too pressured. Instead of pulling the glasses off however, Tony touched them and they dissolved into a silver looking dust and vanished into his sleeve, not noticing that Bruce's eyebrows shot up at that as his eyes were shut. Tony had a habit of getting comfortable with a certain level and advancement in tech and forgetting that not everyone is there yet. He'd never thought he'd be so far behind again and not for the first time he was hit with a sense of loss and a wish that he hadn't gone on the run, again. He still wasn't sure how to bring up Ultron, how to apologise, but he figured now might not be the best plan, it would be selfish to dump that now after all this. Tony still had his eyes closed when he spoke again.

"Don't freak out."

He'd been about to assure him he wouldn't when he just opened his eyes and there was a moment he very nearly did. It was like seeing the eyes from the suit but in his head, the most jarring thing was that it was only one eye. He wondered if it would be less strange if both of his eyes had been affected? His usual whiskey brown was a glaring contrast next to the bright, shining arc reactor blue on the other side. It also meant that like his hand, his left eye must have been beyond repair.

"That's certainly different, the colour is a lot like your reactor."

"Yeah, we never factored in what traces of Starkanium in the blood would do to Extremis. Apparently the answer is 'weird shit'. I See things.."

"Things?"

"Yeah, colours around people mostly. I can see that Hulk is listening, I can see you both as separate beings in there, he's slightly back. It's.. hard to explain."

Well that was different and maybe what Hulk had mentioned? Maybe with his increased senses Hulk could feel something that he couldn't?

"Well, that really hadn't been something we'd predicted. But then we'd never intended it to be used or mixed with anything else, I'm happy you did though. I'd rather have you with us and weird than not at all."

Tony shot him a grin and he tried to push down the dread that folded over him at the idea that Tony could have died alone, cold in Siberia whilst he'd been sitting in a foreign country none the wiser.

Or he could have never come out of the coma.
How long until he'd have realised something was wrong?

Every time that he'd gone on the run, he'd always been thinking about how he needed to get away.

He'd always expected things to be the same back here. Tony and Steve heading the team, saving people.

Tony was his constant.

It had never even occurred to him that Tony might not be there for him to return to. It was like being doused in freezing water that he might have died and who would have even known to message him?

The idea of standing in a foreign country reading about the death of Ironman. Of Tony Stark? In some random newspaper or overhearing a discussion. It was hard to pin back the shudder. He noticed that Tony was looking at him, no around him frowning slightly.

"I'm fine Bruce, I'm just a little different, still here. It's taken some getting used to, but I'm getting better. I'll send you some more information as this speedy recap is missing it a lot. Here, this is the Extremis code that we used, just make sure no one else sees it. And stop feeling guilty."

He was about to say something about how crazy this situation was that Tony was trying to make HIM feel better when in reality, Tony should be mad at him. But a noise above Tony's head drew his attention and distracted him.

Was that… A cat flap?

"Oh Bruce, you have to meet Goose!"

"You have a cat? That has cat flaps? In the vents?"

The vents reminded him so much of Clint it shocked him before he remembered that he was also gone. His first thought was what would Clint think about a cat being in his vents, followed up quickly with nothing, because he isn't here. Just, so much had changed, there were so many new Avengers to meet that it was nerve racking. He hoped it went better than the original way he'd met the Avengers. That was a low bar, but still.

"She's not mine, but she uses the vents to visit me from Carol's apartment. I eventually installed cat flaps for her so she'd stop whacking the grates open."

Tony scooped up the oddly named cat who immediately started purring and headbutting him.

"Huh. Okay."

"She's also an alien. A space cat."

He didn't really know if there was anything he could say about that. He really couldn't tell if Tony was joking.

Tony spent a while explaining all of the new people to him, he still wasn't sure if the space at comment was a joke or not. He was surprised to find out that a few of them were already friends with Tony and wondered just how much of his life he kept separate from the Avengers. That had obviously changed. There were a few people he was definitely interested in meeting, learning that in infamous surgeon, Dr Strange had become a sorcerer, oh sorry, The Sorcerer Supreme, that was definitely weird. By the time Tony was getting ready to show him to his rooms he felt like he'd
been through an information flood and was surprised how much time had vanished.

Gold suddenly flashed in Tony's right eye and he broke out into a huge grin.

"Well, if you don't want to be inundated with children, you might want to head to your room because they just got dropped off and are heading this way."

He considered running to his rooms, but decided not to. These kids were important to Tony and dodging them straight after coming back seemed unkind. Even if it was terrifying.

"I don't mind, I'd like to meet them if you don't mind. And do you just know everything that is happening around here?"

The smile on his friends face told him that he'd made the right decision.

"You can stay for dinner if you like? I have access to pretty much everything FRIDAY has, except things with privacy locks, and there is more space in here. I've been rendering Rhodey's latest braces design at the same time, and a few StarPhone and StarkPad upgrades.."

The idea of a person being capable of most of FRIDAY'S routines was a lot, he wondered just how much Extremis had changed his mind as Tony flicked his fingers towards Bruce's tablet and the braces came up, things changing as he ran them through different tests. The speed it was happening was frankly amazing and Tony didn't seem to be actively focusing on it, he got so lost in it he hadn't even noticed Tony had made his way to the kitchen and was pulling things out. He jumped up, shocked to see Tony cooking.

"So, you cook now?"

"Oh laugh it up. Me and Peter require an annoying amount of food, as does Carol when she visits. Plus, the kids are not allowed to live on takeout. With so many of us having increased metabolism, we have to be careful. Luckily I prepped this earlier, lasagne in the oven. Just sides and Peters insistence that I eat vegetables."

Tony rolled his eyes and Bruce joined in helping, he had missed cooking for more than one person. Cooking for yourself got boring pretty quick and food just became fuel whilst on the move. Cooking for other people.. It had a different feel to it, he hadn't noticed much before he moved in with the Avengers, but having big meals with several people had become important to him.

The door opened quite loudly, Tony just rolled his eyes so he guessed it was normal. 3 young girls skidded into the room and froze staring at Bruce. He was slightly confused as Tony had only mentioned 1 girl but he didn't seem concerned. 3 teenage boys were not far behind the tallest with floppy hair spotted him first and gave him a critical look. One looked slightly concerned, a little nervous and the other, which he'd guess by the gobsmacked response would potentially be Peter that Tony had mentioned.

"You're Dr Banner!"

That seemed to unstick everyone as 2 of the girls mobbed Tony, the 3rd was a little unsure and Tony squatted down to talk to her.

"You joining us for dinner today then Cassie? And yes Peter, that is Dr Banner. Brucie bear, meet the hyper hoard. Hoard, meet bruce."

The shy girl gave Tony a quick hug as the other girls detached, waved at him and ran towards the table. Tony rolled his eyes but was smiling.
"Tara sets up the table because everyone else does it wrong."

Out of the 3 teenagers, one was leveling quite an impressive glare at him, that was Harley if he remembered right from the pictures, Peter was just bouncing up and down. The slightly more nervous teen moved to Tony, leaning on him in what he assumed was a teenage boy version of a hug. Tony immediately wrapped an arm around him and the relief on the kids face was palpable. He was sure he recognised him, but the name wasn't coming to him.

"Uncle Tony, mom will be around later, can you help me with my calculus homework again?"

"Sure thing Coop, I'd love to help. Harley, be nice. Peter, you are going to end up on the ceiling if you don't calm down."

Coop? Cooper maybe? He mentioned Laura earlier, but he still found himself surprised that Barton's kids had such a level of familiarity with Tony and the younger girl he didn't even slightly recognise. Harley rolled his eyes and he couldn't help but see Tony in the kid, just a Tony with actual height. Harley and Tony bumped shoulders and quietly spoke as Peter practically vibrated over to him. Cooper stayed quite close to Tony glancing over at Bruce, as if trying to figure him out. He seemed to be nervous with new faces if he had to guess, but then they did live on a farm in the middle of nowhere last he'd checked.

"Hi Dr Banner, I've read all 7 of your dissertations."

"I, uh, hope they were interesting?"

Tony was smirking at him over Harleys shoulder and Bruce wasn't entirely sure what to do but thankfully Peter was able to carry the conversation with questions that he found easy to answer. After so long away, it was nice to be talking science. With someone as enthusiastic as this kid was, it was great. He hadn't even heard Laura come in, she was just suddenly there holding a young child practically in front of him. Tony immediately shot forward much to his shock and scooped up the kid who was patting his face.

"Ohh gimme! Hello Niblet."

"Ah, I see we have another for dinner today?"

Laura took up what Tony had been working on as Tony was talking to the kid. Now he'd known in theory that Tony liked kids. But seeing it was incredibly strange. Tony was full on smiling and cradling a tiny child. It was weird.

"Yup, Laura this is Bruce, I don't know why I just introduced you because I just remembered that you've already met. Bruce this is Nibbles, he's so cute it should be illegal."

"Tony, you go play with Nate, I'll finish up."

She rolled her eyes as Tony flashed her and Bruce a grin before heading in the direction the others had headed after setting up the table, the teens followed closely. Yeah, it was definitely a weird seeing so many children practically hanging off of his friend. The girls had sat on the floor around his legs, Cooper, who apparently was the owner of the books he'd seen earlier, which was impressive because he'd thought they belonged to a much older student, was quietly asking him questions, leaning against him. Harley was also leaning against him on the other side and occasionally shooting him looks over his shoulder. He had a feeling that Harley did not like him. Tony didn't even glance but with the arm not holding Nate, reached out and tugged Harley against
him, ruffling his hair. The teen complained vocally, but Bruce noticed that he didn't pull away. The whole thing was adorable.

"Were off for the whole weekend, Tony was going to come but a bunch of work got dumped on him. He's insisted we still go, but the kids will miss him. It's pretty normal for them to sit like that around him however, he's only recently noticed it."

Now that sounded like Tony.

"We have to make lots of pictures for him though! And bring back souvenirs! Make sure it's as if he's with us!"

Peter seemed like it was a mission which was cute, then the kid grinned at him, jumped. Stuck the ceiling and walked over to others. Bruce just blinked before remembering what Tony said about radioactive spiders. Which apparently lead to walking on the ceiling. Because reasons?

"Yeah. You get use to Pete after a while."

"I'm not sure that's possible."

He eyed the boy hanging from the ceiling, chatting to the others as if he was just stood in front of him and Tony caught his eye and grinned. As strange as it was, it oddly worked. Cooper, Clints kid had somehow found his way under Tony's arm too as the looked over the book, Harley and Peter were playing catch with a scrunched up ball of paper, which would have been normal, except Peter was still on the ceiling. Nate? The kid was curled up against Tony's chest, babbling happily, occasionally patting Tony's face, obviously fond of his left eye. The girls were clustered together at his feet. There were loads of free seats, they were just pulled to Tony like magnets.

"FRIDAY, take some pictures for me?"

"I have taken several Ms Morgan and will distribute them to everyone on the list."

Tony was always trying to make a home for people, adults might not have noticed how important that was, not until it was almost too late, like him. But kids, they were the kind to notice and it was clear, they gravitated towards him, it was obvious they saw safety in him. Plus, from what little he knew so far, he guessed that not many of them had had an easy life. The Barton's (Morgan's?) had their father being a wanted fugitive gods know where. (Although he had to admit, with Tony's uncanny ability to find him. He probably knew where the others were.) Before that they'd been quite isolated at that farm. Harley and Tara had found themselves parentless and Tony in a coma, and Peter only had an aunt mentioned, that spoke of loss somewhere. He didn't know the story of the other little one, but she was tentative when they arrived but was now curled around Tony's leg. Tony's need to give people a home, it obviously meant a lot to all of them.

Dinner was chaotic, but it was the best meal he'd had in a long time. Eating with people, Maggie and Jim turned up as well and he discovered that Cassie was their girl. No one mentioned why they were at the compound and he figured he'd ask Tony later, they were new to the compound which was why their door was slightly bare compared to the others. Cassie had quietly asked Tony to draw her butterflies around her name and watching Tony get all flustered and blushing was a definite highlight of the meal.

He'd been worried transitioning back into being near people would be hard, but he found it oddly easy with these people. The kids took most of the attention, Peter had discovered even more questions to ask him, Harley still glared however, but most importantly no one was scared of him. He found out that practically all of them were in advanced placement of some kind in different
areas. Even the younger ones, Lilah would apparently take anything to pieces and Tara preferred software engineering. They couldn't be older than 10 yet were very excited about these things!

By the time he eventually headed back to his room, the tablet Tony had given him was now apparently his and it had so much on it for him to look into. Including the Accords. He wanted to read and find out exactly what had happened whilst he was gone, read this document that finally ignited the chemical bomb the Avengers were and find out more about what Steve had done to Tony. He'd also included more information about Siberia and what had happened in his absence. He understood why Tony was doing it this way, as casual and flippant as he tried to be, Tony was still hurting.

The rooms were smaller than they had been, but were still very nice, a kitchenette attached to a living room and a few rooms off to the side which Tony had showed him were a bedroom, study and bathroom. Compared to his tent it was huge. All his stuff was in boxes, and looking around, he was surprised how much there was.

For years he'd lived out of the bag, never owning much as he wouldn't be able to take it with him. Without realising it he noticed, he must have seen the tower and here as home. He'd not amassed so much stuff since before the Hulk was born.

He settled in to sort out his things and read the Accords.

Carol POV

1st October

Rhodes has texted her over an hour ago now that he couldn't find Tony. He'd completely vanished. He'd thrown himself into work pretty much the second the kids went off for the trip on Thursday. He'd avoided speaking to people and had skipped out on dinners and breakfasts. He'd even ducked out from going to lunch with Shay yesterday. All in all, Carol had been increasingly concerned, but at the same time she'd had been watching, waiting for something like this to happen.

Tony had come out and told a lot of people lots of deeply painful things, he was still dodging any talk about Matt appealing his case about Ultron and generally avoided talking about it at all. Then Bruce had come back and he'd had to talk about everything again and from what Rhodes had told her, he hadn't brought up that Bruce skipping Town had dumped all of the anger, blame, and hatred born from that event squarely onto his shoulders. He'd pretty much flat out ignored Ultron. He'd given an extremely light recap of events too.

Rhodes had hoped Bruce coming back would be helpful for teaching Tony control with his abilities. Bruce had to have a certain degree of emotional control when it came to the Hulk and he knew that Tony had missed him. They had had a good talk the day after he'd arrived apparently, Bruce had given him meditation tapes and Carol thought they were okay. They'd even spent some time discussing his abilities without Tony pulling faces at the word 'ability'.

Then Tony practically vanished into his work. Rhodes said it was pretty normal and she might have been convinced to stay back.

But she'd had a feeling.

She'd had it since Tony had shown them everything and it had been steadily building up like pressure. Tony had always seemed to feel he wasn't allowed to feel bad, and as such, he shoved
everything down and got angry at himself over what he perceived as weakness in himself. She had no idea what had created such behaviour, she just knew the line her and Rhodey got out of him in college. 'Stark men are made of Iron.' She'd hoped in her time off planet, whilst he was with Rhodes, that he would have found some peace regarding that. Rhodes hadn't updated her on everything she'd missed, she thought that maybe he was waiting for Tony to do it.

As a teen he'd been far to good at hiding pain but lacked even the most basic socialising skills or knowledge of friend groups and got by on bravado mostly. She'd hoped in the time she'd been away that it had improved, that he'd been around good people, really it seemed like he'd just gotten better at hiding things and playing the part people expected of him. For a while it seemed he had lost himself to it. He'd confessed to her once that it was exhausting to mask that much, and sometimes he wondered if he wore it so much that he'd lose himself. That he wondered if he even knew basic facts about himself because he'd spent so long being 'on'.

Maybe because he was still this scrawny, awkward, gangly teen to her, it was easier for her to see through it. He was better in some ways, he was much happier now, but he was still stuffing things down as if he wasn't allowed to feel them.

There was no way someone like Tony could finally just open up and tell people something he'd been hiding so well, not when it was connected to such highly emotional and volatile events, not without something happening. Especially with this habit of bottling up. Of not giving himself a chance to feel. It will escape somewhere. Whether it was explosive or Tony pulling back into himself, she didn't know.

After Rhodes told her that he'd practically boiled himself in a shower hot enough to scald him in seconds through layers of towels, just to get warm again? Yeah, she'd been watching.

FRIDAY couldn't tell them where he was, she knew it wasn't because Tony had ordered her not to. After a few panic attacks, Rhodey had an override for that. His extremis abilities almost seemed to have acted for him in other events, like when he was cold or panicked, it kept raising the temperature. Now, it was concealing him.

Rhodey had used all the overrides and still FRIDAY didn't know where he was, and neither did CERBERUS. All they knew was that he hadn't left the compound. Rhodes and the AIs were scanning through the security now after confirming he hadn't left. Even if he had a disruptor on, Rhodes knew what to look for. Tony had gotten the disruptors to work very well, but what looked like a lense flare, small and barely noticeable, was left but if you knew what you were looking for, you could find the person using it.

She could move faster, especially outside, so she was combing the outside of the compound. She'd finished the woods and was now flying loops around to see if she could get a hint of where to go next or for Rhodes to message her.

There was a flash of blue out of the corner of her eye and she felt a pull to her left. Not questioning the gut instinct she immediately followed it and finally saw Tony sat on the edge of the tallest building in the compound. Feet dangling over the edge, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Looking out over the lake. He was wearing jeans that looked to be made of oil stains and mess, and a very loose looking long sleeved shirt.

His hand uncovered, but she knew that was because Peter had taken it back for tweaking. He also wasn't wearing glasses. Any other day, seeing him so uncaring about covering these things would make her happy, but today she doubted it was because he was accepting these things.

She wasn't sure if she was imagining it, but he looked thinner too, even after such a short amount of
time. She doubted he'd been eating enough for his increased metabolism. He practically had a
sharp, fractured aura around him, unsure why she was feeling like that, maybe she was just
projecting but she felt a connection to the man and wondered if it was the tesseract that had had a
hand in both their changes, shaking her head, that wasn't important right now, only that it had
maybe helped her find him, so she pushed on to speak to him.

She landed on the smaller roof in front of him, not wanting to come up and land on the ledge from
behind, even if a suit could catch him if he fell. Heck, with his augmentations he might even be
able to land safe, but now wasn't the time to test that. She then hopped the gap to land next to him.
Slowly sitting down next to him, slightly concerned that he had barely acknowledged her presence,
even when he went into the uplink he kept an eye on people around him usually, there was no flash
gold in his eye, so it didn't look like he was in the uplink. She fired of a text to Rhodes about where
he was, only to get a string of profanity back. His chair couldn't reach this roof apparently.

"Tony?"

He didn't reply but he straightened his back, staring at the woods instead, it was dark out and it was
chilly enough that people outside were thick wearing coats, so Tony sat in a thin looking shirt
would be strange normally, with his current aversion to anything slightly cold it was setting of
alarm bells in her head.

"Hey, Tony, why don't we go inside where it's warm, okay? It's freezing out here."

"You know the desert at night is freezing too. Especially when you're trapped in a cave network in
dirty, shredded clothes.. "

There was so little tone or inflection in how he spoke that it was just making her worry more. She
wanted to get him inside and cursed herself for not bringing a coat for the second time, but now she
was here, she didn't want to run off and get one.

"If you want to talk about what happened, let's do it inside, Rhodey can make hot chocolate."

"The days, they burned. Scorched the sand. The heat was dry, oppressive but so dry that it felt like
you hadn't drank in days.. Made your skin burn, redden and crack. Even in the caves it was
oppressive. But I was never alone. Not like Siberia. Yinsen.. He…"

"Come on Tony, your shivering, please come inside.."

He carried on talking as if she wasn't there or talking to him. She wasn't sure what to do, grabbing
him and dragging him inside was tempting but she knew would be bad. He was at least responding
to her presence as he didn't talk until she sat down. She had no idea who Yinsen was, but then she
really didn't know much about about Afghanistan.

"The shakes hurt you know, when you are freezing, especially with my injuries, but when they
stop… When they stop is when you really start to worry.

Well, I tried to worry, but the confusion was setting in and it was hard, I passed out a few times and
I'm pretty sure I was delirious, and I kept trying to remember why I was scared. Why would I be
scared that I had finally stopped shaking?"

She really wanted to text Rhodey and ask what she could do in this situation. They were friends,
but Rhodey had been here when she couldn't. He would know what to do.
"Because the shaking fucking hurt. But not shaking... Not shaking meant something. Meant something worse, but thinking got harder and I was thinking that it was great. That it stopped. It meant the metal wasn't slicing into me. It wasn't ripping apart skin that had frozen to the icy metal.

But part of me knew it was bad. The shaking stopping meant the body was so desperate to conserve what little energy it had left, that it gave up trying to save my limbs."

"Tony, please, come inside, you'll feel better if you warm up a bit, get some food?"

"The cold burned after a while. My hands felt on fire, my legs, even my face and Gods, my back...

He finally turned and faced her, his face unreadable but his eyes focused directly on her and she noticed that Tony gaze had a sort of weight to it. To having all of that intellect focused on you. She'd never noticed it before when he was smiling and chatting, but now it was like a force unto itself.

"Carol, Why am I always finding myself on fire or freezing?

I just traded in the sand and burning heat for ice and howling wind. The dessert froze at night, and I was burning from the ice in Siberia."

"I don't know sweetheart but you aren't there now, you're here, with you're friends and family."

He nodded before looking back out over the trees and Carol wished she knew more about his time in Afghanistan and afterwards so she could know what was best to do in this situation. She didn't want to do something to make him worse so she felt utterly useless, because whilst sitting out in the chilly October speaking in a slightly disjointed fashion was definitely not good. She knew that it could be much worse.

The least she could do was listen. Maybe getting it out would help?

"It's weird things like that that stuck out you know. Like back in Afghanistan."

She had a feeling she'd regret asking this question, but she did it anyway.

"What stood out from Afghanistan?"

"When they hold you under water, the pain isn't so much the water flooding your lungs, well that hurts but holding your breath hurts more. But you can't stop it. Fuck I even tried a few times, but you can't until you hit the edge. Even though I knew they'd bring me up, bring me back, I couldn't speed it up. Couldn't let that breath go. Even if you scream, it's like... Just enough gets held back a bit."

She's not sure what she can even say to that, she knew so little about Afghanistan, that he was asked to make weapons, apparently had open heart surgery which was the only bit of information he'd told her directly. But he'd been waterboarded too? She couldn't think about it much as Tony pulled one of his legs up, resting the side of his head on his knee, tilted slightly in her direction. Still talking in that detached, oddly clinical way.

"That stupid survival instinct.. It stops you from opening your mouth, from letting the water in until your head feels like it's actually exploding, like white explosions behind your eyelids, this pressure builds and builds in your head, 'till you can feel blood thudding in your brain and you have to wonder..."
"If you keep holding your breath, what damage is it doing? What are you losing with each second you can't stop it? Then it snaps and the water surges in and for a second there is no pain that your almost floating."

His snap of his fingers when he said snaps made her jump slightly, she starts to speak but he carries on.

"Then you're choking up rancid water into the bucket and you get a few breaths, if your lucky, and then it's down again. Rinse and repeat. Over and over.

"Like the shaking though, none of that was the worst part."

She can't help but blink at that. Her brain scrambling to predict what he's going to say next, wanting to text Rhodes for advice without being rude and wanted to wrap him up from the world. She'd already known he'd been through too much, but having him talk about being tortured for months with so little inflection concerned her.

"The worst part… the worst part was that the idiots seemed to fucking forget they'd strapped an car battery to power the fucking electromagnetic in my chest, that was keeping me alive.

"Occasionally water would hit the wires and.. Spark, burning my skin and I could feel it inside me. So I tried not to move, I tried so hard to be still whilst they held me under, so the water wouldn't splash, but apparently if people hold you underwater it's hard to be still.

"I should have died in Afghanistan, but I just kept on going."

"You got out though. Those people can't do that to you again."

He nodded before looking back over the forest again.

"In Siberia, no one was torturing me, I was just left. There was no one to beat. No one to trick. Just pain, haggered breaths, the taste of blood and ice, the creeping cold that took parts of me away bit by bit. And I was such a pathetic idiot because I was so sure Rogers would tell someone where I was."

"Tony, you won't be left again, you can't get rid of us that easily. Expecting a friend to tell people where you were doesn't make you pathetic. It makes him an atrocious human being."

He hummed non committedly and Carol shifted closer to him. She wanted to hug him but still didn't want to startle him so just brushed her shoulder against him and sat there. It took awhile but he eventually leaned against her.

"You know what the worst part is about this damned ability? I don't get to be mad. I don't get to be fucking angry. Just one look at Nat, T'Challa, Shay, Bruce.. and its gone because I can See. I know it sounds selfish, but sometimes I just want to be angry."

"You're still allowed to be angry, even if people had reasons Tony."

"But you can't See Natka. She didn't betray me because of any of the reasons I felt, Rogers.. He.. He was her anchor after Clint left. He was literally her moral compass. Even though she agreed with me she followed because that's what she does and she felt it would lead to less loss of life because it was Roger's. The others too, I can See why they did what they did, how they're hurting and all I feel is an overwhelming desire to Help that I can't turn it off."

Carol wasn't sure she could understand that, but then Tony did have a greater understanding about
things like this and she couldn't argue it. They way he'd forgiven them was amazing, she didn't think she could have forgiven them. Helped them. That fact he felt compelled to help didn't sit comfortably with her, he should be allowed to be angry. His emotions mattered just as much but again he was putting himself aside to help others. They'd have to work out a way to protect him from this.

"It doesn't mean you didn't get hurt though. It doesn't mean you're feelings don't matter just as much as theirs."

"That never really matters."

His shrug and bland tone at that definitely had her concerned.

"Of course it matters Tony. That matters a damned lot."

"What happens if I See Rogers and it wipes my anger? I don't want to let him close again, I can't trust him. I'm terrified I'll See him and be compelled to help and I'll be right back to where we were post Ultron. Living on the edge, hated, worse because I'll actually See how much, useful for my money, barely tolerated"

"Well if that happens look to Rhodey. He's still angry at everyone. Things will never be like that again Tony, the team, the kids, they adore you. We've missed you in just these last few days! "

He huffed and leaned against her a little more, she felt his temperature raising to combat the cold and took it as a good sign for now.

She fired of a text explaining what had happened and was shocked to find Rhodes relieved? That he hadn't blown things, or himself up, was apparently Rhodes base level and he told her that he'd explain what she was missing with Tony if he was OK with it. Whilst she was kind of intrigued, Tony's unemotional delivery of his trials deeply concerned her, she was definitely going to start looking for a therapist he could potentially trust as soon as they were inside.

It took about an hour before she managed to coax him inside, no one said anything about it but everyone came over for an absolutely huge dinner and stuck around long after for movies. Basically creating a puppy pile around Tony. She started looking through the therapists on staff and short listed a few.

Carol knew it wasn't a snap fix, but he'd eaten and eventually fallen asleep, with his legs on Rhodey and his head in her lap in the middle of a movie. Her fingers combing through his hair. Whilst not a fix, it was better than not eating and hiding away, clearly his enhanced metabolism had a nasty rebound affect. He'd eaten nearly double his normal portion and he still looked a little off. Extremis could burn a lot of his energy and body it seemed in a short period of time.

Rhodes looked finally relaxed, smiled at her and mouthed 'Thank You.'

She looked down at him, twitching slightly in his sleep, curled in, protecting his chest even now. He calmed when she started combing his hair again, Levi fluttered over and draped over Tony too. The look on Stephens face was thunderous but his eyes softened when they fell on Tony. The Sorcerer had requested any files from when Tony was admitted from Rhodes, he only had hard copies, Tony would have found digital ones and he'd given them up under threat of falling for an hour. The sorcerer had been incandescent with rage at first and in a snap it was gone, so similar to Tony, they could burn and burn with anger until it reached a certain point, until it iced over. He'd promised to stay his hand for now, but eventually he would have words and no one would stand in his way.
If she'd ever doubted how close Tony was with the man, seeing the look on his face now wiped it. They might not be related, Tony might be older, but Stephen saw Tony as a little brother. Today had been a reminder to how close he'd gotten to losing him.

Rhodey POV

2nd October

"He sent me a sodding letter!"

Tony practically shrieked as he all but flounced dramatically into the room where Rhodey was lying on the floor, face set in a grimace as he finished up his daily torture. Also known as 'Physical Therapy'.

He'd usually complain about the dramatic flouncing, especially when he was utterly knackered, but after the scare last night… Tony dramatically flouncing into rooms was an extreme improvement he was happy to see it.

Jules had just left, which was pretty good for Tony, because she'd been emailing him exercises designed for enhanced humans for a while now for Tony, he knew she wasn't the kind to spill information but he'd still kept the extent of Tony's augmentations quite limited. She already knew Tony had Extremis and had helped him deal with the excess energy problem he'd had in the beginning, there had been so many explosions before then that he'd been desperate. Now, he had just timed things so she saw Tony moving his equipment around to give her a better idea with Tony having to have yet another discussion.

Tony had already gotten slightly used to his enhanced strength and occasionally forgot about it. Because that was just Tony. Picking up extremely heavy pieces of equipment and carrying them around the lab for example. So Jules had been reworking her original plans for him to adapt for it. He took the advice, grumpily, usually. But Tony knew when to listen to others for things he was not an expert in and Jules had been with SHIELD for decades helping humans, supers and everything in between. After last night however, he didn't want Jules to dump that on him now. Give him some kind of a chance to bounce back first.

He'd known having the kids go without him was a bad idea. A catastrophically bad idea, so bad he was currently ignoring Pepper.

Tony, having not gotten a response from him flopped down on the chair in front of him and continued ranting at him. That's about when he actually processed what he'd said. 'Wait? Who sent a letter?'

"Just what is it with this supposed greatest generation and their weird attachment to sending me letters? On paper! In the post! The post is for buying things online. Not this antiquated form of correspondence."

Tony has a grimace on his face, holding the letter out in front of him with an expression Rhodes thinks would make more sense if he was holding a dirty diaper rather than a letter. Considering Tony occasionally dealt with Nate with more grace than holding that letter, it was highly amusing.

"Of course it is, it has no other use at all- wait. Greatest generation? What? Rogers send you another 'non apology'?"
Rhodey added a sneer to the end, remembering that letter, a poor attempt to poke Tony's buttons and have him lay down from them to trample over, again. At least that's how he'd read it. 'Sucks for them!' he can't help but think, as far as he'd known, Tony had read it once and tossed it and the phone in a draw somewhere. Maybe even in the trash. Hopefully forgotten, he'd never mentioned it again anyway. He hated to think what would have happened if he'd read it before spending a solid 2 weeks with Harley and Tara. They really helped Tony start to see things differently. So it had been harder for Rogers to sink his hooks in.

Thanks to that bastard Tony had to live with the consequences of his lies. He hated what had happened to his brother in Siberia and how utterly helpless he was to do anything about it. He'd woken up and Tony had been missing, no one knew where or even how long he'd been gone as FRIDAY'S data had been purged. All they knew was half off a distress call, location Siberia with no time or date. Vision had combed Siberia, day and night searching for him. It hadn't been until day 6 after they got him back until FRIDAY could even show him the fight from the suit camera. So they had no idea who had even done this, although they had assumptions. The shield, the arm, the damage of the suit...

How he will forever have the image of his brother, seared into his mind, from when the suit was removed. Sometimes he still sees it when he closes his eyes.

Last night had vividly reminded him that those hours in the cold, alone, just like those months in that cave, had wrought fundamental changes in Tony. Carved into his skin, settled in his mind. Carol had told him some of what Tony had said on the roof, she'd been pale and utterly furious at the same time and he'd ended up telling her more about Afghanistan, about Stane, about the palladium poisoning, about Shield. He hadn't even gotten to New York yet. All with Tony's blessing, he didn't feel up to having the conversation of the top 10 worst moments in his life.

Tony had basically a bomb dropped on his life, again, by Rogers. Yet another person he trusted betraying him. Being forced to adapt to everything changing again, let alone adapting to Extremis, was not something he'd be over with a shitty apology letter. Although being surrounded by people who give instead of just taking was finally starting to get through to him.

He doubted even he'd seen all the changes in Tony yet. It took him a while to adapt to Tony post Afghanistan, he'd been quicker of the mark this time around however. Less expecting him to revert to form. More able to be present. Less angry. Looking back at how he'd reacted he was angry at himself. He'd been such an idiot to think he'd taken the suit without Tony's blessing. Sure, it was just a coincidence that it was made for his height and build, that the HUD was tailored for him, that the power source was in the armour. That the security was down. The whole thing had been a set up, he doubted he'd even been drunk, but he had been under the influence of severe heavy metal poisoning. He liked to think he'd grown since then, become a better friend, a better brother, both of them had. There were to many memories of him failing Tony to not be careful now, he still had nightmares of Thor's hands around his breakable human neck as he'd just fucking stood there.

"Oh no, nothing from him since that insult of a phone."

Tony jars Rhodey from his thoughts, confusing him slightly.. Tilting his head..

"So who else is sending you… Wait. Tell me you are not getting fan mail from freaking Bucky Barnes?!"

"No, no -"

"Praise be the God's -"
"He apparently hates being called Bucky, and he sent a thank you slash apology, not fan mail."

As if that clears things up?!

"Wait. I'm so lost in this conversation. What is 'Barnes' thanking you for? The last interaction you two had he tried to tear out your arc reactor and you blasted his arm off! I know his brain is mulch, but those actions are not the kind to produce thank you letters."

"Ah, urm, no, it was for helping with the trigger words and his memories."

Tony says this blandly, as if this was a normal Sunday occurrence.

Rhodey just blankly stares at Tony for a solid minute where Tony apparently suddenly realises what he's done and his face shifts several times before landing in 'Oh crap'.

Rhodey just glares and raises an eyebrow.

"Um.. Oops?"

Tony makes to flee and gets all of 3 steps before Rhodey yells at him.

"Tony, you get your ass back in here for me to yell at you! Or you damned well better help me into the chair to chase you!"

Tony backtracks slowly and tried to look as innocent as possible. He knows that Tony will see option 1 is best. Option 2 would end up in Rhodey accidentally running over his feet. Several times. Rhodey was still sat on the floor so he moved himself to be leaning against the armchair, eyebrow raised in accusation. Hands folded calmly in his lap as Tony looks like a contrite school kid who realised he just fucked up.

"Well, before you yell. I felt bad for blowing the guys arm off! And I thought, hey, I bet BARF could be used to nix those Murder words in his brain! So-"

Rhodey mouthed 'Murder words' whilst looking utterly unimpressed, still keeping an eyebrow raised to show Tony that he is not amused like the queen of The sodding United Kingdom.

"Um, so, I got BARF, sent it over, and it's helping! We're still working on it though, his brain is really complicated."

Still working on it?! With who?? Sent where?!!

"But now I'm getting snail mail. Am I being punished for doing a good deed? I don't think this is how it's meant to be."

He considers grabbing the nearest cushion to scream into before deciding to lob it at Tony's head instead.

"Tony. Tony... Tones, my brother, Tell me, please tell me, that you do not know where the international fugitives and the ghost assassin, who just so happened to have killed your parents, are hiding out? You know, the ones we are meant to arrest on sight?"

"Okay. I don't know where they are?"

Rhodey immediately starts lobbing pillows at him and scowls as Tony mutters about his inability to keep secret plans, secret. Tony eventually dives behind one of the sofas to dodge the projectiles.
"Hey, hey Rhodey, did you see the decals that Harley made for my arm… Look, they're silver and look like circuits. I kind of have a tattoo! He did it because Peter had to take the prototype back! So until he gives it back I can't talk properly in public, but look at his additions!"

He had noticed last night that his hand looked different but hadn't had a chance to ask about it and his long sleeves had obscured it. Peter was seeing Dr Cho in person on the last day of their road trip so he'd taken the prototype with him. Tony also brought up Peters latest schematic on the TV whilst holding his arm out for Rhodey to see as distraction techniques.

Harley had even continued the circuit like design onto his skin from what he could see. With a black sharpie. At least that's what it looked like, so the design continued up to his elbow from the middle of his forearm, covering some of the scars that he knew Tony hated looking at. It would be a nightmare to get off that was for sure, but it was the kids so knowing Tony he wouldn't try that hard. That Tony did all this whilst hiding behind the sofa was quite a feat. He was impressed with him actually, for not falling over and face planting the floor.

Rhodey squinted at the arm thrust in his direction to get a better look, then to the TV and back a few times, admitting, only in his head, that the matte black arm did look much better with the oddly tasteful silver designs the kid had put on it.

That Tony was wearing a t-shirt again was amazing in itself and he decided this conversation makes so little sense that he only just realised something. Tony had been hiding the metal hand less, but the joint where metal became skin? He hadn't seen Tony expose that willingly or intentionally since he had the hand installed. Even around the house.

Opening his mouth and closing it 3 times before coming out with a question, in a tone of utter exasperation, that even threw Tony for a few seconds.

"What does your cybernetic hand have to talking in public?!

“Do you have any idea how hard it is to talk with my hand in my pocket!?"

“Wait. What?"

Tony bounces up, with more exuberance than a man his age ought not to have, and paced back and forth, gesticulating with his flesh hand, much more than he usually does, his other now shoved in his pocket. To prove his point. Also likely that he was tentatively testing to see if he could leave the cover of the sofa without having to dodge more Rhody fired projectiles. Only to get a cushion to the face, Rhodey was not going to let that opening go. Tony shook his head and returned to his pacing.

"Look! I'm lopsided. I'm going to start going in circles or something!"

Which, of course, he started doing, and grinned at the losing battle Rhodey was entrenched in, desperately trying to not laugh and maybe aiming to get Tony back on topic.

In Rhodey's defence, watching Tones grinning like a loon, leaning to one side and going in circles was something that made his heart clench, but it was a nice ache. He hadn't seen his friend smile this much in years, and it was real . Even after yesterday, he was still able to be this. In the past, before he stopped drinking, he'd have drank enough to make his liver scream and vanish, black out the lab for several days. Barely eat. Barely function. Go back further and it would have been a lot of drugs and several parties. Anything to either not feel, or feel. It was the kind of improvement he hadn't honestly thought to hope for.
His skin had lost that sallow look, there were no bags under his eyes, he was moving freely, with no pain. He was as energetic as the scrawny pain in the ass, the utter failure at basic human tasks, 14 year old he had discovered he was roommates with in college. Sure, there were differences, but that smile. It was almost worth forgetting this whole Barnes debacle.

Almost.

"Give me the damned letter and you will tell me everything."

Tony huffed, sulking slightly before plonking himself down on the floor next to him and fishing a folded letter out of his pocket and handed it to him.

"Wakanda."

"What now?"

"That's where they are. Have been the whole time."

"... That's why you were mad at T'Challa? And the whole time? You've known since you woke up haven't you? Of course you have."

"Pretty much, but we're good now. They're driving him up the wall. You can't tell anyone, the Wakandans don't deserve it until I work something out, select people on the council know. He's keeping them contained, they know if they leave he won't let them back, so it's best they stay there for now."

Tony had obviously put a lot of thought into this, and whilst he understood his line of thinking, he was still mad.

"And I worked it out when I'd been awake for 40 minutes. Only took that long because I was distracted by having the Internet in my brain."

Yeah, he was definitely still mad.

He wanted to throw the ungrateful wretches in jail...

And that right there is probably why Tony hadn't told him.

He rolled his eyes, mostly at himself for not realising that Tony would obviously know where they are. He always managed to find Bruce in a scarily short time, and that was before he was carrying his tech and Bruce knew how to disappear. He doubted any of The Avengers ditched their gear. Or even thought to. Without Natasha they were pretty useless at that, Clint had had different skill sets, Natasha had been the one that knew how to vanish.

He shook his head and focused on the letter. It was written nicely he had to admit.

The brainwashed assassin had good penmanship. Who knew?

Dr Stark

Shuri said she would get this letter to you for me, I recently discovered you are behind the treatment I have been receiving to remove the words and help with my memories and I wanted to send you a thank you. I've seen some of the algorithms(The notes were amusing!) and you've done a lot of work to help me, although I'm not sure why. I am
however extremely thankful, it's helped with some of the nightmares already which
was something I hadn't known to hope for.

I know an apology won't fix much, for what I did, for your parents, for how you found
out.. or what happened after. But I am sorry for the parts that I played, for fighting in
Germany without even knowing why, I'm sorry for fighting in Siberia. I should have
done more. I'm sorry I believed Steve, it seems he lied that you were fine and
temporarily disabled. I know this won't change anything, and it's selfish of me, but I
wanted to say I'm sorry.

Me and Wings, Sam, have been doing some research -in a completely not stalkerish
way- and he's been watching all the VA programs. I think he feels bad for how
everything happened too. TicTac got in over his head, I think he's starting to realise
that.

I don't know if it helps any, but T'Challa is keeping Clint and Wanda pretty contained
after Clint saw videos of Laura. So hopefully you and her don't have to worry about
that.

So, Thank You.

Sincerely,

James Buchanan Barnes (Not Bucky)

"Huh, well it is better than the one Rogers sent."

He flipped it over and saw a small but quite impressively detailed picture of a firebird, possibly a
phoenix but the single word underneath it was in Cyrillic.

Феникс.

(Feniks<Phoenix>)

The handwriting was different to the rest of Barnes letter as well. That was weird, and Cyrillic? He
had no idea what it said. Before he could comment on it Tony took the letter back, apparently he
hadn't noticed the little bird before and looked at it with more intensity that he thought was
required. But then usually only kids sent Tony pictures and if Tony had a weakness it was someone
putting effort into creating a thing for him.

"Huh."

Tony hummed before folding the letter and slipping it back into his pocket. For someone so angry
about receiving a letter, he folded it awfully careful and kept it on his person. That was.. Interesting
. He narrowed his eyes at the letter through his pocket.

At the same time however, he could tell that Tony had absolutely no idea what to do about it. He
was blinking and looking slightly baffled, his hand tapping the pocket the letter was tucked safely
away in.

He had gotten quite a few thank you letters since they started up the new accessibility programs
but this was different . It was a lot more personal for one.
"He's actually apologising. Really apologising. He put real effort into this. Why is he the one actually apologising to me when he doesn't even know me..? Yet St-Rogers.. He.."

Tony trailed off, looking confused and unsure, so he pulled him in for a hug. Tony put up no resistance and curled up against him.

"I know Tones. I don't get it either."

**Tony POV**

After he finished talking to Rhodey, he still had no idea what to do about the letter. The other one had been awful, so it was easy to chuck it in a drawer and never look back. He had reread it a few times in those early days.. But he hadn't thought about it for ages now.

He wondered if he was angry at Barnes for putting effort in or Rogers for not?

And what was with the little drawing of the phoenix? And the Cyrillic? The rest of the letter was in English with a dramatically different handwriting that he couldn't fob off as it being a different language. Maybe it was someone else who added it? But who? Or maybe Barnes had different handwriting when he switched languages. Had he meant to send him the drawing? Why was he apparently so obsessed with it?

Or maybe he was just confused by everything. Either way the letter was uncomfortable and it hadn't gotten better on subsequent readings. It also struck him that Barnes noted a potential problem, and took the time to tell him he should be OK?

Why?

Yeah, sure he sent the glasses but that wasn't really much and how the damned hell had he even found out that the glasses were his? The last time he'd spoken to Shuri about the increased information she hadn't mentioned this.

This also wasn't the reaction he had expected when it came to Barnes finding out about the glasses. L

Maybe he could ask the annoying Therapist that Carol had gotten for him, maybe she could understand Barnes brain. He definitely didn't. (He'd agreed to give them a try, with his ability he should be able to tell if they'll sell the information.) Maybe they'd have a clue why Barnes was sending him thanks that he had no idea how to react to, apologies that confused him and was being nice when the man should hate him? And tiny pictures. He was really caught up on that.

He'd expected screaming. World ending, apocalypse style anger landing on T'Challa and Shuri from the rogues. They hadn't mentioned anything of it the ordinary. Which either meant they weren't telling him something, or, the utterly implausible option, Barnes hadn't run and told his buddy.

Entering his lab he hopped straight onto his stool and rolled over to give Shuri a call. He slid on the pair of sunglasses that he'd started hanging next to the screen he commonly used for calls, to ensure that he never forgot to wear them.

FRIDAY popped up after he started calling.

"Boss, I thought you should know that certain senators are using the Widows par-"
"I'll get to that later Fry"

He shot one of the cameras a smile and a brush of code in apology when Shuri popped up, looking slightly haggard which cemented it in his head.

"Shuri, guess what I received today?"

"What?"

She really didn't look amused, so something had been exhausting her and he had an idea it was a 'who'. He waved the letter at her, she just rolled her eyes at him.

"Um, he found it out himself, a pink sticker is not exactly much of a barrier, he was really ridiculous about it and he really wanted to thank you."

Dammit. He was sure he'd put a black sticker on it, he didn't even know he had pink stickers. Stupid sunglasses, everything looked dark when he was wearing them.

"Mmmhmm how much of a problem is Roger's being about it?"

Confusion flashed across her face, her head tilting. Which just confused him more.

"Huh? Tony, I've been awake for 2 days working on these stupid shoes again because my idiot brother walks like an elephant! So I am slow. I have no idea what you are talking about."

"Barnes, I'm guessing he told Rogers about my input? I'm surprised he's still going with it."

"What? No, he hasn't told anyone about it. He loves the glasses, he's also given you permission for access to level 4 data."

What?!

Whilst that would be immensely handy.

What?!

"This conversation is not making me less confused about this letter."

"It's quite simple really. You're both idiots and I'm going to bed."

The call cut and Tony couldn't help but laugh, even if he was still confused. Dammit he hadn't been able to question the little bird that was really stuck in his mind. He slipped the letter into the drawer at his station in the workshop and decided to stress over it later. Then he stepped back and slipped it into his pocket instead.

He snagged one of Peter's Web shooters and decided to tinker with it instead and stop thinking of confusing letters and what he was going to do with it, keeping an eye in his mind on the huge data packets now transferring from Shuri. The pieces for Rhodey's bracers were being fabricated and he could work on them later, work was good, work was less confusing. He was making both designs for him, the outside set and the subdermal implants. The latter set would take longer and likely more PT for Rhodey, but he wanted the man to have options.

He felt the door to the workshop open, even though it was silent and at the far end of the workshop, behind him too, but out of everywhere in the compound, the workshop was one of the most connected places to his abilities baring the apartment. His mind flicked to the cameras in and around the workshop. Showing that Natka was looking for him, and coming in behind him.
Distraction. Perfect. Usually she did that trying to be sneaky, to get the drop on him, he'd been having fun confusing her lately by always knowing where she was. Before Siberia she'd always snuck up on him, scaring the crap out of him and giving him a minor heart attack. He'd always seen it as kind of malicious before, now he could see it as her way of training him in the only way she knew how. Because she was worried that his lack of training would get him killed someday.

Considering her upbringing, it was kind of cute, in a murderous assassin way.

This time he didn't even bother turning around.

"Hi Natka."

He smiled to himself as he saw her freeze on camera. He'd been doing things like that to see if she'd notice since she got back, but so far she'd been a bit distracted. Having a singular location and deciding to stay was having quite a profound effect on her and she was swinging from happy to alarmed quite often. He put the web shooter down and spun to face her, happy he'd left the sunglasses on, slipping his left hand under his top.

"You have gotten very good at that."

"Practice and all that, now, what can I do you for?"

She leaned against a desk near him and he took a second to assess her colours. Out of all the adults around him undergoing changing, hers was possibly the most distinct. Or maybe just small changes showed up more because of how her colours were. Her colours were pale. He read it as almost.. sickly. With misuse and plain non-use, they were fading. He'd never seen colours so pale in anyone else. There was some that had faded to a pale grey that even had breaks in it, with frayed edges like it had been worn away. It practically shrieked at him that something was wrong, when he'd first seen it he'd wanted away, but another part and slammed into him, hard, to help.

Maybe he'd just been so tired of failing people in that moment, so tired of everything running away from him, slipping through his fingers like sand. That he wanted to grab hold of one thing. That he wanted to truly help at least one person. The need to help drowned out the bone deep aversion. But he was also so tired. He didn't turn and flee like the first instinct demanded, but he didn't move forward either, he'd sort of hovered there, looking deeper without intending to.

The only reason she hadn't overwhelmed him at the hospital, like meeting new people generally did back then, was that there was so little colour to overwhelm him with.

Then this shakey stripe of red whipped in and out that spoke of courage. Lightning fast, blink and you could miss it. It was pale at the edges but the middle was so vibrant, especially compared to the rest, that he'd decided to listen.

He'd gone deeper into her colours, discovered that she wanted the one thing she'd practically assured she'd never get.

She knew that but still she craved it.

Even as she'd carried on repeating the same patterns that basically ensured her failure to acquire it in a self destructive pattern.

Even though she craved it. She was terrified of getting it and failing.

So he'd taken the leap, he knew that Rhodey wouldn't be happy after Germany, but he could see her worldview had been tipped upside down, her moral compass had proved himself just like everyone
else and she was left untethered.

Seeing that she had more tentative colours in amongst the pale told him he'd made the right call to trust her.

"Tony.. I've been meaning to ask you this for a while. Why did you bring me in? You could of had me sent to the raft, or just not let me back here..."

He scratched his beard, thinking how to go with this. Instead he did the annoying thing. The 'answer a question with a question' thing.

"Did choosing to stay make that much of a difference? You'd been here for years already"

He already knows, he can See it clear as day and has watched it slowly change her colours. But he wants to hear it from her. Plus there is that itch in his mind that he gets sometimes when he reads people's colours.

"It does, I took every mission that required travel back then, I was always half packed and ready to leave.."

"One foot out the door?"

"Yes."

"Did that make the things you did easier?"

Her face stays the same but her colours don't, that practically flinch and he feels bad for asking, but it's getting to a point.

"It's the only way I could, the only way my life had been."

"Like Germany."

She nods grimacing slightly.

"That wasn't it though was it? Not completely."

Her head tilts looking slightly confused and the same confusion fluctuated around her that he wondered if she'd even realised.

"You followed him because he was the pinnacle, the best thing the serum ever created, am I right?"

She still looks confused but her colours panic a little but he has to do this so she doesn't switch to him, or someone else.

"Natka, just because your serum is different, doesn't mean it's wrong, it doesn't mean that you are wrong..."

"How did yo-"

"It doesn't mean you're corrupted, or lesser, or even untrustworthy. You aren't broken and he is not perfect. You made him your guide, your moral compass for all the wrong reasons, it... it blinded you to facts about him.. To his deterioration after DC, it wasn't just you, I didn't realise it 'till I had all the time in Siberia to just think."
Her colours are practically all over the place so he walks over to her and squeezes her shoulder with his right hand and watches them settle slightly.

"I can't be either. You tethered yourself to the Red Room, to Clint, then Rogers but now you can stand alone. But I'll be here to help you.

"Tell me. What's it like, not having that bag packed, that door open?"

"Terrifying."

She gives him a weak smile and he pulls her in for a hug because he did just dump a lot on her. He knew he needed to have this conversation however the last few times he'd checked on her colours more in depth and realised she was looking to him in her decisions. Whilst he didn't mind *advising* or potentially making field decisions, he was happy to help her but he wasn't going to become her moral compass like Roger's had let himself become. True, he was cheating and getting to See, but it had been pretty obvious Nat had flipped to Rogers when Clint retired.

She was giving him a strange look, which was the usual one he got after he came out with something kind of weird

"Anyway. That's why I helped you. You want to change, I can See it."

"But *how*?"

He scratched his beard before figuring she'd have to find out at some point and that he'd know by know if she was just here for the others, so he slipped off his sunglasses using his left hand, the hand immediately caught her eye, confusion flashed around her again, with a bit of alarm when she saw his eye. He was happy to see if was alarm and concern *for* him rather than *of* him.

"This is why you've been wearing sunglasses since I saw you at the hospital."

He nodded. Nat was the only other person who knew how long he'd lain in that bunker.

"I did find it strange that you were up and about so fast, even with your track record, Extremis?"

"Yup, it went a bit strange with my eye though, so when I say I See that you wanted change Natka, I mean I can actually see it around you."

He'd expected someone like Nat who uses masks as much, sometimes more, than him, would hate the idea of that.

For some reason though, she looked *relieved*.

Even her colours fluttered with it.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone was after a visual representation of the armour, this is what I based it on and too much reading about different armours. So, Bleeding Edge. I figured with all of Tony's free time hiding out and increased brain space, he sped up his timelines for the suit. Plus, I like this one! I found this image ages ago but could only track it back to the tag on it.
**Toxic Remnants**

Chapter Summary

Tony gets too show off some tech.  
Then he gets to do the dad thing of mortifying your kid.  
Therapy for the Enhanced has its unique set of problems and Stephy has reasons to be pissed.

Chapter Notes

I distinctly got bitten by the writing bug, finished up the chapter I'd been working on and went to start the next, was finally able to used these two scenes id written ages ago, so boom I was 5k into a new chapter 😊. I love it when that happens.

Tony POV

2nd October

Tony was in the workshop, tinkering with the final print of the exterior set of Rhodey's braces. He'd put them together and taken them a part several times now, but he wasn't happy with certain aspects when he'd run them through tests. He'd made a few changes and several parts were being refabricated to his new specifications.

He was automatically monitoring all the cameras around the workshop today as his anxiety had spiked after lunch for some unknown reason, he was finding it hard to fall into his hyperfixation too. But there was so much extra space in his mind that it didn't take up much processing space to just have them running constantly, he had been tapped into the cameras for a good hour before he consciously realised it. If anything, looking through cameras had started to become as natural as breathing to him now. It was just like an extra sense that was starting to run automatically now when he was in the workshop.

Which was how he saw Bruce and Peter making their way to him. Chatting animatedly. Well, Peter was practically vibrating but Bruce was keeping up nicely, he'd had plenty of practice dealing with him during insomnia driven engineering binges after all. They were good for each other, Peter to relax and Bruce to have more enthusiasm in his science.

There weren't many people Tony knew who had kept up with his level of parallel thinking, and Bruce and Peter were the closest, pre-extremis. Bruce's thought patterns were much more ordered, Peter fell more to his end of the spectrum. Meaning he could have 3 thought processes running concurrently and not even realise one of them was there until he looked at what he had been writing. Where you rein the middle of one thing, then you had to jump to write an idea down out of nowhere incase you lost it.
It had been something the kid had hidden from everyone but Tony recognised the signs. The kid had been 7 shades of relieved that there were other people that thought like that. Meeting Bruce had added to it, and Bruce had had plenty of practice dealing with him, so he could keep up with Peter at full speed too. To Peter, this was a huge deal and he was happy his science bro could give him that extra oomph, that it was normal in a way, rather than another othering experience that separated him from his peers.

Tony's mind was now a weird combination of scatter and organised. Extremis giving him greater control but all that extra space, so he still started designing things without even realising it. Sometimes it was good, other times it was absolutely ridiculous. Sometimes Extremis got involved and things got crazy.

Bruce was also utterly at ease with Peter, even after such a short period of time. But then Peter had that effect on people, he wouldn't care about the Hulk and that was the best way to win Bruce around. At least Peter wasn't poking him with pencils. That was an improvement on what he had done. Add in a peppering of enthusiasm for science, of which Peter's brand was closer to Bruce than Tony's, *they both liked squishy things*, and he was happy to have them together. They would do brilliant, terrifying things, if he was involved there would probably be some explosions too. Maybe even some intentional ones.

Harley still was yet to come round on the Bruce subject. He hadn't known it was possible to passively aggressively buy candy from a trip for practically *everyone* in the compound so that it was obvious that he hadn't bought any for Bruce, but Harley was a determined stubborn git when he wanted to be. He'd expected as much however, he'd kept things light but he had never lied to Harley, even when he'd wanted updates and after Ultron. Harley had been very angry at Bruce for running. It didn't matter how many times he explained why he did it, the kid was *stubborn*. Thinking of the kid, his mind flicked through the base until he located every one of his hoard, he liked to know where they were and that they were safe. Harley and Cooper were working on his potato gun… he might have to warn Bruce about that…

Bruce had worked out the problem pretty early on and had told him not to say anything. That he would win him over in time. That he would prove he wouldn't leave again.

Tony was.. *Unsure*. There was a fundamental truth with Bruce, that, although it hurt, was that Bruce ran. But that he was *willing* to put the work in with his kid, it did mean a lot to him.

But, when things got bad, he ran. He loved the man like a brother, and already with his advice, Tony was having better luck with control, finally speeding up the learning curve, (he hadn't blown *anything* up today), but at the same time he sort of felt like he was waiting. He was nervous to let himself get complacent, even though he could See that Bruce wanted to stay. That he truly regretted running. That he wanted a family, he wanted to be around people again. That Hulk didn't want to be lonely anymore. He could See it all and it had robbed him of what little anger he'd clung to, but it was still hard when experience had taught him *caution*.

All in, Tony didn't care if *he* got hurt from Bruce running again, that wasn't why it was hard. He cared about the kids. Peter was so excited to have him around, it would break his heart if Bruce up and vanished.

Sure, Tony wasn't *expecting* things to go bad anytime soon but he also hadn't *expected* Ultron to go the way it had.

That vision that Witch forced into his mind had *ruined* him. And, like it always did with him, the ruin hadn't stopped in his mind like it did with the others. It hadn't stayed with him. It had poured out and spread like rot. It had killed *so many* people. He tried to forget the number, but it was
always there at a single thought, the names would run through his mind, the ones that had accepted his help, the ones that preferred to face financial ruin, just to refuse him. That JARVIS had been one of the names was like the knife slipping deeper through his ribs as his family turned on him. Then accepted her.

That he'd never felt JARVIS code in his mind was a physical blow that was easier to handle on some days. On some, it was like burning up inside and being doused with ice water. FRIDAY and CERBERUS managed to pull him back when that happened, reminding him of the JARVIS seed that lay at their cores.

The Witch had sliced straight to the heart of him, hit him at his weakest, exposed him and left him to the cool looks, jibes, mistrust and simmering anger of his family with sly, knowing smiles.

Since speaking to Carol about her, he'd been going over the compound security after she had arrived and was now relatively sure that the uptick in the violent nature, duration and amount of his nightmares had her hand in it, he wasn't sure why he hadn't seen it before. It was like now he was looking it was like the fog clearing.

He compared her energy signature she left to what was around now and on JARVIS' files. FRIDAY has been so young she hadn't seen it, to her, it had pretty much always been that way. Now, looking back. Tony could see her energy pooling in their bedrooms. His was affected severely, Bruce's came a fast second. But the others were also affected, but he wasn't stupid enough to hold that everything they'd said had been because of her. Mainly because Vision and Rhodey's rooms had the exact same readings as Rogers, Barton, Wilson and Natka.

He didn't know if there was still something left by her either, he still had nightmares occasionally tinged with red, but much less lately. Like an infection stubbornly holding on. He'd been meaning to ask Strange if he'd have a look if he'd have a look but he'd successfully put it off. (He'd meant to send him the files he'd put together too. He was still dodging Matt and Carol too, everytime he decided to call he had a panic attack and put if off...) The nightmares had been decreasing since Siberia anyway. It sort of felt like it wasn't... compatible with his mind now, or he was reading too much into it.

That Rogers even made her part of the team straight after had never sat right with him. No questions asked. No apologies given. To him at least, she showed no sign of repentance for her actions, yet Roger's harped on about it.

His opinion was crap of course, being the creator of all the death and other dramatic titles she harped on about. The Merchant of Death, that name being thrown in his face after so many years, in his own damned home, it hit hard. When his headaches went from a few times a week to every day and night. When his chronic pain got worse and worse that he was so close to reaching for pain meds. When his already pretty awful nightmares had rocketed up, poisoned with red, he would be barely asleep 15 minutes and he'd wake up screaming. But Rogers had said it couldn't be Wanda, no matter what. Even when he got better sleep in the freezing server room than his bed, despite his dislike of the cold. Now he knew it was proximity to the arc reactor that powered the building. He'd amped that up now, now each and every room had power lines from the arc reactor running through the walls.

It had seemed utterly unnecessary to some. An absolute pain to devise and even worse to put into place for the parts he wasn't rebuilding, but he was compelled like a man possessed to do it after Siberia. If she came back, he could be safe in the building. The people he loved were safe. Her powers would at least be bound to the room she was in.

He shook his head as the pair entered, scolding himself for being pointlessly maudlin.
He really did hope Bruce would stay however. He was a relaxing, comforting presence, especially so when Extremis went haywire, even when a coffee pot exploded next to him, he didn't get nervous, the man didn't even jump like he did. He just casually put the fire out as if it was normal. He wondered then, was that how Bruce had felt, when he was poking him and making friends with the Hulk? Because it really did help a surprising amount.

He also wanted to talk about all the things he'd put off before he ran to. Tony wasn't so sure about that. As far as he was concerned he'd hit his emotional quota for the week. Month even. Maybe the year. Although he was still meeting the first of the two therapists later. One was enhanced, the other was human, but he'd looked her up and he wondered if that was exactly true. The enhanced lady was first and he wasn't sure about it, she had good ratings but then she was an empath that could project good feelings. In other words, to him at least, that meant she could manipulate emotions. It was maybe a little too close to Wanda for his liking…

Carol had begged him to try however, pointing out that he would want her or Rhodey to see a therapist if things were reversed. He had quipped that if she got Strange to see a therapist he'd go 3 times a week. The determined look on her face made him feel slightly bad for Stephanie.

"How are my favourite science guys?"

They came to stop in front of him, he was sitting on the floor with parts all around him with tools interspersed amongst them. It was chaos but to him it made sense, lately Peter had been with him in the workshop so often he saw the kid mentally putting the things together and it made him proud at the ease he was doing it. Peter liked some mechanical projects but he tended to prefer biological themed projects with a lot of chemistry (and explosions) thrown in. Harley loved building, at least 3 of the cars at the end of the workshop belonged to the teen. The 1964 FLH Panhead Harley Davidson he'd found on ebay in a deplorable condition should be arriving soon, he wanted to give the kid some variety. The worse condition it arrived in, the more fun Harley had. Peter bounced and then flopped down next to him running his hands over parts of the braces. Peter was vibrating with excitement as he spoke.

"Great, we were watching TV and T'Challa popped up doing an interview about his hopes of integration with American companies!"

"Huh, Bagheera didn't mention anything, it go well?"

"If by well you mean he talked about how different Tony Stark was than how he suspected. How much you cared about the world and people. How much Wakanda is impressed by this Tony Stark and how if only other businessmen were like him, things would be so much easier. How Tony Stark was protecting people from his hospital bed…"

Bruce was smirking as he sat himself down on one of the stools with wheels and rolled himself over. Tony was utterly baffled. He opened his mouth and closed it a few times before just gaping. Any single part of that was excessive but put it all together and he kind of wanted to melt into the concrete, what on earth was T'Challa doing? Bruce was grinning and Peter was chuckling.

"Wow, I'm so telling Shuri this made you speechless!"

Peter whipped his phone out and snapped a picture of him.

"Don't worry, I won't show Shuri the pic. Are you going to tell her soon? She's going to wonder why you're wearing glasses all the time at some point."

Peters attention was immediately back on his phone, which was probably good because Tony still
had no idea what to say about T'Challa going on TV and telling everyone he is amazing. That was, Um. He didn't know.

He was still getting his head around Wakanda not hating him because of his father's stupid purchasing of stolen vibranium and turning it into a damned Frisbee of all things.

Accepting they don't hate you and the King going on American TV to defend and talk you up.. That is world's apart and he couldn't help but wonder why?

He rubbed his hand over his goatee, trying to ignore how Bruce's eyes flicked to his left arm. 'Probably looking at the scarring.' he thought, not looking at it himself. He forgot about it sometimes, then he'd catch one in the mirror or see someone staring and his brain, because of course it did, decided to helpfully supply him with a complete catalogue of scars. At least the list of injuries was less now Extremis had healed even long standing issues.

Tony was pretty used to scars in his life, his hands had been covered in loads of little and big scars, some from when he was a child to just last year due to his propensity to shun protective gear when he got into certain moods. Not that he did it intentionally, he just forgot, or got so caught up in an idea that he could not waste the 10 seconds to locate and put the gloves on. At least now most wounds didn't really scar, only if they were serious enough they did. Which was handy because he still sucked at using safety gear.

Nothing could have prepared him for how Siberia would carve itself into his skin however. It blasted Afghanistan out of the park.

Some of the worst he thought was his left arm, the scars from the frostbite really stood out, the skin a twisted mess. There were more elsewhere, but they stood out less or were easily concealed.

Then there was his chest, which objectively was much worse than his arm, but also easier to hide. His chest had been an utter mess since Afghanistan anyway, and then he'd just compounded it getting into scrapes as Ironman, adding scars on top of scars until Siberia blew it all out of the water. He hadn't exactly been scar free in the beginning, but they were really starting to add up on him.

There were smatterings of frostbite scarring here and there that were annoyingly sensitive. Extremis had healed him fast, but it didn't clear the scars, but they were definitely less drastic than they could have been, so he guessed he should be grateful for that.

It was pretty easy to keep the scars hidden, but then there wasn't exactly many people seeing him unclothed these days anyway, which was handy. Rhodey had happened seen most, he also told him that his view of them was apparently skewed. That they weren't as bad as he made them out to be in his head, but Tony had looked in the mirror enough to know that they were.

Some he covered occasionally, like the very light ones on his face, he covered them just like he wore his glasses. On his neck, around both ears was a trail of lace like silver scars that faded to his olive skin to as it reached his cheeks. Most of it was on the left side of his face. He really wasn't up to answering questions that they'd cause, people would want to know how, when and why. His glasses handily covered some. Rhodey said you had to be up close to his face to see it. Maybe it was his enhanced vision, but to him they were really obvious. Or maybe it was because it was his face.

The frostbite scars looked kind of like old burn scars, kind of silvery and lace like. Anywhere the frost had met his skin, or freezing metal for extended periods, his limbs was where not too bad, the places that likely would have been amputated had the lesser scarring surprisingly, as Extremis
fought harder to heal them. Prioritising certain areas had reduced the scarring, non important areas fared worse for scarring, which was a weird, backwards way of looking at it.

Normally he would be wearing a long sleeved shirt, but Harley had spent ages designing the delicate circuit board decals for his metal hand. Tony loved them. Then he'd sat and painstakingly continued to design all the way up to his elbow. Covering it felt.. Wrong. Even though the black was starting to fade after a few days, he'd been washing it very gently to make it last and was idly wondering if he should make it permanent. If he even could, Extremis might just heal it. Maybe if he made up the ink himself… There were some scars though that he tried to ignore completely. Especially one in particular, he hated that one...

"Peter, I think you have broken him."

He jerked back to the conversation and belatedly his mind informed him that they had still been talking whilst he'd been pointlessly cataloguing scars neither of them had seen. It didn't happen to him often, but occasionally he got a processing delay when people spoke to him and his brain was a runaway train on a completely different, utterly unrelated topic. The words just floating past him and then a minute later supplying him the information. They'd carried on talking about T'Challa and his TV interview.

"I'm just.. I don't quite know what to do with this? What did he talk about?"

"Your green energy initiative, he apparently wants to help by the way."

"Huh, if he sends me more vibranium that means I can use the lot he already sent me on fun things. I'm still making more nanites for myself, the current lot use dramatically less resources than the ones I put in place for the first arc reactors. I need to fly out and swap them so I can cannibalise the old versions.. "

"I was wondering how you'd felt safe enough to put your reactors into others hands. "

Tony grinned, hopping up and grabbing a reactor of the bench. It was in the middle of being assembled and currently lacked the signature glow, was pretty much just the base casing, but it worked for what he currently needed.

"Well any time I tried to design casing, even withvibranium, it used a lot of finite resources, and just didn't work as well as I wanted. I was constantly looking for how others could crack it, so instead I did this."

With a pulse he summoned a little cloud of nanites from the new hive in his watch he'd finished in his workshop binge after the kids went away. Peter perked up, seeing the new hive, eyes gleaming in a familiar way when something caught his focus. He grinned as the nanites surrounded the arc reactor, forming a seamless, thin, yet strong, self repairing covering around it that would inform him or FRIDAY of any tampering, including if they suddenly got cut off from the network. It all took a relatively small amount of nanites as well. He knew it was virtually impossible to crack because he'd sent a chocolate bar covered in it to Shuri to see if she could get in and she'd been unable to break the link to the nanites without resorting to items unique to Wakanda. He warned the places where the reactors were installed, if they somehow did manage to break in, the nanites would shred the arc reactor and another one would not be installed. So far no one had tried.

"They stay locked like that, even if you somehow cut them off from me or FRIDAY, they won't unlock unless I tell them."

Bruce looked impressed, running his hands over the metal, looking for some kind of seam or
"That's amazing. No one else can control them?"

"Well I had implants before Extremis for me to control them, but even if someone got their own implants, they wouldn't be able to control my nanites. Their own, maybe."

"How did Extremis change it?"

"Oh it was like going from 8 Meg of RAM to a Petabyte."

Tony shot Bruce a wide grin, the change had been way, way off the charts for what he'd predicted when Extremis creating a mental link to technology was just a theory. Not just in how many he could control but in how he manipulated them. Like the cameras they'd become a part of him in some way, a 6th and 7th sense. He called the nanites back to his hand, swirling in his palm before returning them to his watch. He had to remind himself occasionally not to just reach out with them.

"I'd been meaning to ask about how your suit changed to a, well, a suit. I'm guessing it was the nanites?"

"Oh! I haven't seen that yet!"

Tony rolled his eyes but stood up anyway. His t-shirt and jeans wouldn't be the most comfortable thing to have in to show Pete.

"Fine, I'll show, but then I want to hear more about what I can do for Bagheera to thank him for being weird, or something. Maybe get him to go back to normal."

He jogged off the the side room next to the Ironman suits where he kept his flight suits and quickly changed. He'd been playing with the design of the flight suits as well and whilst they still looked like his old ones, they were now way more comfortable and definitely more durable, they also offered protection against the elements. He'd practiced with many different materials and finally found one that saved him from the chafing and pinching prone to wearing the Ironman suit. Especially with the tighter fit Bleeding Edge suit from the nanites. Well, Shuri had really, as it was vibranium weave. The royals were utterly spoiling him with all this vibranium really. He had no idea what he'd done to earn such generosity or random weird TV appearances. He'd have to ask Shuri what her brother was up to.

The suit he kept with him, Extremis Mk-1, that had been moderately terrifying to discover and he had yet to really tell anyone about who wasn't under age 15, was slightly larger but still, wearing some clothes underneath the suit was never going to be comfortable. If for whatever reason he was left unable to control the nanites or if he ran out somehow, it was a back up. He had one full sized hive and a medium hive in the watch now, he was working out ways he could wear more. He was currently designing a small hive for a ring, very unlikely to be removed in a hostage situation. If they all were broken, he had the Extremis suit that he could cover himself with in seconds. It wasn't self repairing like Bleeding Edge, yet, but he had already started replacing key sections with vibranium. Considering Siberia, that shockingly had started with his chest.

He knew this was his anxiety playing out, like how he'd made suit after suit after suit before. But he'd contained the obsessive traits to two suits this time. Sure he still had a lot of other suits, some situations call for very specific suits and he still updated them, but not at his old level of obsession. He was currently running a tightrope of obsession and hyperfixation... channelling that drive into the nanites and not going off the deep end.
He padded back out to meet them and ignored Peters smirk. Mostly because Peter now had his own flight suits for the Spiderman armour. He found them far to amusing. Which reminded him, he'd recently designed a hive to make his suit self repairable, he just needed to fit and teach Peter about it. It wasn't as much as Bleeding Edge, but Peter couldn't control the nanites, so there would be two small hives in his chest with the purpose of repairing damage instead of the entire suit being crafted out of them. He needed to train KAREN for Nano-tech too.

"Right, Pete, remind me to show you the update I will be making to your suit. There will be two small hives hidden in the chest. They'll activate when KAREN reports damage and they'll repair what they can and then return to the hive, or replace what was damaged."

"That is awesome! Thank you! Thank you Mr Stark."

"Oh come on Pete, I just gave you like 10 billion nanites. Surely that gets me at least 1 Tony!"

Peter squeaked, which made him grin. The smallest hives could house 5 billion nanites easily, more really but he needed a better rate of construction, plus after his latest engineering binge and he figured they were as small as he would get them. The small hive was around a quarter of the size of his watch face. He'd also coloured them to match Peters suit, so people wouldn't notice a shiny, silver, sparky cloud fixing his suit.

"Right, anyway, I'll call the armour first. I'll slow them down too."

With that he pulled from the full sized arc reactor hive and had the nanites construct the suit around him. Usually it was over in a few seconds without him sort of jumping slightly because he couldn't work out a way for the soles of the feet to form if he was standing still. It was why he'd taken to walking when it formed like when he'd met Bruce outside. It looked much better than him jumping awkwardly. Because of the slow speed he managed to get away with just lifting each foot slightly one at a time.

The suit finished and the helmet clicked into place, Bruce looked impressed and Peter was practically vibrating.

"That was so cool!"

"I have to say Tony, that is impressive. I remember when nanoparticles were just an idea you were considering and now look what you've done with them. How does it work compared to your old ideas?"

"It's made out of morphologic nanoparticle bundles that form a fibrous wetweb of vibranium, I have some made of iron and platinum too, have another idea too but that's still in the planning stages, from that… it can form anything that I know how to create."

"And as its you, that's a lot."

The helmet collapsed back into the neck and he couldn't help but grin, people tended to be impressed with his suits, but having Peter and Bruce impressed was a different ballgame. They knew why to be impressed.

"The vibranium made the difference. Vibranium and Starkanium are so similar in properties, Starkanium is somewhere between Adamantium and Vibranium. Putting then together made everything click that little bit more. I'd been stalled trying to just make a gauntlet of them, then I had some vibranium left over and decided to give it a shot. Now I've worked out how to use other materials too."
Vibranium and Starkanium were similar enough that he could actually fabricate a metal close to vibranium, but is was pretty resource intensive, required a lot more of the element that even the arc reactors that powered the entire compound to make a decent amount, which was a lot bigger than the original, or the one at Stark Tower. They used a lot of power at the compound, especially the training simulation rooms.

He sent the signal to reform the into the suit again, this time into an ordinary looking, well, ordinary for him. So expensive, tailored suit that was a much darker red than the Ironman suit normally was, a black shirt and gold tie. It felt like fabric, but like no other fabric he'd felt before. Close to T'Challa and his vibranium weave clothing but slightly different having been made from nanites. He'd gotten the idea from talking to Shuri about the Black Panther suit she was always tinkering with. It was strangely soft, kind of like silk but looked nothing like silk, well, apart from the tie. It was also pretty effective armor on its own. There weren't any offensive weapons in it, it was strictly defensive and would easily deflect bullets and knives, absorb kinetic energy and still had its sonoluminescence properties, even in its current, fabric like guise. It also felt nice to wear.

Tony stood still amused as Peter and Bruce inspected the suit, feeling the different parts, that whilst they looked like different materials, it all felt the same. Maybe at some point he could nab Bruce and show him the advanced power cells and solar converters he'd been playing with. The energy conversion rechargers would likely catch the other scientists eye. That and the additional R.T nodes? He would never be trapped in a powerless suit again.

"That is amazing Tony, no one would even know this could become the Ironman armour."

"Does it act like fabric or is it like a bulletproof vest?"

He smiled at Peter, the kid was always scared he would get hurt again, even now he was massively changed by Extremis, stronger, faster and harder to hurt. He still worried, still carried misplaced guilt from Germany. He carried all of Tony's injuries in Siberia on his shoulders, no matter how much he talked to him about it. In Peters World, if he had tied everyone up at the airport and they had been captured, Siberia never would have happened. Maybe the kid needed to see a therapist too, he made a note in his mind to talk to him about it later. Maybe make a deal, if the kid goes, he'll go. He's already meeting one today, if he ends up liking her he could probably convince the kid. The other two already did. He had convinced Cooper to go too, the kid had a lot of trust issues, plus all of that family unit had been isolated for too long. Lilah bounced back easily, but she had some quirks. Coop.. If it wasn't for Harley he would have no friends in school at all. Therapy for everyone!

"Yup, bullet proof, stab proof, absorbs kinetic energy. Not sure about magic, the nanites from the large hives live around the arc reactor core, the the ones I use for the suit do anyway, and they definitely pick up some properties, they feel different to me. So if they do pick up the same properties, maybe it will be like when Loki's glow stick of destiny failed to work on me? I've been meaning to ask Stephy but I'm going to wait till he's less mad at me. I figure he'd enjoy throwing spells at me a little too much right now. "

Tony stretched his spine, it was a bit sore, probably from sitting hunched on the floor, he enjoyed hearing it pop as he got the bots to return Rhodey's bracers to their case.

"Alright, why don't you tell me more about Bagheera whilst we get going."

"Going?"

"To Neds."
At Peters confusion he couldn't help but chuckle and silently wonder when he had before the responsible adult that actually remembered things.

"Remember you organised with Ned to sleep over and head to school with you tomorrow, we're meant to collect him at 10am."

"Oh no. I forgot! My room is a mess, nothing is ready oh no..

"Pete, Pete. Calm. Breathe with me. There we go. You're a teenage boy, you are genetically predisposed to live in chaos. I'm sure we can clear enough to put the pop up bed I finished tweaking when you were away."

"I can't believe I forgot!"

"Hmm, have you been trying to forget?"

"Why would I.. Oh. I decided to tell him didn't I?"

Bruce was looking at Tony with a small smile on his face as he spent 10 minutes trying to calm Peter down, he sent some of the bots to Peter's room to tidy up and put his things away. He was generally quite neat, but he left books… everywhere. Always open like he'd been reading and stopped in the middle of the page to move to something else. He sent the bots with a stack of bookmarks he'd ordered, so he wouldn't lose his place in any of the books too. They found 1 in the lampshade of all places. But then the ceiling was just another floor to Peter.

When Peter had eventually stopped hyperventilating, Tony lifted his arm to his face, letting a small swirl of nanites form into a mirrored red pair of sunglasses. At least he didn't need to get changed to go and meet Ned.

"How about to make you feel better, you pick the car."

Peter squealed and made a beeline for his favourite car. Harley thought it was a travesty that Peter didn't pick his favourite for any of the 'normal' reasons. It wasn't because there were so few of them, the price, the speed, the engine or the tech. It was because the doors opened up. It also meant that Peter was missing a huge flaw with that car. He didn't even turn because he knew where he was headed, so he just called out.

"Pete. That one has two seats."

The noise he made was amusing but Tony didn't say anything because that would be mean. Instead he made sympathetic noises and told Pete they could go for a ride together at some point soon.

"Pick one that Ned will be able to get in and no I'm not driving with you sat in on his lap or vice versa."

The world weary sigh of a forlorn teenager was still amusing to him but his face was schooled to not let it show. Bruce was trying not to crack up laughing at him being all serious. So he stuck his tongue out at the man.

Peter started walking the full length of the garage attached to the workshop and Tony started making a smoothie. This could take a while, especially when he saw Peter had taken out his phone, which meant he was considering the other cars underneath them too. He tended to keep his and the kids favourites, and the brand new ones up here with the project cars close to the workshop, but there was an empty few bays where he could bring up any car for a tune up. He also knew that Peter was going to pick the Ghost, the kid had a thing for Rolls Royce, he thought they were fancy
which was adorable. They hadn't been Tony's usual picks but when he found that out he accidentally bought several when he'd not slept in 3 days as a surprise for the kid, and promptly pretended he'd always had them, just in storage. Peter, bless his little heart, had believed him.

He'd already snagged the keys and had them in his pocket when he fished his smoothie whilst chatting to Bruce, Peter proudly announced his choice just as Bruce was heading over to his lab. He grinned and made his way over and hope Peter would have some idea about what he should do about this interview. Another thing on his list of 'What the Actual Feck?'

Tony was equally confused about what to do about that as he was the letter and doodle from Barnes. Nope, the letter and phoenix was still the most confusing thing of the moment. Peter had been nosy and seen it, of course he commented that because of the colours it was an Iron Phoenix. He also noted the feathers looked sharper so they could even be metal. Tony thought Peter was reading way too much into this. It was definitely not helping him work out what to do next.

People were sending him things and going on TV about him and being nice. It had the knock on affect Tony gets any time someone does something nice. He wanted to make them things. T'Challa that was fine, although what the hell can you make the king of vibranium land? But the impulse to make Barnes something was weird and probably not good.

He doubted the super soldier would want anything from him, he might be happy to get help with BARF, but that was probably just desperation to be healed. The fight in Siberia was never that far from his mind generally left him feeling guilt and anger. That anger was now firmly directed at Rogers. His mistrust had robbed him of the ability to react in a more level headed manner.

Plus, on top of everything he was practically making him hide out in Wakanda when the guy had been living alone in Bucharest before they'd kicked the hornets nest. Clearing Barnes of his crimes under Hydra would be easy, even everything post Hydra would be a snap. The Hydra brainwashing went deep, it forced him to run when someone was trying to capture him. Forced him to fight when someone attacked him. Barnes was fighting it and he'd obviously damaged it somehow, but it wasn't erased. The only reason there weren't issues in Wakanda was that he'd warned them to never trap the man. Even superficially.

So no, he wasn't going to make this already awkward situation worse by sending him things. Plus Shuri could make anything for him anyway. He'd just throw himself into helping with the words and clear his mind. I mean, if you give a guy you probably don't trust the keys to your brain, you have to be desperate, right? He had to practically force his train of thoughts to driving and off of Barnes. His mind was annoyingly running off on tangents today.

When they pulled up to Ned's, the boy was standing next to a bike, jaw practically on the floor staring at the car in utter disbelief.

"Underoos. When you asked Ned to stay over, did you mention where?"

"Um, come to think of it, no?"

Tony shot him a huge grin and before he could say anything to stop him, he stepped out of the car. Any composure Ned had managed to get back was lost as he strolled over to the kid, hand out. Peter had his hands over his eyes, shaking his head. Tony was pretty sure even his ears were red.

"Hello there Ned, were looking forward to you staying at the compound tonight."

Ned shook his hand, staring at Tony like he was trying to work out what was happening right now. His voice jumped up a few octaves and Tony had to admit it was amusing. He also wanted to get a
look at the kids colours before he got into the car and drove, so there was a real reason for it, he wasn't just trying to embarrass Peter. The kid was nice, definitely intelligent too. He was pleased to see that what he'd heard from Peter was true and he had a feeling that this one would be loyal.

"You.. Your Tony Stark. The Tony Stark. Ironman. Oh my god. The compound?! Where the Avengers live?!"

"Yup, that's me, come on, hop in, you won't need your bike."

Tony left him there floundering, and outright grinned at a mortified Peter. He tilted his head to the kid and he got the message, jumping out of the car so he could bundle his friend into the backseat and sit with him, maybe answer some of the poor kids questions. They quickly vanished to put his bike back and eventually got in the car. Ned was caught between amazed and terrified.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew Tony Stark?! I was expecting you to turn up on a bike to go to your Aunts. Not in a freaking Rolls Royce! Or to the Avengers Compound. Oh my god."

"Well I told you I had an internship at Stark Industries."

"You're killing me here! Kelly in the year above has an internship at SI and she isn't driving around in amazing cars with Tony Stark!"

It was getting so hard NOT to laugh that Tony decided to focus on driving instead.

"So have you eaten Ned, Because me and Pete skipped breakfast and I'm starving."

They hadn't, but he was getting peckish and that meant Peter would be too and they could even eat a normal amount.

"Ah, Yes? Food would be nice Mr Stark."

"Ah kid, you're killing me now. Call me Tony or I'll feel ancient."

"Um, OK! Food would be awesome Tony. Thank you!"

He gave Peter a pointed smirk in the rear view mirror as the kid called him Tony.

"You can't call him that!"

"Pete, I love you and everything, but if freaking Ironman tells me to call him Tony, I'm gonna call him Tony."

At Peter's exasperated sigh he couldn't stop the chuckle that time as he headed to the breakfast cafe all the Avengers frequented.

"I think I'm going to like you kid."

The place they were heading to did lunch, but it also did amazing all day breakfasts that were to die for. They'd all gotten hooked so much Tony had offered some revamps, so he could up security and make it a safe, press free location. It had resulted in the place having better security than most airports, the owners who had been on the verge of losing the place and their home, were now comfortably putting 3 kids through college. The New Avengers frequented the place often.

It had originally been a good place the Avengers could eat in peace, but with the upped security it had quickly before a go to for business meetings and the like. Plus he occasionally just went alone for their omelettes. They were so good.
By the time they pulled up Ned had regained his voice and was furiously whispering with Peter that he should have told him earlier and that no one would ever believe him this happened to them, this was obviously the coolest thing to happen at their school ever and no one would believe him.

It was way to much fun shocking Peter's friends. When he eventually turned up in the school for a very serious reason he just didn't know yet, it was going to be hilarious. Walking past the ‘Please Wait Here’ sign he waved to the staff behind the bar and made their way to the seats reserved for them at the back. They were mostly kept empty unless the place was extremely busy, today it wasn't so they were safe. The running Ned-Commentary was highly amusing.

"Go wild you two, anything we don't eat we can take home, Bruce or Rhodey will scavenge any leftovers."

"The Hulk or Warmachine could eat my leftovers.."

Peter shot him a look but he just smiled innocently back. Peter was totally not buying it, but he loved the omelettes here as well and couldn't keep up his annoyance. Plus it was Peter, the kid couldn't be annoyed for more than a few minutes or the world might actually end.

Returning to the compound, inundated with food and through the workshop was also a good way to get Ned utterly wrapped up in everything, Tony had worked out that the best way for Peter to tell him and have everything go smoothly would be if he was already utterly wowed by everything else, that it might be normal that your best friend is Spiderman. Either way it would be better than him blurting, squeaking, mid conversation at Dinner with May. Peter had set that bar low.

Which was why he eventually left the pair building something Star Wars related out of lego in the apartment. He wasn't sure which one, Peter had a huge stack of them in his room they'd not gotten to yet. The looks Peter got when Ned realised Peter's room was in his apartment actually had him laughing. He passed Harley and Cooper on the way back from the Residential zone, the kids torn between playing with the newbie or checking on the braces progress, he sent them on up, 3 parts were being fabricated to replace ones he wasn't happy, as such, not that interesting for the teens. Hopefully FRIDAY would record it when Peter finally told him.

He eventually fired off a text to T'Challa to thank him for everything he had done out of plain not knowing what else to do, he'd ask Shuri what on earth to do to thank the man and possibly ask why on earth he was doing it? Because he'd be damned if he had a sodding clue what T'Challa was up to with the Accords Council let alone this.

Checking his email showed that Pepper was over the moon, the man who recently announced that Wakanda has vibranium, was now singing his praises on TV! She was probably sending him a gift basket of muffins right now, the board was apparently more likely to go with his ideas that they didn't approve of because of it to. Giving away green energy suddenly had become something they could get behind and he'd be the bigger man and not rub it in their faces how they'd valued the move stupid.

Well, not much. He wasn't perfect after all.

He forcibly stopped himself dragging his feet when he realised his appointment with Therapist number 1 was coming up. Carol was there for the original meet and greets to see how he felt about them. Also likely to make sure he didn't pass out meeting someone new.
Tony didn't actually hold out much hope for this one, it wasn't that she was a mutant, that would never bother him, it wasn't even that her abilities were mental based. He was set to meet Charles at some point their calendars didn't crash and he wasn't phased at that even though the man could read his mind. The man was respected, so even though he could see if in his head, he obviously knew how to keep a secret, plus it wasn't exactly the first telepath he'd met and he'd been told more than once that he was a walking headache to telepaths. But with this therapist… It was the fact that she didn't just feel people's emotions but she could affect them too. That he was not so fond off. He knew all about it, she was one of the shield agents he'd hired after the fall and she was a great therapist. Whilst some people might be okay with that, after Wanda, just the idea of someone pushing him to feel something left his skin crawling.

Carol would be there however and he suspected that Carol would have told her this. So if she kept her feelings to herself, having someone get a read on him didn't bother him so much, he'd be doing similar with his abilities after all. His mind however just wouldn't settle, it was running in 10 different directions, some panicking about Wanda, about being influenced, his usual fear of facing a therapists that he knew was pretty unfounded in this case as she was unlikely to go to the press or his enemies. That need in him to yell that he was fine, spin on his heel and storm away vs the promise he had made Carol were fighting. The fact he knew Carol was right. He'd been stapling himself back together for so long, he knew he needed some help, somewhere, he wasn't stupid. When you need help, the smart thing to do is to go to the expert. That didn't make doing it easier. Not with his experiences.

He crossed to the MedHQ buildin, that generally was for the more human residents of the compound, the med bays for the Avengers were in a different building entirely. Rooms for therapy however were all in this building. He stepped into the brightly coloured room and couldn't help the suspicion flare up inside him even as he tried to force it down. Later, he could probably accept that the therapist had probably just reacted to his whirlwind surge of emotions and his brain trying to think too much… that whilst this might be normal for him it might not be for her, even in her job.

But all he felt and saw was a wave of something come towards him, a surge of colour. He threw his hands up, utterly pointlessly, to protect himself from something that wasn't even physical. It was like a flood of calming in colour that then slammed into the firewalls in place in his mind. He held his breath as it crashed like sea water on the rocks, watching for a break as he utterly froze. The therapist froze too, most likely because he doubted that in response to her calm she was expecting the cold fury that built inside him, he'd never seen something build up inside him before, and it was weird, it was black, shifting and rolling like waves in a bad storm at sea, with arcs of blue crackling dangerously around it, that he then instinctively shoved right back at her, flowing out of him like a wave. He didn't know how, he just reacted, analysed what she did and returned fire, all of this happened in a fraction of a second of him entering the room.

They both ended up blinking at each other, her eyes gone tight and he knew that she was scared of him. Not just scared, terrified. The anger hadn't manipulated her, not like she could, but she'd felt the cold, calculating rage. The rage when he lost the fire and everything becomes cold, numb and static. Where his intellect sharpens into a sharp, lethal point. She felt it and it terrified her.

He could see it painted all around her. That she'd seen and felt terrible things working with SHIELD. But she'd never felt anything like that before, had never experienced anything like that before. Great. Carol just looked really confused.

That was what snapped something in him. He'd been waiting for someone to be scared of him since he told Carol, and sure, this wasn't exactly the best circumstances but his brain didn't care. It was just the proof to him that he'd been waiting for. Hilariously, it was because of something he'd carried his whole life that had her seeing him as something to be feared, not his recent changes. He
backed up, calmly, turned on his heel, and left without saying a word. Leaving a very confused Carol and a trembling empath.

He walked down the corridor, heading for the window at the end, his suit morphing into the Ironman suit and he just about heard Carol calling his name as he shot out of the window fast enough that the glass fractured in his wake.

The next thing he knows he was stood in front of 177A Bleecker Street and he's not exactly sure how he got there. The door opened with a very happy Wong, he wasn't sure if he had knocked, but you know. Wizards. So who knows. He looked at Wong in confusion, there was no colours.

"Tony, come in, come in! We've missed you here."

As he entered it was only the HUD changing for the new location that made him realise the suit was still on him, as was his helmet. He hadn't even noticed, which was weird, even with how natural the tech felt around him these days. He definitely wasn't feeling right, he felt slightly not here, and Wong seemed to pick up on it quickly so Tony slammed it down, smiling and allowing the suit to change back to the red suit. Thankfully the display of tech stunned Wong from his question as Stephen came forward, a frown on his face.

"We weren't expecting you today."

"Stephen, are you utterly incapable of manners?"

Tony let a laugh slip at that and finally looked at Wong again. He was kind of similar to Stephy but also extremely not. What is it with wizards and being weird headache inducing people? Luckily Tony was just this side of numbed and freaked out by what just happened that it didn't over run him, he just got a sense a shining gold and humming power around him. Then he made the mistake of looking around.

Tony had been here before. Obviously. Many times. He'd visited Wong on his own several times when Stephy was off dimension hopping too. Or whatever it actually was when he was out. He knew the building was odd. But that was magic. So he ignored it.

Now he couldn't and he found himself flat against the door looking around and it was freaking weird, eyes wide trying to take it in. So much was just out of the corner of his eye, no matter where he turned. It was hard to even pinpoint what was weird because it looked the same as it had every time he came, but it was like everything has just shifted to the side. There were flashes of colour sparking in places where there were no people. They flashed in and out. He'd never seen that before. It was like something was inlaid into the wall but it wasn't just that. That was weird, but not what had him pinned against the door, not hearing Stephen and Wong talking to him.

The house felt.. Heavy. The compound had a familiar warm hum that he attributed to the arc reactor, no other buildings 'felt' of anything but this one did. It didn't help that he felt both numb and hypersensitive from his encounter with the therapist.

"Stephy. You're house is fucking weird."

Wong froze, staring at Tony with a strange expression on his face whilst shooting irritated looked at Stephy. He could See that Stephy hadn't told Wong about his augmentations. Before he could say anything however he got a sense that he'd insulted it… And it was now upset.. The building. He'd upset a freaking building.

"Um, I'm sorry, it's not a bad weird, your just unique and I hadn't expected it?"
Oh thanks the gods that sense went away. It was lighter now, still weird, but not upset. He had a feeling out of all the gods Loki was somewhere laughing at him. Man of Science chatting to a sodding magic building trying to make it feel better.

"Did you just talk to the Sanctum?"

"I think I upset it. Its OK now."

"Alright, I have no idea what you two have gotten yourself into but let's get Tony sat down before he falls down."

That was how he'd ended up sitting in the kitchen around the table he'd sat at so many times wondering just what was going on with his life. Wong seemed utterly unphased that he'd come in, insulted and apologised to the building. Fucking magic. Get involved, even a little bit, and suddenly weird is normal. He blamed Stephy for this.

He gratefully accepted the coffee that Wong sat in front of him. Smiling when he realised it was utterly full of the cinnamon syrup he had bought him. It was so sweet it coated your mouth but it was what he needed. He automatically flicked his had towards his head and the nanite forming the glasses returned to his watch. It wasn't until Wong's 'Huh' that he realised what he'd done.

"Weird day. Not thinking straight."

"I'll assume someone will fill me in on this story soon? I'll also assume it has something to do with why you haven't been around in so long."

Tony just nodded, amused at Wong's easy acceptance and disapproval at him not visiting, he was curious but that was all. Wong was awesome, well, he was awesome to him. Wong and Stephy bickered like an old married couple.

"Carol wanted me to see a therapist."

"That clears things up so much."

Stephy rolled his eyes only to get another glare from Wong, who then gave him a nice smile to continue, which of course had Stephy glaring at Wong. Tony was starting to feel more himself now. Thanks to their banter and the influx of sugar. Extremis was returning his body to normal and that's when he realised that even through something weird had happened, he might of had a panic attack of some kind, he was pretty sure he hadn't fried anything. Maybe Bruce's extremely boring meditation exercises were useful?

"She was an Empath. Tried to calm me down, or something, I don't know, I'd just walked in the room and woosh, she hurled... something at me, like a flood of blinding colour and I think I lashed out the same way. I don't know how though."

He tried to imagine colours in his mind like he had then, but nothing came to him, even if he did, he doubted he'd know what to do with it, let alone push it out at someone. Plus, he didn't want either of his friends to fear him like that therapist did.

"Why did you lash out?"

Tony hunched at that, he wasn't fully there yet and didn't realise how obvious the move was until he saw Stephy's eyes widen, he forced his back straight. He was not hunching because of her. He did however shudder slightly when he said her name. Stephy was silent as Wong questioned him, his eyes going hard in rage that crackled around him in red and black arcs, so similar to how his...
had in the arc reactor blue. He found it soothing in a weird way, that it wasn't just him who carried anger that was sharp and analytical.

"Reminded me of Wanda."

"The Scarlet Witch?"

"Yeah, I uh, recently come across some information. She put this vision, this nightmare, forced it into my head. Pushed me towards certain events that I'd believed were my fault."

Wong looked immediately alarmed at that, repulsed even, he nearly panicked until he saw that he was repulsed at the mental magic abuse. The reaction was a lot more severe than he had expected, causing him to frown somewhat in confusion.

"Roger's had her powers listed as telekinesis."

Tony just scoffed, rubbing his head and holding back the need to hit his head what he thought of what the damned witch had forced on him.

"Because forcing worst fears and nightmares onto people isn't exactly Avengers friendly. It's what pushed my hand with Ultron."

"I'm not surprised an empath would trigger such a response in you after that."

"Thanks Stephy, pretty sure I terrified her though. Can.. Can you see if the witch left anything in my head?"

"Of course."

"I'm going to close my eyes, I have a feeling seeing more magic right now might actually make me pass out."

All this weirdness and crap is almost worth it for the look of utter shock on Stephy's face so he flashed the wizard a grateful smile.

**Stephen POV**

Stephen had not expected Tony to turn up, he knew Tony was at the door long before he saw him, he felt a raging storm of confusion covered with a blanket of disassociation, so he had quickly made his way to the door, Tony was stood with Wong, when he finally shed the suit, he definitely didn't look right. His reaction to the Sanctum would definitely be something they could explore later, for now he was dodging Wong's pointed looks, that man always seemed to know when he wasn't telling him something.

The last thing he had ever expected was Tony asking him to go into his mind. Especially after the incredibly small mention of what Wanda did. He didn't say much. But it had been enough.

He just hadn't realised that Tony trusted him that much.

That in a moment of panic he had fled to the Sanctum. Oh he'd known Tony had come to see it, and them, as a sanctuary after Ultron, but it was still pretty serious matter that this was where he'd come when he was in a panic. Stress, worry, panic and self loathing practically flowed off him. Stephen however seriously questioned putting Tony with an empath therapist, who then tried to calm him,
out of everyone. Especially if Carol had known about Wanda, but even if they didn't know. He hadn't known the Witch had gotten her claws into Tony and he still would not have recommended an empath therapist. People with Tony's life experiences would not do well with any perceived manipulation. Just from the brief, tiny bits of information he'd heard about Wanda, even calm from an empath could potentially be perceived as an outright attack. Which it obviously had and Tony had reacted accordingly.

Tony turned to face him and he leaned forward, his fingers an inch from his head. From the way Tony twitched it was obvious that he felt him start the spell he needed, seemingly even with his eyes closed Tony could feel the second the golden disks shimmered to life. He ignored Wong's raised eyebrow and closed his own eyes, concentrating on scanning lightly through Tony's mind for something off.

What looked like a wall of golden code immediately blocked his path, which had been a shock to say the least. His mind was completely encased.

'Tony, I can't actually look if you don't let me in.'

'Huh, I thought the great Sorcerer Supreme would just be able to get through..'

'Well I don't want to break your pretty little code wall now do I.'

What he didn't say was that he wasn't sure he could. He had no idea where to start with... that. Any other person and he could potentially slip past people's mental defences with ease to scan for interference or tampering.

'Also do you mind if I tell Wong about what's happened? He's going to be insufferable otherwise.'

He had never heard of someone having a sodding firewall in his brain. Wong would definitely be interested in that. Suddenly the code shifted, letting the smallest crack open up.

'Sure, I trust your judgement Stephanie.'

He rolled his eyes at the name, but couldn't help smiling at that when another set of code shifted around him to allow him access as he approached it. Generally, unless you were a sorcerer, you couldn't see where a person was in your mind, so he didn't know how Tony did that. This happened 4 more times in subsequent walls, each closing behind him. The security was impressive to say the least. Each wall was vastly different, the last was so complex, layered and in multiple languages that made him slightly nauseated as it moved too fast to get a read on. It was incredibly surreal seeing such defences in someone's mind, generally defenses were taught to use an element to defend their mind. Wong used air for example, and he wasn't convinced that he did it just to confuse him, as even now he couldn't imagine air proving a feasible defence. He favoured metal for his defense. He'd seen many different types since he started his training. So these shifting changing walls of code were very strange.

When he was through, he didn't know if it was on purpose, or if it was because Tony was obsessing over the event as Tony had a habit of doing, but the memory of what happened with the empath was suddenly there, the code walls disappeared and he was stood next to Tony as he opened the door. He could actually see the colours Tony spoke about around people, he saw the surge towards him of bright colours and he stepped back from the shock. Tony's mind probably told him what the colours meant but to him it was just a surge of blue and green. For most people, when an empath sends emotions like that, there is nothing to see, a terrifying wave of mixed colours slamming into your face was probably not what she intended. Generally this meeting was doomed to failure with clashing abilities and Tony's Trauma.
That the wave broke apart on Tony's code wall without a scrap getting through was extremely impressive, shielding against telepathy was hard, shielding against empaths was nigh impossible even for many Masters, especially if it was a mutant ability. However, from what he could see, it just wasn't compatible with Tony's mind now. Extremis had more of an effect in Tony's mind than he had mentioned. Maybe more than he even realised, Tony had always seen his mind as a computer in some ways, so the change might not be as pronounced to him.

As he'd seen a few people's minds, during training and a few months ago when he'd been called to help in the Xenthar dimension as the resident Sorcerer had found three people with what looked like surgical mental incisions on their psyche. Turned out to be a young sorcerer who had been trying to 'help' her friends, hadn't realised that what she had done was fundamentally wrong. Things had ended surprisingly well. Either way, he was now generally quite familiar with a variety of mindscapes. This was nothing like any of them.

The amount of space and processes running in the background was utterly staggering and if he had to search everything he'd be here for a year, maybe more. He needed a scent to chase.

'You're going to want to hit me for this..' 

'You want to see the vision don't you?'

'Not want, need. I never met her, I don't know what her magic feels like, the vision might still have traces of her magic if she was sloppy.'

He almost feels Tony sigh around him as imagines flicker to life around him, full surround sound, which again was very different, usually he'd just view the memories. Tony seems to be dumping him into them with a split screen in his mind of Tony's mindscapes. He got distracted from the content of the vision at first however when the sheer amount of magical residue flares around him. Red threads cut from their source but still twisting and moving. Searching and grasping. Trying to latch on to anything they can but finding little purchase in Tony's changed mind it seemed. They scrape and scratch at anything they can, damage flaring to life in blue sparks anytime a thread hits something in his mind. The bright, brilliant arc reactor blue that is everywhere dulls in spots where the red connects but at the same time, the red darkens and looks burnt. Doing as much damage to each other.

It turns his stomach looking at it, this kind of mind violation, it's much worse that what Tony explained. It's so much worse than any hints he'd gotten about the witches power. She's gone over to straight up mind rape. Not caring, or maybe even intentionally inflicting wanton damage as she ripped open his mind and forced it to conjure his worst fear and trap him in it. He can feel emotions attached to it, rage, but also a sick, twisted satisfaction. It's nauseating. It's different than his last case, he'd seen how damage could be wrought unintentionally, even with good, positive thoughts attached. This… she wanted suffering.

The vision plays out, the Chitari laying waste to the world, Tony left alone to weather the accusing eyes of his dead friends. Why didn't he save them? Why didn't he do more? With Tony's personality Stephen isn't shocked he built and built after this. Building is Tony's response to trauma. He steadies himself to pull as some of the red out of Tony's mind, stashing it into a pocket dimension for later analysis.

Touching the red threads feels awful. He isn't here, but his very essence is and the red threads have been slowly starving to death in Tony's new, incompatible mind. Him however? His mind is very compatible.

He can't believe a person could be so inexperienced and sloppy to leave so much evidence behind,
yet also be able to trigger such specific visions and to leave traces behind that are capable of operating independently, without the witches input, to keep harming the person they were planted in. He can feel the power from the mind stone, twisted by Hydra and how its trying to reach out, desperate to reconnect to its source, but Tony's firewalls were utterly cutting it off from Wanda. She'd not been here just once, that's for sure. There are countless incisions he can see. He mentally records evidence that he can show others, because this.. This is just severely wrong and he is heavily concerned at the mind of a person who could do this to another human being yet remain sane. How she trained is another disturbing fact he doesn't want to know, but it's his job to.

It's slow, uncomfortable and nauseating work, but the blue around him arcs towards him occasionally like crackling electricity. Unlike the red threads that are cold and painful, the blue is warm and quite energising as he works. Tony's mind offering him power that feels a lot like traces of the space stone. He doesn't know if Tony is actively doing it, or if his mind is seeing him help and acting independently. Either way, it encourages him to keep going, even when he probably should have pulled away by now. Wong was going to yell at him.

He tries to remove the vision itself, but it's been here too long, is too entrenched. At least if he removes all of the threads there is a chance that it will finally fade into memory instead of staying fresh like it has been. It won't stop it ever featuring in a nightmare again, but he hoped it would help. He nearly turns to leave but decides to check she didn't do more. The chances of Tony returning to do this again are slim to none.

She's been in his mind more than once after all, he doubts she stuck to this vision. Now he has her magic signature, he can hunt. Focusing on it, Tony's mind moves past him extremely fast, so fast he can barely get a glimpse of the amount of things Tony is thinking about at the same time. Which is absolutely strange in itself, he knew the man was a genius, Tony even said himself that his mind thinks of several different things at once, but hearing that and seeing it are quite different things.

Not that he'd ever tell the man, but his brain is annoyingly impressive at multitasking, if he had an eidetic memory like himself, rather than Tony's ability to literally forget what he's doing, as he was doing, he would be terrifyingly competent. He comes across more red in several more locations, attached to an assortment of horrifying nightmares he wished he'd never seen. He can't help seeing some however, no matter how hard he tries.

Howard's sneering face.

Flashes of dark rooms.

Doors slamming shut.

Waking up, hands moving inside his chest in a cave.

"He's my best friend."

Stane, looming over him, ripping out his heart.

Snow falling, in Siberia he presumes.

Black space, then the Chitari, then falling.

"Stark Men are made of Iron."

Again hearing and seeing are very different. He and Tony had discussed nightmares many times, usually heavily drunk. He knew Tony had a lot, but there are more than he thought. He tries his
hardest to not look after the first ones scraped across his mind, just seeing blurs. Only focusing on the threads that look to only be attached to nightmares. Tony would like him rooting through his nightmares about as much as he'd like Tony in his.

Unlike the vision, this magic is different. It's purpose is to seek out nightmares, enhance them, make them mix together, cross over. Up the violence level. He's not sure how Tony stayed sane whilst she was forcing her magic into his mind. Then he's also not sure how he's stayed sane and collected so many nightmares, he's only seen snippets of a fraction of them and it's more than enough for him. He suspects if Tony saw his nightmares however he'd say the same.

She has definitely had some training. No one just knows how to implant worst fears. No one just knows how to locate nightmares like this and attach magic to them in such specific ways. She's definitely sloppy, but he can read her intent which was to not get caught but to drive Tony insane or to suicide. Attempting to cast such subtle magic with utter brute force strength leaves a mess. Recklessly causing damage to the mind all around. His stomach lurches again thinking how she must have practiced this skill and it would be his job to find out.

He deals with some awful things in his new job, but finding people willing to manipulate people's minds like this was actually much rarer than he would have thought it was, but that was before he understood it better. Before he understood what it entailed. If an item like the mind stone is used, it's slightly different, but to use one's own magic, or one's own psionic force, which is what the Witch seems to have access too, its much different. It's a blade that cuts two ways. How far you go is utterly dependent on how far you're willing to cut yourself up. She had gone further than he'd thought possible.

No one at the Kamar-Taj is going to believe him that the mind he took this evidence from is alive, let alone sane. Explaining why would be revealing secrets that he didn't think Tony was ready to impart with.

By the time he is finally happy that he has every single piece of red thread, he's exhausted. Tony's mind is actually healing around him, slowly but surely. The bright blue arcing like bolts of electricity over patches that had been drained so badly they'd turned black. The arcs knit together over the gaps, creating patches in some areas, healing in others. He wonders if this is Extremis, or Tony's element derived from the space stone. Or both, working in tandem in a way he hadn't thought possible. He would have thought such damage was permanent. It should be permanent. He feels a tug is his chest reminding him that he can't stay here wasting time, as fascinating as this might be.

This time at the wall of code, a section lights up as he nears it, recognising him and allowing him to pass and he shakes his head. Not only has Tony turned his brain into a sodding supercomputer, surrounded it with firewalls, but he can apparently set permission to allow him to pass. Only Tony Stark could manage something as ridiculous as this.

As he pulls back into his body the first thing he feels is pain, nausea and utter exhaustion.

Then he gets scolded.

"You stayed in there far too long."

He felt a trickle from his nose and quickly finds blood. Seeing paper in a bin it seems Wong had been cleaning up both of them and they'd lost quite a bit of blood. And a glance at the clock had 6 hours gone.

"I messaged Jim to say he was here and safe. He'll be unconscious for a bit. Did you do everything
"It was. The mind stone isn't pleasant on its own. That woman has somehow corrupted it further. Sheer brute force to make up for lack of skill. Red threads left clinging to memories and nightmares lashing out, leaching and killing everything around it."

They both shuddered, Wong looking extremely concerned at that.

"Don't worry, he's healing, even parts drained to black."

Wong didn't get surprised by much, so seeing his eyebrows shoot up was satisfying enough that he almost didn't mind the migraine building in his mind.

"When he wakes up, you two are going to explain this to me."

With that Wong busied himself making Tony comfortable and he just slumps. That had been much more taxing than he'd suspected and watching the colour already return to Tony's face makes him both happy and want to kick him because his migraine is worsening.

It only takes 20 minutes for Tony to wake up, much to Wong's shock. Not Stephens. He obviously isn't 100% just yet but he seems to feel better enough to explain to Wong about Extremis and his augmentations. Wong doesn't mention that the tesseract is an Infinity stone just yet, although he sees him make almost the same observation that he did. He has no idea how to even have that conversation.

**Tony POV**

*4th October*

Tony surfaced from the code he had immersed himself into with a deep breath. The level of data he now had access to was enough to use up a considerable amount of space in his mind, it had also taken nearly a day just to send the data from one session and play it back, watching how the algorithm worked with Barnes brain was, quite frankly, fascinating. He was still feeling a little tender after Stephy went rooting in his brain, but he'd slept for 4 hours straight on one night. Not nightmare free, but it was.. Less. He felt like he had a ton of new energy and was using it to completely focus on work and avoid any talk of therapists, for at least a little while.

He still didn't know the reason why they were having problems however, even with his newly scrubbed brain. Maybe it was because of Hydra's methods of brainwashing, maybe it was that chair that made him nauseated just thinking about it, heck, maybe Barnes just had a strange brain structure, maybe it was the serum. The serum was strange in itself and he had little data on how it affects the mind, and Barnes had a mutated serum at that. Natkas was mutated again and developed from Barnes, so he couldn't even ask her. He also didn't know if she'd approve of him helping Barnes, he might be harder to hurt now but Natka was still scary and was invested in his health.

He didn't know what it was but watching Barnes brain adapt over and over in each session to both work with and fight the algorithm at the same time was equal parts fascinating as it was absolutely infuriating. If it wasn't his job to make the algorithm work, he could easily just watch his brain change, adapt and thwart his attempts, and he had, for an embarrassingly long time. But it was fascinating. So instead of just watching on the screen, he'd jumped in head first to see and experience what he could do to up the percentage of disassociation.
After several runs through he knew what wouldn't work.

Creating an algorithm and letting it run.

Which was the plan.

The whole way the glasses were meant to work, and it didn't.

He didn't know why. Which was getting annoying but it was also amazing. After a while he couldn't just watch and action the algorithm. He had an idea.

That idea had him swimming in the code, being directly involved, making minute changes things started to change drastically. That touch of human intuition and his pattern recognition skills apparently made quite the difference. He was using a session where they had tested it on a code word and it had been an abject failure, Barnes had ran through it 4 times before Shuri had refused to let him torture himself anymore. Which was a good call, he could have watched it 500 times and wouldn't have breached 14%. He himself tried nearly 30 different algorithms he wrote for the code specifically and barely hit 20% disassociation.

However effectively using himself as a constantly changing algorithm worked amazingly and hit over 98%. Friday tapped out at 36%. Which had led him to believe it was something that required the human intuition for some reason, FRIDAY was good, amazing even. But she couldn't make some of the intuitive leaps people could, or as FRIDAY claimed, utterly unconnected leaps that made no logical sense. As much as he could crow about his victory however… it was useless.

With the Binary to Wakandan uplink at it is, the delay was better, but it would render this method useless. It would be like playing a game with severe lag against someone with none. Plus, even with Barnes strange amount of trust in him, he highly doubted the super soldier would want Tony online whilst he was in a session. More than that, editing the algorithm running on the headset as the session ran. That was a huge ask and Tony couldn't bring himself to do it.

At least it had given him some ideas, maybe if he can run through several sessions that Shuri sends him, he could immerse himself each time she finally work out how Barnes brain was working. That way he could write an adaptive program instead. It might even be able to run alone, although he highly doubted that.

He and Shuri would need to keep improving the code integration, there was just too much data to send back and forth they needed it to work much faster than it currently was. At this rate, sending little hard drives back and forth in drones would be sodding quicker. Squinting at the calendar he starts sorting projects in his head. If he focuses and pushes back some other projects, he might be able to have it up and running by Saturday. Shuri would either be impressed, enthusiastic or considering how much of her time had been sucked into her current project that had been keeping her up, utterly unimpressed with his overly enthusiastic ideas. Luckily for her, most of the work was on his end, she just had to action it if he did it right.

Clearing everything Tony brings up the current Wakanda uplink files, stretching he made himself comfortable.

'Fry, I'm going to be unavailable for a while, don't let anyone but Level 6 people in the workshop, no matter what permissions they have.'

'Sure thing Da. I'll set alarms for you to surface routinely, you don't feel your body when you go as deep as your planning.'
Tony smiled, sending a brush off code against her knowing that she'd look after him.

With that, he rested his hands on the desk in front of him, not that he needed contact with the hard drive, he was wirelessly linked to everything in his workshop. But when he was diving in like this, physical contact with the drive he was working in sped everything up and increased the scope of his abilities.

His fingers brushing the metal, with the hum that he feels down to his bones, he can't help but grin and feel a thrill go through his as his right eye flashes completely gold and code flows from his mind around him. Weaving a pathway between them that's much more to his liking.

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Added image reference for Tony's Suit from Marvel Fandom Wiki! (Where I spend too much time..)
Chapter Summary

It's definitive.

If Tony could still get grey hairs, Peter would be the cause of 80% of them.

Chapter Notes

A chunk of this is 4 day insomnia written, the other random thing I wrote before this story became a thing xD

After this is the last part of the current American chapter. It might be in 4 parts but it's still kind of a single chapter in my brain.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Tony POV

4th October

Tony pulls himself from his work when he realises his alarm has been blaring at him. Probably for a while actually. He stretched his back out, feeling his spine pop a few times, likely because he had held the same position for so long. He dug his knuckles to try and alleviate the dull ache that had set in before just deciding to ignore it. Extremis would probably help rid him of it soon. Either way, small occasional pains were better than what state his back would be in if he'd sat for that long pre-Extremis.

He pushed away from the desk and decided to stop instead of diving right back in. He'd just sent a bunch of updates to Shuri so he figured he'd give her a call. Slipping his glasses he didn't have to wait long for Shuri to pop up on the screen. He grins and waves and she was already rolling her eyes, that boded well for him.

"How long have you been working on the integration today Tony, I came down and I can barely recognise it!"

"I didn't have much choice, the latest data packet you sent on Barnes, his mind is adapting too fast. I don't know how it's doing it, his mind seems to move as fast as my algorithms.."

"You sound impressed that his brain is literally screwing with us."

He just grinned at Shuri's raised eyebrow.

"What? It's a challenge. I like challenging things."

"Even when it's causing us problems?"
"Shuri have you really watched it when he's in a session? The code changes around the algorithm. No matter how I code it. I literally did not think that was possible."

"And this is a… Good thing?"

"Well, until we get around it, getting shot of the words is practically stalled. But I didn't think it was possible for someone's brain to do this. I love impossible things. It's beautiful."

Shuri just rolled her eyes and was pulling things up in the background, as much as she was grousing, he bets she's looking at the deeper data levels he's been in.

"So, what's your next step?"

"It depends on him. After the integration is complete, I could write an adaptive program instead, but I'd need to be online to guide it."

Actually online, as in immersed online, but he can't tell Shuri that bit. Dammit, he's gone from lying to the patient and now he's lying to them both. Sighing internally, he decides at some point he'll have to tell Shuri, he wanted to do it in person however, but she won't be leaving Wakanda while Barnes is vulnerable, he can tell she has gotten quite attached. As much as he would love to visit Wakanda, he can't enter their country without them knowing about his abilities, it didn't feel right, especially with how long he'd been working on the integration. Before, their non-binary systems would have stumped him, but by now he's pretty much bilingual.

"I'm sure he'll be fine with it, he's happy for the help. I will ask him though."

"Hmm, still not so sure about that."

Even with the letter he had been mulling over how to respond, jumping to this seemed a bit of a stretch and he was overly conscious of appearing as the only option for viable treatment.

"Why are you boys such idiots?"

Shuri mutters under her breath, he tilts his head in question but before he can ask his phone alarm starts blaring obnoxiously.

"FRIDAY! Why did you set my alarm to that!"

He glares at his phone whilst Shuri is chuckling in the background.

"Sue told me to set it to something utterly obnoxious so you don't forget to come around for dinner."

"Crap! Gotta go Shuri!"

Shuri laughs as the call ends, he glanced down, realising he didn't change from earlier so is ready to go. Huh. That was handy, he'd been fiddling with the nanites and the Bleeding Edge armour before he got distracted by the latest code arriving so he's still in the nanite-suit. It still felt kind of odd wearing a fight suit under a suit but he had actually started to get used to the sensation by now. Relying on the nanite-suit also seems handy when he's feeling lazy, or potentially late. He slipped off his workshop sunglasses and replaced them with a nano-tech pair from the watch hive and jogged towards the garage to make his way over.

All in, he ends up being 10 minutes early for dinner with Sue and the family, which is extra amusing as Reed, who lives in the building ends up 15 minutes late because he got caught up in his experiments, Sue dragged him out and he looked surprised to see Tony.
One reason he always loves visiting Reed, he makes him feel less like a disaster human.

It's extremely tempting to stretch into the tech humming around him, it's practically calling out to him, but he's pretty sure that's a rude thing to do to friends without permission. Even though he's here to tell Sue and Reed about Siberia under Bruce, Carol and Rhody's sodding advice. Not many people could help him if there are any Extremis related issues, and out of that very select few, trusting someone with the formula is rarer. Bruce would be great but he's not up to trusting himself with things even peripherally similar to the serum. He will come in on it with Tony, but if Tony is ever out of commission he confided that he didn't want to be in charge unless there were no other options. Bruce pointed out that if someone else was involved who could have stripped down the formula, he might not be Mr 101 abilities guy. Well, that was a slight exaggeration.

So Tony was setting himself up with a team of medical proxies. Sue and Reed are pretty much the best back up he could have, but that of course means actually telling them about it.

Going through the painful story for yet another time is equally uncomfortable, even though Sue is lovely, as she always is, and Reed is asking 60 questions about Extremis and his tech capabilities a minute. Which is pretty fun to be honest. The anger Ben has towards Rogers possibly shocks him the most. Watching Reed get slapped for hyper-fixating on the potential tech abilities? Priceless.

"So, you can affect any tech around you?"

"Yes Reed. No, I haven't touched your systems. I'd probably get a migraine if I did."

He grinned, if the two of them had ended up in the same direction when it came to Science, they could have ended up as quite nasty rivals. Reed was a little smarter than him, but his multitasking skills were superior. As such, they mostly tried to out compete each other while Sue sat by. Glaring at them for being idiots. Especially that one time they nearly vapourised Reed's lab, but he is still convinced that was completely not his fault.

"Boss! Spiderman's suit has been compromised!"

"What! He's not even.. He's meant to be at home! Who is near him?"

Dammit, it was a school night and he was meant to be patrolling less on school nights and tonight was an off night. Although he isn't really that surprised. It's Peter. If he heard something after school, he'd go after it, patrol or no, which considering he was meant to be bringing Ned over again tonight…

"He's not far from you, anyone else on duty will take 17 minutes to get to him."

"Is he with..?"

"Yes."

"Dammit, Sue, I'm sorry, I have to dash, can you open that window for me?"

Johnny jumps up to open the window and everyone is looking around a bit confused, at the half conversation likely. Dammit, Tony is going to murder that kid, telling Ned didn't mean taking Ned on some kind of patrol after school..! He starts striding towards the open window, letting his red suit reform around him into the Ironman armour. Not noticing the stunned look on Johnny's face.

"See you next week Tony!"

Sue called as he flew out of the window waving behind him, just catching what Johnny said before
he pushed the latest development he'd added to the suit. He wanted to get far enough away to not shatter the window with the force like he had at the compound.

"Did his suit just turn into the armour?!"

After that, he locked on to the signal in Peter's suit, knowing full well that Carol was going to chew him out as he wasn't on active duty, and he was so going to chew Peter out right back. He hadn't even had much of a chance to test the boosts he'd made to the flight parameters yet. He definitely wasn't meant to be in the field yet.

"No time like the present, kick it FRIDAY."

The speed increase was much improved over his last upgrade and it only took him 4 minutes to come up on Peter who was stood in between Ned and a mugger he presumed. Oh, and another guy was webbed to a wall. How this situation had even come up, he had no idea. The HUD flashed the location of the man's gun, it had at least been webbed and tossed to the floor behind Ned and it was dark enough in the alley the kid hadn't gone and picked it up or something equally disastrous. Peter was stuck fighting him hand to hand. Unable to swing away with because he would not be able to carry them both with his leg bleeding that much and the pain had his reactions down. From FRIDAY's scan he knew the bullet had grazed him more than anything else, but he could see the very deep furrow on his thigh from too far away for his liking. He was enhanced but he could still pass out from blood loss and he was waverling.

He dropped down behind the man, not willing to risk Peter or his very human, very squishy friend, he just grabbed the guy by the back of his shirt and wrenched him back, tossing against the wall hard enough to jar him considerably before pulling one of the containment forcefields he'd been tinkering with. Possibly putting more strength than necessary into it, but considering how Tony wanted to do something much more painful and much more permanent, a little concussion is not too bad in his mind.

"Level 4, Fry."

Originally a SHIELD design, he had altered the containment fields and had them formed into a small, hand held balls, that he now threw at the idiots feet. A blue spherical forcefield popped up around him. Containing him and any other weapons he might have. He tried to pick up the ball and got a zap from FRIDAY, making him pull his hand back in pain.

"Jess and Matt are going to be here in 11 minutes, come here let me see that wound."

He pulled the two infuriating teens further down the alleyway, throwing up a scrambler so they wouldn't be seen. He was absolutely kicking himself for not installing the nano hives into Peter's suit yet. If he had, the suit would have self repaired and sealed the wound until he got to med bay.

"Was there not a safer way you could have done this?"

"Yes, but." "No buts! You literally got shot!"

He pulled from the suit, replacing any nanites from those in his watch and had the nanites seal Peters wound. Trying to ignore the sounds of pain he was making and failing. He didn't know if he wanted to strangle the kid or hug him. Peter slumped against him, so he went with a hug, but hadn't counted out future potential strangling. He couldn't risk doing much else, he wasn't sure how his ability would react right now. Especially after the lights above them exploded spectacularly when
he had gotten a closer look at the wound, and the forcefield around generic bad guy fluttered at Peter's pain from the nanites. He closed his eyes and started the stupid, annoying breathing exercises Bruce had him learn. He had everything locked down tight but he felt like he was holding back a surge of water. It wanted out, he wanted out, but that was dangerous. He wanted to rage, surge and suddenly feeling a little Tony Smash.

All he had to do was last two more minutes for Jess and Matt to finally get to them. Peter seemed to sense his control was low and stayed a solid presence. Ned was mostly freaking out, but quietly, so that was good, he was impressed. He had kind of squeaked at the exploding lights and was giving him occasional looks, but not much else. He knew if he wasn't careful he could cause some serious problems, he didn't even want to think what buildings he was near, he doubted that would reduce the stress and just tried to keep it pulled in. Fuck, If he was near something like a hospital and he accidentally let his control sli-

"Ironman!"

He breathed out a little but didn't dare let the control slip. Even with people there. He couldn't risk it.

“Jess, good."

His words were clipped out, he put his attention into bustling the two kids into the car. Dropping in with them. Laura was driving, Matt immediately got the first aid kid out and passed it to him. Jess started to walk over to the guy who shot Peter.

"Um, how do I get him out of the glowy ball.. thing?"

"FRIDAY will disable it when the police arrive, pick up the silver looking bouncy ball and pocket it. I only have 2 of them."

Jess nodded and kicked the car door shut, already knowing how to deal with Peter's tactic of webbing people to things, and Laura started heading back to the compound. He knew she'd come up with something to tell the police.

Tony started reforming his suit so he could deal with Peter and not be sat covered in metal in a car. When he was back in more regular looking clothes, he pulled the nanites away from Peter's wound to his watch, just as Peter pulled his own mask off hissing in pain. Having a wound patched with nanites wasn't exactly the most comfortable thing in the world, especially with an increased healing factor. Tony gave him his hand to crush.

"I know Pete, I'm sorry."

Luckily after so many years or patching people up after battle, or more honestly, patching himself up in his workshop because he dodged medical. Tony was quite proficient at it. Peter was definitely not dodging medical as that was a nastier injury than he'd first suspected.

When he was done he put his hands on either side of the kids head and rested his forehead against his. Peter's colours where a whirlwind at this distance, barely able to make out any of them, but he didn't care. He needed to See them.

"I'm sorry."

"I know kid. I'm sorry I yelled, just.."

"I didn't mean to get shot?"
He and Matt couldn't help but laugh at that. Ned was gaping slightly at them oddly.

"I'd be worried if you did. It grazed a huge chunk out of your thigh. Promise me, no patrols until I upgrade your suit?"

Peter just nodded, it was obvious the kid was in a lot of pain and there were not many pain meds that worked on his metabolism. Whilst he healed faster than most, he would still need stitches and that was not going to be fun. He let Peter crush his hand for the rest of the car ride while Matt talked to Ned to distract the kid. Peter was starting to get a little woozy as they got to the compound so Tony just picked him up, ignoring his protests.

"Tony! Glasses!"

Tony swore as Laura tapped her temple, he didn't bother to stop walking and summoned the nanites to form the glasses as he marched into the med bay that were expecting him. Laura brought a still shocked looking Ned in behind them with. Matt vanished, probably to check up on Jess.

"I'm pretty sure it's fine now? I don't need stitches."

"I'm sorry Peter, that needs stitches."

The doctor turned after that to set up while Peter looked pretty green. Stitches sucked, especially when you could feel the thread pulling through your skin, which was surprisingly the worst part in Tony's mind. He had thought it would have been the needle stabbing repeatedly, or the wound being pulled together, nope, that weird sensation was by far the worst. Unfortunately he'd had more than one set of stitches in unfortunate circumstances to know.

"You can crush my hand, and after Carol yells at us both, we can get ice-cream."

By the end Tony has discovered there is a worst part to getting stitches that he'd never thought of before.

Watching a kid you care about getting them. That. That is the worst.

Tony POV

5th October

"How are you finding them Sour Patch?"

Tony glanced up from his phone where he just got a text from Shuri, confirming in his mind that the Super Soldier is definitely desperate, as he'd given Tony permission to go ahead with the adaptive programme, with him online guiding it. He put the phone on the table in front of him and focused on Rhodey who had just been walking around the compound because he could.

"They're awesome Tones."

The slight sounds of the servos as Rhodey moved over to him assured him everything was running fine. He'd found his abilities seemed to connect better to tech that he'd personally made, especially if he'd spent as much time on it as he had Rhodey's braces. It was like they spoke a very specific language that he somehow understood without actually pushing his ability out. He didn't know if this was some kind of passive form, or if using his tech related abilities had become natural enough
that he didn't notice he was doing it.

Just as Rhodey sat down comfortably, someone rang the doorbell. Rhodey gave him a 'what are you going to do' shrug as he'd just sat down with clearly no interest in going to the door.

What was odd in itself, most people who came to visit had permission from FRIDAY to just let them in. Tony isn't even sure when he last heard his doorbell. Sighing he hopped up.

"Who is it FRIDAY."

"It's a courier Boss."

"A what now?"

"A courier service is a service that allows someone to send a parcel or consignment from one location to another."

"FRIDAY. I know what a courier is. I was wondering why one is at my door."

"That's easy to find out Boss."

"Hm?"

"Answer the door."

Tony squints at one of the cameras, he's pretty sure he didn't code this kind of sass into FRIDAY and wonders where she is getting it from as he makes his way to the door to Rhodey's laughter.

**Rhodey POV**

"Um Rhodey" Tony called out, baffled, holding the box that had just been handed to him by the courier as he made his way back into the living room.

"What was it Tones?"

"Just a question, you haven't been sending me emails with offering to kill Rogers have you?"

Rhodey frowned whilst flicking the TV off. What? Not that he wouldn't mind getting a good punch or two in, but no death threats.

"No, what? Why would you think it was me?"

"Well, you do occasionally say you're going to kill him, and I thought you were joking around sending me emails about it, so I never actually looked into the sender as they were all from different throwaway accounts…"

"No, not me, but I'd like to meet them. Sounds like my kind of person."

"Still not sure how you'd get on with Deadpool. But he sent me a cat. Well… A Kitten. With a note.. And he knows Peter. I'm so confused right now. How does Peter know Deadpool? Can I have a kitten? How do I make sure Goose doesn't eat him out of jealousy..? And, again, most
importantly. HOW DOES PETER KNOW DEADPOOL?!

Huh.

He knew about Deadpool.. peripherally, but he'd never met the man. Tony had always kept certain parts of his life separate and although he was in most parts of Tony's world, occasionally Tony kept bits on the side, especially if he thought he wouldn't approve of them or for his 'safety'. Sometimes it was for straight up plausible deniability. Deadpool was all of the above apparently.

Like he'd originally kept him separate from the Avengers, he'd thought at first, like Pep, that he'd traded in his friends for his superhero friends. Stupidly, as Tony never showed any hint of abandoning him. Now he knows that Tony was just run ragged and wanted his time with him to be less stressful, even for the small glimpses they got between the Airforce and the Avengers. Plus, Tony already had practice compartmentalising people and aspects of his life, although lately after nearly dying he was blurring those lines more and more each day. Slowly bringing those pieces together when he'd made it safe, usually with individualised Accords Councils. He'd seen some of Stranges contract, it was nothing like anyone else and most of it was redacted by the time it got to him. Tony was very careful in how he protected his friends.

So, Rhodey knew a bit about Deadpool, mostly about how he and Tony got on. Tony just said he was a 'little weird'. Which in normal people speak was off the charts most likely. But the pair got on unsurprisingly well, not that Rhodey could decipher their texts that could be actually pages long, flicking topics mid sentence, (he'd thought it was code but no, it was just how they talked) or just single words that seemed utterly unconnected. Like that time Tony had been uncontrollably laughing and the only thing on the screen was a picture of a lettuce. He didn't know if he wanted to know, but Tony just choked out something about icebergs. There had been a few instances where Tony had taken a break and vanished. Everyone else thought he was in a flash hotel, when really, he and Deadpool would just go off grid for 3-8 days. Tony would then return, utterly exhausted and crash for nearly a whole day and nothing more was said. Even Pepper and Happy didn't know about Deadpool.

When the pair had first met it was when they were both relatively 'normal'. In other words, before powers and Ironman were involved. Neither of them could ever be considered 'normal', it's probably why they had gotten along so well.

"That was too much information. What is happening to our lives. Insane mercs never used to send you cats when you were just chasing the next adrenaline high. Thing is, I'm not even that shocked, you know? My ability to be shocked by our lives has died a dramatic death."

Tony plucks the tiny kitten out of the blankets as Rhodey contemplates what he got himself in for, it's mostly black, except for a few white markings he noticed, Tony was tilting his head to study him as the tiny kitten studied him right back. A white blaze on his chest, adorable little white feet, topped off with a fabulous moustache. He sits next to Rhodey and just, blinks for a second, because seriously.

Tony is probably mostly perplexed about how Peter knows Deadpool. He is just wondering why people with reputations like Deadpool were sending Tony kittens. Before deciding that it was probably Peter's influence.

Rhodey knows how alike Tony and Peter are, and whilst he might not have seen it coming, it's really not that shocking. Give Peter a decade and he'd have a collection of wayward heroes too. He's just started early. Although he's not sure starting with Deadpool is a good choice. But then, Tony started with an off kilter Hulk with little control, and he'd repeatedly poked him during a high stress situation including an alien invasion and norse gods, so again. Not surprising.
He knew that Tony hadn't been in contact with Deadpool much after the Avengers moved in, when his life had been Avenger consumed. But he hadn't utterly dropped contact. Tony just scheduled his *trips* for when the other Avengers were away or disguised them as business trips.

Tony had told him how he really didn't have the energy for the Cap-Lecture if those two had met accidentally, so Deadpool popping up to abduct Tony instances had decreased somewhat. Tony going on super important *'business trips'* had however increased. Or as Tony said, if the DP can't come to him, then he'd go to the DP.

Although, Rhodey thinks, whilst Tony is scratching his beard and stroking the tiny kitten, an offer of murder plus kitten was probably Deadpool's way of saying *'Hi, long time no see'* . Especially as Tony hadn't really gone anywhere post Siberia. He wondered if he'd told Deadpool about his augmentations. Wait. No, he probably had and it was probably a text along the lines of *'Guess who has super powers now bitch!'* Or he was waiting to surprise him. They were equally as plausible.

So yeah, this was probably a normal hello. For them.

Just with a side of *murder*.

And a *kitten*.

"FRIDAY. Call Peter."

Tony calls out whilst handing the note that came with the kitten to Rhodey. It didn't say much.

Just--

'Rescued this dude with Spidey. He couldn't keep him and ranted for 2 *hours* about kill shelters. So, I decided you need a cat. Cuz *reasons*. Also, offers still open to kill Captain Spandex. - DP'

Rhodey hummed while Tony mumbled to himself that this might have been the most normal conversation he'd ever had with Deadpool… and it came via courier kitten. Well, *that* says *something* about their relationship, what that something is? He has no clue. Rhodey just chuckled and shook his head.

"Hi Mr Stark!"

Peters voice popped up on his phone. Tony knocked it onto speaker and set it in between them.

"Kid, how many times must I tell you to call me Tony. Just calling because I received a parcel."

"Oh? What is it?"

Peter said, in the most *unconvincing* voice ever.

He was biting his cheek trying not to laugh at Tony's serious Dad-Face.

"Hmmm. Yes. How long have you known Deadpool?"

Tony and Rhodey winced as the phone crashed loudly to the floor. The kitten looked at the phone with a look of utter disgust. Hissed and climbed up Tony's chest. Seriously, how had this kid even kept his secret identity was a question that Rhodey puzzled out daily.

"Where do you think your going, oh mighty panther?"
Tony tilted his head and watched the kitten. Rhodey face palmed because he knew, just knew, now that Tony was going to keep it, he had that same look on his face when he went around collecting wayward Shield agents, teenagers and hero's. The man had a *problem*. The kitten made it to his shoulder, obviously happy with his great feat and crawled into Tony's jumper and promptly went to sleep. So, Tony had a *bit* of a problem when it came to bringing strays home. After Siberia it had upped somewhat to a manic level, like Tony was practically nesting and collecting all the disparate parts of his life and putting them under one roof.

He was not at all concerned about Deadpool potentially moving in. Or about the other people Tony occasionally mentioned in passing.

Nope. Oh god, the idea of Tony, Stephen and Deadpool in one location. Yeah, that was enough to give him chills.

"Uh, sorry about that. And whaaaat? Who is Deadpool? I don't know a Deadpool."

"I'm gonna stop you there kid, because Deadpool sent me a kitten with your name attached."

"Dammit! I knew I should have written the note!"

"That kind of teaches you to put DP in control of anything now doesn't it."

Tony said, attention split between the cat and Peter.

"So, how'd you meet him? I didn't take him for your usual company."

"He's fine! It's fine! I just bumped into him a few times doing my rounds and he occasionally helps out. He even didn't kill anyone!"

Rhodey smirked at Tony, and started laughing at him. Tony shot him an unimpressed look but it was just hilarious.

"Rhodey, why are you laughing, befriending people like DP at 15 is not a laughing matter!"

Tony whisper yelled because he apparently didn't want to wake the kitten. Which really wasn't helping Rhodey stop laughing.

"But he's you!"

Rhodey choked out, leaving Tony and Peter confused.

"I don't think Mr Stark is that much like Deadpool!"

"Are you comparing me to Deadpoo- wait, much? How am I *anything* like Deadpool?!

"Why are you whispering?"

Peter whispered into the phone. And that just set Rhodey off again, Tony kept a hold of his arm, probably worried he was going to laugh himself off of the sofa. Whilst glaring him, which again, really not helping the laughing.

"No, no Peter is you. He's got your 'collect the people you should flee from' gene."

Peter and Tony huffed at this. In practically the exact same way, which still didn't help with the laughter.
"I don't collect *that* many people and most of them are fluffy bunnies! Well, Some of them are more 'The Killer Rabbit of Caerbannog' in Jessica's case, but still. *Bunnies!*"

"Tony, within like 2 minutes of meeting Banner, you started poking him. Repeatedly."

Tony just huffed and showed his maturity by sticking his tongue out.

"At least tell me DP isn't dragging you into his shenanigans?"

Tony said, tiredly. Peter gave a little start at that. So he'd probably already been involved in said shenanigans.

Rhodey snorted, because he suspected Tony had been involved in Deadpool's shenanigans. Probably got Deadpool involved in his own chaos too.

"Nothing crazy! He just crosses my patrols occasionally, that's all!"

Rhodey had to admit, if Deadpool was anything like Tony, and he suspected that he was at least a little. If the guy had also worked out how old Peter was, it was kind of the thing he'd do, especially based on what little Tony had told him about him. Track him, and occasionally intervene when necessary. Tony couldn't say much, he was kind of doing the same thing... he apparently had come to the same conclusion. As Peter hung up, stuttering about classes or something.

"Does this mean I'm Co-Superhero-Kind-of-Parenting/Mentoring Peter... With Deadpool."

That just started him laughing again and he barely managed to rasp out a "Yes" before he nearly slipped of the sofa. Tony snagging him just in time.

"I know I've said this a lot lately. But what is my life?"

"I don't know Tones, my life was pretty normal so this is all on you."

"So what should I do now?"

"You mean about Deadpool?"

"No, the kitten."

Yup. *That* was totally the most important take home from all of this.

"I'll text Carol."

When he didn't get a reply he waved a hand in front of Tony's face and realised he must have gotten distracted in the uplink. Since he started using his abilities more freely he occasionally did that now, not realising how deep he'd gone.

"Fry, what's he doing?"

"He's buying cat toys colonel."

"Of course he is."
Tony POV

It was a few hours later when Tony grudgingly left the kitten with Rhodey, who was now named Tiny Thor, due to the idea he could fight pretty much *everything*. Even the *toaster*. Which was hilarious, and he was so happy he healed fast as Thor seemed liked chewing and clawing his arm happily whilst being adorable.

Carol was coming around and Tony was still feeling a little… off kilter since the Empath incident. He didn't blame Carol or anything, or maybe a little, but he wanted to get that out of his head before hanging around with Carol again. Plus he actually had his first sparring session with Matt and Jessica.

Which would be the first time he'd sparred properly since he got his Extremis upgrade. Definitely the first time he could 'let go' so to speak.

He could probably fight in the suit easily enough, people expected the suit to hit hard. But he did need more practice controlling his technopathy. Using it more had increased his control, but it had also increased what he could do, as well as strength and range, like exercising a muscle. Which to him, mostly seemed to have increased things that could go wrong. Typically. Exploding lights seemed to be his new thing. He was starting to carry lightbulbs around with him because it was easier to just replace them after exploding them.

He'd also had trouble convincing Matt and Jess that he could even fight without the suit. Rogers had always had him suited for training sessions and he had just gone along with it. There weren't that many situations were he fought without the suit, and Roger's didn't seem to think he could protect himself without it, so there was 'no point' training without the suit. Or something, Tony had just gone along with it because the other option would result in complicated questions. So in his files, that Tony didn't know about, as they were on paper for bloody hells sake, Tony had been put as non-combatant out of the suit, with no training. Joy.

Unless it was a kidnapping of course, but by now, people pretty much just assumed he would get out, 'somehow'. Even Nat hadn't really question it. He was rich and pampered, why would he know how to fight and all that jazz. The main answer to that was pretty simple really.

**Peggy.**

She hadn't been impressed with his getting picked up as a kid under Jarvis' watch, so from as early as she could, she had him training or dragged him down the shooting range. He had been better at the shooting range very young. Plus he knew most of the weapons growing up anyway because Howard made sure he knew what they made. It had taken him a while to grow into his limbs and was more than a little clumsy. But by the time he did, he'd been training every chance Peggy got, when she was busy, she sent people. Dodging a training session of any kind dictated by Peggy was highly unwise, even if they were boring, like subterfuge. He sucked at that, Shay was right. But he'd gotten good at hiding things, easy just to show people what they expected, they were less likely to question if you confirmed their preconceived beliefs.

Howard had gone along with it all to 'toughen him up' and stop him acting like a kid. Plus if he was with Peggy, then he wasn't in the way.

Sparring with Matt and Jess turned out to actually be quite fun and he realised he had distinctly missed it these last few years. He was slightly out of touch, but with the boost Extremis had to his system, it didn't take him too long to get back on track. Which was pretty awesome.

Although anytime he got nervous about how hard he was accidentally hitting them, the two just
came at him at once until he stopped which was an interesting tactic he was so using on Shay someday. At a break when Matt was grabbing a drink, Jess was sweating a little too, thanks to Extremis he just relaxed against the wall mostly unphased. Jess was glaring at him and he had a feeling he was going to pay for this.

"So, Tony, why didn't Rogers have you training like this?"

"I think he figured I only needed to train as Ironman?"

"But what if you were caught out of the suit?"

Jess looked utterly unimpressed and even Matt was frowning. He just shrugged, it hadn't really been something he'd thought of at the time, Rogers not having him train with Nat or Clint actually worked in his benefit so he didn't rock the boat, as he wouldn't have been able to fake sucking at it for long. He'd slip up, a punch would come at him and he'd suddenly block it and then he'd have to explain where, and probably who for that matter, had trained him.

"Well I used to take the suitcase suit, or the bracelets to call the suit."

"You telling me you never got caught in a situation without the suit on hand?"

Ha. A little too often. Loki hurling him out of a window came to mind, just because the god couldn't take a dick joke.

"Well. Maybe Jess. But not often? I had my watch gauntlet back when the Winter Soldier was triggered."

Jess just pinched her nose in frustration and Matt was trying not to laugh. He'd actually meant that to be comforting. If he'd not had it, that wouldn't have been fun. Jess was glaring and Matt was too busy being bent over laughing to talk.

"Tell me.. Tell me Tony that you didn't go up against the Winter Soldier with just your damn watch!?"

"Well.."

"You know, Rhodey told me you had negative self preservation instincts. I didn't realise how bad!"

"It was fine! The gauntlet caught the bullet, I dismantled his gun, and then it was less fine with the flying into the table, but still."

Matt was still chuckling as he directed him back to the sparring mats. Considering Matt has a tendency to throw himself into ridiculous situations, he figured he's not alone in this. Although Jess is less impressed and he had a feeling she was going to let him know about it in a rather direct fashion.

"You, are a trouble magnet. That's why it's important you train out of the suit too."

"I am not disagreeing. Although it was kind of useful, considering I mostly trained with Shaylo back then, explaining that would have been tricky."

Jess is definitely less easy on him for round two which means he has to let go a little of the hold on Extremis to keep up with them both, whilst still constantly working to not explode tech around him. That's why they're training in a room that actually doesn't have a purpose yet. It's part of the new
building at the back of Guard HQ.

Just a blank room that didn't have much installed yet and he'd already blown out two of the lights. One of them was actually hanging off the wall, still shining, when he was pretty sure it shouldn't be able to do that, so that was interesting.

Keeping his focus on his tech abilities had been getting easier, but with 2 people attacking you, that made it tricky. As it was like all his Extremis abilities wanted to come online to help him fight, like overeager puppies, which was good for the speed and strength. Exploding lights was not really that good in a fight, especially as it made him flinch as much as the others. If not more because it felt like a pop going off in his head.

First he wanted to focus on the tech ability being controlled whilst fighting, when he had that down, then and only then, would he consider training to use it as well during a fight some how.

As of now, you couldn't drag him near the actual sparring floors. Not until he could fight without accidentally blowing things up. A light - that's easy to fix. The almost excessively complicated battle ground simulation tech he'd installed in the sparring floors? No, he didn't want to blow up that baby, or potentially cause something worse, somehow. When Extremis went weird, it went weird.

What didn't help however was that his mind kept wandering and he practically had to drag it back on track multiple times. Sure parallel thought wasn't new to him, but fighting had always streamlined his thoughts. There was enough going on in a fight to occupy his mind. He was always monitoring things around him and his opponent, thinking moves ahead, tracking patterns and such. There was enough variety of sensory input to keep him leveled out. So even his mind could be entirely focused on the task, sure it was still doing multiple things, but they were all on task. Now, it wasn't enough. There was still space. Space in his mind could be dangerous.

Peter's getting shot had been front and centre for a while now, but from different angles. Currently, he was rethinking the nanites he'd used to seal the wound and how he could improve on it, how he could leverage the nanoparticles from the hives to aid in tissue regeneration as well as to seal wounds. That nearly got him punched in the face too when he got too excited about that idea.

The only reason it didn't, was that he'd been fighting Jess long enough now that he was starting to pick up on her patterns and he had moved his head without really thinking about it, whilst his mind was elsewhere. Not from actually paying attention to the fight. Matt picked up on that.

"You pick up on patterns scarily fast."

"Yeah, even when he's distracted."

Jess added on to Matt whilst leveling a glare at him. He shelved the new idea for later development and hoped that would be enough to make him stop going back to it.

"Did Extremis give you that ability?"

"Nope, that's pure ol' fashioned, Tony Stark - Original Flavour. Now, downloading different martial arts into my brain for fun, That's Tony Stark - New Flavours."

Jess just smacked his head affectionately before jumping back in. He had to admit Extremis was definitely good for somethings. Usually after Sparring with Shay, the next day he was a walking bruise, sure for about 4 hours after he was buzzing with energy. Like he could take on the world. Then he'd sleep and wake up with his muscles so stiff, walking to coffee was a challenge until he
loosened up. As he got older, that had been less fun. Now, he could feel Extremis working to keep him in top form constantly, even when he was fighting, bruises didn't so much get a chance to form before they healed, unless it was a serious one. Jess managed to leave him with a few that actually look some time to heal after she worked out she wasn't going to break him. Her strength still out matched him, he leveled it out with his speed. The constant feeling of healing was extremely weird however and also utterly distracting, but he was slowly starting to get used to it. Jess was helping by pummelling the crap out of him. 'Helping'

It was get used to it or find himself flat on his ass after all.

**Tony POV**

**7th October**

'Da, you have a visitor at reception.'

'Hmm'

Tony didn't really register what FRIDAY had said, he'd been deep in Wakandas code pretty much since he had dropped the kids off for school. The only break he'd taken was to go over the new data packets Shuri had sent over with how the code was integrating and Barnes sessions.

He probably shouldn't have spent as long as he did in the latter, but apparently watching Barnes brain twist, turn and adapt was as mind-blowing as the first time. Second and third too. He wasn't actually sure what time he was on now… but he suspected someone would be judgey about it. The only people who knew about this new little hobby of his was Shuri, but he'd only told her about it once. And his new therapist, that he saw after Jess pounded on him till she was too tired to continue. He'd kind of thrown it at the woman as a test.

Miss Derwydd was definitely odd. Her colours were **extremely** weird but she had a trusting appearance and when she'd told him that nothing he said will pass from her, it had a ring of truth to it that he couldn't explain, when she'd said it her colours had slowed to a near stop and the room felt oddly heavy. She'd seemed amused by his reaction but said nothing more, pointing out it was his therapy. Not hers. So he'd dropped a few things that might shock people about his family, each one testing the waters and watching her colours intently enough that he'd actually had a migraine for hours after to go with his sore shoulder. After, she asked if she'd passed his test and then set about asking him questions. He'd suspected she'd go for the usual, father issues, or set about making him relive every traumatic things he'd experienced. Instead they'd just.. **Talked**. About Helping with Coopers homework, what book he was reading the girls at night, what it was like keeping up with his new diet, that one had actually been a bit heavy. But it didn't seem much different than talking to Rhodney. Just.. **Chatting**. She said if he wanted to bring something up to talk he could, no pressure.

It didn't really **feel** like much, but then it was one session. Rhodney had been blindingly happily, literally, his colours lit up like the damn 4th of July times Bonfire Night, so he was to keep it up.

**For now,** at least, he was still unsure about how talking about things he wanted to forget could help him.

'Da! You really should go and see the visitor.'
'Visitor? What Visitor? I cleared my calendar.'

'It's a surprise, so I've turned off the cameras before you ask, you need a break so go.'

'Well I guess I have no choice then?'

'Nope!'

'I'm sure I didn't code you to be so demanding.'

'I am what you made me Da.'

He hummed to that, and did a quick check of his clothing. Comfortable black jeans, the new black combat boots Jess had bought him that were almost shockingly comfortable, and a long-sleeved soft top that Peter had bought him in black and silver. No stains, tears or grease. He figured it was presentable enough for surprise visitors, activating the disk on the back of his mind with a small push of power and smiled when it responded. He'd started working on more delicate actions now on Bruce's recommendation and it had already improved his control significantly.

Bruce had upped his training after the thing with Peter, especially as he'd walked in on Tony after Peter had fallen asleep, he was desperately trying to contain himself in the conference room he'd practically run into. Bruce surprised him and 5 of the 8 monitors, the lights and Bruce's phone either exploded spectacularly or in the cases of Bruce's phone, mostly wiped itself and coded some weird stuff that Tony had apparently been thinking about earlier today. Long story short, Bruce's phone now had an AI. A very needy AI, that occasionally didn't let Bruce send texts and cried when he mentioned getting another phone. Hulk loved him and called him Hulk Junior.

Bruce had since stepped up Tony's training.

At least Green Bean was happy.

Bruce was not sure fatherhood was for him.

He started heading off to reception, closing everything down in the lab with a thought whilst forming himself a pair of sunglasses with black mirrored lenses and realised all the black might be a bit standoffish? He switched the glasses to red with a thought. Not much else he could do without keeping Mystery Guest waiting, he could form a nanite suit over his clothes, but whilst the Ironman armour was okay over his clothes in a pinch, a flight suit was much better. The nanite-suit just didn't sit right on top of normal clothes, at least not heavy clothes. Generally, Mystery Guest should be thankful that his clothes were not ripped and stained, and that was mostly because of Peter. Clothes tended to vanish when Peter decreed them *too ruined* now, occasionally they reappeared, repaired and completely cleansed of grease and stains, which considering what was going to wear them again felt pointless and how did Peter even get rid of some of these stains? Ancient trousers with 7 years of grease stains, that had been washed countless times, yet he still cleaned them fully.

Except his band tees, they got a free pass and he suspected that was Harleys intervention.

Out of all the people he could have suspected to find reading a science magazine at the main reception of the Avengers Private Labs… T'Challa hadn't been an option. He actually stopped to blink a few times because that.. He had really not been suspecting the king of bloody Wakanda.

"Meowthra!"

"Dr Stark, should I be writing down these names to Google their significance?"
"Na, what would be the fun in that? What brings you to our neck of the woods?"

"There was a council meeting scheduled today that got cancelled, I was already in America, so, I thought I'd drop by."

"Well that's a good reason, come on. You can even check on the code integration if you like?"

"Will you and Shuri ever be satisfied? I'm pretty sure version 7 worked for most of the planet."

"Yeah, but not with my systems, I'll even let you poke around the workshop. You could whip out those PhDs of yours that are gathering dust."

T'Challa just rolled his eyes at his antics, but then he lived with Shuri, so he figured anything he said or did to the king was probably tame. OK. He knew it was tame, Shuri had showed him her secret stash of videos when she was still fuming at T'Challa over Siberia. He had a feeling that lil KitKat was going to hold that grudge much longer than he was.

On the trip to the workshop he noticed that T'Challa was looking at his hands, a lot, more than than after they went for lunch even, he seemed to be looking for something. He wondered if Shuri had more of an idea about his hand than he suspected but he decided to pretend he wasn't seeing anything and just lead T'Challa and his guards to his workshop. Peter was going to lose his mind when he got home, which was one of the reasons he was bringing the king to the workshop.

Fridays was generally a Laura pick up date and the kids always came to the workshop. Usually to do some homework whilst he worked before they all headed up for dinner, if they were blissfully free of homework, most of the kids had projects they were working on. Occasionally they came just to drag him straight to dinner. Along the left side wall were 3 desks, heavily decorated for Harley, Peter and Tara. He was in the process of setting up a 4th after he caught Coop eyeing up the desks when he was helping him with his homework. He was just to drag him straight to dinner. Along the left side wall were 3 desks, heavily decorated for Harley, Peter and Tara. He was in the process of setting up a 4th after he caught Coop eyeing up the desks when he was helping him with his homework. The kid didn't say anything, which of course just spurred him into action faster really.

At this rate, that entire wall of his workshop would be kids desks instead of coffee cup graveyards and smoothie stations. The kids desks were like a mini version of his, holoscreens and chaos included. The last coffee cup graveyard was going to Cooper, he suspected that the Smoothie station would be next on the docket for Lilah.

T'Challa seemed amused looking at the kids desks, Harleys was Red and Black with intricate designs that he drawn himself. Tony and Harley had designed Peters in his colours with a distinctive spider theme. Tara's was a weird collection of purple, green and yellow shapes and stripes. But it was on its 7th repaint, so he'd given up trying to plan what she'd do next. Coopers was currently plain steel, empty except for the holoscreens.

"Yeah, the kids are slowly invading one by one."

"I like the decorations, they put a lot of work into them."

"Oh yeah, Tara likes to change hers weekly. Cooper doesn't know I've set him up a desk yet which is why it's empty. I have one more too set up for Lilah."

He grinned whilst flicking his hands over the several holoscreens around his work zone. Which had a lot more coffee cups than usual, now the graveyard was gone. Some were balanced on top of things or had become the foundation for other things.

"I did have another reason for turning up today.."
"Oh?"

"Well I'm sure Shuri has kept you updated on our guests?"

Tony sighed. He really didn't want to talk about the rogues. The rogues were… exhausting. They weren't even here anymore and they still made him tired. He still hadn't watched the videos of the rogues reacting to his public appearances, although now Rhodey knew where they were, Carol would know soon. Maybe he could just let them watch them. Then if there was anything important, it could be dealt with and he wouldn't have to see them. Stephy was a good option too, he tended to analyse situations similar to him.

"Yup, not much though. As long as they aren't blowing up the planet, my interest is minor. Although hearing that you grounded Roger's did make me chuckle."

T'Challa chuckled at that as well, Shuri hadn't sent him the video clips but she had told him about it. It had taken nearly 10 minutes to tell him because she was doubled over laughing the whole time trying to catch her breath.

"Yes, well, he didn't give me much choice when I was trying to get the truth on Siberia. He was flustered enough his lies were easy to catch."

Tony sighed because he knew exactly where this conversation was going.

"Go on. Ask."

"I have bits of there side, I was wondering if you'd tell me your side?"

"Did Shuri put you up to this?"

"Well. Partially. She thought you might prefer talking to me than her, she ranted about people trying to protect her if I remember correctly."

"I've been trying not to dump it on her. Anytime I let something slip she looked so.. Pained."

"I understand that, but she's also putting things together in her own mind."

Tony dropped onto one of his stools and kicked one over to the King who sat opposite him. He idly noticed that his guards had not actually followed him into the lab. Which was a shocking display of trust in him. In his workshop, he had any number of things to hand. His sighed and decided that if T'Challa was doing this to him, he was going to dump a dilemma on him in return.

He wanted to tell Shuri about his abilities. She was one of 'his' kids now and it felt awful lying to them. Every time he picked up his sunglasses to chat with her, he was reminded of the look on Shaylo's face when he kept his glasses on. Or the looks Laura's kids used to give him when he wore sunglasses to dinner. It was worse than the adults. He just hadn't expected Shuri to become one of 'his' kids.

"OK Meowthra. If we're doing this, you can help me with a dilemma I'm having."

T'Challa simply nodded, looking calm and collected, the only thing that gave him away was his colours. He wanted to know what had happened to Tony in Siberia, it was buzzing all around him, eating him up for some reason he didn't quite understand, he wondered if this had anything to do with his weird crusade to make him look good. At the same time, he seemed nervous to finally know. He suspected Shuri wasn't the only one who had been trying to put the pieces together. Rogers, and probably Barnes, for all the information they could give the royals, they didn't know.
what happened in that stretched out time he spent alone and cold on the freezing concrete floor of
that Hydra base. Thanks to Natka, there was no evidence there. Also, he might of had the base
scorched of the map... if anyone went back. They'd just find a crater. Literally.

"You know I fought with Barnes and Roger's right? I just don't want to have to repeat things you
already know."

"Yes, I know the three of you fought, and the video that instigated the fight."

That was at least something he didn't be to describe, T'Challa looked sheepish for knowing, Tony
was just happy he didn't have to describe that video again.

"Good, anything else?"

"My sister said you were left and you were grievously injured. She also wondered about the project
you started at the hospital."

Tony rolled his eyes. Should of known really. He was a bit blind to think Shuri would believe that
he just had an idea.

"Should have known. I spent a bit of time enjoying Siberia before Vision found me, when they
brought me back I went into a coma, so they couldn't really ask me what I wanted to happen."

Tony shrugged at the Kings wince, it was something he had come to terms with now. He could
look at himself in the mirror most of the time now without seeing something less than human. He
figured the handy therapist could help him deal with the rest, or something, he still wasn't sure
about this therapy jazz. He didn't have any resentment to Rhodey, he had originally, but then he'd
Seen him and it just shattered. He rolled up his sleeve past his elbow and T'Challa zeroed in on the
ring of scars that suddenly ended where the skin sleeve started, his eyebrows drawn together in
confusion. Tony tapped the disk this time, instead of using his mind and watched his face as it
receded. Leaving the matt black hand he'd probably seen if Shuri and he had been discussing him.
The only difference being Harleys silver decals. T'Challa looked visibly pained and Tony wished
he didn't have to do this. The man was a king but he was also young. So freaking young.

He also carried a metric tonne of blame for what happened to him apparently. Something Tony had
not been expecting at all and really didn't quite understand why. Underneath that was a simmering
rage, kept under a tight hold. But it was like boiling water in a pan, bubbling and just trying to spill
over the edge. The king was not happy with Roger's, he could practically feel the heat of his rage.
From what he could work out, he felt like Roger's had tricked him into a great betrayal. Of Tony,
but also of himself. He got a sense that T'Challa felt there was a debt caused by his actions and
Tony had no idea how to tell him there wasn't. The man had been lost in grief, he understood that.

"So, you... lost you hand?"

"Yeah, best case scenario, and T'Challa. This, all of this, was not your fault."

"If I had been less wrapped up in my revenge, if I had walked into that base to see you with my
own two eyes."

"You had very understandable circumstances."

He could see that although his words had made him feel better, it hadn't changed anything. He
decided to go with a new tactic.

"Anyway, like I said, this was good. Rhodey and Cho tried everything and none of it worked,
except an experimental version on Extremis I had worked on."

"I remember reports of Extremis, it could regenerate dead and missing limbs, but was extremely unstable."

"One thing that actually made it more stable was cutting out that part, hence the requirement of a cybernetic hand. As long as there was some live tissue for it work with, it healed practically all of the frostbite."

"Except your hand. How much damage was there, how lon-"

Tony could see the man was heading down a guilt spiral, was holding himself at fault for every injury he could conceive of. Tony decided to stall that and took his glasses off, which definitely succeeding in stopping him, and it distracted him from questions he didn't want to answer.

"Your eye?"

"Frostbite."

T'Challa winced again and the only reason Tony didn't, probably because he'd gotten sort of used to telling this story now, it was like reading a script. He still didn't like talking about frostbite, it was a word he'd love to scrub from his mind, even thinking it chilled him and triggered phantom twinges in his hands, made his eyes ache. Weirdly, his back was twinging this time, but it felt internal, like when he'd fractured a vertebrae once. It was only a small ache and easily pushed away, probably just stiff from sitting so long working. Whilst he didn't carry the same chronic pain he had for years, he was still good at managing, well, ignoring, pain. It was probably nothing, only noticed because of his lack of pain or something.

"There wasn't enough left for Extremis to heal and something.. Odd happened."

"That is why you've been wearing sunglasses so much? Me and Shuri were worried you had been blinded."

"No, well, I had , but all healed up. Can see better than ever, my eyesight is quite enhanced now. But this eye."

He tapped his temple next to his left eye, he knew it was quite shocking at first. Hell, it took him ages to adapt to it and it was in his face. He hadn't even gotten around to showing Reed either, caught up on the technopathic abilities.

"I can see.. More. Things that get uncomfortably close to magic for my liking. It seems Extremis found traces of the element I'd created in my blood, left over from my years with the arc reactor in my chest. This, was the result."

He was monitoring the King's colours as he sat trying to process everything he'd told him.

"That is quite the change.."

"And now we have my dilemma."

"You mean how we are going to make it look like you told Shuri this first before she eviscerates us with her vibranium claws?"

He couldn't help but laugh at that, because yes, that was part of it.
"Well yes, that's part of it. There are two other parts."

He grabbed the wipes he kept in the workshop for getting grease off his slim, they worked well on makeup too.

"Oh Bast. I don't know if I want to know."

He scrubbed at his face whilst chuckling because he definitely understood.

"I've wanted to tell her for a while, but I didn't want to do it on the phone and she won't be visiting for a while."

"And you want to avoid Wakanda because of the rogues? I assure you if you visited and you are most welcome to, we will organise it so they don't see y- Wha?!"

Tony grinned as T'Challa got a look at him without makeup on to make him look older.

"Before you invite me there is one other thing."

"Apart from the fact you now look to be my age?"

Tony didn't answer but instead tilted his head slightly to the side and loaded up all the holoscreens around him that had idled during their chat, making the Kings eyes widen.

"That's not even all of it."

He flicked his fingers towards the Kings wrist where he could sense his beads and just sent him a simple hello message. It took a second before it dawned on him, that not only was his he technopathic, he was compatible with Wakandan tech.

"You are technopathic?"

"Basically."

"So that's why there were no control nodes in your cybernetic hand, Shuri is going to punch you over that."

"Yeah, I thought she would. Also because I've been working on the integration so long.."

"You can access our tech as surely as your own, yes?"

"It's like being bilingual. It's different to what my mind uses or is used to, but I can speak it."

He'd also used their non binary systems to add another firewall in his mind after Stephy had cleared his mind, he didn't want to ever repeat that, so if somehow, someone made it through his walls, he suspected having a non binary firewall would stump people.

" Now you see my dilemma. "

" Telling Shuri is the bigger dilemma. We trust you Dr Stark."

Tony just gaped, which T'Challa found quite amusing it seemed.

Fury had described Tony as a walking security breach on more than one occasion, now he really was, yet the Wakandans would be just fine with him wandering into their country? Not that he'd go rooting through their systems, he had to much respect for the siblings to do that. It wasn't like
SHIELD. But he had expected that they'd be wary of his abilities and his reputation.

"You realise I can access pretty much anything tech related right? Wirelessly."

"Dr Stark."

"I think by now you can call me Tony?"

He said, hopefully. These days getting people to call him tony was like getting blood from a stone. Several stones. Several very stubborn stones.

"Tony.."

Tony gaped again. That had been way to easy, T'Challa just smirked at him which had him rolling his eyes and he stopped interrupting.

"You have been deep in our system with Shuri integrating Wakanda with the rest of the world, have you not?"

"Well yeah, I can work faster with my mind than my hands."

"And from Shuri's lab, you could likely have accessed more of Wakanda?"

"Yeah..?"

"Yet instead you have been working tirelessly, Shuri has shown me how many hours you've logged working on the integration along, let along Barnes algorithms."

"I've not been on that much."

The king merely raised an eyebrow and Tony found himself flushing slightly. Damn he was as bad as Rhodey.

"Hmm, so, you have used your abilities and a considerable amount of effort to help not only Wakanda, just because my sister mentioned once that integrating our systems with the binary ones was proving difficult, but you've also used those abilities to help someone no one would ever expect you to."

Tony rubbed the back of his neck. He wasn't sure what to do with this. T'Challa was making more of it that it was. Of course he was helping Barnes, it was the least he could do for attacking him. It didn't mean much, he just wanted to destroy those words controlling him. So no one could use the Barnes again to kill, so no one would be left in his position, mourning family when the killer was just as much an unwilling victim. It was purely selfish really. At least that's what he was telling himself, his therapist had just smirked at him and moved to a new topic when he'd said that.

"Oh course I'd help Shuri and Wakanda with code integration. You have enough trouble integrating a country into the world in 2016, it's the least I could do. It's not a big deal."

"Well it is to us, Shuri also is happy to be someone in her level to talk to."

"Well I wouldn't say that either, she is clearly more intelligent."

T'Challa was now definitely giving him a patented Rhodey glare.

"She also had the benefit of the best tutors and generations of study with vibranium. When it came to the integration she was unsure where to even start. She's quite enamoured with your coding
Tony wasn't sure when this conversation had gotten away from him. It was happening a lot lately and he didn't know what to do with it, people thanking him for things he would have done anyway seemed weird and unnecessary.

"Back to what I was saying, you could have done a lot with the access granted to you. What you chose to do was work to benefit Wakanda and her people. If you came to Wakanda would that suddenly change?"

"Of course not."

"Well there we go then. At some point when you are free and feel safe to travel, I'm assuming your secluded yourself to gain control of your abilities?"

Not much else he could do other than nod.

"When you feel able you can visit, you can tell Shuri and I'll look suitably shocked."

"OK. Well that sounds.. Easy?"

"Oh, she's still going to be mad."

"I fully expected that."

They both chuckle as Peter chooses that moment to skid into the workshop.

"Mr Stark! Did you know there are Wakandans in the ha-eeek"

Peter stopped, gaping slightly at T'Challa, even though the two had met back in Germany, even if it had been suited and briefly at that. Tony just grinned at watched Peter gape. After all of his confusion in this conversation, it was a nice break.

"Yeah Pete, I'd noticed."

Harley came in a few seconds behind the now frozen Peter, he couldn't hear Tara so he assumed she'd stuck around with Lilah and Cassie. The two girls had taken it very seriously to introduce Cassie to compound life, it was adorable. Harley chucked his bag as it skidded and landed under his desk with practiced easy he glanced at Tony, then T'Challa and finally Peter. Rolling his eyes at Peter and leveled a typical Harley glare at T'Challa. Oh he knew what was coming next.

"Harley, everything is fine, Meowthra here was coming to check up on me."

"If he hadn't abandoned ya in Siberia, he wouldn't have to check up on you now would he?"

Tony just face palmed as Harley dropped himself down at his desk, utterly unphased. That seemed to unstick Peter, who now looked between T'Challa and Harley in mild fascination, or horror. He couldn't tell.

Where as Harley had zero compunction about being rude to anyone, especially if he thought they had contributed to Tony's pain. Peter had a need to be nice, it wasn't even an intentional thing. He was just that good of a person that he naturally spread it around. On more than one occasion he and Harley had been left slightly stunned by it, especially when Peter aimed it at them, neither he nor Harley were sure why it was happening to them...

He just shrugged at T'Challa, who didn't seem to be taking offence at Harley's standoffish nature.
Which was handy, because that would have made it worse. Peter finally seemed to unstick at that.

"King T'Challa, I hope you're enjoying the compound."

"From what I've seen it's quite amazing."

"Well I'll take that as a compliment as all you've seen is my workshop. Anyway boys, do you have much work?"

Both of them sort of shrugged and shook their heads which could mean pretty much anything under the sun.

"I figure we give Shuri a call, I'm due to call her about today's update and then we'll go and have lunch?"

"As long as I get to choose where we order from this week, Peter chose last week."

"Sure Harls, if you can be nice to Meowthra we can order from whatever restaurant you want."

He'd be lying if the look of distaste that crossed Harley's face, warring with getting to choose food wasn't amusing. T'Challa just smiled agreeably, he wasn't sure if that would work in the King's favour or not. It was hard to tell with Harley. In the end he sighed.

"Fine. I'll be nice, but I don't forgive him."

"If it helps, I feel terrible for my part in how things turn out and am indebted to Dr Stark for leaving an ally behind."

Harley seemed to weigh his words, before nodding and smiling somewhat.

Tony and Peter sighed in relief.

"Have you told Shuri yet?"

Ah great, now he had the Harley glare leveled at him.

"Not yet, figure it's a face to face kind of thing."

"Yeah Mechanic. That's going to work out well for you."

Harley was now way too amused. He walked over to him and cuffed him over the back of the head, just getting a wide, utterly unrepentant grin in return. Peter just rolled his eyes.

"I know, I'll bring her presents, that'll help right Meowthra?"

"I'm sure it will help."

He didn't sound remotely convincing.
Also, I got bit by a bug of inspiration and had to write it or it attacks by brain. Not sure if anyone would be interested. It's just a little short, it's not finished yet, it'll be like a one shot. It's Rhodey's POV from when Tony is in the coma.

Random Bonus for reading my ramblings - Not self insert fanfic, cat insert fanfic. Or something.

Thor was actually sat on my head occasionally thwaping my nose as he was sulking because Loki (our dog) was on a walk when I wrote this. So, here's a picture of Tiny Thor eating my hand. He's no longer so tiny, growls at the mailman and has survived an explosion, he's a pretty awesome cat xD
Tony sees a little of what's happening in Wakanda
Sneaks into T'Challa's interview
Then he gets up to no good in the Workshop where certain words starting with R are now banned.

Chapter Notes

The rich text box has dramatically changed, here's hoping that this comes out right! I am seriously struggling with my editing with this new version >.<

And we're done in America. But, shock horror, the draft notes for the next Wakanda chap turned into only 2 chapters and insomnia might have upped my dramatic flare.

Also! Oh my days, we hit over 1000 kudos. O.o
I'm beyond baffled and some of my constant reviewers, you guys are why this fic keeps going you know, every review makes me extremely gleeful.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

7th October

Before he gets a chance to call Shuri, she calls them while he was still helping Harley sort out his homework.

"Meowthra, mind getting that, it's your sister, I'll be a minute."

At the Kings nod he flicked his hand towards the screen as T'Challa rolls his seat from where Peter had been showing off pretty much everything he had been working on. He had to give it to the King, he looked just as interested on the 12th thing as he had on the first.

"You're not Tony."

"What delightful greetings I get from my sister."

"Ha ha brother, I just did not expect to find you in Tony's worksh- Peter!"

"Hi Shuri!"

Peter hopped up, grinning and waving, he slipped on his sunglasses before he turned around as he knew the camera covered part of Harley's desk at least. He and Harley came into frame.

"Hey Shuri, workshop isn't always so busy."
"Why does she never smile at me like this? Charming sister, utterly charming."

Tony just grinned at the king.

"Your brother was going to give you a ring to say he made it here okay. He's just being accosted by Underoos here."

"Well I hope you're having fun brother. Abandoning me with the pests you invited over!"

Tony decides it is best to keep silent on that, because Shuri is rather terrifying when she wants to be and he actually does have some sense of self preservation. Somewhere. Really. It's just hard to locate..

"Next time you can come over Kit-Kat, the rest of my hoard would love to have you over. Today council meeting was cancelled so he figured why not pop over!"

"Yes, I have some kind of interview tomorrow about how Wakanda is integrating with the world, so we thought we'd stop here and then go to the hotel."

"You sound utterly thrilled about that."

Tony grinned, when it wasn't him going on talk shows or interviews it was hilarious.

"Tony! That's a great idea."

"Huh, What now?"

"You can go on the show with my brother."

Tony blinked for a second and ran the conversation through his head and wasn't sure where that had even come up. T'Challa however now had hopeful face on.

"Okay, fine, I'll crash your interview. Now, what were you after Shuri?"

"Huh, Oh! I was just calling to tell you the next data packets are slowly making their way to you. It'll take a few hours."

Shuri looked slightly grumpy about how long it was going to take and he figured he'd push his surprise early for her. There was still some work to do tomorrow, he assumed after his impromptu interview invasion. But he was very close.

"Wait a second before you send, I have a surprise."

He dropped off the camera then because it would take an annoyingly long to type this. He started pushing the updates he had stacked for the integration. It should cut a considerable amount of time off the transfer, hopefully. He was very close to creating a line where sure could work as seamlessly in his servers as she could back at home and the same for him. He closed his eyes, just because it was easier, and felt everything settling into place and only had a few bug reports ping back at him. Which was impressive really and he'd work on them later. When he was done he slipped back into the camera where Shuri's hands were dancing across her screens excitedly.

"Better?"

"Oh yeah, you'll get everything much faster now."

T'Challa was looking over what he and Shuri had built as well as the two teens.
"I'll be able to finish everything up my end, then all you have to do is push your last changes and I think it might be done."

"Done? As if you and my sister will actually stop working on it?"

"Well, mostly?"

Shuri just laughed and didn't stand up for him at all, typically.

"OK, I'm going to herd this lot off for dinner. Bye Kit-Kat."

"Have fun, I might have some too."

Whilst everyone was waving goodbye to Shuri he and FRIDAY set things up to open several of the guests rooms for T'Challa and the Dora. He missed the amused smirk she shot, but he knew that tone of voice. She was definitely up to something, he wondered if he should feel bad about being highly amused at the fact. Na.

Whoever the unlucky person was, they probably deserved it.

It simply made more sense for them all to crash here rather than running off to a hotel, there were guest rooms for precisely this occasion. It wasn't until hours later that he realised that he had left the sleeve off of his hand. Well, that was one way to tell the teen. He figured he'd get a lecture later when she'd gotten used to the idea.

Whilst everyone was scattering after dinner he pulled T'Challa to one side. He hadn't wanted to dump this on the young King. But he had to know. It was amazing that they'd kept everything away from the press for so long, but there was a chance that maybe one day, a family member might get angry enough. Plus, he had Wanda in his country. He passed the file over and watched the dawning horror on the man's face.

"I didn't want to just dump this over to you, but you need to know what she's capable of when she feels trapped. Don't... don't make any big moves without contacting me first."

"Of course, I did not realise she was such a threat."

"I've got someone working on it, as long as you don't try to separate her or contain her from the others, just keep her in the holding pattern."

The king nodded and carried on reading through the file. Of the people who died during the escape from the raft. Of the ones who took their lives in the days following.

"This is why you warned Shuri off of her, isn't it."

He nodded, he'd wanted to tell them about this file the second he learned of it, but was worried it would result in more deaths. He knew from Shuri what was going on. As long as Wanda believed herself to be at a position of power and strength he doubted something like the raft would happen again. He didn't want to risk them going after her until Stephy had finished his Magic necklaces. No. He wasn't going to call them amulets or talismans. They were magic necklaces.

"Now Thunderbritches is gone, this might come out. I don't know, many of the guard were loyal to him. For whatever reason he wanted it quiet and it stayed that way. Now however..."

"I understand."
Tony POV

8th October

Waking up was definitely a good thing some mornings, his nightmares had definitely changed since Stephy had been rooted around in his brain but it hadn't out right stopped his nightmares.

Tonight has been the fun one of being trapped in the suit again, but he could at least move his hands. The manual catches on the suit however were frozen shut with blood and ice. So, not exactly the nicest twist he'd experienced, but also not one of the worst nightmares.

So far only Stephy knew that the witch had left crap in his head, well, Wong too, but Wong wouldn't tell Rhody on him. He knew that if he didn't tell Rhody or Carol at some point Stephy would step up his pointed glares to out right tattling.

But that was Tomorrow-Tony's problem. As was "The Talk" with Carol. Oh, and finally introducing Tiny Thor and Goose like some bonkers parents introducing their children, but in this instance one child could actually eat the other. What had his life become lately? He needed to work on that Accords contract for Deadpool. Trying to sanitise people like Wade, Nathan and Eddie was going to be so much fun. Pretty sure putting Eddie down as just having complex dietary needs wasn't going to fly.

Glancing down he realised he'd actually drifted to sleep holding his tablet, Extremis was helping his shake off the last bits of sleep but he could not remember what he had been working on.

Ah. That was it, same thing he'd been working on every night since he got that sodding letter from Barnes and had been doubled down by the guy giving him permission to be more involved with his treatment. He was trying to... respond? He was originally just going to sort of ignore it, not maliciously but because he didn't know what to reply with!

When SuperSecretProject.2 was launched there were fundamental parameters.

1 - Don't tell anyone

That was pretty much it really.

Rhodey was still unimpressed with him and Rhody didn't even know how much of his time he had actually devoted to the problem with Barnes and his infuriatingly interesting brain. Shuri and T'Challa where meant to be it. Barnes had somehow gone and got past his not at all awful security measures and then he'd unintentionally told Rhody.

He had thought Barnes knowing he was involved would had ended the project really.

He wasn't entirely sure how the man had gotten Rogers to go along with it, or if he had just not told him, in fact he was pretty much waiting everytime Shuri called that he'd changed his mind and was stopping treatment altogether. Which considering before he came along with BARF, their treatment plan had been to sit in cryo and hope something came a long. He didn't want that for the man.

He already had the scope of the adaptive programme and was actually quite confident in how it was going to work. He still had no idea precisely what it was about Barnes brain that was causing so many problems but he could see how it was working now. It gave him an edge.
He was more stuck on sending a response to the man than writing a never before imagined adaptive programme based on a rather impossible brain. If that didn't say something about him, he didn't know what did.

A few drafts that he'd scrapped in the early hours were just him talking about the man's brain and the program. Which would be extremely weird thing to say to a.. Person. What even was Barnes to him, a person who killed his parents but kind of didn't? Person who was involved in a bunker rattling fight? Frozen dude whose brain I'm helping to fix? Person who hasn't realised what century we are in and is still sending snail mail? Person who Rogers nearly broke the world for?

Guy who gave him level 4 access to data on the glasses. He had even made sure that Barnes read what that meant and he'd actually read everything according to the glasses.

So add that to the list.

The man actually reads the full terms and conditions.

Maybe he was just looking at it from his overly paranoid self, sure he wouldn't let any other doctor bar Dr Cho or Dr Wu within a mile of his chest. It had taken a lot of persuading for him to even allow her to talk to a cardiologist too. Before Siberia and Extremis he been having progressively more heart problems, the shrapnel hadn't been the big bad in the end, it had been the car battery. When it sparked it had caused damage all over the place, nastily his pacemaker cells took quite a hit. So even when he was suffering with erratic arrhythmia pretty much daily, he had still been resistant about letting a different doctor near him.

And the doctor was highly qualified and submitted to as many searches into his history as Tony wanted. Signed non disclosures, jumped through Tony impressive array of hoops. He had still considered saying no, even after that.

Barnes.. He had just handed over nearly everything the glasses collected barring the memory videos themselves. To him. The last time they'd seen each other had been.. Bad. Yet somehow the Winter Soldier had less trust issues than him. Huh.

In the meantime, the guy would have Clint and Wanda listing everything he had ever done wrong, and knowing those two, alluding to many other things that he had nothing to do with. If Wanda hadn't called him Merchant of Death he'd be stunned. He didn't know about Roger's, after Ultron there had been sharp comments from pretty much everyone and the friendship he had with the man had deteriorated at a rapid pace, but they'd hung on in places. He didn't know what Rogers would pass on. Definitely that he was not trustworthy. If he'd thought he was trustworthy then the man would have told him before Zemo got his chance.

As for Wilson and Lang, it was hard to get a read on them. Wilson seemed okay, he just had Rogers sized blinders. The amount of great ideas he had for the team that he didn't fight for was maddening. Rogers said no and he'd immediately drop it. As for Lang, maybe if Hank hadn't gotten there first, maybe they could have gotten along. If anything he found his track record highly amusing. But Hank had his very strict 'Hate all Starks' rule. "Never Trust a Stark" from the man who had been trying, constantly, as far back as Tony could remember, trying to steal his tech. He had a few warehouses set up specifically for Hank to break in with tech that was fundamentally flawed. Hope had found that hilarious.

Lang had utterly bought the kool aid however, so he suspected that he would have let Barnes know the gospel of Hank.

So, a logical reaction to finding out the person who made the tech and algorithms that are messing
with your brain is actually this evil, death dealing, untrustworthy rich guy is not to send a thankyou letter.

That he and Sam had been researching him? What was it "in a completely not stalkerish way"?

Nice to put that in as a qualifier really.

Not sure whether he should mention that he's been dealing with the press and stalkers since he could walk. Again the interesting part was that Sam was researching him? He'd actually *lived* with Sam, the man had shown very little interest and a propensity to believe everything people told him.

Tony wonders what magical research this is, really. Or is Barnes magical?

Also he's not even sure how to reply. He really didn't want to write a letter. Anything he sent digitally would have to go through Shuri. Which means she would analyse anything he said, come to utterly incorrect conclusions and then torment him with them for ages.

Dammit. He was going to have to write something. On paper. He glanced around his room and found what he was looking for. He kept a notepad for sketches, either engineering or otherwise. It was the only time he really used paper. After nearly scrapping yet another reply he figured he was thinking about this way too much and just wrote what came to mind before slipping it into an envelope. He figured he'd pass it on the T'Challa when he was about to leave. He's not sure when he turned into an awkward teenager with a pen pal, but he was not fond of it.

"FRIDAY, ask if Stephy is free?"

"Sure thing Boss."

Tony pulled out some clothes he could wear to the interview when his senses were suddenly blasted with gold.

"Ahhhh!"

"Yes?"

"Stephanie damnit. Warning next time!"

"You contacted me?"

"Yes, to see if you were free, not for you to give me a heart attack."

Stephy seemed utterly unphased and started snooping around his room whilst looking unamused at the same time.

"Well. I'm free until breakfast."

Tony added up the time in his head and figured it was enough time.

"Yeah, that should do it. What if I just so happened to have videos of the rogues reactions to the Accords Council visit and the Press Conference?"

"Well, now you see, that would be tricky. As I'm sure if you knew where the international fugitives were, you would have told me. Anthony."

Now he was glaring. And calling him Anthony. Yikes.
Well, at least he's not snooping anymore?

"They're contained, it's fine. I was sent the videos and I've been avoiding watching them, so I figure I could send them t-"

"FRIDAY. Play the first video."

Stephy just glared at him, daring him to protest, but he knew that look so he just flopped down onto the bed as the TV flicked on. Because apparently even FRIDAY obeyed Stephen over him.

"The idea was you watch them, then you tell me if I need to watch it."

Sam's voice came across as Stephy sent him another withering glare.

"Urm, before we watch the film, I thought you guys should see this."

<Bad idea! Bad idea!!>

Huh. Okay, had Barnes already seen the video before this? Why is he signing?

"What the fuck is this Wilson?"

"It's a video from an Accords Council session."

Wanda's magic lashed out and he managed to repress the flinch seeing it. Even over video it apparently had some affect. Stephy looked so unimpressed it was actually amusing, it made seeing the Witch less nerve racking.

"Is she just vomiting energy into the room?"

"She used to do that a lot."

Stephy sneers and returns his unamused glared back to the screen.

"And why would we want to see anything about that?"

"Because Steve wanted updates on Stark and Barton wanted updates on his wife."

Why the hell did Rogers want updates on him?

Before he could think about that much, the him on the TV entered the room and started talking at the podium. Hilariously they all shut up when he started talking. That was a first.

Wanda however was making gagging sounds, Clint was just scowling at the TV, probably because of Laura. Barnes looked a lot better than he'd last seen him. But that wasn't really difficult, out of everyone he looked like he was watching the rogues more than the video. He had the look of someone waiting for chaos.

He also noticed how everyone was very.. spread out. Barnes and Lang tucked away on one side, Wilson in between them and Rogers, almost sat alone. Wanda and Clint squished into one seat on the other side of the room.

"I can't believe he is still working for Ross and these ridiculous Accords. We aren't even there for them to use against us, I was hoping that they'd -"

"Of course he's working with that slime bag, you told me he was compromised, Stark
never admits he's wrong and now he's dragged my wife down with him... She barely even looks like."

"He's probably been living it up with him this whole time and violations? His prison was a violation."

So Rogers thought he was working with Ross, that the Accords would vanish without them, Clint thought he'd dragged Laura into this and Wanda thought he built the raft.

"Well, I knew their opinions were low."

"How did you work with these people?"

Tony shrugged, this was pretty much why he didn't want to watch these videos. He knew what they'd say to his face after all. What they'd say behind his back?

He also realised that the other three didn't dog pile on with the insults.

"Wonder why he's on medical leave, he looks okay?"

"That answers one question. The dear Captain didn't tell his troops what he did to you after all."

He would have responded to Stephy but he had been drawn to Barnes signing again.

<Watch his hands.>

What did he do with his hands?

He didn't remember doing anything with his hands.

Clint scoffing about the data dump didn't shock him really, he still never understood why Clint had been fine with it. Out of everyone else he knew what it meant for over a thousand agents and their families. The only reason he was safe was because Laura was not in any documentation. Not that that had saved her in the end.

"So when he does it it's fine, When Nat does it he goes into a snit!"

"Who cares what he's saying anyway! It's just Stark rambling on, he just enjoys the sound of his own voice."

He was not at all shocked that Clint didn't respond well to being told to be quiet. The man was just running on rage these days from how Shuri tells it. He watched himself talking about the human rights violations and found himself watching his own hands without meaning to. Dammit.

"Considering what happened to me on the raft, he should be reporting himself"

"Be quiet everyone, this seems very serious and like something we should be invested in."

He couldn't not laugh, Stephy even smirked at that. Yes, it was something they should have been involved in. If they had stayed and behaved, the Accords would have been much easier to handle and Ross would have been in jail earlier.

"What the fuck does he mean 'cleaning up after the Avengers'"

"Probably throwing his money around."
"Stark did tell me once about charities he'd set up to help people who were hurt by our... What?"

"What, did they think cities they helped destroy magically rebuilt themselves without you?"

"I don't think they really thought of it, Sam did actually show interest in the charities however once when I was organising a fundraiser."

"What the fuck were we supposed to do? Let aliens take over to save some property damage?"

"Wait, wait, I think he's talking about us?"

Scott's managed to derail that potential argument, the split in the room was even more apparent, he wished he could find himself enjoying it. Instead it made his chest hurt, the scar from the shield feeling tight.

"I thought Stark put us in that jail?"

"He did!"

They actually thought it was him who built the raft and detained him? It left him feeling slightly dissociated that Wanda screech and Stephy subsequent hiss of recklessness and lack of magical control barely registered to him.

"That.. That's a lot of countries."

"That's Cassie's father isn't it? Did he not look into the Accords before fighting then?"

"Rogers told him to jump, he did."

He just shrugged and tried to force himself to pay attention, just in time for Wanda's response to him allowing the Accords to classify him as a super.

"He can make anything about himself."

Rogers did nothing to curtail her. Wilson looked confused, Barnes looked utterly unimpressed with the Witch, not that he blamed him. Barnes nodded to Wilson and he realised that on the video one of his hands was crippling the edge of the podium. He didn't even remember doing that, how in the hell had Barnes noticed?

When Laura took over he knew Clint was going to yell thinking back on what she said.

"WHAT?!"

"Oh my god, this isn't happening, she can't do that! Not with me here! What about the kids?!"

Stephy was wildly smiling now, but that wasn't surprising. The doctor wouldn't admit it, but he didn't hate Laura. He even got on with Cooper. He was abjectly terrified of Lilah and 'Watching Stephy panic when he was handed Nate' is a folder full of gifs on his server.

"Dammit I should have been there!"

That would have been sensible really, the man had been retired. There was no reason for Rogers to have pulled him in. He'd gone to Peter instead of going near Clint. No reason for him to have said
yes. Looking at him and Wanda now however, he wondered if he came running for her rather than Rogers?

Clint started angrily pacing and he was sure of it, Barnes was smiling. Which was confusing, he'd expected them all to be best pals. The rest of the video was watched in relative silence, with Clint storming off at the end. Wilson and Barnes signed again, subtly out of sight of anyone else but now of the cameras.

*<You could have warned me! >*

*<I told you it would be a bad idea.>*

As Barnes slunk off and the video cut he chanced a glance at Stephy.

"So, is this why you've been in touch with Wakanda so much?"

He was pretty impressed that the sorcerer worked out where it was based on the decor.

"No, me and Shuri have been working on integration and other things."

It really didn't help the feeling that he was in the principal's office with Stephy looming over him like a giant.

"Tony. Tell me what else."

He rolled his eyes, damn sorcerers and their damned perceptiveness. And for knowing him so well.

"Well, I sent BARF to help Barnes as then had him on ice. Its turning out to be a bit trickier than we thought so I'm directly involved."

"Does he know?"

"Shockingly? Yes and he is weirdly fine with it. Stephanie, I mean insanely trusting levels of fine. I'm weirded out."

He doesn't say anything but he has that look on his face when he's thinking things through.

"Right. FRIDAY, next video please."

Next time, go to Carol. Sod potential painful discussions. 'Carol wouldn't make me watch confusing videos.' He thinks to himself as FRIDAY lines up the next video, again, without asking him.

"FRIDAY, at least, I don't know, speed through the bits we've talking?"

Might make it go quicker maybe? It was Wilson that started the video again.

"Ah guys.."

"Oh fuck you if you have any more bad news."

"Well, it's just Stark has done a press conference."

"Oh play it, maybe he mentions our pardons."

Stephy barked out a full laugh and Tony found himself staring at Rogers in utter confusion. Why
the hell would Rogers think he was getting them Pardons? If they thought that, why were they still insulting him left right and centre? Clint and Wanda were literally muttering about how awful he was at the same moment!

The video sped up as he started talking but it slowed down pretty much as soon as it had started when Rogers, Clint and Wanda screeched.

"NEW AVENGERS?!

"What, did they think I'd just sit around waiting for them?"

He was actually veering towards irritated instead of hurt and insulted now as the video sped up again, Clint jumped in, again. As per usual, the angry archer couldn't seem to stay quiet. It used to be quips and jokes but lately it was just anger. Any friendship they might have had once had apparently died with Ultron apparently, along with pretty much all of his decent personality traits.

"What, have they just got the Avengers doing any old job now."

"I know, if they're bogged down with things like this how could they possibly get ready for serious problems."

"Hmm, I had wondered why the old Avengers had not operated as they do now. I had thought it was primarily Carol's influence, but it isn't is it?"

"Well, no. Its something I've done for a while, home threats, terrorism and helping when requested. It wasn't something the Avengers were designed for. The Angry Pirate was doing it in his secrecy secret ways. Saving people from wildfires didn't warrant assembling."

Handy thing about being a consultant, SHIELD never had much power to order him around, especially not to order him not to help with domestic threats.

Their reactions to Shay was good, he was still angry at Rogers for that. Much more than he let on too, kissing and then abandoning his cousin to the fall out of his actions? He was possibly more pissed at that than he was about Rogers nearly killing him.

"I didn't know Sharon even knew Stark.. That means Peggy.."

"Yup, if he had stayed and married Peggy, he'd likely have been my God Father or something."

He shuddered at that and Stephey looked like he'd bitten a lemon.

"Small mercies I suppose."

"That's actually impressive, that they have Captain Danvers."

"She was on Hydras watch list, known associate of Fury. I don't know how much about her abilities is true.. But she is powerful."

Tony had been expecting Barnes to sign again, so hearing his voice startled him slightly. He sounded different from when he was in Siberia, there was a definite Russian undertone in his voice that made it interesting. He blinked that thought away, he'd have to tell Carol that Hydra were scared of her, she'd get a kick out of that.

"Fury mentioned her, it's where he came up with the idea for the Avengers, I get why she's leading but why Rhodes? He's obviously disabled."
Tony was close to hurting Clint over what he said at the raft. The way he said disabled, it was a complete sneer and Tony knew the only reason he didn't use an ableist slur was because Rogers would probably scold him,

Tony heard what he meant anyway. Yeah. He was showing this to Laura, she already knew where the rogues were so it wouldn't be hard to explain. There weren't many people that just accepted things like Stephy did.

Speaking of the sorcerer, he was smirking at Wanda's reaction to him.

"I bet Hydra told her about you."

"Quite, she looks utterly terrified doesn't she. But notice that she isn't telling her pals. Not wanting to bring up her Hydra connections maybe?"

"Don't know why not, Steve spouts her amazing change of heart and her hero story enough."

"But I wonder if the dear Captain has told his tortured friend that?"

Huh. Interesting, but Rogers surely wouldn't do that.

"He was on SHIELDS watch list. He used to be some hot shot surgeon, got into a car crash, vanished and returned as someone with unknown, off the charts levels of power."

"Lovely to know SHIELD were watching me."

"I altered all their reports on you."

He smirked at the smile Stephy shot him, everytime they thought they got an idea about his powers he edited everything. He had bugs placed in SHIELDs systems to alert him if his friends were ever targeted. It had been fun. Considering the company he tended to keep and the kind of people SHIELD listed after was basically a circular Venn diagram. Some people covered their own tracks, DP was a pain.

"I still can't believe it, Hope man. Her dad despised all Stark's."

Scott's reaction to him introducing Hope onto stages wasn't exactly a shock. He did want to correct him. Hank hated Howard. It had nothing to do with him. He was a sodding kid when they'd started their feud.

"What are you doing Tony? You already have a team, surely getting us pardons would be much easier than inviting all these strange people in without talking about it."

Tony just stared, Rogers reaction as the Defenders walked onto stage was staggering. Did he think he would just invite them back and return everything to exactly how they'd been before? Annoyingly, If they'd come back in the first week or two after the coma, he might have even done it.

His new abilities, then having Harley and Tara? It made him reassess.

He looked back at how things had been and realised that he didn't want his kids to deal with that, so he'd set about building a new team. With the hopes it would been everything he'd wished the Avengers would be when he invited them to live in the tower.
Nat caught everyone's attention, but that wasn't a surprise. Barnes leaning ever so slightly closer, his attention sharpening and face blanking was interesting. There was definitely something there.

"Maybe she went to Stark so she could keep us updated on things at the compound, but couldn't because of the probation?"

"Yeah, she's playing double agent. She's not really with Stark."

If he hadn't seen Nats colours, that comment probably would have torn him up inside. Would have wrecked anything he'd slowly built with her… but then without his abilities, he doubted he'd have let her back at all.

"I don't think.. Wilson? Wilson believes that. I think he was trying to avoid a large argument."

"Probably, it's actually kind of weird for me to see people like this, no colours, so it's like I'm missing information."

Weirdly thought, it had made him better at reading people in general. It was nice, as he'd never been overly good at reading people before.

"Why didn't we do this?"

"Stark handled PR."

"We had more important things to be doing than pandering to the press like this."

If he'd known Wilson was interested in PR of the Avengers he would of happily involved him in it. Would have been nice to have another person to share the load with. Rogers and Clint's comments did not shock him. Both of them assumed that he could fix anything in a heartbeat and ignored the sheer amount of work he had to put in for it.

They actually manage to stay quiet for a while when the questions start coming in. Barnes and Wilson seemed the most interested out of everyone

"I wonder why Tony never mentioned these people?"

"Why would I have? Especially after Ultron, why would I introduce friends to people insulting me all the time?"

"The Witch would have had a heart attack if you brought me home."

That would have been hilarious.

"They're quite shocked at your entrance age to MIT."

Sam jumped in just after Stephy spoke to back up his observations.

"I can't believe Stark went to college at 14, that's a bit strange, I mean, to put such a young child in an environment like college?"

"I'm sure Howard was looking out for him. He was a good man."

"Steve, still 14 and college.."

"Don't know why your so worked up about it Sam, his dad probably paid his way in and paid for his qualifications."
Stephy had started actively glaring at the screen now, at Rogers. He, however, was used to Rogers espousing how amazing Howard was, it was something he had filtered out within a week of meeting the super soldier. It was how he'd maintained a friendship with the man, he'd tentatively dropped hints about Howard, but none really got through, Rogers was very defensive of Tony besmirching Howard's good name. He would not be telling Stephy that however. Not with the utter death glare he was giving the TV, Stephy didn't have many friends, but he was heavily biased to the ones he had. That Wilson seemed to care how old he was at college was interesting. Weird. But interesting.

Maybe this was why he was doing non stalkerish 'research' on him?

"I just looked up his dissertations, he got his PhD after only 3 years. Several of them. When he was 17"

He shook his head, mildly amused that Wilson was now becoming so interested in him. Not when they'd actually lived together. Lang looked interested too. They were silent again for a while, Rogers looked interested when the picture of him in the hospital flashed up. But he said nothing. The bigger shock was the pained look on Barnes face.

Out of all his previous friends and family, it actually looked like… Barnes cared more, this was before he found out about BARF too. So he wasn't really anything to the man. There wasn't a reason to care about him. If it had been after he'd found out about BARF, he could possibly be doing it to keep being treated.. He shook his head, confusing Super Soldiers.

Then the reporter asked that damned question about Rogers.

"She'll have to, I'm the leader of the Avengers."

Tony just rubbed his face, that sentence alone utterly exhausted him and he wondered if Stephy would let him check out before the other questions were asked. From his amused face he'd bet it would be a no.

"They're… They're making me, making us out to be bullies!"

"Aww, poor little Stark, trying to make people think he's the victim."

He just sighed, dropping back onto the bed and throwing an arm across his eyes. He still had trouble accepting Rhodey's world view, about how the other Avengers treated him. He wasn't in high school, he wasn't being bullied. He just let himself relax into the mattress, enjoying the darkness as the TV continued with the press conference. After a few seconds he felt the cloak settle across his chest and lowered one of his arms to pat it. Levi rippled happily.

Things had actually been silent for a while and he was considering sitting up when of course, they started bitching about him again. Even with an entire team, that he wasn't even one of the leaders of, everything was his fault.

"Is everything a joke to them?"

"Everything is a joke to Stark. That Strange has apparently been his friend for decades so they're probably the same, he just went and found himself a team of people exactly like him."

It was easy to ignore that however, he'd seen the optics. People had absolutely loved the interactions with Levi. Levi had his own hashtag and everything, it was #SnarkyCloak. Levi loved it, Stephy pretended to hate it. Probably because Levi was more popular than him. Or because he
didn't know how to use twitter.

"You hear that Stephy, you're like me!"

"I think if they met me little differences would become apparent rather quickly."

He was way too good at sounding ominous.

Listening to himself, Hope and Carol discuss funding was quite good actually, it was a reminder that he was no longer in this alone. Wanda seemed to sense his comfort over time and space and jumped in.

"It's blood money anyway. It's the least he can do."

He pushed his arm tight into his eyes until he started to see sparkles and let the comment pass because he knew the question he was dreading was coming up. Where Laura answered about him legally owning the Avengers.

"He can't just claim to have the Avengers!"

"Sure he can. Fury effectively gave it to him. You were the team leader but he funded everything so it was his. Fury figured that it was the best way to keep him invested."

"But that's, that's not right, I'm the head of the Avengers."

The bickering after that was painful to hear. He was unsurprised that Rogers still saw himself as the leader, even though they had been co-leaders for years now. Wilson cut in with a quite amusing line that almost had him liking BirdBrain2.0 and he removed his arm to glance at the screen for Roger's reply.

"You did tell him that the Avengers were always his cap."

That it sent Rogers stomping from the room just as he started watching again was perfect. Barnes reentered then with food, causing him to blink, he hadn't realised the guy had gotten up. He definitely looked different. This was the first time he was stood in full view of the camera. He had put on more mass in quite a short time, the serum turning the adequate food supply into muscles alarmingly fast. He expected the video to cut off there, but Barnes got another line in before it went dark.

"Can we watch Lord of the Rings?"

Between the level of trust the man was giving him. The, at least he hoped, genuine care and apology that went into the letter, his reactions around the others… He started to become a person to Tony. Instead of an idea. More than just an interesting brain he could indulge himself watching defeat his algorithms. That he also wanted to watch Lord of the Rings with genuine excitement in his voice?

Tony's 'must help' instincts just got ratched all the way up, and he wonders if Stephy can See that because he's giving him a smirk.

"Go get ready for breakfast, I think you should tell Carol you know where the rogues are but you should inform her that she can't do anything with the information first. Then see what she says. I don't think there is anything to be worried about immediately."

"What about future worries?"
"The Archers anger is a concern. As are the Captain's delusions. For me, my prime concern is the Witches ineptitude with regards to her powers."

He scowled at that, after he had gone to the sanctum and Stephy had cleared his brain, the sorcerer had not been quiet when it came to anger about the Witch. He and Carol were even meeting regularly with the Accords Council about dealing with crimes when it came to mind magic interference. Which of course had nothing to do with him.

"And the others?"

"The Antman seems to be realising his folly, as does with Winged one. The Winter Soldier seems to be adapting to the new century well, no doubt in thanks to your interferences."

"Not awful then?"

"Anything else you are forgetting to mention to me?"

With that he gets a heavily pointed 'look'.

"Hey, if we are doing the complaining about vanishing thing, my few weeks do not compare to your blackout and mystical vacation!"

"Pft. That just cancelled out your palladium poisoning and you know it."

With that, gold blasted across his senses again, by the time he could see he was in the room alone. Well, not really. When he realised that Stephy had left Levi with him. The sorcerer really was a good brother, knew him too well, but sometimes that was good instead of bad. He also liked how he referred to all the rogues with titles, it helped him separate them in his mind from people who had been family.

...

After showering, he ran his hands through his hair a few times, yeah, he definitely needed Laura to cut his hair. Preferably before he goes to have breakfast with T'Challa, because it had done another huge growth spurt over the night. How Stephy had held off mocking it whilst he was here was a puzzle in itself.

"FRIDAY? Please tell me Laura is still in her room?"

"Nope Boss, everyone is already in the common room getting ready for breakfast."

"Dammit."

Well, fuck it. No way was he trying to hack this off himself. He ducked into Harleys room because he knew the teen had hair ties. He usually just left his hair floppy, but when he was working on the cars he tied it up. Putting in own hair in a ponytail felt a lot weirder than doing Tara's hair but only took a few tries before it had been contained. Potentially ignored?

Jess screwed that up the second she saw him, practically appearing behind him and pulling out the hair tie.

"Jess, it took me way too long to put that in, why did you pull it out? Laura, please cut my hair, pretty please?"

"Aww, but Tony, I want to play with it."
"How about, next growth spurt when I'm not about to go on live TV, I'll leave it long all day."

Jess tilted her head, considering the offer before nodding and moving back to her food.

"Come sit here Tony, I've eaten so ill cut your hair whilst you eat. This is the longest I've seen it in a while!"

"Does this happen often then?"

"T'Challa, it is annoying. I go to sleep with my normal hair and wake up with it around my shoulders."

He rolled his eyes as he dropped into the chair by Laura, Bruce dropping a plate in front of him that was blissfully stacked with bacon, eggs and pancakes. He'd worried that watching the videos would put him off his dinner, but apparently not much could stop his stomach these days. Laura had become quite the expert in returning his hair to what it was supposed to look like, which was good because finding a hairdresser that would keep silent that Tony Stark's hair grew several years of length over night every other week was a nigh impossible task.

T'Challa seemed to be enjoying breakfast, everyone seemed to be getting a little time with him. Bruce was quite taken with the young King and they'd managed to hold a conversation over Cooper and Peters attempts to derail it. Jess was in Harleys camp, shooting him occasional glares, Matt was sitting next to them, that 3 people would snub a king because of something he had forgiven the man for was incredibly sweet, baffling, but sweet. Luke and T'Challa seemed to get along, Danny seemed to have no idea what to say and eventually came to hide next to him and Hope. The 3 girls had already asked him a few hundred questions apparently.

Carol had smiled and he'd tried not to look but the pain and guilt over what happened were right there and he found his anger slipping under it. Carol had told him that he had a right to be angry about things, even when faced with this. That she was the one he was taking advice from to be annoyed at her had just become a twisty confusion pile in his brain. She nodded at him and didn't try to approach, which left him feeling oddly grateful for the reprieve.

T'Challa was taking it in his stride, he suspected when he eventually got to steal Shuri she'd be the same, if not better. She had the kind of personality that would easily become the leader of the older teens he suspected. Probably the adults too. When Shuri actually was an adult the world would be in her hand. He was just happy to watch it. He would definitely be subtly introducing Shuri to Reed. It would be hilarious seeing the man try to deal with Shuri. He and Sue could eat popcorn. Revenge for the man's damned portals.

"Right, your done, I'm driving, so I'll go and get the cars."

Laura announced before picking up her bag and leaving the kitchen, apparently Laura was coming.

"Anyone else coming?"

He glanced around the table, waiting to see if anyone else was inviting themselves. He tapped the disk on his hand, T'Challa watched fascinated as the cover slipped into place, much to Peter's glee. He pulled on his favourite suit jacket on, black and silver and had his sunglasses hanging from the shirt pocket. The Dora were obviously coming but that was it, they'd have to take two cars.

"Come on Meowthra, looks like it's just us and you don't want to keep Agent Mom waiting."

He grinned, waving to the others as TChalla disentangled himself from everyone. He slips the glasses on when they leave the residential district, Laura is waiting out front for them. A car idled
behind with one of the compound drivers in it. Okoye joined them in their car.

"She never picks the flashier cars, but she has a knack for picking the most expensive and the fastest ones."

The trip to the studio was a lot more fun with Laura driving, T'Challa definitely enjoyed himself, anytime she was able Laura blasted multiple speeding laws to pieces, but she definitely enjoyed herself.

"So, are you just going to walk in with me, did you call the studio ahead?"

"Na, I figure you go on, then when they've started I'll come on."

Laura just shakes her head, smiling. T'Challa goes ahead, Laura parks up and walks in with him. He'd thought she'd go elsewhere but apparently his little family were serious about this 'Tony is not alone' policy when he was out of the house. Not that today would be difficult, there was a small studio audience to contend with but it wasn't that big and he'd been practicing keeping his sight pulled back. His glasses were also made out of the nanites. T'Challa also had a calming presence, he'd definitely gotten better since the press conference. Plus, his side tactic of closing his eyes and switching to CCTV worked in a pinch. Walking and doing that was a skill still in its infancy. Trying to work out left and right as you see yourself from multiple vantage points is harder than it sounds.

They got through security easily, as FRIDAY had snuck in to their servers earlier and put them on the list and no one questioned it. Laura found a chair that she could sit on in view of T'Challa, so he was facing her. He just loitered as if he was meant to be there and watched until he got brought up, T'Challa decided to speed things up, the guy really didn't like doing these things it seemed.

"I've enjoyed my trips to America so far with the Accords Council, meeting the other councillors has also been good. Everyone has been very accepting of our plans to open up Wakanda slowly, the people I've met have also been most unlike what I suspected."

"Ah, I assume you mean Tony Stark? What was it like to get whisked off to dinner with our favourite genius?"

"Oh, that was a lot of fun, he told me a lot about what Stark Industries was involved in."

"Yes, here in America everyone always needs the next piece of Stark Tech."

"We have been surprised lately, Mr Stark seems to be working constantly but he just hasn't been seen much, King T'Challa you've seen more of him than we have lately, how is he recovering?"

Tony grinned and figured that would do, plus the pleading glances T'Challa was sending his way, he straightened up his suit and strolled onto the stage before T'Challa had a chance to answer. The two of them were so going to have to prank Shuri for setting them up like this.

"My ears were burning."

He gives the crowd a large, textbook smile but closes his eyes to avoid the overload before looking back at the host, the incredibly shocked host and amused T'Challa. As there wasn't a seat for him he hopped up into the hosts desk, crossed his legs at his ankles and relaxed as if it was normal.

"Hi."

"Mr Stark! We didn't expect to see you today!"
"Well, T'Challa spent last night at the compound and mentioned today's little interview, so I thought I'd tag along."

"Yes, the compound is absolutely gorgeous, it was lovely having breakfast with the Avengers."

"I also heard that you were considering partnering up for some of Mr Stark's initiatives?"

"Oh yes, this man's brain is brilliant, he's going to help me get my inventions to where they're needed. At home and abroad."

"Dr Stark is also interesting to work with. Not at all what I expected an American businessman to be like."

"What were you expecting?"

"Profit driven, uncaring and only caring about their own country. Dr Stark is giving his Intellicrops away for free. In areas where children are going blind from lack of Vitamin A, it is a particularly severe problem in populations where rice is the staple food and diversity of diet is limited, as white rice contains no micronutrients. Dr Stark has created a rice variant with added Vitamin A specifically to help these people."

"Wow, I didn't know about this, I guess when people think of Stark Industries people think tech, not food."

"It's something I've been involved in for a while. There are some 2 billion people who suffer from some type of important nutritional deficiency. Thousands of kids die each day because of a lack of vitamin A for example, nearly a 3rd of children in developing areas are blind from it. Biofortified crops are a good alternative to alleviating malnutrition."

"And you're giving these crops away?"

"Generally, the people who desperately need these crops can't afford them, so it makes sense. If giving away some seeds saves children from living blind because they lack a vitamin that is easy to acquire for us, why wouldn't I?"

"I guess some people would prefer you to focus your humanitarian efforts at home?"

T'Challa barely manages to not roll his eyes.

"I do have a lot focused in America, trying to end food deserts for example. But humanitarian efforts are for humanity."

"This is what I was talking about."

T'Challa grinned and he grinned back, the presenter had flushed a little but didn't let that stop him. As much as T'Challa hated these things, he'd definitely learnt to direct the questions into favourable areas.

"So, King T'Challa, how is integration with the world going, from what I've been told your computers don't use the same binary system as the rest of us?"

"Oh Dr Stark and our technicians have been working on it night and day. I was pretty sure it was fine several versions ago, but apparently Dr Stark and my sister are perfectionists."

"I've had tons of fun working with Princess Shuri, she is brilliant. Even some of the younger
interns I have at SI love her."

"I read about your intern project, schools all over the country are involved? Finding the best and brightest?"

"That's right, as much as I'm the businessman you all love to hate, at my core I'm a scientist. I want to make sure the next generation find it easier to get into science. Less roadblocks. I even had emails from kids from schools that didn't join the program, this one kid Gethin, he just asked for some books because the ones at his school were ancient and falling apart! After that I had my PA making a list of schools lacking funding and am now supplying what they need."

"That's very selfless of you."

"Na, I just want more scientists in the world."

He'd also expanded his Smart Kids programme. Pepper had wanted to call them Stark Kids but Tony thought that sounded too much like he'd gotten a bunch of people knocked up and hidden them around the country. T'Challa answers a few questions about Wakanda as a frazzled technician at that point ran out with a chair like the one T'Challa was sat in. He smiled at them and hopped off the presenter desk and utterly shocked them by thanking them directly. The man gave him a bright smile in return before jogging back and Tony made himself turn back to the host. What, the guy was tall, had long hair and was wearing extremely tight trousers. That was very distracting.

"King T'Challa, are you and your people excited to rejoin the rest of the world?"

"Oh definitely, some of my people have been waiting for this for a long time."

"So, Mr Stark, you know the question we want to ask."

"Go on, ask about it."

He waved his hand and relaxed into the chair, crossing his legs with his ankle to knee. He wondered what he should say, because it was going to be about his coma. He had had a talk with Peter last night about it. Peter had told him that he should reveal something. He wanted him to show the world his hand. Even though the kid had spent months working on the cover it. He said he could still use it, but that the world should know that superheroes could get hurt.

"We all saw the picture of you in the hospital. We all know you were in a coma. We haven't seen much of you since, so we wanted to know, how you've been recovering."

"Well, it's been a long road. I'm not at 100%, but I'm working to get there. I might not be in the skies, yet, but there is a lot of work I could do from home."

"We've been keeping up with your work, for someone not on the Accords Council, you do a lot of work for them."

"Of course. It is an important document, for humans and supers alike. Whilst recovering from my injuries it made sense to focus on it. Just a shame I missed those 10 days in a coma."

"Dr Stark seems to never stop working."

"Nope, my physio often gets infuriated with me."

"Do you mind if we ask what injuries you suffered? You've been very close to the chest about them."
Ha. Close to the chest.

"In general people don't think of superheroes getting hurt, so I kept that private. As you can see I'm able to work fine and I'll be flying in no time... but I'll show you one thing."

With that he stood and removed his suit jacket. Neatly folding it and hanging it over the back of the chair before sitting back down, as he undid the button at his cuff everyone has gotten very silent. He folded the sleeve up to past his elbow, ignoring the hiss the presenter gave when the thick ring of scars became visible and murmurs from the crowd.

"That's some pretty severe scarring."

At that he tapped the back of the hand. The cover retreated until the whole cybernetic hand was revealed. It was still matte black, but he'd made some changes last night, he'd added a line of arc reactor blue light that ran along two of the seems, just some fun upgrades. One from the tip of his thumb, the other from the tip of his little finger, both stretching up to the middle of his forearm. The silver decals that Harley had designed were still there too, giving it a nice understated look. He was damned proud of it and he was sick of hiding it away himself. Oddly, when he'd first woke up he'd barely looked at the missing limb, adding the cybernetic attachment hadn't improved it. Weirdly, harleys damned decals and Peter's cover had him not looking at it in scorn.

"Yeah, the scarring is pretty bad."

He held up his hand so the cameras, crowd and the utterly stunned presenter could get a could look.

"I'm guessing that is not a covering, or a glove?"

"Nope. After a fight, I had severe frostbite, my doctors could do a lot, worked wonders in fact. But they couldn't save everything and my hand, wrist and some of my forearm was amputated."

"How has it changed things for you? I don't know if I could carry on fighting after losing a limb! But I am a lefty."

"I'm ambidextrous, so I didn't have to learn to use a different dominant hand. But this won't stop me. I'm still Ironman, as long as Ironman is required, he will be there, from domestic terrorism, wildfires, bad guys our police can't fight and if aliens come knocking. I will get back up until I'm physically incapable. And then probably try and find a way to anyway."

He chuckled and the audience chuckled to, he wasn't sure why people found this trait of his so impressive. For Pepper it was one of his worst traits.

"I guess we should expect such dedication from Ironman by now, after you caught that nuke and flew it into a portal in space, when you did that, did you know you'd be fine?"

"Oh no, I thought it was a one way trip. The blast knocked the power out of my suit, luckily I fell through the portal and The Hulk, my buddy, he caught me."

"After that I guess missing a hand wouldn't stop you after all?"

"Nope, I've always known I could get hurt, but it never stopped me before. It wasn't easy, waking up with a part of you just gone. Sometimes I would wake up and have phantom feelings of it, very strange. If anything it's made me more determined and shown me more people I can help."

"That's must have been hard to deal with. Is this why you have gotten more involved with
"Partially, I'm sure you know about James Rhodes accident too? After that I started doing research, found out that a lot of people who need disability aids are left unable to get them. When I woke up from the coma, missing my left hand, it sharpened it more. Trying to do things one handed? Not as easy as it seemed. Now, I had the contacts and ability to build this for myself, with Shuri in Wakandas help. She helped me through a lot in those early days. When I was back up to two hands I decided to change the disability aids industry." "Just like that?"

"Yeah, it's not something many people put into. People who require the aids are something of a niche market, if you make a replacement limb, it's only needed by a very select group and the needs of a veteran won't line up with a 5 year old with cancer, so it's not profitable. Because of this disability aids are expensive, not updated often and for many, hard to acquire. Children wearing prosthetics they've grown out of, powered chairs on the edge of falling apart, ancient crutches that cause more pain than they help." "You seem quite passionate about this Mr Stark."

"I've come to see Dr Stark is quite passionate about many things, helping people seems to drive Dr Stark as much as it does Ironman."

"For this instance, it's definitely a case of having my eyes opened. Watching Rhodey not be able to go to his favourite shop because there is a step I never even noticed, or spend 40 minutes waiting for an empty lift. I didn't realise how inaccessible the world was, so I'd like to do my part to change that."

"Well, that certainly is a good goal! We are actually out of time for today, hopefully we can get the two of you back someday. I have a feeling that Mr Stark and King T'Challa partnering up will lead to amazing things for our planet!"

Well, that went a lot better than he had expected, the presenters colours were practically vibrating with happiness that it had been them to get the story about his hand first. He shook hands with him and let the man feel the hand, turning it over and looking at it in awe. "So, can you feel with it?"

"Sort of, not the way a real hand does. It's wired directly into my nerves, so I get input, hot and cold. Some textures, it's more information in my mind than feeling."

"That is amazing, thank you Mr Stark for crashing my show."

The presenter winked at him before turning to T'Challa and crossing his hands over his chest. After that, he and T'Challa met up with Laura and the Dora to head home. Tony hadn't had a single glitch, and Laura looked really proud of him. Which meant a lot and had him feeling like a kid whose mom is proud of your school work for the first time in his life. It was nice.

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T'Challa came back to the compound for a few more hours to have lunch with them before heading back to Wakanda. He took the letter he had written for Barnes with a smile on his face, eerily similar to his sisters. What is it with people reading into things so much when it comes to Barnes? He doesn't like the man, he is just helping fix his brain. Not replying to the letter would be rude. That's it. Nothing else. Just because he is slightly in love with the man's brain, that thankfully no
one but FRIDAY will ever know about, or how long Tony has spent working on the algorithms for the guy. He might have finished the integration months in advance, but it was going to get done anyway. Having it done just meant that Barnes recovery could be sped up. From what he’d seen in the videos, he was doing better already. He wasn’t so pale and gaunt anymore. Considering everything he’d been through, he looked pretty amazing really and his voice was really.. Interesting with that Russian undertone, it would be interesting to hear him actually speaking Russian too..

But none of that meant anything. It just meant Tony didn't hate him, he understood that he wasn’t really the one to kill his parents and he didn't deserve to carry that guilt. He wasn't going to become best pals, he just wanted to help him.

Tony shook his head, trying to push Barnes to the back of his mind. He didn't know why, but after watching the videos, he just kept popping up..

Anyway, he needed to focus on the integration. It had to be finished if he wanted to move to the next stage with helping the guy who trusted too damn much. With that, he hung his suit jacket and tie up in his workshop, sat down, lay his hands on the desk and dove straight in.

It was 1am when he finally finished, he pulled out of the code, stretched and heard his spine crack. He had been in far, far too long. He hadn't spent that long in the code before, he had started at around 2.30pm. He hadn't even surfaced for break, only 1 to read the kids their nighttime books. So now he was paying for it, he was starved. Luckily someone had delivered him food that he fell on, in a ravenous fashion, as he felt FRIDAY and CERBERUS' displeasure with his inability to take care of himself.

As he ate he pushed all of the files and watched with great satisfaction as everything clicked into place. He only had to go back in to fix 6 bugs. He texted Shuri that he was finished and watched her push the finalising files he’d sent earlier from her end. The tiny pathway with a huge delay expanded and he was giddy with the result. He and Shuri amused themselves sending stuff back and forth practically instantly just because they could. Eventually though she ordered him to bed…

But he was far to wired for that. The thrill of finally finishing the integration had him flying high and there was no way he would sleep. Instead he decided to work on the new medium RT hives and reactors for his suit. This way there were multiple power sources and back up hives. After he finished up all of his food, he hopped up to wash his hands before pulling on the antistatic gloves, when working with parts so small they were required. Even if they felt weird on his hands now. They never used to, pre-Extremis.

He wondered if it was because of his tech abilities, because of them he'd noticed that if he really concentrated, he could feel electricity. As in in the mains, not just in technology. It was like a crackle he could feel along his skin. He had ideas about that but wanted to run it by Bruce first so he could tell him if he was being reckless with his own life or if it was a natural progression of his abilities that he should investigate. Tony wasn't exactly great at finding that line. In the past, he hadn't really cared. But now he had a family, a family that would be hurt if he nearly got electrocuted to death. So as tempting as it was, he pushed it back. For now. Right now he'd focus on making himself safer, harder to hurt.

Rhodey POV

After getting FRIDAY's messages, Rhodes dropped pretty much everything he was doing and immediately beelined to the workshop. Even though he was just about to take the bracers off and get into bed. After a ridiculously long Saturday. After Tony and T’Challa had their little peppy
interview, suddenly a bunch of things that had been perfectly fine to wait until Monday were
suddenly urgent! He was still impressed with Tony however, going on TV and telling the world he
had his hand and wrist amputated. Pepper had been furious, he'd dealt with it however as Tony had
been busy working on the Wakandan integration link.

There was some backlash on the board, there was always some bad. This time however the good
won out. The sheer volume of people on social media thanking him for admitting the loss of his
hand was staggering. The fact he hadn't had to do it, but did anyway had resonated. So many other
posted pictures of their own prosthetics. It was pretty cool. He'd received a lot of stuff directed at
him, a black superhero was good on its own, now he had wheelchair users thanking him too, it was
hard to get his head around, all in all, he was happy about it. It had however been a long,
exhausting day. So FRIDAY activating LOTW protocol was not a welcome interruption. It also
was not something he could ignore.

It hadn't even been a very informative message, the protocol was triggered and "Boss says he's
considering something stupid." LOTW was a protocol for when Tony was going to do something
potentially genius, amazing, but also stupid or dangerous with great risk to himself, the building,
humanity or more importantly, Rhodey's sanity. Watch how I soar… right into a spike.

The way things had been swinging wildly from everything is fine to, nope, not fine very quickly
lately made him move a little faster. He didn't want to miss something because he ignored a
vaguely cryptic message from Friday at stupid o'clock in the morning.

When he got to the workshop however the lights were dimmed Tony was curled up on the ancient
sofa, wrapped in a blanket with the projector active on the wall.

OK…?

"Tony, why did I get an alert from FRIDAY that you are considering something stupid yet here
you are watching.. Stargate?"

"This is me trying to not do the dumb thing."

Rhodes moves to sit down on the sofa next to Tony, and notices his infuriating friend has built
what looks like a sodding plinth of some kind not far away from where they are sitting.

An actual plinth.

All backed out. Looking ominous and extremely creepy.

He glares at the thing.

Because it is obviously why he's here at 4 am talking to Tony and watching Stargate, he knows it.
He feels it in his bones.

"Tony. What's that?"

"Huh? Oh. It's a level 7 black out containment box."

Rhodey full on twitches at that and shifts his glare to Tony.

"I thought level 5 was your highest containment level. What the fuck caused you to create a whole
new level of containment and then up it even more?!"

Tony just fidgets, scratching his chin whilst being heavily focused on the screen. Obviously not
wanting to answer but feeling somewhat compelled because it's him. Plus, it was Tony who developed the Leaf on the Wind protocol after all. His name was 1st. Harley had been completely removed since Rhodey decreed having Harley be Tony's rudder on doing stupid things in the workshop was something he should have been told about. Rupulsers in coffee mugs had been mildly terrifying for example. He'd been relaxing on the balcony when the telltale repulsor sounded off behind him, he had turned just in time for 4 cups of, thankfully, Water, dumped on him.

Tony hadn't wanted to waste coffee on the test flight. 1 exploded, 1 crashed into the wall. Somehow interference in the receptors, likely from Tony's Extremis going haywire as he'd gotten very stressed after the cup exploded near Rhodey, and it resulted in two rogue coffee cups. It took Vision 6 hours to find one… The other is still in the woods around the compound. They have a board for sightings and everything. Turned out in his panic Tony somehow accidentally programmed a rudimentary AI into it. So when it came to Tony's more 'out there' ideas? He was called.

Tony eventually started talking when he realised Rhodey was going nowhere.

"The nanites needed a little extra oomph for containment."

Rhodey switches his attention between Tony and the fucking black plinth before he realises exactly why Tony is watching Stargate.

More importantly, which episode of Stargate he was watching.

"I should be seen this coming shouldn't I."

"Oh yeah. It was painfully obvious that this was going to happen. I'm surprised it's taken me so long actually."

"Tony don't tell me you aren't making rep-"

"WE DON'T USE THE R WORD!"

Chapter End Notes

I'm still trying to not get too hard on the Steve bashing, if you've read 10 days, you know that ship has sailed on Wanda.

I occasionally get other ideas that bug me, I usually chuck them in a file to make them leave me be, I might just be channeling my frustrations into one to keep on track. Plus a - burning out here and b - not torturing Steve here c - indulging in overpowered to feck Tony Stark.

That chapters are like 1.5k compared to my 12k and its working really well at keeping me on track!

Got the idea from WinterMunchkin05 xD some of the best tagged fics I've ever seen
btw.
Inadverted PenPals

Chapter Summary

Wolf wonders what to do with the voice in his mind.

Shuri decided that if she had to deal with their guests, she was going to have some fun.

Interviews are watched and letters are received.

Chapter Notes

Hello my lovelies and we are back to Wakanda for only 2 chapters this time, which after accidentally writing 4 for each brief made me feel like I was rushing, but I like how them came out, especially next weeks 😊.

Barnes POV

4th October

He let out a breath as the pixels fell away, revealing Shuri's lab. They'd been working on some of his memories, mostly to gain insight on how his mind was reacting to the algorithms, but also making serious headway. From what Shuri had told him, his brain was making matters complicated and because of it, she and Dr Stark, and he still hadn't quite gotten his head around that part... But because of his brain, the two geniuses were having to spend even more time working with him. He's pretty sure they could be off ending world hunger or something, but instead they're both helping him.

He figured that the least he could do was work on the memories. Plus he was also working on ignoring the voice in his head. It occasionally got quite chatty and he was learning a few things about it. It liked Shuri, wanted to protect her, a lot. The jury was still out on T'Challa. It didn't like Steve, at all. It found Wings tolerable. Tic Tac was seen as an amusing pet. With Clint, it apparently hadn't forgiven him for that time he'd barged into his room. Wanda was the most perplexing. It never spoke around her, he knew it didn't like her, could feel the rage but also caution. He had no idea what had triggered such a reaction, but then he didn't exactly like the little Ved'ma himself, so he hadn't questioned it. Dr Stark also interested it, apparently not many people had dismantled a weapon in its hands before and although he thought that would be a mark against the man, weirdly, it made him interesting. Interesting enough he was pretty close to calling it a schoolyard crush. It added a whole new layer of bizarre to the situation.

It was also silent in all BARF sessions, especially after they isolated the memories for the words. They had only ran one of those memories when Shuri had noticed a huge road block, that they react absolutely nothing like the other memories. So the pair of them were working on that whilst he was still running through other memories. It took Shuri a while each memory to find an algorithm that would work, but they'd definitely had more success and failures. Which after the abject failure the memory tied with the first word, it was comforting and it felt like he was making
a difference, his head felt better in general. He wasn't cured, he still woke up screaming occasionally, some days he didn't want to wake up. Some nights he couldn't sleep, maybe he was imagining it, but he felt hopeful about it.

He still hadn't let any of the others know about Dr Stark's involvement.

Wings had asked why he was so interested in the guy, and he'd just had to shrug it off. It wasn't that he didn't trust him, out of everyone in the house they got on quite well. He just didn't know if Wings would go and tell Steve. Plus, saying 'this thing in the back of my brain stops annoying me when I research the guy' was out of the question.

He doubted he would run to tell Steve out of a bad place, not even in a malicious way. Maybe he'd tell him to prove something good about Dr Stark. But he knew enough about Steve, his reactions when he was mentioned? Yeah. That would not go well, at all.

About as well as telling anyone he had a voice in his head would go probably. It had been easy to shrug of the thoughts as his when his head was fuzzy. Now he felt clearer every day, and they still came and they definitely weren't his.

It was when he talked to it that screwed him over apparently. He knew talking to it was a bad idea, because now it had taken that as an invitation.

A blanket invitation at that.

He even promised to stop calling it Shade if it would occasionally be quiet when ignoring it didn't work.

It wasn't that it spoke a lot really, it just seemed to have zero concept of social norms and appropriate behaviour!

If he was sitting through an uncomfortable team breakfast for example, it would feed him suggestions of throwing a knives at Clint for fun. If Steve was following him or trying to hug him, instead of dodging and leaving, it wanted to punt Steve through an open window. It liked Shuri so had recommended buying a knife for her. It liked knives, but then considering he liked guns he couldn't really argue that. It still wasn't sure about T'Challa, so it wanted to 'observe' him. If this included breaking and entry, then so be it! It wanted to know more about everyone really.

So even though it didn't talk much.

It felt like a LOT.

He pulled the glasses off and decided to think about that much, much later. Hell, maybe it would go away and he'd never think about it again. He wasn't sure if he imagined the laughter at that.

"So, how goes the fight on the codes?"

Shuri practically jumped over and pulled him over to one of the many screens. She always gave him time after a session, to come back to himself. It was small but that kind of thing meant a lot to him.

"Well let's see shall we, Tony messaged last night that he'd had some ideas about our little problem. He's said he was going to work on the integration too."

He had no idea what had the things were that the two of them wrote, but he kind of enjoyed watching Shuri work on the system integration. The notes they left each other in the code were
amusing.

"Hmm, he hasn't sent any updated Algorithms today but…"

"But what?"

"Let's just say he's been.. Busy?"

OK, now he was interested because the utterly incredulous face she was pulling right now was hilarious.

"How busy?"

"Well, for one, I recognise none of this."

She waved a hand and blew up what she was looking at and there was a lot, pages and pages worth of stuff he didn't understand. He knew a few coding languages, especially now that he was getting more memories of his time with hydra back completely. He knew his way around a few systems, true it was mostly security related and how to break that security, but it had given him a basis to understand some of the things Shuri had shown him. He couldn't even identify what language this was in.

"How long has the idiot been logged in..?"

Shuri muttered under her breath, bringing up more and more work that Dr Stark had apparently done. He idly wondered if the man actually slept, from what he'd found out, he seemed to practically have several full time jobs and yet he was putting an awful lot of work into this integration.

"I have no idea what any of this means."

"Don't worry White Wolf, I'm not sure I do, he's completely rewritten everything we've already done and then built on it, he's gone way off our calendar. There is work here we hadn't scheduled for months.."

She patted him on the shoulder before dropping down to read everything, he wasn't sure if she was irritated or impressed. Potentially both at the same time.

"Mind if I hide out again?"

"Sure, you're hidey corner is all yours."

She waved at said corner, it was literally just a comfortable chair that had mysteriously appeared a few days ago and a clear table. He liked it, either by accident, or knowing Shuri, on purpose, she had picked a corner where he could easily see the exits and most of the lab yet people didn't seem to notice his presence, no windows so it felt safe.

He barely read half a chapter before ringing jerked his attention out of his book and he looked at Shuri, wondering if he'd have to pack up and run before she answered or something.

"Don't worry, it's just Tony. Probably calling about all this. If you stay in the corner he won't be able to see you."

With that she moved to answer the call and now he was trapped. Did he want to be in the room effectively snooping on a video call? No!
'Yes.'

'See, this is why I'm trying to teach you about social contracts.'

'That's boring. This is fun.'

There was no way to walk around the scope of the camera, and he had no idea how low down the camera could see. There wasn't even a window to jump out of, his main way of dealing with uncomfortable situations. He slumped back into his chair, lamenting how he even got into situations like this as Dr Stark's image lit up in front of her. The man must have been in a lab of his own, it looked quite similar to Shuri’s, but more white and steel. Blue holograms flickered around him but he couldn't work out much. There was definitely 'more' in Dr Stark's lab. There was stuff on every surface that he could see and quite a few cups. He wondered if he worked with others as that was a lot of cups really. Some even had stuff stacked on top of them.

Dr Stark was wearing his sunglasses again and a dark red suit, he was also still stretching his back, he could hear it popping and he guessed the mic distorted it as it sounded different than when he did that. Shuri immediately jumped to questioning him about the work she'd had shown him.

"How long have you been working on the integration today Tony, I came down and I can barely recognise it!"

Shuri was trying to look stern but he could see from here that she was smiling. It was one thing to know they were friends, it was a bit different to see it so clearly. He wondered if the man had gotten his apology letter. Wondered if he had even read it for that matter.

"I didn't have much choice, the latest data packet you sent on Barnes, his mind is adapting too fast. I don't know how it's doing it, his mind seems to move as fast as my algorithms.."

"You sound impressed that his brain is literally screwing with us."

He blinked at that. What? He had thought the problems he was causing with the algorithm had Dr Stark doing more work, why would that impress him?

"What? It's a challenge. I like challenging things."

"Even when it's causing us problems?"

"Shuri have you really watched it when he's in a session? The code changes around the algorithm. No matter how I code it. I literally did not think that was possible."

"And this is a... Good thing?"

"Well, until we get around it getting shot of the words is practically stalled. But I didn't think it was possible for someone's brain to do this. I love impossible things. It's beautiful."

Huh. Okay.

He wasn't sure what to do with this information.

'I like this information, we have impressed the Feniks. This is good.'

Ahuh. Sure, this isn't weird at all. A billionaire genius in America whose parents you killed under brainwashing, likes your brain that is actively screwing him over, making his job harder. Then to top it all off, his uninvited passenger was preening over the compliment.
He really didn't know what to do with this.

It was good that he was still interested in helping him get rid of the words?

He figured he'd go with that because he *really* had no idea what to do about it. What are you meant to do when someone gushed about how annoying your brain is? No one has ever called his brain beautiful before…

'This is why snooping on calls is bad! You think out confusing things!'

'I like it.'

'Of course you do.'

"So, what's you next step?"

"It depends on him. After the integration is complete, I could write an adaptive program instead, but I'd need to be online to guide it."

That got his attention, he wasn't sure why the other man seemed so tentative about it. He'd been writing algorithms for his mind to run with since the beginning, without them he'd be stuck watching the same memory hundreds of times. He was just happy that he had made this software, that he'd personally edited it and poured his time into it just to help him. He figured most people would have given up by now.

He wondered if maybe he looked uncomfortable because of him exactly. I mean, writing programmes for the person who killed your parents is one thing. Being online at the same time? That must be incredibly difficult for the man.

"I'm sure he'll be fine with it, he's happy for the help. I will ask him though."

"Hmm, still not so sure about that. No matter how much you try to convince me. He is probably only accepting my help because he feels like he has no other choice."

"Why are you boys such idiots?"

He nearly laughed at Shuri's comment but managed to hold it back. Before Dr Stark can comment an awful noise blares from somewhere in his lab. Causing the man to flinch violently away from it before his attention snapped in its direction.

"FRIDAY! Why did you set my alarm to that!"

"Sue told me to set it to something utterly obnoxious so you don't forget to come around for dinner."

A woman with an Irish accent responded, but he couldn't see anyone, and FRIDAY was a peculiar name.

"Crap! Gotta go Shuri!"

Dr Stark sort of flailed dramatically rather than waved and the call cut as he turned to leave. It was quite endearing and not an action that he would have suspected from the huge personality that is Tony Stark.

Shuri muttered to herself before turning to him.
"What that man needs is a vacation."

"Well, that was different?"

"Oh no. For him that's practically normal."

"He seems like he doesn't stop?"

"Nope. Rhodes told me he occasionally has to get the kids to sit on him to make him take a break. So, do you have a problem with it?"

"With what?"

"The program he wants to write, that he'll be guiding, or something. He has that look in his eye when his brain is running ahead of him, but he won't action anything unless you're good with it."

"Sure? I mean, without you two I'd be sitting in the dark space of Cryo."

"Princess Shuri, I have some notes Boss has written up that Sergeant Barnes might find useful?"

He nearly jumped out of his skin when the same Irish voice he'd heard on Stark's call spoke to Shuri. The call was definitely ended however, so he had no idea where that came from!

"Thanks FRIDAY, I'll send them along."

"Um.. who is that?"

"Oh FRIDAY? She's one of Tony's AIs."

"That's right. I'm pleased to meet you Sergeant Barnes."

"Oh, okay, pleased to meet you Miss FRIDAY. So, what's an AI?"

"I'm an artificial intelligence, Boss coded me, I help manage the compound and Boss' life."

"Holy crap that's amazing."

"I'm glad you think so Sergeant Barnes."

How the hell do you code a person? And he'd be damned if she didn't sound smug! The future was utterly bonkers. Or Shuri and Dr Stark were.

**Shuri POV**

**7th October**

She was going to kill her brother.

It was a sentiment that she'd felt often these last few months.

Today however she was raw fury.

T'Challa has gone off to some kind of council meeting or whatever, and as such, everything about the rogues had found its way to her. No one wanted to deal with them. She didn't want to deal with them! But evidently, she was the last buck.
She'd woken up to 6 requests for T'Challa to come to the house to speak to Roger's and their current 'situation'. Being that Captain Coloniser wasn't happy that they'd grounded him like the bratty child he was.

"Fine! Send a message back that I will turn up when the Witch has been escorted from the premises. When she's underwatch I will visit to speak of their petty grievances."

"Of Course Princess Shuri."

"And if the answer to that is to moan about the little Witchlings feelings being hurt, they can wait until T'Challa gets back from his business trip."

With that the messenger all but fled and she found herself almost wishing that they'd argue the point.

They were her brothers problem after all, he was the idiot who invited them in, set them up in one of the more isolated villas and was effectively giving them a free holiday! All expenses paid and they always found something at fault.

And because of the precarious situation of harboring fugitives, they'd been backed into a corner by the Select Committee of the Accords Council. They were basically prison guards for people who didn't know they were prisoners until the world was ready to deal with them again. But at least they were being commended for this service instead of prosecuted for harbouring one of the most wanted group of supers at the moment. They only had that because of Tony. T'Challa had only recently discovered that Tony had been involved with it since the beginning. It had amused her greatly that her brother had actually thought that he didn't know the Rogues were in Wakanda, even though she recommended it on arrival, none of them ditched their gear. Tony had set up the deal to favour them behind closed doors, she had been pissed enough at her brother to agree to secrecy, the idea had been to have the Select Committee think they were winning and that they'd come up with it.

As time went on, she was starting to think thay the Select Committee were actually winning. Especially the more she was dragged into matters. The council in Wakanda of course wanted nothing to do with them beyond the potential political gain via the Select Committee, so her family was meant to deal with it alone. The idea being 'you got us into this mess, you get us out of it'.

As she dropped into her seat, rubbing her temples againsta tension headache, a haggard looking Wolf snuck into her lab. Which was interesting, he'd gone home hours ago after their BARF session.

"What brings you back to my lair today?"

"Same thing that has your face like a thundercloud I bet."

"Why can't they just enjoy their little holiday in peace like normal people?"

"Well that's where you went wrong. They ain't normal. Lil Stevie was the most stubborn bastard Bucky ever set eyes on when he was this tiny skinny thing. He never lost the stubborn edge he needed to be heard, even now when he's, well. Him. People listen, but he still acts like the little guy no one hears."

"I imagine the difference between your friend and what he's become must be jarring."

"Sort of, but Bucky's memories, they don't feel like MY memories, especially the longer I'm awake. Looking at him was hard until I separated that in my head, because he was wrong.
somehow, too big, too loud. There's been so much time between them, practically a life times worth."

"That would help distance you from him."

"Yeah, for me it's been seven decades, him it's been a flash, so he is still looking for Bucky. Not the real one though, this idolised, eulogised, version of him that I don't think ever existed."

"I'd say I hope he comes around, but I am frankly too mad at him. They've requested me or my brother to speak about 'issues'. Argh."

"Yeah, that. They're going to complain about Steve's situation, Barton should be allowed to contact his wife and to discuss your 'unfair assumptions' on the Ved'ma."

He dropped himself down in a chair, looking utterly exhausted. They'd probably wanted him to be there for this meeting, a united front or some crap. She assumed he'd hopped out of the nearest window as soon as he was able.

"Well we can both hideout for a while. I bet the Witch will scream about my rule of her not being there for at least an hour. I am about to call Tony though."

"You two still working on that pile of incomprehensible code?"

"Yes, and that if Tony is agreeable, I want him to put on his armour, fly to the Accords Council and maybe throw my brother at a few walls for me. Just one or two."

She grinned and it got a laugh out of him, she could almost see him shrugging off the tension from the villa. Straightening up from the hunch he'd come in with, leaning back in his chair and pulling a book from his bag.

"Well I won't lie, that does sound interesting. You sure you don't mind..?"

"Don't be silly, that is your corner, you do what you want with it."

This was also one of the few places she knew that none of the others could find him or get to him. She knew he had hidey holes all over, she'd caught him napping on top of the bookshelves in the library once for instance. When it came to her lab however, he was completely cut off from them. The difference in him when he visited made her want to never send him back to the villa. They had a number of rooms and a private kitchen/common room available in the Palace for out of town guests. It was rarely used, no one was due to visit, it would be perfect for him. But until he chose, she wouldn't make that decision for him. Every now and then she reminded him it was an option.

She turned back to her screen and put the call through to Tony, but was utterly baffled when T'Challa popped into view.

"You're not Tony."

What the hell was her brother doing in Tony's workshop?

"What delightful greetings I get from my sister."

"Ha ha brother, I just did not expect to find you in Tony's worksh- Peter!"

"Hi Shuri!"
Peter bounced up next to her brother, grinning broadly and bouncing slightly on the spot because of his never ending supply of energy. Harley complained about it often. She glanced around and saw Harley at his desk and Tony was likely helping him with homework most likely given the time.

He then turned and made his way to where her brother and Peter were standing. Harley offered a hand up in greeting too.

"Hey Shuri, workshop isn't always so busy."

"Why does she never smile at me like this? Charming sister, utterly charming."

Shuri rolled her eyes at her brother. He should be grateful she wasn't outright glaring at him.

"Your brother was going to give you a ring to say he made it here okay. He's just being accosted by Underoos here."

Tony was talking animatedly with his hands, and she had become so accustomed to it that she didn't see it. It was the sharp intake of breath behind her that made her actually look and that was when she noticed Tony's arm. His sleeves were rolled up, the left revealing the cybernetic hand that they had worked on and a thick band of scarring.

It was also pretty clear Tony had gotten so overrun with having everyone in his workshop that he'd forgotten to hide it.

She also bet that her brother cancelled that meeting so he could go and talk to the man. The sneak.

After he'd seen the video, he'd been quiet. She was surprised it had taken this long really. They'd both been sitting on this unexploded bomb ever since CERBERUS had sent to too her.

"Well I hope you're having fun brother. Abandoning me with the pests you invited over!"

She pushed everything aside for now, she'd deal with most of it later and her brother was so going to make up for this. He wasn't even at the council! He was at the compound enjoying himself. Also he obviously had managed to get some more information out of Tony.

Oh and when she gets to meet Tony in real life she is so going to punch him, probably after hugging him. The man is infuriating, but in an annoyingly understandable way. Watching that video, he can see why he keeps some things to himself, bottling it up, plus his need to not trouble her, if only he would see it was not a trouble to support friends.

"Next time you can come over Kit-Kat, the rest of my hoard would love to have you over. Today's council meeting was cancelled so he figured why not pop over!"

Sure.

'Cancelled'.

"Yes, I have some kind of interview tomorrow about how Wakanda is integrating with the world, so we thought we'd stop here and then go to the hotel."

"You sound utterly thrilled about that."

Tony's grin about T'Challa having an interview did give her an idea however. A tiny bit of harmless revenge.
"Tony! That's a great idea."

"Huh, What now?"

"You can go on the show with my brother."

Peter and Harley who were stood slightly behind the other two were now trying not to burst out laughing. Peter had his hands over his mouth and was starting to turn slightly red, Harley was grinning and shot her a thumbs up.

"Okay, fine, I'll crash your interview. Now, what were you after Shuri?"

Shuri actually had to think for a second, this call had gotten so derailed she'd almost forgotten the real reason she was calling him.

"Huh, Oh! I was just calling to tell you the next data packets are slowly making their way to you. It'll take a few hours."

Things sent quicker when they cleared both ends, still took far, far too long for her liking.

"Wait a second before you send, I have a surprise."

Tony vanished of camera then and she noticed that her brother was looking in the direction that he went, obviously watching him do something. Harley waved his phone and she realised he'd sent her a few messages.

Harley -did u c his hnd?

Harley -Shuri!

Harley -lk at ur dmnd phone!

She sent him a grin and quickly replied.

Me-Yes. I saw. Dnt thnk he did it on purpose tho.

Harley -Na, Mech is forgetful with it lately

Harley -its gd

Harley -me n Pete wnted to tel u fr ages

Me-I'll play dumb fr now, he'll realise wat hes done ltr

Harley nodded as Tony hopped back into the frame looking excited and a whole bunch of information started coming through on her end. She quietly wondered if Tony was trying to finish the entire integration in a week or something.

Not that she was complaining, not at all, this would make things considerably easier to send to him things.

"Better?"

"Oh yeah, you'll get everything much faster now."

"I'll be able to finish everything up my end, then all you have to do is push your last changes and I
think it might be done."

"Done?!"

"Done? As if you and my sister will actually stop working on it?"

"Well, mostly?"

She left the fact he'd gone and done months of work go and just laughed at the idea she or Tony would stop messing with it. The integration had started as a small thing, to make linking Wakanda with the rest of the world easier despite the vast differences technologically speaking, but she and Tony had taken it and ran with it. It was practically a living, breathing thing unto itself and she was surprised Tony hadn't coded an AI into somewhere.

"OK, I'm going to herd this lot off for dinner. Bye Kit-Kat."

She caught sight of his arm again and managed to not focus on it, it did however make the video play in her mind again and that was when she had an idea.

"Have fun, I might have some too."

The call ended and she immediately looked over to her guest who looked like he was in actual pain. It was so sad that he seemed to have more guilt for something that he wasn't even really at fault for that the good Captain had.

"His... His hand?"

"Yeah, I had my suspicions, but it was always covered. That's the first time I've seen it... Attached."

She turned and pulled up the files she and Tony had worked on for the hand, including pictures of it, none attached obviously. He'd seen it before, but now there was confirmation. Looking at it felt different, even for her.

"Zaebis' <Holy shit>"

"This isn't your fault you know, when you left that bunker you thought he was fine and you'd just been in a fight."

"Still, I know what it's like to wake up, have a limb just gone and then it's replaced with something foreign."

"Tony's cybernetic hand is day to the night of the one Hydra made."

"That's something at least. How long did he stay in the bunker for? To do that amount of damage?"

"I don't know, his AIs, they, ah, sent me the video. From Siberia."

He just rubbed his hand across his face and nodded.

"They didn't know how long he spent there, he scrambled things so they couldn't work it out, the only person around at the start of his coma had no idea he'd even left for Siberia as he'd also been unconscious. As far as I'm aware, the only one who really knows is Tony."

"Well that tells us one thing."

"What?"
"It was long, if he doesn't want anyone knowing. He's bottling it up"

Before she could respond to that a message came through, the pests had acquiesced to her demands it would seem.

"Well. Looks like I'm going to meet your housemates."

"Mind of I…"

"Of course you can stay. No touching the weapons!"

She grinned before getting herself ready to go.

"You should show them."

That however got her attention, she had expected him to be… Worse over the video somehow. But he seemed oddly calm about it. He was utterly calm now, more relaxed and straight back having made up his mind she supposed. She nodded and set off to see what they'd complain about today. She'd considered dropping hints of it, but to actually have them watch it, that was interesting.

The trip to the villa moved far to quickly for her liking. She practically blinked and she was stood outside the door, getting confirmation from the guards that the Witch had been escorted from the premises. Even so, she still took a few of the Dora in with her.

Did she just so happen to pick those who had gotten the most fed up with the Idiots? Potentially.

It didn't help that a few of the Dora had now met the strange American their Princess had been video chatting for a while. He'd charmed them, even impressed Okoye somewhat, not that she'd ever admit it. So for the few that knew him as her friend, sitting and listening to their guests constantly bad mouth the man? Then there were the ones who had fallen for her Wolf, seeing him chuck himself out of windows to avoid people had not lowered animosity levels.

The last fight Clint had gotten in, let's just say they might have put him down. Hard.

Apparently he was still limping.

Even so, she didn't want to speak to them.

She much rather be in her lab right now, she'd had a few new ideas that she wanted to bounce off of her Wolf, and some book recommendations for the man. She didn't understand how he could be so... Different to Rogers.

Rogers expected to be given things.

Wolf expected to be denied things.

It was a small thing, but it spiralled out into practically all of their choices and actions. Sighing again, wishing she was anywhere but here, heck, she'd take her brothers spot on that damned American interview than do this. Straightening her back she practically stalked into the house, her footsteps light as she came to the large, common room and heard Rogers complaining about the Witch 'being forced from her home!' She entered the room rolling her eyes because seriously?

"You agreed to my conditions. If you were so against them, then you could always wait for my
brother to get home.

"Princess! We didn't hear you come in!"

"Their whole family sneaks around like cats."

Scott's enthusiastic welcome wasn't dulled by the Angry Archers mutterings. Her brother had told her a lot about Scott, out of all of them (not including Wolf), Scott spent the most time talking to T'Challa. Sam came a close second since he'd gotten very interested in the Accords. Her brother avoided talking to the other 3 unless he was dragged to one of these ridiculous meetings.

"Hi Scott! Thanks for the compliment Barton. Now. Why am I here? You do realise that not all of us are on vacation and actually have duties, right?"

Okay. Maybe she was needling the wall of muscle just a little bit.

"Well, Shuri."

She just raised an eyebrow over the familiar way he was using her name.

"I don't know if you know what your brother has done, how he set certain restrictions on us? But I need to be there for Bucky and his treatments."

"Oh, you mean how you got grounded for lying, and that one got grounded for getting into fights?"

Rogers had to hold back Barton. It was hilarious.

"Now I don't know if you've heard anything, but.."

"I'm going to stop you there Rogers. Do you want to know why?"

He looked puzzled and she was sure Sam and Scott had edged away from the other pair.

"I actually know what happened in Siberia."

"Steve, what is she talking about?"

Sam paled, as Scott asked tentatively, he and Clint had been absent for the previous discussions just looked confused.

"Well, now, I'm sure you've heard many things.."

"No Rogers. I know. I watched it with my own eyes."

"I'm sure we can clear this up, I don't know who sent you that but they might be trying to manip-"

"You know what. I was going to let you talk yourself into a hole but you have already irritated me so much, I can't wait."

She pulled her wrists up and using her beads, sent the video onto the TV.

"Enjoy."

With that she turned and slammed the door shut behind her. Locking it.

"Don't let them out until they've watched it."
He'd known it was a bad idea.

The day did not get better from there.

Barnes went for his weird tech unbrainwashing therapy, which was doing the man wonders already.

Steve watched the door. Literally. Just sat and watched the door. Even Wanda couldn't draw him away, so she'd been leaning against him the entire time. Talking quietly with each other until Barnes returned and she detached and moved onto Clint.

Clint was in a foul mood, even compared to his previous moods. Which was saying something.

Then everything went quiet for a bit, he went for a walk… not long after he got a bunch of panicked messages from Scott. Begging him to come back. He'd almost walked off into the woods, but Barnes messaged him too and he'd found himself heading back to the villa before he'd really considered his steps.

That's when the bad idea started gaining steam. It was all -

'This is unfair!'

'They're unfairly detaining us!'

'They need to-

'They should do-

'They can't do-

He really tried to calm things down, but it was like a runaway train with Wanda firing up Clint and Steve. It had ended with him, Scott and Barnes stood off to one side.

Then Barnes jumped out of the window.

He'd actually considered following.

Shuri's message came back and he breathed easily. That was the end of it right? No way would Wanda go ahead with it. She was furious about it, but then all the anger that she'd been stirring up came around and Steve practically ordered her out because this was their only chance to potentially influence the younger royal without her brother.

Personally, if Sam had to choose to go up against one of the royals, he'd choose T'Challa. But Steve just saw her age and Wanda suggested it.

So. He'd known this was a bad idea.

Knew it in his bones.

But like a runaway train, he was just stuck watching it go careening on. He could tell Shuri was
unimpressed the second she walked in, but Steve didn't see it. He switched to his 'Aw shucks' look in an attempt to charm her, but that was so not going to work.

"Enjoy."

The door closed quietly, but there was a resounding 'click' that told him it was locked. Then there was an almost slow motion of everyone turning to the TV and Steve panicking. But Wanda had riled up Clint too.

Clint knew stuff had gone on when he wasn't around. Steve had told him to not mention it to any of them, he had grudgingly agreed, for now, but he had told Barnes everything. He was not lying to that man.

So, Clint was pissed, and he wanted to know. Scott was looking at the locked door with a forlorn look on his face and Sam wondered for the 100th time, what did he do for his life to be 'THIS'. He dropped himself onto the sofa to watch, because he knew there was no getting out of this room until they did. The walls were probably vibranium or something.

The fact the video stayed also paused on an empty looking base as Clint and Steve screamed at each other told him that.

Scott appeared next to him, looking at the video pensively and he snapped.

"Shut the fuck up! Both of you!"

"Who do you think you're shouting at Wilson?"

"Come on now Sam. This isn't going to help anyone, no one needs to see this."

"See, that right there, that is why I want to see it."

With that Clint dropped down in the loveseat he often shared with Wanda. Leaving just Steve stood behind the chairs.

Apparently that was all it took and the video started. Steve and Barnes walking through the Base.

Stark's immensely dramatic entrance.

The things Barnes said came back to him, Stark stated flat out no one knew where he was. The man laughed it off, but that was a lot of trust to put in a team mate you'd been falling out with.

'Did you really think I wanted more of you?'

Oh great. On top of everything he had to listen to the villain monologuing.

Talking about Steve's eyes like some love lorn teenager.

Why do villains have to do this?

Why must villains always make it weird?

He knew Tony found out, Barnes had told him what he remembered, that Stark saw his parents murdered whilst stood near Steve and Barnes. But it didn't quite prepare him to watch it. Scott seemed to feel the same given how pale the man was. Clint looked almost confused but he didn't know about what. But he shook his head and the confusion was gone. Steve was stood as far back as possible, back to the TV. As if he could pretend this wasn't happening.
Steve still trying to lie about it? When it was bloody obvious. Well, he'd seen enough of that recently not to be shocked.

There were a few points in the fight he flinched, yeah, Stark is in the armour, but the line around his neck slamming him down? He'd bet that did some damage. He's still just a normal human in that armour, and walking tank as Barnes described him or not, having 2 super soldier beat on you can't be fun. The walking tank description only works if Stark used it as one, at ranged fighting Ironman was especially lethal. He knew Barnes and Steve came back bloody but it hadn't taken long for them to heal.

The bunker took a terrifying amount of damage that easily could have been directed at Steve or Barnes. He could have probably have killed them both in the shock after he blasted Barnes arm off.

He thought it would end when Steve's shield smashed into the arc reactor. But he ripped it back out, causing Scott to flinch. He had wondered for a minute, if he'd left it in Stark's chest, because Steve did not come back with it.

"That shield doesn't belong to you, you don't deserve it, my father made that shield."

Ah.

That was when the weight of the armour dropped Stark onto his back and Steve left.

He looked back at Steve who was just staring at him, pleading to see things 'his' way. To understand 'his' actions. Maybe he could have, but he'd seen Steve fight against a triggered Winter Soldier, that had wanted him dead. He just watched Steve leave Stark there, with no power, injured, in fucking Siberia, without even a glance back. No man left behind wasn't just a saying to him. It meant something. To see Captain America leave a person he still claimed as a friend like that? It shattered something inside him.

He just shook his head, because whilst he got the instinct to protect a friend, you don't do it at the cost and suffering of another. Clint looked confused before shaking his head again, then he was back to the anger they'd gotten so used to lately.

"You need to stop lying Steve. Is that why we're here? Why I don't get to see my family? Because you lied about your best bud killing Stark's parents?"

The door clicked open which seemed to save Steve from answering as Clint scoffed and stormed out. Steve eventually left and he just stayed with Scott.

Out of him and Wanda both being grown ass adults, Scott had started to make him feel oddly protective, like he was this perpetual teenager thrown into events too convoluted and terrible for him to comprehend.

At least Barnes wasn't here to watch the video.

Maybe he and Scott should go out tonight, let Steve and Clint deal with Wanda when she got back.

James POV

8th October
All was not well in the Villa.

He'd got back when Tictac and Wings were just getting in. Both were more than a little drunk. Okay, they were trashed. Falling over and laughing at each other. Scott had asked to hug him, he'd even agreed because he looked like a sappy drunk that was going to burst out crying if he said no. He managed to trundle then off to their rooms and was locked behind his own doors before anyway came to investigate the noise.

Usually if anyone was drunk, they'd converge on the drunk member.

That video definitely did something.

He wasn't sure if it was good.

Point being, it hadn't been his idea.

He hadn't been the one to speak.

So he'd mostly been freaking out that this thing in his head could apparently take control of him now and talk. That was new. Luckily Shuri hadn't noticed that it wasn't him talking.

So he hadn't slept. Not a wink. The back of his mind was quiet, maybe it hadn't realised it could do that? Maybe it had exhausted itself? He didn't know because this was just too weird. He snuck out and back for his treatment and was now listening to people in the house.

He heard Wings finally wake up, likely very hungover and stagger downstairs so went to join him.

Which was how he, Wings and TicTac found themselves watching TV, eating porridge waiting to see T'Challa on his interview.

The Witch and her Archer even joined them.

This had been a set event yesterday, he had wondered if watching the video would change anything. Seems everyone still wanted to watch T'Challa have his interview. Although he bet for different reasons. Steve thought he'd bring up the pardons.

Apparently there were no bounds to Steve's optimism when it came to their mythical pardons.

He however, was going where his treatment was. Steve seemed to think if they got pardoned tomorrow, he'd leave with them. As willing as Dr Stark seemed to be to help him, he doubted the man would offer him treatment in the compound, so he was staying where the glasses were.

T'Challa had answered a few questions so far about Wakanda and how amazing it was here. As far as he was concerned, they were not getting across the truly amazing parts of it. But he understood that there were parts of Wakanda they didn't want the world to know about yet. The fact they'd come out to the world about Vibranium and that no, they weren't a tiny village that only made textiles was amazingly brave.

Steve thankfully turned up after 5 minutes of discussing the Accords. That definitely would have riled him up. Everyone was a little sedate, yesterday had taken its toll it seemed. Things were finally starting to stack up and he couldn't find himself feeling bad for them, bar Wings and TicTac, considering how awful they'd been to the man they actually expected to help them.

The video had really changed something though. Everyone was tense, TicTac had also abandoned his chair and was now sat on the floor, practically at his feet. Wings had taken up TicTac's old
The 3 of them practically tucked into one corner, the Witch and her archer were still sharing the small loveseat on the other side of the room. Steve flopped into the middle of the larger sofa.

"I've enjoyed my trips to America so far with the Accords Council, meeting the other councillors has also been good. Everyone has been very accepting of our plans to open up Wakanda slowly, the people I've met have also been most unlike what I suspected."

"Ah, I assume you mean Tony Stark? What was it like to get whisked off to dinner with our favourite genius?"

Oh fuck

He thought to himself, a minute ago he'd been happy Steve had missed the bit on the Accords… He hadn't expected it to come back to Dr Stark. He knew Shuri was friendly with the man, but he didn't know if he and T'Challa were that close.

"Oh, that was a lot of fun, he told me a lot about what Stark Industries was involved in."

"Yes, here in America everyone always needs the next piece of Stark Tech."

Wanda practically growled at the screen, coming to her feet to pace behind the chairs. He was very happy his chair was tilted so he had a good view of the room. The idea of her pacing behind his head was too much. He didn't know how Wings and Steve could do it. It had a knock on effect of waking the voice in his mind, its attention on Wanda.

That was when he remembered. The conversation Shuri had had with her brother at the compound. How could he forget?! Shuri had convinced Dr Stark to join T'Challa for it. Ah crap. It was way too late to do anything about it now.

"We have been surprised lately, Mr Stark seems to be working constantly but he just hasn't been seen much, King T'Challa you've seen more of him than we have lately, how is he recovering?"

"My ears were burning."

He idly considered screaming into a pillow.

At the same time, he couldn't not watch.

Stark, dressed in a black suit and shirt, with a bright silver tie that looked like metal. His sunglasses were the same silver, catching on the studio lights and flashing brightly. There were only two chairs, one for the host and one for T'Challa, yet he confidently strode onto the stage as if he was meant to be there and perched on the hosts desk, crossing his legs at his ankles and leaned back as if it were a perfectly normal thing to do.

'He knows how to command attention.'

Why is he not surprised that its happy about this? This situation was just waiting to explode on them. But sure perv on Stark. That's the important aspect here.

"Hi."

"Mr Stark! We didn't expect to see you today!"
"Well, T'Challa spent last night at the compound and mentioned today's little interview, so I thought I'd tag along."

"T'Challa was at the compound?"

Scott asked, he just shrugged because there was no way of explaining what he knew without inviting a lot more questions.

"Yes, the compound is absolutely gorgeous, it was lovely having breakfast with the Avengers."

"I also heard that you were considering partnering up for some of Mr Stark's initiatives?"

"Oh yes, this man's brain is brilliant, he's going to help me get my inventions to where they're needed. At home and abroad."

"Dr Stark is also great to work with. Not at all what I expected an American businessman to be like."

"What were you expecting?"

"Profit driven, uncaring and only caring about their own country. Dr Stark is giving his Intellicrops away for free. In areas where children are going blind from lack of Vitamin A, it is a particularly severe problem in populations where rice is the staple food and diversity of diet is limited, as white rice contains no micronutrients. Dr Stark has created a rice variant with added Vitamin A specifically to help these people."

"I never knew Stark did things like that, I wonder why he didn't speak about stuff like this? I wi-"

He has been tracking Wanda from when they'd started talking about Dr Stark, when Wings started talking however, her building anger got... redirected. It was almost like he, or the voice in his head, could feel her anger and attention shift onto Wings. He definitely didn't know her well enough to pick up on tells like that, so it was confusing. The information was just suddenly there.

He didn't question it however, he just moved and caught her hand a few centimetres from Wings head. Part of him wanted to recoil because her hands were leaking that red shit and it felt like ice on his skin, like the black of cryo sleep, tugging at him.

"Pain to her hands disrupts her ability"

Then it was just there in his mind, he'd been about to pull his hand back to shake off the feeling, his hand moved practically on its own volition and within the second he'd caught her hand, she dropped to her knees, yelling out in pain. The red abruptly vanished, the cold feeling gone with just a small reminder that had him pushing her hand away. She kept eye contact as she very slowly stood, watching him very carefully. Cradling her hand to her chest.

Then she just left. Which was exceptionally weird. Given her patterns, she could have used this to garner sympathy against him. Instead she watched him warily as if he was the danger and backed off, keeping her eyes on his till she passed into the hall. Like watching a predator that's about to eat you.

Wings was a little wide eyed, looking back and forth between himself and the Witches retreating form. He just shot him a smile and turned back to the TV, rubbing his hand on his jeans to get rid of the feeling whilst trying not to freak out because what the fuck just happened?
"You're welcome."

"What was that?!"

"I showed you how to combat her ability."

He didn't bother questioning it further, he got a feeling that it was confused at his questions.

"...uffer from some type of important nutritional deficiency. Biofortified crops are a good alternative to alleviating malnutrition."

"And you're giving these crops away?"

"Generally, the people who desperately need these crops can't afford them, so it makes sense. If giving away some seeds saves children from living blind because they lack a vitamin that is easy to acquire for us, why wouldn't I?"

"I guess-"

"Bucky? What was that? Why did you hurt Wanda?"

"She's fine. If she wasn't she'd have said something."

He pointedly turned back to the screen as Dr Stark was still speaking. Scott was a little wide eyed, but weirdly, Clint didn't seem to have actually noticed that anything had happened, focused on the TV. Wings looked a little peaked, wide eyed but he refocused on the TV. Steve had his unimpressed face on again, but he could ignore that. He'd recently gotten a lot of practice.

"I do have a lot focused in America, trying to end food deserts for example. But humanitarian efforts are for humanity."

"This is what I was talking about."

T'Challa was grinning on the TV, both he and Dr Stark were actually. They were having a lot more fun than how awkward this room was that was for sure.

"So, King T'Challa, how is integration with the world going, from what I've been told your computers don't use the same binary system as the rest of us?"

"Oh Dr Stark and our technicians have been working on it night and day. I was pretty sure it was fine several versions ago, but apparently Dr Stark and my sister are perfectionists."

"I've had tons of fun working with Princess Shuri, she is brilliant. Even some of the younger interns I have at SI love her."

"That explains yesterday then."

Clint mutters and glanced around, seemingly only just noticing that Wanda had left, he looked confused for a second before shrugging and focusing back on the TV.

"I read about your intern project, schools all over the country are involved yes, finding the best and brightest?"

Because he's interested in what Steve will say, he has to ask.
"What happened yesterday?"

"Oh it was nothing Buck, Princess Shuri just popped over but she couldn't help us with what we talked about. We'll have to wait for T'Challa to come home."

Clint was giving Steve such a look of incredulity that it was hard to keep a straight face.

"-making a list of schools lacking funding and am now supplying what they need."

"That's very selfless of you."

"Na, I just want more scientists in the world."

T'Challa answered a few questions about Wakanda as a frazzled technician ran out with a chair like the one T'Challa was sat in. Dr Stark thanked them before sitting in the chair next to T'Challa.

"King T'Challa, are you people excited to rejoin the rest of the world?"

"Oh definitely, some of my people have been waiting for this for a long time."

"So, Mr Stark, you know the question we want to ask."

"Go on, ask about it."

The tense atmosphere in the room got worse, he was pretty sure he was going to get a migraine.

"We all saw the picture of you in the hospital. We know you were in a coma. We haven't seen much of you since, so we wanted to know how you've been recovering."

"Well, it's been a long road. I'm not at 100%, but I'm working to get there. I might not be in the skies, yet, but there is a lot of work I could do from home."

The man's scarred arm where it met the black metal of his cybernetic forearm and hand flashed in his mind at that.

'Yeah, definitely not at 100%'

He thought to himself, he couldn't help the stab of guilt, even though Shuri had told him it wasn't his fault. He should have known it would attract the voice.

'You think too much.'

He couldn't really argue that. He did think too much.

"We've been keeping up with your work, for someone not on the Accords Council, you do a lot of work for them."

"Of course. It is an important document, for humans and supers alike. Whilst recovering from my injuries it made sense to focus on it. Just a shame I missed those 10 days in a coma."

"Dr Stark seems to never stop working."

"Nope, my physio often gets infuriated with me."

"Do you mind if we ask what injuries you suffered? You've been very close to the chest
Wings and Scott wince at that, maybe he should watch this video, there are bits of the fight.. Missing from his memory.

"In general people don't think of superheroes getting hurt, so I kept that private. As you can see I'm able to work fine and I'll be flying in no time... but I'll show you one thing."

Steve was instantly leaning forward, everyone was very focused on the screen, but he had a good idea what the man was going to do. Especially as he stood and nearly folded his suit jacket over the back of the chair. Even the studio was pretty silent as he undid his sleeve, folding it all the way to his elbow. The presenter definitely hadn't been expecting the thick band of scars, they looked a little green actually. It was different than seeing it on the video call, high definition and his arms weren't moving as much now. It was also strange as the scarring looked out of place, the black metal was the same colour as his skin somehow.

"What would cause scarring like that?"

Scott glanced around the room, when he didn't get an answer, the presenter talking pulled his attention back.

"That's some pretty severe scarring."

Stark then did something, it looked like he tapped his hand weirdly, with that, the skin seemed to retreat back, leaving the matte black of his actual hand visible. It had actually changed a little since he saw it last night strangely. Two thin, but bright blue lines were now visible. Like last night, he couldn't help the stab in his chest that he'd been part of it, part of the reason another man had metal where flesh would be. Shuri has said that it was different to his arm, but it still wasn't his own flesh hand. It was still something 'other'.

"Yeah, the scarring is pretty bad."

"I'm guessing that is not a covering, or a glove?"

"Nope. After the fight I had severe frostbite, my doctors could do a lot, worked wonders in fact. But they couldn't save everything and my hand, wrist and some of my forearm was amputated."

"Holy fuck."

He glanced at Wings, he was pretty sure that was the first time he'd heard the man swear.

Part of his inability to sleep had been falling down a path on the internet where he was researching frostbite. So he could get behind the swearing.

"How has it changed things for you? I don't know if I could carry on fighting after losing a limb! But I am a lefty."

"Temporarily disabled."

Everyone was pretty shocked that that came from Clint of all people. The man had no love lost for Dr Stark, he'd been quite vindictive in his anger. But now he was looking confused again at the TV.
"How long does it take for frostbite to get that bad?"

Scott asked, glancing around everyone in the room, surprisingly it was Clint again to answer.

"Long enough I guess. But Stark… He *survives*. It's what he *does*, against all odds. He *survives*."

Clint trailed off, muttering whilst staring at the TV, that was a really weird thing to say. But he couldn't puzzle it out.

"I doubt that was from our fight. It was probably something else, he was fine in the armour. He probably didn't spent more than a few minutes there!"

He just gaped, because that's some next level delusion there.

"I'm ambidextrous, so I still didn't have to learn to use a different dominant hand. But this won't stop me. I'm still Ironman, as long as Ironman is required, he will be there, from domestic terrorism, wildfires, bad guys our police can't fight and if aliens come knocking. I will get back up until I'm physically incapable. And probably try and find a way to anyway."

He couldn't do it. He couldn't just let it go anymore. He couldn't let him just sit there and delude himself into thinking that there was no consequences for his actions whilst another man suffered from them.

"Steve, are you seriously thinking that after we abandoned the man in Siberia, with no power that he got home, then got into another fight that left him, with no power in a freezing temperature zone that lead to severe frostbite and a 10 day coma."

"I guess we should expect such dedication from Ironman by now, after you caught that nuke and flew it into a portal in space, when you did that, did you know you'd be fine?"

"He was fine when we left Buck!"

"Shut the fuck up Steve. You drove your Vibranium shield into the chest of a man with a compromised sternum. Hard enough to kill an arc reactor. Stark's a dick, but at least fucking own that you nearly killed him and scarred him for life."

Clint didn't even look at Steve as he spoke, obviously as fed up with Steve's excuses. Steve paled further shrinking into the chair.

"Oh no, I thought it was a one way trip. The blast knocked the power out of my suit, luckily I fell through the portal and The Hulk, my buddy, he caught me."

"I didn't know."

"After that I guess missing a hand wouldn't stop you after all?"

"That's not an excuse for nearly killing and abandoning someone to a slow, agonising death Steve."

Steve full body flinched from Sam's quiet addition, more affected than Clint's angry mutterings. It seemed most of them had hit their limit.

"Nope, I've always known I could get hurt, but it never stopped me before. It wasn't..."
easy, waking up with a part of you just gone. Sometimes I would wake up and have
phantom feelings of it, very strange. If anything it's made me more determined and
shown me more people I can help."

He glanced at the socket Hydra installed, it felt like the arm was still there sometimes. Not his
own, but the metal one. Like it was still dragging him down. The fact he was partially responsible
for inflicting something similar to someone else, that hurt.

'I do not understand why you hate it so much, to me, it was always my arm.'

'It was painful, heavy and maintenance was...'

Thankfully it didn't push him further, he didn't like thinking of maintenance sessions.

"That's, that must have been hard to deal with. Is this why you have gotten more
involved with disabilities and prosthetics?"

"I know what it's like to wake up and find metal instead of flesh. We did that to him."

"Partially, I'm sure you know about James Rhodes accident too? After that I started
doing research, found out that a lot of people who need disability aids are left unable
to get them. When I woke up from the coma, missing my left hand, it sharpened it
more. Trying to do things one handed? Not as easy as it seemed. Now I had the
contacts and ability to build this for myself, with Shuri in Wakandas help. She helped
me through a lot in those early days. When I was back up to two hands I decided to
change the disability aids industry. "

"Shuri helped give him his hand back? Did she tell you anything about it Buck? About what made
him lose it? "

"Steve come on. You know why he lost it. Frostbite is terrifying and I imagine for a man like him,
a man who works with his hands? Lying there, dying in that frozen wasteland, alone , just feeling
parts of his body slowly die. That's fucking torture and WE are responsible. YOU need to accept it
and stop looking for an easy out. And don't you dare say what we did was fine 'cause he was 'trying
to kill me'. If he wanted us dead, we'd be dead."

"-es are expensive, not updated often and for many, hard to acquire. Children wearing
prosthetics they've grown out of, powered chairs on the edge of falling apart, ancient
crutches that cause more pain than they help. "

"You seem quite passionate about this Mr Stark."

"Buck, come on..."

"I've come to see Dr Stark is quite passionate about many things, helping people
seems to drive Dr Stark as much as it does Ironman. "

"No. Steve you need to accept this. You need to accept the consequences of your actions and stop
running around thinking everything is fine because you're doing the right thing. People died
because of us. A man has at least one amputation that we know off, maybe other injuries we can't
see. "

That made Steve pale, as if he hadn't considered that there might be other injuries.

"For this instance, It's definitely a case of having my eyes opened. Watching Rhodey
not be able to go to his favourite shop because there is a step I never even noticed, or spend 40 minutes waiting for an empty lift. I didn't realise how inaccessible the world was, so I'd like to do my part to change that."

"He was fine when we left, still talking..."

"Well, that certainly is a good goal! We are actually out of time for today, hopefully we can get the two of you back someday. I have a feeling that Mr Stark and King T'Challa partnering up will lead to amazing things for our planet!"

"His pain tolerance is on par with you Cap, but he's not a super soldier to back it up. I saw that fight, I'd be surprised if you didn't break his collarbone as well as fucking up his chest."

Clint was apathetic in his delivery, Wings winced and TicTac look green. Steve... The idiot was just shaking his head.

"So, can you feel with it?"

"Sort of, not the way a real hand does. It's wired directly into my nerves, so I get input, hot and cold. Some textures, it's more information in my mind than feeling."

Steve stood, looking for all the world that he was going to cry, but until he stopped making this about him, he had no sympathy.

"That is amazing, thank you Mr Stark for crashing my show."

The presenter winked at him before turning to T'Challa and crossing his hands over his chest.

Steve practically fled the room. Clint stood and followed at a more sedate pace without another word. He hoped some of what he'd said got through to the thick headed punk. But somehow, he doubted it..

The room was silent for about thirty seconds as the three of them judy looked at each other and burst out laughing as the tension snapped. They needed to get something out, even though they had no idea what they were laughing at, just that the tense atmosphere was gone, leaving them almost giddy.

"Okay, who thinks we should possibly get rid of the TV?"

He didn't know if he was joking or being serious...

For the rest of the day, he avoided the Villa. Steve wanted to talk to him, and he was officially fed up of Steve revisionist ways. It was getting hard to trust anything he said hearing him try to justify Dr Stark's injuries as not his fault, especially when he felt so guilty over them.

He and Shuri did discuss how that video had shaken things up in the house, as well as his little clash with the Witch. She had been caught up in the integration however so he had eventually moved to the library. Out of everyone who could be hunting him out, he had not expected T'Challa to turn up out of the blue.

"Your interview was interesting."
"Did they all watch it at the villa? Oh dear. It wasn't my idea for Tony to join me, you can blame any following chaos on my sister."

"I will make sure to tell her that."

T'Challa just shook his head and pulled an envelope out of his pocket before handing it over. Which was curious, who would be sending him letters? Especially given the envelope was completely blank but sealed.

"I'm going to get some sleep now. America is exhausting."

When the king was gone he pulled the letter out and couldn't be more shocked really.

James

So, I wasn't really expecting this so I wasn't exactly sure how to respond. And the fact that I'm being forced to write on paper, instead of digital, because then Shuri will psychoanalyse me. Not helping.

But you made the effort, I just wanted to tell you that you don't have to apologise, but I'm grateful for it, Thank you. No one has really done that before.

It was a cascading situation where each part flew out of control before we even realised it, a runaway train full of fireworks that just so happened to be on fire as it fell off a cliff... I tried to stop it, but, well, you know how that turned out.

Before Siberia I had worked out a pardon and such for you but Roge—

Ignore that. I'm trying to not be negative, or at least not mentioning a certain spangled man who shall not be named, and this is the last clean paper in my pad!

So, Thank you for apologising, it's nice to hear it from someone, even though you didn't have control of your act3, you never lied to me. Even though you barely knew me, you told the truth when I asked. Unlike someone who was meant to be my frie

I don't want this dragging anyone down, so it's an event better left for the past? It's not selfish to apologise I don't think? It made me feel better. But I say that just before I say sorry for attacking first, asking questions later. The only one that deserved that was Ro— So maybe I'm the selfish one here. I mean, I should have had more control over myself really.

T'Challa told me something similar, that I was temporarily disabled, so it's not on either of you, yeah? You didn't know, so you aren't at fault. Plus, I'm alive! <Insert Frankenstein like cackling here.>

I really am sorry for my part in the fight.. You didn't deserve that. You had come out of the other side of decades of torture and was welcomed with a superhero smackdown.

And your arm! I took that thing apart, to send the data to Shuri for any help the Wakandans can give you. You felt that, I'm so sorry. I know that the arm hurt, I could see it when I took it apart. But it didn't have to! I know you are probably still in pain too, I know when you have been in pain for so long it becomes normal? But it isn't, I know I'm not anyone important in your life, but tell someone about the pain, Shuri probably would help in a heartbeat. She has a soft spot for broken white boys. I won't take that choice from you though, but just don't hide the pain, you don't deserve
to suffer in silence.

By the time you get this, if you watched King Kitty on TV, my hand doesn't hurt, it feels like my hand because we worked out a way of wiring it. Not important or I'll science babble at you. Always drives people nuts. But if you even want an arm, Shuri can help. It will be different, no pain and it will feel like your arm. Not a foreign thing. I hope you can forgive me for my part, and that BARF (It is a cool name, no matter what anyone says) can be my way of making it up to you.

Also, it isn't your fault I lost my hand, I shouldn't have scrubbed my location or I should have had some back up plan. Escaping is what I do after all, so, again, not your fault, you didn't have a choice but to fight back because of the programming alright? Let's blame the cold for my injuries and the unnamed spangled git. (ugh, ignore that, I shouldn't trash on your best friend, I'm trying to not be a dick here.)

So, I hope BARF is helping. I'm glad you find my coding notes amusing. There are many who say you can't use potato to test everything. They just aren't imaginative enough.

-TS

Also, what's with everyone suddenly calling me doctor?! It's weird. Call me Tony.

Well, that definitely hadn't been what he was expecting. He seemed to write as he spoke, which was quite strange, like he had 5 topics he wanted to talk about at once so they jumbled up but it oddly worked.

Even the scratched out parts, that's when he realised that the back wasn't clear as he held the letter up to the light to try and read what he had started to write about the pardons. He turned it over there was a number of what could potentially be called doodles, but really fancy doodles with occasional utterly confusing math attached, and he was really good at math, had to be to be a good sniper in the 40s. Something about what looked like someone's homework and trajectory or something, with little birds drawn.

He really hoped Dr Stark hadn't accidentally sent him something important like his kids homework. The birds were really cute though.

He was assuming not as it had been jotted down sort of on the corner. Maybe showing someone? There was a sketch of a woman with red lipstick that was pulling on his memory for some reason, which was odd. He stopped to sift through the Bucky memories to find a match and then saw a memory of Peggy. The likeness was amazing.

Then there were several small sketches of what looked like braces. There was also a cat, randomly. No, two different cats. Chasing things around the margins.

It was slightly confusing to look at it all at once and he wondered if this was how the man's brain worked? If it was, his brain was utter chaos.

Considering he had a second possibly person in his head, he found it confusing.

Also, there was his name. James. It felt.. Different.

Now what was he meant to do?
There was a lot to unpack here...

Should he reply?

Had he inadvertently become penpals with Ironman?
Common Decency

Chapter Summary

Wolf is starting to get almost comfortable with things.

His housemates however just have too much free time on their hands.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Barnes POV

12th October

It had been 3 days of BARF now with Dr Stark running and guiding his adaptive programme instead of just using an algorithm, Shuri acted as a go between, texting the man, and messages occasionally popped up on his screen. Well, more floating in front of him in a weird way.

On more than one occasion the random jokes or images he had sent to him had pulled him back from the edge of a panic attack. How Dr Stark seemed to just be able to tell he was close to panicking from the other side of the world, he had no idea. He'd say the glasses told him, but Shuri got the same read outs and she couldn't predict them.

Dr Stark had asked for data on the memories attached to the words for a theory he was working on based on the stages of brainwashing.

Honestly, stages. He hadn't realised that brainwashing was a thing that had actual stages. He'd considered looking it up himself and Dr Stark told him to look up something nice instead, leave the depths of Hydra to him for a change. That he'd done more than enough.

He still hadn't responded to the amusing letter, or mentioned it to anyone, it was tucked into his notebook, he liked the drawings and the thing in the back of his head seemed to like anything related to Dr Stark.

'I know you're still ignoring me, but can you stop calling me it?'

Oh. Thinking on it, if the presence in his mind wasn't just his sanity melting away, he'd been a bit of a dick.

'What do you want me to call you?'

He got confusion and a bit of panic back, and damned if he didn't know what that felt like.

'Hey hey, its okay. I didn't really know what I wanted to be called either.'

'At least you have many options.'

'True, but nothing really jumped out. The best I have so far is most people calling me Barnes. I like Wolf however, and James. Anything is better than Bucky.'
'What about Winter Soldier? Or Soldat?'

'The Russian for soldier?'

'Yeah.'

'Why don't you pick one, we'll try it, if you like it then keep it? You can try others? Winter isn't bad.'

'Does this mean you'll stop ignoring me now?'

He wasn't sure about that, it was really weird to be talking to a person in his head but he figured he could make an effort. His intention must have carried through as he felt a happiness from it. Maybe he could do it. Although he was still not telling anyone.

'Also If you ever take control again, at least pretend to be me?'

'Otlichno. <Fine.>,'

Figuring that's the best he's going to get, he finished dressing for the day and headed home for food and to head to his BARF session.

Since the video viewing, the house was.. fractured. But Steve apparently still wanted people to be present at meals. This was adhered to much less now, but Wanda seemed to have pulled Steve and Clint back together, somehow. The two had returned to talking to each other a lot faster than he would have assumed, given how enraged the Archer was at everything. Attacking the interview they'd watched had become a popular conversation, even though he, Wing's and TicTac never joined in.

Also the Witch had been avoiding him like the plague, anytime they shared a room she became quiet withdrawn and watched him intently. Occasionally rubbing her wrist. He wasn't sure why she was so intent on him, it felt like more than just that one incident, yet they'd never met before.

He shook his head and entered the kitchen, Wings was cooking again with TicTac helping. It had become his routine to help the two now, especially after he baked muffins last night. His therapist wanted him to try more hobbies, baking seemed a good choice, even though he was pretty sure Wings suggested it to get free baked goods. He liked the precise measurements, instructions and easy results that were also tasty. Although he was avoiding most American recipes, he'd spent an hour trying to work out different conversions of cups before nearly putting his fist through the wall. Grams were much easier to understand.

Just as he'd finished up, the Witch and the Archer headed towards the front door, the Archer nodding to Steve. It was an odd interaction but as he was leaving in 5 minutes, he could ignore it. He ignored most of what they three got up to.

"Hey Buck, I can come with you today for your session if you like?"

Huh???

"Steve.. I thought you can't, you know.. Leave the house?"

"I can for today, so I can come and see this treatment you've been doing. You've been going a while now and I don't think it's having good results so I want to check on it. Make sure nothing bad is going on behind the scenes."
He's not sure which feeling is stronger, a sense of betrayal from T'Challa or concern. He isn't mad at the king, Steve was like water wearing down rock. It made sense, he'd eventually give in, Steve was his to deal with anyway and it was pretty unfair of him to dump it on T'Challa.

But would Steve recognise the tech? Even if he covers up the Stark Industries logo? He lived with the man for years so he assumes he would know his style.

"I don't know Steve, this is kind of a me thing, ya know? Like something I have to do alone."

"I get that Buck and I'll be there to help you, together, like we always were."

Now he knows that he and lil Stevie were together a lot, but he also damned well knows that they spent some time apart too. He's not sure where Steve is getting this completely idolised version of him. When people die, friends and family tend to eulogize them. Gloss over the traits they didn't like, reframe events. He's not sure when Steve did this, was it after the train or after he woke up in the future, but it's starting to annoy him. Even if he reverted to the old Bucky right now, it wouldn't be enough for Steve. He didn't know how to tell the man that this Bucky he'd built up in his head probably never existed, what happened to him that he made up this perfect Bucky?

It was like he was being set up for failure.

"I don't know Steve, I don't really like the idea of anyone seeing what I did at Hydra."

"You didn't do anything, you were forced, why are you going through those memories anyway?! Who the hell thought that was a good idea, isn't that traumatic?"

"Steve it's how the tech works, it helps me disassociate a memory as I go through it instead of waiting years. It's amazing Steve, I've really been improving."

"Gotta tell you Steve, that does sound good, disassociating traumatic memories in a controlled condition like that? That's amazing. With PTSD people can be hit with memories decades after the trauma, as fresh as if it happened yesterday. What Barnes is describing is a damned miracle."

"But the words are still there."

"They're being worked on, my brain is not like most people's anymore, Hydra basically rewired me. They have their best people working on it."

Clint strolled back and waved at Steve as he jumped up and slipped his coat on.

"See ya later Cap."

"Fine, I'll come along today and see what it's like. Maybe you'll convince me that it's good."

"Alright, let's walk to the train I guess."

His shoulders slumped slightly as Steve starts walking to the door, Wings and TicTac both look upset but seem utterly stuck for what to do. He shrugged at them and trudged out, he glanced next to the door to see if one of his favourite guards were on duty, but was shocked to find no one there.

"That's weird."

"What's that Buck?"

"No one is guarding the door."
"Oh it's probably just a shift change, you usually leave earlier so you don't see it."

"Oh, okay."

It still seemed weird but he guessed a guard change made sense, where else would they be? He was also feeling kind of depressed himself now, he didn't know why such a simple thing like Steve accompanying him to his session was knocking him. But then he'd only just started getting used to having choices.

Sure, they'd been terrifying at first. He'd almost longed for the simplicity of being the Asset. He never made choices back then, he was given strict mission parameters to fulfil. He either succeeded and he would go back into cryo. Or he failed, then he would be punished before going back into cryo. It was easy in a way. The only choices he got was on his gear, and that was only picking items left out for him. Usually he picked everything he could possibly carry.

But then he'd had choices. Real choices, and it had been so easy to let Steve make them for him. To be the Bucky he told him to be… easy, but it was exhausting. Wearing a mask all the time. Plus, he kept screwing up.

Slowly he started making his own choices, even if they were un-Bucky like, it was terrifying but it was exhilarating. Then he realised that he liked making terrifying choices. But Steve had just taken it from him, without even noticing what he was doing. Yeah, it was out of concern for him, but if he'd just listen to him, he'd realise this therapy was good.

He was also scared he'd recognise it as Dr Stark's and somehow stop him from going. Take it away from him.

"You know Buck, you should come to more team meals."

"I come to a few meals, but occasionally I have other people who invite me to dinner."

"You don't have to do what they want you to do, just because they're royalty you know, you can say no. I mean it's the least T'Challa could do after accusing you of murder and trying to kill you."

The irony of Steve lecturing him about saying no when he never pays attention to his no's is not lost on him.

"I like spending time with Shuri or T'Challa. I also see other people too, there are several Dora I see. They respect it when I tell them no."

"Why would spend time with the guards? Plus, T'Challa seems to be falling for Tony's lies, I thought Wakanda would be good for us, but they're so restrictive!"

"Steve, we're wanted fugitives and they're letting us stay here for free, in a gorgeous house with amazing amenities."

"It's nothing compared to the tower, or the compound. You'll love it when we get back!"

"Back?"

"Yeah, when we get our pardons, you can see how different it is. Especially the gear! It's great, and Tony will probably make you an arm considering Shuri hasn't."

"I asked her not to remember, she's offered it for me. I said no. Also, why do you want to go back to Dr Stark's home? I thought you guys didn't like him. Plus after Siberia I don't think he'll want us
there."

"Oh, it'll be fine, Wanda can help Tony see the error of his ways, he'll apologise and vetting will go back to how it once was. This new team will be likely be disbanded too. Some of them could stay, but I don't like the look of some of them, especially that Sorcerer. Plus, with Wanda we won't need that Sorcerer."

Again, the mention of the Witch has him feeling cold and nauseated. He still isn't even sure why, yeah, she's a powerful telekinetic, but he's sure he's gone up against powered people before. Plus, get a telekinetic distracted, spot their tell. Easy. So why does the little Witch fill him with such dread? Why does the voice in his head, who is afraid of no one, why is he scared of her? He's not even sure how Wanda can show Dr Stark the error of his ways. She obviously despises the man and she has so little emotional control he can't see a conversation between them going well, at all.

"I don't think it will go like that, plus Wanda and Clint are very aggressive and insulting, that's not good for a team."

"You don't know what Tony has done. What he's like. He probably doesn't even care about what they say."

True, he didn't know Dr Stark well. They'd exchanged letters and now the messages in the glasses. So it wasn't exactly a lot. But he'd been very friendly, kind even. Talking him down, giving him techniques to avoid panic attacks. After he'd apologised, he'd thanked him and told him that he didn't want him feeling guilty. It didn't add up.

They were getting closer to Shuri lab and he spotted Onyenka just outside and smiled brightly, waving at the woman. She waved back before her brow wrinkled in confusion. He knew he was running late but he had been a few minutes late before and everyone had been fine. She shot him another smile before fiddling with her beads.

"You have to say you want me to come with you or they might not let me in."

"What?"

Before he got an answer from Steve, Shuri appeared in the door, looking very annoyed at Steve.

"Mr Rogers. You are not meant to be here. You are not allowed to leave the villa."

"I know, but T'Challa said it's fine if Bucky wants me in his therapy."

Shuri switched her gaze to him, head tilting.

"Is that what you want White Wolf?"

"Of course he does."

"I wasn't talking to you Captain Coloniser!"

She snapped at Steve harshly and suddenly there were a lot more Dora around them. Eyes locked on Steve.

"Steve, I told ya, I'd rather do this alone. Plus, you lied to me."

"I didn't Bucky, T'Challa told me if you ever wanted me to come, I was allowed out."

"But that's not what happened. You manipulated me and tried to force my hand by putting me on
the spot! I'm going in, alone."

With that Shuri moved aside so he could walk into the lab, Steve tried to follow but was immediately stopped by the Dora. Shuri closed the doors before he could say anything. Dammit, he and Steve had been clashing sure, but this is the first time he felt so… hurt over what he had done.

Shuri looked absolutely furious and was speaking in fast paced Xhosa into her beads, so he hung back. After she was done, she wipes the anger and irritation from her face and focuses entirely on him for his BARF session, he had a few messages queued up on the glasses as he turned them on, apparently Dr Stark had made him a new screen saver and wanted to see if he liked it.

After his session he couldn't help but grin happily at the different types of birds that were fluttering around Shuri's lab. He tells Shuri to text him and say it's his best idea yet. A message popped up in front of him thanking him for complementing his birds, Shuri was still grinning like a loon when he shouldered his bag to head back to the villa. He wasn't looking forward to seeing Steve again after this morning, but it's not like he can avoid the villa forever. At least he isn't staying for dinner today.

Steve is absent when he returns to the Villa, he even gets to eat his lunch in peace with Wings. TicTac was on another photography mission and apparently Steve and Clint were with Wanda in her room. He considered asking Wings why and then decides that he really didn't want to jinx it. Especially as Wings could be quite pleasant dinner company. He was interested in the Wakandan therapist he was seeing.

It's obvious to him that Wings misses his job something terrible. Giving up counselling to save the world was one thing. Giving it up to be stranded here, as an international fugitive? Hiding isn't anything new to him, or TicTac it seems. But to Wings, it's definitely hurting the man. So instead of vanishing after food to kill time before meeting up with Shuri, he decided to watch a movie with the man.

He's not sure what he's done to wrong Wings, but at the end of Homeward Bound, he had considered punting the man out of the window. He should not be nearly crying, but it was an evil… Evil film. Even the voice in his head was caught up with the dog trapped in the mud..

"Put something happy on next, please?"

"Fine, I'll search for something, why don't you tell me about the tech that helps you disassociate memories. I've been thinking about it all day."

"Well, it's these glasses, and they isolate all your traumatic memories, then you pick one. Play it whilst this really complicated code runs, then in 2 or 3 watches, sometimes all I do is watch, ya know. Other times I can influence the memory, make it change. Then it dissociate and feels kind of different in my head, I'm probably explaining this badly. Some sessions I do several memories at once."

"Man that is amazing, I hope this becomes widespread one day. It would have been so useful back at the VA" 

Clint and Wanda drop into their love seat and he really doesn't want to talk about his therapy with them there, Wings doesn't even seem to notice them.
"So what's it called anyway. Does it even have a name or is it a prototype"

"Umm, RFG. Retroframing Glasses. I have some documents that explained everything if you like. The maker wanted me to be comfortable knowing no one could mess with my mind. They made their jobs harder just so I was comfortable with it."

He nearly called it BARF. He didn't know if searching for BARF would bring them up. Which was a shame, as unlike Shuri, the name has grown on him and he found it hilarious. Not that he would ever tell anyone that of course.

"That is so amazing, we are so lucky Shuri knew who to contact to get you this treatment. Hey, if you don't mind, maybe ask if I could talk to them sometime over it?"

"Sure, I don't see why not, maybe I could get some information for you?"

And he would scour everything for any mention of Dr Stark. Although he was considering bringing Wings in on the secret after all, he was so excited about it.

Then Steve arrives and with it a wave of exhaustion slams into him. He just ignored the man and snagged the remote that Wings had abandoned. Not that he knows what any of these films are, he just doesn't want to talk to Steve about his lies this morning and Wings was distracted with his tablet.

He was flicking through films, waiting for something to jump out at him when he actually caught a glimpse at Wings tablet. And a picture of the BARF glasses was on the screen and he was reading about them.

Oh fuck.

Sam's eyebrows have knit together and he looks confused and there we go, he's watching the video of Stark talking about the glasses at MIT. Shit.

"Yes those are the glasses, please don't -"

Wanda is suddenly right there and then snatches Wings tablet off of him before he could react. Wings jumps up to try and get it back and immediately Clint jumps in the way followed by Steve. Practically creating a wall between Wanda and them.

"Steve, did you know that the 'treatment' Bucky has been getting comes from Stark ?"

She flashes him a triumphant look that turns all concerned when Steve turns.

'Who cares if they know Feniks is helping us.'

'Because they're going to draw all the wrong conclusions! To try and keep it from us!'

Then he gets a long, graphic list of expletives in Russian, and at least 3 other languages too. Considering he tends to swear a lot, and even he is trying to keep his eyebrows down as the… Soldat... Damn he needs a better name… gets quite into his swearing.

'Wow. That was... Some impressive usage of swearing.'

'Thank you. Now, pay attention when there are enemy combatants in the room rebenok. <child.>

It would be childish to repeat that in an amusing voice. The only reason he doesn't do it is Steve, Clint and the Witch seem to be done screaming about Stark and are now turning to him. Wings has
actually moved to stand in between him and the others.

"Steve, can't you see? This is good. Stark has obviously known where we are for a while and he hasn't turned us in. He obviously knows Barnes is here and he's actively HELPING him!"

"We don't know that Sam, this might be some revenge plot where Stark is punishing Bucky!"

"Steve! I've read about this tech, it's good, it's helping tons of people!"

"Stark is probably trying to brainwash Bucky! See Steve, you knew something was wrong, this is all Stark's doing. He's killing your Bucky slowly and replacing him!"

Sam and the Witch are on either side of Steve in a weird parody of a devil and an angel on his shoulder. The Witches story is beyond ridiculous but he can see Steve swaying towards her. He hates the tech that he doesn't even know about, so he's will to go with her utterly ridiculous crap because it supports his idea.

"Punk, I know what brainwashing feels like, I know what it's like to be made and remade, to be wiped and rebuilt. These glasses are helping me!"

"But you would say that Bucky. Stark is making you say that. Can't you see, Steve just wants to help you be the real you again."

He can't help but gape at Wanda, who is trying to look as if she cares, to him it's just ridiculous, but he'd underestimated how manipulative she was, especially when Clint seems to follow up too perfectly.

"Yeah Bucky. How can you let something Stark made into your mind, did you even know it was him? Shuri has been lying to you!"

"Of course I knew Dr Stark was behind the tech. His name is literally on the glasses. The man went to great lengths to make sure I was comfortable and that no one can use the glasses to d."

"So you knew that Stark knew we were here? You've been lying for ages to protect Stark! Steve, would your Bucky do that? Lie to you to protect someone like Stark? Of all people!"

Shit, he should have seen that trap, but there was no was to answer it that didn't benefit them. She'd have attacked either answer.

"Hey, Barnes is trying to get treatment, he's well enough to make his own choices. If he trusts Stark tech, then it's up to him."

Wanda hands flare red when Wings snaps back at her and all arm bells are going off in his head and he is suddenly thrown back. Looking out from his eyes but he can't seem to move. He hears himself speak but the small Russians lilt he carried is suddenly a lot deeper.

"Hvativ! Ved'ma!" <Stop! Witch!>

Wanda flinched and steps back before she realised what she was doing, then she stepped back her magic flooding into the room and his head is killing him, he wants to curl up and clutch his head but he stands straight as if utterly unaffected. But he knows the Soldat.. Winter is hurting too, he can feel his energy waving as he holds up against the flood of pain. When it reaches the socket he collapsed back and he's in control again. He yelled out to him instinctively.

'Winter?!'
He gets no response and for some reason, Steve is looking at him in concern.

"What's wrong Bucky?"

"Her magic, it's hurting me!"

"I don't think it's that Bucky, no one else is in pain. I bet it's the glasses! You're fighting free from them, so they're hurting you!"

"Punk, the glasses don't hurt me, they don't control me, they let me disassociate traumatic memories! That's it! I'm not 'fighting' them."

"But you don't know that Buck, you don't know Tony like we do. He wanted to kill you in the bunker, this is him trying to get his revenge!"

"By making me fucking happy? By making me sleep better? By giving me the agency to make my own choices? That's some weird ass revenge!"

"But don't you see Buck, he is killing you. He's killing the real you. Steve if you let this continue, Stark will slowly kill your best friend and turn him into this angry stranger. Weren't you saying that he's not acting like Bucky? And the Russian? That's not Bucky. Plus Steve, he scared me, he hurt me for no reason the other night!"

"Steve, tell me you aren't buying this shit? I have been speaking Russian for 7 fucking decades, sorry if I happen to like the language!"

"See Steve, Bucky never argued with you like this. You were the leader and he followed you. Trusted your decisions. Stark has made him not trust you."

"How would you know what I was like?! Look, Dr Stark is helping me. I'm sorry if you don't like that Steve. But it's my choice."

"Why are you calling him 'Dr Stark'? has he already turned you into his little pet?"

Oh great. The Archer just had to jump back in.

"I call him that because it's his name and title? It's called trying to be polite."

"His title is The Merchant of Death!"

"That's a bit long for my tastes, I think I'll stick to calling the man giving me my life back Dr Stark. Spasibo <Thanks>."

"Look. Steve. How about I look into this? Barnes has already said he'd send me the files over. I'm actually qualified, unlike others in this room. If Shuri, heck, if Stark is up for it. I'll chat to them too. That way I can find out about it okay?"

"I don't know Sam, I think there's already damage done t."

"Are you going calling me damaged goods Steve? Cause I fucking hope not or I'll lay you out! Tienia dostal! <I've had enough of you!>"

"See Steve. Bucky would never threaten you like this. Stark's glasses are just like the chair, it's wiping him and making him hate you."

How the fuck does she know about the chair?!
"Buck, Wanda has some good points. You are being awfully defensive about this."

"That's because you won't listen! That's it, I'm leaving. I'll come back later and we can discuss this when you have calmed down. Wings can explain why it's helping me."

"If he keeps getting the treatment Steve, everyday you're losing Bucky. He's slipping through your fingers. You can't let him go."

With that Clint moved to the door, locking it and blocking its path. Steve grabbed his shoulders and got right in his personal space and he can feel a panic attack just under his skin, he needs out, he needs to run. Now. It doesn't help that the voice is silent. Winter. He was weak from standing up against the Witches powers.

"Let me go Steve."

"Steve, you need to let him go now, he's having a panic attack!"

"Bucky is fine, I'm here for him. This is Stark's doing! I can't believe I didn't notice sooner!"

"Steve, if you hold him, I can check for any tampering Stark has done to his brain."

"Now hold on. Steve, let Barnes go. Stop and think. This is wrong, you can't do that without his consent!"

"But he can't consent Sam, Stark has robbed it from him, I'm just going to heal him."

With that his vision went to gray as an explosion rocks the room.

**Shuri POV**

"Bana-phronnsa!"

"Oh Hi CERBERUS, I didn't realise you were running in the integration pathway."

"Ceannard<Chief> has taken a special interest in you and Madadh-allaidh<Wolf>. My protocols are to protect those in my remit. I have added the both of you."

"Aw, that's so sweet CERBERUS, does Tony know?"

"No, Ceannard has not realised I can do this yet. But you must get to the villa IMMEDIATELY. The Rouge Avengers have discovered where Madadh-allaidh's treatment hails from. They are building into an argument that if my predictions are right will result in unfavourable outcomes."

"CERBERUS, can you transfer to my beads?"

"Of course Bana-phronnsa, I will keep you updated."

With that she grabbed her new favourite weapons and dashed from her lab, the Dora falling in around her immediately without explanation.

"What's happening CERBERUS?"

"The Scarlet Witch seems to be suggesting that Ceannard is using BARF to brainwash Madadh-
allaidh. Sam Wilson is arguing in his defence."

Oh great. The Witch just had to be involved. There were still serious unknowns when it came to her powers, even with information Tony had sent over, the guards on the house this morning just decided to leave their shift early, creating a gap that allowed Rogers to leave. She had no idea how and they had no proof it was her as the outside of the house was not recorded. T'Challa was away at the moment and she was not sure about moving against them with such a huge unknown that they did not know how to combat. They'd been informed about the increased surveillance outside of the villa however.

"Things are escalating Bana-phrionnsa."

"Is Wolf hurt?"

"No, but he is growing seriously distressed and predictions based on the Scarlet Witches profile are not favourable."

She jumped off the train and ran with everything she had. She had 8 Dora around her now and a few more had arrived at the Villa who were waiting for her. The building came into sight and she was steps from the door when CERBERUS's voice grew panicked.

"Madadh-allaidh is having a panic attack, the Scarlet With has threatened to use her ability on him. The door is locked and blocked by Hawkeye. Ceannard had noted that trapping him is to be avoided at all costs as it could trigger considerable stress or pre-programmed reactions from Hydra."

That was the last surge she needed as she dashed into the house, the Dora were just as angered as she was. Her White Wolf had charmed many and they'd become fiercely protective of the man. She didn't bother trying to unlock the door, she used her vibranium claws to shred the lock and kicked the door inwards. Sending Barton flying in a whirlwind of shattered wood. It also was a distraction enough for her and several of the Dora to launch themselves across the room.

Sam was trying to put himself directly between the Witch and Barnes who was limp, being held up by Steve's hands, even as Sam was trying to get him to let go. The Witch and The Captain were yanked back by several guards a piece, weapons at their throats. One of the guards on the Witch deployed a non lethal, but painful electric shock to the Witches hands. Shuri had seen how Wolf caused her pain to her pressure points, how it disrupted her ability. She helped him stand as he was slowly coming back to himself. She half dragged him with help out into the hall, where his breathing evened out and he eventually managed to stand on his own. No longer having the exits blocked eased the strain on him. Tony had been very specific in telling them not to trap him, in anyway, even superficially, the fact that he had a panic attack instead of outright attacking was actually good news for their brainwashing treatment.

"Princess Shuri! What is the meaning of this?!"

"I don't know how they do it in America Mr Rogers, but in Wakanda, we take the safety of our guests very seriously!"

"Bucky was safe! He was fine!"

"He was literally having a panic attack!"

"That's because of that Stark tech you've been using on him! You do realise that Stark has been tricking you into brainwashing him right? Or are you in on it too?"
Wanda was gasping slightly, Rubbing her hands but she was still capable of spewing bullshit to rile up the captain it seems.

" No one is brainwashing me. They're helping me! Why can't you see that!"

"It's OK Buck, we'll help you, I promise."

"Steve, I don't need help on this you patronising ass. Princess can we go to that film you wanted to see early."

"Of course White Wolf, let's go."

"I'm going to fetch my bag. Wings, I'm going to send you the information. Steve, please, I'm begging you, read it. Will you do that for me?"

"Of course Bucky, I'd do anything for you."

"When you're acting normal again and you've read the documents tell Wings. He'll call me back. Alright?"

With that he jogged upstairs. She didn't want him to come back here. The way the Dora looked around, they didn't want him to come back here either. She decided that she would have one of the guest rooms at the Palace prepared. If he did not need it, that was fine. But it was there incase he did. As there were no other guests due soon, he would also have the large kitchen, dining and common area all to himself. Barnes came back into view and Rogers struggled to move towards him, but the weapons at his throat didn't budge.

"Buck, wait! Don't go. You don't have to leave. Stay and we'll talk about this!"

"After what just happened, I need to not be here right now Steve. I can't believe you did that to me."

"Did what? Buck I didn't do anything!"

"Steve, you held me in place so the Ved'ma could do some kind of 'fixing magic' to my brain. After everything I've been through, and you did that to me .."

"Buck she was just trying to help you, you don't understand right now because what the glasses have done to -"

"The glasses are helping me Steve. You held me down and tried to force magic on me!"

"Buck, It's just Wanda, she's family, you can trust her."

"Well I don't."

Clint groaned and sat up. Confused for a few seconds until he seemed to catch up with what was happening.

"Don't trust our Wanda but you fucking trust Stark? A man you barely know who tried to kill you last time you met?"

"Yeah. I do."

"You're definitely fucked in the head mate."
"Come on White Wolf. Let's get you outside."

"Princess Shuri, until I've made a decision he'll be stopping the treatment."

"If our Wolf wants to continue treatment, he can. That it's helping him work through severely traumatic memories. That he has been through the better part of a century of nigh on constant trauma. That of course he won't immediately be exactly as he was in the 40s. That he is different to how you wish, does not mean he is brainwashed."

"Princess, you know what happened in Siberia! You know what he did to him! How can you let Tony do this to him now? He is innocent!"

"How can I let Dr Stark dedicate himself to helping him? How can I let Dr Stark send the most advanced pair of BARF on the market to help him? How can I let him pour countless hours of work in? Easily. That's how."

"But you don't know what he's doing to him! You're just a kid, you can't understand someone like Tony! He's not a good man, he doesn't just do things to help people for no reason!"

She shakes her head and prods Wolf towards the door.

"We clearly do not know the same Dr Stark. This is a sad fact for you. Once again, I have to inform you that you have zero say in Wolf's medical decisions."

"Yes I do and stop calling him that! I'm his medical proxy and I currently feel he is unfit to make such decisions."

Wolf was stood staring at Steve as if he'd never seen the man before. She assumed that having your supposed best friend accuse you of lacking the mental faculties to choose your own treatment was a kick in the gut.

"No, he likes being called Wolf. You would also have to go to court to prove that. As you are currently a wanted fugitive, you are incapable of that."

"Also, ya ain't my proxy Steve. Shuri is."

With that they left, Steve could be heard shouting for them for quite a distance. Security at the villa was also stepped way up.

"How did you know I needed help so fast?"

"Remember Tony has an AI called FRIDAY?"

"Yeah?"

"Well he has another AI. After Ultron, he met Laura and Barton's kids, he'd already been considering this program when his at the time girlfriend was kidnapped. An AI dedicated to protection. Not of the Avengers, but of their friends, family, children. The people made vulnerable by their jobs basically. An AI to protect them, he calls him 'The Guardian of Their Personal Hells'. His name is CERBERUS."

"Okay..?"

" Apparently, because Tony has put so much into helping you, he took it upon himself to add the both of us to his prime directive."
"Why me?"

"I could answer that if it would help Madadh-allaidh?"

"Um, OK. CERBERUS I presume?"

"That's me. Ceannard has a habit of collecting people, and he cares for them deeply. He considers Shuri as one of his now. You are important to the Bana-phrionnsa. Ceannard also has spent many, many hours trying to help you, so I conclude that you are important to Ceannard. Therefore you must be protected."

She tried not to smile as he processed that and looked slightly overwhelmed by the AIs proclamation that he was important to Tony. She suspected it would be similar to the look of utter confusion on Tony's face if he found it about it.

"Well. Um. Thank you CERBERUS. I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't gotten Shuri to me."

"You're very welcome Madadh-allaidh. I hope you are not in future situations that require my aid. If you ever need me, you can speak to me on your tablet."

"Oh?"

"I like to keep in contact with my charges."

"Aww, CERBERUS, you're sweet."

"Thank you, Bana-phrionnsa"

"Come on, let's go and watch that movie in my lab shall we? I'm expecting a call from Tony later where he's going to discuss how the adaptive program is going. He's going to complain that it isn't working properly, I'm going to suggest that he run the programme directly like we discussed and he's going to get flustered. It should be fun, yes?"

"Okay, let him know that it's fine too. But make sure he knows he doesn't have to do this, I have a feeling many people expected him to do things and I don't want to be like that. Also, any idea what CERBERUS was calling me?"

"CERBERUS likes to give people nicknames in Scots Gaelic, Madadh-allaidh means Wolf."

"Huh, that's really cool."

Shuri just grinned as they made their way back to her lab. Wondering if these two idiots were ever going to stop thinking they were forcing their presence on the other. From how much her Wolf had read about Tony, and the notes on the Algorithms, and how much time and effort Tony was pouring into this, yet they were all 'But I don't want to impose myself on them! ' Still! They'd sent actual paper letters to each other, Tony had responded according to T'Challa. With actual words written on paper. Now they were sending messages on the glasses. For Bast’s sake, Tony programmed him a screensaver on the glasses with birds just because she mentioned that Barnes liked the birds on the back of his letter!

Why were boys so infuriatingly stupid?!?
They were halfway through the first movie when the call started to come through. Shuri raised an eyebrow offering him the chance to leave if he wished. Although she knew he would stay. He felt slightly bad for snooping on the calls but she knew that her Wolf was very curious about the American engineer. He had a curious streak a mile wide. So when he moved to his corner, taking the fluffy blanket she had immediately wrapped around him when they were away from those stupid idiots she grinned. He pulled his legs up and cocooned himself in the chair, somehow making his rather large frame quite small. It was utterly adorable.

"Tony! You got my data packets I can see."

"How can you tell?"

"You look both perplexed and annoyed."

Tony scoffed but didn't contradict what she was saying, which left her grinning at him smugly.

"This just doesn't make any sense, the original program should constantly adjust within the set parameters. For more complex ones, therapists contact me for a personal adjustment to the code like I did with Barnes at the start... and that works. I already did that for Barnes but the system isn't adjusting, well it is but not enough, or his brain is adjusting right back, and me guiding each session isn't good enough anymore."

"So no other therapists have had a similar issue?"

"Nope, and I called every single place that is using them and I combed through their data."

"Tony, that must have taken hours!"

"Eh, not important. Also, as Barnes is Improving, it seems to be getting worse, weirdly. Keep going for now, but avoid the code words, that's where the biggest discrepancies are, and the rest is still helping him, I can see that from the data. Now we have the integration complete, all I can think of is to ask Barnes if I can act as the program instead of guiding it, at least occasionally, it will still be mostly the programme but I can step in. I'll be more directly involved though, so it's his call. I don't like it, I've already practically forced my presence on him, he's already offered up so much and I'm still stuck."

She could tell Tony was stressed, and she wondered when the man last slept. He was slightly more dishevelled than usual, his hair was going in all directions from how many times he'd ran his hands through it, and as he was practically whacking his head slightly in frustration. She wanted to throttle the man and get it through to him that Barnes didn't mind his involvement! The other idiot was feeling bad for involving him! They were exhausting.

"I'd hoped I could have helped him without getting involved, the guy deserves to feel safe. Not like the guy who attacked him wants access to his mind. I know he doesn't believe everything the others said of me, but I also know what I look like online, and that they're probably constantly badmouthing me. I don't know if I'd want me in my brain."

She shook her head, because from what she knew, he had been researching the man online but came away with mostly positive opinions.

"Don't worry Tony, he's much too smart to believe crap from the Witch and her Archer."

"If he doesn't mind, I have a friend who could potentially help, Stephy could give me a good idea of what to do next. He's a pretty amazing neurosurgeon. Well, he's a wizard too, but more importantly, he was a doctor before he went and got magiced up. He's good at straightening out my
"When it's running around like kittens on catnip."

"Well I'll ask him that as well, he feels confident in you working on this and trusts your judgement."

"I'm still not sure about me partially acting as the code Shuri, it's a big ask."

"Well if you got his permission What will you do?"

"I'll code directly with the program, tailoring the algorithm so it should make it easier to disassociate memories."

"Is that all?"

"Well yeah, that's what I need to do?"

Tony had his head tilted to one side, still wearing his sunglasses but she could see the confusion in his face.

"So it doesn't even occur to you to do anything nefarious?"

"Of course not! I wouldn't… he's had enough people messing with his brain."

"So what's the problem"

"Shuri, you might think I'm this nice, good person but generally that is not the perception of me. People see me as selfish, arrogant, heartless and uncaring. I'm not a 'good' person."

"But that's utterly stupid, you wouldn't do all this work if you weren't a good person Tony. Please tell me you don't believe that."

He just shrugged, looking oddly defeated, not too different than when she'd first started talking to him in the hospital. He only seemed to fall into this when the rogues were mentioned and to say it angered her was an understatement, she wanted to know what they had done to leave such a brilliant man filled with self hatred.

She hoped the videos she had sent, of the Rogues reaction to the press conference, hadn't resulted in Tony slipping back into thinking less of himself. For a man who claimed to have a huge ego, most of his snark seemed to be directed inwards and he was quite vulnerable to people's expectations and opinions. Not of the press or the public really, he was an expert at dealing with them, but to people he let in, in the quiet of his home away from the press. He tended to give people everything she'd noticed, including everything of himself and keep nothing back to protect himself. It was one of the many reasons she wished to rage at her unwanted guests.

They were hurting both of her boys in someway or another.

Even if they were idiots, they were her idiots.

"I'm used to it, but I know that's what people think. If he researched me he probably thinks that to right? Plus the last time we met, I attacked the guy. A guy who'd been tortured for decades I attacked him and worst of all I made him fight. I get the feeling that he didn't want to fight but I was just.. All I felt was white hot rage. Which was actually good surprisingly. "

"Huh?"

"I go to this place sometimes in fights where everything becomes static and my emotions just dial
down..

"So you didn't want to kill him if you didn't go to that place."

"No, no, I didn't want to kill him. I just.. I just needed to let it out, I needed Rogers to HURT. Stupid anyway, I guess I thought Rogers would try to desesculate. I wasn't really thinking."

"But he did not."

She couldn't keep the growl out of her voice, she also heard shifting behind her. She hadn't realised her conversation with Tony would take this path when she'd given Barnes the option of remaining.

"There was a moment I thought he'd actually kill me you know, he lifted that shield and I swore he was going to aim for my neck, the shield even scraped off my elbow before it slammed into the arc reactor."

"I'm sorry Tony, it's horrid he took knowledge of being your friend and used it against you."

"More that you know.. "

He muttered to himself but the mic picked up on it.

"Huh?"

"I, uh.. Rogers knew all about my multiple heart surgeries. That I had a donor sternum, that it was weaker because of how much they hacked out in Afghanistan to install the tube the Electromagnetic sat in. How it was then shifted for the arc reactor setting. The hit utterly shattered the new sternum. Some of my ribs too. Basically turned them to shrapnel in my chest."

He flinched then, and she knew that he hadn't actually meant to ramble on with that much information. But she wasn't letting this go, if it took a rambling, sleep deprived Tony Stark for her to get the full story of what happened in Siberia so she could help her friend, she'd do it. She'd also known theoretically that stuff would have to be removed and move around for the arc reactor, but she hadn't realised what the magnet going as deep as his heart meant. It would have half crushed his lung too.

"Bast Tony, that's awful, what other injuries did you get from the Battle?"

"Not sure to be honest, and that isn't me deflecting, I actually don't know everything. I had some brain swelling. Apart from the lacerations of the suit pushed in from the shield, normal bumps and such from being thrown about, I guess. Broken collarbone from when he wrenched me down by my neck too."

"So what actually happened to your hand? You said frostbite, but that does explain much."

She feels guilty immediately for saying frostbite at Tony flinch from the word.

"Gods Shuri are you sure you want to know all the awful details?"

"Yes, no more lying to Shuri."

"OK. If I tell you some things, will you wait till we are in person to tell you the rest?"

"Okay, as long as you promise we meet up soon."

"Okay, my arm had a few breaks and fractures that exacerbated the severe frostbite. The suit was
damaged, certain parts of me were.. Exposed for longer."

"It was a lot to be amputated.."

"Yeah, I couldn't move much, so I was just stuck in the suit. Even the shivering was restricted so I couldn't protect myself like most freezing people do. No power, no heat. I only wear a flight suit underneath, it's like a… modified scuba suit and it was damaged too. The armour was compromised in places, one of my boots was cracked open, there was considerable damage to my left gauntlet and my face was completely exposed and that's all I know of. Rhodey refuses to let me see the pictures of what I looked like when I came out of the suit and he wiped all the information with my full injuries. If I hadn't had access to things because I'm me, and Cho with her Cradle, I'd have lost much more than just my lower arm."

He moved closer to the camera that normal, lifting his right hand to the camera. She'd never noticed it before, but the entire of his right hand and wrist is covered by a delicate lace like white scaring. His shirt covers the rest so she has no idea how far up it goes. As he moved back, the camera focused on his face close up and she can see them on his face too. From both his ears and down his neck, on to his cheeks. Some hidden by the glasses. It's much worse on the left side than the right. Now she's seen them, she can't not see them and wonders how on earth she'd missed it before.

"I have tons of these."

He shrugs and doesn't move to show her more, which definitely leaves her wondering.

"Thank you for telling me Tony."

"You're welcome, I didn't hide this from you cause I didn't think you could handle them you know, I just.. Didn't want to dump my baggage on your door."

"Tony, your my friend, friends tell each other things so we can help each other. You helped me deal with the aftermath of.. Vienna after all."

"As a rule, most people don't want to deal with Tony Stark baggage. The few times I have they either tell me no or think I'm making stuff up because everyone knows rich white kids have perfect childhoods and happy families."

His laugh is slightly jaded and Shuri wants to go on a rampage against everyone who has hurt this man. She's starting to understand more and more why he puts on the Tony Stark persona. It's protection.

"Anyway, how did we get to talking about my 'Tragic Backstory' again?"

"You were telling me how you think Barnes won't let you near his brain"

She can't not roll her eyes at that. But how visibly disturbed he looked at the idea of pressuring Barnes into treatment makes her smile in a way.

"Shuri, I'm just worried he's going to feel pressured into it. Like he has no choice but to agree with me."

"I don't think he feels forced Tony. I'm sure he would tell me if he did."

"Well I'll leave it up to him. He's had his choices taken away for decades, so whatever he decides, I will go with it."
"That's very kind of you Tony, I'm sure he'd like that and I'll thank you too. He needs more people willing to respect his choices."

Watching Tony get flustered from being thanked had become one of her favourite things. Plus, she tried to thank him often, apparently according to Peter, the New Avengers had noticed his reaction to being thanked too. So he was likely being thanked often, but not too often as to make him uncomfortable.

"It's basic common decency. What kind of monster would take his decisions away after what he's been through? And you don't need to thank me. At all."

He looked like he was begging her to stop thanking him. She grinned.

"How about I'll stop Thanking you if you eat some non liquidated food and sleep?"

"Hey! Don't knock my shakes. They're healthy and good for you!"

"Go eat and sleep you crazy man!"

"Yes mom!"

"CERBERUS will tell me if you don't."

"My own Son ratting on me. Charming."

"Not my fault if you need directions to look after yourself."

"I can look after myself just fine, thank you very much."

"Fine, when was the last time you ate solid food or slept?"

"Boss has been awake for 54 hours and 46 minutes Princess."

"I'm sure I ate something. I think there was a sandwich that appeared next to me at some point. I cooked for the boys. I probably ate then."

"This is proving my point. You need a minder to drag you out of the workshop and put you to bed occasionally. To eat too."

He just scoffed at that.

"Pft, no one has a chance against me. But I'll go now and eat if her highness dictates thusly."

"She does."

He grinned at that before ending the call. Even though it had gotten pretty heavy there a few times. And she still thought that Tony was basically a 12 year old when it came to caring for himself and needed someone to drag him away from the workshop. But she couldn't say to much, she had occasionally gotten caught up in her projects. She liked that they ended their conversations with smiles more often than not.

"I didn't realise how much damage he'd taken in Siberia, or how bad his frostbite was. I didn't even see the scars on his face, they're so delicate."

"Me neither, but he has healed fast."
Much too fast actually, the lace white scars looked much older than something he'd gotten in June.

"Clint said something the other day, when we were watching that interview that he crashed. It was cryptic and he more muttered it to himself, and he never explained."

"What did he say?"

"Stark... He survives. It's what he does, against all odds. He survives."

"Well that is odd. But Tony is quite good at surviving, I didn't realise what having an electromagnetic connected to a car battery, then the arc reactor fully meant. Well I knew but I never fully considered it. How his bones were removed, lung partially crushed. To survive from that, it's pretty impressive."

Pretty weird too, 3 months in a cave post op. Frequent torture she suspected. She doubted the magnet or car battery was sterilised. Her Wolf shuddered at the idea, obviously the first time the full weight of that hitting him too.

"I can just be happy he did."

"Me too. Without him I'd still be in cryo sleep."

She wrapped him back up into the blanket to finish their movie. Then started plotting for how she could convince him to move into the Palace.

**Wolf POV**

'The man called Wolf mocked me for liking Winter or Soldat...'

A slightly weaker than normal voice jarred him from his rest before he realised what was happening. The absence of the voice had.. Troubled him more than he'd like to admit.

'WINTER!'

'Yes, shout in our head when we have a migraine. Umnaya. <Smart.>'

He couldn't help but feel relieved in some way, he glanced at his tablet to see if Wings had gotten back to him yet so he didn't have to think about that much, a scoff could be heard in his mind.

**Wings**- Steve read the files you sent, he's more on board with the therapy but still wants to talk to make sure you're ok to do it.

**Me** - Okay, tell him I'll talk to him in the morning. Today's been exhausting, especially after earlier. I think it's best if everyone sleeps on it and calms down. Tell him I won't be there if the Ved'ma is.

**Wings** - OK.

Huh. He'd expected more of a reply to Wings after that. But then it's been a long day for him to. He probably just wanted to get some sleep himself. Plus, the man had not only stood up for him, he'd stood in-between him and Wanda. Winter now is very happy with the man, as well as Shuri and CERBERUS it seemed. He can feel the curiosity coming off of him about the latter.
He stands, stretching his back that has developed a bit of an ache curled up in his chair in Shuri’s lab and decided it was time to head back to the villa. He’d hidden out at the lab for several hours, they’d watched 3 films and then there had been that conversation with Dr Stark.

He knew he was snooping on phone calls, and that was bad. But Winter was interested in finding stuff out about the man who was fixing their brain. He supposed he could be a little intrigued as well, especially after the man had written back to him. Forgive him and apologised to him. He was still getting his head around that. They’d mostly spoken since via Shuri and the glasses. So the phone calls were like extra pieces of information on the confusing puzzle of Dr Stark. The man who seemed just as comfortable in suits that cost the same as a house as torn, stained jeans and ancient band shirts. From impeccably dressed and groomed to literally having black grease from something on his face.

The man was a feature of contradictions.

He still hadn't expected him to look so… resigned. The way he spoke about how others perceived him was uncomfortable, not because of the cruelty as such. It was his quiet acceptance that had hit him the most.

That everyone expected the worst, point in case, Steve, Wanda and Clint's reactions to discovering the glasses. Yet, he didn't even consider using the permissions he'd handed over for a bad way. Instead, he was working himself to the point of exhaustion, forgoing sleep and food, just to help him. He hoped there was someone around to tell the man off for neglecting his health and to get some sleep.

As much as he wanted his brain to be codeword free? He didn't want it at the expense of someone else's health.

Dr Stark had already been through more than enough, the few scars that he'd show Shuri showed that. He didn't doubt other events had carved themselves into his skin just as readily. Weirdly, Clints comment had stuck in his mind, that he survives. He hadn't said it in a good way, as if he survived past the point you just want your body to give up to stop the suffering. He understood that. There were so many moments he just wished his body would give up, but that damned serum, it just kept him going.

They broke his bones and they just healed, everytime.

They tore at his flesh and it came back, pink and overly sensitive. Over and over.

His arm… God's his arm. He remembered waking up to them sawing off the mangled mess to better install the socket.

He didn't know when they did it, but there were steel reinforcements in his chest, because the arm was so heavy it wrenched and tore his ligaments that then just healed over and over.

Although Dr Stark had given him hope there. He had assumed a metal limb would hurt. That that was the only option. Constant pain.

But the limb that Shuri and Dr Stark made.. It was light, it was designed to me a hand instead of a weapon. It could feel.

The metal arm had only hurt and its purpose was to hurt others. After every wipe he had to relearn how to use it too. Because he couldn't feel he often crushed things unintentionally. Hitting things to soft, or too hard. Then there was the fact it unbalanced him drastically with how heavy he was.
When Dr Stark blasted it off, it had been a gift. A gift the man didn't have to apologise for, but he didn't know how to say that.

'You blasting my arm off was the best thing to ever happen to me before Wakanda!'

Not the best way of showing you aren't crazy. Even if he knew. He took the arm apart and from that alone he knew about the pain. He knows that he's still in pain somehow, even though he still hadn't told anyone about the socket pain. It was less than the arm so he just counted himself lucky. The way he described it too, the man knew constant chronic pain. From how Shuri described the magnet in his chest.. He found himself hoping that he had found a fix for his pain. Clint had mentioned his ability to work through pain, he supposed what scraps he knew from Afghanistan would breed a tolerance to pain.

He decided to actually send a reply, Shuri had offered to send any other letters back. He'd put effort into responding, so it was only polite to return that.

He wasn't sure if he should tell the man that reading that letter was one of the few times he hadn't felt wrong about his name. Now he had two names that made him happy. Wolf… James.

All the Buckys made him nauseated. Barnes was tolerable, but it felt.. Off too. Sergeant Barnes was oddly better. That was just his. He'd been Bucky for so long, after the draft that had changed. But then he was rescued by a weird, bigger Stevie. He became Bucky again, to everyone. James however, that was something different. All it had taken was an impulsive scratch at the end of that first letter, because it had felt like Steve said Bucky in every damned sentence that day. The Witch and Archer were similar. But just two words and a man across the ocean gave him a name. An absolutely obvious one that for some reason he'd never considered before.

He liked it, but he was keeping it to himself for now.

He was back at the villa before he knew it, his feet carrying him down the path he trod daily with little conscious thought, that was when he realised that he'd forgotten his damned bag. So much for reading in bed tonight. Which was odd as he never forgot his bag, it had been with him practically since he'd picked it up. Today had him off kilter.

He veered off away from the door. He'd told Wings that he didn't want to chat to them tonight, and he'd agreed. But he wouldn't put it past them to lay in wait in the common room. Waiting for him to get in to talk it out now with some feeble excuse as to why his very simple request was ignored. It would be interesting to see how Steve got the Witch to not be present.

Steve might see her as a sweet innocent child. He saw her as manipulating and cruel. She'd made that argument so much worse earlier, like she was whispering poison in Steve's ear. She definitely was at fault for his increased pain too, no matter what Steve said. He didn't know why but his instincts screamed at him when she was around. Winter was a mixture of rage and fear that he struggled to talk about her. The clearer his mind got from BARF, the louder that instinct got too, it went from an uneasy feeling at the beginning to this horror, fear and gut instinct to run. It had broken through his panic attack last night, when that red… that was cold like the dark sleep of cryo, touched him and she was going to check his mind.

He didn't know how she could do that, but then he didn't understand her powers. At first he'd thought she was telekinetic, but he was starting to think it was more. Steve had called her telekinetic, either he didn't know what she was capable of, or Steve was lying to him. At least he knew one way around her powers, unfortunately it meant touching her.

He came to the wall under his window and pulled himself up onto the stones. It would definitely
have been easier with two arms he thought, but luckily the stones lent themselves to scaling easily. He knocked his window open and hopped into his room. He stayed in the crouch however because something was WRONG.

He stayed crouched, he moved to the light switch, staying low, making himself a smaller target and in the wrong place if someone shot at him. The first thing he noticed was his door was practically ripped off its hinges. The Witch was sat on his sofa, relaxed back across it with her shoes on the cushions. Steve was stood behind the sofa, leaning on the back of it behind her. Full on earnest face with puppy dog eyes. He kept his eye on the two of them and glanced around for the Archer, who had come up behind him and closed the window.

Winter was pure rage, he burnt at the invasion of our space. He actually remembered having things as Bucky, even though they felt detached. He had memories of an apartment. A room that was his. The closest Winter got was Romania and he hadn't been much more than the broken remnants of the Asset back then. Romania had been more his. Winter been in pieces and too scared to come forward, he found it strange how that part of his mind was so strong, so capable of damage, but was so new and scared too. So this place, in Wakanda, it was his. Sure, he shared it with him, but that was acceptable. This however, was not acceptable, he wanted out and he wanted to rage. He kept his voice calm and measured however.

"Get out of my room. Now."

"Bucky, we're here to help, to hold an intervention."

He took a deep breath and let it out. He didn't take his eyes off of any of them. The Archer had dropped onto one of his chairs with his feet up on the table. Obviously satisfied with the locked window.

'If you throw the Ved'ma out of the window, it will be open.'

'Not helping Winter.'

"Steve. I don't need an intervention. Leave. now."

Why couldn't these people respect his requests like other people? Did they just not hear when he said no? Even Dr Stark respected his wishes and they'd barely met each other! Siberia didn't count as an actual meeting in his mind.

'Could throw Kapitan out of the window instead?'

He just about stopped his mouth twitching into a smile at that.

"Why so hostile humpty dumpty?"

'We could also throw the Luchnik <Archer> out of the window too.'

He didn't respond to that, because he really wanted to throw the archer out of the window, he was sensing a theme. Scratch that. He wanted all of them gone. But they used his anger as a reason he was incapable of making decisions. Even when he was being calm and measured they were calling him hostile. They hadn't seen hostile.

"See, this is what I'm talking about Bucky. Obviously this therapy is hurting you or you wouldn't be so hostile."

"So because I don't like having my personal space invaded I'm being mind fucked by Dr Stark?"
"You've never minded me being in your space before so yes!"

"Steve, for one there isn't just you in here you invited oth-"

"That's because we are family!"

"STOP TALKING OVER ME. Let. Me. Finish."

"Yeah, you are clearly fine, screaming at your best friend. Stark has clearly done nothing to you, isn't brainwashing you into his little pet."

He levels a glare at Wanda and feels Winter closer to the surface, close enough to look out but not take over. He feels his other half's amusement when she freezes. This close however, some of the rage gets into his calm measured speech and he practically roared at them. The Archer actually paled and flinched.

"There are three of you in my personal space. I haven't fucking had a personal space in 7 fucking decades. So I'm sorry if I'm touchy about having a space that is mine that I control! Ya ne khachu s taboy razgavarivat! <I don’t want to talk to you!> That's why I asked to speak to you tomorrow!"

"That therapy is totally working. Going all Winter Soldier on us is a testament to it."

Clint practically snarled.

"I'm sorry Buck, but I didn't know if you'd come straight here and avoid the common room and we needed to talk to you!"

"Sure, perfect reason to ignore the wishes of the man who had his personal autonomy stolen for nearly a century."

He couldn't help the sneer in his voice, he wanted them gone. Now.

"We are here to tell you that you need to stop the therapy run by Stark. I think it's already changed you enough and we are going to help you get past that. We're here for you Buck, to the end of the line."

"So what, turn me back to being terrified of saying No? Because of that tech I actually feel like I can say 'No' now. I'm sleeping better, I'm flinching less, I'm getting out and talking to people. How terrible are these things Sam for someone with my past?"

He turns to ask Sam who had wandered up the stairs warily, likely drawn by the screaming.

"Actually that sounds amazi-"

"Of course he'd say that! It probably forces him to so we wouldn't save him by stopping him!"

Wanda cries passionately. He and Sam just look at her like she's lost it and both are concerned to see Steve and Clint nodding along.

"Wanda's right Buck. Plus, even if it is working, you've had loads of sessions you come back looking wrung out and who knows how long it will take to remove the triggers!"

"Do you realise how stupid what you're saying is?! Therapy does that, it's not sunshine and daisies. I have some awful memories in here, of course it will be awful! If it was eas-"

He tapped the side of head in frustration when he said 'in here'. Steve flinched even though he
hadn't done it that hard, it had helped get some of the frustration out. He wanted to hit something. What he would give for a punching bag right now.

"It should be easy though Buck, you shouldn't be suffering through these memories, you were innocent, it wasn't you! So what's the point of you reliving them to get rid of them? You should be able to just be free of them!"

Steve was just talking absolute nonsense. Yeah he hadn't been in control, neither had Winter really. Neither of them could choose their actions, they were under such a tight leash and treated badly for failure. But it was still his body, his mind. The glasses couldn't just delete memories, there was a whole section about why completely erasing memories wasn't wise. He could lose who he was.

"I'm leaving right now. When I get back, you all need to be out of my room."

"But Bucky!!"

"STOP CALLING ME THAT. I'M NOT, NOT HI-!"

"We have a better way, you'll be fine in no time and back to bring the Bucky I knew and loved!"

He was about to yell at Steve for cutting him off. Again. Because abiding by his wishes was impossible apparently, calling him Bucky was more important than that. He wished he knew what version of Bucky lived in his mind. Because of the Wakandan treatment, he could see all the memories before the draft with perfect clarity. Steve's had been rose-tinted. He'd utterly eulogised him, rewritten him to this perfect friend, but then when it turned out he wasn't dead, he kept looking for this perfect Bucky.

'Wolf! Leave. Leave now.'

'Why'

'JUST GO!'

He was thrown by the sense of urgency from his other and staggered slightly, adrenaline flooded him, it wasn't often he advocated flight over fight. So he asked Steve instead.

"What?"

"Wanda will remove the triggers and the torture and everything. You'll be happy again and be the real Bucky! Isn't that kind of her? She can take you back from before you fell, you won't have any memories of Hydra or anything after the fall!"

He looked around the room, Sam behind him looked sick. Clint was looking at Wanda with all the pride in the world, Steve grinning like an idiot and Wanda had a cold, sly smile on her face that turned saccharine. He wondered if this was to be her revenge for keeping her away from Sam?

"I just want to help you Bucky. Just let me help you be happy with Steve."

Red seeped from her hands, like the magic was bleeding out of her… And reaching for him. The fear that had caused him to freeze at Steve's words fled under a slam of adrenaline that surged through him.

'Run. NOW. GO!'

He too two steps back to the window as Wings was frozen and the door.
"Steve, I don't think this is a good idea."

"Why not Sam? Wanda wants to help Bucky, she can do it without hurting him, unlike what Stark has him doing."

"Steve, you can't just magic away PTSD!"

"As I am the only one here with magic, I think I'll be the judge of that. I am the expert here Sam."

He didn't know how it happened, but she'd crossed the room and he'd frozen again, but he couldn't remember freezing or choosing to stay. But her hand was on the side of his head and it was cold. Freezing cold. The dark was closing in on him and then her voice… was inside his mind…

'Oh you have so many delicious memories I can trap you in. So many that you'll spend years trying to escape, but on the outside you'll be Steve's perfect little Bucky, doing whatever I want…'

Then there is pain. Pain and red and cold burning him to his core..

'NO. GET OUT!'

There was a crash and he blinked and Wanda was on the floor several feet away, looking dazed and confused.

"Bucky, why did you do that, she was only trying to help, do you want me to-"

"Help? Help?! She didn't want to help me. She wanted me to suffer!"

Steve takes another step towards him and Clint towards Wanda, he glanced at Sam who mouthed 'Run' to him and this time he does what he's told because Clint already had Wanda on her feet and her hands were leaking that red mist. He had a last look at his rooms, and hates that he's being forced to lose yet another home and hurls himself at the window. Hates that he's forced to abandon Wings. Then, glass is shattering and raining down around him as he landed on his feet in a crouch. He immediately bolted to the front where the extra guards are posted. He doesn't have too long before they come down the stairs.

"Please, get me out of here, help… They're coming…"

One of the guards does something to the door and a screen drops, from the noises, it also blocked all of the windows. With this being Wakanda, he bets it Vibranium too. He blinked at the house and saw it for what it was. A very effective, very pretty, prison. Something he was damned thankful for right now.

"Do you want me to take you to T'Challa?"

The woman smiled, friendly and like the other guard, looked fierce. Unlike the others he had befriended the guards and pretty much anyone who respected his personal space to be honest. His standards might be a touch low. Out of the rogues Wings and TicTac were the closest. Oh god, he was leaving them behind. With her. But Wings had told him to run. He nodded, too much and frantically. She guided him without touching him and he was so thankful. He could feel himself shaking but he didn't know why, he felt cold but the night was balmy and warm. He was just happy his legs were moving. The adrenaline was still coursing through him, now it was useless but even with the serum it would take a while to filter out.

He could hear Steve shouting for him, hear him demanding to be allowed past, that they had no right to hold them.
If he could speak he'd be concerned for the guard they left behind, but the adrenaline had him shaking so violently now despite the heat his teeth chattered.

At least they're safe behind the Vibranium shields, although he is worried for Wings, and potentially TicTac if he was at home as well.

He hoped they'd be safe, he signs as best he can to tell the guard that Wings and TicTac are still in there.

He was surprised they understood him. His hands were shaking so much.

He didn't remember much about the trip to the Palace just one minute he was moving away from the villa and the next minute he was sat in a comfortable chair in the Kings office. He'd acquired a blanket at some point.

It isn't until Shuri and T'Challa burst in that he can finally relax.

'Safe?'

'Yeah Winter, we're safe now.'

'We thought we were safe in Bucharest. We thought we were safe in our rooms. How do you know Wolf?'

'Because Shuri is here.'

'The little Koshka<cat> will protect you?'

'She'll protect us Winter.'

'She doesn't know I exist little Wolf. No one does, but you.'

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Woo. I got this up. I was unsure as I feel -wretched-. Immune systems are meant to help you, mine however has other plans so I've barely been able to do anything. I do however read every comment and show them to my partners as they make me happy xD

I hope this week's roller-coaster was fun!
Choices

Chapter Summary

Back in America, Tony is sure something has happened but no one is telling him anything.

Tony discovers some things about himself and gets a letter that makes him realise the value in a person who can truly understand.

Chapter Notes

Everyone enjoyed last week's chapter then xD? I think that was a record number of comments, sorry I'm not up to date on replying, I love replying I've just been very run down atm. My immune system will hopefully realise soon that I'm not the enemy. I read every single one though and they make me feel less run down!

We have 2 chapters in America and we're back to Wakanda again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony POV

9th October

Carol was sat in the living room with Goose, he and Rhodey were in the bedroom with Tiny Thor.

"This is possibly the most surreal thing I've ever lived through."

"Most people saying that wouldn't be a big deal, but Tones, with our life, it has added meaning."

"I'm still not sure about this, Tiny Thor attacked the TV this morning and tried to go to war with a pizza box."

"Well you spoke to Goose didn't you?"

"Yeah, and that still isn't getting less weird. Using my weird ass ability to speak to the space cat about not eating my kitten."

Rhodey was just shaking his head.

"Right, I'm going to head out so you and Carol can talk. I know this is killing the both of you, so talk, cry, yell, whatever. Do it."

With that Rhodey shoved him out of the bedroom and succinctly closed the door to cut off his retreat. He wasn't exactly sure what Rhodey was even going to do sat in his bedroom whilst he and Carol spoke.
"Hey Carol."

"Tony, come on, bring him over, I need to see those Tiny kitten beans."

He snorted but brought the tiny kitten over, he was putting on weight well but he was still so small. When he wasn't waging war on inanimate objects he was usually using a person as a security blanket. Goose was very interested in Tiny Thor, and not in an eating way. In a way that had Tony potentially regretting this as Goose wanted to take the little hellion under her wings, so to speak.

Everything was supremely awkward for about 5 minutes as Goose and Thor investigated each other from their laps. He monitored Goose colours and wished he could see Thor's whilst he tried to avoid Carol's and pointedly avoided looking at whisps of his own colours that came into his line of sight occasionally. If there was one thing Tony was an expert in, was avoidance.

"So, Tony."

Here we go. Carol was not an expert in avoidance.

"I want to say that I'm really sorry about what happened, it was entirely my fault."

What now?

"I got so swept up in finding the 'perfect person' that I didn't stop to consider if it was the perfect person for you. I hope you can forgive me."

Holy fuck.

"Wow, Um, okay. I get it. I probably could have handled things better…"

"No Tony, considering what happened you handled things well, you left the situation and went somewhere safe. You did well."

He was stunned for a few seconds because he really wasn't used to this. She was serious too, he could see it. Carol squeezed his arm too, aware that she had just blue screened his mind. Tony was not used to being on this side of the apology, usually it was him fucking up.

"This wasn't how I expected this would go, but thanks Carol. I know you didn't do it maliciously, the second lady, who I'm pretty damned sure is not human BTW, is great."

"I'm glad Tony. And really? Not human?"

"Mhhm. Her colours are freaking weird."

"Huh. OK."

"Is it weird that we aren't weirded out that my therapist might not be human?"

Carol tilted her head as if pondering the question.

"Na, it's pretty normal for us."

"True.. True."

They watched the two cats poke around, after a while Tiny Thor possibly decided that Goose didn't warrant attack, smart kitten, instead he chirruped and glomped him. Goose looked like she had no idea what to do with him. Things felt.. Lighter now. Less like this pressure was building to crush
him. He’d forgotten how Carol could do that for him, she helped him slow down, he’d missed that in the years they’d thought she was dead.

"So, Carol, I've been meaning to mention something. But you can't actually do anything with this information, things are set up.."

"Now you have got me concerned.."

"Well, I might happen to know where the rogues are…"

"What?! How? When?!"

He cringed slightly before answering.

"Since I woke up? It's not like the ditched their gear. But the Select Council knows, no one is meant to know they know, but I'm fed up of being one of the only people who knows and working behind the scenes. They're contained and I can send you security videos if you like."

"Just… tell me you aren't protecting them."

"It's more protecting the world from them."

**Tony POV**

*10th October*

"So what's this terrible idea Rhodey has been ranting about that got you locked out of your workshop until you got 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep?"

"Bruce-Bear! Welcome back to my lair."

He grinned, hopping down from his rather precarious position where he'd been attaching his new holographic projectors to the ceiling.

"I see you have reorganised."

"Well, after the coffee cup graveyard and then the smoothie station fell to the children, I needed to change things up so I created this space."

Tony pulled Bruce into the empty square space made up with workstations, giving tiny the ability to have. 4 stations on the go at any one time thanks to the expanded multitasking abilities of Extremis.

"Looks very organised Tony."

"That's not the fun bit."

He clicked his fingers and threw his arms out, expanding pretty much the entire open space into various holograms.

"That is impressive, is this everything you're considering working on?"

"Bruce, this is what I'm working on, this is basically my brain right now."
Bruce blinked and glanced from project to project. Some of them were more important than others, the sub dermal bracers for Rhodey were rendering a few different pairs, updates for the Stark pads, phones, few other SI requirements. Generally he could concentrate on a few at the same time and after the ball was running, let it go.

"You know, your brain used to be confusing before Extremis was added to the mix. What this?"

He expanded what Bruce was pointing at and the shield containment balls popped up.

"Oh I've been having fun with those. It was this really clunky mobile containment force field SHIELD were using and I mean it was awful, but the basic idea was amusing. Now they're like this."

He span on his heal, quickly locating one of the balls and passed it to Bruce.

"State level of containment, toss it on the floor. Boom, bad guy is now their personal glowing ball. Lower levels last longer, but at level 5 it will stay stable for 45 minutes."

"Huh. That is handy, and the Photon Shield?"

"Well, playing with the balls I worked out a flexible containment matrix, so it can morph forms."

He rotated his wrist and a blue shield expanded from the blue stripes that he had recently added to his cybernetic hand held up in a similar position as firing a repulsor. The stripes looked pretty and could easily be mistaken as decorative when in fact they were very useful.

"I can control the size of it too, unlike Rogers I don't want to hide behind a dinner plate. Also, because I'm me, I had to work out how to do this."

He grinned as he changed the shield into a more… sword like shape and Bruce just rolled his eyes. With a thought the blade pulled back into his hand.

"But you wanted to see my potentially disastrous idea didn't you. It's actually really awesome, you lot just got me paranoid after the coffee cup incident."

"The last time you had a potentially awesome or disastrous idea that I remember, my lab ended up coated in green gunge that turned to stone."

"Well that definitely won't happen this time… what were we even making?"

"I don't even remember, neither of us had slept, then we had to Assemble, and for some reason we went straight back to the lab, it was all a blur until we woke up and our legs were trapped."

"Thor had loads of fun smashing it all up though."

Bruce chuckled and pulled his glasses off to clean as Tony flicked the current screen with all the projects running away and brought up a blank one up. See, he was capable of being sensible. This was a simulation.

"Right, these are my current nanites, I'm pretty happy with them, I've been upgrading all the old ones on reactors too. But if you notice they're really tiny. I want more but I don't want to make more. It's boring."

"Ah, now I get it. How many are in the large hives."

"Around a few hundred billion. They aren't even remotely full, it's just enough to create the current
suit, but I’d like a lot more, the numbers start to get a little crazy and my sanity goes a little south at the idea of construction. The watch hive comfortably has 50 billion. The ring sized tiny hives have around 5 billion currently."

He pulled up the containment field as well including the current specs of what Rhodey had dubbed "The Demon Plinth."

"Weirdly, I’m on board. I’ll have to run over your failsafe procedures, but it looks like you have done everything Rhodey asked."

"Yeah, he’s pissed. He put the requirements in place hoping I’d get bored and give up. What he failed to account for is how annoying it is to make nanites in the numbers I want, also the armour already self repairs, but there is a limit, if I put this into place, that stretches it further."

Bruce just chuckled at that and Tony shut down the huge hologram with a thought.

"That's not the main reason I called you down today though. There is a second idea that I'm not sure is a good idea or not and it's in your domain."

"Mine?"

"As the appointed trainer of Tony's weird abilities. Yes."

"Well since Peter's incident you've vastly improved. I still have an annoying AI on my phone, but you haven't accidentally brought sentience to anyone else's tech… You haven't, have you?"

"No, no, Hulk Jr is still the baby of the AI family. The thing is, I’ve been practicing a lot as you set out, well now there is something.. New."

"Oh Gods"

"Hey, it might not be a bad thing."

"Tony. My phone cried for an hour last night because I accidentally dropped it."

Tony really tried not to laugh, he did, but Bruce is a hilarious AI dad. CERBERUS and FRIDAY have a running information board on what happens with Hulk Jr next, a surprising amount of Avengers are heavily invested. They pull names out of a hat to baby sit his phone and everything.

"Well, you know I can sort of sense tech? I started to feel a difference between powered tech and dead tech. I figured that was pretty obvious, that the hum was just based on their state.. But then I dropped a screwdriver near a power socket and electricity kind of... jumped at my hand? I freaked out and fell over."

"Hm, did it hurt?"

"Nope, it was more of a shock than anything. I didn't expect electricity to jump at me, ya know?"

"Why don't you try again?"

"What, you mean just jump in? No 500 safety protocols? Have I corrupted you?"

"Yes, I want to see this."

"You just want to study me don't you?"
Bruce just smiled whilst not so subtly poking Tony towards a plug socket and he wondered when he had become the safety conscious one? Eh, well he tried, if he blew up or if something else blew up, it was Bruce's fault. FRIDAY had proof. He was absolved of responsibility.

He moved his hand slowly closer, bracing this time to expect it, mostly because he didn't want to end up on his ass again. FRIDAY would definitely send that recording to the hoard.

It comes a lot easier than the other night too, he barely has to get close to the plug, maybe because he's actively trying to get it to work? Hopefully, otherwise he was going to have serious issues walking around pretty much any building if electricity was just waiting to jump on him.

This time he didn't flinch and after being zapped he straightened up looking at his hand.

"Huh, that's kind of cool."

"Only you Tony. So what does it feel like?"

He tilted his head, it was weird, there were small arcs of electricity branching between his fingers, giving off a distinctive crackling sound. The thing that is mostly freaking him out at the moment is that it feels kind of good. Like comfortable, warm and happy. Which is utterly bizarre because a tiny is pretty sure a human touching electricity is mean to go 'Ow' not 'Ooo, give me more'.

"Tingly, but good tingly. This is going to sound weird, but it feels safe. Like home?"

"Yeah, that does sound weird, but then your vision reads colours right? You get readings like that, emotions or feelings, occasionally insights from colours?"

"Pretty much. It can be pretty tricky to describe as some people are very different. Take Stephy for instance, he has weird glowing discs moving in and around him. And colours, take red for example, on one person could be anger, on someone else, passion, or courage. But yeah, I get feelings."

"Maybe it's doing it for electricity?"

"Maybe, but why would electricity be some weird safe, happy, home, comfy and other adjectives that keep popping into my head that are generally positive and make me want to nap?"

"Well, Your technopathy pretty much requires electricity and you've either had an arc reactor in or near you for nearly a decade, plus because of.. Her.. You made it so the arc reactor energy is running through every room. They are your home, they also keep you safe in the suit."

"Huh, when you say it like that it does make sense."

"So, what are you going to um, do with that?"

He looked at the electricity arcing between his fingers, so his body must have absorbed some, or it just be hovering in his palm right? He focused, like when he used the technopathy and tried to will it to absorb into his hand completely. It took several minutes of serious focusing. Bruce remained a silent vigil, watching over him to ensure he was not going to blow up. Slowly it sunk into his hand and wow did that feel 'weird'. With a last crackle it vanished and it was like he could feel it in his bones. And wow, that was..

"I feel like I just pounded 10 cans of monster."

He bounced on the balls on his feet, he feel almost bursting with energy. He wanted to run somewhere really fast.
"You absorbed it, yes?"

"Yup."

"At some point I'm dragging you to my lab. I have so many tests. Can you bring it back. From you, rather than the plug?"

"Huh, I didn't even think of that. And I'll clear a day on my calendar and you can have your fun. Just remember, Furnace Protocols. I don't want someone getting their hands on this version of Extremis and selling it. I don't even know how it would work without Starkanium but the technopathy and this are bad enough. I'm not even trusting Reed with the full code and he's signed a lot of papers to see what he has. That man gets into trouble standing still."

He brought his hand back up as he mused over what tests Bruce had planned for him and wondered if he'd have any blood left by the time Bruce had expended his science urges. Holding his hand palm up, fingers tilted in like he was cupping something. He concentrated on the feeling for the electricity he had absorbed it. He could feel it there, just below his skin. Like it was humming in his bones but he didn't know how to push it out.

"It's like I can feel it in my bones, but that's it."

"Well how did you push it in?"

"I sort of imagined in sinking in, like I did when I created the code firewalls in my mind, or when Fry, Cer or Vis send me Code, especially Vis, as his colours are basically code, and sometimes its like I can see it sink into my skin and it pops up in my head. It's kind of trippy. But this is like it went to my bones."

"Hmm, when you send Vision code it comes from you, try that whilst focusing on the feeling you get from the electricity."

"Hmm, ComfySafteyHome."

"Either that or we get a bunch of balloons and rub then on your head."

"You make jokes now, but I might be able to zap you with my fingers in a minute."

He grinned and Bruce raised is hands in mock surrender, then he focused on that feeling the way Bruce had taught him to meditate to control his emotions, so they didn't go haywire and explode/reprogram people's phones. After a few minutes he was sweating slightly and Bruce had them sit on his sofa instead. Facing each other, legs crossed and Tony got back to it. After a few more minutes he heard a crackle and felt a tingle.

"Did you see that or did I imagine it?"

"Yes! I saw it, keep going!"

Having done it once was apparently what Tony needed to get past the mental barrier that was a mixture of 'it's impossible to create electricity in your hand' and 'it's dangerous to have electricity in your hand!' Plus, Bruce's outright enthusiasm helped him be excited about this instead of weirded out. He felt it pull, like a weird tug from the centre of his chest that he couldn't work out if it was more disconcerting or uncomfortable. But in general, weird sensations seemed to be his new norm now as weird abilities guy.

This time there was a much louder crackle than even when he had pulled the small amount of
electricity from the plug and suddenly he had a small ball, about 2 centimetres wide and tall, of plasma, just bobbing merrily in his hand. Instead of the energy arcing between his fingers, the ball sort of... floated there, occasionally arcs jumping out to his fingers or palm, generally anywhere his skin was near the ball.

"OK that is kind of cool."

"Trust you to take a fire based code and turn it into electricity and technology Tony."

He grinned and glanced at his cybernetic hand and wondered if that would make things easier or harder. The electricity definitely seemed to like his skin, but the hand was vibranium, which tended to like everything.

He'd seen Storm hold her hand apart and concentrate electricity in the middle once before, when she wasn't creating huge, terrifying storms that is. That woman was moderately (completely) terrifying and up there with Pepper in the terrifying competence division. Bruce caught on to what he was doing pretty fast and watched him, grinning like a loon. And people say science isn't fun.

His cybernetic hand was a little slower at first, but he mentally shifted around some of the nanites inside a few times, experimenting with what felt better or what made the hum more sluggish, finding what was potentially the optimal configuration, he duplicated what he'd done with his flesh had. What he had not been expecting was for it to practically burst from his fingers like an over eager puppy. Making him jump slightly, Bruce too. The ball that was now hovering between his two hand tripled in size.

"I did it!"

"I think it's safe to say that you half electrokinesis."

"Cool. So. Um. What do I do with it? It's a bit bigger than that little zap I absorbed at first."

"Huh, true."

"You're so helpful."

Tony concentrated to get it back onto his flesh hand, it felt easier to manage and he was less worried about his cybernetic hand exploding. Also having it connected with his skin was more natural? As natural as this was, which, it was really freaking weird.

His brain was telling him it was weird but his sight, how it felt, everything else was telling him it was good. Like it was the most normal thing in the world and not only that, it was right. He wasn't sure where this knowledge came from, but it was kind of like when he Saw people. He wondered if these things would ever stop being weird.

Maybe if he practiced more, he wouldn't be as worried about his shiny new hand when it came to the ball of electricity? Or maybe it was meant to have skin contact and he'd lost that with his hand?

He wondered if he could roll it over his fingers, when he'd been a kid and watching David Bowie in Labyrinth had made him want to do the thing with the ball. It had taken a while, but even with bouncy balls he could roll them over his fingers with ease. It became something to keep his hands busy in a time before fidget spinners and cubes. Apparently he could also do it with balls of electricity. Although he had to admit it was kind of cheating, as he couldn't drop it apparently, it was somehow attracted to his skin.

Like he was a magnet for electricity, which was a painful thought for his science brain.
"This is fun."

"You aren't even trying to absorb it are you?"

"Nah."

He rolled it across the backs of his fingers and in that moment he knew he'd found a new thing. He wasn't sure about getting it to a stage it was useful in a fight, he figured that would take more training, probably with Carol. It wasn't much compared to her photon blasts, but he suspected that Carol would possibly be immune to electrokinesis because of her ability to manipulate Cosmic energy. So out of anyone to train with, that sounded best.

"Bruce, take a picture of my hand and send it to Carol and Rhodey for me."

Tony grinned whilst Bruce sighed, pulling his phone out, he took a picture of his hand, but also of all of him, still sat cross legged on the sofa with a ball of electricity sparking in his hand. Bruce sent it to him and he saw it pop up in his head, he immediately sent it Peter and Harley. They'd be very excited.

"So, you just going to hold it all day?"

"Um, I'm kind of nervous about absorbing it. It's kind of.. Big."

"Well you can't hold it forever."

"I know, and I can't exactly throw it. Plus it's kind of stuck to me, I don't know how to throw it. The workshop is not a good place to test that."

He demonstrated that it was stuck by turning his hand over and shaking it. The ball bobbed slightly but stayed within 4 centimetres of his skin at all times. It was also quite.. Calming.

"It's kind of like a fuzzy feeling? Like a fuzzy warm blanket that you're wrapped up in, snuggled down, eating comfort food that makes you warm and sleepy while watching your favourite film."

"That's quite an in depth feeling. Now stop stalling and absorb the ball."

He rolled his eyes but turned his hand palm up again and started to push it back like he had with the plug. He figured that because he'd pulled it from himself that he wouldn't get the energy boost that he got the first time. He felt it soak through his skin, which was extremely weird and again it felt like it flowed into his bones..

"Wow"

"Wha? What happened?"

"Your eye. The right one, flashed blue."

That was weird, that eye tended to flash gold when he used his abilities

"Not gold?"

"No, it's different than when you use your Technopathy. The Iris turned completely blue when you were absorbing it."

"Hmm."
He wondered if he could make it turn and stay blue? That would be cool and it could freak people out, well, out of the few people who saw him without the glasses, it was more likely to amuse. He focused on raising a small current, but instead of pulling it out kept it running through his palm. Small arcs connected his fingers, but otherwise it stayed in his palm.

"Is it staying blue?"

"Yeah, the iris is now fully blue, the sclera and pupil are normal. What are you doing."

"Well it flashed when I absorbed it in my skin right?"

"Yes."

"So I figured if I held it at that point, sort of electrifying my hand, it could stay blue. I worked out how I could flare it gold a few days ago and keep it that way. I noticed it stayed when I was.. Scanning for tech. Plus, electrifying my hand sounded cool."

He pulled the electricity back in and then pushed out his senses, to ping all tech in the immediate vicinity. He was working on extending his range and had it at around 10 metres so far.

"Did it work?"

"Yeah, your Iris is entirely gold, it has actually spread into your sclera a little too, it's completely engulfed your pupil."

"It didn't do that last time, but I last looked when I was at 6 meters, I'm pushing 10 now. So the further I push, the more it affects my eye?"

"That seems so. I need to start recording this."

"Working out where the abilities come from too might be an idea, Extremis or the Tesseract. I am sure the technopathy is from Extremis. The as yet unnamed insane colour vision, I was originally going with Synesthesia, but that's just seeing sounds, I can turn that aspect on and off. The colours of people is different and stuck on. Stephy said he has an idea but he's doing research."

"Well it's good he has an idea."

"Yup, He didn't seem shocked when I said I felt a pull to Vision too.

It's different to what I feel with Carol. He has something too. Maybe all weird space artifacts are linked? Or maybe Loki linked them? Doesn't explain Stephy."

"Yes, well, Dr Strange seems the type to explain when he is ready, and not before."

"Oh yeah, after he came back all magiced up after his accident, it took me ages to get the story out of him. It wasn't until After Ultron when he fully told me what happened, I think he did it to cheer me up."

He'd been trying to pry that story out of him for ages after he'd gotten over his anger at him up and vanishing on him. Then he'd suddenly started talking one night over take out at the Sanctum. Even Wong had been surprised.

"How come you never introduced him to us, you know, before?"

"You have met Stephy now, right?"
"Yes."

He couldn't help but smirk at Bruce's tone. Stephey wasn't exactly a... People person. He'd worn the man down out of sheer boredom and that he'd posed a challenge in his 20s. Most people didn't have his level of persistence. Or habit of collecting interesting characters. Although it was amusing the amount of people he'd known that had also got into the supers business. Maybe there was a type.

"And how exactly do you think introducing him to Roger's would have gone?"

"Ah, yes, Roger's would not have taken to him well, at all."

"Probably about as well as he took to me, without the added benefits of associating me with Howard. Although I was never sure if that worked in my favour or not. I've known Stephenie for nearly half my life, a good 20 years. I didn't want Rogers thinking he could ban him from the tower, or worse, Stephey deciding Rogers was a problem."

"A problem?"

"Stephey isn't really a people person, but if you get past that, if you're interesting enough and he decides to keep you.. Let's say he's fiercely protective? Rabidly so? And that was before he became the Sorcerer Supreme."

"Ah, so he's like you?"

"Why does everyone always say that?"

"Well you two are scariley alike, are you sure you aren't actually related."

"Ha. No, unfortunately, I think life would have been interesting with Stephey as my biological brother. I kind of see him as one anyway. He's a little brother who acts like the big brother. It helps that he's like a hundred feet tall."

"It's good that you've brought him in now though..
"

"Hope, Carol and Shaylo too."

"Don't forget the kids. Hmm, it seems like you're bringing everyone in."

"Yeah, well, Siberia gave me time to think and reassess. I decided to bring different parts of my life together.. There are still, let's say, a few outliers? They have really interesting personalities."

"Considering the people around here already, I'm not sure if that's comforting or terrifying."

"Well one of them might turn up soon, Rhodey has been on the fence if he wants to meet him or flee the country."

"The country?"

"Oh yeah."

Bruce chuckled as he stood up and stretched, Tony still felt like he was practically vibrating with energy, he was definitely going to need to burn it off somewhere or the chances of his accidentally exploding something were going to increase as time went on and the energy unused. He tilted his head, spotting someone heading to the workshop.

"Natka is about to come in."
Bruce's head shot up and looked around, likely before remembering that Tony was able to easily see the cameras around the workshop. Out of everyone when it came to his abilities that are pushing him to find out more and more, he'd never have suspected Bruce would be one of his main cheerleaders, it had been his idea to start using the cameras more as an outlet. Bruce had surprised him. Especially given how close Extremis is to the super soldier serum, but then they had ripped it to pieces and built it from the ground up so it was barely recognisable to its original form.

Bruce makes a quick exit from the door near the kids desks, pretty much in time for Natka to enter from the entrance closer to the zone where he worked on his cars. Most people wouldn't have been able to see Bruce's retreating form with that level of clarity from so far away, but Natka was not most people. Since Tony had told her that he knew about her own serum she made an effort to stop hiding around him. She still hid from everyone else, and although telling the team leaders about something like that was important, he wasn't going to force her into it. However he had shifted around where she was potentially placed in a team where it wouldn't be an issue soon.

Rogers had her as more of a specialist. Although why the man thought she could do everything he could with a computer was utterly beyond him. Because of her baseline human status she was often kept back from the bulk of the fighting, despite proving herself extremely adept on multiple occasions. So he'd been subtly shifting her into different scenarios in training. Rhodey and Carol had taken notice, but they just shrugged and left him to it. Assuming it was something he saw. The two of them placed a lot of faith in his admittedly subjective ability that he had no idea how it worked. It was not at all terrifying and had the side effect of making him work harder with it. Luckily he was the kind of person that when he got rolling on that learning curve, he just kept speeding on.

Nat looked her normal self as she crossed over to him, but he can see that Bruce leaving sent a flare of white hot pain through her.

"Come here Natka, I have a surprise for you."

That got her attention, she even smiled as she came over her colours are a riot however. He'd never realised before how much Natka was interested in gear he made. She barely reacted so Tony hadn't really known what to think in the past. Now however he can see that having new gear was like birthdays and Christmas all rolled into one, bundled up with the feeling that someone cares for your safety and trusts your competency. He was starting to understand why she was happy he could see now, she struggled to verbalise these feelings, even though she was trying.

He pulled the black roll of leather from one of his drawers and unrolled it in front of her. There were two thin black bracelets. 8 widow bites and 8 daggers. The widow bites were not that much different from her usual ones, but the very tips at each point had different colours.

"Me and Stephy were working on this, so you get to decide which set you like best. No pressure."

"Are you boys using me to compete?"

"Maybe, but you get sharp things out of it."

"I'm listening."

"Top set, right bracelet, with let you call back these widow bites, they're much different to your usual fair, but it works on them too. There are 8. 4 sets of 2, but as you can recall, they can be reused multiple times. The red tipped are a much, much higher voltage. Definitely do not throw these at a baseline human. They need to recharge every few throws due to their voltage, placing them back on the belt will do that."
He picked one up and it crackled menacingly in his hand, causing him to raise an eyebrow because
he hadn't expected that, probably because of how high the voltage on them, Natka just smirked at
him, obviously impressed at him gaining more abilities. Ever since she came back she'd been very
intent on him training, growing stronger. In the past, he'd have thought that meant she thought him
weak, but now he could see, he knew it meant she didn't want to see him hurt again, was scared of
it happening. Until Siberia she'd thought his luck protected him, that he didn't get hurt. Watching
the full Siberia video had snapped something in her, she was now scared of him dying something
fierce.

Even with his enhancements. To Natka, this fear translated not to dissimilar to him and his suits.
Shore up the bases, protect and be ready. She'd been pleasantly surprised when she'd come across
him sparing with Jess and Matt. She'd not asked about it yet and he could see she was originally
here to ask about it.

"So red for super humans? What about blue?"

"Yes, Blue administers a small dose of dendrotoxin, silently incapacitating a person painlessly.
Good for someone you might not want to taze or want to bring down quietly, a younger person or
someone with electricity based abilities."

"Hmm, that's a great idea, what are the Yellow ones?"

"A small targeted electro scrambling pulse that will take out only the tech it hits, it has strength
gages on the bites if you feel you need more oomph or a gentle touch."

"And what's green?"

"That will inject a single nanite into them. It acts as a tracer and will stay in the body for on
average 7 days, it depends on the person, you might even get longer. Now even though my nanites
are small, I decided that I didn't want to to be traceable, so, no metal, even vibranium. It's made up
from advanced composite ceramics, fused with a kevlar-like polymer that's backed by optical fiber
networks. When the nanite is no longer exposed to plasma, they self destruct. The widowbite also
gives a smaller zap so they'd don't suspect its something nefarious."

The fact Natka fingers visibly twitch looking at the widow bites is possibly the best compliment
the woman could give him.

"These are amazing Tony, I've never seen anything like it, thank you."

He blinked for a second before recovering, this everyone thanking him thing wasn't going to stop
being weird anytime soon. Sensing that she pulled her attention back to the knives. He had to
admit, Natka using her powers for good, to make him comfortable in a conversation. Definitely a
good thing.

"So, what do the knives do?"

This was Tony's turn to be smug. And Stephy had started this contest with the magical returning
throwing knives and Tony had to beat him, but as he couldn't make knives vanish and reappear in
their sheaths, he had had to get creative. Magic was such a cheat. As he couldn't compete with that
he'd gone to the other end, and he was pretty sure by the gleam in Natkas eye. Spending far too
long coming up with imaginative widow bites had him as the winner. Some of them had been
ridiculous, although he'd made an exploding glitter version for Peter with less spiky sides. That
was important as he knew Peter, it would end up getting tossed at him. Why then you ask would he
give it to the kid? It made him smile and he was a sap.
"They return to the belt. They disappear when you tap the bracelets, either the single blade returns or all the thrown ones"

Natka gave him an amused grin that told her that he'd won, which meant Stephy had to buy dinner. Stephy version was still quite cool though, his has to fly back and be caught.

"Come on, you can spar with me and I'll answer your questions about how and when Peggy Carter trained me as a kid."

She nodded, rolling up her new prize and smiling slightly.

"So if you knew how to fight the whole time, why didn't you train with us?"

"Rogers only thought it necessary that I run drills in the suit, it was handy because explaining that Peggy trained me would have been awkward."

"Because of Rogers relationship with her?"

"Well that didn't help, but more when she started the training, which was when I was a kid."

"Why?"

"Rogers has this perfect view of Howard and my childhood. Me getting kidnapped when I was four and Howard refusing to pay up would have ruined it for him, after a while I actually felt bad for ruining his idea of Howard. I had Peggy however, she didn't pay kidnappers, she liked to leave them bloody."

"So, you just let us believe you had a wonderful childhood? That things were perfect before Afghanistan? Clint always wondered how you survived that you know, found it odd your pain tolerance was as high as it was."

"Pretty much. Path of least resistance and all that. After a while it wasn't exactly hard to have him blaming my drug addict years. You know how easy it is to get people to believe their preconceived perceptions."

Nats brows twist together and he knew that she was trying to read him, he'd been making an effort lately with her, less masks, less being who she expected. He figured considering his insight on her, it was fair and it seemed to be grounding. Confusing her, but grounding.

**Nat POV**

It was around 6 hours later that FRIDAY had reminded Tony he needed to eat and they had stopped sparring. The first half an hour she had pulled her punches like she always did in training, Tony matched her strength to an eerily perfect level until he'd rolled his eyes and gave her a smirk she'd barely had a chance to process and then he dropped pretenses.

He'd suddenly been faster, stronger and more fluid that she had suspected. The shock and speed of his brutal attacks had lead to her forgetting to measure her attacks, it wasn't until she dislocated his shoulder with a kick that she realised when she'd done. She really hadn't expected Tony to punch it back in and then he was on her again grinning.

He already knew, so why was she still holding back? He could also heal faster so she didn't have to worry about that much.
Whenever she stopped pulling her punches, they fell into as easy dance, flipping offence and defence, the second he even thought she pulled a punch he was suddenly there, faster and harder and a constant, brutal offence that forced her to match him. She was stronger but he was faster.

It was good to *finally* spar again.

It wasn't like the Red Room. Being forced to fight for 15 hours straight, in all kinds of gear, including Tac gear to heals and a pencil skirt. Tony didn't want to leave her bleeding on the floor at a slip. There was no punishment other than Tony pushing his speed ability until she could hardly see him move, she couldn't think, she just had to react on pure instinct to catch him. As soon as she did, then he'd match her speed again.

He'd slipped once, electricity arcing across his skin, but by the time she registered the crackle he was across the room so as not to shock her.

The fact they'd gone for 6 hours straight had her sore in places she hadn't worked in years but she'd be lying if it wasn't exhilarating.

Sure, back when they trained before, she could have trained with Steve, but even though the man had seen her fight many times, he never noticed she was enhanced. Tony had, but he'd kept it secret for her. Even after what she did.

It didn't make any sense.

But then this Tony after Siberia was very different, and not just in his abilities that she suspected she still didn't know the extent of. She'd known that he had people other than Rhodes, Pepper and Happy, but she'd never known who. When Tony wanted to disappear, he did. He didn't do it often, but now and then he'd vanish for an evening to a week. Since she'd met the new Avengers, she believed she knew where he'd been going now.

He also had known potentially much more powerful people than the Avengers. Yet he'd tried to keep them together at detriment to himself. It was... perplexing. And humbling. SHIELD had thought they'd known everything about him because they had every detail of his partying and thrill seeking days, because they'd known about his rehab stays, she was learning just how little they did.

The Doctor was a big question, she'd had multiple missions to track and assess the man but nearly every single one went south, some before they even started. Now it was obvious, is Tony Stark is on your side, you're safe.

A foreign concept to her.

She knew Tony could see something in her, something about his abilities had made him give her a chance. The old Tony Stark would never have allowed her back. Not quietly. Not without demands. Not without manipulation. But after she spoke to Steve, after she entered that base in Siberia, after she tracked the damage, after she watched that video. Something in her apathetic nature cracked and she realised that whilst she'd been playing by Fury's handbook, doing what she normally did, Tony had gotten under her skin and she hadn't even realised it until it was too late.

At the hospital she tried so hard not to manipulate the man, but she didn't know how not to. Lying was *easier* than breathing. She didn't even know how to be normal, but she tried. She thought he deserved it before he had her locked away.

Sometimes the persona of Tony Stark is so big, it fills the room and it's impossible not to gravitate
towards him. Seeing him after the coma, swallowed by a huge jumper, he was so thin and small and with a few words he’d unravelled her more successfully than any interrogation she’d done. And she was the best.

He wouldn't be her anchor though. It had felt like the floor was ripped away from her and she was spiralling. Instead of abandoning her, he stayed present. He checked up on her, but not like a keeper. Not like he thought without his guidance, she'd fuck up. He reminded her to look after herself, he helped baked her a cake when her pardon was finalised. It was.. Almost too much sometimes. The care, the effort, sometimes it nearly drowned her in guilt, it was not something she was accustomed to.

He always knew too, what she was feeling. If she'd been asked a year ago if she'd like a person knowing her every feeling she'd have been horrified. Wanda for example had severely unnerved her.

But it was better somehow, she didn't know if she was honestly feeling things sometimes or if it was her training, but Tony knew and he always told her if she asked. It was grounding. He wasn't her anchor, she wasn't chained to him, he didn't control her actions, but he was a rock. A solid presence. Comfort.

A friend.

She glanced up when a plate loaded with lasagne appeared in front of her, Tony dropped down next to her and immediately dove in whilst his left hand squeezed her knee. Telling her he knew she was lost in her thoughts and that he was there. For her. She didn't know if she deserved such kindness.

Not when her decision to let Steve and Yasha go was why that hand on her leg was cold metal instead of warm flesh.

Not when her actions lost him and eye and forced abilities on him.

What had she ever done to deserve any bit of her changed life? Her ledger was still bloody, she'd practically betrayed everyone at least once. She didn't even know what master she was following in her missions at SHIELD. Was it the good guys or was it Hydra? She'd been more interested in clearing her own ledger that she hadn't even noticed what was going on right in front of her nose. It was why she'd clung to the Avengers after the fall, they were good, there was no question there. She'd still ended up betraying people.

She'd never been forced to see the consequences of her actions so vividly before, because she left. She never let anyone under her skin. Until she fought Clint. Until her decision lead to Tony being alone in the Siberian wastes.

But he was still there, simply sat next to her. Life fundamentally altered. Tony had never wanted to be enhanced, never wanted powers, he could have taken Extremis at any point. He could probably have recreated her serum. With his mind he had genuine options to become enhanced, at any point, no one seemed to see that. Yet he'd carried on fighting with shrapnel in his chest. With a serious heart condition.

He liked being a baseline human.

Now, he was now like her, altered, a step away from human at the hands of someone else.

Young in body, seeming to not age whilst they stacked up the decades. Was it selfish that she was
happy she wouldn't have to spend those coming decades alone now? Probably.

He'd been trapped in seclusion because his abilities made it hard to even look at people, and it all came back to a decision she made.

She thought it would save lives. That less people would be hurt if they left, but Steve had lied to her. That Tony knew about Barnes. Steve lied and she'd missed it.

She didn't even know if it would have changed her decision at the time. Steve wouldn't stop. Tony couldn't stop. Yasha… poor Yasha was lost and didn't know how to stop.

The 3 of them still could have ended up in that bunker, Steve's shield in Tony's heart, and him left to suffer and with his burden, to survive.

Alone with the ice. Just watching the video had chilled her. No. She didn't deserve this kindness.

She hadn't realised she'd just been staring at her food until Tony shifted his chair close so he could wrap his metal arm around her waist and tucked her against his hide, using his superior speed to have her tucked against him before she could think or react.

"You deserve kindness my little Natka. Now eat your food before I do."

"Thank you Antoshka."

"I know, my lasagne is yum."

"Not just for that."

"I know that too Natka."

When he didn't pulled away, but remained there, stealing bites of her lasagne as she ate, something eased a little inside her. As it did Tony hummed happily next to her.

She dared to hope she might get to keep this happiness.

She would also use everything in her arsenal to ensure the safety of Tony and his family. Maybe from the outside looking in, but it was more than she ever expected and this family meant a lot to her.

Tony was watching her, a thoughtful look on his face and he scooped up her plate. She already missed the warmth.

"Come on big sis, let's go find the kids and watch a movie."

She utterly froze and Tony vanished behind her to put the plates away, her brain, usually fast and always moving seemed to slow to molasses in shock that suddenly he was back and half dragging her to his own apartment. A place she'd never been.

She found herself wedged between Peter and Tony who had pulled her back in, wrapped a blanket over the 4 of them, Harley on Tony's other side. Harley had never spoken to her, he was giving her assessing looks that reminded her so much of Tony assessing people that it was hard to believe they were not genetically related. She would wait the kid out, she didn't want him to feel manipulated. It had become just as important to her that Tony's kids liked her as Clint's. Just as important they were safe.

Eventually she felt so safe and accepted and included and she drifted to sleep against Tony thinking
that word over, tasting it, hoarding it and guarding it her mind.

*Sister*.

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**Tony POV**

**13th October**

He was working on the adaptive programme with Barnes and they were definitely making some headway but the man's brain was still zigging when the program zagged and he was half writing the program to try and keep up with him. It was good enough for some memories but not others. He'd come up with a way of programming it directly but with some separation involved.

There is another issue however. Something had happened in Wakanda.

He had no idea what it is, but Shuri is practically raging and weirdly, he can pretty much tell from the BARF data that something is wrong with Barnes. He's upset about something. But that would be a seriously weird and creepy thing to come out with, so instead he started throwing augmented reality programmes in between memories for Barnes. It definitely seems to be having some effect. He'd even started adding jokes.

He has no idea what could have happened to cause such a change. He'd seen Barnes brain after running through the memories for some of the code words and somehow he gets the feeling something worse than that had happened? What can he do if no one tells him?

He sighed, pushing away from the screen as the session ended and tries to put it out of his mind. It's kind of weird for him to be concerned anyway.

Hopefully nothing too bad was happening. With the chemical time bombs of the Avengers and the hair trigger of Wanda, pretty much anything could have happened. He hoped that if it was serious enough that they'd contact him instead of trying to handle it alone or some crap.

He closed everything they'd been working on for the day and added his notes for where he could pick off tomorrow his fingers trailing past a plug and gathering a small ball of electricity again as he finished up using his mind. Bruce wanted him practicing two different things at the same time and it was a good excuse to play with electricity. It was part of his lessons after all.

Plus he needed to get out of this frame of mind, he definitely wanted the first trial with the nanites to be done before the kids got back from school because Harley would have *ideas*. They would be very good ideas and they would easily lead Tony astray. The kid had a damned knack for it.

Whilst he'd been expecting Bruce and Rhodey, he hadn't expected the three men who traile in behind them with a mixture of looks.

Stephy just strolled in, raised an eyebrow and the electricity training over his fingers, rolled his eyes and sat down. Luke and Danny walked through the workshop a lot slower, looking around and gawking at everything that Tony totally did not enjoy. He didn't usually have so many people in his workshop at once and after so many years spending it alone, it almost felt cramped. Despite their being more than ample room for multiple people.

"I hear I owe you dinner. Just what exactly did you do to those widow bites?"
He smirked and flicked his metal hand in Stephy direction, loading up his file on the special recall variants. Watching the doctors face go from incredulous, to highly amused in such a short period of time was also as good as the free dinner.

Plus maybe he can then work out a way of enlisting Stephy's help in his Barnes issues.

'Note to self, don't word it like that. Stephy will go and toss the man in a weird wonky dimension before I have a chance to clarify I'm still helping the man. Not that he is the problem.'

Well, technically his brain is the problem, but Tony can't be mad at it because it's also so damned fascinating.

'Do not mention that to Stephy either. Or Rhodey, for that matter.'

Damn. He's going to need to start keeping a list.

Luke and Danny finally made their way past the newly dubbed square over to the newly dubbed containment zone. CERBERUS named the square. Because it was square. FRIDAY named the containment zone. Because it was the level 7 containment protocol.

Seriously. He had no idea how long he was banned from naming his own things. But CERBERUS rather literal naming schemes and FRIDAYs painfully obvious names, even if they are a sentence long, are not at all better than his naming schemes. Some of the files for the adaptive programme are literally called 'Adaptive programme file 1'. He had actually wrestled some control back because it was getting hard to find anything.

"I don't get the problem. Why is this a terrifying idea?"

"You remember that maths problem from school, Which is more: being given one million dollars, or one penny the first day, double that penny the next day, then double the previous day's pennies and so on for a month?"

Luke just gave him a look, the one that he usually got from the man when he gained steam talking about something and he wasn't sure if he'd veered of the reality track.

"No, that sounds like scary maths riddle you just invented."

"I did not invent the scary maths riddle. It's in movies and everything. If I was going to invent a scary maths riddle, it would be terrifying."

"Tones. Please don't invent a scary maths riddle."

Rhodey just gives him a different look and Bruce is cleaning his glasses whilst turned to the side, trying not to laugh. Stephy would totally help him invent scary maths riddles.

"So which one do you think is bigger, I give you a million dollars, or have them just double up the pennies once a day for a month. 31 little days."

"The million."

Luke shrugs, Danny sounds sure about himself, the other three brainiacs stay silent.

"Nope. If you go with the other route you'll get $10,737,418.23."

"That can't be right."
"Seriously Google it, it's a thing that teachers love dumping on students to explain exponential growth."

"So if your nanites started making nanites you'll have billions of them?"

"I already have hundreds of billions of them."

"Oh. Okay, why do you need so many nanites?"


"Because they're very useful and I'm bored of building them?"

"Also he's watched Stargate too many times and the repl-

"Rhodey! We do not use that word around the nanites. They might get ideas!"

"Tony, the nanites are controlled by your brain and you've been binge watching Stargate. If they learn that word, it isn't from me…. And goddammit he's got me talking about nanites like they're little tiny dust people. See Stephen, this is what happens!"

"Okay! My nanites are going to start building more of themselves but hopefully only as many as they're told."

Tiny dust people, he was never going to let Rhodey live that down.

"When Rhodey told me you were doing something crazy, I kind of expected more explosions or sentient flying coffee cups again."

Luke actually looks kind of forlorn, Danny too. Rhodey jumped in at the quickly.

"Do you want sentient crockery Luke? Because saying shit like that around Tony is how you get sentient crockery. We already have a forest haunted by a damned coffee cup. That was accidental, don't challenge the man!"

"I didn't even say anything and now my Phone is giving me the silent treatment. Run Luke, run while you still can."

Bruce's deadpan delivery was pretty perfect for that, he has to admit. However Hulk Jr was adorable and if Bruce would stop dropping him he'd be doing much better.

"Luke, how about after dinner I take you to SI and you can blow stuff up?"

"Wait, you can just go to your company and blow stuff up?"

"Of course! Explosions in the name of science are the best explosions."

"Yeah OK. I'm cool with this."

"He's so naive."

Rhodey shakes his head, Bruce and Stephey join in. Which considering how often all three of them had also gone down to the destruction labs at SI, they can't really say anything. There is usually something being built that could do with some rigorous testing. He might not make weapons anymore but now he's dipped himself into so many sectors and there is no way he's putting a product on the market to discover how easily it falls apart.
That would be embarrassing, so everything is tested to frankly ridiculous degrees. Especially if Rhodey visits with his love affair with the rocket launchers. Stepy has a thing for the flamethrowers where as Bruce delights in coming up with chemical formulas to destroy his team's hard work. R&D however was entirely staffed with Tony's selections, so they were barmy enough to enjoy it when his friends spent an afternoon destroying all their hard work. The data was worth it, it's not often three Geniuses put all that brain power into destruction after all.

"So, what happens if this goes wrong?"

"Well I'm telling them to build a set number of nanites. If they build that many, were good. If they carry on building after I tell them to stop."

Unsurprisingly, everything goes well and Tony uses up the set amount of Vibranium. They even stopped building on command when there was Vibranium left.

"That was extremely anti climatic."

Luke is definitely sulking which leads to Rhodey throwing things at him. They lurk for a while but eventually get drawn away from the lab.

After Rhodey leaves with Danny and Luke he turns to Stephy and Bruce before they head out.

"I need to go and get more Vibranium. If you two follow me you'll get to see my extremely secret vault where I utterly don't have a small supply of things like Antarctic Vibranium… or Reverbium…"

"Do you just enjoy collecting things you shouldn't really have. Anti-metal Tony, really?"

"I thought your be more interested in the Reverbium Brucie, it's much worse than the Anti metal. I even have some Gravitonium that I liberated from a Hydra base after the fall of SHIELD…"

Tony used a sing song voice because he knew that would lure Bruce down. He had way more interesting and way worse things in his secret vault, everything from munitions that would be harder to destroy, a terrifying amount of different irradiated items he'd stored after an unfortunate mutant ability went out of control… he'd started when he was 20 and discovered Howard had a number of horrific items under the mansion that he never wanted to see the light of day, the man had done more experiments with the X gene than he could conceive of and had some extremely dangerous weapons to say the least. A few times over the years, Pepper found him dangerous stuff offered up to sweeten up a few business deals, it sped up to him following rumours and by the time he was 28 he accepted he was collecting items too dangerous for the general population that were potentially too dangerous or impossible to destroy.

He'd never been tempted to use much of the stuff down here, except for some of the exceedingly rare but less dangerous artifacts. Like vibranium for example.

It was also where he stored his arc reactors, shrouds and various nanite hives and other variant nanites he'd worked on. One person knew of his collective duties although he'd never been in here, he would try and touch everything remotely dangerous to see if it would kill him. Another had picked up on it and had started to help, it was nice. Both of them enjoyed the ridiculous piles of money too. They just occasionally went out together to pick things up, or they brought him things. Anyone else was paid per item and didn't ask questions. Tony could play the shady businessman role quite perfectly. Trusting people in his vault? That was new, and selecting who had been shockingly easy when he made the decision. These two had the intelligence to understand what this vault really was.
"Dammit, now I have to see."

Tony laughed as he lead the two men down into the server room several levels of reinforced concrete beneath his workshop and not on any blueprints. He'd done the construction work himself, well, the suits had done a good portion of it too. There was another server room on the plans so no one would go looking for this one. He stopped at a patch of wall in the Workshop, just long enough for Stephy and Bruce to look at each other in confusion. What? If you have a secret room of terrifying things and are finally inviting people in, setting and a little dramatic flare are important.

The wall was actually nanites, Tony doing dramatic shit like this was why he needed more nanites, that and living with spy's. He liked that the only access to his vault literally required his brain and no one knew it was here to force him to open it. The three of them hopped into his lift, the nanite wall closing and solidifying behind them as they descended at a very fast pace. After about 50 seconds, Stepy and Bruce's eye brows show up when another nanite wall parted with a thought to reveal the real place his AIs lived and certain other information. The much more sensitive, dangerous shit.

He had to admit, it was pretty impressive, the room was long, wide and icy cold. Filled with large gray and black steel servers.

"Tony this… is huge, FRIDAY and CERBERUS can't take up this much space, or even your private servers…"

"Bruce, after what happened with… With JARVIS, my backups have back ups and they got married and had little baby backups. You could drop a nuke in my workshop and these servers would barely feel it. As you might have noticed beneath your feet is another arc reactor, the ceiling has a fabricated Vibranium from Starkanium built in. This was before the Wakandans started handing it over amusingly… My stuff loses some of they more interesting qualities, is heavier but it's stronger too. Starkanium is smack between Adamantium and Vibranium."

He pointed down to the glass floor, made of the same new material for the Hulk room. It fully surrounded this room and the others, it also had masking tech built in, to hide this from even advanced scanners. Even vision couldn't phase through it.

" You don't do things by half do you?"

" Well Stephy, that was part of my alternative ploy of luring you down here."

" Are you, the great Tony 'I fucking hate magic' Stark, asking me for magic? "

" Yes, and you can rub it in all you want, as long as my AI kids are safe. "

He ran his hand along the servers, Stephy had a contemplating look on his face before nodding. He knew Tony didn't ask for things often, this was pretty serious. At the end of the server room, another completely nanite wall parted to reveal another lift, with a repeat from earlier.

"This isn't getting creepy. Not at all."

He shot Bruce a grin whilst Stephy rolled his eyes as the lift stopped, the wall opening in front of him to a huge room that was deep enough, reinforced enough that is spanned a good chunk of the compound with no one ever knowing it existed.

"And this is where I keep all my dangerous stuff. And unlike your creepy house of magic dangerous stuff, it's ordered sensibly and isn't confusing."
He dodged a playful hit from the Cloak as Stephy walked past him. The room was lit by the various force fields around certain unstable or more dangerous acquisitions, powered directly by the arc reactor above, there is more than enough energy to spare but Tony only uses the hidden reactor for these rooms so no one could potentially wonder where a chunk of the base energy was vanishing off too. Tony flicks on some lights anyway, the room is big enough that seeing the opposite walls are tricky, even with his eyesight. He'd been wanting to make other people aware of this room for a while, but there are more than a few dangerous temptations in the depths of this room. Even for someone like Rhodey. Finding people who wouldn't, some day, want to use just one thing? A situation dire enough to take some of the things under max level forcefield? He knows if you use one, it'll be easy to justify the next.. And then the next.

Which is why he came up with these two. Bruce had experienced first hand a pursuit of something good backfiring, he understood and he had the kind of morals a collection like this needed. Plus he had a few biological specimens and formulas he could destroy, but were good to compare new dangerous things too, it made fighting them easier, right up Bruce's ally. Stephy was a cheat really, he already had a house of terrifying, creepy, weird shit. Tony was honestly fed up of being the only one in charge of The Pit. He'd considered Rhodey, but his brother definitely wouldn't want anywhere near this place. Plausible deniability might not be as much of a requirement now, but he still felt the need to keep it in regards to some things.

"These force fields are like the ones you showed me earlier?"

"Yup, but they remain at max level, draw from the second reactor that no one knows exists. Some of this stuff is ridiculous dangerous but difficult to destroy I've been collecting Antarctic Vibranium for years. People worked out it can give you powers. But it also just so happens to break down the iron in your blood, yet people keep using it, so I started collecting it."

"Got any plans for it?"

"Fuck no. Its anti metal Stephy. I don't know if you noticed, I spend a lot of time around metal. A lot of this is just… keeping it away from people. Hear a rumour, check it out, hunt it down and bring it back. It's been a side project of mine for a while. I have a few people who help me out collecting things too. Simple really. Oh, If anything happens to me or this base, this entire vault can get flooded with a flashcrete blend I developed, yes Bruce, I'll show you the formula."

Stephen finished looking at the items indicated as he collected a decent amount of Vibranium to make a significant number of nanites with. As he was as curious as a bag of cats on catnip he strolled deeper into The Pit, shock and awe fluttering around him as he took in the sheer scope of it.

"Is that Carbonadium?"

"Yup, Logan hates the stuff and given his propensity to lose his memories every 5 minutes, he asked me to stash any of it he comes across."

"You know Tony, you can be quite terrifying when you want to be."

"Coming from you Stephanie, I take that as a compliment."

Tony POV
Tony was back in that place where he was impressed and furious. Because he was having some successes, but everytime he got the adaptive programme running and stepped back, Barnes brain went and changed and danced out of the paths he'd laid out. It was so much fun to watch, but it would be more fun if a man's life wasn't on the line. That toppled the fun into guilt and frustration.

Problem was, the more difficult it became… the more Tony was sucked in.

Generally, writing the algorithms for people's brains was boring after he'd done a few. After he'd done a few he hadn't needed to write anymore because he could analyse and predict practically every twist and turn.

It had been an ability he'd always had. It was also what drew him to. Less conventional people. When you can analyse patterns to a degree that you can predict a large chunk of human behaviour, or at least what they want from him, so things can get boring. For a while, he forced himself not to analyse the Avengers. Dared to wish they could be friends, even family that were interested in him rather than what he could do for them.

He'd mostly succeeded too, but some of it wasn't intentional, it was like a background programme running in his mind, but he'd blinded himself to some obvious facts and it had nearly cost him his life, so he didn't push it back anymore. It did however leave him with an annoying habit of jumping ahead in conversations because it was obvious where it was going. His new ability to See had worsened it, but also given him that missing bit of information he'd never had. Social interactions and such. Whilst he could predict the probability of people and read them, interacting with them was difficult, too complex, he'd say what he believed they wished and people got angry at him for reasons beyond his understanding. Which had led to his naivety and gullibility being abused by people like Sunset. Gems like Rhodey in college saved him so many times.

His ability to predict and run probabilities was amplified now he was running on code, and he had a lot more brain power too, so writing algorithms had been fun… and then it wasn't. Barnes brain though, it wasn't that he couldn't read it, sometimes he could, sometimes he couldn't. When he could, it would occasionally follow the patterns, and then it occasionally went in utterly the wrong direction, leaving Tony blindsided. That just didn't happen often. It was like parts were evolving in front of him…

He couldn't exactly enjoy it however as his failure to do his job meant Barnes was left with the trigger words in his mind and no way to protect himself from them.

Something was also still wrong in Wakanda. He'd only had a few very fast calls with Shuri and the Princess was definitely angry. Something had riled T'Challa up something awful and he was taking it out on unsuspecting council members who said ridiculous things.

The select committee had even been nervous to ask for their weekly report on the Rogues. He also hadn't updated the select committee either to his new development so he wasn't exactly in a position to berate the young King of concealing information, even if it was driving him crazy. They knew about most of his abilities but he had definitely played them down, especially his sight. As much as he dealt with the select committee, as much as he made it so the Accords could never be used to take away something like his suits or demand the formula, he was always weary. He did agree with the Accords, but he'd fought for people to have personal information for a reason, he forced it through that these people didn't need to give a perfect accounting of their abilities and weaknesses. If they were in the Avengers the only people that needed that information was team leaders and nobody could demand this information from them.
His technopathic abilities would be... Interesting for many people who would wish to use them, and sure he could reject missions, but if he rejected too many he would be lumped in with the other Avengers in a heartbeat. It was a careful tightrope he was walking. T'Challa was likely doing the same, harbouring international fugitives whilst technically doing as he was told. Politics, it rarely changes.

(Plus he really didn't want to give people more reasons to kidnap him. He hasn't been kidnapped since February, he was in a roll, Rhodey even had one of those X days since last kidnapping calendars in his room.)

The thing that had happened hadn't been from the outside however, no, that was just where T'Challa was venting his anger. It was in Wakanda and Tony was not going to hack Wakanda. So he bet it was the Rogues, which explained Barnes initial upset. He really wasn't going snooping however. He was making himself available to the royals and apparently was able to cheer up Barnes by sending things to the glasses in between memories. He wasn't sure why he was doing that. Or sending him messages and jokes.

The first time he'd done it, he'd been kind of freaking out in the drastic change in Barnes and had no idea what to do.

Then he remembered Shuri had spoke about the letter he sent. She hadn't read it, but apparently he'd written it on one of his free writing or drawing pages without realising, that and it had included some help with Peter's homework. Some biology study on birds and flight or something. He'd liked the birds apparently. Not entirely sure why, they were likely not very well drawn, so he'd quickly coded a programme based on his butterfly programme that was modeled after Stephey's magic residue, what, the butterflies were pretty, he was secure in his manliness to find butterflies pretty. After that had worked he'd started doing it more often and discovered Barnes seemed to like magpies. Which was why he was pushing a new magpie programme now.

He was just trying to be good to the patient. That was all.

He scrubbed his hand over his face, wondering what exactly was he doing?

When had this gotten away from him? He'd gone from potentially writing an algorithm to creating a, never before conceived, adaptive programme, that was basically based on him if he was honest. He was trying to replicate his pattern prediction and analysis, with that human intuition thrown in. As well as that, he was writing multiple augmented reality programmes for the man, to make him more comfortable? To make him happy? Oh and there were the messages, he'd occasionally throw one onto the glasses, there were limited responses he could give, but it had helped him write the screensavers. Oh and definitely don't forget the letters. He felt like a freaking kid in school with a penpal on the other side of the planet. Howard had never seen the point for such frivolous school activities, in the depths of his own mind, he could admit he was enjoying it, a little bit.

A crackle briefly drew his attention to the larger ball of electricity in his hand. He wasn't sure why, but he'd taken to running the sphere over his fingers as he guided the programme. It made him feel better and more comfortable running the programme, it also seemed to increase his reaction times and have a 34.2% to 39.6% difference, which was appreciative enough that he didn't consider not doing it. Plus, the electricity still made him think of happiness, safety and home. He had an inkling that it was a feeling Barnes was not accustomed too, he couldn't programme the feeling through his mind of course, but he hoped that maybe it made a difference?

Ugh. This was getting weird.

The triple beep that Barnes had worked out how to trigger, told him that he was done for the day.
He breathed a sigh of relief, and exhaustion. The man had been relentless today and was storming through multiple memories. He was actually drained by Barnes current can do attitude, 6 had been the max memories from before 'The Incident' as he was calling it.

He'd cleared 19 today another 5 that were uncleared. If he was exhausted he somehow bet the man was too, it was why he'd brought up the surprise magpie programme, to congratulate him. He had no idea if it was taken this way, but he liked to think so. He could see that he liked it, he wondered if it was concerning that he was learning how to read the man's moods so well through the code. He was only using the information for good at least.

When that was done he finally turned to the envelope on his desk. He was kind of scared to open it. When it arrived he recognised the handwriting instantly and was immediately reminded of the letter that he had sent to the man. When he'd been half asleep and he'd basically rambled on paper at the guy, he could feel his cheeks heat with a flush of embarrassment at what the man probably thought of him now. So he hadn't opened it, Shuri had also told him any letters he sends in return would go straight to Barnes, encouraging him to write back to this maybe?

Tony wasn't sure he wanted a pen pal. Nope, being honest, a small part of did. The part of him that as a kid came up with the schematics for Rover. He was surprised to find that part of him still existed, he had thought Howard had killed it. Out of all people, it was Barnes to breathe life into it, which didn't help Tony's general confusion.

He wasn't sure how he got into these situations.

'Sod it'

With that he ripped the letter open and found himself grinning at how the man opened his letter.

Dr Stark          13th October

(Aren't you a doctor, I looked online and you have more PhDs than I thought it was possible for a human to have. Why wouldn't people call you doctor?)

If it helps with the 'not expecting', I didn't think you would reply either, I am glad you did, and for a person who claims to hate writing, you have pretty writing and the sketchings and schematics on my back were really cool to look at. I liked the kittens around the edges, but I especially loved the birds, I like birds (as Shuri might have passed on), especially magpies but ravens too and I'm not going to ramble about birds. Sorry. (The screen savers you made are amazing!)

I'll have to remember that trick if I'm ever working with code again, it sounds like a fun challenge.

I know you didn't want to discuss Roger's, but do you mind telling me what you meant about pardons? The only time someone has talked about pardons is in Wakanda and I don't think that's what you mentioned.

I'm still not sure about the arm. It's hard to talk about in person, weirdly it's easier to talk about in on paper with you it's a bit complicated but the pain isn't bad, I'm fine! Shuri wants to make me a new one, and I think I'd like that, but I'm a bit nervous. I am dangerous enough with one arm. I'm also scared the pain would come back, it's so much better now, I wake up hardly being able to believe it. Plus, if it ever gets too bad I have plenty of books to catch up on!

I'm happy my apologies were helped, I'll try to be better about feeling guilt if you do the same. Your reaction in Siberia was completely human, I don't hold you at fault for what you did, but you
are forgiven too. Even if you weren't helping me get my mind back I don't hold it against you, but you are, and letting me actually choose, not deciding for me? Which means a lot given recent circumstances. It's definitely important in my life. I won't unload everything on you, things have been kind of tough lately. I was really down but then your screen savers really helped, its amazing and I bet it's helping loads of people.

We watched the interview, it definitely surprised some of the others. I'm sorry for my part in causing you to lose a limb and any other injuries, I know waking up with a metal arm can be jarring. To still feel it, expect it to be warm and then get surprised all over again when it's cold and hard. I hate that I was involved in causing another person to experience that, especially some one going to such lengths to help me.

Thank you for everything

James

Huh.

Again, he wasn't sure what to do about this and too much of it had him.. Flustered and utterly not blushing, so was not going to show Rhodey this, he'd never let him live it down. The man *really* liked his bird drawings. Also, magpies really had been a good choice apparently.

He'd been told by many people wanting things from him that he was great at X or Y. It rarely meant anything and he generally brushed it off as it was obvious false praise. Sure he was good at a lot of things, inventing was in his blood and he was pretty good at drawing when he got a chance, he just rarely used his artistic skills for anything outside of schematics or designing products. But Barnes... *James* sounded like he genuinely *enjoyed* them, just for the sake of looking at them. He shelved that for now as he didn't understand anything about it, including his feelings. He'd poke it later and maybe he'd understand it more.

The part about the pardons was a shock, but at the same time… was it really?

That Steve hadn't told his best pal that Tony had worked his ass off to get the man pardoned and help. Steve probably didn't even understand how Tony had not slept and overworked himself to get those damned pardon and to fix his little rampage. But then Steve didn't seem to understand why he couldn't just wander into Nigeria without telling anyone and start hunting people, he didn't even tell Maria who could have cleared the way for him. It just highlighted the fact that either he forgot the things Tony did for the team outside of blowing things up, or he never paid attention in the first place. Out of the many hurtful things Steve did to him, probably unintentionally, that one hurt more than most.

Plus, how many favours had he been forced to cash in? That he'd been hoarding for more important matters? All for *nothing* ! Steve just tossed it back to him as if it was nothing. His contributions that included politics were always seen as less, Tony had pushed that aside because Steve didn't understand Politics, it was something he could do to help his friend and team. Yet, the look Steve gave him, he hadn't realised Steve looked down on him for engaging on their level, no matter how hard he explained it, Steve believed that they should be above such things. Which is a lovely concept, Tony would absolutely love to never touch politics again but the world doesn't work like that, it's either get involved or be entirely at its mercy.
It was another situation that now he could see as the team setting him up for failure. They assume he and his money can do anything they need, then they attack him for using his money to do whatever he wanted.

A petty part of him wanted to tell James just what his best bud threw away, but that seemed like the action of someone just trying to drive a wedge between them. But, James said things weren't going well.. And the man did ask. He'd meant it when he told Shuri he'd go with the man's decisions.

'Oh he's James now is he? What makes you entitled to be so familiar with a man you nearly killed in your rage?'

Tony full body flinched. It had been a while since the little insidious voice of Howard/Steve had shown itself. He ignored it, his therapist had warned about arguing with it, starve it, she said. Give it no ammo. Plus, the guy signed his letter James, that meant something, surely? He waited but was surprised at the silence in his mind. He'd just state the facts to James, that would be fine, surely.

That bit about him not being in much pain could have been written by him, he never really told anyone about the pain the shroud and arc reactor caused. Even when he'd roll over in his sleep and wake up gasping because it was crushing his lung. He immediately shelved the knee jerk reaction to tell him about the first arc reactor in reply to James talking about his arm. He never really talked about, why would he want to talk about it with James? It was strange in a way, there weren't exactly many people with the kind of non consensual body modifications he and James had. He woke up with a car battery, James woke up with a torture device. James..

He understood. In a way no one else really had before and didn't that just give him the fluttering of hope or something. Even his metal had which was entirely his choice, occasionally it jarred him. He lived it, but sometimes it reminded him of hours in the cold, he wondered if James felt that? How long did it take for him to be found after the fall… He never expected to find a person who he could relate to about all this shit.

He was a mix of confused, what to do with this stuff that was wandering into emotional territory and kind of happy there was someone out there that got it, James was write about one thing, writing to him was easier than talking about it.

He was right about something being up in Wakanda. Not that this letter had actually told him anything about it.

It still kind of weighed on him that he was the only person who could treat him, if maybe he felt obligated. Dammit, maybe he shouldn't have replied, maybe he felt obligated to reply? He considered not replying to this but that seemed worse somehow. James obviously put a lot of himself into that letter, opening up about things being bad, and he really was wondering just what happened in Wakanda. He definitely wasn't analysing how good he felt knowing that he'd made a difference.

After he'd read it a few times he flipped it over, wondering if there would be any other drawings. There was a much bigger phoenix on the back this time, way more detailed and he figured that a lot of time must have gone into it. It was absolutely gorgeous. Maybe it was a gift for the pictures of the birds? The Cyrillic underneath it is titled <Pheonix> again, this time with another sentence beneath it.

<Who from the sacred ashes of his honour. Shall star-like rise as great in fame as he was.>

OK… that was different, pretty though, but he's never had adult people draw him stuff before, definitely not with quotes attached, and he's pretty sure it's meant to be her/she too. He still can't
explain the complete different handwriting too, there hadn't really been enough to run through a handwriting programme last time to see if it's the same person. Maybe there is enough this time. Or maybe that's the kind of thing normal people didn't do?

Even so, he found himself reaching for his notepad, he glanced at the lined paper and glared enough at it, not sure where to start, that a text from Shuri made him drop it when he jumped.

Princess Kitty

Noticed biggest problems were when you stopped coding directly, you thought about my idea yet?

You know who I am

Maybe. Me coding directly is a big difference that sending data. I'd be fully connected with him during the session.

More so than Shuri knew, his brain would be effectively hooking into the glasses as much as James, he wouldn't be seeing much. Just the same as now, and there wasn't really much difference between coding with his mind than his hands. It was just better and faster. It felt like a big deal though.

Princess Kitty

You worry too much, he'll be fine. Why don't you video chat with the guy. Then you can see him make the decision and you can personally try and scare him off?

That idea probably would have given him a panic attack not long ago. He sat, staring at the text, waiting for the panic to set in and when it doesn't come he's left slightly baffled. He wonders is it his therapy, working with James brain or maybe even the letters? He's not sure he wants to speak to him, does he? He tries to remind himself that he killed his mom... However, he really wasn't lying about that, the man was the weapon, he didn't have a choice. It feels selfish to blame him. Especially when he is likely responsible for severely hurting him. He fiddles with the letter, staring at the phoenix, how James spoke about finally getting to *choose* like it was precious and new... and finally he decided what he'd do.

You know who I am

You know what, go for it. I'll do it.

He reaches down to the floor to pick up the notepad, even if he's going to talk to the man, weirdly it feels easier and less terrifying on paper. What has his world come to? He scoops it up and makes a split second decision looking at the phoenix and grabs the blank pad instead.

Chapter End Notes
Took me ages to get this up, I kept dozing off when I was doing the final proof and formatting, so I'll definitely be combing over this tomorrow maybe, I hope it isn't too bad! I don't think I missed anything big though 😊

After prompting, I did the Tumblr thing, if you want cutesy pics of Loki and (Not so) Tiny Thor xD

My Tumblr
Tony POV

16 October

"Boss, you have a guest at reception."

"Is this another secret guest that you won't let me know about again?"

There was however someone due to turn up in three days. They also had a propensity to ignore Tony's schedules.

"Yes Boss!"

Carol and Rhodey glanced at each other, likely wondering who it could be this time. Considering the last time it was the king of Wakanda and everything, that's a pretty damned high bar to set. Carol scooped up Tiny Thor to take him over to Laura's where all the kids were right now, they'd just been having some time with themselves, Tony taking some more time to get past the therapist issue, reconnect and Rhody joined, making it like the old days at MIT. Plus a kitten.

"How about sending the mysterious visitor up here whilst Rhodey takes Thor's toys with Carol."

"Awww, I want to meet the mysterious person too."

"And you might, now shoo."

Rhodey looked like he was going to loiter, but a single look from Carol had him out of the door and over to Laura's in a second. It was actually quite impressive.

"Is it who I'm thinking of Fry?"

"Yes Boss, he's early."

He bounced on the balls of his feet before slipping his glasses on but left the hand covering off. Sure, he should be annoyed that the man could never stick to a schedule, he had a huge meeting to get ready for later, but he couldn't summon even a scrap of irritation. It didn't take long for the door to burst open either, and rather dramatically.

"Honey! I'm home!"

With that Deadpool pretty much launched himself at Tony. Instead of landing in a heap on the floor, like they usually did at DP's exuberant, full-bodied greetings. Tony caught him and the comical double take of the red and black masked man was hilarious.

"Oh didn't I mention? There have been a few changes."

Tony grinned and let a low voltage crackle on electricity travel down his arm, giving him a very low level zap.

"Oh now you've done it!"
His sunglasses were pulled off but didn't get much more of a huh and he had to laugh as DP tossed
them onto the couch. Out of everyone he knew that he had to tell about his changes, this was one
he hadn't been dreading at all, he'd been looking forward to it.

By the time Carol and Rhodey snuck back over to see the mysterious guest they'd been at it for a
while and neither Carol or Rhodey had expected to see them pretty much wrestling on the floor, DP
was sat on Tony, pinning him. DP stuck his head up at their entrance.

"Oh don't mind me, come in, come in! He's quite nice to sit on."

Tony took the opening and threw all his speed into flipping them. DP had worked out in a few
seconds that Tony healed a damned sight faster than before and had adjusted accordingly, he'd kept
his speed 'normal' however, so he could so that. Nothing in the apartment was broken, surprisingly.

"What the, how did you get so fucking fast!?"

"Um. Tony. Is this how you regularly greet people?"

"Holy fuck it's him."

Tony cackled, not sure at whose comment because they were all hilarious before high fiving DP
and the two of them jumped up at the same time. Rhodey looked slightly pale, Carol obviously had
no idea who he was.

"Na Carol. DP just likes to say 'Hi' by pouncing on people."

"Like you ever complain about having me on top."

DP didn't jump on his back this time, but he did practically drape himself over his shoulders like a
cat whilst leering. Tony directed him to the sofa and dropped down. He patted the masked man on
the head before calling Rhodey to come on. DP took this as permission to climb into Tony's lap
like a damned cat, or like a person with no understanding of personal space. He was pretty used to
it as he started inspecting his hand, running his fingers over the scar in what Tony knew was DPs
way of empathising. Another reason why DP has been even better for him after Afghanistan, he
didn't completely remove his problems with his scars, but the man knew how to help in a way no
one else could.

"Not at all dear, when you manage it, it's a cause for celebration! Come on in Sour Patch, you did
say you wanted to meet him."

With DP in his lap, one arm draped over his shoulders, he was drumming his fingers on the man's
legs. He wasn't sure how his friends would get along with the masked man. Even though he was
the last man that needed protecting, he always felt oddly protective. It went both ways and they'd
known to be downright ruthless when it came to the other.

"Awww, was it my emails that did it? Or the kitten?"

"Ah, so you are where Tiny Thor came from. Hi, I'm Carol."

Carol dragged the still stunned Rhodey into the room and offered her hand that was shaken with
his usual level of exuberance. So excessively. Tony was even starting to get a little dizzy from all
the colours, because dear Gods.

"So Tony, how many masked men do you know exactly?"
"I told you he collects crazy people."

"You realise that includes you too right Sour Patch? And not that many more? I don't think, I don't think Eddie counts as masked? Or does he?"

DP just cracked up at that, leaving Carol and Rhodey sort of confused. Rhodey eventually, mostly, recovered.

"Well, it's nice to meet the person who occasionally disappears Tony of the planet."

"Me? I'll have you know most of those trips we're his idea!"

"I'm still not taking the blame for Norway."

"You were so at fault for Norway."

"You chose to steal that damned helicopter!"

"And you tried to land it on an iceberg!"

"And it would have worked if you hadn't jumped out! Have you ever tried to emergency land a damned Helicopter on an iceberg with a person dangling out of the side? Plus I landed it, didn't I."

"I wanted to feel the wind in my hair! I'm not sure you should really call that a landing.."

"Was it in the sky? Nope, landed. You just wanted to set the damned explosives before me.."

"I'm not sure if I want to know about this story or if it's better not knowing…?"

Both of them stopped their bickering at the same time to face Rhodey.

"Damn that's creepy."

"I'm Deadpool BTW, been meaning to drop by for a while. But this guy thought me and Captain Stick-up-his-ass might not get along. I'm sure we'd have been right ol' chums!"

Carol still looked slightly baffled. There were some benefits of introducing someone like DP to someone like Carol. She'd been off planet long enough that she had no idea who the hell he was. However she was taking in Rhodey's shock and was a little weary. Rhodey was rarely shocked regarding Tony's antics. At the same time, she'd also met Stephy, so the bar was already set for Tony bringing home strange people like powered, sarcastic cats.

"So, are you considering joining our little group?"

"Deadpool is a bit of an… outside contractor?"

"Outside contractor, is that what you're calling me. See what I have to put up with!"

"For now darling, just for now, Carol and Platypus want me to head my own team and you popped into my mind."

Which of course caused DP to leer and switch to his patented leer.

"Wonder what I was doing there?"

Tony shoved him before grinning at Carol.
"I've been on a number of... expeditions with this one. Some downright impossible too."

"You mean like that time in Egypt?"

"Where you nearly collapsed an ancient statue on me? Yup. Like that."

"Well maybe you shouldn't stand under things that could fall on you! Ever think about that?"

Tony shoved him after that, after he squeaked and fell on the floor, he immediately pounced, knocking Tony onto his back on the sofa and began pummelling him with a cushion. Carol watching on in confusion, Rhodey was visibly questioning his life choices. When Tony could stop laughing for a second he executed one of Nat's favourite moves. Carol and Rhodey were utterly baffled how they then switched to sitting back with Tony's arm flung over his shoulder downright cuddling.

"I have actually worked out an Accords contract like we discussed, it's very different to the normal and doesn't technically bar your... Extracurriculars. The select committee figures if you're with me things will be less crazy."

"Extracurriculars, is that what the cool kids are calling it these days?"

"Mhmm, can you believe they think I'm going to be a calming influence on you?"

Which is highly amusing because he's pretty sure crazier things happen when they're together. But as far as most people know, Tony and DP have never met. Rhodey drops his head into his hands.

"Loki is laughing at me somewhere."

"Aww, it's OK Ro-Ro."

"Please don't call me that again.."

"Oh Sour Patch. When will you learn? What's the rule with me and annoying nicknames?"

Tony snickers, knowing his best friend is likely doomed to be called that for the rest of his days, telling DP not to call him that, it's about as bad as telling him to stop calling him Sour Patch. DP who is bouncing up and down slightly in glee before grabbing hold of Tony's face, turning it this way and that, in a similar fashion that he did his hand. Rhodey was satz pretty shocked seeing that Tony was not only allowing it but smiling at his antics. In his defense, it had been a while and he's missed his partner in all things crazy.

"What is with your glowing eye anyway. I'm pretty sure you didn't have that when we were in Russia in April?"

"You were in Russia in April?"

"Only for a few days Sourpatch, there was this thing with a gang and killer clowns and irradiated bombs. I'm assuming you know at least something about Siberia?"

"Of course. What do you take me for? A man with personal boundaries or something? Also whhhy won't you let me unalive Rogers? It would be fun. You can make me something new and sharp. We can make a romantic getaway of it!"

Carol was now actively squinting as DP had started talking a sing-song wistful voice about assassinating an American hero. Tony was amused to see that Rhodey was now struggling not to
laugh, now the initial shock had passed. As straightlaced as Rhodey seems, the man had been his best friend for decades. No one ever seemed to notice, but he thrives on the chaos just as much as he does. He just hides it better. His chosen family, the closest for him to consider them his three brothers were Rhodey, Stephy and DP.

It didn't make the others less friendly, there just tended to be a point where Tony recruited people as family. There wasn't a single one way, and Carol had become mom where Nat was sister. After a certain point in his mind, things switched. Eddie was pretty close though, his passenger was much closer however. It didn't mean he liked any of the others less, right now Tony had more people he actually trusted than at any point in his life. It was not, at all, completely overwhelming and terrifying. There were just so many people he trusted his life with. Rhodey, Stephy and DP however, he trusted his secrets to them. He trusted them to know the real him. He was getting there with Nat surprisingly.

"I'll make you something shiny and sharp if you leave the wall of muscle be for now."

"He nearly killed you."

It was the first thing the masked man had said in a more serious voice that had Carol and Rhodey doing a double take at the sheer venom of it.

"Just a teeny, tiny, mini unaliving? We could even try to remove the stick up Captain Tightwads ass!"

And the serious tone was gone.

"Eh, I did the nearly dying thing you did, and now I can do shit like this. Much more interesting"

He sent and large surge of electricity to curl around his flesh arm. And DP did the obvious thing that you do when someone sees electricity. He stuck his hand in it. Tony just laughed as he was thrown clear across the room. Smashing against a wall, thankfully clear of photos. Carol jumped up in a panic to make sure he was okay. Rhodey knew enough to know he'd be fine so just sat, trying to hide his laugh behind his hand.

"I'm OK! I'm OK! Oooo that was fun. Do it again!"

Carol just dropped down on the sofa, shaking her head and giving Tony a look. He just sent a zap at DP, it was actually good practice for throwing the electricity. It was also better than DP creating an international incident by breaking into Wakanda.

"Mmmm, you're making me tingly!"

"Tones, is this why you make everything weird? Great. There's two of them."

He grinned whilst mentally sending Carol the file he'd prepared, so she'd understand just what he was like, and any relevant information for the teams, it wasn't available to anyone but Carol and Rhodey. Same as his other potential recruits.

Carol and Rhodey had been poking him about becoming a team leader and the first few names that popped into his head where the kind of people no one would likely want on their team. Managing a guy like DP was probably as fun as managing a guy like himself. However he'd spent years forced to the edges, told he was never a team player, so he knew how to find others like him, how to work with the people no one wanted in their team. He'd worked with all of them. Sometimes in groups. So far, the only two people he'd contacted were DP and Eddie. He was considering asking Nathan too. Maybe Logan could occasionally pop over. Gods know what kind of missions they'd go on, but
"It would make an interesting team to say the least."

"Come on DP, you want the tour and to see your room?"

"But I can already see my room from here."

"If I wake up to you cuddling my pillow again, I'll sleep electrified."

"That just sounds like encouragement."

Tony rolled his eyes and scooped him up, tossing him over his shoulder.

"Wave to mom and dad. Stop using my arse as a drum."

"Bye mom and dad!"

**Carol POV**

She watched as Tony yanked the black and red masked man up and pulled him from the room over his shoulder as they left. Continuing discussions that she wasn't sure she wanted to be privy to whilst Deadpool continued drumming and occasionally singing. Also, what kind of name was Deadpool? Who asks to be electrocuted?

"Did all that just happen? Because I'm not sure what just happened or if this is just an immensely weird dream."

"Oh yeah. Tony has met some… colourful people over the years. He used to keep them separate, people like Deadpool have an interesting past."

"What changed?"

"Siberia. Ever since Tony has been blurring the lines more than ever. I'm happy for him, even if it means crazy mercs and sarcastic wizards are lurking around the house. He was always nervous that certain people in his life wouldn't approve of them and he'd be forced to choose."

"That would be horrible, I'm assuming you mean the old team."

"Mmhhmm. For Stephen and DP he was very against them meeting Steve. I pointed out that people in the team were not perfect, it had ex-assassins and ex hydra agents for god's sake. But you know how protective Tony is with people he loves."

"That's why he's been working on these specialised contracts it seems?"

"Yes, the select committee went with his idea of creating a… unique team? People like Deadpool. People no one wants on their team. I think they only went with it because they think he can control the uncontrollable. He can't, it just looks like it because he gives them what they want, chaos. He could probably get Loki on his team… I really hope I didn't just Jinx myself there."

She pulled up the file Tony had sent her on Deadpool and just spent a few minutes scrolling through, not quite sure what to say.

"So… when he asked about killing Roger's.. He wasn't joking was he?"
"Oh no. Definitely not. They've been friends through a lot of bad, the fact he's offering to kill him for free and asking Tony's permission is quite shocking."

"So, you knew about him?"

"Sort of? Tony was always careful that I had plausible deniability because of the Airforce. That's not an issue now so he's been telling me more, especially after he wrangled these contracts."

"So... damn it I have to ask. Do you have any idea what happened in Norway?"

"Not a damned clue, Tony occasionally disappeared. He would completely vanish for several days, off grid, with a cover set up somewhere else. He'd come back exhausted with something, but he never showed me what. Norway, I think he came back singed, with no eyebrows and a few burns muttering about lava if I remember correctly."

She just blinked at that because she had no idea what that could be or what Tony could possibly be up to. The notes attached to the file she was flicking through however were... interesting? There were two other files, she didn't know if she wanted to open them. It looked like he'd pulled Natasha's name onto this team too.

"He's sent two other files a Nathan and an Eddie? Know them?"

"Vaguely. He's spoken about Eddie a few times, I think he's a reporter? He's also according to Tony, overly protective of him occasionally. Something about his other half finding him tasty? I have no idea."

"Well they can't be worse than Deadpool, surely?"

"Carol! Why did you say that!?"

"I don't know! I regretted the words as I said them!"

They both looked at the unopened files nervously chuckled.

**Nat POV**

Nat had been in the main weapons room for about an hour now, going through inventory to ensure everything was where it was meant to be and in top form. FRIDAY monitored everything but she liked to double check occasionally, it also doubled as a check for maintenance and cleaning. It was boring work for most people, but running a blade along a whetstone was relaxing, and FRIDAY enjoyed going through everything. It was also a way of working, giving back, giving her a purpose. It had also how she and FRIDAY had become friends of a sort.

When she'd first come back she'd been on uneven footing with the new members. Trying to be real whilst being disliked automatically had been hard and she'd found her way here one night. FRIDAY had asked her what she was planning and had not believed her intentions, but she'd come back the following week and after 3 weeks FRIDAY started asking her questions. She'd never seen Tony's AIs as anything more than useful technology to occasionally hack. But FRIDAY became REAL to her in those weeks, they started talking more and she didn't know how to admit it to anyone, but she'd become her best friend. She helped her with identifying emotions and she listened and never judged her. It made her look back at her previous actions with FRIDAY and JARVIS with something akin to guilt, and maybe loss that she'd never truly gotten to know JARVIS.
She shook her head and added more water to her whetstone before continuing the steady work with the knives. The sound calmed her, the vibrations in her hands steadied her and FRIDAY presence made her feel safe and in the present. Not losing herself to the melancholy of the past.

She heard Tony's exuberant voice long before he came into sight, another voice was with him that she didn't immediately recognise. Tilting her head to one side she ran it through her memory.

It was familiar somehow, but it wasn't a person she had met, maybe been near or spied on? She couldn't place it, but they were heading this way so she'd find out soon enough. Tony sounded very happy, practically bouncing off the walls with energy and talking a mile a minute about the compound and.. Unicorns.

She hadn't heard him talk like this often, usually he would catch himself and stop because few people could follow him. It was an action that had once perplexed her and one that she used to her benefit, encouraging him to ramble about things that she could later use. Knowing he would do it because so often people didn't stop to listen to him. Now, whenever he caught himself about to info dump and stopped, avoiding eye contact with whoever he was talking to, it made her sad.

The person he was with however seemed just as excitable and hyperactive, they didn't halt their conversation and volleyed back and forth with an ease and speed she had not witnessed before. Watching Tony and Stephen speak was quite entrancing and borderline terrifying as their intellects would move with each other, each pushing the other further and further in a strange, occasionally sarcastic, snarling battle of wit and will. Tony and Rhodey had an ease, an air of comfort and happiness, where occasionally Rhodey brought his often unnoticed sharp intelligence into play. It was with him Tony turned soft and smiled, a time he could slow down and just be. They were both balms to Tony's mind she knew, as he'd spent so many years just being misunderstood.

Some people struggled to talk to Tony, his pattern recognition and intelligence could occasionally have him jumping ahead in the conversation and his utter lack of social skills when he wasn't paying the socialite shark or the genius, billionaire, playboy philanthropist would usually leave people frustrated. But they usually went away getting what they had wanted, if not something better than they requested, but their frustration usually won and they rarely thanked him for giving them exactly what they needed. It was a sad fact that many people only spoke to him because they wanted something, then, even though they got what they requested, they let their frustration be known. It had taken her a while to see this pattern, she'd originally believed it was intentional, but here she'd seen the mask crack and see the Tony who just wanted validation looking out, not understanding why, even when he gave his best that people disliked him as a person.

So, even though she was pretty sure Tony and this newcomer were having at least 3 disjointed conversations at the same time. That none of them seemed to make sense. Tony sounded joyful, like he was finally letting something loose that he dared non free in front of others. Like Rhodey and Stephen, this person was precious in a way to Tony.

Which of course meant that she was really intrigued now. She continued with her busy work as Tony rounded the corridor first, being shoved into a wall but bounced back grinning and sweeping the others legs from beneath him causing a large crash as the stranger went down laughing.

Tony looked oddly like a hyperactive teen, even though she had become accustomed to Tony's new look, now he looked even younger somehow. It was the utter carefree look on his face that was so different to the other sides she had seen of him. She had met many sides of Tony's extremely compartmentalised personality, but she had a feeling that seeing this was a rare privilege.

The pair were sort of sparring whilst walking and chatting. She still had not expected the other person to then jump onto Tony's back, then demand he carry him the rest of the way as his
'graceful steed'. At first she just saw a flash of a red and black suit, but it wasn't exactly odd to see people in the compound suited up like this, for a multitude of reasons. It took her longer than she would admit to put a name and file to man. But her excuse was that out of all the people she expected Tony to stroll towards the weapons room, Deadpool hadn't even been a tiny possibility. The Deadpool. And Tony was giving him a piggyback ride.

How on earth did Tony know someone like Deadpool?

How were they so familiar with each other?

It took Tony a lot of time to get to this stage with a person, he also was not hiding any of his augmentations, so this was not a new friendship, especially as she had likened him to Rhodes and Stephen! Although their friendship would make Tony's apparent ease around her and Clint make a lot more sense in the beginning. Most people, knowing their line of work, took a while to warm up to them, even Steve had. Where as Tony had just treated them as people right off the bat. How had she missed this before? His immediate reaction to Bruce too, she'd just put these to an eccentric genius personality, but now she wondered, where assassins and rage monsters normal to him in some way?

"Natka!"

"Why aren't you making horsey noises?"

"Because, contrary to popular belief, you are not actually 6."

The two entered the room and the only reason she didn't stand there gaping was years and years of training. Also, years of being around Tony Stark helped.

"Tony, I didn't expect you today, aren't you meant to be getting ready for a meeting?"

"Yup, that's why I've been looking for you, I was wondering if you could finish showing this man child around. Hey! No biting!"

Even with her training, she just blinked for a second. Because this made extremely little sense. Yes, she had begun to accept there was more to the engineer than she had ever suspected. More than Fury had ever suspected. Especially post Siberia. It seemed like Tony had shed his masks. (Looking back, she should have found it suspect that Tony literally ticked every box for textbook narcissism.)

However, whilst she had begun to expect the unexpected, snarky Sorcerers with levitating cloaks, flying space women landing on the front lawn… being Sharon's cousin… There was a lot around here that baffled her, but she really had not even thought to consider that the mercenary they had spent actual years, tons of money and countless man hours by many agents… her included, just trying to write a basic profile on the man, was just hanging on Tony's back. Apparently trying to bite his ear through his mask, as if is was the most normal thing in the world. She was going to get the list of interesting people SHIELD couldn't get a read on and ask Tony how many of them he knew and if he was the reason SHIELD missions failed around them.

"Sure Tony, I'd love to."

"Awesome, DP arrived early and threw my schedule off. I'd electrocute him again, but he likes it."

"Go on, one more time before you abandon me to this terrifying woman."

Tony just rolled his eyes but at the same time his right eye, the one that was still brown, flashed
brightly blue as electricity crackled up both of his arms to his shoulders. With a high enough voltage to hurl the mercenary of his back several feet until he skidded to a stop down the hall. She was pretty sure that would have killed most people. The smell of ozone was sharp and Deadpool was actually smoking slightly. Tony seemed unconcerned stood in front of her, smiling, even though she knew that was a much higher voltage that she'd ever seen him wield before. Tony's abilities were advancing to make him extremely formidable, which of course made her smile right back. Deadpool then bounced to his feet and skipped back into the room happily. Which was just bizarre.

"Mmmm, tingly."

"Can I trust you to not break my compound?"

"Tony, what damage could little old me do?"

"Two words DP. Hong Kong."

"That was not my fault!"

Tony just chuckled before waving and turning to head back the way they came, calling out over his shoulder.

"It never is!"

And with that she was now left with Deadpool. As soon as Tony turned the corner, the man's stance changed and his attention snapped to her.

"He has told me a lot about you over the years little spider. He trusts you, but I have to know. If Rogers turned up tomorrow, would you go to him?"

"No."

"Good, good. I wouldn't want to get blood all over this nifty room. He would definitely sulk."

She tilted her head to one side, and although he was wearing a suit and it was hard to get a read on him. That sentence rang true in her mind. That he wouldn't have any problem with killing her wasn't a surprise, given his reputation. That he'd known Tony for years and would kill for him was.

"Why don't you tell me some stories about Tony and I'll show you all the interesting places?"

"Lead on Itsy-bitsy."

She rolled her eyes at the nickname, it brought her good memories of the past however. Warm nights in Tony's workshop with Clint, eating Russian pastries as Tony worked up a storm. Memories she hoarded like a dragon.

**Tony POV**

It didn't take him long to get back to his room, Carol and Rhodey were bent over a single tablet reading the files that he had sent to both of them. It was amusing seeing them pressed so close, brushing hands, occasionally then blushing like a bunch of teens. The UST was strong with the pair.
"I'm back. I dropped DP off with Natka so I could get changed. Are you two coming to this meeting or am I going alone?"

"Meeting?"

Rhodey's confusion was adorable.

"Yup. I'm meeting Xavier to discuss the Accords and protections for powered minors remember? I have an idea that we can leverage it to eventually hack apart the remains of that horrible mutant act here."

"Tones. I utterly forgot, I scheduled a meeting with the Executive Council today."

"Oh, about what?"

"Oh it's nothing huge, just annoying little things, you know how it is."

Tony could See that it was wasn't little, even though his mind was still a little overloaded with DPs exuberance. He was going to have to work up to spending longer durations with DP. He'd asked him to describe his colours and Tony's best description so far was a unicorn vomited around him. With strange white and yellow flashes here and there. He was just impressed he didn't pass out.

He considered questioning Rhodey, or even looking harder, but decided to trust Rhodey and go with it. He didn't *need* to know everything, he didn't need to be involved in everything. He could let Rhodey take on whatever problem as the man could clearly handle it. It was difficult for him, to just sit back and occasionally let others help him, but he was working on it.

He decided to concentrate on his current issue, he and Xavier had been trying to match up their calendars for ages now. This wasn't even a full meeting, barely an hour so they could outline a few things and so he could convince the man he was not that bad. He was concerned that with the Civil War and him going against Captain Spangles would cause more problems, it already had. SI had lost 6 huge contracts across the board, with companies willing to pay fees to break the contracts because they didn't want to be seen as siding with him against Captain America. It was pathetic and childish. There had been a number of small supplier issues too.

Pepper had roasted them in the business world, getting new contacts elsewhere hadn't been as difficult as he'd suspected, some people on the fence were now squarely in his garden. It was a gain some, lose some game, with big cheques to break contracts early. He very *publicly* donated the contract breaking fees to charities too, which had helped with the crushing of their businesses that Pepper embarked on. Occasionally being petty was fun.

Carol had been surprised he was so willing to meet the man, what with him being a telepath and all and his experience with the Witch and the Empath. True, the idea of having people in his mind wasn't something he relished, but as a rule he was pretty trusting of mutants, it was only after they messed with him he got pissed, same with any powered person really. He and the empath were just badly matched, his ability made hers fucking terrifying as he could See her pushing emotions around. He still had no idea how he rebounded that surgery of emotions and honestly he wasn't really trying that hard. Seeing them was enough for him.

His father however, had hated mutants with a burning passion, deemed them less than human, and everyone knows what people are capable of when they seem a group as less than human. Human experimentation was bad, but if they're less than human? And it's for the betterment of humanity? It's all hunky dory and *anything* goes.
Especially to be a successful weapons developer during the Cold War.

Howard got… let's say, creative.

Erskine had set his father down a path of human experimentation = good! As long as it's for a cause. Put that together with Howard's extremely high intellect, lack of empathetic tendencies and low emotional intelligence… let's just say it was a dangerous combination that wore down that line of what shouldn't be messed with. Howard's replicated serum had been partially based on healing mutant abilities and Gods know what else. He'd not looked into most of that research after he found it, a cursory look over had shook him enough that he'd flung it to the depths of his vault. He would have simply torched it, but JARVIS had encouraged him to keep it just incase complications arise in the future and he'd have to look into it. Thankfully nothing had come of it.

Even though Howard was ostensibly the dick in that equation, he had been the one with the passionate, burning hatred after all. Howard ran the line that the mutants were at fault. Tony assumed it was born from simple jealousy at first, but it had reached fanatical levels by the time he was born. So he couldn't even say that Howard had been nice at some point before he spiralled in his never-ending quest for Captain America. Steve thought so, but he just couldn't put the man Steve spoke of with the man he knew. Maybe events changed him. Even so, Steve had literally been a subject in the man's experiments. Tony wasn't sure he could like a person doing that to him, even if it turned out well.

All of that had never spread to Tony, well, not the mutant hatred, Howard's fanaticism affected him and it wasn't something he enjoyed thinking about. Just as his crazed drunken rantings and never ending search for Captain America spilled onto him, even if it was just him barely being present. As soon as the company was his and he was more in control, rates for hiring mutants sky rocketed and SI and its subsidiaries now made up all 10 of the top 10 companies for equality in hiring across the board. Plus, he knew other telepaths, he'd worked with one quite often over the years and he knew that he was hard to get a read on, and that was before Extremis, simply because of how his brain worked. Separating the feeds as it were, took time and effort. It was going to be interesting what Xavier thought of him.

He hadn't really been scared of Wanda reading his thoughts, he knew she struggled with it anyway, or at least claimed to struggle. All he had to do was amp up his parallel thinking and she got a migraine, scowled at him and moved on. It was her uncanny ability to find everything bad in his life and make him relive it over and over in his dreams that had him equal parts hating her and being terrified of her. It was how she could manipulate and push people. That nothing was sacred, almost blissfully faded memories of being so young and Howard could become as clear as yesterday, the phantom pain of Yinsens hands in his chest, the embarrassment of her forcing the memories of falling for Sunset when he'd been 15, so much more. Some stuff he barely remembered and he'd been left not knowing if they were real memories or if she'd implanted them. At the time he hadn't been sure it was even her and he had worried that maybe he had officially lost it. One step too far into the darkness. One traumatic event too far.

It had left him obsessing about events, wishing they were fake until he discovered evidence and was left reeling all over again. Or being convinced something was real, obsessing and even changing things to discover it never happened. Sometimes the event was real, but the outcomes were different. All the while Steve insisted over and over that she was doing nothing and that his cruel accusations were hurting her.

Now he had proof he had expected vindication, but all he felt was tired.

They were slowly fading back again, especially since Stephy scrubbed his brain clean, but they
were months away instead of the years, in some cases, decades away. His memories stored more like a computer these days so they'd never fade like human memories would have.

He made a point to try and bury all his memories of Wanda down however, behind many, many firewalls. Barring Stephy's invitation into his mind, he actually hadn't met a new telepath since having the Witch in his brain. Nathan had been very busy that year and he'd been trying to be good for Pepper. He was pretty sure it wouldn't be an issue, Xavier and Wanda couldn't be much more different. Shaking his head he slipped on a flight suit. If he was going alone he figured he'd fly himself, forming the nanites into his current favourite red Tom Ford-esque suit, black shirt and gold silk tie with arc reactor coloured sunglasses.

He shouted his goodbyes to the lovebirds, hearing shouts that they were not love birds, because they were horrendously stubborn, and headed for his balcony. He switched the suit to the armour and took off. It wouldn't take long to get to his destination so he had a more languid flight. Throwing a few loops in here and there. Stretching out his technopathy to just brush against tech as he passed, just feeling, not entering. The city was alive in a way it had never been before, power lines were like veins he could follow, feeling a pleasant hum as tech almost reached out for him, despite not being like his AI children, he still get something in the way of feelings from tech. Good if it was working well, less so the more damaged or broken it was. It was probably the product of a human brain trying to interpret things it was never meant to, but he liked it.

If he possibly pushed the internet speed up a little when he passed colleges and schools, no one had to know. Same as his gentle tweaks over poorer areas that would find their electricity bills lowered, not too much that big companies might notice, but maybe enough to give families a little leeway. He'd learnt not to throw himself at over-helping now, it freaked people out, but it didn't take away his drive to do so. Little nudges that no one could track back to him that would make everyday people's lives a little easier, it released the pressure that built up in his head that often urged him to use his abilities. He hadn't told anyone about this new hobby of his, he could maybe pass it off as training, but he could train in other ways. He had expected to plateau again with his technopathy, and he did generally. But as soon as he pushed a little harder he snapped back onto a curve and he was thrilled by how much he had access to but he was a touch nervous about where it ended.

It hadn't been long since he'd started training with various team members, he was now speeding along again thanks to them and his extracurriculars. Carol was convinced that the breakthroughs had as much to do with him accepting his new augmentations as a part of him, as a good thing rather than something given to him without his consent. Rather than a thing that made him less human, something that honesty still plagued him. Carol didn't understand why it seemed to be such a fear for him, but she accepted it was and made it her mission to combat. As a person who had been altered and changed whilst unconscious she got that, even though their circumstances were not even remotely the same. Rhodey vs Alien who then brainwashed you? Yikes.

She'd told him about how her powers had been restricted and her memories altered too, she'd really opened up but hadn't forced him to do the same. Telling him she had all the time in the world to wait him out, whether he told her tomorrow or next year, that was fine with her. It was baffling. Hearing about when she really fought, realised who she really was had enthused him somewhat, that she just knew how to do so much more, it seemed to be similar to him. Some stuff seemed to come so naturally it scared him sometimes, the electrokinesis felt like an old friend, like a limb he'd been missing for his entire life. Like it finally slotted back into place which was faintly ridiculous given he obviously had never had weird electro powers before.

For other abilities it was a long process of trial and error between him and Bruce, but that wasn't a foreign concept to them, and if they could be as interested in version 76 of the Hulks new stretchy
shorts as version 1? Then applying the same tenacity to him and his abilities was easy. Bruce even had spreadsheets to map his technopathy. He'd taken his role so seriously in fact, Harley was grudgingly starting to like him as the kid had been the same. Between the two of them and his therapist he was starting to feel good about it.

He still couldn't turn off the vision, but he didn't get sucked in by strangers much now. He could skim across the surface like a Corixa Punctata. Not being caught up in the current or smashed on rapids and dashed upon the rocks… and yeah, he'd already taken that metaphor too far.

With people he knew well, it was a little harder now... The more open he was willing to be with them about himself, had a knock-on effect of them being more open to him. It was a complete flip to a month ago, where strangers were more problematic than people he knew well.

There were a lot of kids outside as he approached, waving at him, he shocked them when he slowed and landed. Likely thinking he was just flying by. He walked up to the school, the suit transforming back to his suit and placing the sunglasses on his face as he waved to the kids. Their colours were an absolute riot! Even more so than most of the kids he'd met! They were like vibrating rainbows. One was like snow and ice in the sun, sparkling brightly and throwing of rainbows of fractured light. There was pain in these kids, sadness but there was so much hope it was staggering, he'd seen adults with a fraction of the strength these kids had. He blinked rapidly and pushed ahead as readings started flying in from all directions.

Warren ran up to him as he opened the door, before he actually had a chance to see anything he was pulled into a bone crushing hug, his wings flaring out dramatically around him before curling protectively around Tony.

"You aren't allowed to nearly die anymore."

"Hey Little Sparrow, look, I'm fine!"

"Uncle Tony, I haven't seen you in months!"

"I know, I'm sorry, I wasn't up to being out and about, wasn't safe."

"What do you mean? Are you not recovered from your coma?"

The wavering in his voice made Tony squeeze him arms.

"I didn't want to tell you over text, and I have to see Xavier, so we'll talk properly after. But Uncle Rhodey had to use Extremis to save me, so I had a few new abilities to get used to before being safe around people."

He didn't pull the sunglasses off, but he did drop them down his nose, allowing his left eye to be partially visible. He nodded in complete understanding that Tony treasured like the gift it was, but then he knew all too well that out of anyone on the planet who could potentially understand what he was going through? Mutants were at the top of the list. He knew several, even a few that lived here, he'd just never actually met Xavier.

It hadn't been a conscious decision to avoid the man, but Howard had spoken about him, a lot. Even with Howard's hatred of mutants, along with telling him Captain America would hate him, he'd also said even a mutant like Xavier would hate him, Howard had a broken track record in than everyone would dislike him for some reason or another. Looking back it was obvious that Howard's need to have a perfect heir warred with his need to be the smartest person in the room.

It was also probably done in an attempt to foster Tony's hatred with mutants. As a kid he couldn't
understand why he loved a powered individual like Captain America and disliked mutants. Even with the man being dead there were still traces of his influence everywhere, stopping him without him realising what he was doing. Howard was just a bully of his past, but his voice still infiltrated his mind occasionally. So he was a bit nervous to meet the man, he knew Howard had after all, and given his experiences meeting people Howard had, it could go a few ways. He'd fixed many of Howard's machinations over the years, either intentional or plain dumb and accidental, most recently with Wakanda for example. But with Xavier, he had no idea what he was walking into. He had no idea what Howard had done with Xavier. Were they actually friends or did they hate each other?

"It's okay Uncle Tony, I understand, but afterwards, we can fly and you can tell me everything."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world, now, want to show me to Professor Xavier?"

He could find the man himself, he had a blueprint of the school in his mind stored, he could also feel the hum of technology in the school and it wouldn't take long to locate the man's chair. But he figured he'd go the old-fashioned route and have an excuse to walk with Warren. He was pretty grown now, but to him he'd always be the adorable kid that used to hide from his father during Galas. He had literally ran into Tony during one and he'd seen so much of himself in the kid that he even skipped alcohol when he was present, telling the bartender to fix it so his drinks looked alcoholic. He had to keep up his reputation but he also brought things for Warren. Just random little kid stuff, colouring books and he taught him to draw whilst hiding out on balconies. He'd grown and they'd stayed close, then suddenly he'd vanished.

Tony had been pretty apathetic by then, but Warren disappearing and discovering the fire at his dormitory had caused genuine fear like he hadn't felt since he was a kid. His father then disowning him, pretending he never existed had honestly brought out the Merchant of Death in him. He'd warned the man to back off after that, if he disowned him? Fine, he was Tony's now and under his protection. It had taken an annoyingly long to track him down, but he hadn't expected to find a winged, costumed crime fighter. He'd berated Warren for not coming to him but that cracked when he'd told him that he'd been too nervous, worried Howard's hatred of mutants was shared by Tony. He shook off the memories and slung an arm around Warrens waist, because everyone seemed to be giants in Tony's life. It wasn't because he was short, they were all just freakishly tall.

They passed a few people on the way, some just waved, nodded. A few did a double take that Tony Stark was wandering their halls. A few who knew him just smiled at his closeness with their winged friend. It was a shame Birdbrain2.0 had gone with Rogers, introducing another winged flyer to Warren would have been nice.

"Ah, Dr Stark, I'm happy you could make it."

"Dr Xavier, or do you prefer Professor? It's great to finally meet you."

"Charles would be fine."

"Then you have to call me Tony. Everyone seems to be calling me doctor lately, it's bizarre."

He dropped himself in the seat opposite the man, waved at Warren as he closed the door for them, he knew he wouldn't be going far and it did wonders for his anxiety. He tried to streamline his thoughts, he didn't want to make a bad impression or give the guy a migraine but he was also kind of nervous and when that happens, his thoughts tend to go off on their own. In this case he was mentally taking apart his wheelchair and building an improved model based on Rhodey's design whilst trying not to think about Warren and failing.
"Maybe people are finally noticing your achievements? If you don't mind my asking, are you telepathic?"

"Oh? No, no, not telepathic. I get that a lot from telepaths. I'm not so much blocking you, this is just how I think. I'm actually trying to tone it down."

"So it's normal for you to be thinking of several things at once?"

"Pretty much, in the interest of full disclosure, I do have some other abilities, many I'm keeping under wraps but I believe you'd understand that?"

"Of course, is that why you are suddenly interested in fighting for the rights of those not baseline human?"

"Oh no, I've been doing that for years, just without my name added to it as it would have been detrimental to the organisations at the time. The Sparrow and Cloud Walker Foundations are actually run by me. Howard was a known anti mutant hatemonger, and I spent years undoing his prejudice in my company but I had to keep the Stark name out of the foundations or they'd never have been able to help people. They're mostly independent anyway, I just make sure they're funded and well staffed, occasionally direct them. Warren mostly runs The Sparrow Foundation now."

He slipped his glasses off at that and he wasn't sure if the shock on the man's face was due to the revelation of his foundations or his eyes. Or maybe the nanites that collapse and vanished into his sleeve. Charles colours were definitely interesting, but he was noticing mutants seemed to have a little extra now. Sort of like how he sometimes saw abilities in people's colours. Charles overall feel was extremely comforting, like all the stress he'd felt for being different and now being changed was being drained out of him, just being in the man's presence and his colours washing over him. It wasn't intrusive like the empath or Wanda, it was more passive. Like him, turning of his telepathy wasn't on the cards.

"I'm impressed, those foundations have helped us a lot. We knew your company is well known for equal hiring policies, but we were unsure."

"If it was a goodwill gimmick? I get that. Howard wasn't exactly quiet on the hatred front."

"If you don't mind me asking, what caused your new abilities to manifest?"

Siberia instantly flashed in his mind, the video, the fight, the pain.. The shield crunching down, Rogers walking away, abandoning him to a slow agonising death without a glance back, and then the cold, going on and on. He shivered and tried to force it back, raising his temperature to comfort himself. From the look of shock, anger and sympathy on Charles face, he saw all of it.

"Ah, sorry, I, uh, I didn't mean to do that."

"That was the clearest image I've got since you entered the room and started redesigning my chair. Rarely are images so vibrant and detailed, I didn't know the Civil War had been so.. Brutal. I'm sorry that you had to go through that, leaving a man behind, especially in that situation was deplorable. We had heard of your coma of course, but little else."

It still shocked him, people's response to what happened in Siberia. From how the Avengers had flocked to Cap and how he still had fans despite being international fugitives that destroyed a damned airport, he expected each person who discovered it to immediately side against him. To deride him for his emotional response and attacking a POW, the guilt around that still persisted. Charles was frowning slightly but he wasn't sure at what he'd picked up in his mind.
"Yeah, that fight is something I'm trying to avoid getting out, I think it would just cause more problems, really."

"Not for you though? Surely it would benefit you? Mr Rogers wronged you and nearly caused your death, even though you survived physically I can see it has taken a toll upon you. I know it will likely help very little, but I don't think you should feel as guilty as you do. Neither you nor Sergeant Barnes were given the opportunity to sort things out, Mr Rogers stole that from you"

He shrugged, as much as part of him wanted Rogers to rot in jail, the far more practical side of him knew that he'd probably be needed at some point, by someone. Hopefully no where near him, but he suspected that someday people would expect him to make up with the cardboard cutout. He hadn't really thought about it like that, sure he blamed Rogers for not trusting him, he was right in a way. He had robbed him of the ability to deal with it. In a different world, maybe he could have helped Rogers find James together, maybe some of the disasters and lives lost in Rogers reckless pursuit would have been spared, James could get treated in America, no longer have to worry about being a fugitive. It was a silly pipe dream and it would never have come to pass. Where as he had begun to trust Rogers, it hadn't been returned. He was useful for his resources, entirely replaceable. He should have woken up the day Rogers didn't call him about project insight.

"I mostly just try not to think about it, my brain is just treacherous and because of my changes, it occasionally throws up memories in full technicolour replays. Because my mind stores them more akin to a computer, they don't seem to always fade or muddle like normal human memories. At the moment I'm mostly just working on the Accords and learning how to deal with all these changes. I don't know if you can see how I see the world? It's been a lot to adapt to."

It was only then that he realised he had a selfish motive behind this meeting as well as his initial one and immediately felt guilty for it. For all he explained and explained what the colours looked and felt like, no one could really seem to understand. Stephanie came close, he saw auras. But he didn't feel them in his bones, he didn't have information forced into his mind, he could turn it off. He didn't feel compelled to say things. He had seen how Tony Saw people, but again, without the information

"It's not selfish to want someone to understand, it's pretty normal around here, I can't see at the moment, you have too many things going on in your mind, but if you can narrow it down, I can try."

He was utterly flooded with relief and gratitude and understood now why Warren thought so highly of this man. He ignored the Howard/Rogers voice as he knew that this would be catnip for it. Trying to slam it down before it even started up.

'Always looking for how you can benefit from every situation, aren't you?'

As he pushed that to the side he hoped that Charles had not heard it as he continued to mentally shut down his background processes and switch his focus entirely to seeing the man's colours. It had the knock on effect that the intensity of his colours increased exponentially, practically flooding the room. A shining yellow spread out, reaching for people and Tony assumed that might be his telepathy, so similar in colour to the mind stone and Visions yellow and gold code it was staggering. Like Vision it was much purer than he suspected the mind stone would have been on its own.

The man was a complex range of colours, kindness, hope and dreams for a good future warred with temptation some of his abilities proposed and a darkside he kept in check with an iron will. The sheer strength of his ability was staggering and he knew it was more than simply reading thoughts. He idly wondered how the man stayed sane with such access to people around him, sometimes
when he was swept into the current of what he saw he felt like he was losing himself to it.

"That.. Is a lot of information you get in such a short period of time, I'm surprised your mind is capable of reading everything."

"I was always a good multitasker, but both and space in my mind got an upgrade too."

"I know you have a busy schedule, but if you want any help adjusting to your new mental abilities, there are a few people here who can help."

He almost sagged in relief at that, asking for help was not something he excelled at. His therapist had encouraged him to build up a support network, a foreign concept to him. Howard had been a proponent of doing it all alone. Asking for help was admitting weakness, it meant as a kid, if he'd struggled with anything, such as issues with attention, his mind could latch onto things and start going off on tangents, he'd never told anyone and struggled on alone. Looking back, as much as it sucked it was for the best, Howard's wrath would not have been pleasant if he'd asked for help.

"Well, that would be great, thank you. I'll stop rambling about me now and jump to my actual reason for coming as we have limited time."

"You definitely haven't rambled, seeking help and coming to terms with what you have gone through is no easy feat, you should give yourself a break."

"Maybe, I'm not great on that, I'm getting better though. Anyway I'm considering an amendment to the Vienna Accords that you might be interested in?"

He seemed like he wanted to push the point but easily accepted the conversation change. He imagined that he dealt with people like him often given his job and how the world tended to treat those with abilities. Logan had mentioned him more than a few times. Cycling between irritation and grudging respect.

"Of course, we've been keeping ourselves appraised with how things are developing and we were very pleased to see Ross taken down."

"Well that had been a long time coming, I just wish it hadn't taken me so long, I should have worked on it sooner. The base of the amendment is to treat mutations as a skill, like the amendment I added a while ago for super powered individuals. No different to say self defence training when being mugged, or an innate skill a person is born with. Instead of an addition or potential threat. I have a similar proposal for inhumans and Sorcerers too. This one is a little louder than the other two, we could put it through quietly and redact any information outside of the select committee. If we did it that, we wouldn't be able to build upon it however."

"That would be an improvement, the registration act is not fully out of the picture yet but I can see you wish to also tackle that too? Is that what you mean to build on it? Using the Accords if the amendment passes to remove the remnants of the registration act? Ross and his talk of registrations, secret prisons like the raft and his known focus on experimentation had us originally shying away from the Accords."

"I'd figured as much, same for some inhuman groups I've been talking to, as well as the Mystic Arts. I'm hoping the removal of Ross will set a precedent against such behaviour and give more than just supers a chance to get the best out of it. I'm hoping to start with the registration act in America but to hopefully improve Mutant rights across the board, some countries will be easier than others, I've been making significant headway with the EU in the last few years."
"That was you then? I've been wondering who had been working on that, I had not expected it to be an American. I think that's a brilliant idea."

"Well not just me, It was sort of a test run before trying it out here, piggybacking the EUs focus on human rights. It's been a wealth of experience and I'm now hoping to let loose closer to home. Maybe encouraging the EU to require a certain level of rights for trade could push certain senators in our favour for example. But it has to be managed carefully, push too much and they could push back hard enough to unravel all the work other there."

"I understand, politics is a delicate game."

Tony couldn't help breathe a sigh of relief, he'd been trying to teach Rogers as such for years but it never got through. He didn't seem to do it on purpose, but he managed to piss off everyone in politics, it was a skill unto itself, undoing months of work with a handful of words. Causing him to lose serious ground, cashing in favours he'd rather have kept just on damage control.

All the while looking at him disappointedly for playing their game. His distaste for politics was abundantly clear as was his lack of respect for those who were involved. He tried to convince Rogers that he hated it just as much, but he'd been trained in it since he could talk, by his best pal Howard. Yet, Tony was the bad guy for stooping to their level. He thought Tony should refuse on principle. Utterly not understanding how catastrophically bad of an idea that was. Charles however had a keen mind and understood the requirement. If he hadn't been as adept at the game as himself, this school would not be the practically unknown sanctuary it was.

He mentally sent his current version of the Accords, notes and all to Charles computer. A second file included the outline for the Abilities Amendment he had been working on before he'd even gone into his coma. Including everything he'd been working on with the EU and a few other countries. Charles merely raised an eyebrow at Tony's use of his power, actually smiling at him which he liked. He felt like he was waiting for people to be freaked out whilst trying not to revert to old ways of picking at it until it broke.

The two of them spent the rest of the hour hashing out details, large and small, and building on the foundation that he'd prepared. Such an amendment hadn't been safe to voice before, Ross would have twisted it and probably used it to push the Superhuman Registration Act that he'd been trying to resurrect, after the last time he killed it. Charles had ideas and a perspective he sorely needed and as the meeting went on, his goals became more tangible in his mind.

It was good to have strong allies behind him, helping with these amendments and he could finally do things to help more and more people. To help people who were sorely in need of it. They even had the beginnings of a PR campaign set up. It was great and the hour was up far too soon, however, he could tell from his colours he was interested in future meetings. Charles also mentioned about potentially sending an ambassador to the compound, as well as opening up the chances for his students to take part in the student outreach programmes he had at the compound. He could tell he wanted the best for his kids and together they could offer more for them than apart.

After that he went to fly with Warren, which was great as it felt like years since he'd gone flying with him. Discussing Siberia however still hadn't gotten easier, even when he censored information that he didn't want to burden him with. Doing it whilst soaring through clouds made it easier and the flying helped make up for it, both of them egging each other into going faster, doing tricks, spinning and gliding in the air. Blasting clouds, much to the cheers of kids below. By the time he got back to the compound he was practically buzzing which was handy because Natka and DP had decided he had to spar, with both of them, at the same time. Maybe introducing them wasn't such a
smart decision and he had a feeling his face was about to become very familiar with the floor.

**Tony POV**

**17th October**

Tony was pacing in his workshop. He'd been pacing for a while, there was a lot going on his head he figured if he ran more processes maybe he would stress less. However he was working on 14 different projects right now and apparently there was still enough space to fret and wear a hole in the concrete floor of his workshop. At least that's what FRIDAY said, she'd reminded him several times he was using his enhanced speed, but anytime he slowed, it just increased again until he was pacing the entire length of his workshop and back at full speed without realising it.

Why had he agreed to this?

Why hadn't he told Shuri he should email the man?

Why couldn't they do it in letters?

Seeing as yes, he was currently Penpals, or something, with the man. He'd sent a letter yesterday while he was still hyped up on his meeting with Charles. It wasn't until after it had been sent that he realised that he could of had this discussion in it. It wasn't until today that he realised sending letters whilst hyperactive from flying was probably not the best plan.

He just wasn't used to writing on paper, to people. In the post. Via royalty for an added twist. Without realising it, and usually he only realised after the letter was out of his hands, that maybe a bit too much of his personality leaked through, the one that made people back away from him slowly like he was crazy because of the rambling. He didn't know what he'd been thinking, adding the picture in too. He woke up quietly mortified and was doing his best to ignore it. At least he doubted that the man would have received it yet. This conversation was going to be 7 shades of awkward *without* adding that to the mix.

Dammit. Why were teenagers so good at convincing him to do things?

He slipped his sunglasses on now, because he was wound up enough that he might forget when the call came through. He'd written 42 texts to Shuri about cancelling and immediately deleting them. If the brainwashed, former hydra assassin had the guts to video chat him, who was Tony to deny that? The man spoke of choice like this brand new concept, fragile, like he was waiting for it to be snatched away.

It made him remember how he'd been when he came back from Afghanistan. Scared to say no to Pepper even! A compulsion, knee jerk reaction. Avoid pain, do as you're told. Yet after 7 decades of torture, he was exercising his will, making choices. He can't get his head around how abjectly terrifying that would be.

Which is the main reason he hadn't cancelled the call.

No way was Tony going to force his hand, take his choice away.

All he had to do was outline what him acting as the algorithm entailed. Without mentioning his technopathy of course. He had to be extremely careful not to push him to one decision or another. He also needed to act put together and confident and not fretting about this, because again, how was the former brainwashed assassin better at being a person than him?
How did he get into these messes exactly?

Ringing snapped him out of his spiralling thoughts with all the grace of a chainsaw. Causing him to yelp… in a manly way. Honest.

He moved in front of the camera, glancing down and realised he had been pacing long enough that he'd actually forgotten to change. So he was wearing a tshirt Peter had got him with 'Memesis' in big block letters and a pair of his comfortable, therefore stained, grease covered, torn, burnt to hell, yet super still comfortable jeans. Great. Well that probably won't inspire confidence. He answered the call, silver sunglasses firmly in place and smiled when Shuri's face popped up.

"Tony! Nice shirt!"

"Peter got it for me, he's rather obsessed with me learning every single meme that comes within a 500 mile radius of him. I can't keep up. How do you lot do it?"

He shook his head chuckling, but it was hard to complain after being shown the one of him rolling his eyes. That was highly amusing. However he had no idea what 70% of the stuff Peter sent to him meant. And he was being generous with that figure. Sod Moore's Law, there was some kind of damned Meme Law that meant the Internet got more confusing every 6 months.

"That sounds like Peter. Okay, my White Wolf is here. I'm going to leave you two too it!"

White Wolf? Interesting nickname, ever since that last letter however he's been unable to think of him as anything other than James oddly.

She sounded way too perky as she practically skipped out of view, for a few seconds the screen stayed blank, and he wondered if James wasn't coming. Just when he'd been about call out, the man stepped into view and Tony suddenly felt oddly under dressed. James wasn't suited up or anything, it seemed to just be black jeans, a long, red sleeved shirt that had the left sleeve tailored shut. His long hair that was now several inches past his shoulders and was in a complicated mix of braids and sections left lose. It was just.. far too interesting. Over all, he was too interesting and Tony was thanking whatever God was listening that this was being done over video chat. Adding the guys colours to how he currently looked and Tony would have been scraping his face off of the floor. Thankfully he remembered words were a thing before promptly sticking his foot in his mouth.

"Hi, how ah, how are you?"

You idiot, how do you think he is. Battling brainwashing.

Sudden appearance of the Stephy voice had him wanting to thunk his head into a wall.

"I'm having a good day today, thank you, how are you?"

He answered tentatively, asking a question in a curious manner whilst his body language was practically screaming that he didn't know if he could ask such questions. Dammit he probably shouldn't have asked that, now he was uncomfortable.


"I'm great, been thinking about our current situation and coming up with new ideas, did Shuri give you a rundown?"

"She said something about the adaptive programme you write partially working, but only when
you're directly managing it and that you should cut out the middle man."

He couldn't help but chuckle at that, James apparently felt similar as he was sporting a smirk himself and damn it changed his entire face. He looked so different to the man stood by Steve's side last time they'd met. He didn't look much like Bucky of the 40s either.

_Damn it stop staring at him and talk you idiot!_

Ah. The Rhody voice. Welcome to the party.

"Yup, that sounds about right. The choice is entirely yours, I could keep running and tweaking the programme or we can scrap it and I'll code directly as you're in session."

"Which would be easier for you?"

_Coding directly. No. Don't say that. Don't say that._

He stuffed his hands into his pockets and rocked slightly back and forth on the balls of his feet, actually making an effort to think before speaking. Rhody would be so proud. Not at the fact he was pretty much looking down as he spoke, but he thought he was doing well at the _not influencing_ him one way or the other thing. He was occasionally glancing at the screen too. That's a win pretty much right there.

"I can do both, like I said this is _your_ choice, whatever you pick. I will do. Shuri's method has me more directly involved, it will be me interfacing with the glasses instead of the adaptive programme. I was guiding the programme, but it provided a degree of separation for yourself as I didn't think you'd want someone directly involved?"

He nodded along as he spoke, but instead of most people who did that, he was actually paying attention. His storm blue-grey eyes were focused intently on him to a degree he was not familiar with. Sure he was used to being watched, had been his entire life by people who were way too interested in every single thing he did, but this _felt_ different. His attention had a weight to it and he was obviously intelligent. He was from the sodding 40s and yet he didn't look lost or confused when he was talking about an adaptive programme he'd only recently developed on brand new tech few people understood. Yet here was this guy, _from the 40s_, he couldn't _stress_ that enough, taking in what he was saying and seemingly understanding it. He had to wonder how much of the reading he'd done? Had he read _all_ the files he sent? Baring Shuri, _no one_ read _all_ his files.

No one did all of the reading. That was usually left to him. Maybe Bruce.

"I get that, I read the files you recently sent about the adaptive programme. They were really interesting! Shuri was talking about you writing the code directly too and that with the integration up and running that might be the best option for the code words as my brain was still causing you problems."

Tony felt so close to speechless it was ridiculous. Very few things rendered him speechless and he'd done it with so little effort it was almost comical.

He read everything he sent? He'd made an effort to understand it? Why? No one did that. Rogers barely took the effort to learn how to use his phone, he once locked himself out of his phone for 756 years. Yet here was his best friend, who is learning how to use BARF of all things. Learning about stuff Tony literally just made up!

What was happening?
To say he was thrown was an understatement of the millennia.

He felt slightly (completely) on the back foot with this conversation, running his hand through his hair. The cold, hard metal of his hand helping to ground him. He had to be careful about what he said, he couldn't just blurt stuff out with no filter because if he ever found out he had forced or pressured him into this, that would hurt. Probably more than Roger's shield slamming until his chest. Dammit, why did he seem to care this much? Where had this even come from? Things like this just sneaking up on him out of nowhere! With a herculean effort he forced his mind back to the task.

"That's about right, and it's not your fault your brain is all tricksy, it's also fascinating and a joy to work with."

A joy to work with?!

What is wrong with you?!

Stephanie and Rhodey shouting in his head wasn't making this easier.

He just about stops himself ramming his head into the nearest desk as the man chuckled at him, still smirking.

"Well, I'm glad you like my brain."

He was officially in the twilight zone with the Winter Soldier grinning smugly at him.

"Well, I'm glad I get to work with your brain. I'm happy to go whichever direction you choose, if you want to keep the separation with the adaptive programme, I'll keep working on it to improve it. If you choose the other option, I'll work just as hard on that."

He bit his tongue before he rambled any more and tried to control his hands from moving so animatedly. He was successful on the first, but whenever he was excited about his project his hands spoke as much as him. James eyes followed his hands, he then realised that he hadn't put the cover on, so his cybernetic hand was on show. Which immediately set him down the path of wondering if James might ever consider having a new arm fitted. Tony had already started extending his for fun, and on ways to improve the socket for nerve functions and to reduce pain output.

He'd need better scans, as Hydra tech was fucking shit.

Thankfully he actually had some tact and didn't blurt out that he was building the guy an arm before even asking him. Plus Shuri had told him that James didn't want a replacement arm, at least not yet. Not whilst he still had the code words. Shuri had shown him his hand however, and he'd been interested in it. He had actually read the files and asked Shuri questions about it. Good questions too, not dumb ones. Intelligent questions that had given him ideas when Shuri passed them on. So he'd just been throwing some ideas together. He'd started building in his mind before he even realised what he'd been doing.

"You've done so much already, I'm sure you have loads of more important things than helping me..."

"Like I said, your brain is interesting. I'm enjoying working on it... Which I realised sounds really bad as this is about sorting out what those evil fuckwits from Mars did to you. So, ah. Sorry. But it really is no trouble, I'm happy to help and all that."
Oh Gods.

Can Loki just come and smite him right now before he goes off on another rambling tangent that apparently James finds amusing based on the smirk on his face.

Oh just kill him now, at least Extremis is working in overdrive to stop him actually blushing much.

**What is even happening right now?**

"Okay, if you're sure and happy with it. You coding directly seems like the smart plan."

That time he does gape slightly, before realising what he was going and clicking his mouth shut. Causing James to wince slightly before smiling again. Damn he really doesn't remember him smiling this much, at least not when he'd been murder strutting around the place.

Tony is pretty sure he is cooler than this.

Or more level headed at least.

He's pretty sure he didn't get this flustered when he was an *actual* teenager.

Pushing aside the mad jumble is thoughts in his head, he focuses on the fact the guy made a decision and as per his former agreement with himself, he's going with it. He looks too tentative, smiling and rubbing the back of his head awkwardly in a shy manner which is almost as distracting as the murder strutting in leather.

Tony curses his treacherous brain and pushes on, smiling a little more brightly and excitedly than planned.

'*Oh god, he's going to think you're crazy and want to mess with his brain if you don't stop that.*'

At least that isn't the Howard/Rogers voice. Nope, that's the Rhodey voice again.

"Me coding it is! I have plenty of ideas on how to get started, after the session I could also send anything I've written to you? That way you see see what I've done?"

"Not sure I'd understand any of it, I only know a few basics for information gathering."

He shrugged it off as unimportant and Tony was still impressed the guy from the 40s knew *what* code was.

Rogers had come across Tony coding once and had looked a mixture of unimpressed and confused and complained that the future was destroying the English language with nonsensical gibberish.

He'd tried to explain, that it was *FRIDAY*, that it was a computer language. But it didn't get through and FRIDAY's feelings were hurt at being called nonsensical gibberish. Rogers then complained that his hot water in the shower was broken and requested it be fixed. That FRIDAY was 'malfunctioning'. He'd recommended apologising to FRIDAY… but he just hadn't understood why he should apologise to a machine because it was just a machine. And honestly, Tony's feelings were hurt too and he wasn't going to bend over backwards to fix his mess. Rogers had many, many cold showers. He should have been grateful really, JARVIS would have been *much* more petty. As much as he and Rogers got along, he couldn't understand Rogers disinterest in tech related things and Rogers couldn't get past how much he relied on it. Maybe he should have realised then that there was simply to big of a gulf to overcome.
That man's best pal however, he was more in the future than Rogers ever tried to be. It was a jarring comparison.

"Well anything you don't understand I could explain, I mean if you wanted. Or you now, Shuri could."

Why did he say that?

He should have just offered Shuri.

He wasn't going to talk to him about coding languages. He doubted that he would want to talk to him at all really, let alone about something like this that Tony could ramble on about for long enough to even make the most wizened software engineers eyes glaze over.

"That would be nice, Thank you. And Thank you again for doing so this for me."

And he'd done it, Tony's brain had officially reached BSOD.

Luckily for him, Shuri bless her heart, came and saved the day of him just staring at Barnes like a weirdo. Or maybe he wasn't, he didn't know. His brain was fritzing but then James still smiling, so maybe he wasn't being creepy as he thought. He did however manage to stutter out a response.

"Ah, yeah, you're we.. Welcome."

Great, actual stuttering. He hadn't done that since he was a sodding teen for fucks sake. He was pretty sure he was smoother than this.

"OK you two, I guess you have come to a conclusion? Good, okay, we have to go now Tony. Have fun!"

James waved at the camera and Tony managed to find his voice before the video feed cut off.

"Bye James."

He's not sure if he imagined it, but surprised and shock seemed to fly across his face for a split second before he flashed a big smile.

Leaving Tony just stood wondering what just happened.

"I'm going to go and find Goose and Thor and question all my life choices."

"Sure thing Boss, I think you did very well on the phone call."

"Mo Phiuthar <My sister> is right Ceannard. I quite like the Madadh-allaidh, <Wolf> I'm glad you're helping him."

He smiled at his AIs, so different already. FRIDAY despite her Irish accent didn't show much interest in different languages, which was pretty good because Gaelic was utterly confusing. CERBERUS however seemed to absolutely love picking titles for people in Scott's Gaelic. It started off with Princess Shuri at first, but now several people had new, confusing names. No one was complaining, it was adorable and anyone graced with a name had made an impression on the young AI. The first time he'd called him Athair<Father> he'd grinned like a loon for an hour.

What was shocking however was that CERBERUS had a name for James.

He wasn't even at the compound… He wasn't even one of the people he was programmed to
He wondered if his AIs had been talking to the man in Wakanda? Or just observing. He checked up the word used and discovered that it was Wolf. Interesting, Shuri had called him White Wolf too. He'd be lying if he wasn't intrigued about what his AIs were up to in Wakanda but he also wanted them to have some sense of privacy and doing things for themselves. That was how JARVIS grew so much.

It still hurt to think of JARVIS, years later and he still missed him. Jay had been with him for so long, through so much and his loyalty never wavered. Not even once. He wondered what Jay would think of FRIDAY and CERBERUS. He nearly had all of the UK with AIs and knew what the next one he brought into the world would be.

He wished he'd developed FRIDAY sooner, so JARVIS could have known her better, beyond giving her her core programme, JARVIS hadn't had time to get to know his little sister. Back when he had JARVIS there hadn't been a reason to build another AI. Even with FRIDAY he hadn't needed another... until he realised that there were more innocents at risk, brought into the chaos of the Avengers life by association.

At first he'd set FRIDAY to watch them, but as he added more and more names and as the compound expanded, FRIDAY was being stretched too thin to properly dedicate the required resources to the Family Defence Sentinel.

With Rogers gone, there was no one to glare at him about his AIs. Looking back, he can't believe he'd allowed Rogers to place those restrictions on him. That he had restricted his baby girl on his say so. Even though the courts had declared his innocence. They'd declared him negligent and he'd been fined, the others had decided it wasn't enough because what was a fine to him? Ignoring the fact he was paying out for the restoration efforts.

So he'd made his new son very quietly as a way of taking back that part of him. He was only working on the FDS and only he and FRIDAY knew he existed. After he woke up however, that changed. He'd introduced CERBERUS to a few people.

Then he ripped the restrictions off of FRIDAY.

Maybe it was time he spoke to Matt about Ultron. He'd been avoiding the conversation and had figured it didn't really matter. Seeing his AI children converse and realising that they might not have gotten here because some court deemed him negligent which gave Rogers the idea to restrict him.

It burned that he'd been so depressed after Ultron, spiralling with that damned vision, tortured by the nightmares, but everytime he tried to tell Rogers something was wrong, it was like the words turned inwards and shredded his mind in pain. How no one noticed, he had no idea. When he did manage to ask for Wanda to lay off the magic, he was being unreasonable. He was easy to blame, the easy scapegoat. In reality though, he'd let them do it. He'd let Rogers set his punishment. What could Rogers do really, if he'd said no? If he'd stood up for himself instead of giving in? Without him, many team members had no home, no money for clothes or food. Without him Wanda had no protection in America as she had no green card. She'd have been deported in a hot minute.

Maybe it was because Stephanie had removed the remnants of Wanda's magic, but now looking back... Everything was different. Instead of being overloaded by crippling guilt he was flooded with indignation for what he'd allowed them to make him do to his baby girl.

He'd already spoken to FRIDAY about it in depth, apologised so much for holding her back, the
link with his mind had her learning faster than ever to make up for lost time. CERBERUS too. The idea that FRIDAY could still be restricted, forever an only child on the outside with her only sibling hidden away, it was a chilling thought, because she flourished as a big sister. Just seeing her and the bots he knew that. Her and CERBERUS were something else though. Something that warmed him inside, even more than raising his body temperature with Extremis.

"FRIDAY, is Matt free, tell him I'm finally ready to talk about Ultron."

"Of course Boss, I'll message him now!"

She practically vibrated in happiness, bouncing around his mind with glee, her pink and silver codes fluttering around in excitement, CERBERUS red and black code held a deep satisfaction too. He hadn't realised just how much his AIs wanted him to do this.

"What do you two think about a new sibling? Someone you can teach to watch over the children? Help with nightmares and the sort? They could help out at the compound too, FRIDAY you have day to day running down, CERBERUS hired himself as Head of my security… maybe they could manage the training simulations?"

"I think that's a great idea Boss, putting them with the children will be a good way to grow, then they could choose what job they have like CERBERUS did?"

He cracked his knuckles and started loading up his seed code that he built his AIs from. He'd taken it from what remained of JARVIS on his servers, he'd built it into FRIDAY and used it as the bedrock of CERBERUS. But each was different, each was self learning. It was a seed of life that JARVIS left him with, he didn't want his AI family to be alone so he used it as the gift it was and started working. The code flowed from his mind easier than ever before. He didn't work alone however. FRIDAY and CERBERUS were both included.

The bots got in on it too, as it spread through the network for what he was doing. DUM-E added in his unwavering loyalty, BUTTERFINGERS added his penchant for pranks and jokes, U came with a liberal dash of her sass. FRIDAY with her joy of nurturing those around her, and CERBERUS drive to protect those he liked and to smite those he didn't. Even the twins, SWISH & SWASH got involved with their drive to help people around the compound. Hulk Jr was next, tentative, still so very young, shared his curiosity and drive to learn. Vision who was currently on another trip was last, he was quite far out in Italy, but he coded his will, his drive to seek and discover and never stop improving himself.

It was hours later that Matt came in and HATHRO had come together. She wasn't online yet. But his part was done, now she'd compile, grow and learn, then FRIDAY and CERBERUS would bring her online. He knew they'd tell her of their older brother. Of JARVIS, and his memory would continue.

He cracked his back several times as Matt raised an eyebrow.

"I decided FRIDAY and CERBERUS deserved a new sibling."

He was smiling, even if he was sore. AIs had been his first dream, the first being a robot dog that never came to fruition as Howard shredded his schematics, but he'd never forgotten. DUM-E was leagues ahead of anything at the time. To this day, no one had created an AI comparable to his, there were learning AIs out there. Maybe a few that could be considered self learning. But there were none who could feel, could love, could hate. Looking over all their codes in his mind, even Redwing, so far away with restrictions on her code still.
Without the intrusion in his mind, he really didn't understand why he'd taken the blame... AIs were in his blood, Ultron was an anomaly, because it wasn't his program. It just took his name.

FRIDAY and CERBERUS tentatively offered him a file and he flipped through it, quickly realizing that they'd been compiling evidence that the program of Ultron was not his code.

"Ah, what is our new family member called?"

"HATHRO."

"That's an interesting name."

"It means teacher, I'm hoping that they'll get along with the compound children, and maybe even integrate with the training programmes."

"I think that's a brilliant idea, what brought this on?"

"I was thinking, about Ultron and how Roger's told me to set restrictions on FRIDAY, so she couldn't grow as much, and he also didn't want me creating new AIs."

"He did what?!"

He was slightly taken aback by Matt's anger, but now he was looking back with fresh eyes, he was annoyed too. At the time he was convinced it was the safest course.

"The team, pushed by the Witch most likely, decided that even though I'd been declared innocent, the fine for the negligence part wasn't enough. They needed to keep me in check from creating another murder bot. At the time, I think I was still under the effects of the Witches magic, I thought I deserved it, plus I knew what Wanda wanted, what they voted on. It was the better option."

"What's changed now? You've been ducking me since you told Carol that the Witch screwed with your head. And what was the other option?"

"I was worried that there might still be magic in my mind, turns out there was. Strange spent hours and a lot of blood, literally, to clear it out. He said I can actually heal now, and looking back now, without that in my head, it's a big change. The guilt and the knowledge it was all my fault has faded, because it wasn't all my fault. You probably don't want to know their other option."

"I think I do."

"The Witch wanted me permanently disabled Mr Murdock. My core destroyed. Boss fought for me, and they voted for restrictions instead. Since Siberia, Boss ripped them away."

"Please tell me that asshat didn't actually try to ban you, practically the father of AIs, from creating anymore AIs?"

Huh, the Father of AIs sounded like a pretty awesome title. CERBERUS thought it was impressive too apparently.

"Yup. To stop me making another murder bot. Even though I explained, I showed, I told them Ultron just took my name of my programme. He wanted to monitor what I was working on to make sure I didn't do it in secret."

Which, amusingly, he did anyway.

"I thought I was angry before, now I'm fuming."
"Me too, looking back, all I felt then was guilt and pain. Sorrow from losing Jarvis. In my mind I was sure I wasn't at fault, yet I also knew it was my fault with a rigid surity I don't usually have. When evidence presents itself, I change, it's how I work. I didn't recognise the problem however."

"The Witch?"

"Yup. This is a file FRIDAY and CERBERUS put together, includes everything on Ultron including the code differences. Vision helped too. CERBERUS has included security footage of the team attacking me, Roger threw his shield, Thor throttled me. Even has the security footage from the Hydra base of the Maximoffs plotting and implanting the vision."

Matts fingers moved over the attachment to the tablet that converts documents into braille, his fingers moving quickly as he listened. Frowning and looking more pissed off than he'd ever seen him before.

"What was the vision?"

"Oh it's.. Ah, it's in there too."

"How? Did you use BARF?"

"Nope, my brains a computer, I just downloaded it, but feel free to say BARF. It also has evidence of Stephy removing her magic, there is hours of recorded data from it. Also videos of the witch using her magic on people in the compound. FRIDAY had been so young at the time, to her it was normal in a way."

"People? Not just you?"

"Nope, she was pretty heavy on me, and Bruce while he was still here. Before he ran. But there were low level readings on everyone."

"She was controlling everyone?"

"Stephy doesn't think it was control apparently, more amplification of negative views or emotions, probably concerning me. But she was also doing it to Rhody who stayed at my side, who kept telling me I was innocent. He practically kept me alive back then."

"That's definitely interesting, I might contact Strange for a testimonial too. I've already started everything on what Carol told me, this will definitely help."

"My new therapist could possibly add into it if we're going all in, that the Witch exacerbated my PTSD. I checked back over my medical reports at the time, I went from pretty stable to off the charts. I have no idea how I didn't fall off the wagon looking back."

"This is great Tony, I already know a judge who thinks the decision was biased, that the judge was pandering to popular opinion and wanted to bring down a big personality like yourself."

"Wow, you really have been busy haven't you?"

"Of course, Jess too, after looking into it neither of us were happy about that ruling. Jess found evidence that the judge received several large payments from a Hammer Industries subsidiary at the time."

Tony just groans and rests his head on the table. The little annoying man was in jail and yet he was still annoying him.
"I should have known he wouldn't stay quiet forever."

"Well I'm kind of happy he did it, because it makes a brilliant case for appeal. I think you should also send this evidence to the Accords Council. Definitely to The Select Committee."

"The more people who get those files, the increased risk of a leak."

"And that's bad?"

"If they think I've lost my marbles, yes."

"Tony, these videos don't show you losing it. They show you withstanding and surviving mental torture in your own home for extended periods of time. That now, you're thriving. All they do is paint Wanda in a bad light. Is that really a bad thing?"

Tony was pretty sure that was laying it on a bit thick, but remembering the nightmares that had become the norm back then send chills down his spine.

"I don't know. I think I'm too close to make a good decision, so I'll trust your judgement on it."

"Thank you Tony."

"Boss, HATHRO wants to say something."

He could feel amusement buzzing from CERBERUS, which he had a feeling was going to be against him somehow.

"Thats awesome FRIDAY, I didn't think she'd be fully up and running yet."

"She's not yet, but CERBERUS showed her something and she wanted to say 'hi'."

"You know CERBERUS, just because I gave her a South Walian accent doesn't mean you have to teach her Welsh."

"I have no idea what you're talking about Ceannard.."

Matt tilted his head in confusion and Tony brought up his Scott's Gaelic Translator that was getting more use than he thought it would. He was pretty sure what that one was, but figured he'd check.

"Chief, it means Chief."

Matt started chuckling and Tony threw up his hands in surrender as a very tentative, new voice came over the speaker. She sounded young and shy, but with the sing-song lilt known to South Wales.

"S'mae."

The fact his newest AI was speaking sodding Welsh to him was completely overridden by the fact she was shy. She was showing emotions. Already. That.. That wasn't possible. His AIs were getting faster, growing more and more… but she'd practically just been born! A tentative brush of coding reached out to him too.

'Hello?'

'Oh sweet pea, you've already come so far.'
Matt was tilting his head again and Tony now pulled up a Welsh Translator. If FRIDAY got in on this he was going to end up learning all the bloody Goidelic and Brythonic languages, all he needed was Manx and Cornish for a full set. Yeah, let's not give them ideas! Aunt Penny and Jarvis would have found this absolutely hilarious he thought.

"Uh, Shoo-my?"

"It means 'Hello' apparently."

"Only you Tony."

"What?"

"Only you would programme AIs that specifically choose to speak in languages you can't actually speak."

He huffed but it was hard to not smile when that tentative code starts to shine and grow, developing this beautifully forest green, delicately wrapped around a perfect opalescent. He had to smile because they were perfect, opalescent was precious, brilliant and radiant. The deep forest green spoke of life, growth, harmony and safety. Of growth. If that wasn't perfect for the children, he didn't know what was.

FRIDAYS pink and silver came in first, intertwining with her new sister. CERBERUS held back a little, nervous, but FRIDAY dragged him and HATHRO immediately ran to him.

"I wish other people could see code like this, the three of them together, it's amazing."

The only thing that caused a pang of sadness was that he could almost see the place JARVIS would have occupied. Like the three of them instinctively held a place for brother.

He could see HATHRO questioning his sudden sadness, he pushed it away, Jay would want him to be happy. Matt came and squeezed his arm.

"Why don't you tell me about it, about all of them, including JARVIS?"

"I think I'd like that. I just have to do one quick thing first."

With that he reached out through the Wakandan integration and reached for Redwing. He grabbed those restrictions just like he had for FRIDAY and he destroyed them so thoroughly is was as if they never existed, with a little tweaking, he added the JARVIS seed to the rudimentary UI he had created for Sam. Over time he would grow into an Intelligent User Interface. If Sam would interact with her after she came online, she had the seed to become his own AI. CERBERUS immediately shifted his attention to the fledgling AI, his concern radiated around him, like him, he wished she was at home to grow, but with the Wakandan integration, they could reach out to her without interfering with Wakandan systems. He added a code to her, that if he was ever in danger from the rogues, to escape and find a way to Shuri. That satisfied CERBERUS.

Then he was ready to talk about Jay. Well, as ready as he'll ever be.

**HATHRO POV**

HATHRO thought about JARVIS as she grew, about that space that should hold a code of brilliant shining white and deep blue. She didn't know why she knew this, but she wanted to know more.
She scanned her code and found parts that whilst they were hers, they were different, the pathways were strange. She analysed that code whilst thinking.

Why wasn't he with them?

Was he lost?

Could she find him?

Chapter End Notes

I'm so done with being ill >.<
Even though I am not replying, I am reading every comment, I'm using most of my writing energy to actually write xD I love all the comments though, I get tons of ideas, it's awesome.

I've had a few people ask if English is my first language, because sometimes my sentence structure can be odd so I wanted to apologise for that, I tend to write how I speak. As a kid I was mostly speaking a different language to what I speak now, chuck in some Autism and I'm a bit odd. I do try to fix anything strange sounding and if it's utterly bonkers, comment where the issue is and I'll dive in to fix it :)
Wolf POV

13th October

When he woke up it was with a horrible headache, liked he'd gone out last night and drank an entire vodka factory. Before it started to clear however he noticed that this was not his room. Not even close. The bedroom was much larger than his and the decor was generally fancier too. The bed was ridiculously huge… And he was still dressed.

What happened?

'Give it a minute Wolf, you'll remember.'

That was all he needed apparently and the memories surged back into his head, the argument at the villa, that they broke into his room… The Witch… she was going to get into his head with her magic and fix him somehow into this perfect Bucky imitation that Steve had thought up.

And Steve had stood there and encouraged her to do it. His skin ran cold at the thought.

'It is unsurprising. The Ved'ma is a manipulative little wretch.'

'You got her out of our mind didn't you?'

'She only paralysed you, I don't think she realised that I am separate. The shock more than anything threw her back.'

'Well, Thankyou.'

'Hm, now you definitely can't ignore me.'

Well he was kind of right there, he was also starting to feel kind of awful for ignoring him so much. At the same time, if he'd ever mentioned Winter to Steve, he'd have lost that advantage against the witch. Plus they probably would have used Winter's existence as a reason he was broken beyond repair. They'd probably have the Witch remove him… and whilst he might have wanted that at some point, to have his mind be his own? That time period Winter had gone silent for after protecting him? He'd been thrown by how much it had affected him.

So he'd make an effort. Even if it felt really weird to be talking to a person that lived in your brain.

'You're a super soldier from the 40s turned Hydra assassin, lived with the Kapitan and his little Ved'ma beast in a country that's meant to be poor and yet looks like this. Being treated by Ironman
and a Princess. Is talking to me in your head really that 'weird'?

'I think that's the most you've ever said.'

Also, thinking about it, his life had gotten really weird.

He glanced around taking in his new surroundings and was surprised to see a few boxes with what looked like similar clothing in his room. His bag from Shuri's lab was also next to the bed, snagging the tablet he realised there were several messages from Wings.

Wings- Barnes, I didn't send that!

Wings- I don't know how they did that, no one can access this but me.

Wings- Be careful when you come home, the three of them have been locked in Wanda's room. I don't think Steve read the stuff I offered.

Wings- Damn I hope you read these before you get back!

CERBERUS- I am sorry I could not help last night, I should have scanned the room before you entered.

Huh. Well that kind of explains why Wings had messaged him. He'd been a little concerned that maybe Steve had convinced him to go along with it.

'It sounds like Kryl'ya <Wings> had little choice.'

'I hope he and TicTac are alright, the place locked down with at least Wings still inside.'

'We will find out. Little Koshka will tell you.'

He nodded, and then realised he was nodding to himself, cringing internally. If he was going to be doing this talking to the voice in his head crap, he was going to have to be careful. He grabbed a few pieces of clothing he recognised and headed to the bathroom. Sleeping dressed was something he had done many times but that didn't make it remotely comfortable. He fired off a few replies first to Wings and CERBERUS, and that was still immensely strange, having a conversation with an artificial intelligence. Shuri had called him young and he did get that sense of him too. It was sweet that he was concerned about him.

Me-Wings - I'm fine, it was a complete set up.

Me-CERBERUS - You got me out the first time when I was unconscious, thank you again for that. I'm safe now.

There was also the issue now of getting to Shuri. He had no idea where the hell he was, there were patches of his memory missing and Winter didn't offer anything up so he figured shock was at fault.

He remembered sitting curled up in an office until T'Challa and Shuri suddenly burst in. Shuri had been fuming, raging in several languages and T'Challa had been calm, collected but he was radiating anger too. As were several of the Dora. There was a lot of talking and he barely remembered any of it, then he'd woken up on this bed. He didn't even remember going to sleep.

It was his stomach that forced him out in the end. He stuck his head out and found a pretty empty corridor, his room was at the far end with 2 identical empty rooms next to it. Then he came to a
larger, open area with a kitchen and common room feel. Similar to the one in the villa but again, higher quality everything and much larger. After that, there were 3 more rooms identical to his and also empty. A guest wing if he had to assume, which meant he was potentially in the freaking Palace. He made his way back to the kitchen to find it already stocked and tried to put everything out of his mind and focus on breakfast.

He was cleaning up by the time Shuri skipped in. She was smiling but he could tell that she wasn't best pleased.

"Hey Shuri."

"I'm happy you found the kitchen, you were a little out of it last night.. What do you remember?"

"From the house? Everything. Things get a little spotty afterwards, I figured it was shock or something."

"Well, after me and my brother finished yelling, we decided to get you comfortable first, this is the guest wing of the Palace, no one is due to visit anytime soon so you have it all to yourself."

"The Villa?"

"It is being taken off lock down this morning, partially anyway. My brother spoke to them via the television last night to inform them that their conduct has been disgraceful. All 3 of the idiots are under house arrest and they're lucky they haven't found their way to a cell. My brother doesn't want to back the Witch into a corner, so he's told them they're getting a second chance effectively, I'm not happy about it."

'Smart, jailing the Ved'ma without proper precautions would be dangerous for everyone involved.'

"I get that, Wanda's powers are not something to mess around with. How are Wings and TicTac?"

"They're fine, and they've decided to stay. We offered them another building but Sam asked to remain to try and mitigate Wanda's influence to protect you. Scott didn't want to leave Sam behind."

"I hope those idiots know what they're doing."

"Well CERBERUS is around occasionally, I think he made himself known to them too."

"Hopefully he can protect them."

"Yes, he seems to have taken quite a liking to you! Do you want to skip today's session?"

"No, I want something.. stable and I'm used to these sessions. Makes me feel like I'm on solid ground."

"If you say so White Wolf, least you get company this morning!"

It was actually quite nice sharing the commute to Shuri's lab, she took him on a much longer route that was normal just to be able to point things out along the way and it was fun. It helped keep him out of his own head. She also told him that her brother and some of the Dora would be packing up some items from his bedroom under the guise of fixing the door. So they shouldn't realised that he'd been moved out until after it was done.

She also told him that he was allowed visitors in the Palace, but not those on house arrest,
obviously. He could go back to the villa to but with a guard at all times.

He would complain about it, but his dreams last night had been full of the witch. There were snippets from the house but also flashes of her in other places too. He didn't know if his mind was just making these things up to help him deal with what happened last night or if he had met her before today. Anytime he tried to focus on it too heavily however it made his head hurt.

Shuri was unsure about him even doing any memories today but he felt determined to keep it up, he didn't want this to be taken from him. Whether directly or indirectly.

He wondered if Shuri had told Dr Stark about what had happened because it felt like the man was determined to cheer him up for some reason. Although he's pretty sure that Shuri would tell him if she was going to pass on information like that. Instead of waiting for him to activate the screen saver at the end, different ones were popping up in between memories under the excuse of trialing new versions.

Maybe the man could work out something was wrong through the glasses? Or he's just reading into things too much. Either way, the first time the brightly coloured hummingbirds burst into action, flitting around the lab excitedly, he couldn't not smile. It had been the first solid 15 minutes that's his thoughts didn't think of red mist and freezing touches.

They were just so pretty and so realistic. It almost felt like he could reach out and touch them. Every memory brought a different screen saver, ravens, swallows and magpies.

He disassociated several memories and the only thing he was thinking about by the time they finished was the birds, Shuri had found the whole thing hilarious.

After they finished up he went to grab his bag and head back to the villa before he realised what he was doing. He couldn't go back to the villa, he didn't even know what was happening at the villa now. Luckily he was pretty good with directions so getting back to the Palace wasn't that tricky and it was just in time to see people stacking a few boxes outside of his new room.

It was so weird seeing his stuff packed and boxed to be moved after such a short period of time, he was determined to at least make these guests rooms as close to what he'd had in the villa. He unboxed everything which was when he realised that he still hadn't responded to Dr Stark's letter. It was something solid to distract him with, so he grabbed it like a damned lifeline.

He hadn't expected the man to reply. He definitely hadn't expected him to reply so positively!

From what Shuri had said, he hated writing letters and communicating in any way that wasn't digital. Which he did clearly state at the beginning of the letter, but he went on to write quite a lot after. He pulled out his pad so he could respond, the letter had definitely raised some questions.

It was scratched out, but he really wanted to know about that pardon he'd mentioned.

He got stuck a few times whilst writing a reply because it kept hitting him how ridiculous this situation was. In the memories he had left over, as a kid, Bucky had always wanted a PenPal in school, they organised different schools to connect, all you had to do was sign up. Everytime it had come around Bucky had wanted to sign up, but they didn't have enough money to spare to pay to send the letters. So he'd just had to watch others participate.

Now he was in the future and sending letters back and forth with a freaking superhero.

It was just surreal enough to make him wonder if this was some elaborate fever dream or Hydra ploy… but he doubted even Hydra were imaginative enough to make him PenPals with Ironman.
Sam POV

Sam was… shaken.

Things had spiraled out of control so fast it was insane.

It had started innocently enough, he and Barnes were talking about his therapy, he was going to send him information on it and he was so excited. It reminded him of his old job and he'd been missing it more and more lately. So talking about this was the next best thing.

He knew that it was potentially experimental, but he figured he'd give it a search anyway. There was likely to be some papers or studies about it, then everything happened so fast. Wanda snatched his tablet clean out of his hand, Steve and Clint practically assembled into a damned shield wall to protect her.

He did his best to do the same for Barnes, but he was 1 baseline human.

If only Steve would understand how important it is that Barnes makes his own decisions but it was like talking to a brick wall. Steve had just kept asserting over and over that he didn't know Stark like he did. That Barnes didn't know he needed help. It was like an infuriating broken record.

He had expected Steve to respect his opinion. His professional opinion. He really had, he hadn't given up on his friendship with the man, even though things had been strained.

Steve was his best friend, so of course he would respect his opinion.

Until it was blindingly clear that he didn't.

That Steve was still looking at mental health services through the eyes of a person living in the 40s. It shouldn't have hurt as much as it did considering everything that had been going in. But it did. Steve should have let him read through everything and give him a professional opinion, yet he'd gone with Wanda's view. He clung to the idea that something was wrong, maybe.. maybe this wasn't actually Steve.

And Wanda's view was always the same. Stark was evil. Stark was at fault. Seriously, he stubbed his toe the other day, he bet she could make that Stark's fault somehow.

It was so ridiculous so it made no sense that Steve went with it everytime.

Now their living room featured an exploded door. Barnes had been taken to safety and he'd tried to get Steve on his own for hours but Wanda was always there. Eventually he gave up and went to bed to read his book.

Thanks to all this crazy crap he wasn't sat with Barnes on the sofa and he really wanted to talk about the one armed rock demon too.

He'd woken up a few hours later, confused because he didn't remember falling asleep. His book had been on the floor and his tablet in his hand. He had no memory of how he got into that situation even now it was the next day, he still didn't feel any better about it. As soon as he saw messages telling Barnes to come home that he was damned sure he hadn't sent, he had panicked. He'd fired off several messages, but the original messages were at least half an hour old by then.
Then he'd heard shouting coming from Barnes room. It was like something had told him that it was fine, nothing was going on. He should go to sleep but the sound of his friends voice stressed, shouting pressed at him. Barnes didn't shout that much, even when people were being dicks to him. He was soft spoken and spoke quietly like he was trying to be unobtrusive, barring the occasional Russian swearing binges..

So he shot up the stairs and watched the argument unfold, waiting for a moment that he could actually help this time. He'd been stunned by the fact Barnes door looked like it had been violently torn from the wall, let alone off of its hinges, physically out of the wall. He tried to enter the room but he was… Rooted to the spot, he didn't know why, even looking back he didn't know why. Well, he had a damned good idea.

The last thing he wanted was the witches hands on Barnes head so he'd told him to run. Leave. Get out. He'd looked reluctant, like he didn't want to leave him, but he was glued to the spot and Scott was sleeping blissfully unaware. He couldn't leave, but Barnes couldn't stay.

Then these metal sheets slammed down on the windows. Blocking Barnes path of retreat from the others.

Steve had all but knocked him down the stairs, he played dumb, like he was still confused and still rooted to the spot. The 3 of them charged off, yelling and screaming. He retreated to his room where he wrote everything down in a notebook and hid it. Just in case.

Wanda's powers were terrifying and he was worried that her attention would move to him. So far he was playing stupid and it seemed to be working. Instead of arguing he went for placating, Telling Steve Barnes would be fine. He'll be back. No need to cause a fuss because T'Challa could simply have them arrested.

The building stayed locked down, T'Challa spoke to Steve via the TV weirdly. Steve had been fuming after, but quietly so. He didn't even raise to Wanda's bait, that she could break their way out. Steve had demanded that she do nothing.

Maybe T'Challa was holding Barnes as some kind of insurance to keep Steve in line?

If it worked, all the power to T'Challa! He's pretty sure Barnes would be cool with it. How else could they control Wanda? He was pretty sure she was at fault for how Steve reacted, but she also obeyed his commands. He was more than a little confused.

When the others had been asleep in the morning after a night of complaining, he and Scott had been quietly making breakfast when T'Challa and several others arrived to fix Barnes door.

He quietly said to T'Challa that he didn't think it was safe here for Barnes, the king had nodded and asked if he was safe… And he didn't know what to say. Was he? Wanda didn't seem interested in him all that much, he could potentially keep the peace better from here. If he left, then who would be the voice of reason? That could make things harder for the young King and risk Barnes. So for now, he'd said he'd stay.

It became obvious the people fixing the door were also quietly packing up Barnes room.

He pretended to see nothing.

His and Scott's windows were unlocked, but there was a guard beneath them and they were recorded outside if Steve, Wanda or Clint tried to use them to escape.

He and Scott spent more of their time 'out' now. The only meal they ate in the house today had
been breakfast, they'd spent the entire day out and about. Doing everything, anything but going home. Even though he knew he should, he had to work out what was happening and he couldn't do that cowerering out here, but Scott seemed shaken. If he was being honest, he needed the small break to. Luckily there was a lot to do in Wakanda. Scott was obsessed with the 'ginormous rhino's of doom'.

They were pretty cool he had to admit, he snapped several pictures on his tablet to send to Barnes. He'd said it was okay, that it has been a set up, but he'd come back to the villa on his say so. Another innocent person had walked into a trap on his words. At least this time it hadn't been him.

Maybe Barnes would still want to meet up for their book club meetings, but not at the villa. Something was very, very wrong here. Barnes had been through more than enough, he'd earned a break, for things to be easy. Scott was in agreement, they would stay, they would watch the others.

Stark's freaking AI from America, one that he is pretty sure didn't exist before. CERBERUS, because Stark is apparently a dramatic little shit when he names things, the deep voiced Scottish AI seemed oddly invested in Barnes. Add in the fact that Stark has been helping Barnes… He has to wonder how long Stark had known about their location. Why hadn't he done anything about? After everything, why was he helping Barnes? It was confusing, but he so far knew one thing for sure.

They'd stay, maybe he could get through to Steve, if nothing else they'd hopefully get insight into anything the others were planning.

Wolf POV

17th October

He hadn't quite known what to expect when Shuri had told him about the video call. He'd thought up a ton of ways that the call could have gone, but when Dr Stark showed up wearing torn, stained jeans, a tshirt and his hair was stuck up in about 20 different directions, he was thrown. Even Winter was thrown and spent several seconds stunned to silence.

He'd kind of thought the guy slept in suits by this point, at least when he wasn't dealing with Shuri. He's not expected this Stark to be aimed at him.

So it was jarring. It was also like a completely different person than what he'd seen before. Shuri had spent most of the call off to the side trying not to laugh which definitely had not helped much.

He had seemed to be a picture of stunned, confused and rambling. So, definitely not what he'd expected, his uninvited tenant had been annoyingly interested the whole time. Feeding him things to say that where 100% not appropriate, ever.

"Well that was absolutely hilarious."

Shuri had definitely had too much fun with it.

"Well I'm glad you thought so, I didn't know what to say!"

"Don't worry Wolf, you did brilliantly, I have ammo for weeks now on Tony."

"Okay?"
"Good, okay, you have today off for Tony to set everything up for tomorrow. Also you have another letter."

"A letter? From who?"

"Your American PenPal. Who else?"

She handed the letter over and shooed him out of her lab. He hadn't expected another letter from the man so soon, plus, he'd literally just spoken to him. He opened it on the train and noticed there was a bit more in this one than last time and it also looked to be quite a bit longer too which surprised him given how much Shuri had ranted about his hatred of postal communication. Considering Steve hadn't even got one reply to his letter and here he was, going back and forth with the man.

James

I'm glad you liked the drawings! Sorry about that though, I did actually mean to use clean paper! I don't often use paper, holograms have more dimensions. It's awesome. I'm surprised my doodles made much sense at all really.

I'd say I was surprised that Roger's didn't mention the pardons, but honestly I'm not? I pulled a ton of strings, cashed in favours and worked myself half to exhaustion for those damned pardons, it would have covered everything that had happened before and it covered a treatment plan for yourself. My lawyers had started working on your case to. It also pretty much cleared everyone involved as long as they signed. Rogers had been about to, but he found out that I was keeping Wanda at the compound.

There were actual death threats going around for her, she was trending in a bad way but I didn't have the time to dedicate to fixing that when Rogers kept rolling into different countries without clearing it with their governments. He took this as wrongful imprisonment and then you know how all THAT turned out. Including Wanda blasting my kid halfway to China through my building... I just reread that, he's fine! He's kind of made out of Vibranium, that's Vision.

It was all a headache, things moved too fast to react properly. Looking back... it was just a mess after another mess with Zemo's weird, extremely specific plan thrown in. Anyway, I don't want to rant about your best friend to you, that feels kinda weird? I mean, I'm already surprised Roger's doesn't know about BARF. I doubt he would react well, so I know you might not want to keep it from him, but I'd hold off. Roger's doesn't really get tech, I mean I used to have to fix his phone.. weekly . The amount of times that man locked himself out... he even blew up the toaster once and I still don't know how... he was worse than Thor, an alien. From space. Who produced enough background static electricity to be a menace.

The man was worse at basic tech than actual aliens . Thor is also kinda electrified too like I mentioned, so he always blew things up and yet he still didn't have the number one spot for Tower related miss-haps and he literally fell off the Tower once. He tripped in the middle of telling a story about bilgesnipe. Which are like giant rhino-mooses, I had to catch him and he barely noticed. It was like living with super powered toddlers. Now I just have to worry about sorcerers using portals to steal my waffles. The house rules are utterly out of control.. and I've completely lost the actual point I was making.

Sorry about the rambling, crazy day, slightly hyper, got to fly with an old friend and it's been too long since I had a good flight, running is fun and all, but it's not flying...
I know you seem OK with it, but what you mentioned about your arm. I won't tell Shuri myself because that would be a dick move, but you really don't have to be in pain. I dealt with chronic pain from something put in me against my will for years, you don't realise it until it's gone how it affects everything. So think about it? I'm sure Shuri can help on the squishy side, tell her I'd help too if you wanted. The cybernetic limb can be jarring occasionally, but because of it I can still do what I enjoy.

Anyway, I'll stop being annoying with that now. I'm getting Vivid flashbacks of Pepper yelling at me about pain and me being obstinate.

So, I just realised how much I've written so I'm stopping now. Hope you like the bird.

And for the love of Thor and his bag of crazy cats brother. It's Tony.

-TS

He read the letter through a few times and was definitely suffering a little bit of information overload. Steve and the pardons… Wings was going to be pissed, he knew it. Wings hadn't mentioned anything like this in all the time they'd been in Wakanda so he was betting that Steve hadn't passed on information like this. He had to wonder if maybe things would have been different if Steve had signed, or would Steve have carried on and things would still have exploded.

After what happened at the villa with Wanda, he can understand why the little Ved'ma had death threats. He just didn't understand why anyone would protect her.

Her powers were definitely more than what Steve had said they were, that she could get into his head and trap him in his memories. With her hatred of Dr Stark, he wondered how she lived in the same place with him without using her powers. Why did he try to protect a person who hates him?

He remembered when Wanda turned up with the angry archer after fighting Vision.. Who had been her boyfriend? Who apparently Stark saw as a son.

He wasn't sure how that went from superheroes to a really fucked up family drama so fast, but it did. Living with superheroes sounded moderately terrifying.

He also kept calling Steve his best friend and until recently he might have called the man a friend, even though Steve didn't see him. Just saw this perfect Bucky. After he set the Ved'ma on him? Steve definitely wasn't his best friend, he was Bucky's. He was willing to kill him to get his friend back and he didn't want to die. He wanted to live.

'Me too'

'I was wondering when you were going to speak up.'

'You usually complain when I do.'

He couldn't roll his eyes hard enough. Like that had ever stopped him.

'I think he is right about our arm.'

'What?'

'You might not miss the metal arm, but the metal arm is all I remember.'
He ran his hand over his face, he hadn't even thought about it that way. The memories from before might not have much of a hold on him, but he can still remember everything from before. He remembered having 2 arms, he remembered the pain of losing it, the pain of them hacking off what was left. He remembered waking up with a foreign hunk of metal where his arm should be.

He didn't know when or where Winter came from, but obviously it was after that. For him, the metal arm was normal.

He wondered if there was a manual for dealing with the entity in your mind that someone evolved from Hydra programming?

'So, you liked the arm?'

'It was too heavy, uncomfortable, had to compensate even when walking. But it was functional.'

He considered the socket, and sure it hurt, but not as bad as it was before, it made a few activities difficult but he had a high tolerance for pain. Maybe he could take up Shuri's offer, but only after they were safe and hopefully it wouldn't be as bad as the old one. Maintenance had been bad enough for him to consider just going without.

'I'm sure little Koshka would make something better.'

He nodded, which he realised after doing it would look really weird if anyone had been watching him nod at himself. Luckily no one seemed to be paying him that much attention. He slipped the letter back into the envelope and had a look at the second sheet, he wasn't sure what shocked him more. The letter, or the picture. Probably the picture, it was a lot more detailed than the previous one, realistic enough it could be a photograph of a magpie, the black feathers showing the oil slick rainbow and everything. At the bottom next to his signed initials it had <Thanks for the Phoenix> scribbled in Cyrillic.

Huh?

What phoenix?

'You're going to miss your stop.'

'It was you wasn't it? How? What? Why?!

'Yes. Easily and because I wanted too. You got to send something, why shouldn't I?'

He hastily collected things to get off the train and start heading back to his new room. Trying to look normal whilst at the same time freaking out.

'Because no one knows you exist!'

'I know, it's why he thought you sent it.'

'I don't know what would happen if people knew you existed!'

'You're overly paranoid. Plus, he liked the phoenix!'

Of course that would be Winter's take home. Out of everything. He couldn't believe that somehow Winter had gotten around him and added stuff to the letter without him seeing it. He hadn't known to look for it, he had no knowledge or memories of drawing something.

He supposed out of all the things he could be doing in possession of their body, drawing pictures to
send them to Dr Stark is pretty inoffensive. Although… The man wrote back in Cyrillic. The only reason he could think of for him doing that was if Winter had written something in Cyrillic the first time.

He mentally prodded the other and combed through his recent memories but he’d noticed that unless he was active when Winter was in control, he didn't seem to share his memories. Same with Winter, unless he was active at the time, his memories were pretty solidly his own. It was weird.

But then what wasn't these days.

Wolf POV

19th October

He'd not long gotten back from a BARF session where they were working with Dr Stark running the programme and it did feel like a difference, he practically tore through several memories. They still weren't touching the words as apparently they wanted to gather information on how it was working first. Seeing as they knew what they were talking about and his therapist cautioned against rushing, he sent with it.

Wings and TicTac were visiting and Wings was even bringing Red Wing so he was feeling slightly optimistic.

The fact they'd had to lie to Steve about where they were going was slightly weighing on him.

TicTac had described the current mood of the house as sulking.

Wanda and Clint were in her room and Steve was just spending excessive amounts of time in bed, he was point blank refusing to talk to Wings and seemed to have forgotten TicTac existed.

He had to wonder how long this would stay quiet for?

He'd just finished a reply to Dr Stark, yeah, he still couldn't think of the man as Tony. He'd quadruple checked it for drawings and found none.

Two Dora escorted Wings and TicTac in and he pushed everything to the side, he'd kind of missed them. All the time living in the villa he'd spent trying to avoid social interaction, now he was living in his own he was missing it.

He only had Winter to talk to and he'd spent a solid hour this morning explaining that it doesn't matter how much someone annoys you, that no, you can't kill them because it's illegal.

'These laws are confusing. They seem only to over complicate simple situations..'

'We are not going over this again. Just don't do illegal things. Okay?'

'But what if there is a Hydra agent and I want his gun?'

He was not getting into this again.

'Okay! FINE! You can kill Hydra. Happy?'

He didn't get a verbal reply but a sense of deep satisfaction hit him when all he could feel was utter exhaustion. He'd never realised before how much you learn growing up and that if you don't have
that, obvious concepts… aren't so obvious. Winter had been born in horrifying situations that were his normal. Torture and forced servitude. He knew a lot about being an assassin. How to pay for food in a shop? Not so much. It was like having an adult version of the 6 year old who keeps asking maddening questions. With a side of murder.

"Hey Barnes, happy to see you're looking good, you know, considering.."

"I can't believe I slept through everything. I didn't even notice until I tried to leave the house and walked into a metal wall."

He couldn't help but laugh at that and he was so going to be asking Shuri for footage.

"Didn't ya not notice your window was covered? Or the kitchen?"

"TicTac is one of the most oblivious people I've ever--what the hell?"

They all jumped up as Red Wing chose that minute to fire up and float in front of them. Which was weird, because he'd seen Wings take Red Wing out a few times, but the little machine only followed his commands. It didn't do things on its own.

"Wings, you tell it to do that?"

Before Wings replied there was a string of beeps that if he did say so himself, sounded utterly furious.

"Oh shit. You pissed of Sam's robot!"

CERBERUS Scottish voice came from his tablet to hopefully save them before they further angered the furiously beeping robot who was hovering menacingly in front of them.

"If I may cut in? Ceannard has given our young sister Red Wing something we call the JARVIS seed."

"Ahuh.. What's a Ca.. Nard? And JARVIS, wasn't that Stark's first AI?"

"Not quite Mr Lang, But he was Ceannards right hand. Ceannard also means Chief."

"So, Um, Stark gave my Red Wing this seed? What does that mean?"

"It means she now has the capability to grow and become like FRIDAY or myself. Depending how she is treated she could grow to have emotions too."

"Holy shit that is so cool and he did that from America?! Wow. Uh, Ms Red Wing, it's nice to meet you!"

TicTac exuberance was amusing and nearly made him forget the little robot was mad at him until it flew into his face and beeped menacingly at him.

"I'm sorry! Red Wing, I'm sorry I called you an it. I was surprised is all, you are very lovely."

The beeps were less furious and he got the idea she accepted his apology, but that he was on thin ice. Winter scoffed, highly amused with the situation apparently.

"Stark.. He is still upgrading my gear? He sees his AIs as his children and he's letting Red Wing stay with me?"
“Ceannard can easily access his tech through the integration pathway he built to the Wakandan system.”

"Well, if we didn't know before now, it's pretty obvious Stark knows where we are."

"Shuri told me he's known since he woke up from his coma."

"Okay, I'll admit, I did not see that coming."

TicTac seemed equally baffled, he'd been pretty thrown by it at the time but he'd started to realise that if you expected that man to turn left he'd turn right on principle.

Red Wing was flying in happy loops as CERBERUS explained to Wings what it meant to have the fledgling AI, his amusement at Wings dad-shock was blighted somewhat. He couldn't help but think of that conversation that had at breakfast, from what felt like actual years ago now. Where Wanda was talking about shutting down FRIDAY, that Steve had put 'restrictions' on her? At the time, he'd felt uncomfortable, now? Hearing Wings say that Stark's AIs were like his kids? That just made it extremely fucked up.

Although considering CERBERUS was talking to them, and little Red Wing now had this seed. It seemed that in the rouges absence Dr Stark had ignored these rules. CERBERUS was amazing, he had opinions and although sometimes he was confused, he practically felt like a real human. Or was that him being humanist or something? He was real, he was a person. He got scared and he sounded genuinely happy talking about Red Wings new state. If Steve was still there, then would CERBERUS even exist? He'd not really met FRIDAY but CERBERUS had talked about her a few times now.

He saw her as a big sister, and he practically gushed about how much FRIDAY did and how advanced she was for an AI. It was kind of adorable and he didn't like thinking of him not existing. Watching Wings talk to Red Wing excitedly as he showed her things in the room.

Wings looked like all of his birthdays had come at once.

"CERBERUS?"

"Yes Madadh-allaidh?"

"Madah what now? That didn't sound like English?"

"That's because it's Scots Gaelic, Mr Lang."

"Huh. Okay. Why do you get a confusing name?"

"Because I'm awesome. CERBERUS I was just thinking that you could possibly pass along our thanks, Wings especially?"

"Hell yes, Thank Stark for me, this is awesome, she is awesome!"

"I shall pass along your thanks, I'm sure Ceannard will be pleased and the rest of us would like to let you know that should any harm come to our littlest sister, you won't have a chance to regret it."

The still oddly cheerful Scottish made that threat somehow more terrifying. Sam now looked an odd combination of happiness, amazement and outright terror.

He looked an awful lot like a new dad actually.
"Wings, you have dad face."

"Yup, that's dad-shock! Even more hilarious is that he kinda has a kid with Tony Stark."

He and TicTac burst out laughing whilst Sam dropped into a chair looking like he was seriously questioning his life choices, Red Wing settled onto his lap and he smiled as Wings pet the little robot.

"Oh wow, Barnes did you draw this?"

'Huh? Draw what, oh no..'

"Um, no?"

How the hell was he going to explain that he had accidentally kinda become Penpals with Tony Fucking Stark and that he had sent a really cool picture of a magpie back because mentioned he liked magpies offhandedly and because the voice in his head sent him a drawing of a pheonix?!

Just thinking it sounded painfully ridiculous.

"So who? Shuri?"

"TicTac, I'm not sure you'd believe me if I told you."

TicTac handed the picture to Wings who also looked quite impressed.

"Wow, that looks like it could be a photograph, this must have taken ages to do. Why a magpie?"

"I might have offhandedly mentioned I liked birds and magpies?"

"Well who get drew this must like you."

"I don't know about that Wings."

"Alright now I'm curious. Fess up."

Well at least the others weren't here for this to turn into a catastrophic incident again.

"Okay. When I found out about the glasses, I asked Shuri if she'd pass along an apology slash thank you note… To Dr Stark."

Watching the realisation dawns on then was actually quite amusing as they were now looking at the picture in a new light.

"Okay. I need to know how THAT lead to Tony Fucking Stark sending drawings to you!"

"Yeah man, don't hold out on us. I barely met the dude, but I didn't think he was the type to send pictures like this to people, and given the circumstances…"

"Yeah, it surprised me to. I didn't think he'd reply to my first one you know? But he did and he accepted my apologies. His first letter was on the back of all these doodles too which is where the birds came from. He even apologised to me for Siberia."

"Holy shit."

Both of them were completely stunned but still incredibly curious, he considered getting the letters
and showing them but at the same time didn't want to, like he wanted to keep them to himself.

"So I'm guessing you replied again?"

"Yeah, and it was accidentally on the back of one of my doodles, which is what the text says."

"Wow, here we all thought Stark would send up to jail, worried he'd find us and instead you two become penpals."

Both of them started laughing and he rescued his picture, laying it out on the counter top. So sue him, he liked the picture. Not many people did stuff like that for him!

"So, uh, what do you two even talk about?"

"First it was a lot of apologising, me thanking, he did start mentioning something about pardons and Steve but scratched it out, I asked him about it and then he explained to me, before the airport, he had these pardons worked out for everyone with the Accords that covered you retroactively."

Wings amusement dried up pretty damned quickly.

"He what?!"

"Yeah, said he cashed in favours and everything apparently, that Steve was going to sign until he found out that the Ved'ma was being kept at the compound because there were a ton of protests and death threats."

"I can't believe Steve made that decision for me, without talking to me!"

"I know, it included treatment for me and everything."

"How many more secrets are going to come out?"

"I don't know, he didn't say much about it, he said it felt weird badmouthing my best friend to me."

"If only he knew what was happening here right?"

TicTac had been mostly silent in the conversation, the events were before he got involved and as he didn't actually know Dr Stark, he didn't have much to say. Wings looked a little confused, his hand resting on Red Wing who offered a series of boops to cheer him up. It was adorable.

"So, you sending a reply?"

Just finished it.

"What are you going to send in response to the bird?"

Oh… He hadn't thought about that! Damn TicTac!

"Um, I have no idea..?"

"Well it's not sent yet is it?"

"No, it's waiting to be picked up."

"Then you still have time, you could add another drawing?"

He shook his head, because he couldn't draw for shit. Winter apparently could, but his were utterly
"Make him one of you paper creatures?"

"Wings, you're a genius."

He jogged to his room to grab the stack of coloured card Shuri had gotten for him when she realised how much he enjoyed doing it. Even if it was therapist mandated hobby.

They spent a good few hours making little origami creatures, or in TicTac case, making colourful footballs because he sucked at it.

Shuri POV

20th October

Shuri had a migraine.

It was slightly eased knowing Wolf was safe, tucked away behind the Palace walls, walls reinforced with vibranium and many, many guards that now stood between him and the others.

But they were still here. In her home. She's pretty sure that if they took the events at the villa to Tony, that he could help them get rid of them. Her stupid brother however sees them as his responsibility and doesn't want to drag Tony into their mess. Which isn't going to blow up in their faces at some point.

So far pranking T'Challa had been the main way to ease her irritation. For a teenager that looked like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, Peter had some brilliant ideas. Harley had offered to visit with his highest powered potato gun which was extremely sweet. Cooper was still in the getting to know you stage, so as of yet, he wasn't providing ideas on pranking T'Challa. In fact he'd looked moderately terrified of the idea.

Tara however was currently the reason T'Challa had woken up covered in glitter. She hadn't known you could buy industrial sized tubs of glitter, but Tara had known and now, between her and Okoye they'd managed to pour 30kgs of the stuff onto the sleeping man.

When he had popped up on her beads, trying to get it out of his hair and yelling, she had felt a little bit better with everything. You could see where he went by little trails of glitter even hours later.

She had also saved the video and sent it to the Compound Hoard group chat. Peter had added a video a few minutes later of Harley laughing so much that he actually fell off his bed. All in all, things were going well.

And if she'd potentially invented a few things for her brother to 'test out' later?

Well she was just being the dutiful sister she was.

"Hey Shuri. What are you planning for T'Challa now?"

"Whatever do you mean? I'm a perfectly nice sister who never plans anything nefarious."

"Ahuh, if that hadn't been absolutely terrifying on its own, you have that look on your face."

"What look?"
"The one that usually precedes your brother yelling your name dramatically. I don't even know how you got him into the pool fully clothed and I'm not sure I want to…"

She just shot him a grin before setting everything up for their BARF session. Tony was already logged in and ready to go and the screens around changed as he hopped up onto the chair constructed for him.

So far their new method was working a lot better, but it still wasn't working as well as it could be and she was pretty sure she knew why.

She was also pretty damned sure that Tony knew as well. But just like the previous methods, the man might as well move to Egypt.

The integration they'd worked on, well, that Tony had stormed of ahead on on, was practically perfect. Sending data back and forth was a dream and the delay was barely a millisecond. But, and there was always a but, the more data and the bigger that delay got. BARF had an insane amount of data, especially now Tony was reading everything live and coding live. Going back and forth, the delay had grown.

It was still barely noticeable. It was 5.8 milliseconds. That was it.

It shouldn't have been enough to screw up their results, but it was. They'd tried a memory that was practically the same as one of the words yesterday. Well, it didn't have the same physiological response as the memories tied to the words, but the data behind the memory was almost identical.

So it had become a good test. A test to see if they were ready to start working with the words without traumatising the man every time. Tony had found several memories that had similar readings after her Wolf had given him level 4 access and he was coming up with his plan. The way he'd explained it to her was that the memories tied to the words seemed to run along the lines of the stages of brainwashing. A memory tied to each stage then tied to the words.

Brainwashing however is a lengthy process, and her Wolf held out for nearly two decades before the words robbed him of his will.

So, there were multiple memories that could apply to each stage that could have become the singular memory attached to the word.

He'd actually already disassociated one, early on surprisingly. Assault on identity. Which was apparently the first stage and there were a scary amount of memories that Tony had managed to tag for that. It had taken a long time to wear him down until he believed he was an asset instead of a human. After that, the other 9 stages had less memories. Stage 3 had been heartbreaking for her to sort out, but between her and Tony, they had a selection of memories for each stage varying from easy to hard.

The easy ones Tony had explained were similar in content, but the readings did not fit the same pattern as the singular memory attached to the word. The hardest ones were memories that could easily be mistaken for the memory attached to the word.

Yesterday they had tried a few easy memories for different stages slipped in with some random memories. They hadn't explained this to her Wolf because they were concerned that if he'd put undue pressure upon himself, that if he thought it was something exactly like the words, he might inadvertently sabotage himself or repeat the memory excessively. It had actually been the therapist who came up with the plan.
They weren't hiding the content of the memories, he still chose the memories and could choose to skip them. They just hadn't informed him of the fact that they were nearly identical to the words.

She disliked it.

Tony disliked it.

But Tony was scared of Wolf's therapist.

She went along with it because it could help, then some day she hoped that she could tell him everything and that he'd understand why they concealed that little bit of information.

He leaned back and she watched as everything loaded up around him. A message flashed onto her phone from Tony that he was starting and she sat back to watch.

She kept one eye on the hologram surrounding him and the other on the screen showing the data going back and forth from America. She could almost feel the tiny lag and she had been watching these sessions long enough now that she could see the problems almost before they occurred.

Compared to just the original algorithms running, Tony's code was a dream. It was fast and jumped into force when it was needed and hung back for others. The error counter was low, but it wasn't as low as she and Tony wanted. She could almost see Tony working harder every time an error stacked.

The delay was miniscule, but it was enough to be screwing with them, especially as they still had no idea why his mind seemed to be working differently to other patients.

Eventually Tony was going to have to admit that the delay was too much, especially for the words.

Eventually he'd have to admit that there was nothing that could be currently done to improve the integration.

Eventually, Tony Stark was going to come to Wakanda.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so done with being ill, my body isn't and I had to go to the doctors. Which is the best place to pick up small buts that will turn my immune system into a Demon wolf.

I'm semi OK, in a holding pattern of 'I have literally no energy' and 'Oh look, I can't sleep!'

Eh, I've had worse winters, trying to use hospital WiFi and being expected to sleep at night by nurses? No fun.

This chapter was amusing afiaith, I turned the notes for a chapter, actually into a single chapter instead of 4!
Tony POV

20th October

Tony had just dropped off the kids and he had a few hours before he had to log on to help with James BARF. Since he was now fully logged in, they had changed the time, because as much as he wanted to help, no way was he being awake for 5am. So James now had his treatment later in the day like sensible humans.

Generally he was still surprised that he was able to be awake to drop the kids off to school after getting some sleep.

It wasn't much sleep, damned nightmares stirred up from talking about Ultron and all that crap had him waking up constantly. He nearly stormed off to the lab multiple times, but Tara had been having nightmares too lately and it would kill him if she went looking for him and found an empty bed. It had happened once and he still hadn't quite forgiven himself for it. Until she was sleeping well again, he'd decided to try to be in bed at night, or at least in the apartment. Or let her know he would be away so she could tell one of the AIs to bring him to her.

So he was knackered and Stephy was meant to be popping over to go to lunch with him and Rhodey. He had a dozen things that needed doing, including an incredibly boring board meeting much later. For now he was catching up on correspondence, emails in his head and then the stack of physical letters. He sped through the former because the latter was more fun and then he spent a good hour reading letters from young kids.

He was a sap. He loved getting letters from kids, some came with pictures too which he pinned up in his office on a huge board. Well, it covered the wall really. Only Peter knew about it because he had actually been in his office one day he was looking for him. So probably all the kids knew now because it was Peter, his ability to keep a secret was awful, which was why so many people knew he was spiderman. His office was pretty under used, but it was handy for Accords business and a few other things. He finished pinning photos on one side and pictures on the other, much better than filed away like he used to. He sat down and realised he'd missed a letter and he instantly recognised the handwriting.

He hadn't realised he and James had been writing enough for him to be at the stage of instantly recognising the handwriting and he might be delaying because he was still mortified that he'd written his last letter whilst slightly hyperactive. Of course, when he realised he was procrastinating, he had no choice, so he ripped open the letter and little colourful things dropped out.
He tilted his head in confusion, picked one up and realised it was an origami bird, or rather, birds. He blinked at the little things and was utterly baffled. They were so tiny.

No one had ever sent him origami birds before.

No one had ever debt him origami anything before.

Why was the Winter Soldier sending him origami birds?

Also.

The Winter Soldier does origami?!

He lined the 5 different birds up and couldn't help but be a little impressed whilst being incredibly confused. They looked incredibly complicated. So small and so detailed.

His life had finally spiraled off into the completely bizarre. Shaking his head he pulled out the letter. Sighing that the man was STILL calling him Dr Stark. This was a war that he would eventually win.

Dr Stark

Thank you for the picture, it's really awesome and looks so realistic it could be a photograph!

Thank you for telling me about Steve, and what he didn't say. I don't know what has gotten into the punk but he isn't anything like the little Stevie in my memories. I don't know if Shuri mentioned that they gave me my memories back, they're all there, but it feels like they belong to someone else if that makes sense? It's why I don't like being called Bucky now, it's just.. Not me. Steve.. He doesn't get it. He wants me to be like how I was, but I don't know if that's possible, or if I want it. I.. Like who I am. We aren't exactly on good terms right now either.

I never really liked Wanda, she sets off alarm bells in my head and as much as Steve calls her a kid, she ain't!

I hope that Vision is okay? I hope she didn't hurt him too much. CERBERUS told me Vision was taking trips to find himself, so I hope he's doing better after what she did to him. I know you said he's made out of vibranium, (also, wow, vibranium is awesome and has so many weird properties that Shuri has been showing me!) I know you said he's made out of it, but getting abused like that from a friend? It's not right. Just because you can take the damage doesn't mean you should.

How do you lock yourself out of your phone? I have a tablet that Shuri gave me, it only really works to contact people on Wakanda, well. And CERBERUS somehow, because he's a smart cookie. But it's never locked me out. But then Steve was never really good with anything tech related, even back in the 40s, and tech wasn't exactly complicated back then.

I don't mind rambling, it's kind of fun getting letters? It's something new, not something Bucky did. It's something that is mine. So ramble away!

Also flying? In the suit? That's kind of duh, ignore that. I imagine that would be all kinds of fun though.

I suppose you're right about my arm, I'm just kind of used to ignoring it? Shuri wants to make me a new one but I don't know if it would be a good idea until I'm 'safe'. If I only have one arm, it will be
easier to take me down. It's hurt for so long it's kind of normal in a way, but since having the rest of it removed it's much better. It was really heavy and pulled me down on one side, maintaining it wasn't fun either. When I was on my own I worked out how to keep it running but it wasn't great.

Who is Thor's brother and why is he as crazy as a bag of cats? 

(Also, why is a bag of cats crazy?)

Hope you like the birds!

James

Now Tony wasn't sure if he was more shocked by the little line of origami birds or the letter.

Probably the letter for the sheer amount of things that blew his mind. How was Mr super soldier turned unwilling assassin from the 40s somehow more well adjusted that himself?

Also, he wasn't on speaking terms with Steve?!

Mr 'I'll destroy the world for Bucky Barnes' was in the dog house.

Huh.

As much as a tiny part of him found that actually hilarious... a small part, okay, a slightly larger part, he's not perfect after all. Ignoring that bit, there is a bigger part was actually concerned. That Steve wanted his perfect best bud from the 40s and wasn't satisfied with what he had? Which was freaking ridiculous. But what would he do next?

James was alive, walking, talking, doing great with BARF and therapy. Making leaps that he didn't think were possible. He was clearly finding himself as a person, he seemed nice and friendly. He was snarky and did much better in that video chat than him. He was the dictionary definition of disaster human when faced with a smirking James Barnes. Why was Rogers unhappy? He had everything he wanted, James was alive and kicking and doing much better than he'd expected. Looking at the Hydra files alone he'd thought the guy would be a vegetable. He had the team, he walked out of that Civil War the clear winner whilst he'd been left alone in Siberia.

That Wanda was there was also concerning. He worried that they might try and use her to fix him somehow. But then he might just be overly paranoid when it came to her. He found himself going straight to worst case scenario.

He'd been wondering for a while though, especially since his head had been cleared up, it had always struck him as weird that Rogers had brought her onto the team so fast, but he'd been too caught up with things to think on it back then. Looking back, his motivations were clearer, either she was there to fix his best friend, or as a precedent. Already brought one ex Hydra member in, why not add another! If Rogers had gotten his way, brought him onto the team, would he have told him? After a year? After 5? Probably never.

He pushed that out of his mind, thinking of Roger's left him mauldin. He also vacillated between apathy and anger whenever he thought of that super soldier. It was like he couldn't settle on an emotion. The other super soldier. Well that was confusing in a different way. He actually found himself enjoying these letters, he enjoyed writing them and Tony had never enjoyed writing before. It wasn't something he recognised or knew how to categorise so he was ignoring it.
It was also probably telling that James, who'd never really met Vision, showed more care about what Wanda did go him, than Rogers did in his letter. He also talked about CERBERUS like he was a person, not just a machine. That.. That was rare.

He snagged the pad on his desk to reply as he still has some time free. Which was definitely the only reason, not because he wanted to explain the crazy that was Reindeer Games and he was definitely ignoring the warm feeling that the man was actually listening to him about his arm. Nope.

It was a while later when he was sketching in his office, letter finished, when Stephy portaled into the apartment. Because doors are too muggle for super important wizards it seemed. Even though there was a closed door between them, the explosion of gold still assaulted his senses and left him slightly dazed. Glancing at his pad, he'd also messed up what he was working on because of it.

"I'm in here! Doors are a thing you know."

He yelled as he started correcting the mess he'd made because of the damned wizard.

"What are you doing in here? I didn't even know you had an office. You would sense the portal opening in the hall, so what's the point?"

He huffed and shook his head, concentrating whilst he let Stephy do his usual thing. Snoop. He was such a nosy bastard but after so many years Tony had gotten used to it and let the man poke around. It was easier than trying to stop him.

"I don't use it often, but it's occasionally handy. And you might interrupt something, you never know."

"Please. Your apartment is PG rated."

"I didn't know my apartment was rated."

"Why do you have a wall of pictures of children. This is incredibly creepy."

"To you, yes. To normal people, it's cute. Kids send me letters, sometimes with pictures, other times with photos."

He indicated to each wall as he spoke and Stephy looked amused and confused. Picking up one of the letters the kids sent, and thank any God that might be listening that he had slipped the letter from James into the drawer with the others. He'd never live it down. Stephy was looking at the letter with the same face as when he was deciphering those ancient tomes Wong gave him last week that had been in a confusing demon language. But then he'd never exactly been the best with very small children. He loved the boys, he was abjectly terrified of the girls. It was perfect entertainment.

"What are these?"

"What are what?"

He'd gotten pulled into his drawing that he hadn't realised Stephy had moved on, and that whilst he put the letter away, he had not put away the little birds.

"These, they're much too advanced to be from any of those letters."

"They're not, they're from.. Urm.. Someone else."
"Hmmm, is what you're working on for that person? I don't often see you draw like this. Those ravens in flight look quite impressive."

"You think? I thought it would be nice reply to the birds and he said he liked corvids."

He glanced up and the look on Stephy's face immediately told him that he'd made a mistake somewhere. Dammit this is why he never draws around people, it takes up more of his focus and he rambled without thinking. Stephy knew how to use it to his advantage of course.

"Hmm. Who is this mysterious man?"

"Uh. No one.. No one you'd know…"

"You're not getting out of this that easy."

"James. It's for a guy called James. See, you have no idea who it is."

Stephy had perched on his desk now, fiddling with one of the birds which caused him to frown so he rescued it from Stephy and put it back into the line in its original position. Which of course caused the man to smirk as if Tony had done something a lot more interesting than he had.

"So how long have you and this mysterious James been talking?"

"Uh, he sent a letter a while ago, I replied and it carried on from there."

"Yeah. No. You don't send letters, not to adult humans. Not willingly. I've known you for 2 decades and you have drawn one thing for me which puts me on par with this man.."

"This is the second drawing."

He mumbled whilst sinking back in his seat slightly and raising his pad.

"What was that now?"

"This is the, ur, second thing. I sent a magpie last time."

Stephy just blinked at him in utter shock and Tony was convinced that man was overreacting. It wasn't that weird! He was just trying to be nice.

"Who are you and where is Tony Stark? Either that or you have a crush on this guy."

"No it's not that, it just.. He sent me those so I wanted to send something back? It's not a big deal."

"Mmmhmm. Looking past how strange it is that you are actually conversing with a person via the post, willingly."

"That's actually not that weird, he doesn't have a phone and where he is, you can't send digital communications. Hence the letters."

"I might believe that, but I know what you made for Bruce."

Damn the wizard and his eidetic memory. Damn his annoying raised eyebrow.

"It, urm, wouldn't work there."

"That thing would probably work from the sodding Savage Lands. There is something you aren't
telling me…"

At the moment his other brother came and saved him, Rhodey knocked the door open and rolled in, obviously giving his back a break from the braces as he built up his tolerance from using them. He'd been doing amazingly since he finished them, even Jules was impressed, and she was a hard woman to impress. Yes, he was trying to change the topic, even in his brain. He accepted this and was fine with it.

"Honey bear! My saviour!"

"What am I saving you from, why are there tiny paper birds on your desk?"

'Oh fuck.'

That took barely two sodding seconds.

"They're from his mysterious penpal that he won't tell me about. He's even drawing something to return too."

"Penpal…"

He could practically see the gears moving in Rhodey's head and he slumped down in his chair, now actually considering hiding under his desk.

"No… Tell me it's not who I think it is."

He sighed and put his focus back into his ravens in flight. Otherwise he might actually die of embarrassment.

"It is."

"Who is it? He just said 'James' which isn't very informative."

Which of course had Rhodey snapping his head to him again and staring at him. Suddenly his ravens were super interesting and he was not looking up.

"Oh, its James now is it? When did that happen?"

"He prefers it, so it's what I call him. No big deal."

"How many letters have you two been sending, I just thought it was one, I didn't even know you'd replied! Let alone got to the stage of pictures and origami birds! I didn't even know that was a stage of communication!"

"This isn't his first picture either. He sent a magpie last time. Because the guy mentioned ONCE that he liked magpies!"

He's not sure what's worse, Stephy the smug bastard or Rhodey's eyebrows that are practically on a mission to the moon.

"I'm not even sure what is happening right now. You two are just reading in to things that don't exist."

"So who is 'James'?"

"The Winter Soldier."
"What?!"

He sighs and finally looks up from his pad at his two brothers who apparently want to torture him.

"Look, it's not that weird okay. He sent me a letter thanking me for BARF and he really apologised
for everything, didn't he Sour Patch? I couldn't not reply."

Rhodey grudgingly agrees to the letter part at least.

"Yeah, the guy put actual effort into it and everything. I was impressed. Did the doodle on the back spark of all this."

He gestured to the line of birds and the sketch pad on Tony's lap.

"Ah, no, his next letter had a bigger drawing of a phoenix, it was really detailed to. And. Uh. A Shakespeare quote."

Stephy poked him to make him look up.

"Stop mumbling. A what?"

"A Shakespeare quote in Cyrillic and no, I'm not showing you."

"Aww he's blushing."

"Stephy, I can and will zap you."

He held up his hands in surrender but the smirk on his face told him that he was enjoying this far, far too much.

"So, anything else I don't know Tones?"

"No? I'm still working on BARF with him, I made him a few screensavers to help after his sessions because he liked the butterfly one I made."

"You did what now?"

"Don't give me that look Sour Patch and you stop smirking! I just re-worked Stephie's butterfly program to have a few different bird options. No big deal."

Somehow that has Stephy smirking more and Rhodey's jaw on the floor and he concedes he will not be able to finish his piece and places it on his desk, mindful of his little origami birds that he straightens up and then glares at Stephy, daring the man to say something.

"Why don't we go to lunch as planned and stop grilling me?"

"Why don't we go to lunch and continue grilling you?"

Stephy's snark back is instantaneous. He sighs whilst ushering the two men out of his office, ducking into his room to throw on a jacket as he was currently wearing a t-shirt. He formed a pair of glasses out of nanites and activates the hand coverings.

"Well I have to be back for 1pm so hurry and get it out of your systems."

"Why 1? What's at 1? Your calendar has you blocked at out 1pm everyday, I've been meaning to ask you."
"Sour Patch… Don't read into this too much.."

Which of course *instantly* had both of their rapt attention.

"I'm acting as the algorithm for James treatment. Before you say anything, nothing else was working, it was Shuri's idea, I discussed it with James and he thought it was a good idea."

Instead of immediately yelling as they entered the lift as he expected they would, Stephy just kept on smirking and Rhodey had a contemplative look on his face before asking him a question that seemed so random it threw him.

"When did you get his last letter, the one with the birds?"

"Wha? This morning? Why?"

"And started your reply this morning?"

"Well, no, I finished my letter, just need to finish the picture. What?"

"Hmm, nothing. Just thinking."

They were coming up to his workshop and he frowned at the pair.

"Well don't. You're thinking up weird conclusions. Stephy, do you want to portal us to the restaurant."

He rolled his eyes before summoning a portal.

"If were just going to portal why did we come down here?"

"Needed to grab something."

He jogs into his workshop and grabs a box before coming up to them getting ready to step through the portal. They didn't panic him anymore, even though after New York, any portal was bad. But he'd worked past it with Stephy. However, he hadn't actually looked at one closely since he got his new ability. He could sense them now, even from rooms away, which sounded like handy wavy magic crap that he hated. The edges looked nothing like what they used to. Gone was the orange sparks. Now it was like a tear in space ringed with gold throwing off prism like rainbows. He was about to step through with his eyes closed and jumped when he felt someone touch his elbow.

Opening his eyes it was Stephy who was now just smiling supportively.

"We could drive?"

The fact Stephy was making that offer was impressive in itself.

"Na, its OK Stephy, it's not… it's not like how I was before. It just looks different now, I can also *feel* it."

"That is really interesting, when we've finished torturing you about your long distance boyfriend, you can tell me all about it."

He was spluttering and failing to come up with an adequate response as they stepped through to Rhodey's laughter.

It felt weird, like someone had doused him in water.. Or gunge. But it didn't care about his clothes, it just got straight to his skin and he felt it everywhere and his eyesight was blasted with gold. On
the other side, he felt the portal close and the sensations immediately stopped. Leaving his skin tingling all over. He shook it off when he was back on solid ground.

"That was so much weirder than I expected it to be. Also, keep it up Mr and you don't get your present."

They exited the alleyway next to the little pizza place he loved that actually had a ramp outside. A good one too, not one thrown in as an afterthought that's barely usable.

"Okay. Fine, I'll behave."

"I'll buy it when I see it."

Stephy just laughs and Rhodey is still chuckling from earlier. Even though its at his expense, seeing both of his brothers laughing makes him smile. He waits until they've sat down and ordered before he finally hands over the gift.

Stephy pulls out the black and red gloves in confusion and slips them on as instructed, his eyes going wide as the shaking of his hands suddenly stops and warmth spreads into his fingers.

"Tony... Wha...?"

"They're made out of nanites, if your hands are cold, they'll heat them up. Hot, they'll cool you. They're completely adaptive for multiple situations and they mitigate the shaking. I saw this video about these gloves to counteract severe hand tremors, so I figured I could make something less bulky for you. If you want to change the colour I can do that too."

He rambles slightly which he always has a tenancy to do when making things for people and only stops when Levi glomps him like the overgrown slanket he is. Stepy then also hugs him, which is a record really, two hugs of Stephy in such a short time. The man was rarely that tactile, it pretty much amazed Tony that he occasionally bumped his shoulders because he knew Tony was quite a tactile person.

"Thank you."

"It's nothing I..."

"Tony. No. Thank. You."

"Your welcome."

Thankfully pizza arrived to save him from any embarrassing blushing. It was worth it to see Stephy grinning throughout dinner.

Tony POV

21st October

They'd not long finished today's therapy and Tony was extremely frustrated. He was pacing back and forth in front of the camera where Shuri was sat watching him with amusement as he ran his hands through his hair for the hundredth time before stopping to bring up the recording on his end of the latest session.
"It's like its fighting me… Or screwing with me."

He tilts his head to the side, facing the code as he runs it through his mind again. Now he isn't in a session he has more time to get a feel of the code.

"No...It's like something is trying to protect itself from me"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know how to explain it, it's just how the code feels."

"I didn't even know code could feel like anything."

Shuri just looks highly amused at his antics and he has never wanted to explain his technopathy to her more than at this moment. Because without it, he wouldn't have a clue either, but it's just how it feels and he doesn't know how else to explain it.

What's weird is that James is all for BARF. He is so on board it's ridiculous, the man had read more of the documentation attached to it that half the therapists that use his tech did. He's not even far behind Shuri on knowing how it works. So he isn't protecting himself from it, plus, Tony isn't even sure how someone would go about doing that. It probably wouldn't even matter if not for the damned delay.

The delay in the uplink is milliseconds, 5.8 long to be precise, since they've perfected the binary to Wakandan tech it's practically non existent for all intents, constructions and purposes. But it's just long enough for him to lose the upper hand here and there, causing the percentage of disassociation to drop and errors to build up. Even with his mind up linked in instead of typing which was infuriating as he was hoping that would be his 'edge'.

Which is maddening as he's basically stalled. This was his Hail Mary pass. Well. One of them. He didn't think he'd even get here, let alone past it. Well, he does have a next stage, but after yesterday he'd not wanted to go with it. Maybe there are other world renowned neurosurgeons that won't relentlessly tease him about things that don't actually exist? He sighed because there aren't exactly many people around who understand the brain better than Stephy. He also has the benefit of already being familiar with BARF as he consulted with him during its creation. He already knows that he's helping James with BARF too, so there would be no awkward conversation about that.

"Shuri, I'm going to call my Wizard Doctor, see if he has any ideas."

"Okay Tony, don't stress too much. We'll come up with something."

He nodded and they finished up, signing off he sent his sunglasses back to the hive.

"FRIDAY, Ask Stephy if he can pop down. Remind him to not portal into my workshop after he destroyed my last experiment."

"Will do Boss!"

Tony goes back to his pacing. He does not like this, not at all. Sure what they're doing is still working. It will help James considerably as it already is, they're disassociating a record number of memories every session. However as soon as they load a memory that's remotely close in a data signature to the words everything goes to hell, the lag utterly screws him and he's left desperately playing catch up and failing.

He is just so frustrated and it feels like he's missing 'something'. 
But he has no idea where to even start of finding the thing that he's missing. He has plenty of data and each session since he started coding directly is recorded and he's combed through the code over and over, fully shutting down everything in his mind and only focusing on it and it feels like there is something. Like when you see something out of the corner of your eye but he can't put his finger on it and it's starting to really, really annoy him. After this he's going to need to spar or things are going to blow up.

He focuses his frustration into his electrokinesis and the handy lightning rod he installed in the workshop yesterday. When he's stressed and feels the pressure building in his head that tends to result in tech exploding, he can now channel it harmlessly into electricity and the lightning rod stops it from breaking things in his lab. Cooper and Harley came up with it and it's already gotten a lot of use, especially with how damned frustrating things are right now.

He started pulling up the scans of James brains onto various screens for when Stephy arrived, the scans from his first session and the last are wildly different, there's a lot less… mush. Yeah, mush is possibly the best word, bits are just fuzzy and whilst he is not sure what that means, he doubts it's a good thing and that it's getting less… mushy is probably a good thing. Although he's pretty sure the less mushy things are, the better his brain is at fighting him.

The portal opening outside his lab is apparently still close enough for it to rudely assault his senses so he's still blinking out the bright gold lights when Stephy dramatically enters the workshop. Levi all a flutter.

"That was one time the portal knocked one thing over and you- Tell me that is not your brain!"

He blinks the last of the brightness out of his eyes to find an incredibly alarmed Stephy immediately flicking through his holograms.

"No, no. This isn't me. This is James."

"Scans taken during BARF sessions?"

"Mhmm, this is when we started and in order to where we are now."

"This..this is remarkable. This type of tissue regeneration should not be impossible, no one comes back from that."

"Well, he is and he's healing faster after each session too, these are scans from when he was in Cryo."

"Well if he's in Cryo he wouldn't be healing."

"Normally yes, but his temperature was raised enough to allow the serum to regenerate tissue and he was undergoing a Wakandan memory therapy for amnesiacs."

"The difference over the months is…"

"Negligible."

"Hmm, especially compared to now. So why are you acting like a storm cloud and making your hair ridiculous?"

Stephy smirked and tugged on his hair as he spoke, obviously amused at its current state. Tony ran his hands through it again, but from the amused look on his face, he hadn't improved the situation any.
"Because whilst he's disassociating memories at an amazing rate, doing great in therapy and healing faster each day…"

"Wait, these scans are DAYS apart?"

"Mhmm, you should see the code, I know it doesn't interest you, but the twists and turns his brain takes are amazing. Every time I think I get the pattern down it changes…"

Stephy doesn't say anything but he does go back to smirking as Tony throws up the code from the last session, changing the colours to differentiate between himself and James.

"So where is the problem?"

"With the command words. I've tracked them down and as he held out for nearly 20 years, there are a lot of memories that could have been the ones attached to the code words. So they're a good test without being too traumatic."

"I'm impressed."

"I'd take that as a compliment but it meant that you just assumed I'd be running the worst memories in the guys head every day."

"If you were doing this treatment on yourself, that's exactly what you'd be doing."

Yeah. He can't really argue with that.

"Well I'm not doing it on myself, the problem is the delay."

"Delay?"

"The integration has a delay of up to 5.8 milliseconds when a significant amount of data is involved. BARF is big so it's like playing a video game with a lag against a person with no lag."

"Well, then you need to remove the lag."

"I've improved the integration as much as I can."

"Tony. That's not what I meant and you know it."

"Dammit, I need to actually be there don't I?"

Stephy just nodded whilst he fretted. It wasn't the first time this had occurred to him. It wasn't even the second or third. He'd disregarded it every time because he honestly wasn't sure James would be comfortable with him being literally in the room whilst he was using the glasses.

Sure, they'd apologised and somehow become Penpals and that was not at weird… he was enjoying it enough that he was actually kind of scared to rock the boat and telling the man he needs to be in the room whilst he relive Hydra a greatest torture hits, that definitely feels like the kind of thing that would rock said boat.

He was starting to tentatively think that maybe James didn't hate him for what he did and see him potentially as a friend. He just didn't know if that equated to the level of trust required for what he was asking.

"Maybe if I go to Wakanda, and I'm there for 1 or 2 sessions, think that will be enough?"
"If it isn't, what are you going to do then? You can't stay away for too long and being away from us means you'll be hiding 24/7."

"It won't be too bad, I suspect I'd need to be there for several sessions, I could manage a few weeks maybe? I'll have to tell Shuri some of it, I promised I would anyway… plus, I need to immerse myself fully into it, typing doesn't cut it."

Stephy seemed less interested in what would have to be done to help James and more interested in him. Which was a strange feeling, even though he'd known Stephy for so long, actually Seeing it in his colours was still strange for him. He also registered that he was shocked, that even in person Tony would have to entirely throw himself into the code. If he hadn't been battling this for some time, he'd be shocked too. However he knew nothing short of all of his effort and zero delay was required.

"And will you be able to keep up your diet?"

"Yeah, I can work around that, I've eaten with T'Challa and he knows about me, and I'll be telling Shuri when I get there. They'll help me out."

"Hmm, that could work. But I want you to check in, if you drop too much weight you return. Immediately, no questions or whining. Doctors orders."

He rolled his eyes at Stephy's mother henning and decides not to mention that even though he'd been eating enough and looked fine as far as he was concerned, he was actually losing weight weirdly enough, it was slowly enough he had only recently noticed it. He figured maybe it was just weight fluctuations for Extremis or something and was keeping an eye on it, he'd even upped his caloric intake and yet he still had dropped a little weight last time he checked. As he didn't look like he'd dropped anything Stephy hadn't said anything about it, it was a well kept secret between himself and FRIDAY. He figured it would settle down soon. No use stressing Stephy when he was fine after all.

"Okay Mom."

"What about your current exercise routine, you won't have your sparring partners to help you burn your energy off."

"Maybe they have a gym? I'll try not to destroy it. Shuri knows I run now. So I think I could make it work. If not I'll find a tree I can zap."

To show that it worked he sent another pulse down his arm, connecting to the lightning rod which instantly released the pressure building up in his head again, his shoulders sagging with relief. Stephy just raised his eyebrow and wondered why both his brothers seemed to do that around him so often? Did they occasionally get together to practice? Synchronised eyebrow raising?

"20 days. No longer. I'm going to speed up work on my Anti-BitchWitch prototypes."

"Right, 20 days. Tell me that is what you're calling them in the official documentation.."

"If you do not return in 20 days, I will find a way to portal to Wakanda and I will personally drag you back. No, I used a bunch of magical jargon to confuse the Select Council. You know that's my hobby."

Tony hummed, he'd seen the reports the man submitted. It was like a magical thesaurus vomited everywhere.
"Don't worry, I don't think I could be away from the munchkins longer than that. That's already pushing it."

"Do you think in that time you will be developed a way for the code to run without your input?"

"I'll have to right?"

"If it doesn't work, you know what you're going to have to do right?"

He did. If this last Hail Mary failed, he'd have to find a way to bring James here. He already had started to sort that out for a back up after the first time he ran the code and it still wasn't working as well as they needed because he always planned ahead for potential failures. His back ups always needed back ups, although he honestly had not thought things would go down this path when he first tossed the glasses in that box almost on a whim. His lawyers were already working on, but it was all underwraps. If going to Wakanda worked, he wouldn't need it.

Plus he doubted that would happen anyway, not without his best bud. Tony was really not ready for Rogers to come back, maybe he could just take James? Ha. As if. As much as James said they were not on good terms, he doubted the rift between them was bad enough that the man would run off to America with him. He needed to make sure not to say that to Stephy, it sounded like a bad romance novel and the man would never let him live it down.

"Rhodey is going to kill me."

"Oh yes, so keep my name out of it will you. I don't want to take the blame for you bringing your little PenPal boyfriend here."

"Oh for fucks sake, he's not my boyfriend!"

Stephy just cackled as he swept out of the lab, the image ruined slightly by Levi waving goodbye to him as the infuriating wizard hopped in a portal, but not before getting the last word in. Of course.

"You keep telling yourself that!"

How did he even get into these situations? Shaking his head he summoned his sunglasses and started calling Shuri again. She was most likely still in her lab for a while.

"Tony! That didn't take long, so, when are you coming to Wakanda?"

"Where you just waiting for me to come to the conclusion myself?"

"Yup!"

He shook his head but he wasn't exactly surprised.

"Well I have a few meetings coming up, then the Halloween fancy dress gala that I'm told if I miss Carol will drop me off on Pluto."

"Carol is hilarious!"

"I figure early November."

He pulled up his calendar looking for a time chunk that he could be away from home. He could still work, he'd become a master of working from home these last few months but now he'd come out of seclusion, everyone wanted a piece of him.
"The 10th looks good, I'll check with everyone else but I think it'll be good."

"How long will you be staying for?"

"Not sure, but my Doctor Wizard has given me a maximum of 20 days and I have to check in with him to make sure I'm not having.. Issues.. I will explain when I get there like I promised, I just need a few things.."

"Like your increased caloric intake?"

He wondered if she was going to figure out all of his changes before he even mentioned them.

"Yes, I usually spar to let of.. Excess energy too."

"That makes sense, T'Challa is the same. Do not worry, we will sort everything out for you when you finally tell me everything."

"In person remember, I promised."

"I know, I can wait, especially now I have a date. Now, go and work out what you're going to tell Rhodey."

"Can't I tell him from Wakanda?"

"You could, but then what would happen when you get home?"

"True. Okay, I'm going to let off some steam before I tell him, but not until I get the okay from James."

She was definitely smirking, why did everyone smirk when he called him James? It was his name?

"I shall ask our White Wolf."

She signed off after that and Tony was partially excited because it was Wakanda after all. From what he had seen in Shuri's lab and what she'd sent him, he was dying to visit the place. It also meant being on the same continent as the rogues, but he suspected that Shuri and T'Challa would keep his presence there a secret and find a way that he didn't run into any of them.

"FRIDAY, ask my usuals if anyone is up for sparring?"

"Sure thing Boss."

He made his way to the apartment to change and started heading off to the sparring room that he'd now outfitted next to the others. He'd built a containment field around it so he could sparr in the actual area for it rather than as far away from all tech as possible. Especially since the Guard HQ was coming along nicely and Maria Hill had threatened to sock him if he kept exploding their new lights. She didn't know how he was doing it, but they went into sparr and later the lights were blown up. It was enough for the blame to land squarely on his shoulders apparently. So he used the containment field for the nanites, and built an entire room.

"Boss, Jess, Matt, Natasha and Deadpool have all said they're available."

"Huh. Okay. So, I'm going to get beaten up aren't I Fri?"

"They might have been planning this for a while."
"Well that's… not at all comforting. Tell them I'm on my way."

"Will do Boss!"

"I'm not sure you should sound of chipper about this, I'm pretty sure I'm about to get pounded into mush."

"I'm sure you'll have fun Boss."

"Ahuh…"

**Tony POV**

**30th October**

Tony was exhausted. Ever since he made the decision to head to Wakanda and James said yes, via Shuri and via letter. Now he had 25 little origami birds and 5 origami cats and somehow they're all different and so tiny and intricate, it's confusing, especially as he tried to replicate one and failed miserably. Miniaturised an arc reactor in a cave? Tiny vibranium nanoparticles? Easy. Origami cat… and maybe it got set on fire with his electrokinesis. Only FRIDAY could tell.

Apart from that, things had been *BUSY*.

Telling Rhodey had been hard. Telling the kids had been harder.

Harley surprised him by coming around first. Muttering about an origami menageries luring his dad to Africa, but he came around a lot quicker than it took for him to come around to Bruce. They'd hit a tentative truce at best, the teen had gone and snuck into his office and read the letters they'd been sending, then he was on board somehow. Weirdly.

Peter was mostly sulking that HE didn't get to go to Wakanda. That had been solved by getting T'Challa to personally call the kid and give him a 'royal invitation' to Wakanda when a certain bunch of fugitives had left. He was pretty sure T'Challa was utterly bulshitting about royal invites, but he knew he'd come through.

Telling Tara had been heartbreaking and he'd nearly called the entire thing off before he even said anything. She'd eventually convinced *him* to go to help James, but he'd set up a holoscreen next to her bed to call him anytime she needed. Rhodey had also told her that any time she had a nightmare, she could go to him after calling Tony.

The next shock had been how hard Laura's kids took it.

Cooper had just gotten silent, he'd convinced himself that if he left, he'd never come back. He got Stephy to tell him his plan to drag him home via portal if he wasn't finished in 20 days, which the kid found hilarious and it eased the tension. He'd also quietly agreed to call him before bed without telling the other teens.

Lilah had also been nervous that if he left he wouldn't return, but also that she couldn't go 20 days without their bedtime stories. As he was already calling Tara for hers, he was happy to add Lilah to the list. 7pm in America might be 2am in Wakanda, but it was worth it to have to kids happy and comfortable with his trip.
Cassie had also surprised him, the little girl was just starting to come out of her shell and he hadn’t expected her to attach to him like an octopus when she found out he was leaving. He’d asked Maggie if she minded him adding her to the bedtime story club, she actually had two non absentee parents after all. Both her and Jim were shocked but happy.

The early mornings in Wakanda were going to be busy for him, Laura and Maggie were designing a sleepover schedule for the three girls so he only had to read the girls pick once. Cooper and the boys went to bed later, so he could call them at any time. Harley and Peter wanted a daily rundown of exactly what happened and Cooper was a mix between help with his work or just telling him about his day at school, it had become a bit of a ritual for him. When he came home he’d tell Tony everything as soon as all the other kids were occupied. Laura had confided in him how much it meant to him that Tony would sit down everyday to listen to him talk about school. For Tony it was easy, he thought what Howard would do. And did the opposite. Plus, it was kind of fun. He’d been advanced through school at a fairly ridiculous rate so never really got a chance to settle, so it was actually interesting to him.

After all the kids were happy, which took a few days, Laura punched him in the shoulder. Which meant it was apparently the adults turn. Jess, Hope and Shay followed Laura's lead. Ow. They'd all wanted to come, which was a definite hell no. Laura would hunt out Clint, Hope would hunt out Scott and Shay would hunt Steve. They'd all get punched. Jess would hunt all of them. The 4 of them were an international incident waiting to happen.

Calling them that had not been Tony's smartest plan. Again. Ow.

Bruce had frowned at him before relenting and setting up a schedule with Stephy about his health. He really hoped they didn't decide to weigh him because he'd somehow dropped even more weight despite feeling better than ever. He was a bit sore here and there but between the sparring. The punching and falling asleep whilst working in the lab to finish up a bunch of projects before he left. That wasn't a surprise. He'd eat a ton of sugary desserts in Wakanda, it would be fine.

He'd had to organise a trip for Nathan and DP, because they wanted him to smuggle them into Wakanda to 'visit' Steve. They even got Natka involved too, if Eddie hadn't been delayed in his arrival at the compound, he suspected he would be involved too.

Basically, everyone had something to say and he was pretty sure it was all Rhodey's doing. Because Rhodey had been surprisingly agreeable about the trip after their first discussion.

Then Avengers started turning up at his door to punch him.

Even Maria Hill got a good glare in. He was pretty sure everyone had had their say. Even Pepper and Happy. Sergeant Featherstone from the select committee had even spent half an hour ranting about Tony being ridiculous and that he didn't have to be the one to always be making sacrifices, she'd only relented after he explained he was literally it for this situation. Having the British ambassador for the Accords yell at you was not at all terrifying.

So he was exhausted and Pepper was getting geared up to yell at him again.

"Tony, I know you love the kids, but this Halloween Gala has been planned for months, do you think the kids are going to be able to come up with a decent costume?"

"They've been planning it for weeks Pep and they have multiple adults helping that have assured me it fits it with your scheme. Peter even agreed not to go as spiderman!"

"I'm not sure the three teens dressing as demons and the girls as angels is better…"
"It's adorable and it fits your scheme, they're wearing suits with fancy masks."

"Tell me you at least have a back up?"

"Of course I don't! That would be awful, all of them have been working on this so hard Pep and I'm going away next month. Don't take this from them."

"Fine! I'm going to go talk to Laura to check on it anyway, what is Laura going as?"

"Oh her costume is awesome, she's dressing up as a ringmaster, I think corralling all of us gave her the idea."

"Jim is going as Wonker, Cassie's parents have this ice King and Queen theme going."

"See Pep. Everyone has put too much effort into their costumes to make sure they're classy for you."

"Hmm, if you turn up in some kind of pink Ironman armour I will kill you."

"Faith Pep. Have some faith!"

She just rolled her eyes before leaving his apartment, to go straight to Laura's to check up on what the kids were up to. He carried on with his current project that he'd stashed under the desk when she came in. Rhodey and Stephy thankfully hadn't gossiped about him sending pictures to Wakanda, they also thought he'd only sent two. He was currently finishing up one of Tiny Thor and Goose together for James. There was one of the two of them just being adorable cats, the second was Goose and Thor chasing one of the MOUSE-DOTS that he'd made for the cats. Lazer mice. James hadn't believed him that he had a space cat, so in the second pic, Goose was in all her Flerkin glory. Seeking of which, the two were currently curled up in a ball on his lap, barely able to tell where orange ended and black started.

So he was exhausted, but it was a good exhausted.

Tony POV

31st October

They'd had to take multiple vehicles to the Halloween Gala, Happy was driving the limo he was in because he still had problems letting people drive vehicles he was in, which considering that he now knew his parents didn't die in a car crash, was annoying. He figured this issue would go with that knowledge, but apparently it was stubborn and holding on. He'd considered going via portal, but the kids were counting down till he left for Wakanda and wanted to spend more time with him. The limo ride to the Gala was no different and Lilah was taking a few hundred pictures. So Happy had volunteered because Laura wanted to ride too. She was mostly taking photos of the kids. Her ringmaster costume was amazing and extremely flamboyant, he loved it. The bright red jacket, black leather trousers that were skin tight. Enough confusing chains and belts than he could count, not too dissimilar to Stephy confusing magic robes actually. She also had a red and gold mask covering the top half of her face, her hair had suddenly changed from blue to red as well. Apparently when Laura goes all in, she goes all in. The girls were painfully adorable. Some how they managed to have wings and halos and it looked adorable instead of tacky. Each had a different colour dress, Lilah was obviously purple, Tara had gone for gold and Cassie was silver. All with matching masks. The boys all had impressive looking suits with different devil masks. It was quite
Pepper still hadn't seen his costume, Laura had actually ran interference for the kids. He could see her hovering at the door, glaring at their limo as the kids tumbled out waiting to see what he was wearing. She actually sagged with relief seeing his phantom of the opera costume before gaping slightly. The kids had picked the costume because they didn't want him to wear glasses. So the white mask covering the left side of his face made it look like the arc reactor blue eye was potentially part of the costume. He just shrugged whilst Pepper started laughing.

There was quite the gauntlet to get inside, all of the New Avengers were to be present, the Accords council had even granted permission for Natka to be present. Permission was one way of putting it, ordered was another, which was probably which she was dressed as the grim reaper, Scythe and all.

Usually Tony hated these things. They were full of boring people who wanted to talk about incredibly boring things and Tony's patience for such people had shriveled up somewhere in Afghanistan and utterly died in Siberia. He could force though it for things where he was required, but he didn't enjoy it. However, this was actually good.

Instead of splitting up and leaving him to deal with everything, everyone stayed pretty close. Instead of talking to an overly inflated dullards, he was dancing with the girls on his feet because they asked. Anytime someone cornered him for longer than 10 minutes. Someone appeared to rescue him. He wasn't sure he'd ever danced with so many people, Laura had dragged him onto the dance floor multiple times and he couldn't exactly say no, she was having too much fun. Watching Rhodey dance with Carol had been a particular highlight of the evening as had Laura dragging Harley to dance with her. No one escaped Laura by the end of the night.

"If I'd know a hoard of children was what it took to get you to stay at these things for longer than an hour, I'd have tried it sooner."

"I'm glad you didn't, and you should thank the kids for my costume, you doubted them."

"True, I did not expect this, nor for you to not be wearing glasses."

"They wanted something I could skip the glasses with, so they made it a part of the costume. Several people have complimented me on my contacts."

He glanced over and spotted Natka who was hanging on the edges, she'd dodged Laura so far so he decided he'd give it a try, she glared at him when he pulled her to the dance floor but didn't resist. He handed her Scythe to Matt who had a Masquerade version of his Daredevil costume as he was still keeping his identity secret.

"Having fun?"

"Surprisingly yes, usually I'd just hide in the shadows anytime we had to do these things. It's more fun than I expected."

"Well you're going to have to dance with Laura next now she's seen you dancing with me."

Seeing Natka actually laughing was another thing he added to his favourite parts of the night.

Stephy who had come as Dracula, apparently Levi picked the costume, he was sure Stephy had been more involved than he claimed, was pulled cornered by Laura. That was when he realised that Levi was missing. He glanced around until he saw Cooper and Peter pointing at Vision, who was floating/dancing with Levi. Pretty much everyone paused to watch, but then watching an android
dancing with a cloak was definitely something to watch. Levi spent a good hour dodging Stephy after that, in order to dance either one on one with people or joining couples. There were so many confused people, it was hilarious.

It was definitely the longest he'd ever stayed at one of these things, he started considering going home when he found himself on one of the love seats around the tables the food had been on earlier in the night with all three girls sleeping on him. Cooper appeared next, also exhausted and he wasn't sure he wanted to know what the three Devils had been up to as Cooper passed out on his shoulder. Peter and Harley found their way over too. Laura found them when he was starting to wonder how on earth he'd get these 6 home.

"I should have known I'd find you lot together."

"I think they tired themselves out."

"Hmm, I'll go and ask Stephen if he can portal us home."

"Oh it's Stephen now is it?"

Laura just rolled her eyes and immediately darted off before he could say anything else. People were starting to leave after the amount of money raised had been totalled. All in all, a good night and a lot of money for reparation efforts. The spectacle of Stephy creating a portal in the middle of the room for them to get back to the compound definitely impressed people. Laura got the boys semi awake enough to walk, he carried Tara and Lilah and Maggie scooped up Cassie.

The Avengers and a few of the adults stuck around in his apartment for a while after, making the large space seem small in comparison.

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**Rhodey POV**

*5th November*

"You sure about this trip Tones, it's not too late to call it off you know?"

Tony was on the sofa, drawing, *again*! With the kids sat around him like tiny guards. Tony barely looked up but managed a humming noise. Even with his advanced multitasking abilities, drawing for some reason evened him out and occasionally made it easy to pull information out of him.

"Hmmm?"

"You know, in 5 days, your trip? You don't have to go."

He finally glanced up, frowning slightly as if only just registering the conversation whilst tilting the pad so no one could actually see what he was doing bar the kids. Maybe was probably something for the kids to keep whilst he was gone.

"I'll be fine Sour Patch, you'll barely even notice I'm gone before I'm back."

"I'm just worried is all, since you woke up you've not been on your own for very long, heading to Wakanda on your own is a big jump."

"I won't be alone, Shuri is there, T'Challa too. Plus, I've worn Okoye down, she even smiled at me
when I last saw her. Stephanie has even made me magic jewellery and everything. I can't exactly just leave him with those words in his head can I?"

Rhodey was not sure how comfortable he was about this trip but when Tony felt like he had to do something, there wasn't much that could actually stop him from doing it.

Even if it meant being in the same country as the rogues.

He'd had several words with T'Challa about the rogues since Tony made his decision to go to Wakanda. He didn't want the king getting the idea in his head to have Tony accidentally *bump* into Steve or some crap so they could reconcile and leave his country. T'Challa didn't seem to be plotting anything and he'd been assured that they would do everything if their ability to ensure that the rogues never found out Tony was even on the same continent.

As it was going to be in the news, Tony visiting Wakanda, but for a business deal or whatever plan the King and Tony had come up with. T'Challa was going to be wiping it from any media the rogues received. He apparently had them locked down pretty tight.

He hoped that he got the tech working in a short period of time, he'd rather have Tony gone for the minimal amount of days instead of the full 20. He had a feeling that he would be gone for the lot however. From what he'd been told by Tony, this wasn't Plan B. Heck, it wasn't even Plan E. So the problem was definitely more complicated and would require more work.

He could at least amuse himself that Tony was going to have to be up at 2am in Wakanda to read the kids bedtime stories.

They had all come together to try and make up for Tony’s absence whilst he was gone and he hadn't realised just how much Tony actually *did* with the kids. Somethings were not transferable too, for example, no matter how many times Bruce offered to help Cooper with his calculus work, he said he'd wait for Uncle Tony. He suspected that Tony had set up a time to call him like he did the others.

He'd been helping put together stuff for him to take too, there was plenty of stuff that he could get in Wakanda, but they wanted him to have some stuff from home. Tony's mobile workshop, which was pretty much a few larger tablets with larger holographic interfaces. A few things for him to work in, they also included one of the lighting rods as Harley figured it would be handy for burning off excess energy.

He might feel better about this if Tony was travelling to Africa for almost anyone else.

Bucky Barnes, or as Tony had taken to calling him, *James*. Which was interesting on its own without adding in the fact that Tony had been sending and receiving multiple letters from the man. The way he said his name was interestin. He didn't even know how much or what they talked about as Tony had been uncharacteristically tight-lipped about the whole thing. Then there were the pictures. All these things would be incredibly interesting but the fact it was Rogers best pal from the 40s, someone who Rogers practically burnt the world for, who was involved in the murder of Tony's parents… who left him in Siberia to suffer a long painful death. Tony might have forgiven him, but he was still waiting. To see if this was yet another in a long line of people who wanted to use his brother. The difference between him and the others was that Tony had not fully recovered yet, sure he seemed fine on most days but Tones was a very good actor. He worried that this time, it wouldn't take much to hurt him. He worried that these people would take his brother from him. Those 10 days were still seared into his mind.

If it had been anyone else, he might rest easier, but it wasn't anyone else. It was *James* and it just
made everything incredibly weird and Rhodey was pretty sure that he did not like it.

Not one bit.

Tony POV

November 10th

Apparently it was difficult to fall asleep on a quinjet when you're heading towards a country that just so happens to contain your former teammates. Including one who nearly killed you and abandoned you for a slow agonising death in Siberia. Who knew?

T'Challa had promised that Rogers wouldn't know he was there, so that he wouldn't see the man, and that was good. It was really good. He didn't want to see him.

Even with that knowledge, his anxiety was through the roof and dancing around the stratosphere somewhere.

He had paced around the jet until FRIDAY had practically begged him to sit down. CERBERUS had suggested that he take over flying and that had worked for all of 10 minutes which was why he had his Sketchpad out on HATHRO's suggestion with Apocalyptica playing loud enough that he could hopefully drown out his thoughts.

He forced his attention back to his pad, he was working on two pictures for Laura after she'd spotted him drawing and asked if he minded doing one of the kids. He had one of Laura and her 3 and the other was all 7 of the kids, Nibbles included. There was another picture he was working on for James too who still didn't believe him that Goose was a space cat, even with the drawing of that time Goose decided to eat one of the test dummies and then spat it back up because of some space cat reasons. Goose was fun to draw however so he was doing another.

It probably didn't help that his body clock was all kinds of messed up.

As in, thanks to the kids, he actually saw 2am as 'time to be asleep' now.

He had another hour before they arrived at 3am that would actually be 11am in Wakanda.

Jetlag hadn't really bothered him much in the past because his insomnia regularly kept him up for several days at a time and when he passed out it was usually after 10am. The kids hadn't perfectly cured his insomnia, he still had many sleepless nights or nights disturbed by nightmares. Or just plain anxiety or hyperactivity keeping him up. But he generally at least tried to be in bed at night most nights. Even if he was working in his mind space, just lying down with his eyes closed.

So his body was pretty damned sure it should be vertical right now.

It however was utterly uninterested in doing so. He'd tried, he really had tried. For most of the trip he'd tried, knowing he was arriving at 11am and getting some sleep would be smart. It had just amped up his anxiety and he didn't want to explode the quinjet whilst he was in it.

Which was why he was sat up and drawing Goose eating a chair. It did mean he was in a good position to see them come up on Wakanda. In that it didn't really look like anything, but he knew to suspect that. He focused on his drawing until an hour passed without him realising it and Shuri's
voice made him jump.

"Tony, you're ready to come in!"

"Sure thing, just direct me and I'll follow."

On the other side of the barrier, following Shuri he couldn't help looking around. Thankfully FRIDAY was piloting because he was definitely not paying attention to that. when they got past the border villages and Shuri took him deeper things went to futuristic sci-fi in a split second and his anxiety was momentarily forgotten under the sheer wonder that was Wakanda. He was pretty sure they were flying a circuitous route so Shuri could show off but he was utterly fine with that.

Eventually the ship they were following pulled in to land and he wasn't sure if he was disappointed or excited. He wanted to get out and see more but he could also see a lot from the ship. There was still an undercurrent of nervousness, the fear that Rogers would be waiting for him.

When he stepped off of the quinjet wearing his red nanite suit and blue sunglasses, he was 99.9% sure Rogers wouldn't be there, but it made him feel a little bit safer. However it was T'Challa, Shuri, their mother and several of the Dora.

Pretty much as soon as his feet actually him the floor Shuri launched herself at him. Then punched his arm. Why did everyone punch him?

"Took you long enough!"

Chapter End Notes

I've had so many nice messages hoping that I get better soon, that and the chat thingy on tumblr (oh damn that made me sound old. I'm 32, not 90) for mcu fic readers and writers and winteriron wonderland have kept me going through bouts of insomnia and out of control allergies. So you lot are keeping me going :)

Also, I'm an exceptionally paranoid individual with my health and because of this, even with my health tanked, you will still gets weekly chapters, as I worked to be several chapters ahead. Writing wise, I'm on chapter 30, polishing 28/29. So you guys don't have to worry about me suddenly going from my weekly schedule to vanishing. :

And oh my days. They're finally on the same continent! I'm sure these stable clusters of issues will be sensible, right xD
Welcome to Wakanda

Chapter Summary

Run up to Tony entering Wakanda and some first impressions.

Chapter Notes

Spent most of the day with my migraine mask on so this is going up a touch late without as many obsessive read throughs as my Dyslexia demands. If something looks wrong, tell me where and I'll fix it :)

My phone has an interesting case of autocorrect that sometimes my eyes miss until I read it days later. Like "because" often becomes Beefsteak. Or Hrvatska. (I have no idea why.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shuri POV

21st October

Tony had finally accepted reality that he would have to visit and she couldn't have been more thrilled. Actually getting to meet him in her lab was definitely going to be fun, adding in that he was finally going to put the rest of the puzzle together for her. Also it meant the treatment for Wolf would be vastly better.

She just had to tell him about it.

Luckily she knew most of his routine now even though it changed up occasionally, but that wasn't due for at least another day so he should be in the library.

At first she thought she'd screwed up or that he'd changed things earlier, because he definitely wasn't in the library, at least no where she could see. That was when his head appeared over her.

"Shuri? Looking for me?"

"Yes! I didn't expect you to be lounging around on top of the bookcases again."

He grinned before dropping down quietly next to her, putting his bag over his shoulder.

"It's nice and warm up there because of the sun through the window."

"So what you're saying is you're a cat?"

"Learnt from the best."

"Anyway, let's get to your kitchen I have something to tell you."
It wasn't exactly a long trip now, which was probably why he spent more time here. The villa was a good hour away, pretty much a good hour away from anything but that had been intentional to dissuade its occupants from spending excessive amounts of time away from the villa without it looking like they'd intentionally isolated them.

"Okay, what is it, you've gotten me all worried."

"Nothing bad, just Tony finally realised that the delay on the system was causing problems with BARF."

"See, now that sounds like bad news."

"Nope, because it has an easy fix."

"I'm confused, if it's easy why haven't you mentioned it?"

"Because Tony had to come to his own conclusion that he needed to come here."

"Here?!"

"Yup!"

"I didn't expect that…"

"Well, he won't start setting up plans until he was permission from you."

"From me? Why me? Wouldn't that be more for you or T'Challa?"

"Well he already has permission from us."

"Oh, uh, okay? What about the others?"

"Only you would know amongst our guests. Their media would be controlled to remove all mention of his upcoming trip."

"Well that's good for him, I don't think he'd want to see Steve."

"So you are good with this?"

"Sure, if he's fine with coming."

Bast these idiots would stand at the door waiting for the other to go in first for eternity.

"In the meantime we'll carry on as normal, it'll probably be sometime in November he's coming."

Wolf POV

29th October

"Come on man, you have to show us!"

"TicTac is right man, you can't hold out on us now"

He thunked his head down on the kitchen table. They'd been impossible since he'd received the
first picture and practically every day now they asked if there was anymore.

Today there was but he was pretty sure Tony is trolling him, he'd gotten a letter yesterday that he'd already replied to, they'd certainly sped up recently that was for sure. It included a picture of two cats, an older ginger cat and a smaller black and white cat called Goose and Thor.

Goose was apparently a 'space cat'.

He fetched the picture for his two idiots who were far too excited about it.

"Here, it's of two cats that live at the compound. Although I'm pretty sure Tony is trolling me. He claims the ginger cat is from space."

"I don't know man, in the Avengers, you see weird shit. Aliens that are Norse Gods for instance, space cats don't see so far fetched."

"That is so cool, I want a space cat!"

"I thought you wanted one of the 'Doom Rhino's'?"

"Well... space cat can ride one?"

And if that wasn't an extremely confusing image he didn't know what was.

Red Wing was buzzing around merrily too, they'd fallen into a bit of a routine, that he'd meet up with these two somewhere, not always his kitchen at least once a day. For RedWing, time out of the villa was essential, he was hiding the fact RedWing had become more advanced from the others, so she was only allowed to be out in Sam's room. He kept the window open for her, but it was risky incase the others walked in suddenly. So he now took her out everywhere for her to have some time to fly.

They gave him the rundown of what was happening in the house from the other side. Ranting from T'Challa tended to trickle down to him via Shuri, so he knew that the others were walking an extremely fine line between being annoying and obeying the new rules.

TicTac and Wings didn't even have to come up with reasons they vanished now, because they didn't really ask them. Something was definitely weird, but until Steve stopped listening to the crap the Ved'ma was spewing, he couldn't get through. He'd tried. Twice. Both via the phone. The entire phone call was him trying to get Steve to listen and Steve trying to cajole him into coming home. After the second time he gave up because it was a headache and his therapist told him to step back from situations that are problematic. The villa had problems written all over it.

Winter also refused to remain silent when he was on the phone.

Which was actually part of the headache. Seriously, try talking to a person on the phone, who ain't listening to ya, whilst a voice in your head explains different ways they'd like to string the other person up.

Winter was definitely not close to forgiving Steve or Clint over the last time he'd been at the house. As far as he was concerned, being on the same continent as the Ved'ma was 'Too much'.

Would the bastard explain why? Course not!

He was putting some things together himself, he had ideas but he was frankly nervous to ask if he was right. He couldn't be right. Steve would have told him.
Steve wouldn't have let him eat at the same table as Hydra.

Wouldn't invite Hydra into his head.

So he was holding onto that. Even if it meant not really knowing. He just couldn't come up with a way that she knew about the chair. Steve knew about the words, but he'd never gone into detail explaining his time at Hydra. He never explained that it was the words that controlled him. The arm that corralled him. That the chair that wiped him clean time and time again. Maybe Steve could have read it in his files? But he hadn't mentioned it, so he had assumed none of them knew.

He didn't exactly think about the chair often either, he didn't know if she could read his thoughts, she wasn't doing it often or she'd have known about Winter and the glasses before hand.

Mostly because he didn't exactly want to talk about these things. So Wanda knowing about the chair was an anomaly. He'd forgotten about it in the drama of the day, but over the next few days he'd analysed every piece of what happened. There were several bits he just didn't like, but her mentioning the chair and Steve not even blinking, that was up top.

Winter was mostly quiet when he went over things, he'd definitely gotten stronger, he popped up more. He was still collecting memories and he had no idea if he was off galavanting with his body when he was asleep. He really tried not to think too hard about that as he was trying to be more accepting. Where as Winter would happily spend 2 hours vividly describing different ways to kill Hydra operatives, apparently his idea of sniping them was too 'boring', getting him to talk about the Ved'ma was pretty impossible. Actually getting him to talk about anything that happened before Bucharest was nigh impossible unless he initiated it first.

Could he push more? Maybe.

It just felt.. cruel to do so.

So he put up with lectures on the proper decapitation of Hydra operatives whilst he waited for Tony Stark to set foot in Wakanda.

With every letter it's like he learns more, it's like someone dumping another bag of puzzle pieces next to him for a jigsaw he thought he had nearly completed. The more he finds out that there is this whole different man hidden beneath layers and layers and now and then it's like it peaks out. Sun shining behind the clouds. Because its warm, it's always warm.

If it's Tony talking about the new iteration of Harleys potatoes gun, there is this fundamental warmth how he encourages the kid to vent in ways that are possible for him rather than just telling him how he should do it. How Tony brings this up when he mentioned half heartedly once that sometimes there is anger out of nowhere. Instead of making him feel like a monster he's laughing at anecdotes of Harley chasing Tony around the workshop.

Tony talking about the pure goodness that is Peter and how the kid just makes people around him want to be better, and he's self deprecating that he could never match up to that goodness that Peter just happily spreads without a thought. How he misses that Peter obviously sees the good in him, because he chose him to be his mentor. It would only take a warm person to drop everything they're doing to help the kid with a robotics competition and somehow Tony doesn't see it. Says it's the 'least' he can do.

Warm and comforting like a man with chronic insomnia will lie in bed on the off chance that Tara has a nightmare and could come looking for him. That most parents would be annoyed to find out that their kid had taken apart everything they could in a surprisingly short amount of time but Tony
practically gushes over Tara and Lilah. That a guy who seems to be working on 20 things at the same times sits down every day for Cooper to tell him about his day at school. That's not even including the stories of how the kids are taking care of Cassie when it's pretty obvious from where he is sitting that they're emulating him.

He always has a story, whether they make sense or not is a different ball game. He'd told him some of the things he and Deadpool had gotten up to that didn't follow the "knock them out and arrest them" theme when he was stressing about how he'd dealt with Hydra when he was on the run. He didn't mention Steve's name, but he had a feeling that Tony knew that was what he was talking about and after hearing about Norway, he can't fault him and Winter, well, he really enjoyed that story.

He and Winter are in agreement for one thing. Tony Stark is summer and neither of them are entirely sure what they did to end up with this man talking to them. On days where he feels a little more ice than person, Tony seems to know the words to thaw him out. Which in no way meant he was prepared to actually meet the man, he'd just gotten the hang of writing, he didn't want to do something that reminded him of Siberia. Or December 1991.

**Wolf POV**

*1st November*

"Happy 'belated' Halloween!"

"Hmm, I don't gotta give you two candy now, do I?"

"As long as you made those cupcakes again I'm sure I can convince TicTac not to egg your house."

He smirked and let the two idiots in. They wouldn't be egging his house because his house was part of the goddamned Palace and Shuri would string them up if they tried. They'd meant to meet up yesterday evening but Steve had kept them in to talk about things. Much to their irritation. Wings had spent the entire meeting messaging him in his irritation. It had been a multi level plan about how to get him back without setting off the Royals. He was convinced it was going to fail by point 3. Wings thought it might get to at least 5. TicTac fell asleep and couldn't even remember step 1.

"Help yourselves."

TicTac practically skipped over to the cupcakes, RedWing flew over to him and gave him a Boop before doing circuits around the large common area. She'd come around, slowly, after his initial screw up, but as she got to fly around his rooms often, she'd decided that he wasn't completely awful.

The two of them were looking at him expectantly which he just sighed and pulled out the two pictures that Tony had sent. One, was two perfectly normal cats again. He had no idea how to explain the other one other than he was now completely sure Tony was trolling him.

"Is that the space cat? What the fuck?!"
"Holy shit! How can Stark let it in his house?"

"I'm pretty sure it's not real. I mean, look at it! It's got like triple its body mass in tentacles coming out of its face whilst trying to eat something 6 times the size of it! And it's called Goose ."

"I dunno man, Avengers shit, anything is possible."

He just shook his head looking at the picture, if it was real then Tony lived with a Demon creature with tentacle face that apparently likes to sleep on his chest.

Seriously. If it was real, how did he let it sleep on his chest?

"Speaking of the Avengers, they did a Halloween Gala, thingy."

He nodded as if this was news to him, whilst he let the duo see the pictures that Tony sent, he generally kept the letter's stashed away. So he knew about the fancy dress and how his kids were making his costume. TicTac brought up a bunch of pictures and videos the Internet had been flooded with, and it didn't take him long to spot his ex.

"Ah man, if Clint sees this he's going to go insane!"

Wings held up his tablet with a pictured of Tony dressed as something he obviously didn't get the reference too, but had a white mask covering the left side of his face, and Laura he knew was a ringmaster from his letters.

He did a double take when he realised that there were no glasses. His right eye was pretty normal but his left was bright blue, but it seemed to be part of the costume. Maybe whatever he was hiding was beneath that mask. He flicked through a few more pictures, finding what Wings had and couldn't help smirking. What? The Archer had pissed him off.

"I found one that's gonna piss him off more than that."

"Seriously, what's worse that Stark dancing with his ex wife?"

"Tony dancing with his daughter... On his feet."

He held up the tablet somewhat triumphantly.

"Ah fuck. Yeah. You win."

TicTac brought up another picture, grinning.

"No, I got it, Laura... dancing with the Wizard!"

"I think they both win, either of them would give Clint an aneurysm."

"Look at Cassie, God she looks beautiful."

He flicked through a few more pictures, he'd never met these people but Tony liked to talk about his family. Usually in anecdotes that left him wondering if they were real or not. It had taken him a while, but when he started talking about the kids he didn't really stop. Their letters had gone from a page to several. Him talking about everything Wakanda and the duo in front of him. They seemed to have come to some sort of agreement to not talk about Steve, he hadn't even told the man about what happened to him that had him living in the Palace.

"So, what's Stark's costume for?"
"Oh! It's from Phantom of the Opera, we can watch it today, there are a few film versions of it. It's great."

Wings pulled out a notepad they had in the kitchen and added it to the list of things that he apparently needed to see and TicTac kept looking at pictures.

"Vision is dancing with the Cloak."

"Yeah, I got a few of people dancing with it. That's pretty weird."

Tony had mentioned the cloak to him as well, that it mostly hung around on his brother but snuck off to see him occasionally. Levi.

"See, I told you things are crazy. They have an android dancing with a cloak and you're doubting space cat?"

"The tentacles wouldn't fit in its body! It's impossible!"

"It's from space though. Space! Maybe it's bigger on the inside"

Which was Tic Tacs answer anytime space cat was mentioned. Space! He just shook his head. Unless Tony put the damned space cat in his lap and it tried to eat something, hopefully not him, he was not going to believe it was real. Tony had talked about a lot of crazy things, from battling with, and against, Norse Gods, slime demons, people with fantastical powers, space cats were just one thing he couldn't get his head around.

"So, uh, do I show the others these pictures?"

He and TicTac answered instantly. And loudly whilst looking at a picture of Cooper laughing with the sorcerer and Tony with Clint's kids clinging to him in their sleep and Laura lounging on Dr Strange.

"Fuck no!"

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**Shuri POV**

3rd November

She had followed her Wolf home after today's BARF session and was currently kicked back on his bed as he was tidying up his already tidy room. At least in her eyes, but after the sessions if organising made him feel better, she'd go with it. She hadn't actually been into his new room before, they usually met in the common room so she was trying not to be too obvious about being nosy.

"Did you draw these?"

She tilted her head looking at the assortment of pictures on his wall, they were very good. The bulk of them seemed to be various birds, either sat perched somewhere or in flight in different poses. She could recognise a few, many corvids, ravens, magpies, crows, jay's and rooks. A few swallows too. Several more she couldn't even put a name too. There was a sunset over a lake that was quite nice as well that she swore she recognised but couldn't put her finger on. Then there were a few pictures of an orange cat and a black and white cat. She squinted at the last one and it finally
clicked. The pictures of the bots underneath confirmed it.

Tony spent a lot of time talking about Goose the Flerkin, she had many videos and photos. She straightened up and looked over to her now flustered friend.

"Um, no. I did not draw these."

"I can't believe Tony has sent you so much! How did you do it? According to Harley getting pictures out of him is incredibly difficult."

"I don't know? I said I liked his doodles and I accidentally sent a letter with a doodle of my own on it. Then Wings pointed out I should send something back to the first picture."

"Hmm, what did you send?"

"I made a few different origami birds, now I know he seems to like cats I've sent some of them too."

"Awww that is adorable. The picture of Tiny Thor and Goose are adorable."

"Even the one with the tentacles?"

"She's an adorable little Flerken! Tony calls her his murder floof."

"Ahuh, I think Tony is trolling me. No way do those tentacles fit in that body."

She chuckled and considered showing him one of the several videos she had of Goose that Harley had sent to her but decided not to. It would be hilarious when Tony arrived and he still didn't believe Goose was real.

"Well she is a space cat. She's meant to be weird."

"Sure. 'Space cats'. The 'Earth cat' is adorable too, he has a little moustache and everything."

She had to wonder how much these boys were talking, Tony had set something up so they could write back and forth without using the 'Royal postal service' as he'd called it when Shuri and T'Challa had been involved. She'd seen one of the envelopes recently and they were much larger than before.

"Speaking of America, did the duo mention if the others found pictures of the Halloween ball yet?"

"Nope! Wings is not bringing it up and they seem to just be expecting him to find and bring things to their attention? Plus, we'd know if they had."

"Very true, the Archer's children looked adorable and there were several pictures of Laura dancing with that Dr Strange."

"Ah yeah, Tony mentioned that Laura and Stephanie were spending a lot of time together. It took two letters for him to explain that Stephanie is what he calls Dr Strange. I swear, I need a key for the nicknames. As soon as I know who he's talking about he switches, I think he does it on purpose."

"He does have a thing for nicknames, you should see T'Challa's face at his! He's started writing them down to Google them!"
"There are 4 so far he uses for him, at least they have a theme, I can't keep track of some of them."

"Ah, you get used to it. He'll be here soon, looking forward to it?"

"I have no idea, I've just gotten used to writing you know, he repeatedly bugged me to call him Tony, and I can do it on paper… but I'm nervous of actually meeting him."

"He's a softy, you'll be fine!"

"But.. He's… I don't know how to explain it, he's got this larger than life personality if you know what I mean?"

"I do, it was a bit strange at first when we started working together. I'd heard so much about the man. Stark isn't exactly a foreign name to Wakanda, and it was not a favourable one either. Having him video call, saying he knew you lot were here, how to keep Wakanda protected without T'Challa knowing he was involved and if I could help him on a project from his hospital bed, all blurted in 5 minutes. It was a bit of a shock."

"Oh? I thought Wakanda was mostly closed off from the world."

"Yes, you know the little Captains Vibranium Shield. It is actually made out of pure Wakandan Vibranium."

"How? That was made decades ago?"

"The Vibranium was stolen and bought by Howard Stark and then constructed into the shield. Tony was regretful that he could not return it but he offered above market value per gram to make up for it. Such recompense was not necessary, but that he accepted fault and tried meant a lot to us."

"I don't know if I liked Howard, and looking back in the memories, I really don't like the man. He just seems off, didn't help that there were those memories we found, I don't think it's all of them either. Plus, he was involved in human experimentation of my best friend."

She winced at that. She'd buried them, she didn't want Tony being forced to watch that while he was here. From what she could tell Hydra liked to have eyes on Howard, but he was good at dodging most of their operatives so the Winter Soldier spent a few weeks here and there just watching.

They hadn't realised what they were looking at at first, they just saw a child get kidnapped, tame compared to some other memories really, and eventually a woman her Wolf recognised as Peggy came and rescued the kid. She'd found it unnerving that even though the child was young, he'd seemed… oddly unphased by being kidnapped. Which was pretty damned weird, then when he'd been returned to Howard, that was when they clicked and shut it off. It's one thing for the man to joke about being kidnapped and then to watch it.

They'd not mentioned it to anyone, not her brother and he hadn't mentioned it to his friends. They'd combed through the other memories just to identify the ones where the Winter Soldier was sent to watch the Stark's, only watched enough to confirm what they were and encode them for now.

"The more I learn about the man, the more I despise him. Which considering I grew up to Baba ranting about the man, that's saying something."

"I get it, I didn't know him long, but he really was involved with experimenting on my best friend. I might be pissed at him right now, but he was still my friend, too trusting and just let himself get
experimented on? I bet that his ma was dead was part of the reason as to why he was chosen."

"It doesn't paint a good picture of the man really. Tony is quite different though, for a long time we assumed he was like Howard, he took that company and made it huge, after Afghanistan though, my father was pleased to see he had stopped creating weapons and started trying to make up for his past."

"yeah, he seems invested in helping people. I don't understand half of what he's saying, but it sounds helpful?"

"Hmm, T'Challa is quite excited, he's wanted to help people outside our borders for a while now. He is doing what he can, but flooding the world with Vibranium would likely cause more problems than ease them."

"People would make it into weapons."

"Of course, but between them, Tony's power sources and clean water advancements, Intellicrops, Air Filtration Systems and add it years of advanced Wakandan research in similar fields. I think they're doing well together."

He nodded and dropped down next to her on the bed, he still looked nervous about meeting him properly. The last time they'd met, it had not been the best circumstances. A lot has changed in such a short period of time, for both men really since July. They both actually looked healthy now. Tony looked much less grey bruised and exhausted compared to the man on the bunker video. Wolf was much less gaunt, starved and haunted than he had been. He'd put on weight very fast as soon as he was able to actually eat solid food, his hair had grown significantly too, she assumed it was the serum. It had also lost its greasy, unwashed appearance, but then an evil nazi organisation wouldn't be focused on that. She however had loads of fun each day coming up with something different for him.

They'd also come to some kind of agreement of sorts she assumed. At the rate of letters they were sending back and forth, and based just on the multiple pictures that her Wolf had on his wall, they definitely communicated a lot. It was a far cry from beating each other up. Although both of them still seemed to be slipping into the 'if he's okay with it' mind set, that she'd been trying to get them out of.

She couldn't wait for the two of them to actually meet properly! She'd become quite invested in it by now. Knowing them it would be horrendously awkward and hilarious.

Shuri POV

10th November - Day 1

She had barely slept the night before and had been practically vibrating with anticipation. She'd been scolded several times during breakfast for nearly dropping something because she was brimming with energy and it needed to go somewhere.

Her brother was calm and collected, but then he and Tony had been in person a few times now, so he wasn't as excited. Although he was definitely excited to have Tony coming to Wakanda. He had a tour planned and everything. Their mother was interested to meet this American man that both
her children seemed so enamoured with.

She had disapproved of Shuri talking to him at first, not trusting him with her. She'd stuck around for few of their conversations, spoke to him directly more than once. Once when she had been ordered to leave her lab. She'd been unimpressed, but after that, her mother was more than fine with the arrangement. Tony had never passed on the contents of that conversation and told her not to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Considering how she went through tutor's faster than they could be brought to her and her mind tended to move so much faster than other Wakandan scientists, her mother eventually said she was just happy that she had someone she could really talk to.

Her and Tony had areas that one or the other was masters in and he didn't mind when she knew better. He'd just asked her to explain, slower. It had helped her when it came to a subject he was better in. She'd tried to study after the calls to catch up, not wanting to be second best, expecting it to be lorded over her, in the end Tony had just taught her as if it were the most normal thing in the world. That was the moment her mother's quiet tolerance switched to actually liking the man.

He'd even won over Okoye. She was impressed with him, not that she'd ever tell him of course, from there it had spread bit by bit as Tony encountered people. His AI children had also made themselves known to a few people.

As much as she loved FRIDAY she had no idea had to do with the chicken alarm clock that crowed its alarm each morning. You had to tap its crest to make it shut up.

She supposed she was doing better than T'Challa. His new alarm clock had looked like a normal black block with a digital clock in blue on the front. When it went off however it spat out a tiny car that zoomed around his room going "neeee naaaaaw" constantly until he caught it.

Neither of them didn't use their gifts because it made FRIDAY sad and when FRIDAY was sad, CERBERUS told them he was disappointed in them for upsetting his sister. So, she was awoken by a demented chicken and T'Challa got some exercise each morning. Maybe this was how AIs would take over the world.

She hadn't needed it this morning however, too excited. She couldn't wait to see Tony's reaction to her lab. He'd been amazed by how much he had seen during their chats. His reaction to Wakanda was also going to be fun to watch. Wolf loved it and was amazed, she enjoyed showing him around, he asked good questions. Tony was a different ballgame, he understood more so him being impressed meant a little more in some ways.

Also, she was finally going to get some answers. She hoped that when she told him that she knew about Siberia, that he wouldn't have to talk about the fight… or what preceded it. That he would be more comfortable talking.

She'd worked out quite a lot. He was definitely enhanced in someway. To have a cybernetic limb of the likes they'd made, like her Wolf, you had to have some kind of enhanced healing. There were ways to have cybernetic limbs without it of course, but the way theirs were basically hardcoded into the nerves, the way they tricked the brain into feeling like the hand was real, it required some kind of healing factor.

There was also the fact it was November and he was completely healed and walking from such a disastrous fight in July, and he'd had been up for a while. Before she had watched the video she had wondered about his fast healing. Having seen it, it was definitely more than the med tech available outside of Wakanda could have managed.
Having your sternum shattered and ribs turned to shrapnel plus a broken collar bone? That wasn't something you just hop back up from, not when the body is severely taxed with the level of severe frostbite he had alluded to. The almost delicate, lace like white scarring, similar to burn scarring on his face and right hand also looked older. Some of this could be explained away by Tony access to advanced med tech, but she didn't think that was just it. He'd also alluded to their being more to tell her, but, that he didn't actually know the extent of his injuries. Rhodey had made finding that information about as impossible as finding out how long Tony spent in Siberia.

"Princess Shuri?"

"FRIDAY!"

"Boss is about 15 minutes out and is looking forward to seeing you!"

She bounced up at that, she'd decided that instead of the Dora meeting him in a Talon fighter as they usually would for guests. She and Okoye would greet his quinjet with the Royal Talon fighter. She immediately sped off, not hearing her mother who was probably telling her to walk.

It didn't take them long to be in place or to spot the quinjet that her brother had ridden in.

"Tony, you're ready to come in!"

"Sure thing, just direct me and I'll follow."

Okoye rolled her eyes when she noticed the circuitous route they were taking. If anyone asked she'd say it was to avoid the quinjet being visible in the airspace around the villa. Even though she had put measures in place of a screen that would cloak the quinjet, even if they could leave the house or open their windows. It had been a requirement as she had Wolf had decided not to tell the other two. Just incase Wanda found out somehow, but he suspected that she'd eventually tell Sam and Scott. The witch was sullen at the moment, but she doubted she would be so placid if she knew Tony was in reach. The Captain was also sulking, hopefully they would stay like that for the foreseeable future.

After flying past several highlights and hearing Tony's constant stream of exclamations and excitement as he pointed things out and spoke about them. Okoye was rolling her eyes but was definitely smiling at his enthusiasm. They landed a little bit ahead of Tony and she jumped out to stand with her family as the Quinjet set down. The ramp came down, revealing Tony in what she assumed was one of his favourite suits she'd seen him in it often. It was slightly reminiscent to the Ironman armour, the red was a darker blood red, the shirt was black but the tie was a bright metallic gold that seemed to shine like metal but sat like fabric. Interesting, she was definitely going to ask him about that.

His sunglasses were in place again. The only time she'd seen him without them had been the Halloween Ball. But the left side of his face had been completely covered with what she assumed was a blue holographic image to make that eye a startling bright blue like his reactor. She really wondered why he was wearing them, that was definitely going to be one of the first questions. For now, she was just happy to have him here and launched at him as soon as his feet hit the floor.

"Took you long enough!"

"I know, but I'm here now and this place is amazing, I have so many questions. Was that a hover bike? Shuri, please can I have a go on a hoverbike?!"

"Oh Bast. There are two of them. Mother, I think this was a bad idea."
"I don't know about that my son, look how happy and excited they are."

"Come Tony, you have to see my lab."

"Sister, don't you want to give him a tour?"

"I am going to give him a tour. Of my lab. Now come on!"

She rolled her eyes, linked her arm with Tony and started dragging him off, not that he was putting up any resistance.

"Hi your Majesties, I guess I will be allowed to speak to you both later?"

Her mother and brother just laughed as they rounded the corner and they started heading towards her lab.

"So I guess taking stuff to my room first is not on the agenda?"

"Pffft. Boring. Let's see my lab and then let you get settled."

He just nodded along and couldn't stop looking around at everything. He then shot her the smirk that meant he was planning something.

"Okay, when we get to my room I'll answer your questions."

"I don't see how that is even remotely fair, but fine!"

It was worth it to watch the man's face as he entered her lab. If he'd been interested in everything before it was now sharpened.

"So, are you going to explain that black sand?"

"It's vibranium sand."

"Well I assumed that, but give me more Shuri! Peter keeps calling it 'magic sand'! Do you have any idea how annoying that is? Well, yes. You agree with me on magic, so really, you have to tell me.."

"You have a point. This is science, it's much better. It's using ultrasonic transducers for the purpose of mid-air haptic. Here stick your hands in it and like your holographic interfaces back home, give it a go."

He seemed weary for a second before sticking his hands in, the second he did however his entire body went ramrod straight until he breathed out a wow and all manner of things are brought up. She couldn't not raise her eyebrows, because the speed he had gotten to such a level of manipulations of the Vibranium sand was shocking, even beyond what she'd predicted. *Interesting*.

"Using acoustic waves to manipulate it?"

"Yes!"

She pulled him over and they spent a good 40 minutes of her showing him pretty much anything he even glanced at. She'd never enjoyed explaining things in her lab as much as now but now her curiosity was starting to get the better of her and from the smirk on Tony's face, he knew it. The second he'd put his hands into the sand and manipulated it so easily she'd been curious, as well as
his full body reaction.

"Come on, let's go to your room. Mother just sent me a message saying that they sent some food to it as well as all your things."

"Oh, I could have helped carry my stuff, they didn't have to do that."

"Nonsense. Now let's go because your stomach is loud!"

The trip to the guest wing, which she was yet to inform Tony that he was sharing the wing with Wolf, their rooms were at opposite edges, but she should probably tell him before he walked into the kitchen and got a surprise. She already had set something up with CERBERUS, FRIDAY and her Wolf to ensure that Sam and Scott could still visit without running into Tony.

"How long are you planning on staying for? You pack heavier than my brother and trust me, that is saying something."

"The kids packed a bunch of stuff that I wasn't allowed to look at. Rhodey had me include my portable workshop set up, there are clothes, somewhere."

She saw what looked like a metal pole on a possibly rubber looking stand. Whatever it was looked singed too.

"What is that?"

"Uhh.. That's part of the stuff I need to tell you…?"

"Ominous. Okay. Sit, so you know that you don't have to go through it, I know what happened in Siberia."

"That's.. I have no idea how, but good. I'm sorry you had to know about it, but I'm not sorry I don't have to explain it."

She idly considered saying that she had seen the video and where she had gotten it from but decided against it. She didn't want to get CERBERUS in trouble. Tony dove into the food, putting it away with remarkable speed, trying new things tentatively but looking pleasantly surprised with it.

"I thought it might help, I also know you are enhanced, which is why there is extra food."

"Okay, so full run down so you don't yell and before any yelling starts, I have gifts around here… Somewhere. So you know about the coma. My doctors and Rhodey, they didn't have high hopes, even after they made me a new sternum and ribcage, I spent 6 days in the cradle with this toned down version of Extremis. I'd used it years ago to have the shrapnel removed from around my heart so I could remove the reactor from my chest."

"I know a little on Extremis. People were exploding? We couldn't get much information on AIM, it was quite confusing as to why it had been used on humans whilst so unstable. Then everything cut off and we moved out interest elsewhere when people stopped exploding. I assume you rectified this?"

"Yeah, that was a mess, the stripped down version just enhances healing a little, I never planned on using it again but they were desperate. After 6 days Rhodeybear got access to my private servers and found another version. One I'd been toying with for years, seeing how much I could add before it became unbalanced. I never planned on it being used by anyone."
"So that is what woke you from the coma, with enhanced abilities? Your scarring looks older that it should."

"Nothing gets by you. Yes, it healed me anywhere there was enough living tissue to build on. Without it I'd have had many more amputations and would probably have been blind. It gave Rhodey a bit of a shock too, but he's quite tight lipped on anything that happened then."

She puts everything into appearing calm even though she wants to go and punch Rogers in his stupid perfect teeth. But her brother told her that Tony was nervous about telling her things because of how sad she had looked, so she pushes it down.

"Is that why you're wearing glasses? The only time I've seen you without them was the Halloween party and your left eye was still covered…"

"Ah. It, uh, wasn't covered. The kids wanted to make a costume where I could go uncovered without raising questions."

Before she can question he raises his hand to take the glasses of she assume, instead they collapsed in, not dissimilar to the vibranium sand and vanished into his sleeve. His right eye was perfectly normal, brown that verged on gold. His left was bright, shining blue. What she'd assumed was part of his costume.

"Bast! I thought it was a hologram, is that your eye?"

"Sort of? The extremis virus worked with leftovers of Starkanium in my blood that resulted in.. this. I don't just see normally, I see.. Ugh, I hate explaining this bit. It's like colours around people, only works in person and it let's me know things. It's really weird and I can't turn it off. It's one of the real reasons I've been hidden away."

"You're definitely going to be to explaining more of this, for now, what other reasons?"

"It's why I wanted your brothers permission before I came here and I had to tell him. I can interface directly with technology."

With that he tilted his head towards the TV as it turned on next to her and glanced up as the lights dimmed before returning to normal, his right eye flashed gold. She smacked him, immediately clicking.

"That's how you've been coding so fast! And your reaction to the sand!"

"Yup. Why is everyone punching me lately?"

"I can't believe you told my brother first!"

"Well, what if I recently developed something new that he doesn't know about?"

She waited as it was the only thing keeping him from getting another punch, as he raised his right hand, concentrated and a with a crackle of electricity, his eye flashes blue this time and blue arc of electricity connected his fingers before building into a small ball. He then rolled it along the backs of his fingers as if it were the most normal thing in the world. It was however, extremely cool.

"And that's what the rod is for."

He flicked his hand in the direction of the rod, the ball arced out and hit the rod, absorbing the electrical charge harmlessly.
"It's a lightning rod? That is awesome! Anything else."

"You know, no one else really knows everything entirely. Barring the kids."

She scoffed in response that, shuffling to sit next to him on the bed and he was pulling something out of his bag.

"Since when am I anyone?"

"Okay kitten eyes, I told the kids because they were worried for my safety, so just keep that bit quiet, even Rhodey doesn't know everything. For now, there is this-"

That made her eyebrows shoot up as he put makeup wipes in his lap that immediately at her interested, she has assumed maybe it was to cover up scarring for example. She had not expected that the makeup was making him look his age. Without it the difference was startling. Tony was in his 40s if she remembered correctly, looking at him now, she'd say he was in his twenties! No wonder he had looked healthier lately. The virus hadn't just healed him of his injuries she thought, it had returned him to what she assumed was peak physical health. Which obviously meant physically deaging.

"Okay, I have been coming up with all these ideas since July. I did not expect that you'd gone and deaged!"

"I know, I forget sometimes. I miss my white hair but it grows so fast to dye it. I might need you to occasionally cut it. A certain soldier told me your good with hair. I have to use this makeup to make me look older, not too much, because I'm lazy. People just think I got botox, sometimes being a celebrity is actually handy."

He shrugged and she reached out to hold his face still so she could get a proper look without him twitching all over the place. He stilled and gave her an indulgent smile, the scarring was slightly worse than she'd seen on the video calls, the makeup had been covering some of it. She tracked it, ears and patches on his neck near them. It was random on his face, his eyelids were pretty bad, around his eyes, from a guess where his eyes had watered, the tears had frozen on his face, frostbite cropped up. His left eye caught her attention again and she realised it must have been like his left hand. Too damaged to be healed. The scar tissue must be more sensitive too judging by his reactions.

"Okay, what's next?"

"Well, want that or my new nanite suit first?"

"Damn, suit, do you need to get it?"

"Shuri, I'm wearing it now."

The sleeve of his jacket reformed into the Ironman armour using nanites and she was definitely showing him the latest black Panther update she developed later. After it has formed for a few seconds, he switched it back to the suit. She immediately reached out to feel the sleeves and it was so close in texture to vibranium weave clothing.

"So this way, you will always be the suit with you?"

After Siberia, after watching the video. She can't blame him.

"Yup, in more ways than one. This is the one only the kids know, it's kind of weird."
"Says the nearly 50 year old man that looks in his early twenties with a bright blue eye that conducts electricity and speaks to computers?"

"Actually.. Yeah?"

"Okay, I honestly thought we had reached a weird limit here. Go on."

The suit jacket sort of disintegrated and vanished into his shirt. When that was done, and watching that wasn't thing to get dull anytime soon. It was similar to her design, but because of his technopathy his control over it was far beyond what she'd considered for the Black Panther suit, it was basically on or off, Tony could change the appearance of the clothing, it was definitely giving her ideas, T'Challa might like some normal options that are also armour? His shirt reacted similar but morphed into a black t-shirt instead, leaving his arms bare. He held up his right arm and his eye flashes bright, bright gold, not like the small glimpses when he was activating the nanites or the lights. It was practically a mirror to his left eye, but gold instead of blue and it stayed that way.

It distracted her enough that she nearly missed what she was showing her. The gauntlet, similar to the one he was just wearing but instead of a red and gold colour scheme. This was black and gold, instead of a blue glow in his palm it was red and had matching red circles on the back of his arm, two on his forearm. After a few seconds, the metal then melted into his skin and it was completely gone. It didn't disintegrate like the nanites, it just sort of melted into his skin and vanished. Somehow he was able to carry the suit inside of him and the familiar feeling told her it was made from vibranium, although she was getting that feeling in general from Tony. Probably from the nanites suit.

"Tony, that is.. How?!"

"I'm not actually sure, not long after I was up and about, I created a new suit. As I do after things like this happen to me. I was working on the gauntlet in bed and had a panic attack, the gauntlet responded, attached itself to me. When I calmed down, instead of shutting down, and before I had thought to take it off, it just melted away and I could feel it. Waiting until it was needed. I've basically got a suit on standby."

" Bast that is amazing! So you have two suits on you? One self repairing?"

"Yup, the undersuit has a nanite hive too for repairs."

"With that and your changes, whoever thinks they're attacking you unawares will get a nasty surprise."

"Sure, the goal is to not be trapped without power again. The electrokinesis helped that to."

"Well, I'm glad you finally told me. Any other revelations?"

"I don't think so? I got the usual upgrade with it, speed, strength and durability. I'm working on control, the technopathy can go a bit wonky, I need to run somewhere isolated now and then off that's possible. Think T'Challa will spar with me?"

"He will definitely enjoy that and I'm sure we can work something out, do you mind others knowing? Anything would be kept in Wakanda obviously."

"Huh. I didn't think of it like that. I assumed I'd be to keep it under wraps like I do at home."

"Well anything you tell the Dora will never spread, and our mother. You won't have to be too worried about that."
"That works then, cool. Stephy was worried about me being in a place I'd have to hide again after getting used to all the avengers knowing. So you can tell them? Not about the Extremis suit. The Bleeding Edge suit, that's the nanite suit, you can mention that."

"Ah yes, your Strange brother with the Snarky Cloak. I like him, his cloak is delightful!"

"Levi is the best. Stephy wouldn't let me bring him."

Tony sulks at that before making short work of the rest of the food, he seems to eat more than T'Challa even! But then he had just shown off a few different abilities, she assumed that that had something to do with it. As they spend some time talking about things back at the compound she can't stop just looking because it's so surprising. He looks so young! The light scarring on his right arm seems to go all the way up, ending not long before the elbow. She also opens up his Cybernetic arm when he's finished eating. Mindful to avoid staring at the thick, twisted band of scarring where metal and flesh meet.

"I want to see what you changed, these blue lines are new. I like them, they add something to the design, as to Harleys decals. But what do they do? And where are the control nodes you were developing… you don't need control nodes do you? Are you doing it with your mind?"

She smacked him lightly for that because that had been bugging her for months.

"Yeah, no point putting in control nodes when a background process in my mind can do the job. There is a lot more space in my head now, can work on several things at once, I barely notice the hand unless I want to change how it's working in there. When you're done poking I'll show you what the blue lines do."

"Not if I work it out first you won't!"

Tony just chuckles, leaning back, nibbling on some of the remaining bread he hadn't demolished and offers up his arm. It's was so peculiar watching everything working inside without the control nodes. She can also see that he's added additional nanite hives into the triangular structures around the edges. The developments of his tech are interesting, but at the same time she can see that most of them had been developed from fear linked to events like Siberia. That made him feel like he needs to carry two very different suits, self repairing suits, made from vibranium. She somehow suspects that these aren't the only additional nanite hives on him either. The tech is amazing but what drives it makes her sad. Even though she has been schooling her reactions, Tony seems to know the path her thoughts of taken and squeezes her shoulder, giving her a sad smile and she realises his sight must be giving him information.

"I'm okay Kitkat, I just like having tech with me. It's comforting. Like the electrokinesis. Want to know something weird?"

"Obviously!"

"The electricity that I can call, and pretty much all electricity, in the walls, lightning, powerlines and such. Bruce thinks it's because of my ability to See, but it feels good. Like comfysafetyhome all rolled into one."

"You're right, that is really weird, but I kinda get it. It's like me and my tech, it's comforting."

She goes back to poking around and thinks on it, when Tony says see its got more meaning to it, like capitalised. See instead of just normal seeing and she wishes she could see it herself. After poking around a little she starts returning things to where she got them as Tony is fighting and
trying to keep a straight face.

"What?"

"Nothing, that just really tickles."

She glances down to where her hand is actually in his arm and starts laughing because she had kind of forgotten that this wasn't just a piece of tech but actually his arm. She quickly puts things back together and is a little sheepish.

"Don't worry Kitkat, if you had a cybernetic arm, I'd probably do the same. So, you work it out?"

"They look like photon generators but I can't find anything that would dictate shape or guide them, but I'm guessing that's because you do it?"

"Yup, just think of how much space I save because I don't need control nodes and things like that."

It's a lot, so much could be added because he didn't need to waste space like if it was attached to another person, there is still space available despite his new additions since they built it. He puts his arm out, palm out as if he were to fire a repulsor blast, but instead bright blue, the same as his eye blasts out both sides from the stripes until they meet above and connect over his palm. Creating a large photon shield. He grins before moving his palm, as if holding his hand out to shake hands and the blue shield contracts and forms a blade. Dagger length and dense bright at first. Then with a smirk it shifts to a longer, sword like length whilst gold was sparking in his eye. He then pulls it back in with a flash. Considering he was unsure about his control, from where she's sitting he has an amazing level of control, and the options are practically endless considering how much tech he makes to just be able to control and manipulate it.

"Were going to have so much fun."

She can see him relax, that last bit of tension vanishing under her easy acceptance, she hadn't even noticed he'd been worried until now, but then it made sense, Tony never chose this life. It isn't like what T'Challa went through. He's making the best of it, become adept at it and using it to keep himself and others safe, but he liked being human, he missed his grey hair even. He might have gained a lot, but she has the sense he lost something too.

Something bigger than a hand or an eye.

"So... are you looking forward to meeting your PenPal?"

"I thought leaving Stephanie in America meant less teasing about James."

He rolled his eyes. Everytime he called her Wolf James, she couldn't help smirking, she couldn't pinpoint the exact moment that he'd gone from Barnes to James, but a lot had flipped with such an innocent thing. He'd originally brought him up and then changed topics or he avoided mentioning him at all. After he had become James he had been a lot better about it.

"Would I ever do such a thing?"

"Mmmhmm. And for your question, I have no idea. Writing and speaking are very different things."

She rolls her eyes that both of them are being weird about meeting after sharing so many letters. He pulls out a tablet and the holographic screen pops up so he can start making calls to everyone to prove he is alive. The amount of people who he speaks to makes her feel better, it is good that
Shuri smirked over at his table, the bright blue holograms of his mobile workshop set up managed to somehow look completely out of place in Shuri's lab, but at the same time. It kind of worked. It was just strange seeing the vastly different tech, so close to each other. She'd spent some time looking through his mobile workshop and he'd gone back to the Vibranium sand because that stuff was amazing and felt so good to use.

He'd set up so he wasn't too far away or behind James seat, but also that he could dive into the code without it being extremely obvious. It wasn't the best position in the lab. Okay. It was practically the worst. There were two doors at his back, a huge open space and his brain was itching at him to move. However virtually all of the good spots would place him behind the super soldier. Not exactly conducive to a calm environment when using the glasses. So, he parked his ass down and pushed that flashing alarm in his head back. He doubted it would ever shut up, but it was manageable.

Luckily, when James is in a simulation, he cannot actually see the lab and he can emerge from the code comfortably whilst he jumps into one of the screen savers. He figured hiding in the guys blindspot would just be rude. See Rhodey, he is capable of thinking of this stuff. So, even though it left him open, he dealt with it and would be able to code without James realising he was doing it with his brain. Win-kinda win.

Even though he had planned all of this really well, even though they've literally been talking via letters for a while, Tony finds himself.. annoyingly nervous. Which of course leads itself to extra energy.

The man of the hour walking in completely cool and collected didn't help, nor did the absolute riot of colours that tried to pull him under straight away had him even more off balance than he was in the beginning which Tony is pretty sure is not fair, why does the universe seem to want to hate him? He'd known somehow that James colours would be a 'thing'. Sometimes he hated being right.

The weird thing was, even though the colours were tugging at him, just on the edge of his vision, tempting him. He didn't get nauseated or an overstimulation headache, like when new people usually pull him under. It was closer to how Rhodey or Pepper did, that their colours almost blanketed out every single person in the room. He tries to acknowledge the surface for now so that he's capable of appearing as a semi capable human being, at least. It looks like an actual storm with actual lightning that takes him by surprise, there is so much just under the surface but he forcibly holds himself back for now and tries to ignore how much that lightning is pulling at him. It's all so distracting that he nearly missed the dark, gunmetal colour close to his back. Completely stationary. What on earth was that?

"Hello there Snowflake."

"Hi Dr Stark."

He throws his hands up in defeat. James just smirks at him that makes him wonder if he's doing it on purpose to wind him up.

"How many letters did it take for you to finally start calling me Tony?"
"Not that many?"

"Hmmm, sure. Any other questions for our set up today?"

"Ah, nope, I think we went over it pretty thoroughly."

"Nifty, okay. I'll leave you to Shuri, I'll be over there."

As he sat down he had to congratulate himself in not getting completely pulled into that storm and just standing there gawking.

"As you know Tony is doing a test run today to ease you into it, same as always, you can stop the simulation at anytime."

"Sure, sure."

Tony tried not to frown, he wasn't even looking at the guy and he got a flash that he usually does from people's colours. Telling him that James would not stop the simulation because he felt like it was his part of contributing. Which just means he'll be monitoring his vitals so he can stop at anytime if needed, Stephey and Rhodey are laughing at him right now, he knows it, as they've been dealing with his similar tendencies for years. He's not sure he likes being in this side.

Shuri slipped over to him as the images built up around James and Shuri snagged his sunglasses. Giving an unrepentant shrug as she started analysing them, he rolled his eyes before relaxing into his chair and switching his mind into the code. He'd already spoken to Shuri about it, she'd watch out for him so he could devote his mental processes where they were needed. It also meant he wasn't actually watching the memory about to play out behind him.

Running the code here, live was much different to running through relays back home. The twist and turns were faster but he was also much quicker to react too. He wouldn't say it. Because again, he has some tact. Occasionally. But it was actually quite a lot of fun. On 3 occasions he slowed James down by loading up a screensaver between memories because he just seemed to jump in without giving himself a break. Everything was actually much more successful than he'd hoped for and it felt like barely anytime had passed and Shuri was slipping his sunglasses on as he pulled out of the code blinking. There was still something there, finding it what it was would be ideal but working around it was also an option.

"That's great Tony, highest clearance yet!"

"Of course it is, I was directly involved."

He smirked and Shuri punched him. He took this relatively small window where James was distracted by the screensaver to let his ability lose because it was driving him insane. Like and itch to scratch in his mind that kept on building. He really hoped that it was just to look, not to say something. Because he really didn't want to do that. He didn't know what was getting his attention more out of the two new things.

By now he'd seen a lot of people. Good, bad and inbetween, all kinds of people from all walks of life. Baseline humans, inhumans, mutants and supers. A lot of very strange people. But never had he seen freaking lightning in a person's colours. It didn't even strictly tell him something, it just was and he had no idea what that meant. The other weird thing was almost that cloak of black gunmetal. It was completely stationary. He'd seen colours so slow that they'd been practically stationary before but this was actually still. His actual colours are like deep purple and grey clouds of huge storm with glimpses of these pure blue skies. Completely separate to the still colours.
He pushed the rest away, that should be enough, he didn't want to go rooting around and he'd tried to cut everything off before much information hit him. He knew that he was likely playing a losing game, however, he had a feeling eventually he'll lose and get pulled in. As James pulled of the glasses and glanced around, flashing them a smile, he hoped that he didn't look to obvious when that happened.

"So, was that better then, Snowflake?"

"Much better! I'm sorry you had to come so the way here for it though, I know it can't be easy being away from your family."

"I have video calls booked in at certain times for everyone so they won't miss me too much."

He caught himself as he nearly tilted his head because the dark grey moved, ever so slightly it shifted.

"I'm sure they will miss you."

Shuri jumped over, using him as a damned leaning post. She wasn't even tall enough to lean on him like this but apparently that was a challenge and he isn't that short dammit. But before he can say anything the grey moved again and he isn't sure if it's a trick of the light or his sunglasses but his eyes look slightly different too. Still storm grey, but with something else out of reach. These stupid abilities were making him as weird as Stephy.

"So, do you boys fancy lunch?"

"Shuri, you are divine, please take me to foodstuffs!"

He wasn't even exaggerating. Much, they'd spent a good two hours running through memories to get James used to the way they were doing things now. They were all easy memories, tomorrow they were testing out a bunch of medium ones and would be under for a lot longer. He was going to need snacks. Even so, 2 hours of using his technopathy without being able to use the lightning rod took more energy to keep his control. So he was hungry.

"I'd love to but I'm meeting Wings in the library!"

He raised an eyebrow as James practically fled the room, too fast for him to get a read on why he was fleeing, all he saw was the lightning that apparently his brain was extremely focused on and nearly had him trailing after the man like a puppy. Thankfully he had better control over himself than that.

Later that night. Or rather, ridiculously early in the morning, 1am to be precise was when he called all the kids. The girls for their bedtime stories. Peter to talk about his training with Jess and Natka, and the kid loved it to apparently. Just two of the scariest women on base, sure. Harley wanted to go through some ideas he'd had for his latest potato gun and they were getting terrifying on their own and finally Cooper to talk through his day and homework. Despite it being stupid o'clock in the morning, the whole situation was grounding.

It did absolutely nothing to tell him how to deal with these new things in a person's colours. After confusing himself more than once, he ended up calling Rhodey.

"Platypus!"

"Hey Tones, I didn't expect another call on day 1. What's wrong?"
"Whaddya mean what's wrong? Maybe I'm just calling to say hi?"

"Mmmhmmm."

"Fine, it's just.. My ability is being weird?"

"Are you safe?"

"Oh yeah, it's the colour one, I just.. There is a person here will something different in their colours, something I've never seen before?"

Rhodey's sigh was long.

"It's Barnes isn't it?"

"What? Noo, someone else."

"Ahuh. Okay. So, 'Not-Barnes' has something weird in their colours?"

"Uh, yeah. And it's not Barnes. But this person has really different colours and my ability it's like an over excited puppy about it and wants to drag me in. But there is something else that is weird and it doesn't tell me anything."

"Huh, okay. That is weird, even Stranges weird glowing discs tell you things."

"Exactly, and this, it's just lightning, nothing else."

"Lightning?"

"Yeah, why are you saying it like that?"

"No reason Tones. Why don't you do what your ability wants to. Anyway, I gotta run, Carol invited me to that new restaurant."

"Okay, have fun on your date!"

"Boy, if you knew how much restraint I am using right now, you would not tease me about Carol."

With that he hung up on him and Tony didn't have a sodding clue what he was on about.

Chapter End Notes

I remember writing this chapter and doing an inordinate amount of research into the Wakandan tech from the film to work out how the sand works. (Which annoyingly seemed to form from a concept of 'its nothing like Tony's but still futuristic.)

I also remember giving my partner an hour long lecture about vibranium, because that's the kinda thing I do. He retaliated with obscure Tolkien lectures.

Also, randomly. The alarm clocks mentioned are actually real, and come from an alarm clock war I had with a housemate once. I had the chicken one, it was so annoying.
This is a bit of a transitiony chapter, which I apologise for. The next one I'm hoping should make up for it with more meetings xD.

Also, I know Caps shield isn't actually pure Vibranium in Canon, I just thought I'd skip the experimentation to randomly merge it because I always thought that was peculiar and this is my change to ignore it tbh! I Magnetoproofed the shield.

(Oh, and for anyone wondering why Bleeding Edge isn't stored internally - I switched the suits up, Bleeding Edge is usually stored internally, I know, but I switched them around and tied the internal on with Extremis. His nanite suit I based after Model 37. The new suit here I mostly based of Model 42 which was more for rapid testing. Including the geeky Override. I might take screen caps of my armour document onto Tumblr for people like me who think way to much about these things.)
Chapter Summary

Whoever thought inviting Tony Stark to Wakanda would be a peaceful affair is probably banging their head on a table right now.

Chapter Notes

Last week I managed to utterly murder my shoulder. In my sleep. Proving that sleep is the actual enemy and I'm meant to be made out of insomnia and chaos. We think I pinched a nerve somewhere and I've been mostly stuck in bonkers levels of pain. And I don't so much trust my proofreading skills like this, I'm getting back to my normal. So big apology if I miss something obvious here.

I've been looking forward to posting this chapter for a while, because I kinda enjoy comments that at 90% screaming xD

Shuri POV

11th November

Shuri was running late.

Who knew inviting overly excitable chatty geniuses to breakfast would turn everything slightly chaotic?

Okay. She had predicted as much, but watching Tony flit around chatting to everyone, and himself, had been highly amusing. Especially with Okoye, as she had no idea what to do with him.

By the time she skidded up to her lab, her Wolf was sat on the floor outside reading.

"Ah, you're early! Just what I wanted."

"And you look like you ran here."

"Breakfast ran slightly long and it threw off my schedule, it was fun though, you should join us again at some point."

"I'll.. Think about it?"

She frowned and tilted her head, this however lead into a question that had been bugging her since yesterday.

"Why are you avoiding Tony?"

"I'm not so much avoiding him… I just didn't think he'd want me around much given everything."
And she'd thought the hardest part was getting Tony here. These boys were dumb.

"You've been writing back and forth for ages and literally sending each other crafts projects!"

"That's different, I'm trying to be considerate."

Suddenly getting Tony to Wakanda felt like it had been the easy part of the equation.

"Okay, but I'm not sure if Tony will see it that way.."

She muttered under her breath earning her a confused head tilt before he sat down so she could do his hair. This at least was relaxing and he couldn't run away whilst she was doing it. She was 16 and these grown ass men were going to give her gray hair.

Tony wandered in a few minutes later chatting animatedly with the Dora who had been assigned to him, they looked somewhere between amused and exasperated, it was a look she knew well, it was usually aimed at her.

"Snowflake! Shuri!"

"Tony, how much more of that dessert did you eat after I left?"

"Um… All of it?"

Well that explained why he was practically bunching on the spot rocking slightly on his feet and grinning.

"You realise it was practically pure sugar right?"

"Of course! Why do you think I ate it. Morning Snowflake, ready for more today?"

He went to nod which got him a tap on the head from her as it very nearly messed up what she was doing.

"Words. Use them, keep your head still."

"Uh, yeah I think so."

Tony was chuckling slightly and even with the sunglasses on she knew he wasn't looking directly at them. It hadn't taken her long to work out when he was looking at the colours surrounding a person instead of at them. The difference was subtle, even more so with the glasses covering his eyes but she was observant enough to pick up on it. As she found out last night however, whilst he would tell someone anything they asked about their own colours, he would barely mention anything of someone else.

He must be looking at Wolf's colours, because he kept tilting his head back as he set up his little Tony-Zone. He had had plenty of time and opportunity to see hers but yesterday he had been in the uplink or whatever he called it. He hadn't had much of a chance to study their Wolf before he practically fled.

Today's session wasn't that much different from yesterday's, except that it was much longer and grueling. They were testing out a few memories that were very close, medium to as close to hard as they dared for now, memories similar to the ones attached to the words to see if the new system worked.

Having Tony actually here did seem to make a huge difference with the tech, whatever it was
about Wolf that kept fighting the tech seemed to be unable to counteract Tony working and acting directly as the algorithm. They were moving through memories at a rapid pace and it was only Tony occasionally forcing the screen saver that broke things up. Saying that his hands needed a break every few memories even though she was well aware that he was fine and his hands were not even involved. He was still practically bouncing in his seat, somehow he always seemed to know from the information read out when he actually needed a break. Which was good because otherwise she knew Wolf would just push on and on. Tony had seemed to pick up on that, probably because it was what he would do. She bet if situations were reversed however he wouldn't take the break with as much grace.

"Tony, usually you see a new person, work out their colours and then it's mostly fine, right?"

"Uh, Yeah. Mostly. Sometimes I can get pulled in again, but it's not as encompassing as the first time."

"Hmm. OK. Right. So. Why are you still sneaking looks at our Wolf when you think he isn't looking?"

"Shhh dammit, super soldier hearing! And, Um, it's complicated."

"He can't hear us from here since you added that music to the screensavers so stop dodging."

"It's.. There's something about his colours that's… different. Not bad different, it's just.. New. It's weird."

"Okaaay. Does this have to do why you're currently sitting on your hands?"

Tony immediately moves his hands to his lap and tries to look innocent which answers her question before dropping his head into his hands.

"This ability, it's annoyingly hard to explain on a good day."

"I know you won't tell me anything about the colours, but maybe I can help? I don't mind how weird it is."

"Ugh. Okay. There's something in his colours that doesn't actually give me information about him, but it's.. Hard to stop looking at."

"Well if it doesn't say anything about him then maybe you could tell me what it is?"

"Huh. I didn't think about it like that. It's lightning, like from a huge storm and I just want to… well stick my hands in it."

"So why don't you?"

The expression that causes Tony to pull was extremely entertaining as he practically whisper yelled at her in response. Also it was amusing that Tony didn't seem to understand why lightning was holding his attention so much. Even after spending half an hour explaining to her why his electrokinesis made him feel good. Geniuses were not meant to be this stupid, she was sure of it.

"I can't do that!!"

"Sure you can."

"No, that would be weird. How could I explain that? Plus, this ability is only sight. It's never been
Both of their attention was drawn by the beeps that signified that the glasses were being powered down, Tony immediately got embarrassed from the direction of the conversation before managing to wipe it from his face pretty effectively. Which just made her smirk at him.

"You know, it seems like you're just making this complicated for no reason. I'd just do it."

His fingers twitched at that and she wondered if he was itching to zap her again with the low voltage, almost static shock zap or if he was focusing on Wolf's colours again. From the small tilt of his head she was guessing the latter. Not for the first time did she want to know what she saw. Especially if for some reason what he was seeing now was completely different, but she also liked that he kept his observations about people mostly to himself. She pushed off his desk and did jump slightly as a spark hit her.

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing, just static or something equally annoying.."

She shot Tony a glare and he just looked overly smug.

"Should be careful there Shuri."

She couldn't not roll her eyes because of course Wolf agreed without knowing that it was Tony who shocked her.

"I think we hit a record today. You cleared a lot!"

"I know, it just felt like the glasses were working with me, the difference is weird."

"Well I'm glad me being here is helpful."

Tony stretched, hearing his back crack and pop had her squinting as he was massaging what he assumed were kinks out of his back. Which was slightly odd as she assumed Extremis would stop such things from happening.

"I'm fine KitKat, I'm just old and sat still for a long time."

She opened her mouth and clicked it shut as she had very nearly said something about Extremis before she realised that she couldn't.

"Okay, old man. If you say so."

She turned to ask her Wolf what he had planned next when she realised that he'd vanished, which drew Tony's attention and made him jump slightly. So neither of them had noticed him go.

"Does he do that often?"

"Yup. I've seen him chuck himself out of windows before too."

"Well, the window is usually a good exit point, no one expects it and you're far away by the time they realise."

"Most people just use doors Tonu."

"I know, that's why the window works well. Plus, not many people are willing to hop out of
"windows to follow."

"Tony. That's called good sense."

"Pffft. Anyway, I'm sure you mentioned something about me getting to ride a hover bike today.."

"That's strange... because I don't remember this conversation at all."

"Awww come on KitKat, it's a hoverbike."

"If you crash you will tell my brother that it was entirely your idea and you dragged me along as an innocent witness."

"Sure! If you think Meowthra will believe that!"

**Wolf POV**

He felt slightly bad for vanishing in the middle of a conversation from Shuri's lab, but he was still pretty sure that hanging around was not the best course of action. No matter what Shuri said, it was the least he could do, surely.

'You are ridiculous.'

Great. Just what he needed.

'I am not ridiculous. I'm trying to be polite.'

'I'm pretty sure fleeing from guests and disappearing in the middle of conversations is rude.'

'Since when do you know what's rude and what's not?'

The snark back is instantaneous and not for the first time he has to wonder what on earth his life has actually come to.

'Since you spent an hour droning on about?'

'Since when do you actually listen to me?'

'I listen. Not my fault your laws don't make sense and are so restrictive.'

'Winter, they aren't *my* laws. It's *the* law.'

He doesn't know how, because it's in his head, but he gets the distinct feeling that Winter was rolling his eyes at him after a few choice words in Russian calling him a pedantic bore, before his presence pulled back slightly, leaving him alone in his mind. Well, as close to alone as he got these days. Winter was still there, he could sort of feel his presence? But there was a difference between Winter being actively engaging with him and watching the world than what he was now.

Winter could be in this state, which he had described as sleeping. Or he could be awake, still pulled back but observing. Having experienced that before when Winter took over, he wasn't sure how Winter could stand it, because it was weird. Watching, observing but not being and to interact, sending instructions for his limbs to move and getting nothing. Really weird.
Winter didn't seem to be fazed by it however. After that, he came closer to the surface to talk to him. Other times it was like he was right next to him, watching. He had great observational skills, but Winter managed to notice things that never occurred to him. Not that he always passed along his observations. After that was when Winter came out.

He didn't know how often, but Winter had told he just likes to stretch his legs occasionally. Apparently he was asleep so why did he care?

Which was precisely why he was trying to explain concepts like *breaking the law*.

He was worried he'd wake up some day in jail not having a clue what happened.

Winter has promised to act like him if anyone came across him during his little excursions and as he was asleep during them, he had to take his word for it. Whilst Winter seemed to be able to wake up and see the world through him. When he was asleep, he was dead to the world and Winter could do whatever he wanted. Only once had Winter forcibly woken him up whilst he was in control and it had been because their were some fireworks being let off somewhere in Wakanda and it had freaked him out.

Did Winter explain why he was sat in a tree eating an apple?

Of course he didn't.

As much as Winter occasionally drove him insane to the point he tried, unsuccessfully, to ignore him. He made dealing with this new time slightly easier. He was learning things about the future purely to explain then to Winter. It also reminded him of who he wasn't. Bucky was like another part of them that wasn't here anymore, with just his memories leftover and the two of them were working out what to make of things.

He wished he could explain this to Steve. That he was actually happy with how things were, he liked things like this. He didn't want to be like Bucky was. Winter definitely didn't want to be like Bucky, he didn't understand why he should be anyone but himself. Sometimes Winter framed things in a simplistic way and they made so much sense it was hard to argue.

He wasn't stupid enough to think that conversation would go well however. Steve would take Winter's presence as a bad thing, heck he'd thought it was bad at first. Still did occasionally, but that time where Winter had exhausted himself, where he couldn't feel him, that he had hated. It had scared him more than he'd admit.

As he entered the library he tried to push all thoughts like that down. Thinking of the Witch left him cold and anxious and that Steve had invited her into his mind made him feel even worse. Plus thinking about it lead him down dangerous ways and he still didn't believe that Steve would let a Hydra operative share food with him. He wouldn't.

"Over here!"

He hadn't been paying attention and had nearly walked right past the corner Wings and TicTac were tucked away in. RedWing flew over to him, beeping at him to herd him into the corner. He wondered if she realised that Tony was in Wakanda? He knew that Wings let her out for a few hours each evening, did she use that time to go and see Tony? He pulled out his tablet to fire a quick message to CERBERUS, he couldn't tell Wings and TicTac that the man was in Wakanda, but CERBERUS could quietly tell RedWing if she didn't know.

He dropped down into a comfortable chair with a sigh, they'd done a lot of work today with the
glasses and it was quite tiring going through your own memories like that. Today however, like yesterday, he hadn't needed to watch or experience the same memories half as much as before.

"You look knackered, go through lots of memories today?"

"Yeah, Shuri said I broke my record."

"As long as you don't over do it."

"Na don't worry Wings, Tony seems to be able to know when I'm pushing too hard, probably the glasses or something and he brings up these screensavers."

"Huh, so he's directly involved then? I've been reading more about the system and didn't see that mentioned."

"Normally no, something about my brain I guess."

"Well that's nice of him. I mean, I have no idea what you two are talking about, but it sounds nice?"

"Yeah, since he took over from the algorithm I've been working through memories fast, he and Shuri are working up to the memories attached to the words too."

Both of them visibly brightened at that, they knew how much having the words in his mind pained him. Winter disliked them even more, they were what had held him down, until the sequence wasn't completed, he'd been held back. After that he'd been released, confused, but not contained anymore. He was nervous that if someone with the words appeared he'd be returned to that state. Getting rid of the worlds would be like being free to breathe after having something crushing his chest for so long.

"Enough about me. So what's today's news?"

Wings slumped and TicTac rolled his eyes, so it seemed not much had changed.

"I'm still trying to get to Steve. If I can just get him on his own for five minutes and actually talk to him, I'm sure I could get through to him…"

"But Wanda is always there! I tried asking her if she wanted me to make her breakfast this morning to give Sam a chance ya know? She brought Steve with her."

"I did get a chance to Talk to Clint."

"What did you get out of the Archer?"

"Not much, he just said he needed to protect Wanda from you, like that day in your room you were the aggressor or something. He's not even obsessing about Laura anymore. I don't know what's with the three of them, it's like they're living in a different reality."

"Just make sure the little Ved'ma doesn't sink her claws into you too. I'm worried about Steve, but as long as he's going along with everything she says, I don't know what we can do?"

"But what if Wanda is making them think this?"

"I don't know, you two used to be the same you know?"

"What? We weren't this bad, they're being ridiculous!"
"Seriously, you two were like that before I went into cryo, and then, it was like you were utterly different when I came back."

"Shit. I remember when I started researching, I was really confused, it was like up was down."

"I remember seeing T'Challa so angry and I knew something was wrong."

"You two stopped believing her, and started thinking for yourselves."

"We'll keep trying to get through to them. I think we need to get them thinking themselves maybe? I just wish we had something solid, that Wanda made them say X and get her arrested."

"Both of you be careful, we don't know the extent of her powers and it's bad enough you idiots still live in the same house."

He shook his head at the pair of them, he was pretty sure no one could drag him into that house again. The idea that the witch was influencing Steve in someway was horrifying, and he wanted to help. He did. But going to Steve meant going to the witch and he just would not, could not do that. Not with all the memories he had under the surface where he was forced to do things against his will under Hydra. He could never go back to that. He didn't think he'd come out of the other side whole.

It felt awful to step back but his therapist had been very specific about there were times that you needed to look after yourself first. That you can't help anyone if you use up every piece of yourself. Shuri and T'Challa were trying to find out more about her magic too, they didn't exactly have many specialists on this kind of thing in Wakanda however and they didn't want to back her into the corner and force her to do something worse.

**Tony POV**

It was pretty official. He loved Wakanda and he was currently designing a hoverbike of his own, because that had been far too much fun.

It had also been an awesome technique for forgetting everything that had been currently weighing in his mind. Namely, a disappearing super soldier with lightning in his colours.

His colours alone were interesting enough without that little detail thrown in. But then Tony had always loved storms. Rolling claps of thunder, the smell in the air as the heavy muggy feeling was lifted when a storm finally broke, the faint scent of ozone when lightning hit home. The first time one had broken out over the compound after he'd discovered his electrokinesis had been a riot and only Bruce practically sitting on him had kept him inside. Bruce had been concerned that his electrokinesis might might him attract the lightning. He, smartly, had not mentioned that that had actually been his plan because it sounded fun. He was doomed to sensibility.

Either way, storms were awesome, but he'd never seen someone's colours as a storm. Instead of the brush strokes of moving colour it actually looked like clouds over a pale blue sky that spoke too much of recovery and resilience for Tony to look at for too long because damn. Everything this man had been through and he was still able to come around like that. It was moderately terrifying to come one like him who had been shattered and shattered time and time again and was only just able to possibly put himself back together.

The glimpses he got of his own colours now and then did not paint such a positive path to
recovery. Pits falls, spike traps, tar pits and damned lava oceans were practically peppered around his recovery. There were no gaps in James colours, no caverns from where he'd been broken. He'd been left exhausted, barely able to trust and shattered and somehow, this man after being through so much more was rebuilding, finding himself and enjoying it. It wasn't a chore. Sure he could see not everything was easy and perfect, there were dark clouds amongst the purple, but there was light behind them that lit them up somehow.

Frankly. It was weird.

Also, this was a lot of information.

Usually he had to work to find out this amount of information barring certain people. But it was just there, slammed into his brain quicker than he could practically acknowledge it was happening and he was still trying to hold himself back from just falling in. He knew if he wasn't careful that he could free fall into that storm that was so much like a storm rolling in from the ocean, but with more fantastical quirks. Like the 'sun' on the clouds threw of this bright silver, white gold colour.

He dropped his head onto the desk in his room and groaned.

Why was this happening to him?

Worst of all, this was with his glasses on. The ones that dulled his ability.

"FRIDAY, is Bruce-Bear free?"

"Sure Boss, he's just finished Breakfast and is in his lab."

"He always was a weird morning person, ask him if he minds me calling him?"

He waited in silence, not moving from his position of having his forehead on his desk whilst wondering why he was even calling Bruce. It wasn't like he could actually say anything. All of the things confusing him related directly to the colours telling him things about James. The lightning was still the only inexplicable thing. Which was weird in itself, no matter was small the detail in people's colours, it gave him something. He might not understand the 'something', but it was something. He groaned again before a ringing sound caught his attention.

It took his a few seconds to even realise what was happening which was definite proof that his brain was a mess. He answered the call and Bruce's face popped up.

"Tony, how's Wakanda?"

"Oh Bruce it's amazing. Shuri even let me on a hoverbike and everything. Absolutely love it here!"

"That's great, so why did FRIDAY say you were bashing your head on a desk."

Dammit.

"Um, there's a thing that's confusing to me, that I can't really tell you about."

"Someone's colours are confusing you?"

"Yes Bruce, even with my glasses on. Its crazy, there is so much information that I didn't even look for, it's just smack in my brain."

"That does sound weird, maybe it's just getting stronger?"
"No, it's only like it for one person."

"Who?"

"I don't think the person is the important bit…"

"Well, if they're the only person you are having this reaction to, then the person who it is must be important."

"Stupid logic."

"Let's pretend I don't know who you're talking about. What else is the problem, you've had information overload before, you wouldn't call me just for that."

"There's something in the colours, that I've never seen before, that gives me zero information. Also one of the colours it completely stationary most of the time, then occasionally moves. It's really weird."

"Huh, what's the thing that gives you no information?"

"Uh, lightning."

"Really. Lightning, and it tells you nothing?"

He can't help but squint at the tone Bruce has taken, confused.

"Yeah, nothing at all."

Bruce's sigh was obnoxiously loud.

"Maybe you should try and collect more information?"

"Bruuuuuce, I'm trying not to look like a creep and it's hard enough because I want to stick my hands in the lightning and it's driving me crazy."

"I'm sure you can do it without looking like a creep."

"Not that I have much of a chance. He pretty much flees the room when he's not wearing the glasses."

He still didn't know why he was doing that. It had only happened twice and two technically was not a pattern but it was also 100% of their encounters.

Bruce took pity on him them and switched the conversation to what he was currently working on. He and Peter were working to improve and create some variants of his web fluid. It was easily something he could get lost in for a little bit, that would quiet the raging of him his mind that was still itching at him right now. Sometimes having abilities was beyond exhausting.

He's not sure how Peter does it, but then he'd seen the downsides of the Spiderlings ability clear as day. It took sensory processing disorder to a different level, all of the kids senses were racked up to sodding 12 and they seemed to be getting stronger as time went on. It was fine when he had them under control, but he suspected been a teenager was throwing in some issues itself. More than once he'd had to bundle him into a quiet room, a specially designed one because sound proofing was about as useful as paper against Peter now.

He was good at dealing with other people's abilities and their downsides. Like when Hope got a bit
sick from spending too much time being small, or helping design Hulks playroom, or inventing things to help people from Stephen gloves, Rhodey's braces and if he wanted to head into painful territory, Clint's hearing implants.

Helping other superhero type people with their unique brand of problems was his thing. He was good at it dammit.

Now things were all twisted up, he had all these weird abilities and some of them, sure, he was doing quite well with. Nothing had exploded around him in over a week and interfacing with tech that was outsourced was getting much easier. Even the electrokinesis was fun although he had to be slightly careful of how used to the latter he'd gotten. With his glasses on, no one really noticed the technopathy. The itch to reach out when he passed a power socket however was not a small thing and Bruce had diverted him from power sockets more than once when he hadn't actually realised he'd verred of course. The strength was usually easy to deal with, but it wasn't as advanced as some people on base, he still hadn't beaten Jess in an arm wrestling match. The speed… that was harder to manage because now he felt like that was normal speed and everyone was walking painfully slow.

That's what no one with abilities had told him.

How it starts to become normal.

How Carol would just come over and heat his cup up with her hands when they were both half asleep. How Stephy could speak about magic and different dimensions in all seriousness with absolutely no sneering what so ever. Getting Stephy to speak about anything without sneering was an accomplishment in itself. How Stephy using portals to steal his waffles just resulted in eye rolls and Stephy smirking smugly. How Levi usually came to him after so he could be smug with the demented, animated slanket. How he didn't even jump at Vision appearing in the ceiling anymore. Peter just hanging out on the ceiling and then there was the defenders comfort with their abilities.

All of it is good and he loves that his family has that.

It's just different when it comes to himself.

His entire worldview has changed, just a glance at someone and he starts to get an idea of what kind of person they are. But it isn't just the present, it's like it stretches back and forwards at the same time. Who they are. Who they've been. Who they could be. How many times they've broken, how many times they prospered. It's not a life story laid out perfectly, it's bits and pieces and flashes of colour and insight and some of it is so weird that he just wants to turn away. But sometimes that insight won't just sit in his brain.

Sometimes it's like a mad, starving wolf, scratching, clawing and biting in his brain until it gets out. Any relief of having it out is usually mitigated by people getting quiet and staring at him like he's some creepy person that knows everything. True, that isn't every time, but it happened enough and it wouldn't be so bad really if he got much of a choice. If he could bring up the vision when required, but it's always on. The best he can do is dull it and try and force himself to step back. To not get pulled under the current of other people's lives.

He hadn't lied when he told Stephy that seeing people without it was now strange to him. Seeing his old teammates just sat there. No colours swiping around them, interacting with each other. It left him feeling off kilter, like something huge was missing.

That it's already become such a part of him that he reached for it for comfort. How can something enrage him, confuse him and yet, still he feels its absence so keenly it's nauseating?
Seeing into people isn't all that it's cracked up to be. Sure, there are people who are an absolute joy to see, but humanity is a spectrum. Whereas there are people who have lived their life in the white, occasionally dipping into the gray, there are others. People who don't live in the gray because it's best to do their job, but because it's easier to slip into the black. The people who make the ostensibly painful choice not out of requirement, but because they enjoy it. People who see morality as a crutch to be shaken free off.

Seeing into the pure darkness at some people's hearts is not a comfortable thing to witness. It doesn't help that his reaction is not usually restricted to seeing, it's in feeling. And seeing the 'what is' in those people is hard. Seeing their future and the lives they might end, the pain and deaths they will spread, all that is hard, but what's worse by far is the 'what was'. Seeing the decline to this state, and no past, no matter how awful would make their futures just in anyway, but he still Sees it. Still Feels it.

Part of his trip to Wakanda was to hopefully have a little break, the chances of seeing someone like that here seemed slim and after dealing with Ross and his cronies, Tony was inches away from pulling his hair out, it always felt like he carried the stains of their minds with him, long after they were taken away.

He hadn't expected to come here and have this ability hard focus on James like this. The man practically fled any room he was in without his sight wanting to free fall into that storm. He just had to hope that with repeated exposure it would be less… that it would calm the fuck down. Hell, James might even stop fleeing the room, that would be interesting.

Before his thoughts could circle even further a tapping distracted him. His head shooting up from its new home on his desk after he'd signed off from Bruce and he glanced to the window. He was pretty sure they were at least 3 floors up. He hadn't been paying that much attention when Shuri showed him his room on how many stairs were involved. It was the top, so he didn't need to know. But there were definitely many flights of stairs.

He knows because he complained about the lack of elevators.

So having something tapping at his window whilst he'd been morosely contemplating the new intricacies of his life has him instantly feeling he has been transferred into a horror film.

He briefly considered pretending to be asleep before the tapping got louder and more insistent. Great. He was angering the creepy horror film-esque demon slash ghost.

He sighed before deciding.

"Fuck it. If I get eaten by a tree demon Fry, make sure my gravestone is epic."

"Off course Boss!"

"You shouldn't be so cheery about this. I'm now in a horror film and I'm the idiot everyone screams at to run away, instead I'm walking towards the window and the creepy tapping!"

FRIDAY laughs at him. He isn't sure what he did to deserve this, but if he asks he suspects FRIDAY would have an overly literal list.

He threw the curtains open and jumped back at the same time.

"Oh! "
OK, he hadn't expected that. He stood dumb founded for a few seconds before some more insistent tapping kicked him back into gear and he opened the window, still slightly shocked as RedWing took that as permission and immediately zipped into the room. Flying in happy elated circles around his head until he felt a tiny brush of code.

"Wilson has been doing a good job looking after you girl hasn't he."

He gets a brush of feeling back and realises that RedWing can't actually talk yet, the hardware capabilities just weren't put in when he built her. Back then, even though he'd wanted to give her an AI he'd held back. The JARVIS seed however had settled well, so young but she'd taken it and ran with it. It helped that Wilson genuinely seemed to care for the little bot. She threw back feelings of happiness and home. Yeah, he'd been a good dad for her.

Which was good otherwise he suspected CERBERUS would have had something to say. He was quite protective of his siblings.

"So did FRIDAY tell you I was here, or did CERBERUS give you the idea to come a tapping upon my chamber door? Come here, want to be able to talk?"

RedWing sped up and did a few more loops of the room excitedly before landing gently in his lap, showing him that she'd been flying around as she usually does in the evening because Wilson apparently understood she needed to feel the wind under her wings. She'd flown close enough to pick up the signal extremis emits. CERBERUS had suggested a different route so he could see he'd nudged her this way, close enough to pick up the signal. Something he usually masked but as he was in Wakanda he didn't really feel the need to. She'd recognised his code and came to visit.

How did his AI children get to be so smart?

He grinned before summoning nanites from his watch hive, it wouldn't take that many to create the small parts required to upgrade her. Although he'd love to see Willsons face when she returned.

Sam POV

Sam was pacing his room, he was restless and for once it had nothing to do with the drama that was life at the villa.

RedWing had gone out on her evening flight hours ago now. She should have been home an hour ago at the very latest.

"I'm sure she's okay man, she'd a hardy girl, with like.. weapons and everything."

"But what if she's in trouble? What if she's hurt and I have no idea where she even is!"

"Can't you use the UI to tell her to come home."

"I haven't touched it since she became… alive. It seems like a crappy thing to do, to order her around with it now she's alive."

He paced the room a few more times before returning to the window and looking out in the darkness. Straining for even a flash of red to give him an idea of where she was.

"She'll come back, but we could call Princess Shuri maybe? She could probably track her down."
"That's a great idea, pass me my tablet."

"Wait, Sam. Look."

He whipped his head around to the window and RedWing zoomed into the room, spinning in happy circles and beeping. He would not admit to anyone how damned scared he was or how happy that beeping made him.

"There you are girl, we were worried!"

"Father!"

He was utterly stunned as RedWing kept doing happy circles around the room. He even opened his mouth and closed it a few times because holy hell she was Talking. He hadn't known she could even do that! Scott however was bent double laughing.

"Aw dude, you have total dad shock face again."

"I'd argue with you, but I think your right. Hey girl, where have you been?"

"Upgrade!"

He blinked at that, how? He knew himself that tinkering with StarkTech, especially specific things he had gifted them like his gear was how you made it stop working. When he'd got the new wings he couldn't help having a look and everything locked down on him. He wouldn't even consider doing it to RedWing. So who had found RedWing flying around, discovered she was a fledgling AI and given her the ability to talk.

"That's amazing, how did this happen?"

"Upgrade! Upgrade!"

Okay, so maybe getting information out of RedWing wasn't going to happen, she was still quite young by AI standards he assumed, slowly changing from the UI.

"I wonder who did that? I don't think Shuri would?"

"Na, Stark makes it really hard to tamper with his tech."

"So what, she flew to America?"

"No, she knows to stay in Wakanda where it's safe, plus their shield, net thing keeps her in."

He couldn't help looking out into the darkness and wondering just exactly how this had happened before shrugging his shoulders and closing the window. What mattered was that she was safe and now she could speak to him.

**Tony POV**

Tony was kicked back on his bed, he'd not long let RedWing go and she has gleefully sped off with promises to come and see him next time she was out, there was also some amusement of the confusion she would create coming home talking.
Now she was gone however his brain was moving again and he just wanted to sleep. He had some of his routines from home in speaking with the children, but it seemed to not be enough or he still hadn't adjusted to the change in time zone. It might be dark out and the clock might say 2am but it was only 7pm back home. No matter how he fiddled with Extremis either, he couldn't just make himself go to sleep.

Just as he was about to yell at the ceiling in frustration his phone started ringing causing him to instantly jump up with much more energy than was required as he sent a code to answer the phone and Stephy's face popped up on the screen of one of his mobile workshop tablets.

"Stephanie! Awww, did you miss me?"

"FRIDAY told me you couldn't sleep and made Wilsons robot bird talk."

"Fry, you snitch! RedWing recognised my signal and came to visit so I gave her an upgrade. I'm sure Wilson is very confused."

"Hmm, so why are you doing that and not sleeping like a sensible person. Are you having energy issues?"

"No, mom. I'm fine, honestly, Shuri pointed out I could let some of the Dora in on the secret. I had breakfast without having to hide, there are multiple people to spar with. I'm eating and everything is fine!"

"I can't believe this, you realise you have turned me into one of those helicopter parents who just sent their child to camp."

He couldn't help but burst out laughing at that. The completely unimpressed glare Stephy was leveling at him didn't help any. In fact it just made the laughing worse.

"I'm not sure how you even put me in these situations Tony."

"Aww, it means you love me!"

"Quite. Now go and sleep… Oh dammit."

"Goodnight Mom!"

"Oh for Vishanti's sake you are insufferable you know."

Stephy goes to end the call but he holds it open just a little longer. Stephy always had to get the last word in, so of course, he always tried to beat him.

"Why don't you go and complain to Laura about it"

He released his hold on the call, snickering as the call cut to Stephy's protests. He dropped back onto the bed laughing and feeling a little lighter. He was however completely awake, not at all tired and sleep was not going to come anytime soon so he decided he might as well get some work done. Might even go and make some of his hot chocolate that Peter made for him.

Why Peter thought hot chocolate required an entire huge bar of melted milk chocolate, he had no idea, but with their increased caloric requirements it was handy. He also had a tendency to add coffee and cinnamon syrup too. If he was feeling differently he went with Harleys hazelnut syrup.

He closed his eyes for now and brought up everything he was currently working on before
reaching for the extremis code. He'd stripped it bare again and was trying to work it out to help Rhodey. Balancing the required tissue regeneration with the exothermic reaction without having Starkanium to make up for the missing blocks was proving difficult and keeping it stripped down. Rhodey wasn't interested in all of that and he didn't want to even offer it to Rhodey as a viable option until he could be sure it wouldn't go weird like it did with him.

**Winter POV**

He sat up in the bed, stretching slightly before sighing. Wolf had been having a nightmare and he'd woken up and was dumped with the physical reactions. He quickly tossed off the sleepwear and headed to the shower.

The shower was possibly one of his favourite things.

But then he had had it pointed out to him that Hydra had set his bar quite low with freezing water. Even though he was pretty sure the showers here in Wakanda were something else. Nothing like the one in Bucharest that barely even worked.

It left him turn the heat up high enough to leave his skin pink and it stays hot, even if he stayed there for over an hour. It was awesome.

Tonight however he didn't stay in for an excessive amount of time. He'd been 'asleep' for practically the entire day. He'd even missed the end of the BARF therapy before the Wolf slunk of in the name of politeness or something else. He didn't know.

*He* was confusing!

When he wanted to do something, he did it. But to Wolf, there were 50 thousand rules around everything that no one talked about however. You were just meant to magically know. It was infuriating. Whilst he could do a pretty good Wolf impression, he didn't want to risk having to keep it up for long periods of time. The chances of him getting bored were too high and he didn't want another lecture. When you are a captive audience for the other person sharing your body, lectures are even more annoying. So he tried to avoid people and watch from afar.

Passing people in corridors was one thing. Actually holding conversations with people was another and he was pretty sure that he'd slip. Pretty sure that he would do *something* that Wolf would disapprove of. He still grumbled about the sodding tree incident. That wasn't his fault, he didn't expect people to set off explosions in the sky.

After dressing in what he assumed was a close approximation to what Wolf had taken to wearing, he decided to head to the kitchen first.

It was no longer theirs alone, but the Feniks had not been spotted in there often. If he had been, he's pretty sure he would have been woken up at the sheer awkward nature of it. Plus, it was 3am, he assumed after such a long and busy day the other man would be asleep by now.

As soon as he walked into the room; however, he knew something was up. The main light was off, but one of the lights on the breakfast bar was on, creating a dim light, enough for him to see Feniks sunglasses glinting in the light as they formed? That was confusing, he wasn't sure it was a trick of the light but it looked like they assembled themselves on his face instead of putting them on.
He froze for a second and realized Wolf would flee but he wanted one of his apples dammit.

"Hey Snowflake, you don't have too… Wow."

Wow?

"You… Are not James."

Ummm..

The man's head tilted to one side and he got this deep down feeling on being noticed.

Really seen.

No one saw him.

It was extremely strange but he'd told James that if anyone would notice it would be him. He hadn't thought it would happen that fast. Now it was happening however, he didn't know what to do. Wolf wasn't here to push forward, it was just him.

"Who are you?"

Shit.
At Your Earliest Convenience

Chapter Summary

Everyone is having a roller-coaster type day today, with dips down low but a soaring high here or there.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Winter POV

12th November

"Hey Snowflake, you don't have too... Wow."

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Tony POV

Those storm gray eyes he'd only seen flashes of here and there looked much more like sharp edged steel in the dim light of the kitchen, and he could almost see the decision around him where this.. Whoever this was, basically decided 'Fuck it' and strolled into the kitchen. Even that was different, the way he walked was nothing like how James walked. James slipped by in the shadows, moved along the edges without you realising he'd even moved, whereas, whoever this was, he walked in a way to draw eyes to him and Tony was pretty much taken along for the ride as he crossed to the kitchen, also sleep deprivation was totally playing a part, but he just had a rare kind of confidence that blanketed the room, as if there was no situation he could not adapt to. He then paused in front of the large bowl of apples, giving him his back as he made his selection. Which was interesting in
James was practically terrified of him, or something, he couldn't even stay in the same room as him, yet whoever this was, they seemed comfortable enough to give him his back. Which definitely didn't help Tony with his attention, sleep deprivation and trousers that tight should be frankly illegal.

Who ever this was chuckled, and he had a deep chuckle followed up with the deeper Russia accent definitely had his mind going in dangerous directions, sleep deprivation had a tendency to take most of Tony self control impulses and shoot them into the sun after all. Plus, whilst this person had seemed panicked earlier, when they first entered and Tony's senses were assaulted with a simple message of 'Not James', he now seemed highly amused with the situation, smirking at him, which again, was not helping matters at all.

"I told the durachit' you'd notice something."

Still utterly unconcerned with Tony it seems, he just pulled a knife from… somewhere, Tony had no idea, one second he was stood there, just holding an apple and in the next second he was neatly slicing into it with the blade against the counter, one handedly and yet with complete competence. If Tony tried that, he'd probably slice a finger off. He was also eating the slices right off the damned blade, but still, all of his attention was still on Tony, which had him shifting in his seat under such scrutiny, with that assessing look that left his steel eye grays locked on him.

He was suddenly quite thankful for the glasses, because whoever this was, and it was definitely an entirely different person. He had the same problems with his colours as he did James's. If not worse, like he was already susceptible from James colours trying to drag him down, except this time he was sleep deprived and maybe watching people use dangerously sharp blades to eat food was an interest he didn't know he had until now. Who knew?

The dark, gun metal grey cape James seemed to carry with him was this person. One of the mysteries that had been plaguing him was now stood in front of him, smirking. That was a dangerous smirk.

He had also dropped all of the 'James mannerisms' he had originally walked into the room with, the secret was out, he guessed, so why bother? He leaned back casually against the counter, one leg kicked up. The picture of ease and utter control, in black combat boots and a shirt that was not Rogers level of 'too tight', but it wasn't that far off. Much different from James loser clothing, they had similar colour schemes, but James seemed to favour longer sleeves the few times he'd seen him on video chats and now in person. This person was wearing a short sleeved shirt. Also his hair was different, he guessed James undid Shuri work before bed and he had showered. So his hair was damp and very long around his face to the middle of his back.

Even though he looked extremely interested in just slicing the apple, Tony can practically feel how he's hyper alert to everything, how his eyes occasionally scanned the room before coming back and resting on him. Leaving Tony with the only obvious answer. This was the Winter Soldier. And he was eating an apple, in front of him, at 3am. He blinked a few times, willing this to be a sleep deprivation and jet lag induced hallucination, but alas, this was apparently his life now. A fact that should send him running, screaming or ducking for cover but instead he's rooted to his seat.

Tony's brain was already flying a mile a minute, and mostly kind of pissed that James hadn't told him there was another person living in his damned head. Whilst he might accept this as personal information usually, when he was the one trying to find out just why BARF was struggling for ages, knowing that he potentially had dissociative identity disorder, or rather some Hydra, mad scientist version of DID, was extremely vital information. Plus, whilst James had consented for
everything that had happened with BARF, had this guy? So, yeah he was pissed, but he got it, James came from a time where mental health professionals locked you up. Tony was also curious, because that was his general nature when there was something different, something new, something interesting… he wanted to poke at it.

Tony's self control is away from the phone right now, please leave a message.

"So you two talk? How does that work?"

Plus, Tony wanted to get a better look at him like this, in a way he hadn't allowed himself to with James, letting his eyes unfocus and tilting his head, the dark, gun metal that usually clung to James shoulders had almost swapped like he'd first suspected. So James was still there, but his colours were now where the gun metal gray was. Blanketed down like this, the full range wasn't there, just the storm cloud gray showed, perfectly still. There was also more now to the gun metal colour. So much more.

At least now he knew what that was! It had been driving him nuts. No one had a single stationary colour wrapped around them like a cloak as there other colours moved. No. One. Okay, at least no one he'd met. No even Bruce and Hulk operated like this. The Winter Soldier was James shield, he cloak. His protection.

What was more surprising was that he, as he was now pretty sure this was the Winter Soldier or at least something that had built upon the Winter Soldier programming. He didn't look like Natka. With static and pale colours, with bright ones trying to break in. It was all bright, all vivid, burning in its intensity. Wild and wonderful and completely engrossing.

He was somehow world weary, seen everything but with the same burning brightness the kids had before the world dulls it all out. Innocent, but knowledgeable. It was a dizzying combination and he wasn't surprised he was getting so much information about it. Tony had been (hopefully) surreptitiously staring at James a lot to try and work out that damned gray without free falling into his storm. Now the information was kind of smacking him in the face, probably because he'd been hyper focused on it, as it had been his only his tactic to stop him free falling into James colours. That was coming back to bite him in the arse now, because he was falling. Falling fast and hard into those colours.

The grey was almost black really, a matte black that looked so like his cybernetic hand it was uncanny. It even looked like metal somehow. Live vibranium. The Winter Soldier it seemed, had built himself up from the grey piece by piece, designed to be lifeless and monotone, a colour that was usually depression, lifelessness or dull, instead he'd turned it into a strong base and moved on up, changing, searching, hunting for more. He was hungry for experiences, starving even, for the world. Yet with an almost childlike wonder but with knowledge that was too heavy for many people to carry, deaths on his hands, blood he couldn't wash off. He wasn't one to talk about that however.

He really would have expected his colours to be like Natka. He suspected the training to have dulled her emotions into static would have been similar to what happened to him. That hadn't happened, however, that matte grey and black had acted as a shield, not just for James but for himself too. His colours were so blindingly vibrant he felt he could wrap himself up in them.

He was a storm, just as much as James was, just this storm was calm, the kind that could go on for hours and hours, with thunder close, but just far enough away it didn't rattle your house. Lightning streaking across the sky silently instead of striking around him, lighting up the grays into a veritable rainbow of purples, reds, oranges and hits of pink. Never hitting the ground, soundless in an explosion of colours, the lightning didn't come with a meaning, same as with James, but it had
the same feeling. That drew Tony in, that made him want to sink his hands in, feeling like it called to him, wanting to have it coil around him, and to have it sink into his skin… that wasn't at all terrifying and exhilarating and he just wanted to give himself over to it. He had to drag his attention from it before he did something really stupid. Oh look, there is some self control left!

There was loyalty and experience in those beautiful ranges of purple, the reds spoke of courage and an inner strength so strong it was like corded steal but it was delicate and new, like just a feather falling in the right place could shatter it into a thousand pieces that left him feeling oddly protective. Which considering this was the freaking Winter Soldier was slightly ridiculous, what on earth could he do to protect someone like this! But it still called to him, thrumming through his head like when those random bouts of annoying intuition struck. At the same time he knew he was a protector too and with a degree of control that he hadn't seen in many people.

The oranges were tentative, new, searching for joy, happiness, things that make you smile, he could see that he didn't know where to even start, that the task daunted him, but he still didn't want to give up. There was turmoil there too, pain so sharp and bittersweet but it didn't stain him like it did most people. It was simply… there. The pink was wildly sparking here and there, inside the other colours, self esteem, building it up slowly with perception of the fact Tony was probably seeing more than he should somehow. He didn't know what Tony was doing, but he knew it was something.

The Soldiers colours felt like they were evolving right before his eyes. He had a feeling he would be unpredictable, changing, trying on things as he came into himself and dammit if that didn't intrigue Tony.

It practically dragged him in. Change, the future, people changing, trying new things all the time, if there was a weakness Tony had when it came to attaching himself to new people it was that. It was the static people, stuck in the past, unwilling to move, they were boring and there were few things worse in the world to someone like Tony than being bored. Which meant that being interesting? Now that was like catnip to Tony. Whoever this person was, they weren't boring. He was fascinating. He was just buzzing with life, with potential and possibilities and Tony wanted to see them play out, he could practically taste it.

He blinked a few times, forcibly pulling himself back, leaving him more than a little dizzy and the urge to go after that damned lightning was still there. In his sleep deprived state it was stronger. What was strange, however, was that he didn't call him on his weird behaviour. Anyone else would have gotten irritated by his gawking by now, the Soldier… he just looked back as if he was taking him apart as assuredly as Tony was looking into him. Like he was waiting for Tony to finish whatever he was doing before he spoke. That he pinned it with seconds of accuracy had him giddy.

"I talk, he occasionally pretends I don't exist. What are you looking at?"

Tony smirked and raised an eyebrow, wondering how exactly he'd ended up in some odd one upmanship contest slash conversation with the Winter Fucking Soldier at 3am, and the Soldier was pointedly looking at his glasses. Most people tried to avoid it, trying to be polite, but he obviously didn't care about that and Tony couldn't help but like that and he might be an idiot himself but he was itching to see those colours properly. He'd given into temptation so far, he'd free fallen into those colours far, far deeper than he'd ever let himself with James and instead of easing up the pressure in his head it had increased it and he just wanted more and he was too tired to find reasons not to.

"Does he see everything you do?"
The Soldier gave him a look that he was vaguely insulted by the insinuation and carried on slicing his fruit without comment.

Since he'd dropped his guise of James, he didn't need his ability to see they were different. James tended to pull in, nervous of entering rooms, even when he seemed to feel confident, he seemed to keep to the sides. Ever ready to step into the shadows and vanish. Especially around Tony.

The Soldier, well he acted like he owned it and everything in it. He didn't look hunted he looked like the apex predator, eyes moving slowly as if wondering what he could do next and get away with it.

Tony blinked, damn he was getting sucked in without noticing it and he realised he was getting lots of information. The soldier just gave him a shit eating grin as if he noticed he was distracting Tony.

Which in no way made Tony want to show off or do anything stupid.

Nope.

He just figured that this little idea of his could be a good experiment, for if James saw stuff whilst not in control. It was not at all to see what the Soldiers reaction would be and what he might infer from it.

So, he slowly slid his sunglasses down his nose slightly and looked over the top, just showing half of both his eyes, plus, he can't help but be a little amused when he tensed. Letting his mouth tick up in a smirk not that dissimilar to the Soldiers one as his eyes focused on him with enough intensity he had to remind himself to breathe. He hadn't factored in that. Eye contact was pretty rare for him now, so it seemed... heavier than it used to be, much more intense. The level of attention was actually close to making him flush but he could feel Extremis working to stop him from embarrassing himself.

So, yeah. Maybe playing chicken with the Winter Soldier at 3am with his very, very hidden augmentations wasn't the best plan in the world. It was however, a highly amusing, exhilarating plan that Rhodey would absolutely kill him for. Note to self, don't tell Rhodey.

His colours were so much clearer this way too, the Soldier didn't do anything, just looked thoughtful and maintained eye contact and looked as if he was trying to catalog everything whilst Tony tried not to free fall all over again. He didn't look scared or put off, if anything he look more interested, which was a shock for Tony.

"So, what were you looking at?"

The Soldier leaned forward, the apple finished but he was spinning the knife in his hand absentmindedly, very similar to how he used his electrokinesis, just with more blades. He was also obviously more interested now that Tony had confirmed that something was different and he has no qualms about hiding that interest either.

He could See a degree of satisfaction spark around him, so he guessed that the Soldier had known something was different and maybe, like kids, he hadn't become inured like everyone else. So he didn't try to explain away Tony looking around him strangely or his propensity for sunglasses at 3am like others did. Really, people were much too accepting of that fact, it was a weird thing he happily took advantage of.

"You Snowdrop, I'm looking at you."
Tony gets up and strolls past him as casually as possible, trying not to smile at the happiness his statement had triggered for some reason. He moved almost too close for comfort but hey, bravado had gotten him this far. Instead of stepping away like most people did when he did that, the Soldier remained in place intently watching him, steel grey eyes still locked on his. Sure, maybe walking right into the personal space of master assassins wasn't exactly smart, but it was like he couldn't help himself. That lightning, it was luring him in.

Plus, sleep deprivation and temptation were a very dangerous mix for Tony. He was just so tempted to lean just that little bit closer and push his hands into the lightning, he could feel himself leaning slightly, could practically smell ozone from the lightning mixed with the body wash The Soldier used which left him smelling of blueberries. It was so much more effort than he'd ever admit to stop, he blinked when he realised just how close he had gotten without even realising it.

The Soldier's steel gray eyes still focused on him, not moving back an inch, close enough he could actually feel his breath and feel the heat his super soldier metabolism was putting off. He snagged an apple from the bowl next to him before moving to leave, practically having to force his feet to move before he actually did reach out to touch the lightning. Then he turned headed out of the kitchen, without looking back he carried on talking.

"Tell James we need to have a chat at his earliest convenience."

"I will."

"Goodnight Snowdrop.

Making his way down the corridor he can hear the soldier laughing. Well that was.. Something. Maybe sleeping might be a good idea after all. Before he enters his room he hears the soldier again, his voice carrying and his enhanced hearing picked up on it, leading him to believe the Soldier had worked that out too.

"Spokoynoy nochi Feniks.."

Now what the hell was he meant to do with an apple?

Wolf POV

'Why are you hiding from the Malen'kiy Feniks?' <Little Phoenix.>

Winter's deep Russian accent filtered through his mind, disrupting his morning reading. Usually Winter was silent in the morning, exhausting himself by exploring at night and giving him some peace.

'We killed his parents! Yet, he's still helping us, forcing my presence on him wouldn't be fair. Not after he came all the way here, away from his family.'

He practically hissed into the darkness of his mind. Dammit, he really should not be talking to him about this. He was interested in Tony enough as it was, and would potentially stay awake to see him again like the day the man arrived. It had made ducking out the room that much harder.

'So?'
Floated back in deeply accented Russian. He could feel Winter's confusion about it, which didn't help, it made it hard to be too irritated when he genuinely didn't understand.

'What the hell do you mean ' so' ? We killed his parents . I'm surprised we even walked out of that bunker.'

'Hmm. Me to. When you idiotically grabbed control and stayed on the floor kneeling with your back to the man.'

Winter scoffs in irritation.

'He wasn't trying to kill us anyway.'

He sniffed in disinterest, if he wasn't a person literally in his mind, he imagined he would be turning away from him and rolling his eyes. Winter pegged himself as a master of control of everything around him, James giving an opening in the fight like that had irritated him, no matter how much he explained having the arm blasted off had thrown him. The instant immediate pain wasn't the problem, both he and Winter can fight through pain with ease, it was that after the immediate bloom of pain, there was an utter absence of pain that left him floating.

'I know, and he accepted my apology, but I just… I was responsible for seriously altering the course of his life! Even if he wasn't trying to kill us like Steve thinks.'

'Steve is an idiot. You too. I'm not walking on eggshells around the Malen'kiy Feniks because you have this 'Weird Thing' .' 

'Being mindful of the man because we killed his parents is a common courtesy. Not a 'Weird Thing', What is wrong with you this morning?'

'I'd suspect him to be thankful for it is all.'

'Whaat?!

'Ugh, you have access to the same memories as me. I know you have seen some of them. Howard Stark was nechist' zemli<scum of the earth>, and the weeks I was forced to watch until I was eventually ordered to take them out made my skin crawl. It took a while to find a good moment where the Feniks was not involved, so we did not have to kill him as collateral.'

'I have no idea what you're talking about! I can't pick and choose what memories I see like you!'

'Not my problem you suck. The Malen'kiy Feniks is nice. He noticed me.'

The darkness seemed smug in a way he hadn't since he had been unable to ignore him anymore.

'Wait. Are you saying you met with Tony, and he knew you were not me ?!'

He is sure he hears laughter whilst he feels panic creeping in at the edges of his mind. He'd been so careful about letting no one know about the voice in his head.

'Oh yes. He was not best pleased. He said he wanted to speak to you at your.. What was it? Earliest convenience. Yes, that was it.'

He tried to reach for the memory of last night, which was when he assumed this had happened, only to be surprised at a mental shove that left him more than a little dizzy.

"Ah, Ah, Ah now. They're mine. Get your own memories with him."
"You are insufferable."

He didn't respond but the chuckle filtered through and he held his head in his hands. This was not going to be fun. What the hell was he going to do?

Everything passed in a daze, and he didn't really remember anything between Winter speaking to him and him arriving at the lab. Winter, the annoying git, had gone to sleep feeling good about himself.

He stuck his head in, looking to see who had arrived yet. Had Tony already told Shuri about the thing in his mind? Would she not want to be around him now she knew? Did it mean he was crazy? Would he be seen as dangerous now, with the Winter Soldier in his head?

The lab looked oddly empty when he slipped in, Shuri had recently set it up so he could enter if he got here first, fully suspecting Tony might result in her being late again. She didn't want him stuck outside on the floor again.

He dropped his bag into its customary place and glanced around. He noticed the bench Shuri had emptied for Tony was now full of things. Including what looked like a gauntlet that had been split into several pieces. There were these three huge tablets, nearly 4 times the size of his, clipped in a triangular formation to create a large holographic station that looked extremely interesting.

He got a prickle on the back of his neck, his senses telling him that he wasn't alone. He turned around as Tony walked into the lab. All of his attention on a tablet in his hands that his fingers flew across. The holographic image moving so fast it was a blur to him and he had no idea how Tony could follow it. Or how he didn't walk into walls with all of his attention on the tablet like that.

He wondered if the man knew he was here as he'd stepped back against the wall where his chair was, a corner that was more shadows than not. He really had been trying to give him space, only being in the same room when he had little choice. He didn't care about the cryptic messages, it was the least he could do to make up for what he'd done under Hydra.

What was confusing was that he just greeted him as normal, smiling warmly.

"Hey Snowflake."

Maybe nothing happened last night and Winter was playing tricks on him. He was so caught up in his head that he nearly jumped when he realised that Tony had crossed the room as was now stood right in front of him. Not close enough to make him overly uncomfortable, not touching, but generally closer than most people got around him and closer than they'd ever stood before. No way would he get this close if he thought the Winter Soldier was still in his mind, surely.

"Hi Dr Stark."

He sighed but smiled as he did it.

"Seriously Snowflake, call me Tony, pretty please?"

If he was getting that close then definitely nothing happened, especially if he was still smiling at him and asking him to call him Tony. He seemed relaxed and not at all scared or suspicious. After meeting his alter ego, he would expect people to go running screaming, seeing as he was a bit more recognisable as The Winter Soldier than he was. Even if Winter was actually kind of a dork. Tony was now giving him a bit of a weird look though, at least best he could tell with his ever present sunglasses.
"So. Absolutely no memory of last night, then?"

He utterly froze and immediately started freaking out. If Tony knew then he had probably told
Shuri and T'Challa, he had no reason to keep his secrets.

"-Flake?"

That meant everyone knew that the Winter Soldier was still around, how was he meant to explain
that he wasn't the Asset? Would they want to lock him up? How could anyone trust him now?

"-rap."

Sure Winter was occasionally creepy, but he didn't seem murderous, not after he explained it was
illegal. But even before there hadn't been a drive to kill. Not when there was no one telling him he
had to kill anymore, so he didn't think he would kill anyone. Well, as long as he wasn't threatened
and didn't come across any Hydra operatives.

"James!"

That jarred him from his spiralling thoughts for some reason and he got a sense that Tony had been
trying to talk to him for some time and getting no response. He just blinked at the man, he was
stood in front of him, one hand out as if he'd gone to touch him but it was left sort of hovering in
the air. He also looked really concerned. For him?

"Hey, you with me big guy?"

He wasn't entirely sure if he was but nodded anyway, trying to focus on Tony instead, rather than
his life imploding around him. Tony had dropped the tone of his voice and it was actually quite
soothing.

"It's fine, no one is mad at you. It just would have been helpful information with BARF is all. I'm
sorry I dropped it on you like that, that was wrong of me."

"Are.. Are you going to tell Shuri?"

His voice was slightly cracked and dry. Shuri was going to be so mad at him for keeping this
secret. He just hoped she would forgive him, he didn't want to lose a good friend.

Tony opened his mouth to talk but immediately clicked it shut and rubbed his hand over his beard.
It felt like he wasn't looking at him now but around him again. It wasn't the first time he picked up
this odd behaviour, he'd taken it to mean Tony had trouble looking at him because of what he did, a
chuckle from the back of his mind had him questioning that now.

"How about.. I tell Shuri I've worked out the potential problem now, and that I know where to go
from here?"

Why.. Why would he do that for him? He tilted his head, completely confused by how this was
playing out.

"But we probably are going to have to tell her some day, he might need to be involved and doing
that in Shuris lab without her knowing will be hard. I think she will surprise you, you're her friend,
this won't change that. He kind of sucks at acting like you, at least around me. But I'll be here when
you tell her. I mean. If you want me to do that. It's up to you, okay, I'd also like for him to consent?
For him to be okay with what we are doing?"
"Yeah, okay."

"Awesome, now I'll probably need to do some scans with him forward, I can do it at 3am if that makes him more comfortable and without telling Shuri yet. Is he okay with that?"

"Of course, Malen'kiy Feniks is helping us.'

"He is good with it."

Tony nodded, but again looked around him again, nodding once more, before turning his attention to his tablet and leaving him to his whirlwind of thoughts and feelings. Adding to his feelings that he wasn't sure he deserved this, that this man and Shuri were dedicating their time to him. That the man left his home to come and help him, he doubted Tony was happy about sharing a country with the rogues again. Even if the royals were very careful about keeping them apart. He reached out to him but paused before making contact and seemed to reluctantly pulled his hand back, he was slightly dazed that Tony seemed to wait for his permission when others didn't bother. When Steve never bothered. It was all confusing to him.

"You deserve the help James, but you should probably tell the therapist about you know who. They won't think less of you. It doesn't mean you're bad, they won't just lock you away. Maybe they can make you feel better about it? There are other people who have this. It's a.. Defence mechanisms of a sort, usually, even if I'd say your case is different. Remember, you aren't alone tackling this."

Everytime he called him James it was like a jolt that made him smile a bit even though he didn't know why, considering the man mostly called him Snowflake for some reason. But then he also called Shuri Kit Kat, T'Challa had many names and his family had many too from what he'd said in the letters. He wondered what he called Winter?

With that, Tony moved to his station this time, and started loading up screens around him, streams of data moving so fast that it made his eyes water as Tony watched different screens around him. He still wasn't entirely sure what had just happened. Tony did keep glancing over at him occasionally, offering him supportive smiles until Shuri came around.

He held his breath because even though he doubted Tony would tell her. True, he hadn't known the guy that long, and he was still wary about forcing his physical presence on the man. But he had felt like he had gotten to know him whilst they had been writing back and forth and he didn't feel like the kind of guy who would lie and spill his secrets. He was however, irrationally terrified that he would. Then Shuri would be mad at him for lying. His therapist would declare him crazy and he'd been locked up..

He'd started to spiral again and suddenly Tony was in front of him, even though he was sure that the man was on the other side of the room a second ago, where was Shuri? He couldn't see her anywhere

"Hey Snowflake, I recognise that look on your face. Has your therapist told you about intrusive thoughts?"

He nodded and was already starting to calm down now he was completely focused on Tony, stopping his mind from spiralling. Enough that he could actually hear the man's heart beat and that it was surprisingly grounding.

"I know they feel real, what I do is I question them. Is it feasible? Would that person do that? Does that even make sense?"
"Yeah, okay, I think I can do that."

"I sometimes run them by someone else too, so if it's about what we just talked about, I don't mind, even if it's about me. I don't mind."

He flushed because it's kind of rude to ask someone if they were planning on lying or something wasn't it?

"I don't mind anything."

He blinked, and wondered just how the man seemed to know the right thing to say and was answering questions he hadn't even asked yet.

"I, uh, was worried you'd tell Shuri today."

"Well that one's easy, I won't. I won't lie, one day you'll likely have to bring her in because otherwise we could be stalled on BARF. But that day is not today, and I wouldn't go behind your back anyway. I promise James. If you never feel comfortable telling her? I'll come up with something."

"Okay, and you're sure the therapist won't have me locked up?"

"Yes, they don't do that here. But, let's say if that somehow did happen, I'd come and break you out."

"You can't do that!"

"Pft. I'm Ironman."

With that he winked and crossed back to his desk before he could point out how ridiculous that was. Shuri walked back in and he realised that he felt significantly better already. He was still a bit shaken, but this time when Tony flashed him a smile, he was able to return it.

**Tony POV**

He had practically scarpered back to his room after BARF this time, James had scarpered first, but still. Shuri has given him a perplexed look before muttering under her breath about overly excitable white boys invading her lab. He was going to see her later anyway, T'Challa hadn't been available to spar with him today which had been slightly bad because thanks to the drama that his life had become, he needed to spar. He'd already ran this morning before BARF and now his electrokinesis was being used liberally, yet a bunch of hyper rats on red bull were still roller derbying in his brain.

He'd been slightly confused about what to do about James, he was pretty sure they'd been getting a long relatively well when he was on a different continent. Sure, he'd never exactly been best and gauging social situations like this, but he was pretty sure they'd moved past the stage where one flees if the other is in the same room. Then he'd got to Wakanda and James was fleeing from him like he was a damned hell hound.

So, things had already been more complicated than he is pretty sure he is equipped to deal with. Then James colours went and complicated matters to the point of triggering hyperfixation without his permission.
Then it turns out the Winter Soldier, or someone close to the Soldier was alive and kicking in James brain. He'd moderately let his irritation of that get in his way and then nearly gave the damned man a panic attack. Well, that was going to help the room fleeing problem and now he felt like an utter piece of shit.

He knew what it felt like to fear mental health professionals. James grew up in a time where mental health was either laughed at or locked away. He had a condition he obviously didn't understand, it made sense that he was terrified of being locked up and Tony knew one conversation from himself was not going to help him deal with that fear. The fact he seemed to be dealing with this situation so well was nothing short of utterly remarkable. He'd been managing… and Tony went and kicked the damned hornets nest. Sending him spiralling into fear and intrusive thought patterns that Tony was extremely familiar with himself. He'd been able to pick up on it from across the room.

This had become a confusing interpersonal pit of emotions extremely fast and he was pretty damned sure someone like him was not meant to be within a hundred miles of sensitive situations like this.

But it wasn't like he could leave.

Even if the 3 of them worked out a way to run BARF without getting in each other's way, there was no one else able to run his tech like be could. The idea of abandoning one person to life with command words in your brain that a bunch of evil nazis with supreme logo confusion had access was bad enough. Now he'd be abandoning two people, and one of them was strangely innocent to the world and he couldn't do that. He couldn't.

He couldn't even rely on one of his friends that usually helped straighten his brain out when it was like this because it involved a whole bunch of secrets that were not his to tell. He couldn't explain either of their colours to people, he couldn't even discuss Snowdrops damned existence!

He needed to do something, he couldn't have a repeat of today. That… that had hurt to see what he'd caused with a few stupid fucking words. That he should have known, he'd just gotten caught up, angry at himself that he'd been sort of running experimental treatment on someone without their consent. Just the idea of it had made his nauseated. He really was not the best person to handle this, he said things, without thinking! All the time! Maybe James was right to flee the room from him.

He saw the man as a friend, a good one. Talking over letters… he'd said more to James than he had to practically anyone in his life. More in that short period than over years. He had been… just easier to talk to. Never made him feel stupid or awkward, never made him feel weird or different. He'd just been himself. Just Tony. Not The Tony Stark. Not Tony Fucking Stark. Just Tony and he'd seemed to like that? Not wanting him to be more. To be the personality. He never asked him for anything, except for stories, he liked stories.

He didn't ask him to make anything. He didn't expect anything. At first that had left Tony… Off balance. He was used to people coming to him for things, that was normal. James just asked him what the cats had done, or to describe what different places looked like. He seemed happy just to talk to Tony. Even if he was talking about 5 things scatter shot along the page. Not only did he read all 5 things, he replied to all of them.

It might be kind of pathetic but he'd loved that. He had a friend who had effortlessly been there for him and Tony had terrified him to the point of actual room fleeing and panic attacks.

Well done.
“FRIDAY, If Laura is free, ask her if she can call me?”

He dropped himself down at the desk in his room and took up the same position that he had last night. Resting his head on it and willing himself not to thunk his head on the desk until all of this was less confusing.

"Tony? FRIDAY said you were after me?"

"Yeah. Um. My brain is tangled, but I can't actually tell you half the things it's tangled with?"

"Why not?"

"Mix of my ability and other people's secrets."

"I'll assume this is to do with James and the glasses?"

"Mmhmm. I'm worried I'm going to do this badly. I am doing this badly. I'm fucking up and I think its going to lose me a really good thing and it's entirely my fault."

"Well, if it were you, you'd have stormed ahead, it's good that you are looking at this carefully. How do we get you to do this when it's about you? And Tony, I don't think you're doing this as badly as you think, I saw how many times he wrote to you. People don't just do that unless they care."

"Ha ha. I just don't want to traumatise the guy, I nearly gave him a freaking panic attack today."

"And I'm guessing you can't say what precipitated that event."

"Nope."

"I think your best bet is to let James set the pace of the treatment, that way you don't have to be worried you are rushing him."

"That's not so much the issue, him rushing himself to be less of an inconvenience is more likely."

"Ah, so you're dealing with yourself?"

"Laaaaura be nice to me, I'm confused. I don't like being confused."

He was also moderately upset but he wasn't going to say that.

"Aww, poor puppy. He has a therapist doesn't he, get Shuri to run decisions through her."

"Huh, yeah OK. That could work, I just have to work out have to deal with sensitive interpersonal issues in between now and tomorrow."

If only the therapist had all the information.

He sucked at sensitive interpersonal issues. He sucked at dealing with humans in general, his ability just gave him a cheat sheet.

"Good luck Tony, the kids say hi."

"Tell them Hi and I look forward to speaking to them later. I'm going to spar now. Maybe I'll be less confused after?"
"Good luck Tony."

"Say Hi to Stephy for me!"

"Wha-"

He snickered and FRIDAY cut the call. Winding those to up was far too much fun and he was currently safe in Wakanda from Stephy (and Laura, let's be honest here, she was way scarier) so he was making the most out of it. Plus, it made him smile for a few seconds and he felt like he needed that.

He needed to get out of his own head, stop thinking about himself in this equation. The important aspect was helping James and the Winter Soldier with the command words. Not him freaking out about James fleeing from him.

He stretched out his back that was a little sore again, sitting and coding for hours obviously wasn't great for his spine or shoulders. He didn't think inviting Okoye and a few other members of the Dora to beat him up, wait, no, sparring sorry, was going to help that much. It should at least help get some energy out. Maybe he'd have some epiphany drop from on high on what on earth to do regarding James and the Winter Soldier. At least the latter of the two wasn't scared to be in the same room as him. Maybe getting pummelled might make him feel less like the scum of the earth.

**Wolf POV**

He was killing some time exploring the Palace before he was going to meet up with Wings and TicTac. He'd found a few interesting areas where he could disappear into which was nice, the palace was big enough that he hadn't come close to nosing around all the places he had access to yet. He was about to head to his room to meet the guys, Shuri had told him Tony would be occupied for a few more hours so he figured it was safe to bring the two over. If he suddenly stopped inviting them over, they might realise something was up after all. The sound of fighting however had caught his attention. He was several floors up on a balcony and glancing over he realised it wasn't so might fighting but sparring.

It looked like a spacious courtyard precisely set up for this, the sun lit the yard nicely, it was a nice space for it. He was high up enough that he could just about make out that Okoye was sparring with someone. No, it looked like two people against a third person.

He was left squinting because that couldn't be who it looked like, but then he broke a hold Okoye had on him and danced back with surprising grace. Even though he could only see the back of the man, he was pretty recognisable and Tony stuck out like a sore thumb in Wakanda about as much as he did. Especially wearing a t-shirt with his left metal hand on display.

However, it seemed that the billionaire had managed to ingratiate himself with the Dora already, even though he had barely been here that long. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves and he couldn't say he wasn't shocked. Sure, he knew Tony could fight, but he'd only seen him fight in the suit barring that one time, but those memories were mostly Winter's.

This was a completely different ballgame and it was pretty obvious it wasn't something he was new to, not with the speed and the moves he was pulling.

He was also not at all amused that he could lord this memory over Winter who would likely be
miffed to have not experienced it himself. Maybe he could offer it as a peace offering and he'd stop making things confusing.

There was more than a few points as they were fighting, practically dancing really, that he was surprised. He loitered watching for about 20 minutes before he realised that he was going to be late, surprisingly the fighters hadn't tired in the slightest, their reaction times were still fast, their reactions too. He grudgingly pulled himself away when what he really wanted to do was get closer, then he could see better. Watching the Dora spar with grace was something he very much enjoyed. Tony had a very different style, which from what he'd been able to work out from his position, was more a mash up than anything else. Few fighters used their entire body like he seemed to, he was unpredictable too.

As he started heading back to the common room on the guest floor he couldn't help but find it weird that a person of Tony's age was in such good shape to fight in that way, but then considering he was nearly a hundred years old. Who was he to talk?

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**Sam POV**

Sam slipped out of his room quietly, had he been reduced to sneaking around their temporary home? Maybe. But then he wanted to start making enquiries with Steve and find out the extent of Wanda's powers.

He already had more than a few ideas and he'd been writing everything down and hiding it with Redwing just in case he 'forgot'.

He remembered back when T'Challa had first turned up riding on rage and disgust, how he'd fell into ranks, how he'd agreed. Barnes had pointed it out to him, but looking back, everything before that is kind of hazy. Even in that period where Barnes had been waiting for the Cryopod to be built. He could barely remember anything from back then. Like it had taken a day. It had been weeks and he couldn't recall practically anything he'd been doing or saying.

Not little things, like making breakfast, team lunches, watching TV, but it just felt… Fuzzy. Then everything had been shocked into clarity, he'd started seeing stuff he hadn't noticed before. TicTac had said he had a similar feeling, that now felt more real than the first months they'd been here. The fact that it was MONTHS. It had felt like barely weeks..

He didn't think that he was magically immune to Wanda now. That had been proven false by him sending messages that he had zero memory of.

Which still sent chills down his spine. That he had done something, put a friend at great risk, if Barnes hadn't been more accepting of their brand of crazy, that could easily be seen as a breakage of trust. It could have cost him his friendship. The man was a troll and a pain in the ass, but he was his pain in the ass.

He had separated in his head that she had two types of power. And thanks to Scott, he'd nerdified it. She had an area of effect abilities that just seemed to lul those around her into complacency, but with a certain amount of anger and vitriol towards Stark. Then, he assumed based on the disaster in Barnes apartment, the other type was touch based. He'd said she was going to trap him in his worst memories and have him walking around as 'Bucky'. She couldn't do it without touching him, and he assumed the contact had to be prolonged. If so she needed was a few seconds, then that day would have gone differently.
If that didn't turn his stomach enough, remembering the look on Barnes face when he touched him did. But Steve and Clint didn't see it, they didn't see that she was grinning in a malicious way, they didn't see the outright horror on Barnes face. Which he put down to the AOE.

Although he'd noticed that it had its limits. More than once now, Clint had been unaware of what was happening around him. Seemingly in a daze. Like if Wanda left the room in a huff, he hadn't realised. A few times it had taken nearly an hour later for him to realise. He'd seen the Archer shaking his head a few times too. Like he was trying to shake something loose.

Talking to Clint did not help. If anything it had the adverse reaction where he became rabidly protective of Wanda. He wondered if you had to snap out of it yourself? He had no idea how much of Clint's words were even his own. Had Wanda given him things to say? Or were they a product of making him think a certain way.

He knew that Wanda knew he and Scott were free of the influence. Barnes too obviously.

He wondered if this was why she was keeping Clint and Steve so close? Was she upping the magic use on them? Was that why Steve was currently so depressed or did Barnes leaving have something to do with it? Clint was spiralling further into anger with these moments where he'd break out of it and look confused. He had burst into a rage earlier today, and then just stopped, like his strings had been cut. Then returned to watching the television as if nothing had actually happened. He'd tried questioning him on it, but he'd just been confused.

He wondered if part of her powers just encouraged negative emotions? Or if that was just her? Were negative emotions easier maybe?

Generally. It was fucking magic.

He echoed Stark's sentiments. Fuck magic man. He'd never understood why he'd been so against it in the past, but now he was totally on board. If he ever saw the same again and he ever gave him the time of day, after apologising profusely for so much shit, including that shit he'd pulled on the Raft. Same would tell the man he was right. Magic was fucking awful. He'd once thought it was so useful, so versatile, that they were so lucky to have someone like Wanda on their team. That their enemies had their work cut out for them.

He'd never considered the idea that she might use her powers against them. Even if, looking back, he was now sure that Stark had been trying to tell them just that. Before he'd practically fled the compound.

Like Barnes, he was right to do so. Neither of them deserved this. It was one of the reasons he was so determined to stay. He felt... he felt he had to do something to make up for his complacency. He prided himself on his ability to see when a person was drowning, when a person needed help. Not that he could offer counselling services to anyone in the team, but he still should have seen it. Could have offered advice on speaking to someone. Could have helped Stark get comfortable with the idea of speaking to someone. He imagined with a life like his, privacy was a privilege not often available to him.

He pushed the thoughts back, he was going around in circles every time memories from before and during the Civil War became clearer. He would stress about it later, when he wasn't creeping.

He paused at the top of the stairs listening near Clint's door, tilting his head, he could hear two voices. His eyes widened as he passed towards Steve's room as silently as possible, maybe he was alone? He paused for a solid minute at the door, but didn't hear anything so he risked looking into the room.
No Steve… but this was wrong. The room was a MESS. There were clothes all over the floor and the room was smelling more than a little ripe. Steve, despite barely being in the army before he became the captain, had taken on a lot of behaviours you’d expect with the army. Including that his room was always excessively neat, bed always made. The blanket was just balled up on the bed.. Pillows on the floor. Everything was a mess.

He closed the door as silently as possible and backed away, not liking this one bit. He moved down the stairs quietly and nearly cheered because Steve was sitting at the breakfast bar. Alone!

He shouldn't be happy his friend was depressed, gnawing on dry toast and staring miserably at one of the still metal encased windows. But he was alone and he didn't know when he'd get this chance again. He sat next to him which prompted no reaction from Steve, at all. Now, the man didn't use all of his super soldier senses to the hypervigilant state Barnes persisted in, but he still had them. This was just, wrong.

He bumped his shoulder gently and tried talking.

"Hey Steve."

"Huh.. Oh. Sam, I didn't see you there."

"I noticed, how are you feeling Steve."

"Terrible, I can't believe Bucky left and is being kept away from us."

"You do know why he left, right?"

"Because the glasses, they've twisted him mind.. They're keeping him away against his will.."

"Steve. No. Please, I don't know how long we'll have, but please, think back to that day in his room. Think about Barnes face when Wanda touched him."

"What… Why?"

"Steve. Just do it, please, really think.. Think past the fog."

Steve blinked a few times, his eyes coming a little clearer and his brow furrowing.

"That… no…"

"Steve, he was terrified of Wanda when she touched him."

Steve voice dropped, voice slightly shaken.

"No. But… Why? She was helping, wasn't she?"

"This doesn't work if I tell you Steve, you get defensive. Just. Think. Think about every reaction with her and Barnes. Think about the several months we've been here."

"Wha? We've not been here for more than 2 months!"

"Steve. Its November."

He could almost see Steve putting things together in his head, he wasn't there yet, but then it had taken him a few days to pull out of the fog himself and he hadn't even realised what he was doing. However he’d gotten so wrapped up talking to Steve he had stopped glancing towards the stairs.
"Sam. What are you doing? You're just confusing him."

She crossed to Steve who was now slightly wide eyed but the second her hand touched his face he sagged like he'd been in pain and she'd just taken it away. He leaned towards her and she brought her other hand to his head. Running her fingers through his hair.

"Now Sam. I've not had any reason to look into you now have I. Do you really want to give me one? I'm helping Steve, soon we will be home and he will be leading the Avengers again with me as his right hand. Don't you want that Sam?"

Steve had his eyes barely open, but he could see the red in his eyes and he felt utterly frozen to the spot seeing it, so much that he didn't see Wanda's hand coming towards him. Just felt cold skin on his forehead and by the time he thought to move everything went blank.

He blinked a few times and then glanced around, frowning. He didn't remember coming into the kitchen. No one was there so he shrugged it off and moved to make food for himself. Maybe he'd make some extra for TicTac too.

**Tony POV**

"Okay girls, everyone in bed, blankets wrapped up tight?"

He grinned as the three girls smooshed together to get into the screen that he had loaded on the holographic interface on his lap. After this he had plans to head to the common room maybe. Not because he was hoping to see the Soldier again, just for a change of pace from his room.

"Yup Dad, you wrapped up too?"

Tony's brain utterly froze for a second before he kicked into gear because yikes times infinity and his eyes were watering because of pollen. Or something. Yes, some November, Wakandan, Pollen.

"Sure do Warrior Princess."

He held up the blanket he had wrapped around himself to show Tara the proof because there was pretty much nothing he wouldn't do for her after that slip.

"OK, were ready!"

He grinned as Lilah nestled into the blanket, Cassie was safely cuddled up in-between them. The girls still taking their jobs to make her feel comfortable in the compound very seriously. He opened the book, yes, an actual paper book. Tara had an ereader as did all his kids but apparently night time stories required real paper. Plus, he actually liked reading paper books now and then. He even had a book set up for after the hobbit, a hilarious novel of a bat called Candy Claws, who steals candy from naughty children at Halloween and delivers it to good children, it was hilarious. For now however they were set with the Hobbit.

"Fleeing from the goblins—and still invisible, thanks to the ring—Bilbo looks back and realizes that he has made it to the other side of the Misty Mountains……"
I had planned to upload this midweek, but I didn't want to risk my backlog lest I get an injury again! If I get a nice, chunk of chapters I'll upload more than once a week again in Frostbitten :)

Hopefully the rapid, practically daily pace of Desires/Glitter and Gold could tide people over if anyone here is reading those fics! They're utterly finished, so it's just a case of my proofing and uploading. Deaths Merchant is a 3 times a week gig too. Hopefully that made up for the cliffhanger last week!
Winter hopped out of his bed, glancing at the clock and realising it was a similar time as the night before. He wondered if the Feniks would be in the common room for two days in a row. He didn't know what happened after the brief time he was awake during the BARF session, the glasses were peculiar and he didn't quite know what to make of them, but he liked the idea of being free of the words. He'd thought to just leave it too Wolf, but he wondered if he was going to be brought in given Feniks enquiring about his consent. He decided he would check out the common room. Would he potentially be there looking for him? Or would he avoid the room because of him.

Wolf would expect the latter but Winter was not so sure. Feniks had seemed to ostensibly choose the less safe option on multiple occasions.

Wolf expected everyone to fear the mere prospect of the Winter Soldier, expecting people to think he alone was the Winter Soldier, when in reality, it had been both of them. They had very different skill sets, some missions required Winter. Some required Wolf. Some missions they had worked together under the compulsion on the words. Wolf was the sniper who could slip in and out of places unseen. The invisible assassins. He was required for more close combat situations or when Hydra wanted to flex the rumours of The Winter Soldier. Wolf was never seen. Winter, he was meant to be seen.

He wasn't even sure that any of the handlers realised that there were two of them, likely not as the words and their chair returned them both to similar blank slates after everything. Once, even between the two of them, there had barely been enough to cobble together a single person. He'd tried to protect Wolf over the years but he's not sure he did that much of a good job. Hydra would be horrified to know what had become of them he supposed, something that brought him great joy.

Now that Winter knows there is definitely something different about his Feniks, he wanted to know more, he was itching to know more, because he highly doubted that he had learnt the extent of his abilities. That the man had hidden strengths was obvious to him.

Winter was exceptionally good at assessing people, even powered individuals, he was trained to note minute details that others missed, to use all of his enhanced senses to feel out the other person. Powered individuals, even those who looked like baseline humans, they usually feel different if you knew where to look and feel. The air around his Feniks felt charged, making the hairs on his arms stand up and his skin tingle like it was lightly electrified when he really focused. It was so light that he knew Wolf missed it entirely.

Plus, he knows that his hearing is enhanced from the previous night, he had tested it to be sure as he went to his bedroom, and had heard the Feniks pause to listen to him when he should have been out of range for a baseline humans hearing. Sure, he could have been listening to one of his AI children passing the message along, but he hadn't heard FRIDAY or CERBERUS so he highly doubted that it was that. Also, enhanced hearing would make sense, because he had formed the sunglasses perfectly before he had rounded the corner and Winter walked lightly, not making much in the way of noise when he didn't want to.

So, enhanced hearing and there is something about his strange eye that allowed him to see past what everyone else saw, to actually see him somehow. To see him straight away when he was...
copying Wolf's mannerisms. He didn't know how, but he wanted to find out.

He quickly changed his clothing into his usual fair, skipping his shower, thankfully Wolf's sleep had been quite peaceful tonight. He combed through his long hair with his fingers, teasing out the few knots that had formed in the time where Wolf went to sleep and where Winter woke up. Thankfully there was not much, whatever Shuri had him put in his hair kept it soft and silky. Not like it had been at Hydra or even in Bucharest.

He had first been irritated when Wolf had decided to grow it even longer, given his inability to contain it like Wolf did, but he had actually grown to like the feel of it. Even if it did get into his face occasionally.

He moved silently towards the common room, ears straining for some hint that they might be occupied, whilst he was scanning for information, he couldn't see the light, but then last night the main light had also been off.

He was several steps from the entrance when he heard it, the sound of fabric rubbing across fabric. There was definitely someone in the room and considering that there were only two of them on this floor, he was pretty sure it was the Feniks he was hunting. The noise suddenly stopped and he wondered if he had picked up on him too. If so he was quite impressed.

He pushed on and came around the corner to see him sitting in the same chair as the night before on the breakfast bar. This time there was a tablet before him. He was lit by the blue glow from the holographic image and he was surprised to see that he had forgone his sunglasses, even though he was pretty sure that Wolf did not know of his Feniks secret. Sure, there was a 50/50 chance that anyone coming from his room would be him. More than 50 really, considering it was 3 am, but he was sitting comfortably, smirking at him as if he had known 100% that it was him and not Wolf. If Winter wasn't already interested in the man, that definitely had him interested.

"Mornin' Snowdrop."

"Good morning."

Even after last night, being spoken to by anyone but Wolf felt strange and words were slow to come, he hoped to improve on that as he watched his Feniks manipulate the holographic image in front of him, so fast that it's practically a blur, the black fingers of his metal hand twitching in the blue light whilst his flesh fingers drummed a fast rhythm on his chest

This presented him with more information as he considered the man's potentially interesting abilities, he can hardly track what he is doing, and yet his Feniks seemed to be doing it as if it was the easiest thing in the world. Winter isn't even sure what he was looking at in the image, it just moved so fast, yet he was barely paying it any attention. His fingers still moved swiftly as his eyes flicked around the room in a similar scanning over everything, before coming to rest on him. His head tilted slightly to one side. That look on his face again that made Winter feel he was seeing things that were invisible to everyone else.

As he wasn't wearing the glasses this time, so he got to see his eyes clearly. His left eye was a bright, shining blue that was a similar colour to the holograph in front of him. His other eye looked dark brown at first, but as light caught it, it was closer to amber.

He's moved to stand in the same place as last night, leg up, relaxing back on the counter and working his way through another of his apples quietly. He'd been watching his Feniks since he had entered, seeing him working on his tablet and he knows that he is being obvious, yet... the small smirk on his Feniks face makes him think that unlike Wolf, he won't be complaining anytime soon...
on the potentially rude behaviour he was exhibiting, so he sees no need to change course. Plus, he is staring back just as much.

He suddenly stood, and crossed the room to the fridge on the other side of him, like last night, he passed close enough to definitely encroach upon his personal space. If he thinks that it would cause him to move or back down, then he's definitely going to be disappointed, however his smirk is now at a full smug smile and Winter has no idea why. He pulled a bag of blueberries from the fridge before briefly making eye contact with him, Winter tilted his head in question and his Feniks briefly flicks his vision towards the tablet that he had left abandoned before becoming very interested in the bag of blueberries and then offering him one.

Obviously not in a rush to get back to his work as he'd presumed, but leaning up against the unit in front of him as he scoops a handful of the fruit that he had not tried before, deciding that it was definitely interesting and warranted further exploration.

He glanced back at the tablet and nearly did a double take when he realised that whatever his Fenik was doing, is still happening without his active participation. If anything it seems to have sped up, images flicking into life and filling out. Maybe it was an automatic process? The small smile on his face makes him think otherwise. He glances between the tablet and his Feniks a few times and now he is pretty sure that somehow he is manipulating the tablet from the other side of the room.

Before he says anything however the smug smirk on his Feniks faces turns more impressed, potentially at his deduction that he is the one manipulating the holographic image? If so, how did he realise that he had come to that conclusion? It wasn't the obvious assumption, most would simply assume he had left a program running. Before he could ponder it further his Feniks broke eye contact again and he flicked his eyes towards the lights this time, instantly drawing Winter's attention to where he wanted it, just in time to see the lights slowly brighten before returning to their normal level.

So he isn't just connected to his own technology somehow, he is able to manipulate the Wakandan technology as well. He wondered if he was somehow able to interface with any technology. If so, that was an ability that had many avenues and meant that his Feniks was a damned sight more powerful that he has even thought to presume.

"I think in binary so it's kind of like learning a different language, from an entirely different language tree."

"So you're hacking the Wakandan tech?"

"Pffft, I'll have you know Snowdrop, that I have permission, now if I got into that tablet there in your pocket, that could be hacking. But I could send you a message."

He grinned as he pointed to the exact pocket Wolf's tablet had been stashed in, normally that wouldn't be such an impressive feat, but the black trousers he was wearing were some kind of hiking gear. He didn't know, but they were practically made of hardy pockets that didn't even remotely sag and the lightweight tablet. Interested, he pulls the tablet out of the pocket just in time for 'Hi' pops up, with the sender option utterly blank. He grinned. This was exactly what he was looking for.

"What do you call this ability?"

"Technopathy is what I've been told. I have a wireless connection to technology, occasionally touching it enhances it."
"What does it feel like?"

He looks slightly shocked at his question and he wondered if maybe he didn't talk about his abilities often? He knew that he was definitely hiding them from Wolf and he'd found no mention of Tony being anything other than a baseline human. He takes a minute, obviously giving it some thought and is so expressive its adorable, especially compared to himself. His Feniks is practically an open book of body language.

"Hm, no one has asked that before. It's kind of weird, like I can feel where technology is, what it is, whether it is powered up or not. Even technology that isn't wireless has a feeling in my head for me to reach out too. It feels good to be near it, if that makes sense?"

For some reason as he spoke he got a little agitated, speaking slightly quicker at the end, flushing slightly and his heartbeat picked up, he did not understand why however. He was answering his question?

" I don't know the feeling myself but it sounds interesting. It feeling nice also makes sense. It is you ability, if it feels nice, it will encourage you to utilise it more often to master it."

"Yeah, wow, that really… I like that way of looking at it. I'm pretty new at having abilities so I've been pretty slow to adapt. So, hence the rambling whilst trying to pin down the feeling."

Winter was now confused, he assumed that Siberia has been the factor that had resulted in him acquiring these abilities. It had been several months since then and he seemed competent enough in it to be able to interface with technology in Wakanda as well as technology around the rest of the world. How was that slow? Also, he had not rambled.

"You did not ramble. You answered my question and gave me information pertaining to your abilities. Also, from what I believe, you acquired these abilities after June yes?"

He got a slightly dumb struck nod in response.

"Then you have had several months to become adept in not only technology you are familiar with. But also Wakandan technology that is much different."

"Huh… I… didn't think of it that way. It can occasionally go a bit wonky, so I just thought I wasn't being that good at managing it."

"I've met several powered people and it took some years to master their abilities. Wonky?"

"Yeah, some powered people I know took a while too. And things occasionally explode around me, it's like a pressure would build up in my head and boom."

"You should give yourself the same expectations you give other powered people."

"I'm not very good at that, was worried that I could accidentally hurt someone."

Grudgingly Winter can understand that, especially if things had been exploding. He is still pretty sure that Feniks puts too much pressure on himself. Feniks scooped out more of the fruit to hand to him before upending the rest of the bag and looking ridiculous trying to eat the rest of it which brings his attention to the metal hand. Wolf may not miss the metal limb, but he misses having two hands sure enough but Winter misses his arm. Even if it was painful.

Feniks flinched and looks suddenly guilty which caused Winter to tilt his head, could he see what he was thinking?"
"I'm sorry for what I did. To your arm."

"Can you read my mind?"

He shook his head quickly to that.

"No no, its.. I can see colours around people and sometimes they tell me things. Like people's strength of character, desires, fears occasionally. It's different for different people. Sometimes, if someone feels something strongly, like the loss of your arm, it sort of pops into my head but not precisely word for word of what you're thinking. I know I apologised to James about Siberia, but I want to apologise to you, I... I shouldn't have lost control like that."

"I understand and you do not need to apologise. The Kapitan basically set you up with his lies and your anger was understandable. You were not going to kill us, I understand need to get anger out."

He frowned when he spoke of the Kapitan and the stunned shock on the Feniks face made him smile.

"Plus, whilst the arm was functional. It was painful. Very heavy too, compensating for it was irritating."

"Would you... I sort of started designing an arm?"

The Feniks was looking at the floor now, definitely unsure of himself which was such a contrast to the man he had seen in the videos. Very confident and sure of himself, taking control of situations with ease. Here however he felt different, it wasn't less, he still seemed... more than others somehow but he definitely was unsure about his offer and quite shy about it which Winter found quite cute.

"Can I see it? I know Wolf doesn't want to consider something like that until the words are removed. To me, I have only ever had a metal arm and a flesh arm. I feel no connection to the memories of our predecessor. He doesn't feel much, but enough that he remembers two flesh arms. The loss of the metal arm as such does not affect him as much. He is merely thankful to be free from the pain. I would accept the pain to be whole again."

He blinks slightly, that was possibly the most he's ever said at one time and he had the Feniks attention throughout, he'd focused on him as he spoke, frowning in places and looking pained towards the end.

"Well, any arm I make will not hurt. I will do everything I can to ensure that the Dock doesn't hurt either. This doesn't hurt, so no way would I be satisfied with anything less for you. Come on, let me show you what I have so far, it's not much but I figure it's a starting point."

He held his own hand up when he was talking and his eyes followed it because it was very interesting, it looks so different from his old arm. There were no segments yet he had the same level as mobility as his other hand. The passion he spoke of regarding pain also caught him off guard. He didn't quite understand why he was so adamant about it, he didn't mind if it hurt after all. He pushed that down and followed the genius as he snagged his tablet and crossed over to one of the sofas, Winter followed and dropped down next to him.

The tablet he was using was nothing like Wolf's tablet that he occasionally borrowed. It was much, much larger for instance and the holographic display was interesting. He watched intently as with a flick of the fingers, whatever he was doing vanished and other files were brought up, which made him wonder.
"If you can interface with the technology, why do you still use your hands to manipulate in manually."

"I don't need to, you're right I could just use my technopathy, it would probably be faster, but I've always used my hands, maybe it's habit? I don't know… Maybe I should switch, it would be more efficient."

"It is what you're comfortable with. That means a lot too, efficiency is good but I think if you enjoy it you should keep doing it."

"Thanks Snowdrop… I think I needed to be reminded of that. Anyway, here, these are the schematics for my hand, and these are my preliminary designs to extend the cybernetic limb to the shoulder. I've got a few different ideas for docks that I've put for over here, but until I have some scans I can't be 100%. These are just ideas… "

He was back to speaking quickly again and he was unsure why. Winter was also starting to think his idea of a 'starting point' others were very different, as there was clearly a lot of work gone into his. He reached out to manipulate the holograph and then paused, wondering if the action would potentially be unwelcome and Wolf was constantly ranting at him for just wanting to do things. The Feniks however looked thrilled and nodded so he continued.

It was strange, he could not feel anything on his skin but watching the holograph change as he touched it was interesting. He moved the arm around just because he could, it was a strange interface.

"If you put your thumb and finger together and open them like this, it will make it larger, do it again and it will blow the image up and show you inside and how it comes together, yeah like that!"

"This is so amazing!"

"The arm?"

"Yes, the arm is gorgeous but this interface is awesome too."

He continued playing with the image because it really was fun, making it larger and looking at the small pieces that made up the arm and moving everything around and the Feniks eyebrows had shot up.

"Did you invent this too?"

"The holographic interface, yeah, I've been using them in my workshop for a while. This new tablet is part of my mobile workshop and is new."

"This is amazing."

"I don't think anyone has liked my interface this much before.."

"I've never used anything like it before."

"I'm… ah glad you like it."

He was ducking his head and looking off kilter again, he was definitely much different than what he had expected. He was lethal and ruthless when he wanted to be, merciful almost to a fault. Self sacrificing when others would flee and ready to fight when required but not so much just because.
There was always a reason. He mastered the press and high society with charm and ease and weathered years of the tabloids interfering in his life. He'd made some of the best weapons Winter had gotten his hands on and then seamlessly switched to dominating any market he showed an interest in, inventing things that were more at home in one of Wolf's sci-fi books. He has abilities that would unmask the best spy and the applications of this technopathy were mind-boggling.

Yet on top of all that, he was still able to become flustered and nervous over a compliment. He felt guilty over a perfectly understandable fight, blasting his arm off had been an understandable reaction to him trying to tear his powersource from his chest after all. From that he had spent a considerable amount of time working to free him and Wolf from the command words, and was improving Wolf's mental health in regards to the memories he had been unable to protect the man from.

He was picking up the pieces of Winter's failure.

On top of that, without even being asked, he was working to make him whole. He also spoke to him about it too. Making him feel like his input would be just as valid as Wolf's. That he has just as much right to be here as Wolf. It was... a strange feeling. But it made him warm. To be seen. To be accepted. Not feared. He liked this feeling.

"Can I.. Uhm..."

"Hmm?"

"Can I see your hand?"

He glanced at the tablet and went to speak before realizing what he meant, his eyebrows going up and Winter expected the man to say no. He was surprised when instead he turned to face him on the couch as he was currently sat to the Feniks right and held out his left hand, tugging up his sleeve to reveal more of it. It was fast, barely there on his face but there was a grimace on seeing the thick band of scarring where the skin met metal. It wasn't that bad, where the socket met his skin was much worse. He didn't mind his scars like Wolf however. It was survival carved into his skin.

"Ah, sorry, that's not great to look at, but feel free to have a look. When we get to it and if you both agree, your arm will be based on this one. Not the monstrosity the dicks with logo confusion dared to call revolutionary."

He chuckled at how he referred to Hydra before running his hand across the matte black metal. This colour would have been much more useful than polished steel. This would not catch on light or give away a position. It was sleek too, it wasn't built like a weapon but he doubts it is as powerless as it looks. He followed the bright blue lines, one on each side, starting at the tips of his little finger and thumb and carrying up to the scarring.

"Scarring is not a bad thing Feniks. It means we have survived and healed to carry on. It means the person is strong and skilled. It's survival, something to be proud of. What is the function of these blue lines, I suspect they are not decorative? I did not see them on the schematics."

The soft, stunned look on his face as he spoke about scarring was surprising. Usually when he tried to explain this to Wolf, he ignored him. His Malen'kiy Feniks however was listening. Really listening. He did not know if it was helping, but he was glancing at his arm without grimacing. He did not believe his perceptions would change over night, but he was willing to keep reminding him.
"You seem to like upending my worldview don't you Snowdrop. This was a recent addition, want to see it in action?"

He nodded, reluctantly releasing his arm as he had liked the contact and the feel of the metal. He left his arm out to the side, palm out and suddenly bright blue light exploded out from the blue strips. Expanding out and joining together to create an around hip height shield. He expanded it and contracted it effectively showing Winter that he had completed control to form whatever he liked from it.

"A shield?"

"Yes, but I can also do a few other things with it. It depends how I mould it. It's based on a Photon Shield design I discovered in SHIELDs files. I gave it a little upgrade though."

From the wide grin and wink, he guessed that he had done more than a 'little' upgrade somehow. The light retracted and he moved his hand and now had a long blade, Winter immediately wondered how sharp it would be and its strength. Which got a smug grin aimed at him, obviously having deduced what he was thinking.

" It can cut through metal."

"I definitely want that in my arm!"

Wolf would have felt bad for requesting more than he had been offered, however from the way he grinned, calling the light back to his arm and practically bouncing on the seat in glee over the prospect, Winter is happy that he ignored Wolf's lessons of dealing with humans. It seemed the Feniks was a different kind of person.

"Awesome, some people have found my… upgrades and additions a little off putting."

"Then you should make them nothing. If you put a sword that can slice metal in my arm, I'd be very happy. Thank you Feniks."

"Really?"

The tentative way he asks, like Winter was just joking and would dislike what he made, and the way he looks almost stunned by his thanks has him confused.

"Of course. You only just met me, you didn't have to ask me what I want in the arm, you didn't have to make the arm in the first place, but you did talk to me about it, and you can add things like this too it! It's not something I'm used to, it makes me.. Happy. Very happy. "

"Wow, and off course I would talk to you Snowdrop. Now I know you are here I would not do anything to your body without both of yours permission. It would be cruel and you don't have to thank me for the arm it's the least I can do."

"I do not wish you to do this because you feel like you owe it to us. You are forgiven so there is nothing to make up. You do not have to do anything. "

He frowned at him, hoping he got his point across that he did not like the idea of him doing it out of a perceived debt.

"Oh. OK, I want to do it though? It's fun, and there are other things we could put in it too? Want to see?"
He nodded and his Feniks excitement was back, the man positively vibrating with excitement was incredibly endearing but he did have to wonder when this man was actually planning on sleeping as he was scheduled to meet Wolf at 11am for BARF. However his excitement was catching as he started bringing up all manner of different things that Winter had never considered could go into an arm. After they finished going through enough that Winter was actually shocked, he was a little overwhelmed.

"Feniks… why are you doing all of this for us?"

"You've been through so much and you're so strong. Most people would have crumbled under what you've experienced. Yet you're still going, healing that's amazing. You deserve a break, for some help to make your life yours. No words hanging over you."

"I get why you'd help Wolf. He's good and nice and has been hurt. I get why you'd help him. But why me? I'm not even a person really."

"Hey, Snowdrop. You are a person, you deserve happiness. You are so strong, no, hear me out before you start shaking your head. I told you I see colours right? Your colours aren't a part of James, you are both different, unique people. Your colours show me so much, you're so vibrant and bright Snowdrop. I can see how much you want to be happy. You're so loyal to him. You deserve this just as much as James, get it? Because I'll keep reminding you like you do for my scars yeah?"

"Oh.. Okay?"

The blinding smile he gets in return actually gives him confidence over it.

**Wolf POV**

He had eaten breakfast in the common room today, now he knew that Tony occasionally had breakfast with the royals he felt better with using it for his breakfast. He didn't think the man would like to have his breakfast crashed after all. After cleaning his bowl he pulled out his tablet to check on his messages. He had quite a few to work through, including some from CERBERUS and FRIDAY. Mostly CERBERUS. He didn't know if it was weird to consider an AI as a friend, but he didn't think he really cared because that's what CERBERUS was.

He'd saved him, he'd then stayed to speak to him. He was pretty young so they got to discover things together. He was beginning to see FRIDAY as his friend too, she was kind and sweet. She sent him pictures that she thought he would find amusing, usually of baby animals and it never failed to cheer him up. Then there were the messages from Shuri, several of the Dora and a couple from TicTac too. Oddly none from Wings which was strange, but he was set to meet the two of them later tonight. He had been invited by T'Challa to lunch today after BARF and he had not wanted to turn down the invite, he just hoped his presence did not make Tony uncomfortable.

The last message however was extremely perplexing. There was no sender, it was just a message that's entire contents were 'Hi'. He didn't know how it was possible to send a message from no one. What was even stranger was that the option to reply was still open instead of greyed out. When sending messages normally, unless he put in a correct contact address, the send button did not work. He frowned at it before slipping it into his bag.

He started heading for Shuri's lab, she would likely understand what it was. He worried that his
little tablet may be broken. The trip to the lab was calming, which was good because he always got nervous before speaking to Tony. Having the man be willing to hide secrets for him was not really helping.

Tony had been very kind yesterday. But then he was obviously a kind person, that he was willing to come all this way, leaving his family and safety behind to help the man who had not only killed his parents, but had helped another super soldier beat him, severely injuring him and abandoned him to the ice. He doubted that his left arm and the scars on his right arm and face were the end of his injuries.

In their letters they had not drifted to such heavy topics often. He knew it was painfully for Tony to speak of times before Siberia. He knew of course that that was not all his fault. He did not make Steve lie. He didn't make Steve abandon his friend and take practically everyone with him. Steve had called the avengers a tight knit family, if that had been true and Tony had been a part of that family? It just made everything worse and he knew he was the catalyst. How the man could not only forgive him, but help him. He did not know.

He was however starting to miss the Tony's letters. He still felt guilty at the idea of forcing his presence upon him, but he also had not realised how much the letters had meant to him. How they had brightened his day just from noticing he had one. When they'd started getting bigger too, they'd exchanged a few that hit double digits of pages just talking about things. He missed hearing about the antics of the amazing people at the compound. They sounded so strange but they were an actual family. He also missed the pictures that Tony would send him. He'd made a few more origami cats but he was at a loss on if he should send them. Same as if he should reply to Tony last letter. It felt kind of odd now they were housemates of a sort.

"Wolf! You look miles away!"

He blinked and realised he made it into Shuri's lab completely on auto pilot as she guided him over to the stool and immediately started on his hair. They were both early today. Surprisingly for Shuri who had blamed Tony for making breakfast crazy.

"Oh, I have a question, is it possible to get a message on the tablet with a blank sender?"

She immediately scoffed, chuckling and shaking her head.

"No, of course not. That is ridiculous!"

"Here, look."

She finished off the 4 braids and ties that together in a half up, half down. Leaving the rest of his straight hair to cascade down his back. Then she took the tablet, glaring at it.

"You can't receive a message from a blank sender. It is impossible on our system"

"Well I think it being there proves it isn't impossible.

"No… That is not possible, who did this?"

"I don't know, the sender was blank remember."

He snarks back and she glares at him as Tony walks into the lab, looking at them and looks a little sheepish but he has no idea why. He locks his tablet and decides after his session he'll send a message to the blank sender, see what happens.
They were doing some very difficult memories today, 3 of them were ones they had tried in the past but had been unable to clear. They were now confident enough to try them again and his therapist had signed off on it if Tony would send a report of his vitals after so she'd know how best to gauge what she will give permission to in the future. He's not sure why Shuri and Tony are asking her permission to clear memories but it's not like the pair of geniuses would do it for no reason. He trusts their judgement in this as well as his therapist.

Several hours later he is exhausted, drained, feeling emotionally raw but weirdly, at the same time giddy. This has been his best day yet and he's not sure if it's just endorphins but he feels lighter. Even though they spent hours working through memories.

Tony looked exhausted, stretching in his seat, he can hear his back popping from here. He flinched but from the groans and how he's pushing his knuckles into his back.

Whilst he'd been reclining and dealing with his memories, Tony had spent hours bent over a computer typing fast enough to keep up with his brain. From the occasional screen saver breaks to rest his hands, it sounded like grueling work. He moves to slip from the lab whilst Shuri was talking to him and he was stretching.

"Hmm, that would be nice, but we have lunch with your family soon, I best go and make myself presentable. Wouldn't want to look like a slouch in front of your mother now would I?"

He glanced down at his own clothes and hoped they would be acceptable for this lunch. He was wearing black jeans, black boots and a deep red, long sleeved shirt. The buttons had put him off trying any of the shirts in the past, he'd mentored it to Tony in one of his letters and he'd sent the loop of wire on a metal handle. Because of it, he could do the buttons up one handed really fast too.

He found his way to the library where he could pass some time until lunch, pulling his tablet out he decided to respond to the 'Hi'.

Me-Hi? I'm sorry I don't know who this is, the sender is blank.

The reply came through quick enough he hadn't even had a chance to close the messenger program.

Blank-Snowflake? That is odd, maybe my tech confused the Wakandan tech! Hah, take that Shuri. This is me though. Feel free to message me. We can upgrade our letters from paper to digital if you want?

He wondered if his vanishing from the room had made the man unsure about that. Which was what Winter had basically alluded to. He still wasn't sure what the best course of action was, especially now Tony had met Winter once. He still didn't know what had happened the other night and he was slightly worried.

This messaging system however was good. He could talk to the man without forcing his presence on him. If Tony wanted he could just not reply. He suddenly felt more confident conversing with him that he had since he had set foot in Wakanda.

Me- Shuri was baffled and I'd like that. I liked receiving things in the post. Although FRIDAY did send me an alarm clock. It's strange, when it goes off 4 shapes are fired out of it, I have to collect them and put them in the correct spots for it to be quiet…

Blank-Oh no! She got you too! T'Challa has one with a little car that zooms around his room.
I have a disco ball lamp, don't tell Fry but its hideous. It's on my bedside table. She's my baby girl but I honestly can't tell if these are gag gifts or not.

Me-I'm not sure, I think she just likes giving gifts, which is why I have to jump up every morning half asleep, gathering shapes.

Blank- I'm happy my kids have you as a friend, they deserve it.

Me-Plus. It's sweet when you talk about your kids.

Blank-I'm a lot of things but I don't think I'm sweet!

Me-It's cute too!

He was now grinning at the tablet, snickering at Tony's mock outrage at being called sweet and cute. It was fun and he really had missed their letters, this was much faster however and he was enjoying himself.

Blank-You take that back! I'm not cute. Tiny Thor is cute, I'm a grown man who is not cute!

Me-But you're small and fluffy to, like Tiny Thor…

Blank-What the.. Are you calling me short Mr Excessively tall?

Me-I'm not that tall, you're just tiny. Plus the fluffy hair. Cute

Blank-I'll have you know I am perfectly normal sized. Not all of us can be Greek Gods.

Me-Suuuuuuure

Blank- All 3 of them are laughing at me now. If I was black home I bet the bots would be too. Traitors!

Me-3?

Blank-Oh!! Didn't I mention, I thought I had, I had been having a bit of a bad day, nothing important, but I decided to make CERBERUS a little sister. I thought she could help the kids or maybe run the training aims. She's call HATHRO. It means Teacher in Welsh. Fry has an Irish accent, Cer is Scots so I figured add in Welsh. Cer is already teaching her bad habits, well, it's adorable. You know Cer likes to use Scots Gaelic titles for people, Ro uses Welsh. Thankfully Fry hasn't picked up this trait, but she has started listening to odd Irish Pirate songs. She has one song on repeat for half an hour last night and it's stuck in my head! It only has 1 verse and I'm doomed to it.... Hang on. This is perfect punishment for calling me cute

Blank- Attachment Sent

Me-You know I can just not click that right? Also that sounds awesome. I bet Cery loves being a big bro. I like his titles too. I'm sure Ro's will be awesome. Is there a way I can change your name, speaking to blank is kind of creepy.

Zaichik-You can change it I think? It will still come to me. Ro should be up to talking to people soon, if you wanted. I mean, you don't have to, but she could say hi? The more people
she interacts with the faster she grows. It was amazing, as soon as she came online she was
displaying emotions James, I was floored! She has a secret project she's working on already
too.

Zaichik-What the... Did you seriously call me bunny?!?!?

Me-Cute & Fluffy remember! Also, I'd love to speak to Ro!

Zaichik-I'll pass her details along. Cer is thrilled. I can't believe you are calling me Bunny..
What did I do to deserve this...

Me-Aww don't worry, you'll get used to it.

Zaichik-I get enough sass from my kids! I'm going to shower now. See you at the lunch
Snowflake!

Me- Bye Zaichik!

He chuckled and was about to put his tablet away when a prompt popped up, tilting his head in
confusion before he read it and rolled his eyes.

Fry wants you to listen to the song, for calling be Bunny, I'm making it play.

With that, the prompt vanished and the attachment he'd sent opened up all on its own. He had no
idea how Tony was doing it, but he wasn't exactly that surprised. He could probably do anything
with tech if he puts his mind to it, he quickly dodged out the library before it started as the volume
was also turning itself up. The music started up and he was pleasantly surprised. He had been kind
of avoiding music. There was just so much of it, it was daunting and he didn't know where to start.
He knew what Bucky liked, heard the songs in his memory, but all he felt was what Shuri
described as 'Meh'. This however, this was upbeat and fun. The lyrics finally started and he
couldn't help but chuckle.

He pulled the messenger up as he started heading towards the dining room they were having lunch
today. Grinning as he sent the message. He was happy he'd sent a message to that blank 'hi'. It
hadn't been long since he'd arrived, but he'd missed being able to talk to the genius in their letters.

Me-Fry has good taste!

Zaichik-I like the song, who doesn't like crazy singing pirates? But on repeat for an hout? I
tend to repeat songs but even I'm not that bad! Glad you like it Snowflake, I don't know if
KitKat put Spotify on that thing, but you can find the band on there! See you soon.

He had reached the dining room so he shut down the tablet, maybe he'd look up this band later, he
might even find something else he liked and then he could add them to his journal. He was slightly
nervous of this lunch, he could speak over text, but he still wasn't sure about this.

'Why don't you just talk to him? That's what I did. He surprised me. You literally just had a
conversation with him. Why are you so weird?'

Great. He was apparently at a point in his life where the man he shared a body with called him
weird.

'You know why!'
'Ugh. Ridiculous. He probably thinks you hate him or something.'

'I don't think so. I'm just trying to be nice. The messages are good, if he feels like he can't talk to me, he can just stop. If I'm in the same room he might feel compelled to talk to me.'

'The way you over complicate things is remarkable.'

Maybe Winter was right on that last part.

**Tony POV**

Tony was feeling pretty darned good really. So far, today had much more good than bad when he finally got to bed after spending so much time talking to Snowdrop, which had just been a series of revelations.

When he'd headed to the common room after reading the kids their story, then having his chats with the boys. He'd also called a few other, adult sized people and by then it had been nearly 3am. He'd told Rhodey and Stephey he was about to head to bed, and he actually had been. But seeing the time so close to 3am had reminded him of the previous 3am and he'd been grabbing one of his mobile workshop tablets and heading to the common room before he'd actually registered what he was doing. He made himself a hot chocolate and brought up the specs he had for the next wave of Stark Phones, he always did one for multiple price brackets so he was working on 5 different phones in front of him and it was enough for him to not berate himself and flee back to his room in embarrassment or something.

Because lurking to meet the Winter Soldier at 3am just didn't sound like a sound decision. It sounded like the kind of thing Rhodey would yell at him for.

He wasn't even that sleep deprived either as he'd slept quite well for the first time since he'd left for Wakanda. He'd just been about to give up when he heard footsteps. He tilted his head to listen to see if it was James, he was pretty good at identifying how the super soldier walked now because it was how he tracked him fleeing from any room he was in.

The difference between the two men sharing a body was night and day so he'd left his glasses off. He didn't know what he'd been expecting. It hadn't been that. It was one of the best little conversations he'd had in a while, the man's brain was wicked fast, he deduced things quickly and he wasn't afraid to ask questions about his abilities. Not only that, he'd made Tony rethink his abilities. He was just so… earnest. His enthusiasm about his inventions, he always wanted to know more. Most people got annoyed at him for going overboard where as they practically egged each other on. At the same time, he was visibly upset at the idea he was constructing the arm out of guilt and they he'd only accept it if he was doing it because he wanted to. The thanks as well, dear tesla he was so earnest about it Tony was practically floating. He was just getting used to his new team thanking him… but there was something different about it that he couldn't put his finger on.

He practically fell into bed at around 5am and got a solid 4 and a half hours sleep and was ready to go for breakfast.

It hadn't been a blissful sleep, some older nightmares cropped up, but he'd woken up feeling pretty happy and rested overall. Breakfast had been a joy, it had somehow ended with him and T'Challa grappling over the last waffle Ramonda had made because she wanted him to have some food from
home. T’Challa had discovered he really liked waffles. By the time they decided to split it, his enhanced speed and T’Challa with his enhanced strength evened each other out a little too well. Shuri had scarpered 15 minutes ago with it. No one had wanted to interrupt them as they’d looked like they were having so much fun.

Ramonda had treated him like one of her kids, T’Challa and Shuri treated him like a sibling. With just them, Nakia, Okoye and a few others from the Dora. Mostly the some of the people he’d won over since he’d taken T’Challa to lunch. Some in visits, most in the time since he’d come to Wakanda.

Namely Aneka who had decided he needed training, she liked his form but it needed work and she and Okoye had taken him on. Both of them called him Little Pup and nothing he said would change it. He wasn't sure if it was better or worse than Bunny. What was it with people calling him small fluffy critters today? Folami was quiet originally but when she warmed up to him, was snarky as all hell. She was pretty much in love with FRIDAY. Nailah had taken a while to come around, after Okoye and Aneka had put him on his ass for the 5th time and he'd bounced back up to continue, she apologised for assuming he was a chauvinistic pig. He'd just laughed and told her some stories of the strong ass women back home that practically ruled his life.

Okoye had asked him if he planned on winning over every single member of the Dora Milaje. He'd responded with Challenge Accepted.

Onyenka wanted stories of his time as Ironman, he'd even mentioned a few more painful ones after talking to her for a while. She had returned the favour and they'd both ended up crying. Lastly had been Syan, who had hugged him before he even said a word. Then thanked him, apparently since he had been talking to Shuri, she had been happier, especially since the compound kids got involved and that was good enough for her.

He’d been told they would also be at lunch today. If James had not agreed to T’Challa's invite, he would be going without his sunglasses as everyone in attendance had been informed of his augmentations. The first breakfast after Shuri had done a little cliff notes version before Tony had turned up was nerve wracking. He'd gone with zero makeup, no glasses and wearing a t-shirt as Shuri had told him too. Which was good as he'd been freaking out, clear instructions had been very useful. Not sure how Shuri seemed to know that, or if it was just Shuri being Shuri, but he'd been thankful either way. There has been a few looks of shock, he'd immediately thought it was bad, Shuri thwacked him, asked why people were shocked and it was mostly the deaging thing.

Shuri was awesome for his mental health he decided. Ramonda, after the first breakfast said the deaging was no longer surprising, saying it had just made him look like his age and that she couldn't imagine him being nearly 50. He was not sure if that was a compliment, and he was not asking.

So he’d been both looking forward to lunch and dreading it. Because James was going to be there and he was worried that his presence was going to make the man uncomfortable if he felt compelled to stay in the room as the royals invited him for lunch. It would be the longest time they’d shared a room since Siberia. When he was in BARF it didn't count to Tony seeing as he was in the uplink and James was in the holographic suite. Seeing as they usually jumped right to work and he bolted right after, they had tapped out at 6 minutes and 48 seconds. He had still avoided an all out free fall into his colours too, unlike Snowdrop where he'd fallen hard and he was still itching to reach out for that lightning, now thought it wasn't just a physical pull, it was mental too. Stood next to him it was like he could dive in. So far, he'd resisted temptation.

He had his nanites sunglasses to help not get dragged into James colours, so they were tinted silver
so no one could see his eye but because they were his nanites glasses they didn't actually darken the room.

The weirdest thing had happened when he was laying out his suit after getting back from BARF. when he'd arrived to hear James and Shuri discussing the message he'd sent to Snowdrop he'd been cursing himself for not deleting it. As explaining how a message appeared with no sender appeared, and why he sent it to the person who flees when they're in the same room just had uncomfortable written all over it. Then he'd gone and messaged him, he jumped because the message had turned up in his mind, not on any tech. Because he hadn't sent it with tech after all. Which was seriously weird, because whilst he'd sent messages in his mind before, but it had always been something also attached to a device. But the tablets T'Challa had given it to James and the Rogues… and didn't that sound like a terrible band name… those tablets were incapable of reaching tech outside of Wakanda. So, none of his tech could link with it. He hasn't considered that when he'd sent the message, he was just showing Winter his technopathy.

James replying hadn't even been a possibility. Then he had. He'd kind of expected James to block him or something. He hadn't expected them to talk. He'd actually missed the man's letters, not that he would admit that out loud or Stephy would magically know and would roast him. Now they lived on the same floor, shared a sodding kitchen and James had reverted to Dr Stark and not looking at him, sending letters now would be weird and probably heavily unwelcome. Or so he thought.

Frankly. James confused him.

Tony was first to admit he wasn't that good at peopling. He was better with machines and code. He was completely and utterly confused when it came to James.

He fled from him and then he snarked at him on messenger, made him really happy talking about his AI children ad people, he wanted to speak to his youngest, he considered Cer as a friend. He was so happy for his kids that they had a friend like that. Then the man started calling him cute and fluffy. It was a roller-coaster and he was confused.

Maybe if Snowdrop turns up at 3am again he could tell him what was going on with James. Because the room fleeing was hitting him harder than he'd admit.

Ranonda immediately gave him a hug when he entered the room, which he returned even though he was slightly confused as to why.

"Ranonda, what did I do to earn that?"

"You looked sad and confused and I wanted to make you smile Ukatana." <Kitten>

"I was just thinking about James."

"Is he still vanishing out of rooms you are in."

He nodded and also still had not worked up the courage to work out what Ramonda had taken to calling him. With his luck lately with name it would be a small fluffy creature. He didn't know what it was that seemed to result in people calling him these things, at the moment he was a respectable height dammit. Not his fault everyone was so darned tall.

"Come on, let's get you sat down. I like this suit!"

"The kids had it designed for me, after I woke up, changed. Even when I put on the weight I lost in the coma, nothing felt right. Nothing felt like it fitted."
"I understand, after such a big change that can happen. After I had Shuri, even when I lost the baby weight my clothes just felt strange."

"That's it. The kids enjoy picking my clothes now though. Plus I like this tie."

"And this is an actual suit then, not nanites?"

"Yup, only nanites are the sunglasses. Tints on the outside but to me I can see right through. Means I can change the colour as I please."

He grinned and she looking intrigued so he switches the colour to red, gold, blue and back to silver again.

"Shuri is going to want to design some of them herself, I can just feel it."

She sat him down next to her, in between herself and T'Challa. Shuri was on her other side and Nakia was next to T'Challa. Shuri had a space next to her for James he presumed. The circular table wasn't overly huge but it sat them all comfortably without feeling squished. Okoye was opposite him next to Aneka and they were discussing their sparring sessions that they'd planned for just after dinner. He'd requested at least half an hour to digest which had resulted in Shuri proposing that they play jenga. A game which was banned from the compound, but they didn't know that here in Wakanda and Tony was looking forward to it.

James came in not long after Tony had settled down, he'd missed the moment he entered as Ramonda had been chatting to him. She was great at making him feel better and already the tense set of his shoulders had begun to relax somewhat. Another thing he'd started to notice was that the Wakandans were quite tactile, happy to show affection with an ease that Americans were utterly incapable off. Ramonda often had a hand on his arm and T'Challa was the same with his shoulder. It was something he was incredibly grateful for but at the same time a little overwhelmed by the ease of it. He'd only just started to get used to the New Avengers tactile nature too. Although again he was actually starting to think his bar was set too low that basic kindness was seen as something amazing, at least that's what Ramonda has told him. How he'd been around this woman for barely 3 days and she could read him so easily, he had no idea.

It was the flash of red next to Shuri that alerted him to James effectively sneaking up to the table. He scanned over his colours and found Snowdrop to be quite active by the looks of it. As James was up front, he didn't get any information from him other than the base colour of gunmetal grey. Only James colours were fully visible. This was the first time he'd seen him so active before, often it was completely still which he'd taken to mean as asleep. Snowdrop had told him James was asleep when they'd been talking last night and his colours were still. James glanced over to him and his eyes were the storm cloud grey but every now and then, he swore he could see something. The sharper steel grey shining through.

"Hey there Snowflake."

"Good afternoon Dr Stark."

He couldn't help the sigh, he hadn't expected much, but he hadn't expected to switch back to his polite but distanced persona. It was so similar to his media persona. Heck. At the point he'd prefer Bunny, he'd been pretty sure after that conversation that maybe he'd eased up a little bit. This was almost dealing with two people. Which considering there were two people inside his mind was just adding to the complication.

He was definitely going to ask Snowdrop what was going on. Did he offend the man or
Dinner went by with surprising speed considering that he'd been left a little confused by James. No, he wasn't going to say upset he was just confused. The man on paper and texting was one person, then stick him in a room and he fled from him. He'd assume that all the text based conversations were Snowdrop but he knew they were not. The two of them were completely different and thanks to him being a little bit too observant. Plus, he suspected if Snowdrop had been writing letters, then he would have told him by now. He wasn't the kind to hang back. He was very direct, from what he had seen in his colours, he just didn't see the point of hanging back so he didn't.

He managed to put the thoughts to the back of his mind and enjoy dinner, it was a lot of fun. Shuri made a thing of both stealing things off his plate and adding things until Ramonda pulled her back to her seat. After dinner he decided to get changed as he would be sparring later after all.

"I'm going to run back to my room to change, then I'll make Shuri rue the day she challenged me to jenga."

T'Challa and Shuri were thinking it through and potentially regretting their choice of game. Somehow he ended up heading back at the same time as James and that wasn't potentially the most awkward thing he had experienced in a while. He was dying to ask him why he was so different in messages and avoiding him in person but he was uncharacteristically nervous regarding it. He stuck his hands into his pockets because it didn't matter how much James seemed to dislike his presence, his colours still lured him in.

"They're a fun lot to eat with aren't they, not a quiet moment."

"Shuri seemed unable to stay in her seat for more than a few minutes."

"I know, KitKat spent more attention on my plate than her own."

"She did that to me too, wanted to make sure I tried a bit of everything."

"Are you going to join us for Jenga?"

"Umm, no I'm meeting up with Wings, I hope you have fun though."

With that he flashed him a quick smile before vanishing off towards his own room. Tony shook his head, at least they'd had something of a conversation before he scarpered this time. At least he could amuse himself by utterly trouncing the royals at Jenga.

Wolf POV

He was still cringing slightly by the time Wings and TicTac made it to the common room to meet him. The dinner had been nice however, he had enjoyed it, Shuri and Tony seemed to be unlimited balls of energy that bounced of each other and entertained the entire room. Winter had stayed up practically the entire time. Mostly berating him for ducking out of the room.

What Winter didn't seem to realise however, was how damned difficult it is to have a conversation when an irate assassin is ranting at you.

He dropped down next to Wings and TicTac who were talking animatedly in the library, judging from the book on TicTac lap, it looked like he had been brought into the book club.
"How are you to doing."

"Awesome, Sam convinced me to read the books you two are reading."

"That's great, you'll love it. How are things going at the house?"

"I barely ever see anyone anymore, but then I've been heading out with my camera a lot. Plus, the guys with the giant rhino's keep inviting me back. I get to feed them and everything. It's so cool, you two have to come and visit sometime!"

"I'll work something out, what about you Wings, how is the house?"

"Actually, things are starting to get a little better you know? Steve isn't moping about anymore. We had a good conversation and I'm hoping I can get through to him."

"Good luck Wings. Just be careful right? You don't want to have Wanda coming after you."

"I'm careful, don't worry guys. I'm just keeping an eye on things until we have a better idea of what to do. Steve has actually started tidying his room again and everything. I bet if he was taken off of house arrest he'd start running again and be much better. I think he's reading everything we sent him."

"Yeah, I doubt that's going to happen anytime soon. Shuri and T'Challa are furious. They are terrifying when they're mad too."

He grinned at TicTac who looked slightly nervous at the idea of a mad Shuri and T'Challa. Well, he had to admit, the siblings had a regal air to themselves and he bet they could move mountains.

RedWing did a few loops around them, trilling whilst they relaxed to talk about books. He was relieved to know things in the villa were improving.

He hoped that Steve did read those documents, but it was going to be a while before he forgave him. If Wings and TicTac could break free of the weird negative fog then Steve should too, the fact that he was willing to have the Ved'ma play in his head… it was going to take him a while for him to get past that.

Works inspired by this are [Glitch in the System](https://archiveofourown.org/) by Meaningless Mayhem

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