Together

by MakeYourParadise

Summary

Steve and Tony lost everything after the snap. They try to learn how to move on, together.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Sometimes it seemed that the smell of war would never find it’s way out of Steve’s nose. It always smelled the same, whether it was World War 2 or…this. It always reeked of burning and broken metal and…. death.

Some people used to not know death had a smell. But everyone became painfully aware of it during the last 5 years.

It used to just be in Steve’s distant nightmares, but it followed him into real life after the battle in Wakanda.

Every day, he had tried to find something to hold onto, something to keep fighting for. If not for himself, then for all the other people who were trying to do the same.

But today, there was reason to slam his shield into hardly human-oid faces. There were stakes. He was all too familiar with what would happen if they lost again.
The last five years propelled him, as opposed to weighing him down, as he fought side by side with his friends.

*Not alone.*

He couldn’t lose them again.

However, it was almost consoling, in a way, to know that if they lost, this time they would all go. There wouldn’t be survivors. They would be together in one way or another.

He was almost certain he would welcome death rather than be a survivor.

*The worst part was that I didn’t die, Steve.*

Tony’s words echoed in his head, a faint memory from a late night together.

*I…I had a vision. Where all of you died and it was only me left. All I could think about was how I should’ve been dead, too.*

*If only I’d knew how true it was going to be.*

The first couple months, Steve had been sure that he would wake up. That it would all be a horrific nightmare.

It wasn’t until Tony came back that he realized that the nightmare was stretching too long.

That it wasn’t a nightmare at all.

He had run to Tony’s frail form, because it was suddenly too real. Held him. Heard him talk about the kid, Peter.

Even his own war-ravaged mind wouldn’t be demented enough to make something like this up.

Tony had asked about Pepper, and Steve’s heart sank. How could he possibly tell him?

When no one responded, Tony sank to the ground, too dehydrated to even cry.

They went on their little expedition, and killed Thanos.

And it didn’t feel good. Not at all. And with the stones gone…

It really was too late.

They were practically ghosts during the first year. It became apparent that people are made up of the company they chose to keep, and it’s hard to be anyone when you don’t have company.

It had all been so silent. Everyone kept to themselves, even though most of them were residing in Avengers tower. They had decided to stay together, because they were each afraid of what would happen if they were truly on their own.
Natasha buried herself in work. Finding survivors, traces of the stones. Anything.

Rhodey looked after Tony, and communicated with what was left of the army. Every now and then, he left to do some kind of mission.

Tony was…well. Steve had never seen him like that. He didn’t even go near his lab. The genius, hell-bent on improving, adapting, overcoming, was long gone. He stayed in his room all day, hardly eating unless he was forced.

Steve was glad they had persuaded Tony to stay at the tower. He didn’t want to think about what would have happened to him if they didn’t.

Thor, Bruce, and Carol were the ones they had little to no contact with. Thor said he wanted to try to rebuild Asgard. Bruce had mentioned sorting things out with the Hulk. Carol seemed to be the most in her right mind, but also the hardest to contact. She was out seeing the effects of the stones across the whole universe.

One night, while Rhodey was on one his missions, FRIDAY informed Steve that Tony had yet to eat anything that day.

Steve…struggled at being around Tony. Every conversation with him that had happened after his return always returned to how the Avengers hadn’t been a team when the world needed it most.

And it was strange. Tony never brought up Siberia, or the fight. Didn’t talk about the Accords. It was always about the after. How they were separated. They hadn’t been together.

So, as he brought the tray to Tony’s room, he prepared himself for the inevitable “I thought you said we’d lose together.”

Tony was sitting up in his bed, looking out the window. He was still so bony and thin, but was slowly improving. However, even though he was getting back to health, he looked worse every day. Shadows under his eyes, unkept hair, the wild beard slowly making its way across his face.

It started like it always did.

“Hey, Tony. I brought some food.”

Silence.

Steve moved closer, setting the tray on the bedside table. Tony glanced at it, blinking once, twice.

“You should eat,” Steve tried again.

“Not hungry,” Tony whispered back, his words barely audible.

“I know. But you can’t just not eat.”

Steve could see the why not forming on his lips. But they had had this conversation, this argument before.

“Why not?”

“You need to stay healthy.”
"For what?"

"So you can stay alive."

"Why should I get to live? They didn’t."

"I know it’s hard—"

"Hard? No. Building an arc reactor out of scraps is hard. Saving the world is hard. This is impossible."

"You can’t just give up."

"Giving up means that I have something to give up on. There isn’t anything anymore."

"Tony—"

"Don’t give me that shit, Steve. Don’t try to tell me that there’s something to fight for. Our job was to protect the Earth and we didn’t. And everyone paid the price."

Tony had won the argument that night. He probably could have again, but this time, he decided to keep his mouth closed.

He took a few bites, begrudgingly. Just another thing they had to do now.

Steve took a seat on a chair next to the bed, accepting the tense silence as the atmosphere for tonight’s dinner.

"I was supposed to protect them." Tony said, so quiet that Steve could’ve convinced himself he was imagining it.

"What?" Steve asked. Tony hardly ever spoke around the team, much less be vulnerable.

“I…I promised I’d protect them. Pepper and Peter.”

There was a pause, and Steve stayed silent, hoping Tony would elaborate. And he did.

“She…she was never scared for herself, but I was. Especially after Killian. It made me so aware that anyone associated with me would be a target. It drove me nuts. That’s why we…y’know. Split up for a while. I was so…I was so terrified for her safety that I pushed her away. It was a miracle she came back. And now…and now…."

Tony was staring off into space, unable to finish his sentence. Steve put a reassuring hand on his shoulder, that would hopefully say I understand.

“And Peter. God, he was just a kid. Pulled into all of this because of me. I thought he would be safe with the suit. I put everything I could think of in there. And it wasn’t enough.”

Tony broke out of his distant gaze to lock eyes with Steve.

“What do you do when your best effort isn’t good enough?” Tony asked, his voice cracking.

“No one can change the past, Tony. Not even you. We did what we could at the time, and all we can do now is help who’s left.”

Tony was silent, and it took Steve a couple seconds to realize that he had silent tears streaming down
his cheeks.

Steve stood, pulling the tray out of the way in favor of pulling Tony into a half-hug, half-conciliatory touch. Whatever it was, Tony accepted it.

“I miss them so much,” Tony sobbed.

“Me too.” Steve replied, blinking the own tears back.

There were no winners that night.

The second year was….

It just was.

The amount of times Steve had to say “It is what it is,” was too many.

But they were adapting, kind of.

Natasha was coming and going from Avengers tower. She was still trying to find survivors, reunite them with families. Track down Clint.

Bruce stopped by a couple times. He said he had a plan, something along the lines of how he had spent his whole life trying to control the Hulk. But maybe it wasn’t as necessary as he thought it was. Maybe they could coexist, to some extent. Steve had a feeling that it would be a while before they saw him again.

Rhodey spent more and more time away from Avengers tower. As the government reorganized, they were in need of someone to look after the army. Rhodey had been one of the first to volunteer.

Thor was mostly out of communication. Last they heard of him, he had claimed some ocean-side town as Asgard.

Carol updated at least once a month. Aside from taking half the lives in the universe, the stones were causing all sorts of strange disasters across the universe.

Even Tony was leaving the tower now and again. He was helping rebuild infrastructure that had been lost due to plane crashes, or from nuclear powerplants that had suddenly combusted from the power of the stones. He was in his lab a lot again, since SI was still somewhat up and running, and no longer had a CEO. He was building anything and everything that would aid in the relief effort.

They had gotten in touch with Wakanda. They were still reeling from the loss of so many of their leaders. But people were stepping up, and they were slowly recovering.

And Steve…did what he could. Captain America wasn’t really needed when there was hardly an America. So, he went out a couple hours every day and talked to people. It wasn’t much, but someone had to.

Tony and Steve talked regularly now. It wasn’t uncommon for them to be in the same room for extended periods of time, sometimes talking, sometimes not.

Steve liked watching him in the lab. He was completely in his element, and he seemed to hang on to it for dear life. It was like it was the only thing he was sure of anymore.
It reminded Steve of his art. Something to keep him grounded.

Steve often found himself hearing what happened on Titan. How they had gotten so close….

Even though Tony was eating on his own now, Steve would find himself at his door towards the end of the day, making sure.

They would often end up talking into late hours of the night. Steve would usually leave once he saw Tony’s eyes begin to droop from exhaustion.

One night, as Steve put his hand on the door handle to exit, Tony stopped him.

“Wait,” he mumbled, sleepily.

Steve turned, raising an eyebrow in question.

Tony looked uncomfortable, almost…embarrassed?

“Um. What if you stayed?” Tony asked, smaller than Steve’s ever heard from him. Something warm flooded Steve’s veins, and how could he refuse?

They didn’t touch, didn’t do anything. They simply slept, knowing for the first time in a long time that they wouldn’t wake up alone in the morning.

It wasn’t until year three that Steve finally saw progress in the world around him.

Not anything big, by any means. But small things.

People would actually smile at each other in grocery stores. He started seeing kids outside, playing. Laughter wasn’t so foreign a sound anymore.

And though they were making strides forward, there was still a constant ache of what wasn’t there. Every smile, every moment of fun made him hyperaware of the people that wouldn’t share any of it.

People were resilient though. Every day, they reminded Steve of why he had fought so long for them. They were stronger than he was, in some ways. The universal loss they had experienced made them determined to be stronger, nicer.

People would make food and give it away to complete strangers. Support groups became widespread. Grieving mothers and fathers would house orphaned children.

Each day, Steve felt like he had more incentive to leave the tower and help, because things were improving. Roads were remade, memorials were built. Supplies were sent overseas.

Most of the governments in the world were more or less finally organized. Some Eastern countries were still unsteady as different groups grappled for power. But overall, the nations were at a tentative peace with each other.

Tony would animatedly talk about projects and progress in the lab, and Steve would listen with an encouraging smile. Tony would still have his nights, and Steve would too, for that matter, where he would go silent, remembering. But there were good days sprinkled in, where it was easier to think about what is rather than what was.

They spent more nights in each other’s rooms than they did on their own. It was never pushed past
sharing a bed, or occasionally waking up in the others’ arms. The days were filled with casual
touches and lingering contact, but that was the extent of it. They weren’t rushed to put a label on it. It
was just something they both needed. To start and end days knowing that they weren’t alone.

By the time four years had passed, things were becoming normal again.

Not normal as in how things were before, but more like everyone was learning to adopt a new
normal. Like, sports games and concerts weren’t really happening anymore, because there weren’t
enough people to support them.

But people played sports with each other in front yards. People would sing or dance wherever they
could, and a small group could form, cheering them on.

Crime was very low. In fact, none of the team had touched their uniforms since the snap.

Natasha was still doing her thing, but with more help. She had established coordination between the
prominent leaders of the world, and was regularly getting updates. She wasn’t alone in her efforts
anymore. She mentioned that she had found Clint, but refused to elaborate.

Bruce and Thor were still gone. Natasha had rough tabs on them, but it was clear that they preferred
to be alone at the moment.

Carol still checked in. The effects of the stones were settling, but many populations were struggling.
Earth had, apparently, gotten lucky. Not every planet had been wiped evenly. Some civilizations
only had a few functioning members left in them. She aided in relocating them.

Rhodey was all over Earth. He had branched out from helping just the US. He seemed to be aiding
almost every army, creating an even stronger reason for the sustained peace.

Things were moving along.

And it was good.

But…

It still felt wrong. The world around him felt like a bone that hadn’t set right. Grinding and toughing
it out, rather than moving smoothly.

“Do you feel it too?” Tony had asked one time, setting down his wrench in the lab to look over at
Steve.

“What?” Steve asked, although he knew what Tony was getting at.

“The feeling of, no matter what we do, it’s never going to be the same? We can try to keep moving
along, but the world, the universe is just…it’s just—”

“Wrong?” Steve asked, sighing. He knew the truth. He managed to put it out of his mind while
helping others, but it was there.

Tony nodded.

“Most days I can just…I don’t know. Not think about it long enough to get stuff done. But everyday
we try to move forward…I just feel like we’re moving away from what we’re supposed to be
doing,” Tony said, sinking into a chair beside Steve.
“Which is?” Steve asked, taking Tony’s hand into his own.

“Trying to bring them back,” Tony whispered, as if it were a secret.

Steve sighed again. “Is that even possible? Without the stones?”

Tony was wearing a tight-lipped frown. “I…I don’t know. We’d have to have something powerful enough to warp time and space. I have no clue where to even begin with something like that.”

Steve tugged on Tony’s hand, and Tony stood up. He moved over to him and settled onto his lap, resting his chin on top of Steve’s head. Steve held him close.

“Maybe this feeling is just part of losing,” Steve admitted into Tony’s shoulder. It was Tony’s turn to sigh, and he felt the arms around his back tighten.

“I don’t know how much longer I can keep losing,” Tony replied. Steve didn’t know either.

That night, he was woken up by Tony’s frantic breathing.

“Tony?”

The only response he got was the ragged gasps that tore through Tony’s throat.

Steve sat up, pulling Tony into his arms. He rubbed his hands soothingly down Tony’s back. It wasn’t the first time he’d had a nightmare.

“Shh, it’s okay. It’s over. You’re here now, with me.” Steve whispered into Tony’s hair.

Tony mumbled something, but it was broken up by Steve’s shirt, which was quickly growing wet with tears.

“What?”

“No.”

“No, what?”

Tony pulled away, trying to articulate his thoughts.

“I…it wasn’t a nightmare.” Tony said, his breathing still uneven. Steve moved his hands into Tony’s hair, brushing it out of his face.

“Then what’s wrong?”

The moonlight filtered through the curtains, glinting off Tony’s tear filled eyes.

“It was just a dream. I… I woke up, and I thought all of this, these last four years, had just been a nightmare. And they were all back. They had never gone away. And then—and then I actually woke up. And I saw you here—”

Tony cut off, unable to continue.

“And you remembered it was real?” Steve asked, softly. Tony nodded, pulling Steve close to him. Close enough to feel the arc reactor dig into his own chest.
“I’m sorry, Tony,” Steve said, his hand resting on Tony’s ribs.

This seemed to throw Tony into another fit. His breathing doubled, and he pulled away again.

“Tony, listen to me. Listen to my breathing. Can you breathe with me?” Steve asked, exaggerating his breaths so that Tony could copy them.

Tony tried, and though his breaths were more stuttering and uneven, he was roughly able to match Steve’s breathing. Tony leaned forward, resting his forehead on Steve’s, his eyes closed. His hands found their way onto Steve’s back, and Steve realized that he was trying to feel Steve’s breathing, rather than just seeing it.

“You can do it. You’re almost there,” Steve reassured. He could feel the random hiccups in Tony’s breathing disappearing.

“I just…I need…” Tony said, between gasps.

“What do you need, Tony?” Steve pressed gently, putting his hand on Tony’s chest, careful to avoid the arc reactor.

Tony opened his eyes, and brown met blue in the dark of night, hardly inches from each other.

“I need you,” Tony whispered, his hands gripping onto Steve’s biceps.

The confession hung in the air for half a second before lips crashed onto lips.

Hands pulled and pushed and gripped and clawed. They pressed so close together, it was difficult to tell where one began and the other ended. Bodies moved against each other, needing. Clothes were discarded. Tongues and teeth met skin. Whimpers of want and moans of promise spilled into the night.

Afterwards, they held on to each other like being together was all they had. And they weren’t wrong.

Five years after the snap, Scott Lang showed up. Talking about the quantum realm. And time travel.

He was talking about bringing everyone back.

Tony had been skeptical at first, but it wasn’t long before the promise of bringing back the ones he loved overshadowed it.

And once Tony Stark sets his mind to something….well.

Less than a month after Scott’s return, Tony had figured out time travel.

“Shit!” Steve had heard from the lab. And he knew.

Steve had run in, finding Tony in front of a hologram glowing green.

Tony had leaped on to him, kissing the life out of him. Or, more realistically, kissing the life into him.

From there, everything had moved relatively fast.
He hadn’t seen Natasha’s death coming. It had hit him sharply.

Maybe he had been naïve to think that they would just get the stones and bring everyone back, without any if, ands, or buts.

He was proved sorely wrong.

He was reminded again that everything had a price.

And this one would only have a chance of being worth it if they succeeded.

Steve saw Dr. Strange hold up one finger at Tony.

*One in fourteen million, six hundred and five.*

Tony had talked about it all the time during late nights in the workshop.

*I know it was a low chance, but I was hoping we’d get lucky…*

*We didn’t.*

Steve watched as Tony registered what Strange was trying to communicate, and then looked over at Thanos.

His face fell.

Steve didn’t understand at first, his attention divided between Tony and the creatures that kept coming.

And then he saw Captain Danvers flung across the sky as Thanos reclaimed the gauntlet, and felt sick to the stomach at the realization.

They would win. Just not all of them.

Steve could not comprehend the concept of losing Tony. Not after all this.

In the blink of an eye, Tony was in front of Thanos, wrestling him for the gauntlet.

There was no way Steve was letting Tony do this.

The shield made a satisfying sound against the back of Thanos’ head. The titan turned, only to be greeted with Mjolnir smashing into his nose.

Thanos fell to the ground, and Steve caught his weapons before turning to see Tony taking on the weight of the infinity stones.

“They, Tony!” Steve called out. In a desperate effort to bide some time, Steve called down lightning to bury Thanos in an avalanche of rocks.

Steve wasted no time hurrying to Tony.

“What are you—” Tony began, obviously strained, but was cut short as Steve grabbed his hand. The sheer power of the stones immediately slammed into Steve. He could feel every square inch, every nerve, ever vein, being overwhelmed by the stones.
“Steve, let go. This is a one-way trip.” Tony uselessly struggled against Steve’s grip.

And Steve could see it in Tony’s eyes. That he had always known this was what was waiting for him. That even if he continued on after this, it would only haunt him, make him paranoid. Even if they succeeded, Tony would never feel like he won.

For Tony, the only way to truly win was to die.

But Steve would be damned if he would let him do it alone.

“I know it was a long time ago, but I promised you that if we lost, we’d lose together. I’m still standing by that, Tony.”

Tony’s eyebrows pulled together, but his concentration was ripped away as Thanos’ imposing form stood from the rubble.

They didn’t have time to negotiate.

Tony met Steve’s eyes one last time, and there were a million thoughts that passed between them in that moment. Things that were, things that would never be.

More than anything, there was a serene calm that passed over them, clashing with the power of the infinity stones that seemed to buzz under their skin.

They both needed this. They needed to end this.

No matter what it took.

Steve’s hand tightened around Tony’s, and he squeezed back.

“Together,” he said.

“Together.” Steve confirmed.

Tony raised his arm, unflinchingly meeting Thanos’ gaze. The titan had been approaching, but now he froze. A look crossed his face, not unsimilar to the one Steve had just felt. An acceptance of what was to come.

Steve closed his eyes.

He felt the snap more than he heard it.

There was pain. Of course, there was.

But it had been like having the super soldier serum administered. White hot, but there was a promise of something better that made it bearable.

The vibration that had been under his skin turned into what felt like eruptions, all over his body. He was burning, melting, freezing, flying, falling, dying. All at once.

He could feel Tony, withering through the stones with him. Not his body, but him. His soul.

Steve would never be able to explain what it was like. Tony was...blue. Light blue. And soft. Like the glow of his arc reactor.

Steve wished he could reach out and touch him, but he wasn’t sure if he had a body anymore. He felt
so distant, detached. The thought of having limbs felt incomprehensible.

But he could still feel. Specifically, he felt Tony’s hand in his. Anchoring.

Everything was completely silent. Maybe he had gone deaf. Maybe he was beyond sound. Whatever it was, it was nice after the cacophony of war.

Slowly, the high of the stones faded. And he became aware that he did, in fact, still have a body.

But it suddenly felt *so wrong*. Like he was trapped in his skin. Like he shouldn’t be there anymore.

He could feel the air against his raw wounds, as harsh as a carpet burn.

His heart was stuttering, and his lungs were failing.

Ah. It felt wrong to be here because he was dying.

His eyes were cracked open, but he was having a hard time registering what he was seeing. The world went in and out of focus around him.

A blessedly, somewhat empty battlefield greeted him in those brief moments of clarity. No Thanos. No giant monsters.

No threat.

The fight was over. The one he had been fighting for so long.

A silent tear rolled down his cheek, managing to irritate and soothe his skin at the same time.

He was somewhat aware of the bodies rushing up to him.

Sam and Bucky’s hands found him, careful touches, hardly grasping him.

“Steve?”

They were so far away. Everything was.

He was only aware of…

*Tony.*

Was he dying too?

“Hey, Steve. Bud? I…I don’t know if you can hear me, but it’s over. You did it.”

Steve wasn’t sure if he’d ever heard Bucky sound unsure. A brief imprint of long hair and the sun glinting off a metal arm was all he registered.

He distantly heard a smaller, more distressed voice.

“We won, Mr. Stark. We won! You did it, sir…”

His ears were ringing. But he had to do something…what was it?

*Sam.*

He wanted to speak, but his lips weren’t complying.
Turning his head took a great effort, but he found Sam’s blurred silhouette. He used what felt like the last of his strength to push the shield into his arms.

He wished he could see his reaction, but everything was fading, and he should fight it but…

Fighting was something he’d done a lot of. Maybe it was time to stop.

Steve managed to turn his neck one last time, to find Tony’s eyes already staring at him.

He was smiling.

Steve thinks he is too.

The last thing Steve felt wasn’t the war, or the fight, or the smell of death. It was Tony’s hand in his, and the unknown, but welcome knowledge that everything was finally right.

End Notes

Thank you for reading this unnecessarily long fic. Let me know what you think!

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