Six year old Tony Stark couldn't do anything but watch as strangers break into his home and try to force their way into Howard's workshop. When their plans failed they took Tony with them and hoped he was worth something.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

I did something similar to this earlier but deleted it because I didn't like how it was going so I'm rewriting it. Hope you like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony always had trouble sleeping. During the night he would make his way down to the kitchen and pull a chair up to the counter to reach a cup and pour himself a glass of water. Most nights his dad was up late in his workshop and he could see the light flooding the hall and hear him cursing and banging things together. This night was different, his parents were out of town and left him alone with his nanny and the maids.

He got his glass of water and went to push his chair back towards the table when he saw the woman standing outside the large glass doors that led to the backyard. She was soaking wet from the rain and smiled as she pointed towards the doorknob. He didn’t recognize her, he didn’t think she worked anywhere in the house so he didn’t move towards the door. After a few minutes a man stepped in next to her and fiddled with the door.

“Move, kid.” She said, pushing past him once he unlocked the door. Three men appeared behind her, turning from behind the wall and rushing in through the door.

“I could have picked that lock just fine.” One of the men said, pulling his dripping hood off of his head.

“Less suspicious without the forced entry. Someone watch the kid so he doesn’t wake anyone.” The woman said and pulled off her raincoat, replacing it with a bandana over her mouth. “He wasn’t supposed to be here. What kind of parents don’t take a six year old with them when they go out of town?”

One of the men shrugged. “Who cares? He’s here. Just see if he can be useful, Buck.”

Everyone stripped out of their wet coats and boots and covered their faces before continuing through the house. They put their wet clothes in a large bag and put on new pairs of boots. Tony worried his cup between his hands as they quickly exited the kitchen. He glanced up at the man who had stayed behind with him.

“Do you need something? Papa’s not here if you’re looking for him so you’ll have to come back.” Tony said. The man looked down at him and sighed. He grabbed him by the arms and lifted him up to sit on the table. “That’s rude. You shouldn’t grab people without their permission. That’s what my mama says.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” The man said, kneeling down to look him in the eye. “You’re daddy actually sent us to pick up a few things. Do you think you can show me where he works?”

Tony shook his head and rubbed his tired eyes with his free hand. He knew the rules and he didn’t trust these people. He made a quick glance at the security camera in the corner of the kitchen. It was facing away from the back door but saw most of the room. The people hadn’t shown their
faces since they got in so it was useless and they wore hoods when they were outside so those cameras probably didn’t see their faces either.

“Sir, you seem nice but I’ve known my papa longer than I’ve known you and he don’t let anyone in there. I’ve only been a few times.” Tony said. “Also, you guys are probably robbers. That’s stupid because there’s security all over the place because my papa is a genius. I’m probably smarter than you at this point.”

The man sighed again but didn’t let go of his tight hold on his arm. Tony tried to wiggle free, jumping down from the table and pulling lightly towards the door. The man yanked him back and shook him slightly. He didn’t like these people, especially the one who was hurting his arm with too strong of a grip and was growing more angry at the moment. Tony glanced at the back door quickly. It was still raining heavily but he didn’t mind. He liked the rain and it was only a short walk to his Aunt Peggy’s house. All he had to do was get free and make a run for it.

“Papa didn’t send you, did he?” Tony asked.

“Sure he did. Just needs us to pick up something from his office.” He said. “You can trust us. My name is Buck and I’m a nice man. Look, we even took off all our wet shoes so we wouldn’t track footprints all over your big nice house. Wouldn’t that make your mom happy?”

“I think she would be happy with people not breaking into her house.” Tony said. His head snapped back from the force of the hand slapping across his face. Tony was tempted to keep talking, anger bubbling inside of him but he knew that would only make it worse, angering him more. He dropped his head and looked to the floor silently.

Tony glanced up towards the door every few minutes. Buck was pacing around the kitchen so he figured he wouldn’t notice right away if he made a run for it. Tony knew the only problem was that he would have to jump over the fence that circled the property. He took a single step towards the door when one of the other men walked back in. This one was shorter than Buck but looked strong and it made Tony nervous.

“When they said the Starks were loaded I never imagined this.” He said. “You should see that woman’s jewelry collection.”

“Did you get enough?” Buck asked, glaring over at Tony. The man shrugged.

“Most likely. We probably got enough to pay off our debt and then retire happily.” He said.

“You shouldn’t take stuff that’s not yours.” Tony said, glancing between them. “It’s dishonest. I think I should leave. I’ll just go for a walk because people don’t come over in the middle of the night unless they’re doing something bad or want to be very rude and I’m not supposed to talk to bad people or rude people.” He yawned as he made another small step towards the door.

Tony backed away quickly as the man rushed towards him, grabbing him by the arms gently and dragging him down the hall. They stopped in front of the metal door that led to Howard’s workshop, locked by a keypad.

“Listen buddy, I don’t hurt kids. Not even rude, rich kids. So just tell us the code to get in here and we’ll be on our way.” The man said, holding Tony out towards the door.

Tony didn’t know the code to get in. His dad didn’t even say ‘good morning’ to him most days let alone the code to get into his workshop. He only saw a few of the things that were in there, a bunch of papers he had trouble reading, chunks of metal welded together with wires sticking out, and a
few of his cars. When Tony was allowed down there he would just sit in one of his dad’s cars, mostly the red one, and watch him work from afar. He still didn’t know how to get in though.

Tony shrugged. With an angry growl he was shoved into Buck’s arms. “What’s your birthday, kid?” The other man asked.

“May 29th.” Tony said, frowning as they punched in the date and it was rejected.

“Year?” He asked.

“I’m six.” Tony said.

He punched in the year and growled quietly as the light shone red. He started punching in random numbers. Tony looked down the hall towards the main entrance. The woman he had seen earlier and the third man were there piling a few bags by the door and waiting.

He rubbed his stinging cheek and looked up the stairs. He wondered if he yelled loud enough if he could wake up anyone else. Tony opened his mouth and inhaled just as the alarm went off, a long high-pitched wail blocking out whatever scream he tried to make. He looked back at the man in front of the keypad, red light blinking frantically above it.

A strong arm wrapped around Tony’s waist and lifted him into the air, rushing him to the door. He kicked at Buck’s chest, banging his fists against the man’s head. As they rushed out the front door and into the freezing rain he called for help, begged for him mom, dad, Jarvis, Aunt Peggy, anyone to come get him.

The three others grabbed a bag and rushed after them. They ran down the gravel driveway down to the gate and pushed it open slightly.

“Why the fuck did you take the kid, Chisholm?” The woman asked. “Kidnapping wasn’t part of the plan.”

“We need $500,000. Unless you guys managed to scrounge up that much in less than an hour, we could use him. Those weapons designs could have gone for a lot but maybe a ransom demand could go for just as much.” Buck said as he walked up to a car parked on the side of the road a block away from the house.

He opened the door and shoved Tony into the backseat, shoving him against a blond boy reading by flashlight. Tony looked at him and back at Buck as he slid in next to him.

“You should just let me go now. You’re not going to get anything and I can be really annoying.” Tony said. Once they had thrown the bags into the trunk they all piled into the car and drove off.

“I kept watch, no one went up to the house.” The boy said, looking between everyone.

Bucky held down Tony’s arms as a police car sped past. Tony looked back at it. “What? You watched to make sure the good guys don’t show up? That’s not very nice. Why would you brag about that?” He muttered.

“I did what I was told. It seemed to work out just fine for me except now I have to put up with you.” The boy said, frowning. He turned his attention away from Tony and towards one of the men in the front seat. “Jacques, did you get everything you needed?”

“We didn’t get to stay long.” He said bitterly from the driver’s seat. Tony looked up at him, he
now knew the names of two of them. Buck and Jacques. The woman and the third man were still a mystery. The nameless man sighed and shook his head.

“Whatever was in Stark’s workshop would be worth a lot more than a few pieces of jewelry and the silver forks they have lying around.” He said. “It’s not my fault the kid didn’t want to tell us how to get in. Besides, you shouldn’t get mad at me. You’re the one who gambled us into this kind of debt.”

Tony watched them bicker for a few minutes as they drove out of the city and into the surrounding forest. He shivered slightly, blaming it on his wet clothes from the cold rain and looked out the window. Tony decided he would try to open the boy’s door and jump out. No one would be able to reach him in time and he could run off and hide in the trees.

He made a quick jump for the door, being kicked back by the boy and was quickly pulled back by Buck. “Hey, you got my book wet.” The boy said, locking the door quickly and glaring at Tony.

Buck’s arms pulled around him tightly, pinning Tony’s arms to his side. Tony kicked at the seats and yelled loudly. A hand clamped down over his mouth and held it closed firmly, not allowing him to open it and bite him.

They pulled up to a cabin and Tony was dragged inside. He was thrown onto the torn up couch as everyone else started bring everything in. The bags were small, mostly empty except for the one that held their clothes. The woman started hanging up the wet raincoats and lining up the boots to dry as Buck started to light a fire in the fireplace.

“Clint, keep an eye on the kid. Make sure he doesn’t run off.” Jacques said as he ripped open a bag and poured out its contents. Tony frowned when he saw the pile of his mother’s jewelry.

“That’s the necklace papa gave my mom for their anniversary. You can’t have that.” Tony said, reaching forward quickly. His hand was smacked away roughly and the boy, Clint, pulled him back to sit on the couch. “You guys are the worst people I’ve ever met. And you smell funny, the rain is probably the closest thing you’ve had to a shower in months.”

Clint covered his mouth quickly and dragged him towards a bedroom. He locked the door behind them quickly. Tony frowned at the dusty, ratty bed and the rotted wood on the walls of the cabin.

“Do you ever shut up?” Clint asked, walking over to the wall. He put his foot on the groove where two logs met and started to climb up. He went up towards the ceiling and sat down on an exposed beam.

Clint paused as the wood creaked under his weight and then sat back against the wall and watched Tony intently. “You’re just going to get yourself into worse trouble.”

“Hey, they broke into my house and kidnapped me!” Tony said angrily. “I just want to go home with my stuff and be left alone.”

“Well, they need it. If they don’t pay up soon they’ll be in big trouble.” Clint said. “They’re not that bad. They’re just stressed. Go easy on them and they’ll let you go home once they have what they need.”

Tony frowned up at the kid by the ceiling. “Not that bad?” He muttered and sat down next to the bed, back to Clint.

Chapter End Notes
Please comment. I love comments almost as much as I love pizza. It makes me feel happy.
Chapter Notes

New Chapter, yay! I'm glad you guys seem to like it so far! I'll keep doing my best, I love AU.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time morning came around it had stopped raining, leaving the ground slick with deep mud and the sky grey. Tony had refused to go back to sleep that night, listening warily to the muffled voices on the other side of the door and watching Clint read through his book up by the ceiling. Once the rain had stopped and the clouds parted slightly, the woman and Buck drove off with the bags full of things from Tony’s home. He watched them leave as Clint dragged him out into the woods, Jacques following behind slowly, to gather firewood. He frowned as he thought of all his mother’s jewelry and the silver plated dishes his dad had bought from Italy and numerous other things driving away to never be seen again.

“Come on, Tony. I know it’s wet but you’re going to want to look for pine trees or birch. Those usually stay dry and burn easily.” Clint said, yanking on his arm.

Tony didn’t budge and just dug his feet deeper into the mud.

Clint scowled. Tony had left home in only his pajamas so Clint had put him in his clothes and his only pair of shoes besides the rubber boots Clint wore. He was uncomfortable and cold. The clothes were too big, sleeves rolled up and socks stuffed in the toes of the shoes the help them fit Tony’s much smaller body.

“They really aren’t that bad.” Clint said, handing Tony another pile of birch bark. He had been glaring at Jacques who was standing a few feet away, watching them closely.

“What? They your parents?” Tony asked. He didn’t think Clint really looked like any of them but that would explain why he was here. Clint laughed slightly and shook his head.

“Nah. But they are like family. They take care of me and my brother and they teach me a lot so it’s fine.” Clint said, scratching the back of his head and glancing over to Tony. “They’re definitely a lot nicer than my parents.”

Tony pouted. He didn’t understand and he usually understood everything. Was Clint implying that if parents weren’t nice then he could get a new family? Tony didn’t like the idea at all, especially since these people were terrible anyway.

He glanced off into the woods, taking every handful of sticks and leaves that was passed over to him. Tony didn’t think much about it, he just shoved all the firewood into Clint’s face and took off into the forest. He slipped over the mud and wet leaves but pushed himself up quickly and continued to run.

He was starting to think that he had gotten away from them when Jacques wrapped an arm around his waist, lifted him into the air, and Tony kicked as hard as he could. Jacques let out a pained groan as his foot connected and dropped him hard onto the ground. Tony gasped and curled into himself at the impact. Clint ran up next to Jacques before kneeling down to check on Tony.
“You’re okay.” He said, examining him closely. Clint held out his hand to help him up. Tony pushed it away and stayed in the mud.

“Don’t run off.” Jacques said firmly. “You’ll go home eventually, we just have to be sure.”

“Promise?” Tony asked. Jacques nodded but Tony just turned to look at Clint.

“Yeah, I promise you’ll go home eventually.” He said, holding his hand out again. Tony took it and allowed himself to be pulled out of the mud. Clint promised and although he hung out with thieves and kidnappers that he probably did think ‘weren’t that bad’ but he hadn’t lied about anything yet.

Clint was ordered to take him back to the cabin and just lock him in the room, no longer having the privilege to go outside. With a harsh push Jacques sent Tony forward towards the cabin while he began to recollect the firewood. He walked slowly, mostly trying to be careful not to slip in the mud again in his too long jeans and shoes that were several sizes too big but also to make it difficult for them. It worked back at home, if he annoyed his parents they would make him leave, if he annoyed these people then they would get rid of him faster.

“They’re really as delightful as you said.” Tony said with fake cheerfulness as he followed Clint back into the room from the night before. “No wonder you follow them ‘round like a puppy, they’re angels.”

Clint growled slightly as he pushed Tony down onto the floor gently to sit and pulled on his hands. He had scrapped them slightly during his failed escape when he slipped. They stung because he was covered head to toe in mud and he could feel bruises forming on his side from where he had hit the ground.

“They aren’t perfect but they’re not evil. They’re going to let you go home soon, better than you running away and wandering around in the woods for days.” Clint said as he retrieved the pajamas Tony wore the night before and then dragged him up off the floor and out to the bathroom.

There wasn’t any running water. Tony wasn’t surprised since there wasn’t any electricity either. Clint told him to take off the dirty clothes he was wearing and he quickly changed into his warm, dry pajamas. He yelped as Clint threw a wet towel over his head to clean off all the mud from his hair and face.

“That’s freezing! Don’t you guys have hot water? Did you guys forget to get hot water while you were skipping your lessons in manners and what to do in someone else’s home, like not take their things and kids?” Tony barked out angrily as he threw the towel back at Clint.

Clint ignored him and continued to try to clean him off, moving Tony’s arms out of the way as he continued to try to reach up to swat away the towel. Once his head was clean he moved on to Tony’s hands, still cut up and muddy. Tony didn’t try to pull away this time. He let Clint wash off his hands before dragging him back to the room.

He sat him down on the bed as he went to dig through his duffle bag, returning with a first aid kit. He took Tony’s hands gingerly and rubbed disinfectant on them and wrapped the tiny scratches with bandaids before returning everything with his bag.

“You’re really weird.” Tony muttered. “Who kidnaps someone and then takes care of them?”

Clint shrugged and climbed back up the walls to the exposed beams by the ceiling. He dropped down the book he had been reading the night earlier and it hit the floor with a slight thud. Tony
didn’t pay much attention to it but Clint had jumped back down to the ground and was trying to hand it to him.

“I finished it last night when you refused to sleep. It’s good, has dragons and trolls and stuff.” Clint said. Tony took it and tried to read the title. It wasn’t a word he knew and sounding it out was taking more time than he cared to admit so he just decided to open it and get started.

It was difficult. Tony figured that whatever this fantasy novel was either made up a bunch of words or just used a bunch of really hard ones. He sounded out as many words as he could before tossing it back to the boy sitting next to him. It fell against the bed with a dull thud.

“It’s stupid. Doesn’t even make sense.” Tony said. Clint frowned as he glanced down at the book. “When are they going to send me home?”

Clint shrugged. “I don’t know. Probably before me, Buck, and Jacques go home.” He said. “Then the other two guys will take their share and disappear in to whatever cave they sprouted from.”

“They’re not your friends?” Tony asked as he went to sit by the window. It hadn’t started raining against but the grey clouds had darkened and covered the sky again. “I thought they were your new family.”

“Just Buck and Jacques. They stay at the circus with my brother and me. These other guys are just friends Buck knows that are here to help him get money to pay off his gambling debts. I don’t like them.” Clint said, reopening the book and looking down at it as he walked over to sit by Tony. “This book totally isn’t stupid. Did you miss the part where I said there were dragons in it?”

Tony leaned towards him, glancing over Clint’s shoulder. “You probably shouldn’t tell me about where you and your family live, not that smart for a kidnapper.” Tony said, Clint just shrugged again. Tony pointed down at the page. “See, those are probably made up words. It’s a stupid book.”

“It says ‘sapphire amulet’ and Dr. Seuss made up words all the time and his books were gold.” Clint said. Tony still frowned down at the book.

“Reading is lame. Just talk about where you live again so I know what to tell the police.” Tony said.

Clint shook his head and walked back to the wall. He climbed back up to the beam on the ceiling and continued to watch him. Tony was hungry. He hadn’t eaten since dinner the night before and no one had offered him food yet and he wasn’t sure if he would even take it. His mom always were annoyed when he refused to eat something when they were out, said it was rude and would immediately send him to his room whenever they returned home. They couldn’t force him to eat here, it might just annoy them too.

Tony went back to staring out the window. It was quickly growing darker and the car came back up the small dirt road up to the cabin. His first thought was that they had come back to get him and drive him back. He stood up to walk out to meet them but Clint shook his head.

Buck and the woman didn’t have anything with them, not everything they had taken from Tony’s house or anything to eat, but they looked angry. He flinched as the door slammed loudly and yelling filled the cabin on the other side of the door. He didn’t move from the window until the one man he didn’t have a name for yet came in and grabbed him by the arm to drag him out into the living room.
Clint followed behind quickly, jumping down silently from the ceiling and taking a seat in the corner. Tony didn’t say anything as they all stood around him when they sat him on the couch. A fire burned steadily in the fireplace with Jacques covered in mud and the woman held a cell phone tightly in her hand.

“What do you think you can get us $200,000?” She asked firmly. Tony shrugged and she sighed, typing quickly on her phone. “Let’s hope you are. God knows they have enough to pay that much for you.”

Tony took the phone as she shoved it in his face. He recognized the voice that talked quietly on the other end. It was his mother, her worried voice sounded out through the speaker and asked who was calling and what he wanted and said she was going to get Howard.

“Mama, do I get to come home now? They said I could soon but they’re not letting me and they’re all mean except for-.” The phone was ripped from his hand quickly as the woman started speaking to his mother, demanding payment for his safe return.

Tony smiled over at Clint. He was going home. This had to mean that they were taking him home where he wouldn’t be pushed around by strangers and yelled at for no reason. He could go back to his warm bed and familiar house where Jarvis would read to him and not get upset that he couldn’t read and he wouldn’t have to look for dry sticks for a fire. He hated these people and he hated this cabin and was happy to be going home.

She hung up angrily and glared at him. “They won’t pay it.” Tony looked up at her. Everyone in the room tensed up and he didn’t know what to do.

Jacques grabbed him angrily, lifting him by the arms and dragging him out of the cabin and back into the woods. Tony thought at first that he was being taken out to the car but they turned drastically and went deeper into the woods. He screamed loudly, kicking at the man holding him until he was lifted higher and his arms and legs were pinned to his chest.

He was dropped silently and lifted his head to look up at the man. Tony froze when he saw the gun pointed at him. “You’re worthless. We just needed $200,000 and they won’t even pay that for you.” Clint stepped in quickly, knocking the gun out of the way and standing between them. “Move kid. We didn’t get enough. We don’t have enough. If we can’t pay it then we’re all dead.”

Clint didn’t move as he crossed his arms. Tony yanked lightly on the boy’s shirt as he pulled himself up and looked over at the rest of the group that had followed them out. They were whispering furiously and Jacques turned to shout angrily into the forest. “They’re not looking. You can just let me leave now and I’ll be fine.” Tony whispered. Clint hesitated before he shook his head.

“He wouldn’t shoot you, he’s just angry and stressed. Don’t worry.” He said. Tony groaned and looked back around. Everyone else was nodding and Tony made a quick look back into the woods, contemplating his chances of making it to a road or living out there for long in the cold and the rain if he just ran now.

“I have an idea of what we can do with him.” The woman said. “Just keep your shit together, Duquesne, and you and Chisholm and your little student can go back to the carnival you guys crawled out of.”

Chapter End Notes
I'll update as soon as I can, fall break is coming up so I'll have a lot of free time. Feel free to comment. I love comments and it let's me know what you guys think and how you feel.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

New chappie! Thank you so much for the response this is getting!!! Keep it up, I'm glad you guys like it.
Also, sorry this took longer than I expected it to. My sister kicked my hand and it hurt so bad.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As soon as they made it back to the cabin Clint dragged them back to the room and sat him down on the floor in the corner. Tony didn’t feel like talking. He was cold and wet and didn’t protest when Clint wrapped him up in the dirty blanket from the bed. He was ready to go home.

“You should sleep. You’ve been up all night.” Clint muttered. Tony shook his head. The temperature was beginning to drop as the sun went down and he pulled the blanket close. He looked up to the window at the sound of a few raindrops hitting the glass, it was raining again.

He curled into the side of the wall and listened to the silent drumming against the house and the low murmurs outside the door. Tony knew they were talking about him. Clint promised that he would go home but Jacques pointed a gun in his face and he didn’t feel safe anymore. A loud crack of thunder blocked out all other noise and Clint dropped his bag, his clothes spilling across the floor and he ran back over to Tony. It warmed up quickly underneath the dusty blanket with both of them covered by it.

“Are you scared of thunder?” Tony asked as the voices outside stopped. They must have been finished with whatever they were discussing. “That’s adorable.”

“Shut up. No. It’s just cold so I’m trying to keep warm. Just go to sleep.” Clint said. Tony shook his head and felt him tense slightly next to him as the rain pounded harder against the cabin. “Fine, stay up all night again. But you’ll be on your second night with no sleep and I don’t deal with zombies.”

“I can’t sleep. Jarvis reads me a story before I go to bed.” Tony said as thunder shook the house. The blanket was yanked up slightly as Clint pulled it closer to himself.

“Sorry. I just don’t like loud things.” He muttered. He looked up at the ceiling for a few minutes, waiting for more thunder or lightning to ruin the calm. Clint pulled an energy bar out from under the blanket and held it out to Tony. “You want a story? Okay, I’ll tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a tired little ten year old who met a really little boy who refused to go to sleep. Because sometimes at night it could get loud and scary that brave, handsome kid didn’t want to leave the little boy awake by himself so he stayed up with him and became even more tired. This kid gets angry when he doesn’t sleep for a long time so he just wants to know what he can do to help the little boy to feel safe enough to go to sleep.”

Tony chuckled softly. It wasn’t a very good story in his opinion, the stories Jarvis told him always had people going on adventures and battles that seemed hopeless and heroes pulling through dark times. He understood, though. Clint was sleepy. He could see it in the way his eyes drooped as he spoke, only to shoot back open at a flash of lightning or distant boom of thunder.
“Why are you scared of loud noises?” Tony asked. Clint shrugged.

“I used to know a really loud person and whenever he would be really loud he would be mean too.” He said. “Please go to sleep, I’ll probably be able to sleep then too. No, wait. You’re probably just hungry.”

Clint pulled a few granola bars out of his pocket and held them out. He was right, Tony was hungry. He hadn’t eaten since dinner the night he was taken and he probably would be able to fall asleep much easier if he wasn’t so hungry. However, Tony didn’t want to sleep. Jacques was close by, waving his gun around and he didn’t want to be asleep and alone surrounded by people he didn’t know in a place he had never been before.

“No thanks. I’ll eat when I go home. Tomorrow’s Monday and we have Italian food on Mondays.” Tony said. Clint sighed and laid his head back against the wall.

“Does Jarvis cook it? He reads you bed time stories so it makes sense.” He asked, pausing as the rain softened slightly. Tony nodded. “Where’s your mom?”

“She’s gone a lot. She does a lot of charity work when papa is really busy so I don’t see her often. And he’s usually at his office working for the company or down in his workshop working on his projects. So I have Jarvis.” Tony said calmly. Clint frowned at him. “He’s the butler. I do have a nanny but she just makes sure I don’t do anything I’m not supposed to. Jarvis makes all my food and tells me stories and tucks me in. He’s great.”

Tony yawned loudly and continued talking in an incoherent mumble. Clint sighed and stood up quickly to tuck the covers in closer around the boy. He froze for a moment as a low rumble sounded in the distance, the storm was far away now and the thunder sounded distant. Satisfied that he wouldn’t have to deal with anymore loud noises for the night he tucked himself in close to Tony and let the tired boy rest his head against his shoulder. The bed would have probably been more comfortable that sleeping in the corner but Clint preferred it over the dirty bed that was there when they found the cabin.

He pulled a few granola bars out of his pocket and put them in the pocket of Tony’s pajama pants. He wasn’t sure what would happen tomorrow but they were supposed to be driving back soon and if he didn’t have time to offer Tony breakfast he wanted to make sure he had it.

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Tony opened his eyes groggily as he was lifted into the air. He blinked slowly to see Clint still sleeping, leaning further into the corner as he slowly slid down the wall due to his sudden absence. Judging by the bright light coming in through the window it was late morning. Tony rubbed his eyes tiredly as he allowed himself to be carried outside the cabin.

His eyes snapped shut as the sun beat down onto his face. He buried his face into the shoulder of the man that was carrying him and whimpered.

“Am I going home now?” Tony muttered. He opened one eye to see a tired Clint stumbling out of the door after them. Blinking to force away all exhausting, Tony tried to push himself off of the person holding tightly to him. “Clint, am I going home?” He called out.

“I don’t…” Clint said as Buck walked out of the cabin to stop him.

Tony was about to call out to him when he was thrown into the back of the car. Buck and Jacques didn’t get in with him, just the woman and the other man. The doors locked quickly and Tony
crawled to the windows just in time to see Clint’s face drop with Buck muttering to him before they drove away. Whatever he was saying Clint didn’t seem happy about it and Tony started to worry as the cabin was blocked from view.

The drive out of the forest wasn’t very long. Tony buckled his seatbelt and hummed while he thought of everything he would do once he finally got home. He wouldn’t need to sleep, he had slept all night and all through the morning so he would put that off until he ate something. It had almost been two days since he ate and once he got home Tony was hoping Jarvis would be the one to cook for him because his food was the best. However, his parents should be back from their trip by now. Whenever his mom was home and Tony was hurt or upset she would cook him dinner. It was never as good as Jarvis’s meals but Tony still loved it.

They pulled into a small town and Tony looked out the window. It wasn’t the town he lived in but it was probably where they were coming to pick him up. They parked the car on the side of the road and pulled him out quickly, dragging him into a small diner.

“There we meeting them here? I can go home now?” Tony asked. They ignored him and pulled him into a booth. He smiled up at the waitress who came to take their order.

“Just coffee for us. Would you like something, kiddo?” The man asked, smiling over at Tony.

“No, I’m waiting until I get home. Don’t call me ‘kiddo’. I’m way too adorable to be your kid.” Tony muttered. The woman scowled as the man chuckled lightly.

“Ha, kids. Sorry, we had a long road trip and he’s still tired.” He said. The waitress nodded and walked away. He turned to Tony after she left and whispered angrily. “You’re going to shut your mouth for a few hours or we’re just going to follow the old plan and shoot you in the face.”

Tony’s mouth snapped shut and looked down at the table. He didn’t like the gun. Howard built guns and weapons, he knew what they did and the last thing he wanted was another one pointed at him. Tony didn’t want to die. He wasn’t quite sure what it meant or what would happen if he did but he knew it would hurt and he always tried to avoid as much pain as possible.

He looked up from the table as a man slid into the booth next to him. Tony’s face was plastered over the front page of the newspaper he was holding. He looked down at Tony, studying him closely before turning back towards the other two, who were silently sipping at his coffee.

“I said I would pay for weapon designs.” He said. Tony tried to listen carefully through the man’s thick accent.

“This is Howard Stark’s son, Mr. Mesman.” The woman whispered. “Not only is the kid renowned for being a child genius but maybe he knows something.”

The man turned back to him, squinting as he stared him down. Tony looked back at him, Mr. Mesman. He was wearing a suit and whenever he saw someone in a suit it was one of his dad’s important business clients. He wasn’t allowed to be rude to them and looking away while they were trying to talk was considered rude. Tony felt nervous sitting there in his pajamas.

“What’s your name?” He asked.

“Anthony Edward Stark.” Tony said quickly. He was quickly shushed with a wave of the woman’s hand and the man continued to look at him closely. “Tony, sir.”

“Sir? That’s the most polite thing he’s ever said.” The woman said.
“Are you rude, boy?” Mr. Mesman asked. Tony shrugged. “Don’t shake your shoulders, boy. It’s unbefitting.”

“Sorry. My mama says I’m too rude to strangers but papa taught me to be respectful to important people. I learned that lesson, sir.” Tony said quickly. Mr. Mesman seemed pleased and nodded.

He wrote down quickly onto a napkin and passed it over to him with a pen. Tony frowned at it, not because it was hard but because it was too easy. All he had to do was find the value of x and he quickly passed it back to Mr. Mesman who nodded again.

“If you prove not to be too much of a problem you might be worth the investment. How old are you?” He asked quietly. Tony spoke up quickly.

“I’m six. I can do a lot harder math than that. I’m on calculus with my tutor.” He said proudly. Howard always told him not to act prideful but Tony didn’t think it was a problem showing off how smart he was because his dad always brought it up to everyone. “I’m supposed to meet my tutor today anyway. Are you here to take me home?”

Mr. Mesman nodded after a moment and stood up. He waved for Tony to follow and they all stood up to leave. They paid for their coffee and walked out to the cars. Mr. Mesman handed the two a large bag and nodded.

“He better be worth it.” He said firmly and opened his car door for Tony.

“If not you could just hold him for a few weeks and make another ransom demand. Might work after some time.”

Tony bounced in his seat happily, buckling his seatbelt and watching as the man slid into the backseat next to him and instructed his driver to leave. He looked out the window quietly as the hours passed and the drove out of town and past the forest and into another town.

“Can I ask a question?” Tony said quietly. Mr. Mesman looked up from his newspaper and nodded. “When will we be getting to my house?”

“We’re not going to your house. I have a private jet, we’re going to my home in the Netherlands. I have big plans for you.” He said, turning back to his paper.

“But you said you were taking me home. Clint promised.” Tony said.

“People lie. You should get used that, probably pick up the habit yourself.” Mr. Mesman said.

Tony looked back out the window. The car wasn’t moving too fast for him to jump out but it was locked and he had no idea where he was. He looked back over at Mr. Mesman and frowned. “What do you want?”

“I want you to do everything I tell you to do. If I tell you to learn something, you learn it. I want you to be able to do so much more than you are doing now. I know potential when I see it and when I’m done with you we’ll be able to change the world together. Just do everything I say.” Mr. Mesman said, folding up his paper as they turned into the airport.

Tony unbuckled his seatbelt and looked out the window at the distant security guards. He could make a run for it. He could get a head start, he could make it. “If I don’t?” He muttered.

“You’ll be punished until you learn.”
Chapter End Notes

That part is done. It took a lot longer than I thought it would to write but there it is. I hope it's not too terrible. Update again soon.
Comment, I love comments and they make me happy and it's like wonderful little compliments. :D
Chapter 4

Tony was hungry. He left the plate of food sitting on the floor in the corner as he sat in the empty room and waited for someone to come and get him. After the plane landed Mesman drove him out to this house in the middle of the country and locked him in a small room upstairs. It was entirely empty except for the tiny bed by the window and no one came up to see him except for once when a woman brought up a plate of food.

The window looked out over the back of the property. There was a large stone gate that covered the lawn and Tony could just see over it at the miles of hills and trees. The worst part was that the sky was clear and growing dark quickly while the ground was perfectly dry. It was wet and rainy back home, Tony preferred it that way. If everything was so drastically different then they must have flown far.

“Anthony, ik heb kleren voor je gebracht.” The woman said as she opened the door with a small pile of clothes in one hand. She walked in and placed the clothes on the bed before returning to the door.

“What’s your name?” Tony asked quickly.

She paused for a moment, tilting her head before closing the door and leaving him alone again. He pulled off his shirt and picked up the clothes left on the bed. It was just a simple shirt with a pair of sweatpants but it was a soft, clean cotton and after days of walking around in clothes either too big or too dirty Tony thought it would be nice to change. Two granola bars fell from the pockets of his pajama pants when he put on his new pants.

Tony looked down at them and frowned. Clint must have left them there. It had been days since his last meal and although he had been refusing to eat his stomach was tightening up drastically in painful hunger. He dropped to the ground quickly and ripped open the wrapper, stuffing the bar into his mouth. He barely managed to finish it before he was ripping open the second one.

He threw his trash on the ground and moved towards the plate he left in the corner. Whatever it was it had gone cold and turned into a bland mush from hours of just sitting on the plate shoved into the corner. Tony didn’t care. He ate it and then pushed the plate back into the corner before retreating back to the bed.

He pulled the covers over his head and looked up at the wood headboard. Tony didn’t feel full but he also didn’t feel like he was starving either so he thought of home. They were taking too long. Tony knew they must have been looking, it had only been a few days and his parents couldn’t have forgotten him so easily. He pulled the blanket close as a chill ran up his spine.

“They forgot about me.” He whispered. Howard and Maria were always so busy that they hardly ever noticed he was there unless he did something wrong. Jarvis was always there though, taking
care of him. Aunt Peggy too, Tony knew that they were probably looking.

He turned back to the wooden headboard. He was going to learn everyone’s names for when he’s rescued. Aunt Peggy told him that bad people went to jail and Tony wasn’t stupid enough to think that what was happening was okay. He was carving all the names into the dark wood of the bed with his thumbnail so he could remember. Buck, Jacques, Clint, and Mesman were scratched lightly into the wood.

He kept at it for several hours until the names stood out against the wood, a list of everyone who had helped take him and keep him away from home. Tony knew he probably spelt Jacques and Mesman wrong but as long as it was there to remind him then it didn’t matter. He only wished he knew the names of the other two who helped take him.

When morning came the same woman who came to give him his dinner and his clothes shook him awake and spoke quickly. Tony didn’t understand her but besides the quick urgency in her voice she seemed calm and not at all bothered by his presence. When he was first taken they all treated him like a burden and something to trade off later. Clint at least seemed interested in him, as if he was something that wasn’t supposed to be there but wasn’t necessarily wrong. Tony recognizes that look in Mesman’s eyes as the same on that his mother had whenever she bought a new painting or got a new dress.

This woman just looked at him like child as she had him stand in the corner and handed him his plate and dirty clothes from the night before. She gave him a light pat on the head as he took it without complaint and turned to make the bed. He pulled the clothes and plate close so he could hold it in one arm and wiped away a few stray tears.

“Nee nee nee, Anthony. Je gaat naar beneden om te ontbijten en ze zullen boos om je te zien huilen zijn.” She said, folding the last of the blankets quickly and coming over to kneel in front of him. “Anthony?”

“Tony.” He muttered. She wiped away the tears and took everything from his arms. “I don’t know what you’re saying.”

She hesitated for a moment before nodding and grabbing his hand to lead him out the door. Tony wasn’t ready for whatever they were doing. He wanted to go home and help Jarvis with the chores like he always did. It was usually around this time of the day when he would make Tony breakfast and then they would do the dishes together before his tutor.

“Ah, Tony. Laat ons, Lotte.” Mesman said as they walked into the dining room. Tony stopped as the hand on his shoulder disappeared and he was alone with Mesman. “Come, sit, I’m just about to eat breakfast.”

“What’s her name?” Tony asked as he sat down at the table.

“Her name is Lotte. She is my wife. Excuse her, she never did want to learn English much. Perhaps you’ll pick up Dutch while you’re here.” Mesman said. He grabbed a piece of toast off of one of the many plates sitting on the table. Tony reached forward to grab the bowl of biscuits. He felt like he could eat all of them. His hand was quickly swatted away.

“They’re looking for me, you know.” Tony said, pulling his hand to his chest. “They’re going to find me so I don’t care how mean you are, I’m leaving soon.”

“First of all, you eat when you deserve it. You are allowed nothing here if you do not work for it. The dinner last night was a welcoming gift.” Mesman said, not looking up from his plate.
“Secondly, you’ve been missing for days. They’re looking for a body at this point, not a little boy who was taken to another continent.”

“But they’ll recognize me when I go out.” Tony said, voice dropping slightly. They thought he was dead. That would explain why they’re not coming for him. “If I go to school or to a park they’ll know who I am.”

“You’re not allowed out.” Mesman said simply. He grabbed a book off the ground and placed it down in front of Tony. “Read the title and I will let you eat breakfast. If you can read the title then you can read the book.”

Tony frowned. He had always been terrible with reading. It was the longer, more complicated words that stumped him. Just looking down at the cover he knew he couldn’t read this.

“Co… copt… no.” He whispered as he tried to read the first word slowly. Mesman sighed quietly as Tony continued on with the words. “Comp…Computer?” Tony looked up at him to make sure he got it right. Mesman nodded and Tony reached out again for the bowl of biscuits. This time his hand was grabbed quickly and he barely had time to flinch before Mesman slapped him with enough force to nearly knock him out of his chair. He was yanked back too look at the book.

“You eat when you finish reading the title. You still have a few more words to go.” He said, releasing his bruising grip on Tony’s hand.

“I can’t. They’re hard words. I’m only six.” Tony sighed, rubbing his cheek and blinking away fresh tears.

“When Mozart was six he was a piano prodigy and composing his own music. You are supposed to be a genius and yet you are proving to be useless.” He said, yanking the book away from Tony. “It says ‘Computer Science and Programming’. Next month I want you to be able to read the whole book.”

Tony leaned back in his chair and pouted at the assortment of food in front of him. There was a bowl full of chocolate chip muffins and he thought about grabbing them and hiding somewhere until he ate them all because there was no way he was going to be able to improve his reading in a month. He was hungry and ready to eat just when people decide he didn’t deserve it.

Once Mesman finished eating he stood and looked down at him in silence. Tony didn’t want to say anything. He felt exhausted and hungry so he just stayed in his seat and kicked his feet. The man’s face visibly darkened.

“You know, as a growing boy I use up a lot of energy so it’s important that I eat if I’m going to go about daily activities.” Tony said. All the lectures Howard had given him about respecting important people and doing as he was told flashed through his mind as he spoke but he desperately ignored it. Howard wasn’t coming so he was just going to hope for the best. He wasn’t going to move until he was allowed to eat at least half of that pile of pancakes. Whoever cooked all of this must have known Mesman wasn’t going to eat it all by himself and Tony didn’t want it to be wasted. It was almost as if this feast was put out to taunt him.

He would have said more and probably would have tried to reach for the food again had he not been roughly yanked up by his arm and dragged out of the dining room. He looked around quickly at the house around him, memorizing it in case he ever had the opportunity to try to run away again. It was almost as big as his home but far more empty, not a person in sight walking down the various hallways or sitting in any of the many rooms they passed.
Eventually he was dragged outside, the sunlight pounding down on his face. Tony slammed his free hand over his eyes. After days of rain and clouds the sun seemed too bright. It was still rather chilly, the bright sunlight not doing much to warm him. He felt the firm grip on his arm disappear and he blinked down at his hands, adjusting to the light. Red finger marks were darkening quickly. Tony’s hands shook as he watched them form against his pale skin next to the other handprints left behind from when everyone else decided he didn’t deserve to be handled with care.

“Run laps.” Mesman said, gesturing around at the large, walled off yard.

“What? No way. I’m starving and exhausted. I’ve barely eaten or slept in days and you want me to run laps around your back yard? You’re going to kill me.” Tony almost yelled. He looked up desperately, not seeing any pity from the man standing over him. “For how long?”

“You run until you can’t anymore.” Mesman said, grabbing Tony by the hair and shoving him forward.

Tony started jogging as slow as he can, trying to keep his breath deep and even as he looked up around the large property he was ordered to circle. He was barely half way around when his legs began to ache and a burn settled in his chest. By the time he finished one lap, which seemed like one long and miserable eternity, Merman had settled into a lawn chair on his patio and talked quickly into his cell phone. Tony didn’t understand what he was saying but got one glance at the annoyance written on his face and kept running.

After a while it felt like his lungs were struggling just to expand and that if he stopped his legs would quit working all together. He kept running. If he stopped he didn’t think he would be able to continue and he didn’t want to know what sort of punishments this man had in mind.

He stopped counting laps. He didn’t even think about running anymore, instead let his mind wander back home. Even if no one else was looking, Jarvis had to miss him and Aunt Peggy would at least try to figure out what happened. At least he hoped they would. He honestly didn’t expect them to show up anymore. Tony knew he was annoying and rude most of the time, they might just be a little relieved.

Halfway back to the house he stumbled to a halt, unable to make his legs go any further. He dropped down onto the ground and fell onto his back as he inhaled too many quick, shallow breaths. He basked in the warm sunlight alone for several minutes, not wanting to go back in the house and not wanting anyone to come near him.

“You did well, almost half an hour.” Mesman said, walking up to him after a while. Tony glanced curiously.

“I did a good job?” He asked. Mesman nodded and waved for him to stand. Tony groaned and pulled himself up. They walked slowly back to the house.

“You are exhausted so I’ll allow you a shower and an hour nap. Then you’ll be awoken to join us for lunch before you’re returned to your room.” He said, putting and hand on Tony’s shoulder to rush him forward.

“Am I allowed to eat then?” Tony asked. Mesman nodded. “Yes! That’s good because I probably ran off everything I’ve eaten this week and it would be terrible if I died after you paid however much you did for me. You know, for whatever reason.”

“You are a very intelligent boy, Tony. However, I need you to be smarter, faster, and stronger.” Mesman said as they walked into the house and towards the stairs. “We live in an information age
and to have someone capable of getting into a place I cannot, learning its secrets, and having the skills of getting out, that is extremely valuable.”

Tony shook his head as he forced himself up the stairs, ignoring the sharp pain shooting up his legs with each step. “I won’t do it.” He muttered. They stopped outside of a bathroom that was just across the hall from the room he had slept in the night before.

“You will.”

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Chapter End Notes

And thus begins Tony's new life. I hope you'll stick with me for the next chapter. Comment, I love comments. What did you guys think of the aou trailer? Wow, right?
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Bit of a time jump in this one from the last chapter. Also, I hope you guys had a wonderful Halloween/annoying American holiday. I did.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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After all the years Tony had lived in this house, with these people, he thought that this was the worst part of it. If he was incapable of doing something Mesman wanted him to do then he would be punished until he learned. He wasn’t sure how much they paid to get him but Tony was starting to think it was a waste because although his reading had improved slightly and he could get pasted any standard or electronic lock in his way, there was no way he could remember exactly which objects lying around the house had ammonium nitrate in them. Although he did know what he could do with it once he got it.

This was one of the worst punishments of all. It wasn’t a beating or harsh physical labor. This was just darkness. It was just a closet down the hall that they had taken the light bulb out of so when Tony was locked in he couldn’t be able to turn it on and see.

He hated how cramped it was, they picked the smallest closet in the house. When he was a kid it wasn’t so bad but now he couldn’t even stretch his legs out. If he put his hand out in front of him to touch the walls, he could see nothing. His blank vision turned every small sound hat seeped in through the walls into something malicious.

He squeezed himself into the corner by the door and waited. At most he would be stuck in there all night. It was hard to gauge the time when he couldn’t see anything and after a while his thoughts would run away from him. He couldn’t tell if the moments that slipped by were seconds or hours and every time he heard a noise coming down the hall, sure that someone was coming to let him out. No one ever did and he was left alone wondering if he had imagined the sound.

Tony didn’t hear anyone walk up when the door did actually open, many hours later. He just lifted his head from where it was buried in his shoulder and covered by his arm and blinked into the sudden light. It was overwhelming and hurt his eyes to look at but he was glad it was finally there.

“About time. How long was it this time?” Tony muttered at the blurry outline in front of him. He smiled at the distinct blond hair in front of him and the figure that was much too small to be Mesman’s.

“10 hours. All night.” Lotte said rapidly. Although he had picked up Dutch quickly when he was younger, he still spoke it far slower than she did. “Don’t do that.”

She reached over and wiped away a tear before it fell as his eyes continued to adjust to the sudden shift in light. He pushed himself off the ground and leaned against the wall. Ten hours was a long time, longer than he had thought it was. A few minutes ago, before she came to get him, Tony had assumed it was just a few hours. It was better than earlier, when the initial panic had set in and he thought he had been in there for days.
“Go to your room and rest. He doesn’t expect to see you until dinner.” She said calmly, holding a hand out to him. Tony frowned, his punishment was continuing and he wouldn’t eat until dinner.

He didn’t take it right away. Tony just took a few deep breathes before grabbing her hand going down the hall to his room, trying to relax after staying up all night in the dark. It was the same room they put him in when he arrived, the same room he had been staying in for years. Not much had changed, the small bed still had its wooden frame and the window still barely looked out over the wall in the backyard. He had managed to carve all the names of the people who put him here deeper into the headboard of the bed but they were meaningless now, just names of people he had nothing to do with anymore.

The room wasn’t so empty either. Tony kept several boxes of metal and wires in case Mesman needed him to build something, just to prove that he could. Those were his favorite lessons. He would spend years studying engineering and computer books, trying hard to not stumble over the words as often as he usually does. He built his first computer at age eleven.

Lotte pulled him towards his bed and sat him down. “You’re always so quiet once you leave there.” She said quietly as she knelt down to pull off his shoes. “If you hate it so much you should stop misbehaving.”

“I didn’t do anything. I know how to find whatever it is he wants me to look for and I know how to put it to good use but he gave me fifteen minutes.” Tony sighed, running a hand through his hair. “The only thing I’m good at doing in that amount of time is running two and a half kilometers or taking apart the entire toaster. If I’m given another ten minutes I can probably build a tazer.”

Lotte sighs as she pushes him down into the bed, pulling the covers over him. Tony melted almost immediately into his pillows as she started carding her hands through his hair. He forgot about her sighs and how disappointed she sounded. At the moment he was just too tired.

“You shouldn’t be so stubborn with him. He’s just trying to make sure you do your best.” She muttered quietly.

“He’s making sure I fail.” He said. Tony tried not to lean into her light touches. He may not be fond of Mesman, with his harsh punishments and air of intimidation, but Lotte was always gentle.

“Then you will learn.” Lotte said, leaning down and giving him a light kiss on the forehead. “Just listen to him and do what he says.”

Then next time he opened his eyes he was alone. He pushed himself up and frowned as the knocking at his door continued.

“Tony, get washed up. We expect you for dinner in ten minutes.” Lotte said, opening the door briefly.

He nodded as she disappeared behind it again and frowned at the window. The sun was going down over the back wall and he must have slept all day. Tony hated when he did that, fell asleep without noticing.

He quickly changed and walked across the hall to the bathroom. He still looked exhausted in the mirror and splashing water on his face did little to help. Delicious smells drifted in from the kitchen as Tony walked downstairs and went to wait in the dining room. He was early for dinner by a few minutes but it was better than being late.

Lotte was silently placing plates and silverware in three spots at the table. Large platters piled high
with food were already sitting in the center. She nodded for Tony to take a seat in front of the stew. It was his favorite, diced meat and gravy that is usually served mashed potatoes.

Mesman walked in just after everyone else was seated. Once he sat down and reached forward to start filling up his plate everyone else started going for food too. Tony reached forward to grab a spoonful of potatoes. Once his plate was full he inhaled the delicious smell and lifted his fork.

“Tell me Tony, did you have time to reflect during the night?” Mesman asked. Tony sighed as he lowered his fork and looked over at him.

“Nah, just slept the whole night. I’m pretty sure everything I’ve done so far has been great.” He said, frowning up at the man. “You’re just overreacting.”

“You are not living up to your potential. I am just trying to motivate you to be better.” Mesman said coldly.

“You’re trying to motivate me to do the impossible. I can’t do it!” Tony said loudly. Lotte hummed as his voice rose higher and he sat back in his chair.

There was a quick moment of silence as Tony pushed his plate away and Mesman took a bite while continuing to glare at him. Lotte smiled softly as she stared at Tony, willing him to behave.

“How long have you been here?” Mesman asked after a few minutes. Tony shrugged.

“Thirteen years?” He asked.

“Just about. And you have learned much, I’m almost willing to put you up to the work I’ve been preparing you for.” Mesman said, turning back to his plate.

“You’re letting me out?” Tony asked. Mesman gave a slight nod. “Is this at all like that one time you let me out and I was stranded in Northern Canada for a month?”

“We had spent years making sure you knew how to survive in extreme environments. I only wanted to be sure you could retain that information if your life was actually on the line.” Mesman said. “You did quite well.”

“It wasn’t even winter, Tony.” Lotte said, smiling over to him. “And you were thirteen. Perfectly capable of taking care of yourself.”

“There was snow. It was cold and no food anywhere.” Tony muttered. He knew the argument was over. Lotte picked a side and when she did that Tony couldn't find any strength to go against her. “I ate a squirrel.”

“And you survived for a month.” Mesman said loudly. “You always bring up this argument as if something horrible happened to you. Nothing horrible has ever happened to you no matter what you think of it. We take care of you here. Now I expect you to take care of us and do as you’re told.”

Tony looked down at his untouched food for a second. He wasn’t entirely sure what he was expected to do but if he was being allowed out and it wasn’t for a survival exercise then it could be okay. He glanced up at Lotte, who nodded to him with a smile. After all the years locked in this house with only the two of them to keep him company, Tony preferred her the most. She was always kind and gentle while Mesman was angry and demanding. If she said it was okay then it must be. She never hurt him.
“What do you want?” Tony asked quietly.

“How well do you remember English?” Mesman asked.

“Perfectly, I think. It’s been a while, you told me not to use it in front of Lotte because it’s rude to leave her out of conversations.” Tony said. “Why?”

He remembered that lesson well. He was getting the hang of their conversations in Dutch, which Tony was still struggling to understand. It had been several months since he had arrived, he was seeing his face and his parents less and less in the newspapers that Mesman always read around breakfast and when Tony asked Lotte what kind of muffins she made he was rushed out of the room as soon as he saw her head tilt in confusion. The bruises didn’t fade for weeks and he picked up Dutch words a lot faster.

“I’m sending you to the United States. There is a professor at MIT I need you to contact.” Mesman said, finishing his dinner and pushing the plate away. “Everything will be taken care of. You will have a place to stay, the bills will be taken care of, and I will make sure you have $50 a day to purchase food or anything else.”

Tony nodded slowly. He would be alone? He had only been outside of the walls that surrounded the property a few times and if he was going to a populated area someone was sure to keep a close eye on him. He doubted he could make it very far on his own.

“You’ll do great, Tony.” Lotte said. “As soon as you get back I’ll make the blueberry tarts you love so much.”

Tony sighed. He didn’t like it, didn’t think he was ready. He was punished just the night before for not being good enough and now they were sending him out.

“What do you need?” Tony asked.

“It is a complicated assignment.” Mesman said, looking down at him closely. Tony nodded. “He lectures on Nuclear Physics. He does a lot of classified work for the government so you will probably only be able to contact him at the University. We’ll forge an education history for you, get you into the school.”

“Complicated? How long will I be gone?” Tony asked. “Long enough to find a new family?”

Mesman’s frown deepened. “Depends on if you can find anyone who can find use of you. I paid a lot of money for you and it’s proving to be a waste.” He said bitterly. “We’ll go over the details later. The first part is just to get into the school and make contact with Dr. Banner. Can you do that?”

Tony nodded. He was being let out. The first thing he was going to do with his first day’s fifty dollars and freedom was buying as many burgers as he could and sitting outside in a park. Tony smiled at the thought and excused himself to go to his room.

Chapter End Notes

That took a while to write, sorry. Next chapter will begin him meeting everyone else and it'll be glorious!
Comment, I love comments and they make me feel happy and important.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Yay, new chapter. The response to this has been wonderful and I just wanted to tell you all how fabulous you all are and that I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony had a secret box under his bed full of granola bars, poptarts, and many other snacks. Usually when no one cooked breakfast Lotte just handed him something quick and packaged and sent him back to his room. He usually didn’t eat them, he hardly ever ate if it wasn’t the right time.

Tony ripped the packaging off of a small package of donuts and shoved two into his mouth before he started chewing. He pulled the box closer as he sat down on his bed and looked around the room. He grew up in this room. Even if Mesman told him he wasn’t allowed to own anything he still considered the room his. Tony would stare out that window on rainy days, he would spend hours tinkering with his box of scrap metal and wires until he had something that worked, and he spent most of his time in here every day. This was his room, even if he would never admit it.

A hand went out to brush at the names carved into his headboard. The list of names he refused to forget. Buck, Jacques, Clint, and Mesman. They all had done their part in putting him in this situation, got him used to living here, and now they were getting rid of him.

He frowned when he reached into the empty box. A pile of discarded wrappers had formed on the ground over the edge of the bed while he was lost in thought. He felt sick, his stomach not sitting right after all the sugar he had just consumed especially since he hadn’t had a full meal in a few days.

Now came his favorite part, hiding the evidence. He picked up the small pile of garbage and slowly walked out of his room. It was really late, possibly early, so Mesman and Lotte were sound asleep on the other side of the house where he wasn’t allowed to go. He deposited a small handful of wrappers into the bathroom garbage can before heading downstairs.

He didn’t want to go too quickly, fearing he might throw up with the amount of sweets he ate so quickly, so he took the steps one at a time. After dumping another small handful into the trashcan by the front door, he made his way to the kitchen.

“Why do you still do that?” Lotte asked as he entered the room, sighing at the small bundle of snack wrappers he had left in his hands. She was sitting at the kitchen island, cup of tea in front of her.

“She notices if there are too many in one trashcan. Mesman is annoyed enough as it is that I ignore dinner.” Tony said calmly. He dumped what was left in his hand into the trash before walking over and sat down in the stool next to her. “Besides, I was only getting rid of what I had left.”

“Yes, but it’s not healthy. You leave when the sun comes up and you will be gone for a while. Promise me you will take care of yourself.” She said. Tony smiled and leaned over to rest his head on her shoulder.
“I don’t want to leave.” He whispered. Lotte reached up and softly carded her fingers through his hair. Tony loved her, she was always kind and gently and no matter what terrible thing he had done to warrant a punishment he could always trust her to take care of him and never hurt him. “I want to stay here with you and my room. I don’t want to go out there, I wouldn’t know what to do. I don’t know what the rules are out there.”

It was quiet for a few moments as Tony kept his head rested and Lotte continued to stroke his hair. “You’re doing a good thing, you know. After so many years of us taking care of you it is your turn to take care of us.” She said after several minutes. “This is important for all of us. If this doesn’t get done then I’m worried about what might happen to us. You’ll do great though.” Lotte turned her head to give him a quick kiss on the forehead before reaching for her tea.

Tony pulled away slowly after she shrugged him off. “I said I would do it, don’t worry about me backing out. I’m just worried is all.” He said, frowning as he glanced at the clock. Three in the morning, he only had two hours left. “I still don’t know about what I’m allowed to do when I get to Boston, what I should say to people, what is going to happen when I mess up.”

“You want rules?” Lotte asked. Tony nodded slowly. He liked rules, even if he didn’t follow them then at least then he knew a punishment was coming. “Alright. I will give you rules. You do not talk about your life here, if anyone asks about home you start making up stories based off of that show Full House. You’re not allowed to fight anyone. You cannot tell anyone the true reason for why you are there. Sleep eight hours a night and finally, you have to eat three meals a day seven days a week.”

“I think I can handle most of that.” He said.

Lotte stood up to put her cup in the sink and gave him another quick kiss on the forehead before leaving. Tony sighed. He still didn’t want to leave. He knew what to do here, he knew what would happen if he didn’t do what he was supposed to, and it was all worked out in his head. He had a system here, he had nothing out there.

Tony just sat quietly in his room until the sun started peeking up over the edge of the wall and Mesman started calling for him loudly from the bottom of the stairs. He did one final glance around the room before exiting. Everyone was waiting for him once he got downstairs.

“Are you ready to leave? Do you have your passport?” Mesman asked.

“Yeah, it would definitely be a shame if I forgot that.” Tony said, pulling out of his pocket.

He meant to give Lotte a quick hug before he left. Instead he ended up clinging to her for several minutes. He thought about just stopping everything because the last thing Tony wanted was to leave Lotte. When she was around that meant he was safe and okay. After everything she had done for him, he didn’t know how he was expected to just abandon her.

“Tony, it’s time to go now.” Lotte said, pulling his hands away from her shoulders. “Remember, you’re taking care of us now.”

He nodded and followed Mesman out the front door. Tony didn’t say anything as he climbed into the waiting car. He just looked back at the house as Mesman slid into the backseat with him and signaled his driver to go.

The house seemed much bigger from the front. Whenever Tony was allowed outside it was always in the walled off back yard where he couldn’t see most of the building. As they drove away he could see just how large it truly was. He had explored every area he was allowed to be in and yet
from the outside the towering brick walls and dark windows made it seem so much bigger and almost oppressing.

“Am I allowed to call?” Tony asked once the house was too far away to see. Mesman shook his head. “What about write? What if something happens and I need to get a hold of you?”

“You will be fine. You know the plan and if anything happens then it’ll be fine. Contacting us would only make things more difficult.” Mesman said, switching over to English. Tony frowned at the language. It had been a while since he used it. Not long enough for him to forget but long enough to make it sound awkward.

“What if everything fails and I’m left over there? I have no way of contacting you. You’re throwing me to the dogs.” Tony said. His eyes snapped to the window as they drove past several buildings. They were getting closer to the city.

“You are perfectly capable of surviving on your own. You have money and you have a place to sleep. That’s all you need at the moment.” Mesman whispered harshly. “If everything goes wrong then I have faith in your abilities to get yourself out of trouble and get back here. I made sure you had the skills to do so. If not then you might as well not come back at all.”

“Right. I’m sorry.” Tony sighed.

It was silent the rest of the drive. Tony didn’t have anything else to say and he knew he wasn’t supposed to. Mesman was getting close to that line between annoyed and angry and Tony didn’t want to cross it. They didn’t want to contact him while he was away so that was that, he was going to be completely alone.

Once they reached the airport, Tony grabbed his one bag from the trunk and waved to the car as it drove away. He knew how to get through airport security and he didn’t have anything dangerous on him. Except for his passport and id with a fake name everything he had on him was completely legal.

He ignored everyone else. This was more people than he could ever remember being around. Everything was too loud. He wasn’t used to all the noise and chaos. There were people everywhere, yelling, running around, and Tony hated all of it. He smiled at passing families as he walked over to the area he was supposed to wait to board his plane and sat as far from everyone else as possible.

Tony reserved himself to people watching. Everyone in the waiting area either looked bored or was pouring over cameras with their group. He zoned in and out of different conversations as they passed and everyone seemed to be someone going home after a trip.

Once he was on the plane he just stared out the window. He liked the plane. It was smaller than the airport and had walls. Tony didn’t like the never ending expanse of the outside. Everyone seemed to quiet down too once they were seated and the plane started to move.

Tony thinks it was because that he hadn’t slept at all the night before and that the quiet hum of the plane’s engines were rather soothing that he fell asleep. All he knows is that one minute he’s flying peacefully over Europe and the next his head is snapping up off of the window as his ears pop painfully and they’re descending into Boston.

He went through immigration fairly quickly, answering every question they had with a prepared statement and when they searched his one bag all they found was a pile of clothes, a map of the city, and information on the university. When he was finally out of the airport he took one look
around at the United States and then got a taxi.

Tony’s apartment was only a few blocks away from MIT. It was rather empty, only one bedroom, one bathroom and very little furniture. There was no food in the kitchen either, though he shouldn’t have to worry about that for a few days. Mesman had given him a card and everyday $50 was supposed to appear on it. He did have a bit of extra money at the moment because he had to go buy his textbooks and anything else he needed before class started the beginning of next week.

Then he just had to find a way to befriend Dr. Banner and get a look at his research on Gamma Radiation. That shouldn’t be too hard, Tony thought of himself as a likeable person. He planned on going shopping later, seeing everything the US had to offer after he had gotten a proper nap because even after an 8 hour flight he still seemed a bit tired and there was no one around to tell him to get it done.

Chapter End Notes

Bruce is going to be in the next chapter.
Also, Tony trying to adapt with his new freedom.
Comment, it's lovely and beautiful and makes me happy. Thank you for reading!!!!!!
Chapter 7

Yay, new chapter. Glad to get this out. Hope you like it, I tried.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony didn’t end up leaving the rest of the week. He didn’t see a need to go out when he was needed in his new apartment. The locks on the doors were ridiculous, he realized. If he jiggled them enough they would pop right open. He spent most of an afternoon fixing the locks on all the doors and windows. He then had to fix all the doors to the cabinets in the kitchen. The electrical wiring in the whole place was faulty and he spent another day on that to get the lights to stop flickering. Once everything was fixed Tony just found that he had nothing to do and it had only been three days.

It wasn’t until the first morning of classes that he realized he didn’t have his textbooks, didn’t even have a single notebook. All the clothes that were bought for him before he left were still in his bag in the corner of the bedroom, unpacked. He put on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt with a logo he didn’t recognize and grabbed his wallet.

The bookstore was open and full of students making last minute purchases. Tony weaved through the crowd, careful not to accidentally touch someone, and made his way towards the shelves of textbooks. He looked through the list and grabbed all the books he needed before heading towards the section full of supplies. He grabbed a handful of notebooks, a package of pencils, and a backpack before he made his way to the cash registers.

He stood in line for several minutes before he paid for everything and left. He still had an hour before his first class started. There was a bustling of crowds and groups of students that passed by on the sidewalks and chatted excitedly about the day to come.

Tony watched them from where he sat on one of the benches outside as he filled up the backpack he just bought with all of his books. Everyone walked quickly as they passed, hurrying towards their destinations and looking around at the campus. He didn’t quite understand what they were so happy about, they were all probably far from home and had no idea what they were doing.

When it was finally time for his first class he arrived early and sat in the back. It was a calculus course, he usually excelled in math and Mesman was always pleased with his performance so he wasn’t too worried. The lecture hall filled slowly with enthusiastic students and a low murmur engulfed the room.

“Nervous? Me too. I can’t believe I’m actually here. I mean, this is MIT!” A young man said as he slipped into the seat next to Tony. He shifted around uncomfortably as he stared up at the chalkboards in the front and the podium for the professor. He looked at the seats closer to the front fondly and sighed.

“For someone so excited to learn, you got here a bit late.” Tony muttered, pulling a notebook out of his backpack and glancing up as the professor entered the room.

“I know. First day, everyone shows up early on the first day. I barely got here just in time.” He
said, getting out his own notebook as the lecture began and numbers and equations began to fill the boards.

The class passed quickly. It was all material he had already known, basic math that had been pounded into his head within his first year with Mesman. Tony didn’t even both to take notes. The boy beside him filled his notebook eagerly, eyes never coming off of the professor.

Tony flipped through his textbook for the class. As he suspected, he recognized all of the math. He didn’t think he even needed to show up after today, he didn’t even need to pass. His only priority at the moment was getting to Banner.

“Hey, buddy. You wanna get lunch? I’m starving and I was too busy to eat on the way here.” The teenager next to him asked. Tony didn’t acknowledge him right away until he asked again.

“Buddy?” Tony asked.

“Yeah. You’re pretty much the only person I’ve talked to so far and seeing how we have a class together it’s worth a shot to try to make new friends.” He said quickly, packing up his things into his backpack. “I’m Peter. Peter Parker.”

“Friends.” Tony said slowly. “Oh, no. You don’t want to be friends with me. I’m rude and not very good at anything and I’ll end up eating all the pizza.” Peter nodded slowly.

Tony looked closely at him. They seemed to be about the same age and his hair was a much lighter brown and he was several inches taller. Tony couldn’t be his friend, he was here for something serious and important. He didn’t have time for friends. He wasn’t even sure how it all worked, he never had one before. There were certainly social codes in place to tell him when he was supposed to do something with friends and when he wasn’t and Tony wasn’t sure what those codes were and what would happen to him if he failed. Also, it was entirely true about the pizza. Lotte made it every so often for a meal and it was delicious he ate all of it, making everyone else annoyed.

“I don’t care. I can order more.” Peter said, smiling softly. “Still starving. So lunch?”

Tony shook his head as he stood to leave. He didn’t need to get distracted. The sooner he got this all finished the sooner he could get back. He had one more class that day. A lecture on applied nuclear physics with Dr. Banner so that was the one thing that really mattered. It was two hours away.

He was actually hungry. He hadn’t eaten since that box of junk food several days earlier and he felt like he was finally ready to actually eat again. There was a Dunkin Donuts on campus. Tony had never been, he never left the house back before this and for various training exercises. Still, he liked coffee and he liked donuts.

The names of what he ordered didn’t make any sense. It wasn’t any English he was familiar with and he wasn’t sure if they had a Dutch translation but it sounded interesting enough. He sat down at an empty table with his Frozen Caramel Coffee Coolatta and Croissant Donut and continued his usual activity of watching everyone else as they walked past the windows.

He wasn’t sure where the habit of watching people had come from but there it was. Everyone seemed so calm about everything, unafraid of what might happen if they make a mistake and fail everything they work for. They probably weren’t expecting punishment for if they did something wrong.

“Hey, there you are. You forgot your textbook.” Peter said, walking in and holding a book gingerly
in his hands.

“Are you following me?” Tony asked, grabbing the book from his hands. “That’s creepy. Never expected to have a stalker on my first day.”

“Okay, not really stalking. You just left your book and I wanted to make sure you had it so you could get the reading done.” He said. “And with the way your eyes got all emotional when I mentioned lunch I just decided to check places to eat in the area and here you are.”

Tony frowned at him for a second. He wasn't sure what to do, what behavior was appropriate for this situation. Peter brought his book to him, he appreciated that so he had to give him something in return. He wasn't sure what he wanted though.

“I don’t do readings.” Tony said, nodding for him to sit down. Peter’s smile widened as he took the invitation and plopped down into the seat. “Doesn’t mean we’re friends.”

“Hey, I’ll take it. I don’t make friends easily anyway. What’s your name?” He said.

“Tony. But before you ask me about myself, I can’t tell you. I’m a European spy sent to steal America’s secrets.” Tony said, watching closely for his reaction. Peter laughed. One of the most effective ways to lie was to tell the truth.

They sat talking for a little while, mostly about where they were from and what classes they were taking. Tony made up stories from the show Full House, just like he was told to do. A lot of the bullshit he was saying did sound nice. Peter had an aunt back in New York. He wouldn’t say much else.

Although Tony insisted that they still weren’t friends, he couldn’t get distracted if he wanted to get back soon, they did exchange numbers. He said it was more for Peter’s benefit than his own.

Tony went to his last class for the day. He was ten minutes early and took a seat close to the front to get a good view and yet still hear the doors being opened if anyone came or went. Dr. Banner was already there, smiling softly at everyone who entered and quickly going through a stack of papers.

Tony pulled out his book and waited to start taking notes. He had to do well in this class if he was going to catch Banner’s attention. That was the simplest way of getting a look at whatever research he was doing.

“Hello, everyone. I’m Dr. Banner and welcome to Applied Nuclear Physics. You’re all probably going to hate this class but I’m going to love teaching it so here we go.” He said once the class was full and everyone was seated. “I’m not going to lecture right away. Today I want to focus on what you guys are interested in before we jump into the lesson plans. Go ahead, ask any question.”

No one spoke for a few seconds as everyone flipped through their textbooks and their notes. Tony glanced down at his textbook as well. He wasn’t planning on asking anything. He couldn’t understand most of the book, the words were too long and the letters seemed misplaced. It would take more time than he had to figure out what it said right now.

“What’s the most radioactive element?” A voice perked up from farther back in the class.

“Most scientists and texts would say it’s polonium. Polonium is so radioactive is glows blue, which is caused by excitation of the gas particles by radiation. A single milligram of polonium emits as many alpha particles as 5 grams of radium.” Banner said, pausing for a second with a nod before continuing. “Any other questions?”
The room exploded into a loud ramble of questions and Dr. Banner trying to quiet them down until they spoke one at a time. Half the questions, mostly about generators, fusion, and radiation, Tony could have answered himself but he continued to sit quietly. Tony had an idea of what he was doing, getting questions out of the way so that once learning began they could focus on the topic.

Once class was over Tony just left. He wasn’t going to do anything right away, he had to be patient no matter how much he wanted to leave and get back. On a more optimistic note, Dr. Banner was looking students who wanted to intern for some of his research. He would start interviewing next week. It was perfect.

Tony stopped by the store before he headed back to the apartment. He needed everything, after several days of just staying in and not leaving he had to restock. He grabbed several packages of toilet paper, random cans of food, shampoo, and conditioner along with various other things he might need now that he was out on his own. Once he finally got back he just put his bags in a corner, left his backpack on the ground, and crawled into bed. He curled up under the covers and closed his eyes, not falling asleep.

He was just tired. It was a long day, dealing with more people than he had ever been around and trying to deal with the fact that he had no idea what he was doing. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do with his free time, he didn’t know what time to wake up in the morning or what time to go to bed, he didn’t know how much of his books he should read. No one was around to tell him what to do so he decided if he wasn’t scheduled to be somewhere and if he wasn’t in need of something he had to go out for, he would just stay right here.

Chapter End Notes

Tony's almost making friends and he practically met Banner. Yay. Next chapter I'll have them actually talk.
More Tony trying to deal with his new freedom and living on his own and struggling to understand other people coming up next. I hope you liked it.
Comment, please and thank you. I'll give you a hug if you comment.
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Yay, another chapter. As promised, Tony actually talks to Bruce in this one. They're going to be bros. Also, I had fun with this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Tell me about yourself, Tony.” Bruce said. Dr. Banner’s office was bright, with large windows that looked out over campus and the walls were painted a warm color that absorbed the sunlight. It was also messy, with piles of books that never made it to shelf and heaps of paper that stuck out of the folders laying around on the desk.

“What do you want to know?” Tony asked.

“Oh, you know, where are you from? What are your hobbies? What’s your favorite color? Stuff like that.” Bruce said.

Tony blinked a few times. He had no idea what these questions had to do with an internship and didn’t honestly know how to go about answering them. They were innocent enough, the not looking to be exploitive or threatening. He just pondered them for a second, wondering how to go about answering them.

“I am from the Netherlands, it should say so in my record. I like… building stuff and science. Red is nice.” Bruce nodded, writing something down on the notebook in front of him. Tony didn’t let the moment of hesitation grow too long. “I once build a complete working circuit board before I could even ride a bicycle.”

Bruce smiled at that. Tony felt relieved, he didn’t know how to impress him. Dr. Banner was a leading expert on gamma radiation and Tony couldn’t think of a single thing he had done that was worthy of praise.

“You speak English very well. How did you learn it?” Bruce asked. Tony had to hide his disappointment. He didn’t know how to talk about himself, he thought the interview would be more about discussing what he would be doing and what his research was about. Tony had never had to talk about himself before.

“I learned it when I was very young. I also watch some American tv when I have time.” Tony said. It was the truth. Although Mesman was very strict about what Tony was allowed to watch, he and Lotte liked to spend Saturday afternoons watching Full House or I Love Lucy with Dutch subtitles. “I also try to read a lot.”

“You try? Too busy?” Bruce said. Tony shook his head.

“No, I’m terrible. The words just don’t make sense. I blame our ancestors, who all got together and decided the letter needed to look as stupid as possible.” He said. He didn’t think it was that funny, just stating an opinion but Bruce laughed anyway. That had to be good, he was making an impression.
“I suppose you have a point.” Bruce said. “So tell me about your education.”

Finally, the questions Tony had practiced and went over. He could recite his false background in his sleep. He put on his most convincing smile and leaned forward in his chair. “I took a few classes back in the Netherlands. I did very well but that’s to be expected.”

It was a lie. A simple enough one to put together because it wasn’t that hard to forge an educational background to get someone into more advanced classes. Bruce didn’t even bat an eye at the information so he most likely believed it. Tony wasn’t worried, he knew the material whether or not he took classes. The only thing that mattered at the moment was getting a look at Banner’s research.

“I see you live off campus. How do you like living by yourself?” He asked.

“Oh, god. It’s a nightmare. I have to do laundry, I’ve never done laundry before. I had to buy five new pairs of pants a few days ago because I bleached half of my stuff. I honestly have no idea what I’m doing at any moment of the day and I can’t even ask for advice because then I would probably look stupid.” Tony uttered out quickly. Once again, the truth.

“Trust me on this, no one on any college campus in the world has any idea what they’re doing. They’re just going with it and ruining the laundry. And ruining the dishes too. And here’s some advice, always buy more toilet paper before you run out.” Bruce said, smiling softly.

Tony returned the smile. Bruce just seemed to take everything Tony said to him and turned it into some pleasant little conversation and Tony was immensely grateful. He could talk, if he found something to talk about he was prone to annoy Mesman and Lotte immensely with his nonstop ramblings. The trouble was just finding something that peeked his interest, like how much he hated living on his own.

“So tell me, why are you interested in the position?” Bruce asked.

Tony was prepared for this question and nodded as he leaned forward to speak. “Well, Dr. Banner, your work in gamma radiation is brilliant and the research you did on neut-.”

“Tony, you’re a nineteen year old college student in a new country. You’re not actually looking into an unpaid internship because of the actual research, are you?” Bruce said, cutting him off. Tony froze instinctively. His mind immediately started analyzing every word they said to each other, every small movement Bruce had made. Tony had failed, his cover had been blown and he had no idea how. He’d been trained for this though, even if he was caught just keep on lying and never ever admit anything. A quick glance up to Bruce just confused him more. He didn’t look angry, like he was about to lash out for the threat Tony has caused to all the hard work he was doing. Instead he just looked at him with amused curiosity.

“Boredom?” Tony said hopefully, there was always a chance he could salvage this. Then he could complete his mission and go home and then everything would be normal again. He could handle Mesman’s hateful gaze, even if Tony didn’t like the guy most of the time, because at least over there he knew exactly what actions would illicit which responses and Lotte would always be there to hold him and tell him he was okay. “Entertainment, I guess. I need something to fill my time and I don’t find anything interesting in bar hopping. I like to stimulate my mind. Talking to normal people can be rather draining.”

Bruce nodded. “Well, this isn’t going to be much fun either. I’m getting two interns, mostly to run errands, bring coffee, notebooks, organize, help out a bit on the research I have been working on with Dr. Ross, stuff like that.” He said calmly.
Tony felt the weight melt off of his chest. Of course he was fine.

“Anything to fill the time, sir.” Tony said. Bruce tensed slightly with a shake of the head.

“I like you. You’re funny, smart, and I don’t care if you can’t do laundry just as long as you know how to pick up dry cleaning.” Bruce said, smiling again. Tony noticed he had done that a lot. Probably a good sign.

“Is internship code for free labor?” Tony asked.

“It is in this country.” He said, standing and holding out his hand. “I’ll give you call within the week.”

Tony shook his hand and walked quickly out of the office. He wanted to just go straight home, be done with the day and just wait. His phone vibrated as he started walking down the sidewalk but he ignored it. The only person who had his number was Bruce, it was too early for him to call, and Peter, and Tony knew exactly what would happen if he answered. Whatever weird friendship he was being forced into so far consisted of texting and being roped into hanging out for a while after their calculus class together. Peter Parker was a strange kid, but Tony didn’t quite mind his presence.

He hadn’t been out very much at all between classes, stayed in all weekend, refusing to do anything or see anyone. Peter offered to come over but the thought almost made Tony sick. How could he possibly explain the empty apartment to that guy? Peter still insisted they hang out though.

His phone vibrated again a few minutes later, this times just once to indicate a text. He glanced at it quickly and frowned.

‘I was kicked out of math class for one too many infractions.’ That was disheartening. They had their math class together and Tony hadn’t once seen Peter excuse himself during lecture let alone get an infraction.

‘That’s terrible. What are you going to do?’ Tony sent the message and continued walking. His phone vibrated within seconds, indicating a response.

‘I read this book on antigravity, I couldn’t put it down.’ Now it’s just getting confusing.

‘What does that have to do with getting kicked out of class? Was it because you just read through it??’ Tony didn’t even bother trying to get home. He just stood on the sidewalk and waited for his phone to go off again. It didn’t take long.

‘Really? Where are you? Are you out of your interview? Of course you are, otherwise you wouldn’t be texting. Meet me at Koch Café.’

Tony didn’t answer the text. He was already on Main Street, just a short walk down to meet up with Peter but he was already planning on going home. However, blending in was just as important at the moment to portraying a college student as actually being enrolled in the school. Apparently most college students had friends.

He sighed and headed for the direction of The David H. Koch Institute where the Kock café was located at its heart. Tony had been there before. They served Starbucks drinks. It was his first time drinking it and the coffee was amazing.

Peter smiled as he entered, waving him over from his table. He had a camera hanging around his neck and books and papers scattered about in front of him. Tony wasn’t going to ask.

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‘Honestly, do they not have puns in Europe? If they don’t then I’m never leaving the good old
USA. Maybe Canada.” He said as Tony sat down.

“They probably have more English puns in England.” Tony said with a shrug.

“Yeah, blame the language gap. I’m going to teach you puns. Then when you go back to you barbaric punless land you can teach them the new ways.” Peter smiled wickedly as he held him camera up to his face and took a picture of the young woman at the register.

“I might not be a willing pupil.” Tony muttered. Peter turned slowly to take a picture of a staircase just outside of the cafe. “What are you doing?”

“Aunt May wants all the pictures of my life out here. And that means a shot of everything. Plus, the campus is just teeming with so many beautiful photography opportunities. The place is just stunning and everyone is just so lively most of the time.” Peter said.

“You took a picture of a staircase.” Tony said, smiling slightly. “Was it a beautiful staircase?”

“Yes!” Peter’s voice had a slightly offended edge to it. “I like the food and I always look at that staircase and watch everyone come and go when I come here. Aunt May wants to see snapshots of my life, she’s going to see that staircase. Also, you want lunch? I’ll get you a slice of pizza or something.”

Tony glanced over at the staircase, he could see the appeal. It was nice, clean, and structurally sound. His mind wandered a bit to his schedule, he didn’t think it was quite the right time for that yet. He had been a bit lax with his meals lately but he wanted to get back into routine.

“What day is it?” Tony asked.

“Wednesday.” Peter replied quickly.

“No. Not hungry right now.” He said, shrugging. Peter glanced down at his burrito and opened his mouth to object. Tony needed to change the subject. “Tell me about your Aunt.”

Peter’s eyes brightened at the suggestion. He looked around at the papers on the table in front of him and opened his mouth a little as if struggling to figure out how to start. “Well, she’s great. She practically raised me, her and my Uncle Ben. She puts up with me and all my odd behaviors. Trust me on this, the past few years I’ve only gotten weirder.”

“You used to be normal?” Tony says. It surprises himself. He talks back to Mesman a lot, he knows he does. It’s one of the few rules he breaks simply because he knows he won’t be punished too harshly for it. It’s not like he cares much for Mesman anyway, he would never say any of those harsh things to Lotte.

Peter doesn’t look angry though, he laughs. “Not entirely, just a little bit. That was before I met Gwen though and all the really weird stuff started happening.”

Peter’s head dipped down at that, frowning and looking away. It peeked Tony’s interest. He wanted to know, he was going to find out.

“You used to be normal?” Tony says. It surprises himself. He talks back to Mesman a lot, he knows he does. It’s one of the few rules he breaks simply because he knows he won’t be punished too harshly for it. It’s not like he cares much for Mesman anyway, he would never say any of those harsh things to Lotte.

Peter doesn’t look angry though, he laughs. “Not entirely, just a little bit. That was before I met Gwen though and all the really weird stuff started happening.”

Peter’s head dipped down at that, frowning and looking away. It peeked Tony’s interest. He wanted to know, he was going to find out.

“You used to be normal?” Tony says. It surprises himself. He talks back to Mesman a lot, he knows he does. It’s one of the few rules he breaks simply because he knows he won’t be punished too harshly for it. It’s not like he cares much for Mesman anyway, he would never say any of those harsh things to Lotte.

“Gwen was great. She was sweet, kind, and smart. The weird things were kinda my fault and they ruined everything.”
Tony sighed. Great, now Peter was sad. This was why he couldn’t have friends, he made them talk about things that made them sad. Tony looked quickly at his hands and desperately tried to think of a way to fix it.

“It’s not your fault.” Tony said. Peter’s head snapped up as if to say something but Tony just continued. “I don’t know what happened but you’re one of the nicest people I’ve ever met so I know you would never do anything bad to someone. If we make mistakes we just have to acknowledge it and do our best in the future. It’s how we learn.”

There was just a quiet moment of hesitation as Peter just bit his bottom lip. “When did you get so wise? You’re the same age as me but I swear you should have a white beard and live in a castle on a mountain or something.”

Tony shrugged. “I don’t know. I made a lot of mistakes and I had to learn from them rather quickly.” He said quietly. He didn’t want to talk about that. Not the days spent as they tried to beat new skills into his memory. He wanted to focus on something happier. “You loved her?”

“Yes.” Peter sighed. A soft smile was brushing his lips and his fingers drummed lightly at his camera. “She was brilliant. Graduated top of our class. She was funny too, wanted a house made of chocolate. God, was she beautiful.”

“She sounds great.” Tony said.

“She was.” Peter nodded. He looked up at him and smiled. “Enough about me, how did your interview go?”

“Horribly, talked about myself the whole time.” Tony said. “Anyway, that’s my cue to leave.” Peter lifted his camera quickly and took a picture of Tony as he stood up. Tony’s face fell. “You have to burn that picture.”

“Not a chance.” Peter said. “And thanks.”

Tony didn’t argue or say ‘you’re welcome’. He just turned to leave. That wasn’t supposed to happen. At least, he didn’t think it was. Everyone was supposed to forget about him once he was done and now a photograph would be floating around. Oddly enough, Tony didn’t mind. Peter was sending them to his Aunt as tokens of his life, which Tony was now a part of.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys liked it. More people introduced in the next one. I know I promised some of you that Steve will come in before we get to chapter ten and although we’re getting close I’m not sure if we’re going to make it.

We're getting very close to some big things though.

Comment please, they make me very happy and I love you guys.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

We're getting very close to stuff. Next chapter is going to have some things in it. Yeah. Also, shout out to my lovely reader Jaki, who came up with the great idea to have Tony watch the movie Alien. To those who haven't seen it, chapter contains spoilers to the movie Alien.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony waited just outside the office on his first day. His hands gripped the hem of his new t-shirt firmly as he waited for the door to open and for Dr. Banner to instruct him on what to do. The other intern was there as well, lightly tapping his foot as he casually glanced up at the clock.

“I hope we don’t end up filing papers or running to get coffee all day. I’m looking forward to seeing nuclear physics in action.” He said, leaning over to Tony.

“Maybe we’ll get superpowers like in the movies.” He muttered. Tony liked those movies, the old black and white ones where a mad scientist has a lab accident and becomes part cockroach or starts moving things with their minds. “Not sure I can handle the responsibility though. I mess everything up.”

“That’s okay. We’re teenagers, we’re allowed to mess up.” He said.

Tony frowned, shaking his head slightly. That was wrong, so very wrong. Messing up was failing and he didn’t know what punishment he would receive if he failed at this. A sense of dread crawled into the pit of his stomach, clenching tight and making him want to throw up. It was entirely possible that everything after this moment could go the exact opposite of how he wanted and then he would have to go back in shame and fear.

The worst punishment he remembered happening was when he was nine. Most of the time when company was over he was never allowed to leave his room but he would get curious. He could hear them laughing loudly from the dining room, muffled voices discussing conversation he had no business listening in on and yet he crept silently towards the stairs. He sat down on the steps, just low enough where he could hear the conversation more clearly but not see directly into the dining room.

He didn’t understand most of it, just conversations about politics and trade. Tony was just happy to hear other people talk, to just be near someone else after so long alone in that house. Lotte walked out of the dining room though, heading straight for the bathroom. They both froze when they saw each other. She didn’t say anything as she grabbed him by the arm and dragged him up to his room and he didn’t utter a word.

Mesman came by several hours after that. They had to change the locks on his door again, hoping it would stop him from getting out, and Tony still had the scars running up his back from just how angry he had been that night and sometimes he still rubbed at his ankles long after the ache had passed. He liked knowing what the rules were and he liked knowing what was going to happen when he broke them. It gave him something to expect. Needless to say he never really felt like breaking that rule again, but at least he knew what would happen.
“I’m James, by the way.” The other intern said, holding his hand out and catching Tony’s attention. “James Rhodes.”

“Tony.” He shook the kid’s hand and smiled. “So, how much are we allowed to screw up before we’re fired?’”

“I don’t know, probably a lot. Banner’s pretty laid back and he spends most of his time out in his lab with Dr. Ross anyway.” James said.

The door to Bruce’s office opened abruptly and he waved them both in, smiling at them. The room seemed to have gotten messier since Tony was there the week before for his interview and he glanced around at all the stacks of books, papers, and folders with curiosity.

“Thank you for coming and I hope you guys have a happy first day on the job. I picked you guys because you are both not only funny and I like you but because you both are doing pretty good in your classes and passed the background checks so I know you aren’t serial killers or anything else that would be bad.” Bruce said quickly, glancing down at his watch. “Today I just need you guys to go through all those folders and label them by content. There should be a header at the top of the page saying what it’s about and what to label them by. Then just file them all in that cabinet over there.”

Bruce waved over at the various stacks of folders and papers. Tony could do this, it didn’t seem that difficult at all. He smiled as he sat down at the largest piles of folders. Not only was he given a job for the guy he was supposed to be spying on but his first order was to go through all of his stuff. James just sighed as he went for the smallest pile.

Tony was careful to scan the folder as quickly as he could, mumbling the words under his breath as he tried to read. Luckily it was all mostly numbers and graphs. None of it seemed important though, nothing to do with anything that Mesman told him to look for. He quickly labeled the folder and put it in a separate pile to be filed later.

“What are you doing later?” James asked. Tony shrugged.

“If you’re going to hold out the branch of companionship I have to tell you I’m not friendly.” He said. “Why does everyone want to be my friend?” James just smiled looked back down at the folders around his feet.

“I don’t care what you guys do just as long as there are no drugs, weapons, or serial killers and you do your jobs.” Bruce said as he tapped quickly on his computer.

“So being a regular killer is fine? Okay.” James said calmly. Tony shook his head and continued filing. “Anyway, there’s a big movie night going on in my building and since we’re going to be working together it could be a great opportunity to get to know each other. Maybe get some studying done and talk about how much we love our new jobs.”

Bruce gave a soft chuckle. Tony sighed, still going through his stack of folders. It might be easier to get this all done if he was on everyone’s good side. He might even like the movie. But he didn’t know how many people were going and he would be completely alone with everyone there.

“Can I bring someone?” Tony asked. James nodded. That was good, Peter probably likes movies. “What are we all watching?”

“Alien. It’s an American classic. Everyone on Earth should see it.” He said quickly, putting the last of his folders in the larger pile and dragging them over to the filing cabinet.
“I haven’t.” Tony muttered, scanning another folder.

He stopped, staring at the words in front of him. He read them over and over against to make sure he was reading them correctly. Government contracts to recreate Project Rebirth from the 1940s. That was what Bruce was doing with his experimentations with gamma radiation, trying to make the super soldier serum.

Tony closed the folder quickly and just labeled it ‘contracts’ before tossing it to the side. James had apparently decided that since he hadn’t seen Alien then he would have to describe every single detail of the plot. He had missed most of it as he focused on reading through the folders and filing them correctly in alphabetical order as instructed but nodded along whenever there was a pause.

Eventually the filing was all done and Bruce’s office looked a great deal tidier and he let them go. James gave Tony the time and address for when the movie was supposed to start and he texted Peter, who happily agreed to go.

Tony went home. He still had a few hours and wanted to write down everything so he could remember it for later. He knew about Project Rebirth and super soldiers and if gamma radiation was the answer then Mesman might have big plans for it and Tony wasn’t going to ask too many questions.

He scribbled down the information, the names of the military generals who hired him, what they were trying to do, how they were doing it, and anything else that seemed important. Now he just had to get his hands on the actual research and he would be one step closer to getting home.

‘I can’t believe you’ve never seen Alien. Ready to go when you are.’ The message read. Tony sighed, the movie must have been a big deal for these guys. When he watched movies and tv it was always something Lotte picked so he never thought much about what he wasn’t watching.

“So, what’s his name?” Peter asked. Tony met up with him just a few blocks away from the building to walk the rest of the way.

“James Rhodes. I work with him and he invited me. You guys might like each other, seems friendly enough.” Tony said. Peter shrugged.

“James is such a weirdly professional name though. Does he have a nickname? What do we call people named James? Jamie?” He said.

“Why can’t we just call him by his name?” Tony asked.

“I am on a mission to make as many friends as possible and nicknames derived from an actual name is an amazing method I learned from the internet.” Peter said. “I call you Tony because that’s probably already short for something. Unless you have Tony on your birth certificate. That would be weird.”

“It’s not on my birth certificate.” Tony said quickly. He doubted he had one. He had never seen it. “Why don’t you just call him Rhodes?”

“I’m not calling him by his last name, that’s cold and emotionless. Unlike you, I’m trying to make friends.” Peter shook his head.

“Well, we could always just ask him.”

Tony walked right into the building and up the stairs, looking for the room number that had been given to him. It was a large room, filling up fast with people as they sat down in front of the
projector screen or in the back getting drinks or snacks.

He saw James standing back by the table full of chips and walked up to him, Peter falling quietly behind. He seemed happy to see them. Tony didn’t understand why people liked him so much but he was beyond questioning it at this point. If people wanted to be friends then he could do that.

“Hey, Tony. Glad to see you could make it.” He said, smiling at the two of them as they walked up.

“Yeah. This is Peter Parker. The two of you are both pretty insistent that I see this movie.” Tony said.

“Of course, it’s literally about an alien who kills people and pops out of their chest.” Peter said, looking over the snacks closely. He grabbed a plate and started filling it with a different assortment of chips and dips. “What’s not to love?”

Tony shrugged and passed over all the food completely, heading straight for the drinks. There was a significant supply of alcohol and a smaller yet still large stock of soda. He wasn’t much of a soda drinker and he had never had alcohol a day in his life.

Everyone was either eating or drinking something, getting ready for the movie as the people by the projector said it was almost time. He didn’t care for soda, too much sugar and the carbonation sometimes upset his stomach so he just grabbed a random bottle and filled up a plastic cup.

“What about Jim? I can call me Jim.” Tony heard Peter say when he walked back up to him and James.

“No. Jim makes me sound like an old man.” He said.

“You guys are actually talking about this?” Tony asked.

“He makes an excellent point. My name is a bit pretentious. But Jamie makes me sound like a little kid.” He said.

“And I’m not going to call you Rhodes.” Peter replied, getting another handful of chips and a few cookies.

“Why not Rhodey?” Tony said, sighing. He didn’t see the point of this conversation, never heard of anyone argue about a name before. Tony just always thought to address people the names they introduced themselves with. He did sometimes make up silly little names for Mesman since he was never supposed to call him by his first name but he would never dare say them to his face.

“I like it.” He said, nodding. “No one ever has to call me James again.”

The movie started shortly after. It was interesting, he could see why everyone liked it so much. The movie was set in outer space and the crew of this ship as they responded to a distress call. Some alien, probably the one the film is named after, attached itself to one of the crew member’s faces. Protocol said he shouldn’t be let on board the ship due to quarantine regulations but the Science Officer snuck him on board anyway. That made Tony cringe, people weren’t supposed to do stuff like that. It was going to end badly.

He took a quick drink from his cup and almost spit it out. So this was alcohol. It wasn’t necessarily bad, it was just hell. It was bitter. A quick glance around didn’t show anyone else having any problems so he took another sip. It wasn’t so bad once he was prepared for it.
Sure enough, the crew is sitting around and eating when the man collapses and an alien bursts from his chest. It looked painful. Tony’s hand went up to rub against his ribs as he watched the creature escape. Tony was starting to feel sick. Everyone was dying, the guy betraying his commanding officer, the people who were actually following orders, it seemed like no matter anyone what a bad thing was going to happen.

It wasn’t something Tony wanted to think about. They told him if he did what he was supposed to then he would be alright. He wasn’t sure how he was supposed to feel watching a movie about a bunch of people who were doing their best to survive, follow protocols, and obey orders and all end up dead anyway.

The credits started rolling and he was ready to go home. He stood up and the world turned sideways as he hit a soft yet unmoving wall.

“Wow, Tony. You drink enough?” Peter asked. Tony shook his head as he pushed himself off of him and stood up straighter.

“I only had one cup.” Tony said, holding up the empty plastic cup in his hand.

“Pretty big cups though. What did you fill it up with?” Rhodey asked. Tony shrugged. “Okay, whatever. I’m not going to ask. Do you need help getting home?”

Tony smiled. He didn’t need any help, all he had to do was walk from one place to another. He’d been doing everything by himself since he could walk and he wasn’t going to start accepting help now. He wanted to tell them all that but instead he just waved his hand and quietly repeated, “Nee.”

“Okay, I’m going to walk him back to his apartment.” Peter said, nodding as Tony started muttering in Dutch.

“Okay, just make sure he doesn’t pee in an alley or something.” Rhodey said. He looked around as everyone started to leave. “I’ll stay here and help clean up, call me if you need anything. It was nice meeting you.”


Tony wasn’t paying much attention to the conversation, just leaning on Peter. They walked slowly down the stairs and out of the building. He mumbled under his breath about how, even though he didn’t like how almost everyone died, it was a good movie.

“Where do you live, buddy?” Peter asked. Tony mumbled and pointed down the street. “Alright. Next time, let’s just have some snacks okay.”

Tony shook his head, muttering unintelligibly.

“I have no idea what you’re saying, but okay.” Peter said.

“Sorry. Just tired.” He said. “I know what I’m saying but I guess you don’t know what I’m saying. Languages are strange.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you’re just tired.” Peter laughed.

It took a while of Tony pointing the way and Peter hoping he knew what he was doing as he led him through the streets before Tony finally said they were there. It was too long of a walk for Peter’s liking, he didn’t know how Tony didn’t it every day without complaint.
It was a small place, single chair in the living room and just a small bed in the bedroom but it looked comfortable enough. Peter dumped Tony in the chair and searched through the kitchen, frowning at the empty cabinets. There was no food, not even any plates.

“You have no food, Tony. Just eat out all the time?” Peter asked. There was nothing, no take out bags, no pizza boxes, not a single sign of any food anywhere.

“Yeah. I definitely eat.” Tony said, closing his eyes and leaning back in the chair.

“You haven’t eaten all day, have you?” Peter asked, looking over at him. It would make sense, he hadn’t seen Tony eat since the first day of classes in that Dunkin Donuts. Tony looked terrible, tired and small. No wonder one plastic cup of alcohol was enough to turn him into a mumbling mess who couldn’t stand up straight.

“I eat.” Tony said again, curling into the chair.

Peter sighed, he wasn’t going to get anywhere with it tonight. He just picked up Tony and dragged him to bed. “Go to sleep, idiot. We’re going to have a talk tomorrow.”

Tony whined slightly as he hit the covers. “Are you mad?”

“No.” Peter sighed. Tony smiled, eyes half closed and nodded.

“Okay. That’s good.” He said.

Chapter End Notes

Like I said, stuff and things next chapter. And people. I'll try to get it up as soon as possible. Comment, I love comments and I read them all with joy and pleasure.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long. Finals are coming up so that's my excuse. Also, I have three papers due this week so it's a miracle I ended up working on it at all. I love you guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony woke up underneath the blankets that were pulled over his head. It was dark, warm, and he felt completely alone. He ignored the spinning in his head and the sick feeling in his stomach and focused on his own dark, little world. It was safe and except for the frequent and unpleasant waves of nausea he was content.

At least until he heard his front door slamming shut. That wasn’t supposed to happen. He was supposed to be alone. Tony sat up slowly, blinking as the room moved around him. It was strange and made him regret drinking whatever random thing he pulled off of that table. Tony rolled over and fell onto the floor, knocking over the glass of water that sat there.

Peter must have found one of Tony’s two glasses and left it, just like how Peter walked him back here and how he made sure to put him to bed. He could have very well just left Tony in an alleyway or hurt him or any number of things and Tony was in no position to defend himself. He wasn’t going to go to any more movies, certainly not going to drink again. He was going to focus on the reason he was here but at least now he could actually trust Peter, if just a little bit.

“When I left you were asleep.” Peter said, walking into the bedroom.

“You left.” Tony muttered. He pushed himself off of the wet floor and leaned against his bed. A wave of pain rushed through his head as he sat up. “I must have been a super fun drunk if you wanted to hang out with me again in the morning.”

“Yeah, sorry about that. You don’t have any food so I had to stop by my dorm. I have noodles, bananas, and some random box of pancake mix. I also have a pan and paper plates so we’re set. College is great, I’m so prepared.” Peter said, smiling. Tony looked up at him, a slight downturn to his lips but he didn’t say anything. “I had to bring it all over, my roommate is pissed off at me because I accidentally set a few things on fire trying to do science. I only brought my food and a few clothes. We’re friends, you’ll let me stay over.”

He was lying. Tony knew he was because of the slight increase in the pitch of his voice. He didn’t even ask, he just said he was staying. Tony didn't know if he was allowed to turn say ‘no’ and Mesman never said he couldn’t have people over. Strangely enough, Tony didn’t even mind. Peter took care of him last night, he owed him one little lie.

“Just don’t use all the hot water.” Tony said. Peter smiled, nodding quickly.

Alright, sure thing. I’m going to see if you have a pan and then make us some banana pancakes that you will eat. Change into a dry shirt and we’ll head out into the living room.” He said.

Tony didn’t get up, just leaned his head back against the blankets as the puddle of water spread across the floor. Peter just sighed and started pushing gently at his shoulder. Tony didn’t want to
get up. It was Saturday, he didn’t have to do anything.

“Tony, you have to get up and eat.” Peter said, yanking on his t-shirt. Tony was still in the clothes he was wearing the day before, shoes lying forgotten on the floor as if they were kicked off at the last minute. He shook his head.

“No, I don’t have to.” Tony said firmly. “You guys advertise this as a free country.”

“When was the last time you ate?” Peter asked. Tony frowned. He didn’t much mind the question, although he usually got in trouble for lying to people trying to take care of him it was easy enough to hide the truth. If he admitted it had been almost four days then Peter would no doubt make him eat and this was something Tony refused to let anyone influence him on.

“Yesterday.” Tony said. His voice remains steady and he makes just the right amount of eye contact. Mesman would be proud. “Had lunch before invited you out.”

“Whatever, we’re still eating pancakes.” Peter said, walking over to the pile of folded shirts on top of Tony’s suitcase. He tossed a shirt over. “Change, you’re soaked.”

Tony pushed himself off of the floor and moved to sit up on the bed. Peter waited patiently by the door as he shrugged off his shirt and tossed it aside. He barely had time to pick up the dry, clean one before it was ripped from his hands.

“What? I thought you wanted me to change?” Tony said. He glanced up quickly at Peter. He was standing by the door moments ago but now he was right in front of him. He looked devastated. “I’m really not that hungry. I don’t see why you’re so upset about it.”

“No. No, we’re talking right now. And of course you’re going to eat the pancakes. You can’t lie to me.” Peter said quickly.

Tony held eye contact. He wasn’t sure what Peter was so upset about, usually he would go at least five days without eating and it had only been four. There was no problem, he had had it all under control for years.

“I am talking. And I’m fine. You’re being strange.” He said. Peter shook his head quicky.

“I know. We’ll talk about all of that in a minute. Right now I just want to know what all of those are!” His voice was rising as he gestured at Tony’s chest. “What’s going on with you?”

Tony glanced down. It wasn’t anything to be so upset about, just a few scars that clustered across his shoulders and down his front. He had counted them, there were only thirteen and the longest one curling off of his left shoulder.

“It is nothing.” Tony said, scooting back across the bed to press his back into the headboard. If this was upsetting Peter then he would definitely be surprised if he got a look at his back and Tony didn’t understand what the big deal was. “Children get hurt. It’s not an issue.”

“Yeah, kids get hurt but not like that.” Peter muttered. “You should have a scar from here you skinned up your knee too bad or fell out of a tree not be covered in them.”

Tony sighed. “I did fall out of a tree. See this one?” He said, trailing his finger over the pale pink line curving off of his shoulder. “Climbed a tree trying to gather pine nuts.”

“What were you getting pine nuts for?”
“So I could eat them.” Tony said. “Contrary to what you may believe, I do actually eat.”

“Why on Earth would you eat pine nuts?” Peter asked, running his hands through his hair.

“Well, I was stuck in Canada and I was hungry.”

Peter frowned. He looked as if he desperately wanted to scream but was too afraid to. Tony wouldn’t mind, if he upset him in some way yelling was better. It was certainly easier than having to deal with any pent up frustration for when he angered him again later. Peter wanted to yell, Tony was angering him. He knew he was, he could tell by the way he clenched his fists and shook slightly. Instead, they just sat there in silence.

“It’s a long scar.” Peter said finally, breathing deeply before sitting down on the bed.

“Fell a long way.” Tony said. His mind was racing, he didn’t know what he did. If he did something he wasn’t supposed to, broke some rule between friends, then he had to know what it was to avoid punishment in the future. “It’s fine. They all happened because of me anyway. My fault, nothing to worry about.”

“No, Tony. Is that what they told you?!” Peter yelled. Tony looked down at his hands, his headache coming back in full force. Peter sighed. “Later, we’ll talk about this later. Just put on a shirt and I’ll make pancakes. No objections.”

Tony took the shirt back from Peter, pulling it over his head and following him out into the living room. He sat down quietly into the single chair and Peter got to work in the kitchen. The room filled with the smell of food which caused Tony’s mouth to water. A strange sort of silence fell over them, no one said anything as he watched the food being prepared and Peter glanced over at him every few minutes, frowning slightly.

“Eat.” Peter said, holding a paper plate with a small pile of banana pancakes. Tony took it and frowned. “No forks because apparently you don’t believe in buying anything to eat with. Just use your hands, I won’t judge.” He sat down on the floor next to Tony’s chair with his own plate and smiled.

Tony poked at his pancake. “You can’t make me eat it.” He said slowly. “I feel terrible at the moment so what if I don’t want to eat?”

“I don’t doubt it, considering how drunk you were last night.” Peter said, picking up one of his pancakes. “But no, you have to eat. It’s kinda necessary for life.”

He couldn’t eat. It wasn’t time yet. Tony knew he needed to eat and he was going to but not yet. He had a schedule, he had careful control over it. Mesman never cared about two things, if Tony talked back and how much he ate. Tony cherished both activities. He had toned back on his insolence because he wasn’t sure how people would react and Tony lived his life trying to avoid physical punishment. Controlling his eating was easier, Peter was the only one who noticed so far. Tony could figure something out about that.

“I really don’t think I can.” Tony said, poking again at his steadily cooling pancakes. “I feel sick. If I eat this I will probably throw up on you and neither of us want that.” He stood quickly and slid his plate over to Peter and walked quickly back towards the bedroom.

He crawled back onto the bed and threw the blankets over his head. It wasn’t a lie really. His head was pounding and his stomach did feel like he couldn’t keep down anything even if he tried to eat. Tony never planned on drinking again.
A weight dropped next to him on the bed softly. Tony didn’t look up to see what it was. Instead he just pulled his blankets closer to him.

“You know you’re my friend right? We’ve only known each other for a few weeks but you’re pretty much my best friend right now.” Peter said, voice barely rising above a whisper. “What’s going on with you?”

Tony sighed. He could admit it was probably a little strange but all the scars were his fault, he did something he wasn’t supposed to, he messed up, and he was punished. It used to happen a lot and sometimes Tony hurt so much he could hardly move. He tried to avoid punishment now and the first step towards that was knowing what the rules were. Apparently eating regularly was a big one for Peter.

“Are you angry?” Tony muttered.

“No, no. I’m not mad at you. I just want to know what’s going on with you.” Peter said. Tony frowned under the covers. The only major thing happening in his life was completing his mission and getting back. Mesman ordered him to do it and Lotte said that it needed to be done so they could be taken care of. That was all that mattered.

“Nothing.” He said.

“Whatever. I’ll figure it out.” Peter said. “I just want to make sure you’re okay.” Tony felt a shift in movement and heard him walk back out into the living room.

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“Long weekend?” Rhodey asked, carrying a box quickly as they followed Dr. Banner.

They finally got to see Bruce’s lab. They met Dr. Betty Ross as well as she rushed from one of the computers and into the room containing a large machine. She smiled at them as she walked past.

“You could say that.” Tony said, walking up to the large windows looking into the room with the machines. “Peter moved in because apparently he set a small fire in his dorm and his roommate is angry.”

“Yeah, he’s been texting me all weekend freaking out about something. Won’t tell me what it is but says it’s big.” Rhodey said. “He also described to me the entire plot of the tv series Firefly and then told me to make sure to take you out to lunch.”

They put the boxes down on the table Bruce was waving towards and Tony walked back towards the large window looking into the other room. The machine was large, beautifully engineered and Tony would make any excuse possible to get a closer at it.

“If it all goes well, I’ll buy lunch for everyone.” Bruce said, smiling as he glanced towards the machine. “Okay, you two. This thing, when activated, will give off high levels of gamma radiation. That room is built to absorb it without letting any of it leak out. However, even when it's off neither of you are allowed in that room.”

Rhodey nodded quickly and turned away. Tony squinted, focusing on Dr. Ross adjusting small parts of the machine. This was important.

“It should be ready.” Dr. Ross said, walking out to join them. “Better go double check before we begin.” Bruce smiled, nodding quickly before going in and closing the door behind him.
“You guys are definitely into each other.” Rhodey called out from the other side of the room. He was sitting at one of the numerous desks, leaning back with his feet propped up before him. “You guys make those intense stares every time you glance at each other.”

Betty laughed. Tony just frowned and looked back at them. Was something like that obvious to look for? He followed her as she walked over to where Rhodey was sitting.

“Well, we’ve known each other for a while. I wouldn’t blame him for falling in love with me.” She said.

Tony chuckled as he glanced back at the large windows. Bruce had his whole arm in one of the slots in the machine, he looked focused. Whatever this thing did, it was important to his research. Tony knew his research was based on the super soldier project and Mesman wanted that information.

“I went to Culver University. That’s where we met.” Betty said, pulling Tony’s attention back to them.

“Have you been together long?” He asked.

“A few years.” Betty said. “Why don’t you two tell me something about yourselves. I haven’t had a chance to meet the interns yet.” She walked towards one of the computers and sat down.

Rhodey and Tony stood behind her as she checked the data scrolling across the screen. Dr. Ross glanced up at them after a few minutes and nodded.

“Oh, well I’m from Philadelphia. I’m in Course 16, Aerospace Engineering. Hoping to go into the air force one day.” Rhodey said quickly, nodding.

“So you’re going to be an actual rocket scientist.” Tony said.

“It’s cooler than being some lame mechanical engineer.” Rhodey said, giving Tony a light shove. “I have to impress the girls some way and I don’t have some cool European accent working for me.”

Tony shrugged. Betty smiled at the two of them.

“Your turn.” She said, pointing to him before turning back to the computer.

“There isn’t really much to know about me.” Tony said. Mesman made a list of all the things he wasn’t allowed to talk about, like the fact that his last name on file wasn’t real, he had no formal education, or that he was actually there to first steal Dr. Banner’s research. “I’m just a nineteen year old student from the Netherlands.”

“There we go, that’s interesting. Talk about that.” Betty said, turning around and smiling at him. “What was the Netherlands like?”

“The winters were cold.” He said.

Rhodey rolled his eyes just as a flash of bright green light engulfed them, pouring in from the windows. Betty made a mad dash for the door, screaming something about Bruce before Rhodey grabbed her and pulled her back. Tony just blinked, keeping his eyes down and away from the bright light still pouring in from the windows.

“Let me go! That wasn’t supposed to happen, it wasn’t on.” Betty yelled. “I have to check on
Bruce!

She stood quickly and ran for the door. Before she could reach it a loud roar pierced the air, causing everyone to stop and grab their ears. When it stopped they could hear something being ripped apart, the sound of metal scraping against metal. Tony barely had time to grab Rhodey and jump out of the way as half of the machine came sailing through the window and into the line of desks they were just standing by. Tony looked up quickly, a large mass of green crashing through the wall.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, progress. I really meant to get a bit farther than this in the chapter but I ended up making Peter and Tony's part longer than I planned. Peter is figuring stuff out and isn't happy about it but Tony starting to think he's mad at him. My sweet babies. Also, Bruce.

Comment please, I love comments. I might just add a few more people in the next chapter.
Chapter 11

Sorry this took so long. Happy Holidays, I love you all. Also, I didn't get as far as I wanted to so not very many characters are introduced this chapter (really only one).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What is that?” Tony asked quickly as they dodged the onslaught of fists that were flying around in a confused rage.

Tony wasn't trained for this. There was no plan, no form of preparation, he just grabbed Rhodey and pulled him away from every object thrown towards them and every fist that struck the ground near them. In front of him was what appeared to be a giant green man in ripped clothing and it was angry, punching large holes in the wall and throwing furniture and plaster with loud yells.

“I have no idea.” Rhodey said. He looked around quickly. “But it appeared from nowhere and Bruce is gone. I'm going to get Ross, be careful.”

Betty was pressed against the door to the machine room, crouched down with her hands over her head. Tony ran for the wall near the exit as one of the desks was thrown towards them while Rhodey dashed towards Betty. The giant’s attention was stuck on Tony, rushing towards him with a snarl. Tony ran out of the door, sparing a quick glance back at Betty and Rhodey. They were afraid, frozen as he covered her protectively.

It smashed through the wall as Tony ran into the hallway. The loud roar the shook the building gave him a wave of energy as he rushed quicker through the halls. Dr. Ross and Dr. Banner had a lab in the basement of one of the buildings on campus, Rhodey and Betty could make it out while the giant was distracted by Tony so if he could just make it to one of the stairwell he could possibly trap it in the basement.

Tony was hit in the side, a large fist swinging out and sending a shockwave through his body as he smashed into the wall. His vision blacked out for a few seconds as pain erupted all around him. Something was broken, burning pain erupting around his left shoulder and across his ribs. Tony has had broken ribs before, they were painful and sent waves of pain over his torso whenever he tried to move.

Large pieces of wall started to fall around him as the giant continued to attack the building and the furniture. With a loud grunt it crashed through the ceiling, leaving Tony on the ground pressed up against a wall.

He sat up slowly. He moved his arm slowly to wrap around his chest, experiencing a blinding pain the spread from his left shoulder and down to his wrist. For a moment it seemed as though he wouldn’t be able get up off the ground because it was too painful to try to push himself up. The pull on his ribs and the slightest movements of his arm was too agonizing.

“Shit, you okay?” Tony looked up towards the direction of the voice. It was just Rhodey and Betty, slowly making their way through the trail of rubble that littered the hallway. Walls had been
knocked down, leaving large holes every few feet and broken bits of plaster and wood covering the floors.

Tony nodded slowly. He was fine, alive but a little banged up. If he flinched when Rhodey laid a hand softly on his uninjured shoulder than no one mentioned it.

“I’m alright. I’m good.” Tony said. He could hear loud crashes and the walls still vibrated every few minutes but it was farther away now. “I think I broke something.”

“That’s the opposite of okay.” Rhodey said, gently laying a hand under his right shoulder and around his back to pull him up. Tony wasn’t sure if he let out a groan or a whine when the pain flooded him as he was dragged upright. “Come on, buddy. We have to go right now. Call the police, maybe the National Guard. I have no idea what is happening but it’s time to go.”

Rhodey trailed a few steps ahead while Betty put a gentle hand on Tony’s back to help steady him. It was quiet now, no loud sounds of destruction that would shake the building. They still took their time going up the stairs as their eyes and ears strained for any noises or movements, waiting for it to appear and attack again.

“What happened to Bruce?” Tony asked. He gripped tightly onto the sleeve of Betty’s lab coat.

“He just vanished.” Dr. Ross said. She stared ahead, not even glancing around as they reached the ground floor. “It... I don’t know. It doesn’t make sense, the machine was off. He might have accidently bumped something to set it off or it could have been faulty from the start. I don’t know what happened.”

“I have a few theories. Either the wave of nuclear energy opened a rift in space and time and Dr. Banner fell through in exchange for a giant, violent ogre thing or it caused him to shapeshift and turn green.” Rhodey said. Neither option seemed very pleasant.

A large crowd had formed outside of the building. They rambled loudly as Betty, Rhodey, and Tony walked out the front door. No one paid them any attention, they were all focused on the trail of destruction leading away from the building with a large hole in one of the brick walls.

Tony’s shoulder was starting to throb. Rhodey weaved them through the crowd effortlessly, finding small paths where the people had spread out further. He only stopped when they made it out onto the street and passed by numerous police cars.

He tried to take a few deep breaths. It wasn’t easy, a wave of pain crossed his chest with ever inhale and he was exhausted.

“I think we need to get you to a hospital, buddy.” He said, slowing his pace to walk beside Tony and Betty.

Tony shook his head. “No, I am alright.” Betty’s hand curled into his shirt as he tried to pull away. “I am really okay. We have more important things to deal with at the moment.”

“Oh no, Tony. James will get you to the hospital.” She said, a forced smile barely crossing her face. Rhodey nodded quickly. “I will go back to the offices to see if I can figure out what happened.”

Tony pushed Rhodey away when he stepped forward take him. He didn’t need help, he needed to figure out what was happening. Rhodey just shook his head and placed a steady hand on his back.

The crowd was steadily growing as people continued to pour out of the surrounding buildings and
into the street. No one paid much attention to them, just talked loudly amongst themselves about the monster that destroyed the building and ran off. Police stood around the crowd, muttering into their radios.

“It’s nothing. I am not dying. It doesn’t even hurt that bad.” Tony said, meeting Rhodey’s gaze. “I can help you. I can help you guys go through all the research and files until we figure out what happened. If you guys are still determined to take me to the hospital then I will go willingly when we figure it out.”

Betty looked to be pondering it for a moment, eyes drifting off as she thought. Rhodey shook his head quickly and was soon followed by Betty. Tony frowned.

“No, Tony. You look like you’re barely standing.” Rhodey said. With those words Tony became suddenly hyper-aware of the hands holding him up. Rhodey’s was on his back, Betty’s were gingerly gripping his uninjured arm. Tony went to push them off but only received matching glares from the two of them. “I’m taking you to the hospital.”

“You can’t make me go.” Tony said.

“Oh, yes I can. You’re my friend and you’re hurt so whether you like it or not you’re going to the hospital.” Rhodey said firmly.

Tony bit his lip, he wasn’t here to waste time and make friends. He was sent here to first get Bruce’s research. He had also couldn’t remember ever being in a hospital. Back at Mesman’s house if he was injured it was either left alone or Lotte would help him until he was old enough to figure out how to disinfect open wounds and wrap them himself.

“I don’t want to go. I can take care of this myself. Let me help.” Tony muttered. Rhodey shook his head. “Besides, it’s cold. None of us remembered to grab out coats so it will just be strange for two cold teenagers to show up.”

“Nope, hospital.” He said. “I’m not changing my mind. You’re going even if I have to drag you there.”

Tony stopped, he wasn’t walking and he didn’t know if he had anything else to say. He didn’t want Rhodey to drag him anywhere. It sounded like a big inconvenience that would only give him more pain than he was already in.

Instead of arguing further, he nodded. Rhodey was adamant to get him to the hospital so Tony decided that it must be necessary. He didn’t want to anger the man further.

“Alright good. We’re going to go to the hospital and you’re going to be alright.” Rhodey said, nodding towards Betty. “You’ll be okay?”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. I just… I have to figure out what happened to Bruce.” Betty said. She shoved a hand in her pocket before dangling her keys out to Rhodey. “Take my car, you’ll get there faster. It’s in the parking lot, just hit the button and you should see the lights come on.”

“Not worried about us stealing it and going to Vegas?” Rhodey asked.

“I was given your names, phone numbers, and your student id numbers when you were hired. I don’t think you want to steal my car. Now take care of him.” She said. Rhodey nodded and started to lead Tony towards the parking lot. “I’ll call you if I find anything.”

Tony didn’t say anything. He just let himself be led over to Dr. Ross’s car without further
complaint, he put on his seatbelt when instructed, and he let Rhodey drive down Boston’s streets without question. He was worried, but silent.

When they made it to the hospital Rhodey just sat Tony down in the waiting room of the ER and went to talk to the receptionists. The room was packed full of people suffering from different kinds of injuries and illnesses as they waited to be called back to see a doctor.

He would probably be waiting a while. He wasn’t sure what the method was for prioritizing injured patients was but he was certain he would be fairly low. It was just a hurt shoulder and a few sore ribs. He has had worse than that.

“You’re being awfully quiet. I’m sure you’re IQ is too high to have nothing to say.” Rhodey said, sitting down next to him with a clipboard.

“I just don’t think this is necessary. It’s nothing I cannot handle.” Tony said.

“Nah, your arm is swelling a bit and you don’t move around without wrapping an arm around your chest.” He said, waving the clip around. “You’re doing this and you have to answer questions now. What’s your full name and date of birth?”

Tony sighed. “I can fill it out. I’m not entirely helpless.” He held out his hand to grab the clipboard but Rhodey just pulled it away, giving him a steady glare. “Tony Smit. Tony is short for Anthony. I was born on July 17th.”

They were lies, but the ones in all his student paperwork and in the identity that he was given. He didn’t know what his actual last name was or the exact date of his birth, but he never really thought of them as important and there was no way he could give them to Rhodey.

“Smit? Is that like the Dutch version of ‘Smith’?” Rhodey asked, smiling at Tony’s nod. “Alright. What’s your reason for coming into the ER?”

“ Forced to by coworker.” Tony said. Rhodey groaned and rolled his eyes.

“We both know that. Just tell me what hurts.”

“Left shoulder and the right side of my ribs.” Tony said. “What should we say happened? I don’t think thrown into a wall by a rampaging green giant will seem very… normal.”

Rhodey looked up from the paperwork and looked over at the nurses. “No, I don’t think it would go over well.” He looked over to Tony, focusing on his swelling on his shoulder and the way he protected his ribs. “You can just say there was an accident. It’s technically the truth so you don’t have to come up with any weird lies.” Tony chuckled softly and nodded.

It was over an hour before they were called back to see the doctor. She prodded gently at his shoulder and his chest before scheduling an x-ray. It was done, Tony was completely still in the machine and let them work. Then it was just more waiting as they sat on the hospital bed. Tony considered just walking out. They had been there for several hours and still nothing was better and no word from Betty.

Rhodey stayed sitting in one of the chairs next to the hospital bed he was told to wait on. Tony was surprised but not at all displeased that the man stayed. He could just leave, Tony was capable of dealing with the doctors and legally he was old enough to do it alone.

Tony wanted to say as much but Rhodey looked deep in thought, slouching down in his chair and mindlessly kicking at the floor. He only snapped to attention when the doctor finally walked in,
holding Tony’s x-rays.

“Is he going to be okay? Anything broken?” Rhodey asked quickly.

“He dislocated his shoulder and cracked three ribs. Nothing life threatening but he should take it easy and relax for a few weeks.” The doctor said to Rhodey. Tony rolled his eyes. “We should be able to reset it without surgery. Are you allergic to any medications?” Tony shook his head.

“What are you guys going to do?” Rhodey asked.

“We’re going to give him a few medications to help with the pain and help keep him calm. Then a few people are going to come in and reset the joint.” The doctor said, nodding towards a nurse. “We’ll get another x-ray then to see if it was set properly. As for the ribs, they should heal in a few weeks. Be careful and I’ll prescribe a pain medication.”

A nurse walked over and held out a small cup with several pills inside. They must have been for his shoulder so they could reset it. Regardless, the sight made his stomach drop and he leaned away from it. She smiled softly and held the cup closer.

Tony smacked it from her hand, causing the pills to scatter across the floor. The nurse backed away quickly as Rhodey appeared at his side to check on him.

“Sorry. I’m sorry.” Tony said quickly. He looked up at Rhodey, glancing quickly at the nurse and the doctor. “I just don’t need it. I don’t want any pills. It doesn’t hurt that bad and it’s not swelling too much. I don’t need it.”

The doctor nodded and waved the nurse away. Rhodey stayed by his side, staring intently. Tony didn’t say anything and kept his eyes forward. He wasn’t going to be the one to mention anything.

It was another long wait before the people who would reset his arm came. Tony was tired of all the waiting. He could have this whole thing handled by now if he was allowed to do it himself.

It hurt when they reset it, having him lie back as they gently moved the bone back into place. Tony clenched his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut to keep from screaming but the moment it was reset the pain lessened. It was still there, but not in the overwhelming burning that it was moments ago.

Now all he needed to do was get it x-rayed again like the doctor suggested and he should be free. Rhodey kept staring at him, a slight downturn to his lips as he kept shifting his wait from foot to foot. He hadn’t spoken in a while.

They were left in that room for a longer time than before for the x-ray. Rhodey eventually returned to his chair by the bed and hummed quietly while Tony just stayed sitting on the bed. No one came for a long time.

When the doctor finally came back she looked frustrated and conflicted. She displayed a large from and shook slightly from what Tony would guess as anger. A man followed closely behind her, dressed in a suit and kept his expression neutral. He glanced between Rhodey and Tony before looking back at the doctor.

The doctor shook her head. “Sadly we won’t be able to do another x-ray. I told this man that it was necessary but-”

“He will get his x-ray and we’ll make sure that he remains as healthy as possible.” The man said firmly.
Rhodey frowned, staring at him. “What’s going on?” He asked, standing beside Tony again.

“You have to leave, apparently.” She said. Rhodey opened his mouth to protest but the doctor shook her head again. “We’ll put your arm in a sling, I want you to move it as little as possible. Alright?”

Tony nodded. He and Rhodey analyzed the man standing before them as the doctor retrieved a sling and secured it around Tony’s arm, placing an ice pack over his shoulder and then left to get the discharge forms.

“What are you doing?” Tony asked the stranger.

“Several hours ago there was what appeared to be a giant green creature rampaging across the MIT campus before travelling south. Luckily there were no deaths and few injuries. We were able to find where the attack originated by following the destruction and it led to the lab of Dr. Banner and Dr. Ross. We have yet to locate Banner, but Ross was found in her office and their two interns, who we believe were present when it started, are here in the emergency room.” The man in the suit said, voice calm and steady. “We just want answers.”

“We?” Rhodey said. He took another step closer to Tony and crossed his arms.

“I’m Agent Coulson with the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division. I’d just like you both to come with me and enlighten us about what happened.” He said, reaching into his pocket before displaying his badge.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, yay. Hopefully you liked it, I enjoyed writing it even though I got massive writers block for this chapter. The next one will be interesting, a lot more people then. I promise. Comment, tell me things, I love you.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

I finished the chapter. I hope you guys are happy, I was up until 4am because I had a burst of inspiration. Sorry it took so long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Would you like something for the pain?” The woman asked, taking a seat in front of Tony.

For an interrogation room, Tony expected worse. It was well lit, the chairs were comfortable, and there was no awkward two-way mirror. He had been left to wait patiently for whoever was to come and question him about everything. Tony knew what he was going to say, preparing answers for the most likely questions.

He shook his head and returned to staring at the smooth metal surface of the table in front of him. He didn’t say anything. Usually in this kind of situation he found it best to only speak when absolutely necessary. Mesman may have tolerated him talking back on normal occasions, but when it was serious Tony learned to be quiet and listen until it was his turn to speak respectfully. Mesman didn’t speak without demanding a response.

“I’m Agent Hill. Can you give me your name?” She asked. Tony didn’t take his eyes off the table, didn’t say anything at all. She had probably figured out his name by now so there was no point in answering. “Can you tell us where you’re from?”

“Am I allowed rights?” Tony asked quietly. On multiple occasions he had seen people around campus passing out flyers about American’s rights if they are arrested or attacked by police. One said that they had the right to not answer questions and, although he wasn’t sure he was allowed the same liberties, he wasn’t going to answer questions about himself when they said they were going to discuss the giant green creature that attacked him.

He was shocked when she nodded her head and moved on. He had permission to not speak if he didn’t want to and that was an interesting feeling. Mesman required answers, Agent Hill doesn’t. He whispered a loft ‘thank you, ma’am’ before she continued.

“Can you explain what happened earlier today?” She asked with a sigh.

“Dr. Banner went to inspect a machine that would give off high levels of gamma radiation. Dr. Ross said it wasn’t on but it seemed to have let out the radiation early.” Tony said, thinking carefully of what words to use. He struggled to find the correct words to put together and how to phrase it just correctly that no one else would get into more trouble. “Then Banner was gone and the… thing… was there. It seemed pretty angry before it ran off.”

“And you were injured?” Agent Hill asked.

“It’s not as bad as it looks.” He says, shaking his head slowly. “It is just my shoulder. I’ve had worse than this.”

Her gaze lingered for a few minutes before she said anything. She was thinking, Tony wasn’t sure
what exactly was going through her head but he knew it was about him and the look she was giving him didn’t sit well on his stomach. He stopped himself from breathing a sigh of relief when she nodded and replied. “Dislocated shoulder and cracked ribs. That’s painful, trust me I know. But you’re nineteen, what have you had that was worse?”

Tony shrugged, maintains eye contact and refuses to fidget his hand against the table. “I fell out of a tree.” He said calmly, because it would be too suspicious for him not to answer and although they said it was his right not to answer questions he knew when he had to.

“Does anything else hurt besides your arm or ribs?” Hill asked. Tony shook his head. “Feeling sick at all?” He shook his head again. He felt fine, normal. If not for the sharp pains at each small movement and the throbbing around his sides he wouldn’t think anything was wrong at all. “Were you exposed to any radiation when the accident occurred?”

Tony frowned. He hadn’t, he was in a different room at a desk far from the door leading to where the radiation was released. Also, that room was supposed to be specialized in preventing leaks. He was fine and he told the agent just that.

“Be sure to tell us if you remember that you have. We don’t know how it will affect you the same way it did Banner.” She said quickly.

“Did you find him? Dr. Banner?” Tony asked. “Do you know what happened?”

Agent Hill sighed. “We found him naked, unharmed, and asleep in Franklin Park less than an hour ago. Amazingly enough the path of destruction led right to him.”

Tony felt his muscles relax. He would never admit that he was worried but he was pleased to hear that his professor was found well and safe. Still, it just made him more confused than he was before.

“Was he that thing that attacked?” Tony said, resisting the urge to rub at his ribs.

“We don’t know just yet but we’re looking into it.” Agent Hill said. Tony nodded slowly and looked over to the clock. It was getting late. “Are you tired?”

“It’s been a long day.” He said.

“One last question then.” She said, Tony perked up, waiting for the question so he could be done and go home. “What do you know about Spiderman.”

Tony blinked. That wasn’t a question he was expecting. He wasn’t prepared for it at all. Also, he had no idea what that meant. “I don’t know what a Spiderman is, ma’am.” It was the truth and he didn’t see how it could hurt him at the moment.

“Spiderman is a costumed vigilante from New York. He has never really been a problem for SHIELD but he hasn’t been sighted in almost a year.” Agent Hill said. She stared him down carefully, analyzing every twitch and movement his face made. “Until this morning when he appeared to be guiding the creature away from the more populated areas. Do you have any idea what he was doing in Boston?”

“I haven’t been in the country long, let alone the city. I didn’t know he existed and I don’t know why he’s here.” Tony said firmly. She nodded before releasing him.

“He is in no way connected to Dr. Banner and Dr. Ross’s research?” She asked. Tony just shook his head.
He breathed a sigh of relief when Agent Hill said he was free to go but said that SHIELD would keep in touch. That was fine. Mesman told him all about SHIELD. It was part of his mission, he needed them. Although he hadn’t expected getting involved in quiet that manner, it ended up being useful.

Rhodey was waiting for him out in the hall, a small smile brushing across his face when they saw each other. Tony just nodded to him. He was exhausted, wanted to go back to the apartment and sleep. Rhodey had to go back to the hospital to get Dr. Ross’s car.

Rhodey said that Coulson promised an agent would meet them at the front door to drive them back. It was certainly better than walking. Tony didn’t know much about the building they were brought to, probably one owned by the agency by the looks of everyone in uniforms plastered with the SHIELD logo, but he did know it was a rather long drive back to campus so it would be a horrible walk. If they weren’t getting a ride then there was no way he would go back for Betty’s car and he wouldn’t expect Rhodey to either. They could get it in the morning, catch a bus and make the trip.

“They went easy on you, right?” Rhodey asked when they got to the elevator. “You’re pretty banged up so they better not have overwhelmed you with anything.”

“I’m fine.” Tony said, smiling softly. “The lady was nice enough.”

Rhoder nodded. He continually shifted his weight form foot to foot as they rode the elevator down to the ground floor. He was uncomfortable, Tony could tell. Honestly, they both were. He wasn’t quite sure he had wrapped his head around what had actually happened and he just didn’t want to think about it anymore. If Rhodey felt at all the same as he did then he was probably exhausted too. No point in wasting energy on talking about things they didn’t understand.

They walked out into the lobby. There were only two agents standing near the door, both talking quietly as they leaned towards each other in a private conversation. It was most likely one of them that would drive them home, since Agent Coulson told them their ride would meet them at the door. Neither of them looked like drivers though, both too heavily armed to be anything close to notthreatening.

Then he stopped, just a few yards away from them as he looked them over closely. At first he didn’t want to interrupt anything. Both the male and the female agent seemed to be in a deep discussion, he could wait a few minutes to head home instead of interrupting. Then the man brushed his hair off of his forehead as he glanced over at him and Rhodey.

Tony held his breath as he watched them closely, some unsettling tension pooling in his stomach. It wasn’t right. He prayed desperately that he was wrong and there was a very good chance that he was but he couldn’t stop seeing it. He couldn’t stop seeing the familiar features of the man’s face, the way he held himself. Tony recognized him, no matter how much he wished he didn’t he knew who this man was.

At first he felt scared as he watched the agent nod a goodbye to the woman he was talking with and walked over. Tony didn’t know what to think, random thoughts flashed through his mind but none of them made much sense. They were just desperate, anxious ideas of running away and hiding.

He was walking towards them, smiling happily. Tony hated it, he hated him. He backed up slowly as he approached. He didn’t know what to do, what consequences waited for him for each possibility that popped into his head.

“Hey, you guys ready to go?” The agent asked, stopping in front of them. “I’m Agent Clint Bar-“
Tony couldn’t handle it. He felt a sudden wave of anger and fear wash over him when he introduced himself. It was impossible not to recognize him, Tony remembered each of them, the people who took him and changed his whole life. He hated them. They took him, hurt him, and promised things that never came and Tony never forgot that.

He wasn’t thinking. Tony just blinked and then he was kneeling on the ground, one knee pressed into Clint’s chest to pin him down while he quickly ripped a knife from one of the agent’s many sheaths. It was a stupid idea, a blind moment of anger, because now he had a knife pressed against Clint’s neck with a completely different knife pressed against his own.

Focused, cautious eyes looked up at him as he surveyed his surroundings. Rhodey had backed away several feet, staring intently. Clint had one hand gripping Tony’s arm firmly, trying to push it just slightly away from his throat, while his other hand pressed a separate knife up towards Tony. He couldn’t see it, but he could feel the barrel of a gun brushing lightly at the hair on the back of his head.

That would have been a better choice. Tony could have grabbed one of the agent’s guns to attack him with, it was quicker and more powerful. Instead he had some stranger pressing a gun against his head.

“I don’t like guns in my face.” Tony muttered. He wished his other arm wasn’t in that sling. He could have done something more, smacked away either the knife or the gun that was threatening him.

“Not in your face.” A female voice said behind him. Of course she was there, that one other agent he was talking to right before Tony and Rhodey walked up. She must not have gotten very far to be able to just appear behind him like that.

“Tony, put the fucking knife down.” Rhodey muttered, walking slowly towards them.

“Ik wil naar huis.” Tony said, nearly shouting. He didn’t think he could put the knife down now, even if he wanted to, but he also couldn’t push it those last few inches into Clint’s throat. He just sat completely still.

Slowly the hand gripping his arm loosened and the knife pressed against his face lowered and Clint blinked up at him. He nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I know.” Clint said. “I know and I’m sorry.” Tony frowned, shaking his head and squeezing the knife tighter. The agent didn’t seem worried, he looked Tony straight in the eyes and gave a weak smile. “Natasha, put the gun down.”

There was a pause, the gun pressing deeper into his head until he heard a soft grumble and felt it disappear. Tony relaxed immediately, his shoulders slumping and he took a deep breath. Clint was still staring up at him. Tony nodded.

The knife slipped out of his hand and Tony leaned over to where Rhodey had walked up next to him. He was tired. He just wanted to go back to the apartment and go to sleep. Instead, Rhodey gave him a light pat on the head before Natasha pulled him away forcefully and pinned him face first into the ground. Tony didn’t struggle.
And there it is. More to come soon.
If I start taking too long again just come on tumblr to yell at me, my ask is always open.
* shameless self-promotion: aceofultron.tumblr.com *
Comment, I worked hard on this and I love feedback with all of my heart and soul
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Really thought I would get farther into this than I did. Who knew dialogue could take up such a large portion of the word count. Anyway, here it is. The next chapter, I hope you like it because you're all amazing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I can’t believe you got us arrested, Tony.” Rhodey said, frowning angrily from where he sat on the other side of the room. He’d been saying the same thing all night. Tony shrugged, a small movement that jostled his injured shoulder. “No. You actually tackled someone and whipped out a knife. You could have killed him, he could have killed you.”

Tony didn’t say anything, just looked around their cell once more. It was a large, transparent room, Tony wasn’t sure what it was made of but it wasn’t glass. He could tell by the sounds it made when he knocked his knuckles against it. One wall looked out towards the entrance, large mirrored windows on either side of the door. Someone could be looking in at them and Tony wouldn’t see. He frowned at the windows for a few minutes before turning away, facing the back wall. On the side facing away from the door there was nothing, just a large concrete wall several feet away from their cell. On either side he could see into the adjacent cells. One was empty, the other had an exhausted, asleep Bruce Banner curled up in a corner.

“Are you just not gonna say anything?” Rhodey asked. Tony sat in the corner, back to Bruce’s cell and stared blankly towards the door. “Are you alright?”

There was a slight pause, just a few seconds before Tony shook his head. He considered lying, that seemed to be what he did most so it must have been a talent of his but instead he just silently shook his head. He wasn’t okay. He wasn’t quite sure how he was feeling but he knew it wasn’t okay.

“You are going to get out of here.” Tony said. “You did nothing. They will let you go once they realize you are innocent.”

“What about you?” Rhodey asked. Tony looked back out of the transparent wall. Rhodey walked up to him quickly, kicking lightly at his feet. “No. You’re not allowed to just sit there and say anything. It’s been a long day and I want answers. We were attacked by a giant green monster, I sat in the hospital with you, I was interrogated by an intelligence agency, you put a knife to a secret agent’s throat, and I just spent the night in a giant glass prison cell.”

“I don’t know what you want me to say.” Tony said quietly.

“I want the truth for fuck’s sake! I don’t know if this will get me kicked out of MIT or not but spending the night in law enforcement custody will most definitely have consequences.” Rhodey said loudly, almost shouting. Tony’s chin snapped to his chest almost instantly and he started just staring at his hands. Rhodey sighed, continuing in a quieter tone. “Just, tell me the truth Tony. Why did you attack that guy?”

Tony blinked. He honestly had no idea how to answer that question. What he supposed to say that he recognized him? That that man helped kidnap him and sell him away like he was nothing? That
he was angry because of that? Tony sighed. “I don’t know.”

Rhodey groaned, stepping back and walking towards the other side of the room, glancing at Banner’s sleeping form in the cell next to them. “You don’t try to kill people and have no idea why, Tony. Please just tell me why. I can help.”

Tony didn’t have an answer. With nothing more to say he just leaned against the clear wall, resting his head on the cool surface. There wasn’t much to do now but wait. Tony expected another round of interrogations which would definitely be significantly less friendly then the first. Rhodey would be sent home. He would answer the questions honestly, they would believe his innocence, and they would let him go.

Rhodey had resigned himself to sitting in the center of the room, legs crossed as he watched Bruce through the wall. Every few minutes he would glance over to Tony with a deep frown and a discontented sigh.

He fell asleep. He really shouldn’t have, he was in an unfamiliar environment and could possibly be in danger. Still, he was exhausted. His ribs ached consistently and he continued to lean against the wall and his shoulder sent sharp waves of pain throughout his body with every small shift of movement. It was almost a relief when it all drifted away and his eyes drooped shut.

Tony didn’t dream. He just blinked his eyes open, unsure of how long he had slept for. The lighting was the same, no windows on any of the walls to tell him if it was light out. And Rhodey was gone.

He was sore from probably hours in his position leaning against the wall and his head started to pound as he pushed himself up too quickly. Tony took a deep breath, forcing himself to calm down. They probably just came in to ask Rhodey questions. Then they would let him go. Still, Tony didn’t like it falling asleep and having people disappear. It was unsettling.

“Everything alright?” Tony turned quickly towards the voice. Agent Coulson sat calmly in a foldout chair just outside of the transparent walls. “You can speak. The room you’re in may be impenetrable but I can still hear you.”

“Seems like a bit much for a teenager.” Tony said, leaning back against the wall.

“We built these in every facility about a year ago. We had an interesting visitor in New Mexico and if people like him start showing up and causing problems then we like to know we can handle it. I doubt even your professor can break out.” Coulson said calmly, nodding to the cell next to his. Tony looked over, Bruce was sitting up in the far corner of his cell. He didn’t look at either of them, just stared down at his hands.

“Is he alright?” Tony asked.

“Seems like a bit much for a teenager.” Tony said, leaning back against the wall.

“We built these in every facility about a year ago. We had an interesting visitor in New Mexico and if people like him start showing up and causing problems then we like to know we can handle it. I doubt even your professor can break out.” Coulson said calmly, nodding to the cell next to his. Tony looked over, Bruce was sitting up in the far corner of his cell. He didn’t look at either of them, just stared down at his hands.

“Is he alright?” Tony asked.

“He’ll be fine. He’s been like that since we informed him of everything that happened.” He said. Tony nodded, staring at Banner for a few more seconds before turning back to the agent.

“So it was him?” Tony said. “The giant thing?”

Coulson nodded. Tony frowned, lowering himself to sit back down. “We’ll help him once he calms down.” He said, nodding towards in Bruce’s direction. He still hadn’t moved. “Right now I want to talk about you.”

Tony put his back to the wall to stare out at the large, empty cell instead of look at Coulson. “Go ahead. I’m an interesting person.” He said flatly. “I wouldn’t be surprised if people wanted to talk
about me all the time.”

Tony held in a smile at Coulson’s light sigh. Hopefully if he annoyed the agent enough he’d leave, come back later. It wouldn’t be much but it would give Tony the chance to talk to Bruce alone. He had to make sure he was actually alright.

“What’s your name?” Coulson asked.

“Anthony Smit. You should know that, it’s on my passport and everything.” Tony said.

“No, it isn’t. You see, there were no Anthony Smits born in the Netherlands on the date of birth you have on all your documents. In fact, every Anthony Smit in the Netherlands is accounted for and you are not any of them.” The agent said quickly. He sounded calm, relaxed. Tony’s hands shook slightly.

“That was fast. You checked every single Anthony Smit?” Tony asked.

“You come from a small country. If it is actually the country you’re from.” Coulson said.

Tony turned around slowly, facing the agent. He smiled. “Do you think I would lie about my nationality? If I was going to do that I’d say I was an American. I would stand out less.”

Coulson took a deep breath. “I suppose we can always get to that later. What’s your name?”

“Tony.” Tony replied quickly. Coulson raised an eyebrow at him. “It’s the only name I’ve ever had.”

The agent looked like he was very close to rolling his eyes. Instead he just nodded. “Alright, Tony.” He said, leaning forward in his chair. “Why did you attack one of our Agents?”

“Hmm.” Tony bit his lower lip. “Would you believe accident?” Coulson shook his head. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t.”

“Tony, why did you attack Agent Barton?” He asked.

“Is that his name? Well, he must not be a very important agent if you’re actually interrogating me instead of just dumping me in a prison cell in the middle of nowhere.” Tony said, glancing back at Bruce. He hadn’t moved much. He was still sitting in his corner, hands resting in his lap, but he had looked up towards him. Tony sighed, if he could hear Coulson then Bruce could probably hear them too.

“We like to know who’s attacking us before we lock them away.” Coulson said. “Also, Agent Barton asked me to go easy on you.”

Tony’s snapped his attention back to Agent Coulson. “Why would he ask that?”

“I’ll tell you if you answer a few questions for me.” He asked. Tony looked down before nodding. “Are you working for anyone?” Tony nodded. It wouldn’t matter if they knew he was working for anyone just as long as he didn’t say who. Besides, he wanted to know why Clint would ever try to protect him. “Will you tell me who?” Tony shook his head.

“Where is Rhodey?” Tony asked quietly.

“We brought Mr. Rhodes into interrogation early today while you were sleeping. You are not permitted to leave your cell.” Coulson said, not taking his eyes off of Tony. “Were you sent to kill
Barton?” Tony shook his head. “Then why did you attack him?”

“I didn’t like him.” Tony said. “He annoyed me.”

“He has a habit of doing that.” Agent Coulson nodded. “However, he usually doesn’t piss off teenagers that can not only catch him off guard but also pin him to the ground with a knife pressed against his neck. Were you sent to the US for a reason?”

“I can’t tell you why. I’m not finished.” Tony looked up at him. Coulson squinted his eyes, contemplating for just a moment before nodding.

“Does your work have anything to do with Peter Parker?” He asked.

“What?” Tony said quickly. He pushed himself up off of the ground and stared at the man. He had no idea why he would ask that, Peter never did anything. How did they get suspicious of him?

“Ever since SHIELD took control of the investigation involving the thing that attacked the MIT campus we’ve been getting numerous calls. Several inquiring about the safety of Dr. Banner and Dr. Ross and multiple angry calls from the family of Mr. Rhodes. But nothing for you. Except one call from a rather nervous college student named Peter Parker. Why is that?” He asked.

Tony smiled at him. He shrugged slightly and winced at the pain the movement brought. “He’s my friend. He didn’t do anything.” Coulson hesitated a moment before nodding.

He got up and started carrying his chair towards the door. Tony watched him patiently until he reached the exit.

“You said you would tell me why Barton told you to be kind to me if I cooperated. I think I answered enough questions.” Tony called out.

“I don’t know, that guy just does weird things sometimes.” He said, opening the door. “Also, since you were asleep we took it upon ourselves to take a small DNA sample. Our labs will see if there is a match on any database on the planet. I’ll be back once the results are in.”

Tony stared out the door as the agent left. He doubted they would find anything. He spent most of his life in the same house, there was never a chance for anyone to put his DNA on any digital records.

He sat back down and leaned his head against the clear walls. Rhodey was going to be let go, that much he knew. He didn’t give away anything important. Things weren’t as bad as they could be. He was still perfectly capable of completing his mission. He probably had enough of Banner’s research so he just needed one more thing and he could go back to the house, with Lotte and Mesman and everything he was familiar with.

There was no clock to watch, no way to mark the passage of time. He could have very well have been there all night. It could have been a day since the accident, since they were brought in for questioning, and since he was actually arrested and locked away. A day wasn’t long but it seemed like forever when he was stuck sitting in an empty transparent box with nothing.

“I’m sorry.” Bruce said quietly. The sound barely passed through the walls but Tony looked up at him. “I hurt you. I’m sorry.”

“I’ve had worse.” Tony said. He walked slowly over to the wall connected to Bruce’s cell, sitting down to face him.
Bruce nodded, looking at him closely. “So are you like a spy are something?” Tony hesitated, looking down at his hand and his arm still secured in the sling.

“It hasn’t been proven yet.” He said.

“Were you after my research?” Bruce looked away from him and back down at his shaking hands. It could have just been a trick of the light but Tony thought the color of his skin seemed off.

“Are you al-“

“Just answer the question.” Bruce snapped. He looked up at Tony quickly before returning his gaze to his hands and taking a deep breath.

“I wasn’t after all of it.” Tony said calmly. “Besides, your handwriting is so terrible I couldn’t read most of the things you wrote down. Need to work on your penmanship.”

Bruce took several breaths before looking at him, staring him straight in the eyes and not looking away. “Did you mess with the machine that did this?”

Tony blinked, shaking his head. He didn’t touch it, had no reason to. He couldn’t think of a single good reason why he would ever do anything like that, it would have been dangerous for everyone involved and Tony never once thought about hurting any of the people he had met so far.

Bruce seemed satisfied and looked back down. “Did I hurt Betty?”

“No. She’s alright. Last time I saw her she was completely unharmed, a bit scared and desperate to figure out what happened to you.” Tony said.

Bruce sighed and nodded. “Sounds like her.” He said. They sat quietly for several minutes. Tony wasn’t expecting much conversation. “I didn’t know there were spies that were still technically teenagers.”

“I think I’ve said before, no one has proved that I’m a spy yet.” Tony said, smiling slightly.

“Did your government send you?” Bruce asked. Tony shook his head. “So someone else did. Bad people?”

Tony shook his head before he turned away, pressing his back against the wall. “They’re not horrible. They take care of me.”

“Bad people can take care of others.” Bruce said. The voice sounded closer. Tony didn’t turn to check but Bruce had probably moved closer to the wall. “Do you like them?”

“They took care of me, never did anything too bad to me, gave me food and a place to sleep. I like them.” Tony said.

Bruce hummed behind him. “Do you like the US so far?” Tony frowned. It was a different direction of questioning, he hadn’t prepared for that.

“It is alright. Big.” Tony said.

“Yeah, I guess it is a rather large country compared the ones in Europe.” Bruce said calmly, continuing his deep breathing.

Tony shook his head. “No, I mean it is big outside. No walls outside and I can see forever. People everywhere. And they always try to talk to me and I don’t know what to say.” Tony said. Bruce’s
deep breathing had stopped.

“Did they not let you outside much?” He asked quickly.

Tony frowned at the question. It seemed innocent enough, but Bruce sounded upset. Almost angry.

“They did, but there was a wall.” Tony said, jumping a bit as Bruce’s fist hit the wall. He stood up quickly, ignoring the sharp pain erupting from his ribs as he pushed himself up too quickly. “What are you doing?”

Bruce was standing close to the wall, leaning against it with his head buried in his arms. A green tone washed over his skin as he shook. “There isn’t supposed to be a wall every time you go outside, Tony.” He said, surprisingly coherent. “They shouldn’t lock you up.”

“It is not a big deal.” Tony said. Bruce hit the wall again, fist shaking violently as it made contact.

“I hurt you and you said that you’ve ‘had worse’. They told me what I did. I hurt you so badly and yet you’ve ‘had worse’.” Bruce said. Tony heard the anger clearly in his voice. “Did they hurt you?”

Tony shook his head. “Please calm down. They took care of me.”

That appeared to be the wrong answer. Tony didn’t know why, it was the truth and nothing they ever did to him, although he hated all of it, was ever anything horrible. Still, Bruce’s shaking grew worse until he fell to his knees. Green painted brightly across his skin and fists that repeated to hit against the wall growing steadily larger.

Tony took a step back from the wall, not looking away from what was happening in front of him. The creature from before, the one that had chased him and threw him into a wall, stood before him. It beat against the wall separating them but it held firm and didn’t even shake against the punches.

Tony took a seat in the center of the room, watching silently.

Chapter End Notes

People are still waiting for Steve. I promised him earlier, I know, but we are so incredibly close.
I will update soon, I promise, until then feel free to come yell at me on tumble.
* Shameless self-promotion: aceoffultron.tumblr.com *
Comment, I love reading all of your comments. You guys have a lot of interesting things to say and one of you even mentioned something I was planning and only slightly hinting at. You're amazing.
The response I got from last chapter was amazing. You guys are incredible and I love you all. Thank you so much, thank you for reading. You're all fabulous and it's 3am so just ignore my half-asleep ramblings.

They had moved Tony to a new cell just after Bruce returned to normal and collapsed in exhaustion. No one said much of anything when heavily armed agents stormed his cell, pointing their guns at him until he stood up and raised his uninjured arm above his head. He hated having guns pointed at him.

Coulson didn’t say anything either as he led Tony or the agents down the halls and into an elevator. It was a tense ride up as the unnamed agents stood close to him, guns still firmly in hand but now pointed at the ground, and Coulson staring straight ahead.

“There are several cameras in the room.” Coulson said, punching a code into the panel right next to the door. It slid open and they all walked inside. It looked a lot nicer than the empty, transparent room he was trapped in before. This one had a bed, a large window, and a bathroom. “We’ll be monitoring you at all times. Your bathroom isn’t monitored but agents will come if you spend longer than fifteen minutes in there.”

“Where is the door?” Tony asked, looking over at the small room containing a toilet, a sink, and a small shower.

Coulson didn’t look over, he just waved away the agents and they left without a word. The two of them stood silently for several minutes until Tony just walked over to sit on the bed. There was a single, thin blanket lying on top of the sheets and it felt rough and scratchy under Tony’s hand. They weren’t sparing any comforts for him.

“If we need to get to you quickly than it wouldn’t do anyone any good to have you shut away in the bathroom. You’re an engineering student, no doubt you can figure out how to lock yourself in with or without an actual lock on the door.” Coulson said casually, walking up to the window. “Take out the door and it solves the problem.”

“What could I do in a locked bathroom that would be dangerous? Turn my shampoo into a nuclear weapon?” Tony asked. Coulson chuckled but didn’t answer. “Is Bruce being moved as well?”

“No. It is safer for everyone if he stayed where he is. We’ll have a cot brought down to him, send him meals, and set him up with a way to relieve himself. He’ll be as comfortable as he can be given the circumstances, but it’s not safe to let him out at this moment.” He said quickly, turning towards Tony. Coulson’s stare was cold, calculating. His eyes hovered over every detail on Tony’s face.

Tony looked away, down at his hands. “What happened to Rhodey?”

“After an in depth background check and several hours of interrogation we have decided he had no part in whatever mission you were sent to accomplish, whether it was to kill Barton or not.”
Coulson said, moving to stand in front of Tony. “We let him go, but we’re keeping a close eye on him and your friend, Peter, as well. I’m still curious though. Why did you attack Agent Barton? We’ve asked around your campus and the few people who were familiar with you said you were quiet and relatively calm.”

Tony shrugged his uninjured shoulder and leaned back against the wall the bed was pressed against. The room was too white, the smooth walls, the blankets, the carpet. They all turned the room into an overwhelming pool of slightly off shades of white. It was distracting, until Coulson cleared his throat and raised an eyebrow.

“Why did I attack your agent?” Tony said, looking up at Coulson. The man nodded, crossing his arms as he continued to stand directly in front of him. “I don’t like him.”

“Well, that’s interesting because the moment you were dragged off of him and taken into custody he has done nothing but ask about your wellbeing and try to ensure that no physical harm would come to you.” He said. Tony frowned and looked back down at his hands. “He has also been asking me, almost every hour to be precise, to speak with you.”

“I do not want to see him.” Tony muttered. “He doesn’t care. He lies and he pretends and I will not fall for his false kindness.”

Coulson blinked, pausing for just a moment. “Have you met him before?”

Tony blinked, not looking up from his hands. The arm that was still trapped in its sling was bruising, he could see some purple sticking out under his sleeve. It was easy to distract himself with his injuries. He used to do it all the time, focus on the pain so he could ignore everything else. Ignore all the questions and agendas and everything expected of him. It was just the pain.

“Are you going to answer?” Coulson said.

“No.”

“Is that a ‘no’ for you’re not going to answer or a ‘no’ for you haven’t met Agent Barton before yesterday?” He asked, sighing loudly. Tony looked up and smiled.

“It’s open for interpretation.” Tony said. Coulson rubbed his hand over his face.

It was silent for a few minutes. Coulson stood in front of him, staring intently. Tony just looked around the small room, eyes skimming over the pale white floor and walls before focusing on the window. It was larger and from where Tony sat he could just barely see out of it.

They were high up, too high to consider jumping out of the window to escape. The fall would kill him. Besides, the window didn’t look like it opened anyway.

“You’re not one to answer questions, are you?” Coulson asked, speaking loudly to get back Tony’s attention.

Tony smiled at him. “Maybe.” He said. He held in a laugh at the look on the agent’s face. Tony liked making jokes, he liked humor, and Coulson set him up with that question.

Coulson nodded slowly. “But you’ll answer to Banner?” He said. Tony frowned, dropping his head down to look back at his hands. “We have multiple surveillance cameras set up back there. You wouldn’t think we’d just leave several potentially dangerous detainees unsupervised, would you?”

Tony didn’t answer. It was so obvious, of course they would have been listening. Why hadn’t he
realized that before, when he just thoughtlessly answered Bruce’s questions.

“If the people you’re working for are hurting you than we can help. We can make sure you don’t go back to them, we can make sure no one locks you away, and we can help you.” Coulson said slowly, arms limp at his side as to appear nonthreatening. “You just have to tell us who sent you.”

The two of them stared at each other, utterly silent and both unwilling to speak. Tony didn’t know what to say. They were lying, that much he was sure of. The only thing that would happen from him telling them about Mesman and Lotte would be both of them being arrested and being locked away with him in some prison Tony hasn’t heard of. He couldn’t do that, Mesman would be furious and Tony wasn’t sure if he would survive that kind of rage and Lotte didn’t belong in a prison. She was too kind and gentle for Tony to even imagine her in such a place.

“I do not need help.” Tony said quietly.

Coulson nodded and turned towards the door. “Someone will be by in an hour to bring you dinner and a change of clothes. Expect the results from the DNA tests in a few days.”

He left quickly out the door and the click of the electronic lock sealing the room shut rang in Tony’s ears. He didn’t know how he was supposed to feel, left alone in the too quiet room, but he certainly wasn’t feeling very pleasant at the moment. He didn’t know why either. It wasn’t that he lied, because he didn’t. He didn’t need help, he didn’t need to be rescued from anything. In all honesty, Tony thought his life was fine and he was perfectly content with it. Asking for help would have just been a waste of everyone’s time.

Still, he didn’t feel too pleased with himself. Several minutes ago he wanted Agent Coulson to leave and to stop with the questions and the interrogation but now Tony just wanted him to come back. He wasn’t entirely sure what he would say to the man, he just wanted him to come back.

It didn’t matter though. Tony was alone now, a peaceful quiet filling the room. He got up slowly from the bed and walked up to the window. He was right before, it was incredibly high. The view stretched out farther than Tony has ever seen before and overlooked the many streets and buildings in the city. It seemed to go on forever. Tony didn’t like it.

There wasn’t much in the room, just the bed pressed into a corner. He looked around quickly, the cell was only a about ten feet long and ten feet wide, not much room to fit in much else. A small camera was on the ceiling, tucked into the corner and had a red light that blinked every few seconds. They were definitely watching.

He turned and walked through the doorless entryway into the bathroom. It was smaller than the main room, but at least it had more things in it. A toilet pressed right into a corner, a sink right next to it, and a small shower. No bathtub, no mirror. There weren’t even any razors, just a bar of soap.

The camera in the other room didn’t face towards the bathroom’s entrance so unless there were more cameras hidden that he couldn’t see, he should be safe in here. Away from the constant surveillance.

He leaned up against the wall, letting the coldness of the tiles seep into his throbbing shoulder and ribs. It was quiet. Tony closed his eyes and imagined that small room in that house in the Netherlands. He could see it clearly, the bed, the desk, the books, and that small window that looked out over the back yard and barely gave him a glimpse past the wall. Lotte would come up to sing him songs and stroke his hair until it was time for dinner. Then the three of them would sit at the table in silence, Mesman finding some fault in his recent behavior, some error he needed to fix. It was always something small, like how he slouched too much when he sat or how he kept his
light on too far past when he was required to go to sleep. Lotte would just smile at him from across the table until it was time for him to return to that tiny room.

Tony missed that house, he missed the room he had spent thirteen years in. He missed the company, the criticisms, the familiarity of all of it.

His head snapped up from the tiled wall when he heard the door click open. It hadn’t been an hour yet. Not that it mattered, Tony was hungry and he was thankful for the food to come early. He walked out into the main room and stopped in the entryway, frowning at the man before him.

It wasn’t the arrival of his dinner. This wasn’t anything he was pleased to see. Tony frowned at him, not moving from his spot standing in the doorway of the bathroom.

“I know. You don’t want to see me.” Clint said quickly, closing the quietly behind him. “Just give me a few minutes. Okay?”

“Get away from me.” Tony said firmly.

Clint nodded, taking a deep breath. “Fair enough. I’ll leave you alone after this. I just need to talk to you about everything.” He said. Clint rubbed one hand over his face while the other was held out towards Tony gently, as if to try to show a frightened animal he wasn’t a threat. It just made Tony angrier. “I fucked up, I know. You have every right to be pissed. I did a terrible thing, I worked with horrible people, and you’re the one who suffered for it.”

He paused, looking at Tony expectantly. Tony didn’t move, didn’t speak. He just kept glaring at the man in front of him, half tempted to run at him again and punch the confused look off of his face.

“I never thought I would see you again. I didn’t even recognize you at first. The last time I saw you, you were just a kid. We both were kids.” Clint said. He dropped his arms to his side. “I didn’t realize who you were until you pressed that knife to my neck and looked down at me. You looked afraid, angry. You may have grown up but that was still the same. Please, can we just talk for a moment?”

Tony wanted to tell him no. He didn’t have any time he could waste on this man, but a small part of him wanted to know what he would say. He wanted to know what excuses he had for everything he did and every lie he told.

“You have five minutes.” Tony said quietly.

Clint slackened, breathing a sigh of relief before taking a step forward. Tony backed away quickly, retreating back into the bathroom. Clint stopped, looking him over carefully.

“You will stay away from me.” Tony said. “I will listen to you for five minutes and then I want you to leave.”

Clint glanced quickly at the camera in the corner of the room before looking back at Tony. He nodded slowly.

“Okay, I can work with five minutes.”

Chapter End Notes
You know how since the dawn of time I've been promising Steve to show up sooner than he actually has? I can tell you he's going to make his first appearance within the next five chapters. Which one? I can't tell you.
Comment, I love comments and they fill my soul with happiness and you guys are so incredibly smart.
“Five minutes isn’t a long time.” Clint said quickly. “Especially when you have thirteen years of regrets to talk about.”

Tony blinked, waiting silently for him to continue. He wasn’t here to talk to the man, he wanted him to just leave him alone. It would be better if he just left and never had to see Clint again. All he ever did was lie and ruin everything and Tony couldn’t deal with that again.

Clint sighed. He nodded as he threw another glance at the camera mounted in the corner and frowned. “I don’t know where to start.” He said. “I think I should apologize. I… messed up your life.”

“Maybe instead of thinking about apologizing you should actually apologize.” Tony said quickly. “Four minutes, make it fast.”

“Shit, okay.” Clint said, nodding quickly. He looked around, eyes darting across the room. “I’m not a good person. I lie, I steal. Hell, it’s in my job description to kill people. I’ve been doing horrible things since I was a kid, even before I met you. Those guys, they were my family. I expected them to take care of me and my brother and I just went along with everything they said. They taught me to lie and to hurt people and I’ve been doing it my whole life. But honestly, I really did think they were going to send you home. I never expected them to just sell you off like that. I didn’t even know they did until after you left.”

He shrugged, looking up at Tony desperately. They were all excuses so far, Tony was getting annoyed. The sooner those final minutes were up, the better.

“I never thought I’d see you again. You were just some kid they picked up out of some rich neighborhood and you were gone a few days later. But I liked you. You were just this little kid and you were scared. I took care of you and it made me feel important and you were great company.” Clint said, taking a small step towards him. Tony retreated further into the bathroom. If he came too close Tony wouldn’t know what would happen. He would probably yell, might try to kill him again. He couldn’t be sure. Clint stopped, not taking another step. “Then you were gone and they told me to not speak of it again and I didn’t. Like I said, I’m not a good person. You get so used to lying and the things that you should probably tell people are left unsaid. I’m sorry.”

Tony shook his head. He felt like he was getting more upset with each passing second. He felt betrayed, worried, and angry. He usually had better control than this.

“You are sorry for never telling people?” Tony asked. Clint hesitated, looking him over closely before nodding. “What about helping them kidnap me? What about lying to my face and telling me
I would go home? What about pretending to be my friend and acting like you cared? You were with them, you all hurt me!”

Tony’s voice was growing louder. Clint had dropped his hands to his side, trying to appear both nonthreatening and completely calm. There was a long moment of tense silence as Tony tried to get control of his breathing and Clint just stood as still as possible.

“I hate you.” Tony muttered. “You’re a liar and I hate you.”

“I know. I know and I’m so sorry.” Clint said. “I can’t take it back. I can’t go back in time and change things but I can make it better now. I’ll tell them everything.”

Tony shook his head. “You had thirteen years and you never did.” He said quietly. He doubted Clint would do anything. He was a liar, that’s all he was, and Tony didn’t trust anything he said.

“Hiding all your secrets is a hard habit to break when you’ve been doing it your whole life.” He said. “But I’m going to make this right. I know you’re alive now, I know where you are. I’m going to tell them how I know you and what happened and then they’ll help. SHIELD is great at helping people.”

“I don’t need help! I do not need you or your SHIELD.” Tony yelled. “I am perfectly fine. I am happy and have a good life. Why on earth would you say anything now? You spent your whole life watching your own back and keeping your secrets.”

“I don’t know.” Clint said, voice rising to match Tony’s. “Now I know you’re alive. I know where you are and how you’re doing so I don’t have to be sent on a wild goose chase looking for someone I met once. But now you’re here and you need definitely need help. You’re scared.”

Tony rolled his eyes, taking a step out of the bathroom. He still stood far from Clint. “I am not scared. I have nothing to be afraid of, least of all you and your band super-secret agents.” Tony said. “Maybe I’m just tired and I want to go home. I have a life there, a good one. I’m happy and I don’t need you to ruin everything again.”

“Are you that happy? Happy people don’t end up attacking people they met once thirteen years ago. Happy people don’t lie about their identity to get into MIT. You’re not happy but you deserve to be and we can help.” Clint said, looking back at the camera. “I saw the footage of you talking to Banner. He’s right, isn’t he? They lock you away and they hurt you?”

Tony took a deep breath. “Get out.” He said, maintaining eye contact with Clint. “Your five minutes are up, I want you to leave.”

Clint hesitated a moment, staring at Tony. “Damn it, no. I fucked up.” He said, dropping his head into his hands. “I’m still sorry. I gotta apologize. I’m a piece of shit, I know. But I have to make this right.”

Tony shook his head and pointed to the door. The time was up, Tony gave him five minutes, and it was over. Now he just wanted to be left alone. He wanted to complete his mission and go back to Mesman and Lotte and have everything be normal again. Clint just continued to stand there.

“Go away.” Tony said, grinding his teeth. “I do not need you. I am fine and I know what is best for me. I will work everything out and then go home. I just want you to leave before you destroy everything again.”

“No. I can’t let you go back there.” Clint said, walking towards him. When Tony backed away Clint didn’t stop, just kept his pace slow. “You’re not happy, you’re not okay. It isn’t safe for you
“Well, I am not safe here with you.” Tony said. “It was better back there. They took care of me and my life was just fine.”

“If it’s so great back there then why are you so mad at me for helping the people who put you there?” Clint said. “You know what’s going on is messed up, you’re just denying it. Let us help you.”

Tony frowned at him, stepping back until he was leaning against the wall. He made a good point. Why was Tony so angry? He accused the man of ruining his life. How could it be ruined when he had Mesman and Lotte?

“Well, I am not safe here with you.” Tony said. “It was better back there. They took care of me and my life was just fine.”

“If it’s so great back there then why are you so mad at me for helping the people who put you there?” Clint said. “You know what’s going on is messed up, you’re just denying it. Let us help you.”

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“Shut up, you are trying to trick me.” Tony said. “You just want to take me away again. You took me from my house before and you just want to do it again. I won’t let you.”

Clint raised his hands slowly, still walking towards him. Tony didn’t know what he was going to do. It looked like he was trying to calm him down but there was also the chance Clint would jump forward and grab him. He was getting too close. Tony backed away quickly, sliding along the wall towards the corner.

He kept walking towards him. Tony couldn’t back away anymore, he was pressed tightly into the corner. It was too small, he couldn’t breathe.

“Ga weg!” He shouted, smacking away Clint’s hands as he got too close. “Je bent een leugenaar. Je probeert me voor de gek te houden.”

Clint nodded. “Okay, okay. I’m not going to hurt you. Just calm down.” He said, dropping his hands down. “Can you slow down? It’s hard to understand what you’re saying.”

Tony didn’t stop, his mouth just rambled on and on in sentences he was too distracted to remember. Clint needed to get away from him, he was far too close and Tony didn’t think he could breathe anymore. His heart was beating too fast. Clint needed to leave, he needed to tell him to go away. All he had done with his five minutes was make excuses and then try to lie to him about his life. Tony knew what his life was, it was fine and he was okay. He wasn’t going to be tricked into leaving it.

Someone was touching his shoulder. Tony jerked away from it, hand darting out to slap it away. He was sitting in the corner, curled up with his knees pulled close to his chest. It was wrong, the whole building was wrong, everyone he had met was wrong, the whole country was wrong. He needed to get back. He needed to go back and listen to Mesman’s lectures and Lotte’s soothing words and then everything would be right again.

Clint reached for him again, muttering something Tony didn’t bother to listen to. He just continued to swing at him, screaming for him to get away. He hurt, the quickly, harsh movements, jostled his shoulder and pulled at his ribs but he didn’t stop. He needed Clint to be gone. Tony needed to be alone.

He wasn’t going to be alone because suddenly more people were filling the room. They pulled Clint back and crouched on the ground next to Tony. They spoke softly, but they still crept too close and reached their hands out. Tony didn’t want them to touch him. They were with Clint, they were trying to trick him. He stood quickly, still pressing his back to the wall, and sung his fist at everyone who came near him.
They all backed away quickly, only a few steps further but Tony wanted them to leave. He wanted to be alone.

“Sir, we’re going to need you to calm down now.” The closest of them said firmly. Tony shook his head before smacking away another hand.

The door was open behind them. With Clint pressed in a corner on the other side of the room and the three strangers in front of him he could probably make it. Just make a run for it and figure everything out once he got away.

He elbowed the guy in front of him. The rest of them cleared away quickly, Clint taking a step forward from his corner. Tony barely made it two steps towards the door when the ground fell from his feet and he was surrounded in warmth. He couldn’t see.

“Hey, hey, calm down okay. No one is going to hurt you!”

Tony was being held. His face was pressed against someone’s chest, large arms circling his back. Tony didn’t lift his head to see who it was, just screamed into the fabric of his shirt as he kicked his legs. The body that held him would shift slightly whenever his foot made contact with soft flesh but never released its grip on him.

He kept going for several long minutes. The rest of the room was quiet, he didn’t know if everyone else left or not. No one touched him, no one spoke except for the quiet, calming words whispered into his ear.

Eventually, Tony felt too tired to keep on kicking and his screams died down to muffled sobs. His face was still pressed into his captor’s chest, but he had been placed back onto the ground and the arms that were holding him rubbed his back slowly.

“What happened?” That was Coulson’s voice. Tony had only spoken to the man a few times but he could recall the voice, it was firm, holding authority and commanding attention. Tony didn’t look up.

“It’s my fault, sir. I wanted to talk to him so I snuck in and I think something I said caused him to panic.” Clint said.

Tony tensed, burying his head further into the warm chest in front of him. The hands rubbing his back continued working in slow circles and Tony almost felt relaxed.

“Go back to my office.” Coulson said firmly. “We’ll have a talk.”

Footsteps moved towards the door and Tony turned his head slowly. The people who rushed into the room earlier were still there, standing a few feet away. Coulson looked angry, standing in front of the door with his arms crossed. His eyes grew wide when he turned to Tony, looking towards the man holding him.

Tony looked up at him for the first time. He was tall with blond hair falling over his eyes. He was larger than Tony expected, muscular arms still circled around his back. Tony shrugged out of his hold, the man’s arms falling to his side, and walked over to the bed in the corner.

“What happened?” Coulson asked. Tony shook his head.

“I heard screaming and I walked in and he was practically backed into a corner and fighting off people who were getting to close.” The man said. “When he made a run for the door I grabbed him and tried to get him to calm down. He’s just scared.”
“I don’t want to see him again.” Tony said quickly. Everyone looked to him as he sat down on the edge of the bed. “Clint Barton, I don’t want him anywhere near me.”

Coulson paused, nodding slowly. “I’ll see what I can do.” He said. Everyone started leaving. Tony took a deep breath and fell back onto the blankets. “Thank you for your help Captain Rogers.”

Tony looked over to see the man leave, throwing one last glance back at Tony, and Coulson closed the door. He was exhausted, so he just pulled up the small blanket on the bed and crawled into it.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! It's Steve. I said last chapter he would be making his grand first appearance within the next five to throw you all off! He's definitely going to be quite frequent, no worries. Also, some of you asked and , yes Rhodey and Peter will be returning. Comment, I love comments and they fill my soul with joy. A happy writer updates faster.
Chapter 16

The good news is I'm slowly getting out of my funk and getting motivation back. I'm writing a lot more now. The bad news is I'm also in school and it takes up so much time. Why is college so busy??!!? Also, I'm trying to write this chapter but I keep getting inspiration for events that will happen later and so I end up writing that too.

Tony didn’t mind the room they locked him in. There was a light switch so he was allowed to keep the lights on for as long as he wanted. It was good, he liked the light. The only thing worse than being locked in a small room was being locked in a small, dark room.

The boredom was exhausting. It was late, he could tell by his quick glances out the window to see the night sky. He wouldn’t sleep though. He couldn’t. The last time he did and he woke up missing Rhodey and had a DNA sample taken without his knowledge. He couldn’t sleep.

Instead he just spent hours lying in the bed, staring up at the ceiling. The worst thing about having nothing to do was that he had to think about everything. He tried to focus on the mission, everything he could remember from Banner’s research, or what would happen when he finally got back to Mesman and Lotte. Hopefully going back wouldn’t be too terrible.

Tony shook his head. He refused to be afraid to go home, he wouldn’t let them get into his head like that. Nothing was wrong.

He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to focus on anything else. He wasn’t going to let them trick him and stop him from going back. He was fine, there was nothing wrong with his life, and he was going to go back. His mind wandered off to everything they’ve ever done for him, and everything they had given him. He was going to go back, he belonged back there with Mesman and Lotte.

“Did you sleep well?”

Tony opened his eyes and looked over to the door. Coulson closed it quickly with his foot as he held a tray of food in one hand and a small box in the other. He said nothing as the man walked up to him and held the tray out.

There was a yellow pile in the center and a glass of milk. Tony didn’t take the tray, he wasn’t hungry.

“Don’t worry. They’re just eggs.” Coulson said, still holding out the tray.

“I have seen eggs before. I don’t know what that monstrosity is but it is certainly not eggs.” Tony said. He moved to sit up slowly. His chest and shoulder was still in a great deal of pain, the events of the previous day hadn’t helped.

“I didn’t say they were good eggs.” Coulson said. He put the tray down on the edge of the bed and waited. “You should eat, you’ve been here a few days and you’re probably starving.”
“I’m not hungry.” Tony said.

The agent paused for just a moment before nodding. “Alright. I’ll just leave it here in case you get hungry earlier.” He said. He stared at Tony, eyes wander over every detail of his face. “Barton told me everything.”

“Keep in mind that he is known to be a liar.” Tony said quickly. Coulson didn’t say anything, didn’t even move. “What did he say?”

“About thirteen years ago he participated in what he assumed would just be a robbery of a home in New York State when it evolved into a kidnapping. A few days later he was separated from the child and later found out you were sold to an unknown individual.” Coulson said, he didn’t take his eyes off of Tony. “He says that kid is you, which was why you attacked him earlier.”

“Like I said, he is a liar.” Tony said.

Coulson shook his head. He didn’t believe him. Tony sighed and leaned away slightly.

“If what Agent Barton says is true, then we will be more than willing to help.” Coulson said. Tony opened his mouth to object before the agent held up his hand to silence him. “New York State has thousands of missing person’s reports every year. Given the information Barton has told us, we will be able to narrow down the search for missing children reports and matches for your DNA.”

“No no.” Tony shook his head as he cut the man off. He didn’t want that. They never came, they stopped looking. At this point his parents were probably better off without him just like he was better off somewhere else. He couldn’t even remember that much about them. Just a bunch of silence and a vague idea of what they might have looked like. He didn’t even know their names.

Coulson sighed. “We can help. If you let us we can ge-“

“There is nothing wrong. I am perfectly capable of handling my life more than a handful of strangers who actually believe that these are eggs.” Tony said quickly, waving half-heartedly to the tray still sitting on the bed. “Am I the only one here with any sense?”

“Are you familiar with the term ‘Human Trafficking’?” Coulson asked. Tony blinked up at him before shaking his head slowly. “It is where a person is recruited, transported, or kept against his or her will for purposes of exploitation. You were kidnapped, sold away, and now you work for the people who bought you.”

“It isn’t like that. You don’t know what you are talking about.” Tony said quickly. “I make my own decisions.”

“Did they ever threaten you if you didn’t do what they asked? Did they keep you isolated, refused to let you go out? Did they ever deny you food, sleep, or any proper medical care? They did, didn’t they?” Coulson said forcefully, voice rising steadily. Tony was surprised by the sudden display of emotion, he hadn’t seen the agent raise his voice so much before. He pushed himself back further on the bed until his back was against the wall. It wasn’t much distance, but it would have to do. Coulson sighed, taking a deep breath before continuing. “I’m not going to hurt you. No one here is going to hurt you. If you go back to them, they will hurt you. We can help.”

“I don’t-“

“I know. But we’re going to do it anyway.” Coulson said. “SHIELD protects people who are in trouble.”
He held out the small box to Tony. He had forgotten about it, Coulson had had it tucked under his arm during their conversation. Tony didn’t take it.

“What is it?” He asked slowly.

“Apparently keeping someone in a small room for an extended period of time with absolutely nothing to do is a bit cruel. Steve went out and picked you up a few things.” Coulson said. Tony still didn’t take the box.

“Steve?” He said. He didn’t know anyone named Steve.

Coulson’s body language visibly changed. His face lit up as his body became slightly more relaxed. “Captain Rogers. You met him yesterday.”

“Oh, yes.” Tony said. “He was…” His voice trailed off as he reached slightly for the box.

“He’s Captain America. A good man.” Coulson said.

Tony stopped, pulled his hand back quickly. “Is this a trick?”

Coulson shook his head and Tony grabbed the box. He didn’t know what to expect. Anything could be inside, but he was expecting a threat. Or at least something that would mock him. He certainly didn’t expect a red, spiral bound sketchbook filled with blank pages and a handful of pencils.

“What am I supposed to do with this?” Tony asked quickly, looking up at Coulson. “Do you want me to do something?”

“We don’t want anything from you. Steve just thought you would like something to do.” He said, smiling slightly. “You can draw, write, do anything you want with it.”

Tony hesitated, looking back down at book sitting snuggly in the box with the pencils rolling over them. He didn’t know what to do with it. He had never drawn before and his writing was terrible. What if they weren’t happy with what he put in it?

“It is mine?” He asked, looking back up at Coulson. The man nodded. “I can keep it forever? No matter what?”

“No matter what.” He said.

Tony nodded and poured the pencils onto his bed and pulled out the book. Coulson turned to leave. Tony should say ‘thank you’, it was expected of him. He had been given a gift and he should be appreciative.

“Agent?” Tony said. Coulson turned to look at him, waiting. Tony bit his lower lip. “Tell Captain Rogers he should not ever grab me like that again.” He said quickly.

That was wrong. That wasn’t what he planned to say, but it was easier than thanking these strangers. He was still certain they were trying to fool him, lie to him until they convince him to stay and never go back to the Netherlands. He wasn’t going to let that happen. And he did mean it, he really didn’t want to be grabbed again. Certainly not when he was that afraid and had tried to run away.

Coulson frowned but nodded anyway. He took a few more steps towards the door before turning back to Tony again.
“Also, we have decided to allow you a visitor. Hopefully he will help you remain calm and… just help.” Coulson said before rushing out the door. “Expect the DNA results within a few hours.”

He hadn’t been expecting a visitor. That wasn’t how being a prisoner worked. They were supposed to lock him away and punish him for his mistakes, not give him gifts and let him see people. Tony prepared for the worst.

He wasn’t expecting Peter to walk in through the door that the agent had just left through. Tony was happy to see him, relieved. He relaxed entirely and smiled at him.

“You look like crap, Tony.” Peter said, walking up to the bed and picking up the forgotten tray of food to sit down. “Have you been eating?”

“Come on, Peter. I’m not eating that.” Tony said, looking down at the yellow mush. “That is garbage.”

“Well, what do you expect from a government facility? This is America, where we get this scary looking gunk in all the schools and prisons and hospitals.” He said, smiling slightly. “Honestly, you should be expecting this. I don’t know what they fed you ov-“ He stopped quickly, smile falling off of his face. “You should have told me.”

Tony didn’t move. He didn’t want to have this conversation. “Nothing is wrong.”

“That’s bullshit and you know it.” Peter said quickly. “You’re a spy! You came from another country to steal information, you should have told me that. They’re hurting you. I saw the scars, that’s not normal. You should have told me, I could have helped.”

“Technically, I don’t think anything about me being a spy has been proven yet. I’m surprised they told you that.” Tony said, looking down at the sketchbook in his hands. “And I told you I was here for American information when we first met.”

“You were supposed to be joking!” Peter said. His voice was growing louder. Tony leaned away slightly, not looking up from the book in his hands. “Shit, I’m sorry. But they hurt you. They hurt you and then sent you to do illegal, international things. You gotta get away from them.”

“That’s enough. I do not need all of you saying you are going to help me because there is nothing to help with. I’m tired of everyone telling me I need to leave them when they’re the only people who ever cared about me.” Tony said. He jerked away when Peter tried to put a hand on his shoulder and walked steadily towards the bathroom’s entryway. “They took care of me, they fed me, they let me have a place to sleep, and they made sure I did everything I was supposed to do. You all know nothing!”

Tony leaned against the wall, staring at the window. Peter didn’t move from his spot on the bed. He still held the now cold tray of food and glanced down at the abandoned sketchbook that was now lying on the floor.

“Tony, taking care of someone isn’t giving them food and a place to sleep. It’s so much more than that.” Peter said softly. “It’s making sure they’re safe and that nothing can hurt them. If they do get hurt then taking care of them is helping them feel better and just trying to keep it from happening again. It’s making you comfortable and happy. When people take care of you it means you should be safe, not afraid of what might happen if you make a mistake. When people care about you they don’t hit you or lock you up or make you afraid of them. Those people aren’t taking care of you, they’re hurting you and teaching you to accept it.”
Tony turned and walked into the bathroom, pressing himself into the far corner. Throughout the night he had spent quite a bit of time trying to find the perfect spot to not be seen by the camera. There were two of them, the shower and that little corner he sat in now. He was only allowed to be in there for fifteen minutes every hour, but it was fifteen minutes so he didn’t complain.

He counted the minutes as they slowly passed. Peter was standing now, just a few feet in front of the entryway.

“I’m getting through to you, I know I am. One day you’re going to realize that no one is supposed to hurt you and if you trust me then no one ever will again.” He said.

“Can you just… be quiet? I’m thinking and you’re being incredibly distracting.” Tony said quickly. Peter nodded and walked back towards the bed.

Tony looked down at his hands. What did Peter know about anything? He didn’t know what it was like back there, it wasn’t nearly as bad as they were all making it out to be. Everyone was making really great points though. If everything was alright then why was he mad at Clint? When Barton asked him that question the day before he had panicked, now he was just confused.

Peter probably knew a lot more about healthy home environments, he talked about his aunt and uncle all the time. Peter was great and he never mentioned them ever getting too angry. Bruce had transformed into the… larger version of himself and attacked the wall just at the implications that Tony was being hurt.

Tony liked Peter and Banner, he understood them. If they both thought Tony was in trouble and Mesman and Lotte were hurting him, then they would know. Tony shook his head. He couldn’t let them fool him. Mesman may have been far too rough but Lotte was always kind. She was gentle. Mesman may have been dangerous but she was safe.

“Tony, hey. All of these guys are back and they say I have to leave now.” Peter said.

Tony looked up at him. He was standing at the bathroom door, looking over to him carefully. Tony nodded, getting up from his corner and going over to Peter.

“Alright. Try to get them to let you come back.” Tony said quietly. Several agents stood at the door, Coulson with them. “You’re a good friend.”

Peter smiled, pulling Tony into a quick hug. He frowned, reaching up to pat at Peter’s shoulders and pulling away slightly.

“You take care of yourself too, idiot. And eat that gross stuff.” Peter said before turning to the agents. Coulson was with them, staring wide-eyed at him. “Make sure he eats. He doesn’t and then lies about it.”

Coulson looked over to Peter quickly before returning his gaze to Tony and nodded. Peter left out of the door and it shut firmly behind Coulson.

“I didn’t expect you back so soon.” Tony said. Coulson walked up quickly, taking Tony’s face in his hands and carefully turned his face from side to side. “What?”

Tony pulled away quickly, walking slowly back towards the bathroom. Coulson looked surprised, confused.

“Like I said earlier, Barton’s information narrowed out search for potential DNA matches.” Coulson said slowly.
Tony was back in his small corner of the bathroom, slowly sliding down the wall until he was crouching against the cool tiles.

“I don’t want to know.” He said, shaking his head.

Chapter End Notes

Yay, it's happening. I hope you're all enjoying yourself.
What will happen now???
Comment, I love comments and I love watching you all panic because you don't know.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

It is incredibly late. I am super tired but also inspired so I just decided to finish this up really quick so you can have it and hopefully leave me nice comments for when I wake up in the morning. Lucky you, usually when inspiration strikes I end up writing entire chapters for the future because I can see so many amazing and upcoming scenes for this thing playing out in my head.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

‘Anthony Edward Stark.’

“I don’t like it.” Tony muttered. It sounded wrong. The name was definitely familiar, but it was also confusing and terrifying at the same time. He would give anything to go back and make sure Coulson never told him.

Coulson said it anyway, even after Tony had told him he didn’t want to hear it. ‘Anthony Edward Stark’. The name rattled around in his brain, looking for something to latch onto. There was a special place for that name, but it didn’t seem to fit with him so he would just keep looking for a place for it.

“Well, it is your name. DNA doesn’t lie.” Coulson said, nodding to himself. “Anthony Stark, born to Howard and Maria Stark over 19 years ago at NYU Langone Medical Center. A healthy baby boy, if a bit on the small side.”

“I don’t care.” Tony said quickly. He pressed himself further into his little corner of the bathroom.

No one spoke for a while. Coulson seemed to be at a loss for words. He stared at Tony, almost unblinking, as he opened his mouth several times desperately looking for something to say. Tony hated the silence. He hated that this agent knew more about his family than Tony did. He hated that they were probably going to tell him. Most of all, he hated that he wanted to know, just a little bit.

Tony wasn’t going to ask, he wouldn’t even listen if Coulson ever started talking again. He had more important things to think about. He had to figure out how to finish his mission. He had to figure out how he was going to get anything done and get back when he was still trapped in this room. However, he couldn’t focus on an escape or on the details of his assignment. His mind just kept wandering back to that horrifying name and the terrifying thoughts that had planted themselves in his head.

Nothing was as bad as they were all making it out to be. He was fine. He could handle it. Tony didn’t need them all worrying about nothing.

Coulson seemed to figure out what to say. He cleared his throat to get Tony’s attention. “You parents have b-“ Coulson started.

“No.” Tony said, shaking his head. The agent raised an eyebrow. “I don’t want to talk about them.
"I don’t know them, I don’t care about them."

There was a quick, hesitated silence between them. Coulson’s lips thinned and the lines of his forehead became more prominent. He looked angry, but a controlled anger. Tony was about to tell him to leave when he nodded.

“Alright. We won’t talk about anything you’re not comfortable with.” He said calmly.

“Really?” Tony asked. Coulson nodded. That made no sense. “So if I want to talk about nothing, then we will?” Another nod. “And if I want to talk about something else, we can?”

Coulson nodded again, taking a small step towards Tony. He jerked back, knocking his shoulder against the tile wall and wincing. Coulson stopped.

“Is there anything in particular you want to talk about?” He asked slowly. Tony frowned.

There was so much Tony wanted to talk about, so many questions that were rummaging around in his head. But he didn’t really want to talk about them with anyone here. He didn’t trust SHIELD. He wanted to talk to them to someone he knew at least a little more.

“May I speak to Dr. Banner?” Tony asked. Coulson shook his head. “Agent, I either talk to Banner about all my life and my deep dark secrets or no one at all. Don’t you want to know? It’s all anyone has brought up to me since I arrived.”

Coulson seemed to consider it, his head tilted slightly forward and he crossed his arms. That was good. If Tony could let him see Bruce then Tony could finally get answers to all of his questions. He needed to know.

“You’re not planning on revealing much of anything important.” Coulson said.

“It’s better than nothing, right? I talk a bit to Banner, you guys can hear the story through your surveillance, and in the end we’re all happy. I just have a few things I need to discuss and I trust Banner a lot more than I trust you.” Tony said. Coulson uncrossed his arms and let them fall to his sides.

“He’s dangerous.” Coulson said slowly. “He has transformed into about twice since he’s been here and we don’t know if it’s something that he can control yet.”

“I’m not afraid of him. I just want to ask him a few things.” Tony said. He wasn’t afraid of Bruce, he knew him. Bruce was just a professor, not anyone dangerous.

“He threw you into a wall. You’re injured.” Coulson said. He sighed loudly. “If you tell me what you’re planning on discussing then I’ll consider it.”

Tony looked down at his hands. He didn’t want to tell this man. He didn’t know him, didn’t trust him. All things considered, he also didn’t know Bruce that well. But Bruce wasn’t apart of some organization dedicated to exploiting the secrets of others while keeping their own carefully hidden. Bruce didn’t have any ulterior motives. If Tony asked him a question, then he would answer it.

“I just wanted to have him explain a few things.” Tony said quickly. “Nothing too important.”

Coulson nodded slowly. “Explain things such as what? I can’t let you see him unless I know the nature of the meeting.”

Tony shook his head quickly. “I can’t tell you.”
That wasn’t good, because he really needed to have these things explained. He needed Bruce to tell him why everyone was so insistent that he needed help. He needed to know what was so bad about his life that everyone, especially Peter, was determined to make sure he didn’t go back. Tony was confused, he wanted answers, but he couldn’t tell Coulson. If the agent knew then he would know he was getting into Tony’s head.

“Fine. You don’t have to tell me. I didn’t expect you to anyway.” Coulson said. Tony nodded. “But I’ll let you see him anyway.”


“I want you to meet with a few people.” Coulson said. He raised his hand quickly as Tony opened his mouth to object. “Not anyone bad, just a few doctors. We’ve been neglecting your injuries, in our defense you were a potentially dangerous threat and we were being as cautious as possible. We want to make sure your injuries are doing okay. Make sure you’re doing alright, medically.”

Tony continued to frown at the agent. “I was a potentially dangerous threat?”

“You did manage to pin one of our best agents to the ground and had a knife against his throat. Most people can’t do that with two arms. Apparently he doesn’t expect to be attacked in a SHIELD facility. We’ll have to remind him to always be paying attention.” Coulson said. Tony waited, leaning back against the wall. “We don’t consider you much of a threat anymore. Sure, you might be skilled and confused right now, but you’re also the son of one of SHIELD’s founders. We’re going to take care of you.”

Tony shook his head. None of that made sense. “Son of who?” Tony asked quickly. He wished he could take it back the moment he said it. He really didn’t want to know.

“Howard Stark, your father. He was one of the founders of SHIELD.” Coulson said, smiling slightly. “He created SHIELD to help people, to protect them. Now we want to do that for you.”

“SHIELD protects people?” Tony asked. “Which people?”

“All people.”

“Oh.” Tony muttered, looking back down at his hands. Tony didn’t know what to say to that. His supposed father had built an entire organization to protect people and yet he never came to get Tony. Either he never found him and gave up or just didn’t bother looking at all. It was a bit disappointing. “So just a few doctors?”

Coulson nodded. “And a few people you may have known. From before.” Tony sighed. He didn’t want to meet anyone. “Hopefully it will jog your memory.”

“Agent… I don’t want to meet the people you think are my family.” Tony said, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Then you won’t. I never said I was bringing in your family.” Coulson said. “But this will be good for you. I’ll make sure it’s all as stress-free as possible. Can you just meet a at most five people?”

Tony hesitated, looking back down at his hands. His arm was still in the sling, shoulder hurting at every too quick movement. A doctor would probably be a smart idea.

“Okay. Yeah. I want to talk to Banner first though. Then you can have me meet five people I’m not related to.” Tony said. Coulson nodded.
“Tomorrow.” He said, turning to leave.

Tony walked into the main room and sat down on the bed. Coulson nodded to the other agent in the room. Several others came in when Coulson arrived, but they left with Peter. Probably to escort Peter out. It didn’t matter because there was still one agent still standing by his door, waiting on Coulson.

“Don’t worry. He’s just here to make sure you had everything you needed.” Coulson said, walking out the door with the agent in tow. We’ll send someone to get you something to eat.”

Tony was alone again. Alone in the small, silent room with nothing but an extra pile of pillows and blankets at the foot of his bed. He threw the pillows up towards the end of his bed and laid back, throwing all of the new, fluffy blankets over him.

It was nice, all the fluffy pillows under his head as he curled into a warm cocoon under the blankets. He was getting special treatment, he wasn’t going to deny that. He wasn’t complaining either. In fact, he might just have to thank his SHIELD founder father one day. Tony shook his head groggily into the pillow. He couldn’t thank people he refused to meet.

Tony dozed off. He was more comfortable than he had been in a long time. There were pleasant dreams that were warm and safe and somewhere in the distance he could hear a woman singing. If he could, he probably wouldn’t ever want to wake up.

It was calming, peaceful. Nothing hurt. No one was asking him any questions or demanding that he accept help. Everything was fine. But it wasn’t real, just a dream.

At first he wasn’t sure what woke him up. He hadn’t been sleeping long, he knew that much. Sunlight was still pouring in through the window and everything was still in its place. Except for the two people walking into his room.

“Relax.” One of them said, a woman, as she walked slowly up to the bed. “I’m just here to make sure you eat.”

Tony frowned at her and scooted away slowly. He recognized her. He had met her once, on the day they arrested him. She was talking to Clint, she had pulled a gun on him when he attacked him.

“Go away.” Tony said calmly. “I do not know you and I want you to leave.”

She shook her head. “My name is Natasha Romanoff, now you know me. I’m not leaving until you eat.” She said as she held out a small bowl of mixed fruit. “You haven’t eaten in days, I’ve been watching the footage. You need to eat.”

“No I don’t.” Tony said quickly. “You cannot make me.”

“Would you like to see me try?” Natasha said firmly. Tony held her gaze, not even blinking. They stared at each other in silence for several minutes before she sighed. “Clint’s worried about you. I need to make sure he’s okay and the only way I can do that is if you’re okay. Now eat.”

Tony shook his head as she thrust the bowl towards him. “I do not want to eat that.”

“Then tell me what you do want and I’ll find it for you.” She said quickly.

Tony frowned. That might work. He was hungry and although the bowl of fruit looked very appetizing he wasn’t going to eat anything she picked for him. He would eat when he chose. If he chose he still had control of that.
“Pannenkoek.” He said. Natasha raised an eyebrow. “It is like a pancake. I want is with blueberries.”

“Are they special pancakes or just regular pancakes.” She asked quickly. Tony shrugged his uninjured shoulder and turned his attention to the man standing several feet behind her. “Fine. I’ll be back soon. You’ll eat then.”

Natasha turned quickly and slammed the door closed behind her. He didn’t like her. His only conversation with her lasted barely over a minute but she gave him an odd feeling. She was too demanding.

“She’s being a bit loud. Usually she’s really quiet.” The man said, still in the room. Tony looked back at him. He recognized him too, only far more recently. “Steve Rogers.”

Steve walked up slowly, hand outstretched in front of him. Tony wasn’t entirely sure what to do. The last time he met this man he cried into his chest and kicked him a few times. Why on Earth would he come back?

“Tony.” He muttered, taking the man’s hand with a firm shake.

Steve smiled, nodding quickly. “Yeah, I know. They, uh, Coulson told me. He’s a bit excited.”

“I think he is far more excited about you.” Tony said, pulling his hand away from Steve’s. He moved to sit on the edge of the bed, Steve continued to stand in front of him as he shifted his weight from foot to foot. “You can sit.”

He took a seat quickly. The bed dipped under his weight as he sat down several feet from Tony’s spot on the bed. “Why would you think he’s excited about me?” He asked, glancing quickly over to Tony.

“His eyes grow really large whenever he is in the same room as you. Even when you are gone and he talked about you he started smiling and I thought he was going to swoon.” Tony said. “Why are you here?”

Steve tensed a bit, leaning away slightly. “I wanted to apologize. I shouldn’t have grabbed you, you were scared and my first thought was to just try to calm you down. I should have known you wouldn’t be happy just being grabbed like that. If I made you more afraid, I’m sorry.”

Tony stared at him. He was apologizing. Actually apologizing, no excuses for his behavior, no expectations for forgiveness. It was… nice.

“It’s fine. I didn’t mind all that much. Just do not do it again.” Tony said. Steve relaxed, nodding quickly. “Also, thank you for the gift. No one has ever given me anything that I was allowed to keep before.”

Steve frowned for a few seconds before nodding quickly. “It wasn’t a problem. I know what it’s like to be stuck inside.” He said slowly. Steve stared at him, focusing his eyes on every little detail of Tony’s face. “You look like him.”

Tony sighed. “If this is the part where I ask ‘who’ and then you say ‘your father’ and we have a sweet little moment then I will probably throw up.” He said quickly. He didn’t want to talk about any of them. Everything was fine before, back when he didn’t have a family everyone associated him with and whoever those poor people are somewhere in the world won’t have to deal with him as a son. “Can we just talk about something else? The weather is lovely.”
Steve frowned again, turning to the window. The sunlight the filtered in made his blond hair a shining golden hue. The only rays that reached Tony fell across his hands, making them look thin and far too pale.

“Yeah. The weather’s great.” Steve said quickly, nodding. “Have you drawn anything yet? I wasn’t quite sure what your hobbies are so I just grabbed one of my spare books and a handful of pencils and sent them over. Is it okay?”

Tony nodded. “It is great. Thank you.” He said. He couldn’t help but relax as Steve gave him a wide grin. “But no, I haven’t drawn anything. I can’t draw. I don’t know how.”

Steve nodded quickly. “That’s fine. No one is an expert their first time. Do you have it?” He said enthusiastically as he started to look around. Tony bent down slowly and grabbed the small box up against the wall by the bed and handed it to Steve. The sketchbook was still there. “I can show you how to draw something if you like.”

He almost shook his head. Tony didn’t even know this man but he liked him. Steve was nice, friendly, and so far hadn’t asked anything of him.


“I don’t know. You’re a good guy and you seem bored or confused all the time. Sorry, Natasha’s been watching all the surveillance of you for days. I think she’s trying to figure out why you attacked her friend. But hey, I don’t know a lot of people so sometimes I join her when I’m feeling lonely. She used to be mad but now she’s just… uncertain about things and I don’t think she likes that.” Steve said. He moved to sit on the floor, flipping open the sketchbook before looking up at Tony hopefully. “Anyway, you just seem bored and confused. I feel like that all the time, I’m new to everything and I figured we could just be confused together. Like friends.”

“Aren’t you friends with Natasha? And Coulson?” Tony asked. He didn’t move from his seat on the bed. He needed to know the answer. Natasha and Coulson were friends with Clint. He couldn’t trust Clint, therefore he couldn’t trust any of his friends either.

Steve smiled slightly. “I’m familiar with them. They’re not bad, Natasha likes to make puns when she’s bored and some of them are pretty brilliant. Coulson’s also been really nice ever since I woke up.” He said slowly. “I’d like to be their friends just like I would like to be your friend.”

Tony sat still, looking closely at Steve. He didn’t seem threatening and it looked like he was telling the truth. There was also no mention of Clint. If Steve wasn’t interested in Clint then he might not care. That would be good, Tony didn’t need to be surrounded by people who were going to protect that man and defend him every chance they got. He needed someone here who was on his side.

He slid off of the bed carefully, sitting next to Steve on the ground. “What are you going to draw?” He asked.

It was a simple question, but Steve’s face lit up and grabbed a pencil. “Whatever you want me to.”

Tony thought for a moment as he stared down at the clean white sheet of paper in the book. “A llama.” He said. Steve gave him a bright smile and nodded.
I threw in some Natasha, she's going to be hanging around for a while. Also, some legitimate Steve/Tony bonding time. Hopefully it all goes well. They're both two little adorable cuties who need to hug it out.
Sorry, tired.
Comment, because I love you and hopefully you love me.
This chapter was probably more trouble than it's worth. I spent hours writing, deleting, and rewording basically the same content. But I love you guys so I got it done anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve left after two hours of drawing in the sketchbook as Tony watched contently next to him. He was alone now, lying on the bed and flipping through the pages of his sketchbook. Steve was true to his word, the first page had a large llama on it. Its cartoon face smiled brightly as its ears stood straight up. Tony loved it.

The next few pages were filled with a bunch of Steve’s little doodles. There were little birds in the corners of the page, and quick sketches of skyscrapers he had never seen before. They were beautiful.

He glanced up quickly at the sound of the door banging open, Natasha rushing in quickly with a plate held high.

It was just a single pancake that sat in the center of the plate Natasha shoved towards him. She didn’t say anything, just crossed her arms and slowly started tapping her foot. Tony looked it over carefully. The texture seemed correct and it smelled as it should. If it was poisoned then it was well hidden.

“Are you angry with me?” Tony asked as he looked up from the plate towards the woman.

“Yes.” She said quickly before nodding towards the plate. “Eat.”

Tony looked back down at the pancake and the pile of blueberries on top of it. He was hungry, the smell of the food wafted towards him and his mouth watered.

“Is it poisoned?” He asked, not taking his eyes off of his food. “I do not wish to die, but it could very well be the kind that makes you fall asleep and then you wake up somewhere else and that might just be worse.”

“I’m not going to hurt you.” She said. Tony didn’t trust Natasha, she was too calm. Her eyes narrowed every few seconds as they passed over the little details of his face. She was studying him, taking him apart and analyzing each feature and movement. Tony knew the look. He hated it.

He held the plate back out to her. “Then why are you here? You’re angry with me.” He said quickly. It made sense, Natasha was angry so she would try to hurt him. That’s how it worked.

“Oh course I am. You attacked someone close to me. But I understand your reasons, so I’m not going to hurt you.” She said calmly and shrugged. Tony continued to hold the plate out to her, willing Natasha to take it and leave. “If I wanted to kill you then you would be dead already.”

“And if you just want to hurt me?” Tony asked. Natasha didn’t move. She didn’t say anything. They just waited in a few minutes of silence.
It was hot. Tony felt as though he was sweating too much and that it was definitely hotter than it had been a few minutes ago. It was difficult to breathe. Still, he didn’t move and continued to stare at Natasha, waiting for her to make a move.

“I don’t want to hurt you.” She said in a low, soft voice. “I just want you to eat.”

“Why?”

“Because I care about Clint and he cares about you. I need to keep you alive so eventually he can make a proper apology and he can stop sulking on the roof and you can stop thinking everyone you meet is trying to lie to you or hurt you. I understand why you’re angry, he betrayed you. He’s an idiot. But I understand why you’re so confused and untrusting. I was too. Those people hurt you and taught you about how life was supposed to work but it was wrong.” Natasha said. She still hadn’t moved and didn’t look away from him. “Not everyone is out to hurt you. Sometimes people want to help. Now eat your pancake so you won’t pass out and have a feeding tube shoved up our nose and down your throat and then you won’t be able to see Banner tomorrow morning.”

Tony paused, looking down at the plate for just a moment before nodding. Natasha uncrossed her arms and held out a plastic fork. The pancake looked delicious and Tony was hungry. He wasn’t going to pretend like he didn’t want to eat it.

Natasha stayed and watched him eat. It was slightly threatening. Tony didn’t see the reason for her being here. She was up to something and Tony wasn’t quite sure if he wanted to know what it was. If he knew he could possibly stop it, or watch it creep over him as he accepted the unpreventable. If he didn’t know then he could just hope for the best.

“I’m not doing this because of you. I’m actually hungry. You can’t make me eat.” Tony muttered as he shoveled the fork in his mouth. Natasha didn’t reply, just nodded slowly.

“People shouldn’t force you to do anything.” She said simply.

Tony shook his head and returned back to eating small bites. She was wrong. People could force him to do anything. Almost anything.

When he finished Natasha took the plate and fork and left the room without a word.

It was getting late. The warm sunlight had vanished not too long ago but Tony’s not tired enough for sleep yet. Instead he walks slowly towards the bathroom and stripped out of his clothes in slow and careful movements.

The endless stream of hot water that came from the shower was the only good thing Tony could think of when he thought about his locked room here at SHIELD. Its warmth seemed to seep into him and melt his core.

He was comfortable and calm. Once his muscles relaxed from all of the stress and tension that had built up over the past few days, he turned off the water and slipped on the spare sweatpants and t-shirts that were left in a folded pile in the corner. SHIELD was being strange recently, bringing him everything they thought he needed and probably more.

He crawled under the covers on the bed and sank into the mattress, pulling the blankets up over his head and burying his face into the pillow. It was quiet. He was completely alone. He was safe at the moment. It didn’t take him long to fall into a dreamless sleep.

When he woke up again the next morning it was bright out. He felt groggy, tired, and confused. It didn’t feel like he had fallen asleep at all, a blink of an eye and it was morning. It was worrying, he
usually didn’t sleep so deeply and easily. Any other night he would have woken up to the sound of someone walking into the room. Yet Coulson was there, standing over the bed as he shook Tony awake gently.

“You overslept.” He said, taking a step back as Tony sat up.

Tony nodded slowly. “Yes, I did. I usually don’t do that.” He muttered.

“You usually sleep a few hours and then stare out the window. Confuses the hell out of the guys we have watching the cameras.” Coulson said, the corner of his mouth turning up slightly. “Would you like breakfast before we go down to see Dr. Banner?”

Tony smiled. That’s what he liked, people asking him what he wanted. If Tony didn’t want to eat, he wouldn’t eat. No one could force him to. If he did want to eat though, nothing could stop him. It was always his choice though, something he had complete control over. It was nice to be asked, it meant he could turn it down if he wanted.

But he nodded anyway. He was starving. The tray Coulson handed him only had a small pile of eggs in the middle and a biscuit in the corner with a glass of milk. He balanced it on his knee and looked back up at the agent.

“Is this it?” He asked, raising an eyebrow at the small meal. “You certainly don’t feed your prisoners much.”

“You’re not a prisoner.” Coulson said. Tony looked back up at him. “Well, you’re a prisoner, but one we’re going to take care of. You’ve hardly eaten anything in the past few days so we’re trying not to overwhelm you with a buffet just yet.”

Tony nodded again. That made sense. He held his hand out to the agent and waited until he placed the fork in his hand. He poked at the eggs. They were yellow and fluffy and not like any eggs he was used to.

“I like eggs when you boil them.” Tony said. He stabbed a small glob and popped it into his mouth. It wasn’t bad. He missed the eggs Lotte made for breakfast most days, but these would do.

He took a few large mouthfuls before he started tearing apart his biscuit. By the time he was finished eating, the tray picked clean and still balanced easily on his knees, Coulson had moved to lean against the far wall with an amused smile.

The tray was taken from him and within minutes he was following Coulson quickly down the halls and into the elevator. They didn’t pass anyone, each hall suspiciously empty. It didn’t matter though. Tony was trying to figure out his thoughts. He needed to know what he was going to say to Bruce.

They reached the same room Tony was kept in when he was first arrested after attacking Clint. The cell he and Rhodey shared for a short time was empty. However, Bruce’s cell had accumulated quite a bit of clutter. A folding cot rested in the corner, blankets tossed over it lazily. Water bottles littered the floor, papers were pilled neatly in one corner, and in the farthest corner of the room a toilet had been installed. Tony had no idea how, it certainly wasn’t there a few days ago.

Bruce sat close to the transparent wall and gave a small smile when Tony entered. Coulson nodded as he turned to leave and Tony rushed up to the glass, looking Bruce over quickly.

“You’ve looked better.” Tony said quickly, unable to keep the smile off of his face. Bruce looked tired, his hair was a mess and his clothes were wrinkled badly. Tony was happy to see him.
“Well, you know how it is. Been a stressful few days, haven’t gotten much sleep, and there’s this other guy who’s been giving me hell.” He said, his smile falling off of his face. He looked down with a shrug. “It’s really angry and I don’t know why.”

Tony sat down on the ground across from him. “Are you alright?” He asked slowly, leaning towards the wall separating them.

Bruce nodded quickly, looking back up at Tony. “Yeah, yeah. I’m doing okay. I think I’m starting to figure it out. Maybe.” He said. “They said you wanted to talk to me. Are you doing okay? You don’t look so good.”

Tony chuckled. “I look fantastic. I am beautiful at all hours of the day. I don’t want your criticisms.” He said jokingly. Bruce returned his smile and nodded for him to continue. “I’ve just been really confused about things and the only person I can talk to right now and I know has no reason to lie to me is you.”

“You trust me? Even after what I did to you?” Bruce asked quickly, looking down at Tony’s arm that still rested in the sling. Tony nodded. “Okay. Ask away, I’ll answer them as best as I can.”

“Good. Nothing has been making sense.” Tony said, breathing out a long sigh. “I don’t know what everyone means. They keep saying they want to help and that I’m in trouble but I do not think I am. I don’t trust them either. They could very well be trying to fool me, stop me from going home.” Bruce shook his head quickly as he raised his hand to stop Tony.

“I’m going to be completely honest, just like you asked. You’re being hurt, probably for a long time. If people are supposed to be taking care of you and they ever hit you, cut you, burn you, threaten you, lock you up, or in any way make you feel afraid for your physical or mental wellbeing then they are abusive and you need to get away from them.” Bruce said quickly, taking a deep breath. “Okay, just tell me if they’ve ever done any of that to you and I’ll tell you if you need help.”

Tony frowned at him, his gaze dropped down to his hands as they laid flat on his legs. He wasn’t sure what to say. It was true, they had done that. Several of those, actually. But he didn’t know if answering would be a betrayal to them or not. Mesman and Lotte told him not to discuss his life with these people. He nodded anyway. Tony didn’t look up at Bruce, but hopefully it was enough and he wouldn’t have to actually say anything. Bruce inhaled sharply.

“Then you need to get away from them, Tony. People aren’t supposed to do that to you.” Bruce said softly. He leaned forward towards Tony and ran a hand over his face. “How long has this been going on?”

“Thirteen years.” Tony said. Bruce whined softly and shook his head.

“Are you really nineteen years old?” He asked quickly. Tony nodded. “Jesus, Tony. You were six when they started hurting you. God, no wonder you’re confused. You were a kid and they hurt you. I understand. I know as a kid you’re forming your idea of home and family and it’s supposed to be a good thing and it’s not. You’re in danger with those people, if you go back they’ll only end up hurting you more. I don’t want that for you and deep down you don’t want that either.”

“But they paid for me. And I never really thought it was that bad. They fed me, I had a place to sleep, and she was so nice. Gentle. I owe them.” Tony said.
“What do you mean they paid for you?” Bruce asked slowly. Tony looked up at him. He wasn’t looking good, his fists shook at his side and his skin was slowly developing a green tint.

Tony cocked his head to the side, frowning. “You know, I was with these people and they sold me to other people. They took care of me.” He said. His mind was racing from one memory to the next, attaching these new ideas to each scene. It wasn’t good, nothing seemed quite as okay anymore. “The only really bad things were the dark room… and the basement. Everything besides that was good. He only ever hit me when I made a mistake.”

Bruce closed his eyes, shaking his head quickly as he took several more deep breaths. “It’s illegal for people to own other human beings and you shouldn’t have ever been hit in the first place. It is wrong.”

Tony frowned again as he looked back down at his thin, pale hands. He nodded slowly. Bruce knew what he was talking about. He understood a lot of things Tony didn’t. He might be right. Tony still wasn’t entirely sure, but he didn’t know what he would do if everything turned out to be just as wrong as everyone said. It could change things, but it probably won’t. Tony was still sure he was going to go back.

A gentle hand fell on his shoulder. Tony looked up slowly to see Agent Coulson kneeling beside him. He said his goodbyes to Bruce, who told him to be careful and to take care of himself, and then left with the agent.

Coulson walked slower than usual and he remained beside Tony, not trailing ahead like a commander leading his troops. Tony preferred it, happy for the change.

“You heard all of it, I assume.” He asked. Tony didn’t look over to the agent. “I still don’t trust you. I still don’t want your help.”

“That’s okay. We have time.” Coulson said. He seemed completely calm, too at ease compared to the thunderstorm of confusion and fear running raging through Tony’s head. “Besides, you agreed to meet with a few people in exchange for that conversation with Dr. Banner so we can start there. It’ll probably be a busy day. A few doctors to check your arm and your ribs, check over you general health, and just talk. See if you’re feeling okay. Your guest has also arrived so you can meet them last.”

“Guest?” Tony asked as he looked over to Coulson. The agent almost looked smug, as if he achieved something important to him.

Coulson nodded slowly. “Just an old family friend. Hopefully it will clear some things up with you in case you have question, help all of us understand you better, and maybe jog a few of your memories from back before you were taken.”

“Does my guest have a name?” Tony asked, looking away from the agent. Whoever it was, he would not under any circumstance agree to speak about his parents. They failed him. They abandoned him.

“He’s an old employee of your family.” Coulson said. “Jarvis. Edwin Jarvis. He’s quite fond of you so hopefully the visit goes well.”

Chapter End Notes
Surprise! Jarvis is alive. If you've been watching Agent Carter (you should, it's amazing) then I will try to draw inspiration from that brilliant man.
Tony's doing somewhat okay. Let me know if you think he'll figure it all out and do what's good for him or if he's just going to run off and go back to those horrible people.
Comment, I am the Earth and you're the glorious sun. Your comments fill my life with joy.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

I have a headache. But I wrote anyways, because I love you.
Tony's coming along nicely, I think.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing they did after leaving Bruce was take Tony to get x-rays. Coulson was determined to make sure his injuries hadn’t gotten worse over the week and to make sure there weren’t any other glaring problems that needed addressing.

His ribs were fine, his shoulder needed to be reset again. The second round of x-rays came back fine. It was all taken care of, person one and two of the five he agreed to meet were an enthusiastic x-ray technician and a doctor to put his shoulder in the correct place. As it turned out Doctor number two wasn’t only trained to reset limbs but also give a general physical.

He was being stubborn, according to Coulson. Tony didn’t speak with anyone, neglected every question, and silently let them poke and prod him until they were satisfied.

Lunch was served after that in a small room just a short walk away from the medical wing. The tray that sat on the table in front of him held a peanut butter sandwich, a small bowl of fruit, and a glass of apple juice.

They were getting ready to bring Jarvis in. Coulson had informed him shortly after Tony had started eating and went to sit in a chair in the corner of the room. It was a pretty smart tactic, if Tony was willing to admit it. Have him eat before bringing him in just in case Tony grew upset and refused to eat again later and deciding not to leave the two of them alone, in case Tony got a bit angry or violent. They were trying to take care of him and that sometimes meant making sure he didn’t hurt someone.

Tony sighed loudly. They weren’t taking care of him, he didn’t know why he thought that. They were lying to him, holding him captive, and forcing strangers towards him and calling them his family. He didn’t know who he was supposed to be meeting, hadn’t recognized the name, but he knew it was important.

An important person who didn’t work for SHIELD. He wasn’t quite sure how to handle the situation. If he was polite things could go a lot easier but he didn’t want to risk discussing things he’d rather left unmentioned.

“He’s here, I’ll get him now.” Coulson said, standing up and walking to the door. “I know you’re nervous, but please go easy on him. He was devastated when he lost you and now he has a chance to get you back. Jarvis really cares about you so don’t punch him in the face or yell at him.”

Tony hesitated before nodding slowly. He would just tell him to politely leave. It would be better to avoid the situation. He’ll tell the man to go and then they wouldn’t have to deal with him. He stood to dismiss the man as the door opened.

He was tall, lean, with brown hair with multiple patches of grey. Tony didn’t recognize him, but
the look on the man’s face seemed to be a mixture of joy and fear, as if he didn’t know whether to smile or to run away. He blinked a few too many times and then rushed forward.

“Tony, this is Edwin Jarvis.” Coulson said as he returned to his seat in the corner. Tony barely had time to open his mouth and greet the man before he was swept up in a tight embrace.

That was familiar. Jarvis was warm, smelled vaguely of peppermint, and took several deep breaths as his hand rubbed gentle circles into Tony’s back. It was so familiar and soothing and so damn confusing that Tony couldn’t decide if he should push away or return the hug. Instead he just stood there, completely still and all thoughts of banishing the man had left him.

There was a small moment of silence as he stayed pressed into the man’s chest. It wasn’t for himself, not for the comfort and calm that washed over him in that embrace. He didn’t move or say anything because Jarvis seemed to need to hug, as if he would fall apart if he was forced to let go.

In an instant Jarvis seemed to snap away. “I don’t know what came over me. You have injured ribs and here I am trying to squeeze the life out of you. But the sight of you…” Jarvis said quickly while he looked Tony over. “You’re so much taller than I remember. Given, you were just six years old the last time I saw you. I can’t believe it’s been thirteen years. Far too long. I knew we would find you one day, that you would be alright.”

He looked to be on the verge of tears. Tony didn’t know what to do when someone was crying. His mind shuffled through hundreds of responses or gestures that might stop the wave of emotion threatening to burst from the man.

“Everything is fine.” Tony said, smiling slightly. Jarvis tensed slightly.

“Everything is not fine! You’ve been missing for thirteen years. You finally come back and you’re so thin and you’re alive. Good god, you need a haircut.” Jarvis said, reaching up to run a hand through Tony’s tangled curls. Tony wanted to pull away, get this stranger to stop touching him, but he couldn’t. “We looked for you.”

Tony nodded quickly. “I assumed so but you didn’t find me. Life goes on.” He said, proud of the calm and controlled nature his voice took on.

Jarvis simply shook his head. “But it didn’t. You disappeared and life stopped almost instantly. Your mother stopped going out as often and locked herself away in the mansion. Sometimes she would just sit in your room and sing lullabies or cry. Your father became obsessive, in one endeavor or another.”

Tony wanted to tell him to stop, to not ruin their whole friendship before it even started. He didn’t want to hear about his parents, he didn’t want to talk about what his kidnapping did to them. He didn’t want to know about the people he supposedly left behind and most importantly he just wanted everyone to leave him alone.

He didn’t say any of that though. A part of him just wanted to sit still and listen to every story Jarvis had and worm his way back into the familiar warmth of the man’s hugs.

“Half of the staff quit after we lost you. You were such a spirited child and so immensely intelligent. Lit up every room you walked into.” Jarvis said, walking slowly around Tony to take a seat at the table. Tony moved instinctively to sit down on the other side of the table. “The mansion seemed so much bigger without you.”

“A mansion?” Tony asked. “We had a mansion?”
Jarvis nodded. “Still do, I’m pleased to say. Several mansions. While your mother preferred to stay in the one you used to live in, your father bought several more because he decided he couldn’t find a moment’s peace there. Too filled with memories, I suspect.” He said slowly. “Even years after her death your father refuses to sell the property.” Jarvis winced as the sentence left his mouth, not taking his eyes off of Tony. Coulson leaned forward too, waiting to gauge his reaction.

He blinked. “She’s dead?” He asked. Jarvis nodded carefully. “Oh.”

Tony wasn’t sure how to feel about that. She was his mother, a woman who not only gave birth to him but was so broken after losing him she seemed to have secluded herself in her home. Still, he couldn’t even recall her name, regardless of how many times it had been mentioned to him the past few days.

There was definitely something, some lingering feeling he couldn’t quite put his finger on. He wasn’t sad, per se. Sadness was what he felt when he was left bleeding and alone to take care of his injuries himself, locked away in that small room where he spent most of the day. This was a different feeling entirely, like that feeling he would get when they locked him in that dark closet for punishment. It wasn’t sad, it was uncomfortable and confused with a few distant wishes for things to be different.

“I’m terribly sorry.” Jarvis said. Tony suspected the man would jump up at any moment to pull him into another forceful hug that couldn’t possibly be good for his ribs. Tony didn’t think he would object if he did. “I shouldn’t have said anything. You’re probably still confused about everything that is going on.”

Tony tilted his head to the side before looking down at his hands. “He’s alive, but she isn’t?” He asked slowly. He shook his head as Jarvis opened his mouth. “Don’t tell me. I don’t want to know. I don’t want to hear about them.”

Coulson relaxed back in his chair, disappointment barely visible on his face. He didn’t seem surprised though. Jarvis just looked heartbroken all over again.

“Of course, sir.” Jarvis muttered, nodding quickly. Tony’s heart skipped a beat as his whole body seemed to tense up instantly. “It is my job to make you as comfortable as possible. Perhaps upon my next visit I can bring you a plate of macaroni with little cut up hotdogs mixed in. It used to be your favorite meal.”

Tony didn’t move, didn’t say anything, didn’t so much as breath. Jarvis didn’t notice, Coulson did. Jarvis started rambling softly about all the things a younger, livelier Tony had once loved. Coulson stood and walked up to the table, eyeing Tony carefully. Tony just stared down at the table, not processing a word that was spoken.

It was wrong, the whole thing was so incredibly wrong that Tony was almost certain everything he had managed to eat that day might make another appearance. He had heard things he didn’t want to hear, thought things he shouldn’t have thought, and had participated far too much in all of SHIELD’s games. The worst of it was that he was worried. He was frightened of what would happen to him once he returned to Mesman. It sickened him because he had never been afraid of him before and now that he was it was just proof that they were all getting into his head.

A firm, grounding hand landed on his uninjured shoulder and Tony’s eyes snapped up to look at where it came from. It was Coulson, just Tony and the agent alone in the room. It was disconcerting, being completely unaware of the person he was talking with getting up and leaving the room. He should have noticed.
“Are you alright?” Coulson asked softly. Tony was half tempted to push the man away, to yell at him, hit him. He wanted him away.

Tony just shook his head quickly. “He shouldn’t call me that. It is not right.” He said quickly. He hesitated then, trying to understand his feelings and put them all into words. “It is dangerous.”

“Mr. Jarvis would never hurt you. He cares very deeply about you.” Coulson said. Tony groaned, shaking his head quickly. He wasn’t afraid of Jarvis.

“Je begrijpt het niet!” Tony whispered quickly. He took a deep, shaky breath as he shook his head. He needed to calm down, quickly. “If he learns someone called me that I will be punished.”

Coulson blinked, his frown deepening. “Help me understand. Who will punish you?”

Tony froze again. He had said too much. It had been a small moment of panic and Coulson had taken advantage of that and now they knew too much. Breathing became difficult, his heart returned to its steady pounding in his chest, and this time he actually did push Coulson away.

The agent went willingly, taking several large steps back. “Do you want me to get anything for you?” He asked, still looking intently at Tony.

There was something. This feeling of overwhelming panic and dread wasn’t something he was familiar with and so very different from the familiarity and ease he had felt before he came here to the US, to MIT, to SHIELD. Yet it seemed to be happening more frequently. There was only one person who all of those terrible feelings even a tiny bit better. He hardly even knew the man so that should be a warning sign all by itself but he couldn't bring himself to care at the memories of the warm, sturdy chest he had cried into and the kind, gentle words Tony received when he watched the man sketch.


Chapter End Notes

That could have certainly been better. I guess it is hard though to come up with a conversation piece with someone given the circumstances. Also, next chapter is the 20th of this thing. It's all turning out longer than I originally anticipated but I'm happy. I'll have to write up something special for our 20th chapter anniversary together. Comment, I live and breath for comments.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

In honor of 20 chapters together I wrote one that is twice as long as the usual chapters and full of little feely moments. I'm tired now, my hand hurts because I had an essay exam and then finished this up for you. I hope you love me as much as I love you. Also it's late and I'm tired so if I missed anything in editing then let me know!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was raining out. He could see it pouring down from the dark sky just outside of the window. He wished he was outside. Tony loved the rain, loved the sound, the feel of it. He even just loved to watch it.

He wouldn’t be allowed outside so he had to be content enough to just watch it come down in the warm, dry room he had been assigned to. Steve hadn’t shown up yet. Apparently after spending time at the Boston base he transferred down to New York. Coulson said that for months Steve has been bouncing around different SHIELD bases every few weeks.

He almost felt guilty when Coulson let him talk on the phone with Steve. Tony had just rambled into the phone about how wrong everything was. Steve listened, he asked if Tony needed anything, and promised he would drive up to Boston as soon as possible despite Tony’s protests that there was no need, that he wasn’t worth the effort.

That was yesterday afternoon, now it was morning and all natural light was blocked out by the dark, heavy clouds and the pouring rain. Flash of lightning broke across the sky as thunder seemed to shake the building. Tony loved it.

His eyes snapped away from the window and towards the door when he heard it open. Tony tried not to deflate when Natasha walked in, waving a small bowl of oatmeal. He took it without question, balancing it on his knee as she handed him a spoon.

“Try not to look so disappointed. You can see your guest after you eat.” Natasha said. Tony smiled up at her. “He arrived about an hour ago and has agreed to wait until you ate something. He’s currently with Coulson discussing what did and did not actually happen during the war. Phil’s under the impression the Nazi army created a mind control device and used it to have Peggy and Rogers fight each other. If that had happened I’m not sure there would have been a Captain to fish out of the arctic.

“You are making no sense.” Tony said, raising an eyebrow. Natasha just shrugged, gesturing towards the bowl of oatmeal.

Tony ate in silence under Natasha’s watchful eye. He didn’t feel the need to rush through the meal, Steve had driven up from New York to see him, he would be there when Tony finished. It was an interesting feeling, knowing someone had dropped everything they were doing and drove several hours to make sure he was okay. It was a warm, comfortable sort of feeling. Tony was entirely confused by it.

“I’ll send him up.” Natasha said as Tony handed over the now empty bowl. “Never seen him so
excited to be in a SHIELD building before.”

Tony looked back out the window, frowning slightly as he watched the rain continue to fall. “I shouldn’t have asked for him.” He leaned forward until his head was resting against the cool glass of the window. “I’ve only met him twice. Spoke to him for probably few hours at most.”

“Still, he probably thinks of you as a friend and he doesn’t have many of those right now.” She said calmly. “And I’ve never seen him turn down the chance to help anyone. Coulson’s probably thrilled with having the great and wonderful Captain America back anyways.”

“What is Captain America?” Tony asked. Natasha tilted her head to the side, contemplating. “I’ve heard them referenced before but no one every explained who they are. Is there a reason Steve is him?”

“A very very long time ago Steve Rogers signed up for a secret military experiment, which is rather stupid but I’m not here to judge.” She began as she slowly went over a brief yet descriptive explanation about who Captain America, according to history books and propaganda pieces for the media. It all sounded strangely like some wild fairy tale that didn’t have an end yet. A scrawny, sickly boy turning into one of the greatest soldiers in history and then leaving his love to save the world and ended up sleeping for 70 years. Now he was expected to pick himself up and be a hero again. It all seemed rather sad to Tony.

“What does he want to do now?” He asked slowly.

Natasha shrugged. “At this moment he’s getting ready to visit a friend. Long term I guess it’s up to him.” She said. “SHIELD will most definitely want him to become an agent, go on missions, and keep on saving the world.”

Tony turned his head from its spot resting on the window and looked at her as she walked towards the door. She was the one to bring him his meals the past two days and he noticed little things. She walked louder than necessary, opened doors forcefully, and all of it seemed completely unnatural to her. Natasha was being loud for him and he had no idea why.

“Natasha?” Tony asked as she reached the door. She stopped, looking back at him. “Are you still angry with me?”

“Yes.” She said simply. “Clint saved my life, I don’t like his being in danger all that much.”

Tony nodded at that, it made complete sense. “Are you both agents here? I assumed your work would be inherently dangerous.” He asked. Natasha shrugged.

“He is perfectly capable of taking care of himself on a mission, but I certainly don’t appreciate him being attacked in his own home.” Natasha said.

“Clint lives here?” He asked quickly.

“Not always this particular building.” Natasha said. “SHIELD is home.”

Tony didn’t comment on that. He had no right to judge what people called home. Apparently his was absolutely terrible and yet he was still willing to go back at a moment’s notice. There was nothing wrong with having a twisted view of home. He may not trust Clint, and by default, SHIELD and Natasha, but he at least understood them.

Well, he almost understood them.
“If you’re angry with me, why are you feeding me? Being kind to me?” He asked slowly. Natasha seemed to relax then.

“I am not here to hurt you. I’m mad at you, that means I’m upset with your actions and will probably ask you not to do them again and will later describe to you how your actions affect others. When you’re up for it though.” She said calmly. Tony furrowed his eyebrows and frowned. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“But you’re angry. I upset you.” Tony said, as if it were all obvious.

Natasha shook her head. “When I’m upset I’m the kind of person who mixes in the red socks with the white laundry so look out for that. If someone is the kind of person who hurts others when they’re upset then you might want to avoid them completely.” Natasha said slowly. “It’s a strange concept that everyone ought to know. It’ll kind of obvious once you begin to understand everything, but I know it’s difficult to accept now. Denial is a dangerous sort of thing, it protects us but also has a tendency to hide things we need to know.”

Tony frowned at her. This woman was confusing and intimidating and Tony wasn’t quite sure if she was actually trying to help him or lure him into a sense of security so he won’t see the attack coming.

“I’ll send him up.” Natasha said.

“Natasha?” Tony said quickly. Natasha stopped once again, her hand on the doorknob. “Clint was afraid of thunder when he was a kid. It’s storming out so you might want to check on him.”

Natasha smiled slightly and nodded. “He really is sorry for what he’s done.” She said slowly. “You don’t have to forgive him, no one will make you. But he is going to try his best to make it up to you and I don’t want him to get himself killed trying to.” Tony didn’t have time to reply before she walked out the door and left.

Tony turned away from the window and moved towards the edge of the bed so he was facing the door.

When Steve walked in he looked happy despite what obviously looked uncomfortable. He looked as though he had been standing out in the rain fairly recently, hair and clothes damp although not dripping wet. But he was smiling and holding out a plastic bag as if it contained everything happy in the entire world.

“I brought cookies, just like you asked. There were girl scouts at the mall so I bought several boxes of everything.” Steve said enthusiastically. “I also picked up the colored pencils you asked for.”

Tony returned his smile, tapping at the spot next to him for him to sit before leaning over and pulling his sketchbook out from under the bed. Steve’s grin only widened at the sight of it.

“You’ve been using it.” He said, relief painting his tone. “I wasn’t sure you would, I’m not familiar with your hobbies. What did you draw?”

“An engine.” Tony muttered. “I designed it to be much more power efficient, it’ll use less energy to do the same job.” He flipped through the pages of sloppily looking sketches of different engine pieces. He had no real skill in art, but the drawings were neat enough that Tony could make out what they were. “I’ve also been working on a generator. I want to color code the parts.”

Steve nodded quickly, handing over the small package of colored pencils and a box of cookies. Tony took them both eagerly. He tore both open and began scribbling in different pieces of his
drawing with different colors, stopping every few seconds to plop a cookie into his mouth. Then another.

Steve sat next to him, watching him quietly as he muttered brief explanations on what the engine could be used for and the energy output of the little generator designs. He listened, asking questions every couple of minutes. Tony was more than happy to answer.

He finished filling in the last little shape and handed it over so Steve could get a closer look. Tony reached for the box of cookies sitting next to him. They were thin mints, absolutely delicious in his opinion. The box was empty.

“You ate them all.” Steve said. “Those girl scouts certainly do know how to whip up an amazing cookie.”

“Oh, okay.” Tony said. “Hand me another box.” He gestured towards the plastic bag sitting on the floor by Steve’s feet.

Steve chuckled lightly, a soft and gentle sound that was rather relaxing. “I think you’ve had enough.”

Tony shook his head. “It was only one box. Maybe I’m still hungry.”

“Then we can call someone up to get you some actual food. Eating five thousand cookies sounds like a dream come true but you’ll end up throwing up from all the sugar.” Steve said. He sat up and moved the bag of cookies away. “Why don’t we call and get you some real food and then you can tell me more about your miniaturized cold fusion generator.”

Tony smiled slightly. Steve had listened to his rambles. Still, if he was going to eat he was going to eat what he wanted. “No, give me the cookies. They taste better and they are higher in calories.” Tony said. Steve tilted his head to the side, confused. That just made Tony confused as well, he assumed it was obvious. “I’m trying to catch up.”

“Catch up with what?” Steve asked. He closed Tony’s sketchbook and handed it back.


“You have a system for eating?” Steve said slowly, looking lost. Tony did a slight half shrug and looked back down at the empty box of cookies.

“Yes. I eat normally, then when I feel like it I stop eating for a little while.” Tony said. “Then I have to catch up before I eat normally again. But they keep giving me these small meals so I haven’t been able to. Now can I have more cookies?”

Steve shook his head. “Why would you do that?”

Tony sighed. He really hoped it wasn’t going in the direction it seemed to be. “It’s just a thing I do. It isn’t a big deal, Peter thinks it is but he’s wrong. I have it completely under control.” Tony said. With that the confusion snapped out of Steve’s face, determination started to brush over his features and Tony just sighed again. “You’re not going to start being all Captain America-ish are you? Trying to do the best for people.”

Steve’s shoulders slumped, face closing off. “I’m not just Captain America. I’m Steve Rogers, trying to help my friend. I didn’t even think you kne-“ Steve said quickly before he paused, letting out a low sigh. “Did Natasha tell you about that!?”
“She said you signed up for a government experiment.” Tony said. “Then you became one hundred
and eighty pounds of righteous American justice and patriotism. Not her exact words but that was
the gist of it.” Steve shook his head slowly.

“Please don’t start looking at me like some magical hero like everyone else. You didn’t know
before, I was just Steve.” He said, an air of desperation. “I’m still just Steve though.”

Tony nodded. “Yes, just Steve. I don’t care. We all do weird things.”

“Like stop eating for a while?” Steve asked. Tony looked over at him, frowning. “Why do you do
that?”

“Like I said, we all do weird things.” He said. Steve shook his head.

“There has to be a reason though.” He said as he looked Tony over carefully.

“Was there a reason you signed up for that experiment and then broke into a Nazi base and
supposedly punched Hitler in the face?” Tony asked, smiling. Steve nodded. “Okay, tell me that
first.”

Steve sighed loudly. “First of all, I punched a fake Hitler over 200 times, I’ve been listening to
some of the old radio shows and none of that happened.” He said, smiling when Tony chuckled
softly. “Do you promise?”

“Yes.” Tony said, nodding for him to continue.

“What really happened was I was this scrawny little idiot running around Brooklyn with my best
friend, I got beat up a lot, and he always helped me out.” Steve began.

“What was his name?” Tony asked. Steve’s smile softened and he looked away.

“Bucky, his name is Bucky. He was my best friend.” Steve said. “So he went off to war and I
wasn’t about to be left behind. They wouldn’t let me enlist though, because I was skinny and sick,
but I was perfectly capable. It was my duty. I couldn’t sit at home safe and sound while other
people went out there without knowing if they were coming back.”

Tony hung on every word he said, listening as he described Dr. Erskine and meeting Agent Carter
for the first time. He paid close attention when Steve described the pain of the serum-induced
transformation and getting used to his new body. They laughed together when Steve described the
USO shows and the blue tights he had to wear.

“Then I found out Bucky’s unit had been captured. They didn’t know if he was alive or not.” Steve
said, voice suddenly low. “But he had to be alive, you know. He’s stubborn enough to stay alive so
he could inconvenience his captors until rescue came. So Peggy helped me get a plane, fly to
Austria, and I invaded the HYDRA base, by myself.”

“That sounds pretty idiotic.” Tony said, getting the smile back on Steve’s face.

“Well, it worked.” He said quickly, shaking his head. “I found Bucky, they tortured him. But he
was alive and confused and so damn great to see I thought I might cry. We got out, some guy
ripped his face off to reveal some bright red skin all over his face and that was really gross and
strange, but Bucky and I got out alive.”

Tony frowned for a moment. “There was a man with a red face?” He asked. Steve grew wide eyed
and turned towards Tony quickly.
“Yeah!” Steve burst out. “It was so odd, and scary. Like something out of a nightmare. But weird things just happen to me, I guess. I did end up in the future and met an alien prince so I doubt much can surprise me anymore.”

“Alien prince?”

“Different story, much more recent.” Steve said, waving his hand in dismissal. “Anyway, Bucky and I created a team with a few other escaped soldiers, they called themselves the Howling Commandos. They were all great, I could probably spend days telling you the stories about the seven of us. Peggy was great, she went out with me and the guys. Another one of our friends went with us, an engineer. You might have liked him if you had got to meet him, he talked about engines a lot too.”

“I might have liked a lot of people.” Tony said. “Can’t help any of it.”

Steve bit his lower lip, nodding. “Yeah. Guess none of us can change the past.” He said. Tony nodded for him to continue. “There was a mission in the mountains. Hop on a train, get this scientist named Zola, and get out. Things went wrong though, things went terribly wrong. Bucky didn’t come back.”

His shoulders sagged and he almost seem to curl slightly into himself. Tony didn’t know what to do, he had no experience comforting people. Steve looked like he needed something, anything. But the only thing he knew that worked when he was feeling sad was being left alone for a few hours or days. Tony couldn’t leave this room, if Steve wanted to be alone he would have to go himself. He didn’t want Steve to leave just yet.

The moment seemed to pass and Steve nodded to himself. “I guess I got more reckless after that.”

“You signed up for a secret military experiment, broke into an enemy base by yourself while miles into enemy territory, and you somehow managed to get more reckless.” Tony muttered. Steve shrugged.

“It can happen. I flew a plane into the arctic.” Steve said slowly. “I expected to die, hearing Peggy’s voice as she made plans to go out dancing with me, knowing the world would be safe if I got those bombs in the water. I was fine with dying.”

“Peggy?” Tony muttered.

“Yeah, I loved her. I was perfectly content with listening to her before I died and knowing the world would be safe for her.” Steve said. “But I didn’t die, I took an incredibly long nap. Woke up decades later, everything is different, and Peggy has a husband out in New Jersey. I don’t really have much of anything anymore.”

“Her name was Peggy?” Tony asked. Steve nodded.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure I mentioned it several times.” He said, frowning. “What’s wrong?”

Tony shook his head quickly. “Nothing. It’s just that Peggy… is a nice name. That’s all.”

Steve stared at him closely, waiting, watching. Tony didn’t move, just stared back. Peggy was familiar, the name rolled off his tongue so easily it was like he had known the name his whole life. But he hadn’t. Tony had never known anyone named Peggy, the name was just as new and strange as it was familiar and slightly comforting.

“Your turn.” Steve said finally. Tony blinked up at him. “You promised to tell me why you stop
eating.”


Tony took a deep breath as he looked away from the man next to him and down at his hands. He had to think, he had spent so long on his schedule of eating and not eating that it was almost natural for him now. There was a reason, one he held close to his heart. He just had to remember what it was. It didn’t take long for him to figure it out.

“I do it because I can.” Tony said, smiling to himself.

Steve shook his head. “That’s not a reason. Tell me the truth.”

Tony looked over at him, irritated. “It’s a damn good reason. The best reason to do anything.”

Tony said firmly before looking away again. “It’s just… my thing. I was told when to sleep, when to wake up, how long to exercise for, what books to try to read, and what I should do with my free time. If I didn’t do exactly as instructed then there were penalties. No one ever told me how much to eat, I was free to decide that on my own. If I can choose to eat then I can choose not to eat.”

“So that’s it?” Steve asked. His tone was firm, serious, and Tony still didn’t understand what the big deal was. Why did it make everyone so angry? “It’s about control for you?”

Tony nodded. “Yep. I don’t mind orders and doing what I’m told.” He said softly. “But that little bit of control they gave me is nice.”

Steve sighed, a long and harsh brush of sound that made Tony uncomfortable. “They shouldn’t have had that kind of power over you, to just give you so little influence over your own life that you don’t even know what to do with it.” He said.

“I know exactly what to do with it!” Tony said quickly, leaning away from Steve slightly. “It’s completely fine, I have a system. I eat regularly for a few weeks, I stop for just a few days, and then I catch up. It’s fine.”

It made sense in Tony’s head. The only problem was when he had to catch up and Mesman would sometimes notice the abundance of snack wrappers in the trash. Tony didn’t want him to know. If he knew and decided that it should stop Tony wasn’t sure what punishments would be brought about and he didn’t want to find out. Also, there was some small shameful part of himself that made him happy when he realized he knew something about himself that Mesman didn’t.

“It’s not healthy Tony.” Steve said, anger dropping from his face only to be replaced by worry.

“Why does it matter?”

Steve leaned in closer, reaching out to put a firm hand on Tony’s shoulder. “It matters because we have to take care of ourselves. You could think you have lost everything in the world but you still got yourself and you have to take care of that.” He said.

Tony nodded half-heartedly. “Right.”

He wasn’t going to change, didn’t plan on it. This was important to him. He needed to hold on to this, never let it go. He couldn’t let them take this small little piece of freedom away from him.

“You want to talk to me about your engine again?” Steve asked, breaking the small moment of silence. He didn’t sound too happy or enthused. Steve wasn’t going to drop it, Tony could tell, but he at least knew that the matter was done for today.
Tony shook his head. “I already have. Let’s design something else.” He reached over and grabbed his sketchbook. “I’m thinking a robot. We should make a robot.”

“I don’t know anything about robots.” Steve said.

Tony smiled slightly, a gesture that was quickly replicated on Steve. “I’ll do the mechanics, you do the… physical attractiveness.”

“Aesthetic.” Steve said, reaching for a pencil.

“What?” Tony asked as he opened the book to a blank page.

“Aesthetic, I guess it means beauty or something you find particularly pleasing.” Steve said, smiling a bit brighter.

“Oh. Okay.” Tony said, nodding quickly. “You do that then.”

They began drawing away quickly on separate pages of the open sketchbook, elbows and wrists bumping every so often. Steve’s page was quickly filled with a sleek, simple little robot design that was filled in with light colors while Tony sorted out the mechanics on the opposite page as he asked Steve what he wanted the robot to do. The answer was to have the robot make coffee.

They both got a bit lost in their work. The tension from the last few days and their conversation seeping out of Tony slowly. He was relaxed, designing something he would probably never get the chance to build, and still had the comforting sounds of the rain just outside his window.

The door opened unexpectedly. Tony’s head snapped up quickly, Coulson stood in front of them and smiled at the scene. He looked tired, but not particularly stressed.

“Do you want to meet someone interesting, Tony?” The agent asked slowly.

“Is it another doctor?” Tony said, frowning when Coulson shook his head. “If it’s another person you say I knew as a child I would like to decline. I don’t want to see family and I don’t want to see people who want to tell me what a wonderful child I was.”

“He’s not either of those things.” Coulson said. “He’s a guest… from far away. Apparently supposedly top-secret intel makes for some fast spreading rumors and he’s heard all about the ‘lost son of SHIELD finally returning home’. His words, not mine.”

“Why is he interesting?” Tony asked, looking back down at his small drawing of a mechanical joint.

“Is it Thor?” Steve said quickly.

Coulson sounded amused as he answered. “Yes. Back and ready to meet all of SHIELD’s celebrities.”

“Who?” Tony cut in quickly.

“Remember that Alien Prince I told you about?” Steve said, smirking slightly.

“I thought that was a joke.” Tony said. Steve shrugged.

“I met him already. Is it alright for Tony to meet him?” Steve said.

Tony looked up then. Whoever they were talking about seemed rather important, possibly
dangerous. Tony wanted to meet him.

Coulson nodded. “Tony can’t possibly be able to hurt him and Thor is being given a long lecture by Barton and Romanoff on how he cannot get too rough with the boy.”

Tony frowned again. Clint and Natasha were talking to some stranger about not hurting him. He was slightly annoyed, slightly curious. None of it made sense, Clint he never thought actually cared, but he could just be trying to get rid of residual guilt. Natasha was angry with him, would probably enjoy seeing him hurt. It could all be one big trick, a trap to have him finally injured enough to please all of them.

“I know Thor is mostly harmless but he still might get carried away.” Steve said slowly.

“He’ll be on a strict no grabbing or squeezing rule.” Coulson said and Steve nodded at that, looking slightly relieved.

So Steve didn’t think it would be too dangerous, Tony was mostly sure he wouldn’t lie to him about anything this serious. Tony could very well be wrong and Steve is here to extract information but Tony didn’t think that role fit the man.

“Is he one of the five you want me to meet?” Tony asked. He would meet him, curiosity getting the better of him. Even injured he was still a pretty decent fighter, could probably hold his own. “You still have two spots open for the five we agreed on.”

“No. I’m saving those.” Coulson said. “You can choose whether or not to meet him. He just wants to talk, meet you. I find it easiest to give the guy what he wants. He once fought a giant alien robot and won and it was rather impressive.”

Tony hesitated a moment, thinking over carefully and struggling to grab on to any reason to not meet him. “Okay. I’ll meet your friend.” He said slowly, frowning. “But I want to speak with Clint first. Alone. No cameras.”

The look of surprise that flashed over Coulson’s face was almost humorous. But this was important, he had questions, remembered a few things he wanted to discuss. He needed to speak with Clint.

“Alright.” Coulson said, nodding slowly.

Chapter End Notes

I really did mean to actually introduce Thor this chapter but it was getting too long anyway. I hope you’re all pleased.
* shameless self-promotion: aceofultron.tumblr.com *
Comment, I’m going to make Clint and Tony talk again and it could be devastating or amazing. They’re fate is in my hands.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for sticking with this thing so far. Here it is, the next chapter. As promised we have a lovely Clint and Tony scene, just like I promised. Also, I’ve been considering making this part of a series. Not for a multichapter sequel or anything, but I’ve been planning a few oneshots that would be flashbacks of Tony’s past so you guys can get a clearer view of what all had happened and a few snippets of what would happen after the story. If you’re interested let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I was quite surprised to hear that you wanted to see me.” Clint said. He looked everywhere except at Tony. It was a bit annoying.

Tony shrugged as he looked around the small conference room Coulson had put them in. True to his word, the agent had made sure there were no cameras. At least, no cameras that Tony could see. They were alone as well, no agents to make sure Tony behaved or to make sure he and Clint didn’t end up killing each other. It was odd.

“Well, I was also surprised to hear about you yelling at an alien because he wanted to meet me.” Tony said. “Is he really an alien?”

“Well, I was also surprised to hear about you yelling at an alien because he wanted to meet me.” Tony said. “Is he really an alien?”

“Thor? Yeah.” Clint said quickly, his head nodding along with each syllable. “Completely from another planet. I once saw him beat up about twenty guys so he could get that magic hammer of his. He says that only people who are worthy can lift it and get his powers and whatever but I was in the circus, I know a trick when I see one. Also, I wasn’t yelling. I was merely advising him to be gentle. Go easy on you.”

Tony blinked, taking in everything. “Right. I’m here to ask you to stop.” He said quickly. The sooner this was all over the better. “I do not need you to tell others how to handle me, I do not need you to take care of me, and I do not want you here.”

Tension fell over the room as Clint frowned at him, shaking his head slowly. “I can’t do that, kid. I messed up big time and I have to make it right.” He said firmly. “I’m the reason you’re here, you’re my responsibility now.”

Tony clenched his fist with a sharp inhale. “I am not your responsibility. I am not anything to you. I am not your responsibility, I am not your anything.”

“Hey hey, it’s okay. You’re absolutely right. You’re not mine, you’re not anybody’s. You belong to yourself.” Clint said, going wide-eyed immediately.

That was a strange thing to say. Tony shook his head quickly. “What?”

“Is this not what this is about?” Clint asked. Tony frowned, tilting his head to one side. “Tony, we practically sold you. We treated you like property. We stole you away and when your parents didn’t buy you back we just sold you off to someone else. That was wrong. People aren’t possessions, I shouldn’t have treated you like one. You’re not anybody’s, Tony.”
Tony stared at Clint for a few minutes, confused. The man sitting across from him sat up straight and hardly moved. He looked focused, as if he was proud of what he said but still trying to decide if there needed to be more. He watched Tony expectantly, waiting for whatever he had to say.

It was all very complicated. Wrong too because Tony did belong to someone. They had paid for him, they raised him, fed him, clothed him, and kept him safe and protected in that large house back in the Netherlands. He owed them everything. Tony looked down at his hands, a calming tactic that was quickly becoming a habit. They didn’t seem like his.

Still, Clint looked as though he would press the issue. Tony didn’t want to bring it up. Everyone was so determined he needed help and told him all the time that his whole life wasn’t good or right and Tony was sick of hearing it.

“You are a strange man.” Tony said finally.

“Well, a lot of weird things have happened over the years.” Clint said, relaxing slightly.

Tony nodded slowly. “Makes sense. Strange things happen.”

“Yeah, they do. This one time I got my arm stuck in one of those big blue mailboxes because I was trying to diffuse a bomb that was lodged in it. It was very stressful, but I pulled it off. Because I’m a professional.” Clint said. He laughed slightly and shook his head. “They had to saw open the mailbox. I had my arm stuck in there for hours. Nat made fun of me for weeks.”

Tony chuckled, thinking of Clint just waiting for hours with his arm up one of those large blue mailboxes he had seen around campus. “Natasha’s interesting.” He said slowly. Clint nodded. “Is she going to kill me?”

“What? No! I think you’re starting to grow on her.” Clint said, shaking his head. “Sure, she’s angry. But she’s just gonna glare at you for a while, maybe mix up the salt and sugar, but she won’t hurt you. I think she’s definitely rooting for this all to work out for you.”

“All work out for me… I don’t think that is going to happen.” Tony muttered. “Why am I even still talking to you? I just want you to leave me alone. I don’t need you to defend me or protect me because in the end you’re just going to betray me again. The last thing I need is you ruining my life again.”

No one moved. Tony was waiting for Clint to get up and leave. He didn’t.

“Please leave.” Tony said.

“I ruined your life?” Clint asked.

“I ruined your life?” Clint asked.

“Of course you did. You kidnapped me and sold me away.”

“So you admit that your life was better before we took you?” Clint said slowly, leaning forward. Tony frowned and did a small half-shrug. “Well, your life can be that great again. Just don’t fight Coulson. He’s under a lot of pressure and he really does want to help you.”

“I’m not fighting him. He’s just so… bothersome.” Tony said.

Clint shrugged. “Yeah, he’s just worried that’s all. Hell, even I was surprised to learn who you were. If they ever mentioned it to me back then all those years ago then I must have forgot.” He said. Clint ran a hand over his face and through his hair. “You’re the boss’s kid. Howard Stark is one of the most powerful men in the world and you’re his missing son.”
“I don’t know him.” Tony said, shaking his head.

“That’s okay.” Clint said. “What’s really important is that you said being kidnapped and sold away ruined everything. That means you’re not all that okay with how things are now. Even if you don’t want me near you, S.H.I.E.L.D. will do everything in its power to make sure you’re not hurt again.”

“No! You can’t do that, it’s not what I want.” Tony said quickly. “I’m fine with how things are. I don’t need you guys to change anything.”

“All I said was they were going to make it so people don’t hurt you anymore.” Clint said. He was leaning even further over the table. “You said so yourself, I messed up, I ruined everything, and things were better before. You believe that whatever happened these past 13 years is wrong, you just don’t know it yet.”

“That makes no sense!” Tony said.

“Of course it does. You’re in denial, it happens all the time. I was exactly the same with Buck and Jacques and all those other guys with the circus. I knew they were bad, I just didn’t want to admit it to myself and in the end they both tried to kill me.” Clint yammered loudly. “I get it, you’re trying to hold on to what you have but you know it’s wrong. You don’t deserve to be hurt.”

Tony sighed as he looked down at the table. “Why are you all so sure I was being hurt?”

“Well, first off the doctor Coulson had look at you to make sure you were okay noted numerous scars over your body. Also, a few moments ago when I said S.H.I.E.L.D. would make sure they wouldn’t hurt you anymore you didn’t deny anything. You just said you were fine with everything and didn’t need it to change.”

Tony shook his head slowly. That wasn’t good. If he didn’t deny it then they were all just going to be more sure, more adamant, and even more pushy than before. Tony didn’t know what to do. If he admitted it, then who knows what would happen. He wasn’t even sure what was true anymore.

“Why do you even care?” Tony asked.

Clint shrugged. “Because you’re still that kid and you need help. We actually were kinda friends back then. We were just two little kids hanging out in a cabin in the muddy forest. I liked you, you were great.”

“I am not your friend.” Tony said.

“Alright. I can live with that.” Clint said, showing a forced smile. “I am accepting my wrongdoing, I understand what I did wrong, and it’s my responsibility to do better. I’m terribly sorry for what I did, I can’t take it back.”

“What do you want?” Tony said quickly. “I’m not going to forgive you!”

Clint shook his head. “I don’t need forgiveness. If I actively tried to gain forgiveness from every one I’ve ever screwed over I’d have no life. Most of those I’m not even sorry for. I was doing my job as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent and that’s that. But I do mess up sometimes and I do bad things to good people.” He muttered. “I just want you to be okay.”

Tony laughed. None of that was very funny, nothing was going as it should, but Clint was being sincere. He had spent his whole life hating him, the other people who took him, and even his own family. Yet here was Clint desperate to try to make it right and there was Jarvis, eager and excited to just see him.
He shook his head quickly. “So if it’s true. That I am in a bad place and they were hurting me. If that’s all true, what do I do?”

“You tell us who bought you, who sent you, and we’ll make sure they never get near you again.” Clint said.

“But what if that’s not what I want.” Tony said quietly. “I might agree that some parts of it hurt, that I might have been a bit scared, but I can’t leave them. I can’t tell you who they are and I can’t stay here forever.”

Clint nodded. “That’s okay. One step at a time.” He said, smiling slightly. “Knowing you were hurt is a step, soon maybe you’ll figure out you have the option to leave them.”

Tony shrugged. It wasn’t going to happen. At this point Mesman and Lotte could try to kill him and he would still go back. It was wrong, that’s not how things should be, but it is his life and he had learned to accept it. He couldn’t change things, relearn his entire life.

“Not likely.” Tony said. “Anyway, we should cut this short. I have a meeting with some alien man who is excited about me.”

“We’re all excited about you. Every SHIELD agent ever employed has heard of Howard Stark’s missing son. He created SHIELD and this organization takes care of us so you disappearing has been tough. Everyone’s happy you’re back.” Clint said. He looked off to the side and smiled. “Sure, it should be top secret information. But I guess you attacking me got some attention, that wasn’t secret sadly. I have an image to maintain and it turns out I can be brought down by a kid. Anyway, word gets out.”

“So everyone knows?” Tony asked. Clint nodded. “Explains why everyone is being so nice, making sure I have everything I need.”

“Yeah.” Clint stood up from the table and pushed his chair in. “So… I’ll see you around?” He asked slowly as he took a few small steps towards the door.

Tony hadn’t thought of that. He didn’t trust Clint, but he might have enjoyed his company. Just a little bit. Also, the man really did seem sorry.

“Fine.” Tony said. “I’ll see you around. But you better bring snacks.”

Clint smiled brightly, nodding quickly. “Snacks. You bet. I’ll bring a ton of snacks.” He said right before walking out the door.

There was a small moment between Clint leaving and Coulson coming in to check on him that Tony was alone in the quiet room. It was probably just a few minutes, but it was nice and peaceful. It gave him an opportunity to think about everything. His life, what has happened and what could. It was terrifying.

If Tony told Coulson everything about Mesman and Lotte then he wasn’t sure what he would do. SHIELD could arrest them and then Tony could get that life of safety they had been promising him. Or Mesman and Lotte could get away, come after him, and then everything would either go back to normal or get so much worse.

He looked up at Coulson as he entered the room, still entirely unsure.

“I can’t tell you anything.” Tony said. Coulson nodded.
“Wouldn’t expect you to. Just let us do our jobs. We’ll figure everything else out.” Coulson said, walking over to the table. “Your job is to accept the help we offer you.”

Tony stood up and walked towards the door, Coulson following slowly behind him. “Right.” Tony looked down at the white tiles of the hallways as he walked out of the conference room. “What exactly are you all doing?”

“That’s classified.” Coulson said. “But we’re trying to track down where you came from and keep you safe.”

“Tall order.” Tony said.

They stopped outside of what appeared to be another conference room, just a few doors down from the one he and Clint had just been in. He must be meeting Thor in there.

“We’ll be monitoring the conversation. Mostly it’s just an… extraterrestrial ally wanting to meet the boy everyone’s talking about.” Coulson said. “He won’t hurt you, won’t ask about anything you’ve been sensitive about, and he probably won’t make a lot of sense. Don’t worry, you’re in good hands.”

Tony nodded and pulled open the door. This room was nicer, a large window taking up almost an entire wall, it was larger, but there was also a large camera in one corner.

The man sitting at the table certainly wasn’t what Tony was expecting. For an alien prince he looked oddly human. The man was definitely larger, his long blond hair falling to his shoulders, and he wore a strange kind of armor that Tony hadn’t seen before.

“Anthony! I have heard a wonderful tale of you.” Thor said, standing to great him. Tony’s feet stayed firmly planted on the floor right by the door. “The young son of a nobleman who was long lost and has finally returned home.”

“Don’t call me Anthony.” He said, watching as Thor walked towards him. “Just Tony is fine.”

“Tony.” Thor nodded, holding out his hand once they were face to face. Tony took it. “I am Thor, son of Odin, and prince of Asgard. I’m very curious of what must have happened while you spent so long away from home.”

Chapter End Notes

Well that was mostly happy. Turned out a bit longer than I anticipated, but at least Clint and Tony are getting along just a tiny bit. Hopefully this opens the door for a strong and wonderful friendship to form.

Or not. Who knows.

Next chapter coming soon with a lovely Thor and Tony conversation. Thor's pretty wise and smart, he might just get Tony to understand things a bit more.

Comment, tell me what you think. Next Chapter coming soon!
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Here it is! The next chapter. I think it turned out well. Hopefully you guys enjoy it. Also, I’ve decided that later I’m going to make this a series and then add little oneshots to it to further the story along. Nothing too big, just flashbacks, bits of different perspectives to events, stuff like that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You are not a real alien, are you?” Tony asked, looking over at the man who had sat down next to him.

“Your people used to call me a god.” Thor said with a small smile. “But ‘alien’ works just as well.”

Tony didn’t believe it. The man looked too human. “Are you just a translator here to trick me?” He said. Thor shrugged. “You’ve been speaking Dutch since I’ve walked in. It’s not going to work. I’m not going to trust SHIELD because they gave me someone to talk to.”

Thor shook his head. “I am not speaking Dutch.”

“Yes you are. I grew up with the language, I can recognize it when I hear it.” Tony said.

“In my land we use the Allspeak. Any language in the Nine Realms, brought together through magic to be understood by all.” Thor said. “I speak naturally and you hear the language you are most familiar with.”

“Magic?” Tony asked, raising his eyebrows. It was ridiculous, the whole idea of it. Tony didn’t believe it. There was no way there was a magic alien language that allowed people to understand everything. Still, everything Thor had said to him was as clear and natural as everything Lotte and Mesman had said to him over the years and Tony almost instinctively answered back to him in that familiar language. It was quite nice to speak it again. “There is no such thing as magic.”

Thor frowned, his large smile falling off of his face as he leaned forward slightly. “I was under the impression Midgardian children still believed in such things. Had such a beautiful willingness to believe in so much more than what they could comprehend.”

Tony sighed. “I would like to say that I am not a child. Children are idiots.” Tony said quickly.

“Children are hopeful, imaginative.” Thor cut in with a small frown.

“And idiots.” Tony continued. “They’ll believe everything you tell them, whether you want to convince them nothing bad will ever happen or that if they try hard enough all their dreams will come true. You can lie to children a thousand times and they’ll still believe it. It’s almost sad how stupid they are.”

“You feel rather strongly about the questionable intellect of your realms young people.” Thor said slowly. Tony looked down. “We should go for a walk. Sitting in this room is making me restless.”

Tony stood up automatically. A walk sounded nice. No doubt it would only be indoors and around
the building, if Coulson let him go at all, but since he’s arrived at SHIELD all he’s done was take short journeys from one room to another and sit around for hours on end. He needed to stretch his legs, getting a better look around the building was just a bonus.

As expected, Agent Coulson met them just outside the door. Tony slumped slightly, prepared to walk back in the room and spend another dreadful few hours just sitting around and doing nothing.

“I am just taking the boy for a walk. It soothes the mind.” Thor said to the agent. Tony frowned up at him, looking them both over carefully. He still heard what Thor said as Dutch, yet Coulson just nodded.

“You’ll still be monitored.” Coulson said, in English. Tony just frowned further. There was no such thing as a magic language everyone could understand. “You’ll stick to the hallways, do not take him out of the building and do not enter any rooms you know you don’t have access to. If you want to take him to the cafeteria, you can.”

“I’m right here.” Tony said, addressing Coulson. “Do I not get a say in where I can walk to?”

“No, you don’t.” Coulson said to him. Tony sighed. The agent just shrugged and continued. “Stay in view of the security cameras, should be easy because they’re everywhere. And Thor, the rules continue to apply. You have to be gentle with him, he’s injured and you’re stronger than almost everyone on the planet. We’ll have agents step in if they’re needed.”

Coulson left as soon as the last word left his mouth. That had gone better than expected. Tony was pleased, he was finally allowed out to walk around. No more five minute walks from one room to another, this was an actual chance to stretch his legs. Of course, he had to stay inside and stay with Thor, but at least he was allowed to roam around. This little trip around the building could be rather informative.

“Anywhere in particular you would like to go?” Thor asked, smiling down at him as they walked down the hall. Tony shook his head. “That is good. I don’t know my way around quite yet so I doubt I will be able to get you there if you did have a place you wished to go. Let’s just wander for now.”

They ignored the elevator and took the stairs down to the ground floor. It took longer, but it was a nice and quiet exercise. Once they made it down to the ground floor there were more agents walking through the halls, all of them stared as they passed by and whispered softly. Tony wasn’t sure who they were more interested in, him or the supposed ‘alien prince’.

They ended up in the lobby. The big, open room had high ceilings, comfortable looking couches and chairs over by the walls, and large windows surrounding the entrance. Tony stared at the door, the escape. He could probably make it, if he ran fast enough. He could get away, study up on everything vital that he needs from Dr. Banner’s research and then use that knowledge to finish his mission.

“Are you coming?” Thor asked, stopping as Tony fell behind. “I would be pleased to hear all about your adventures during the years you were lost.”

Tony’s attention snapped back to him. “I had no adventures. I mostly stayed in the house.” He said as he began to follow Thor down another hallway. “Besides, I was not lost. I knew exactly where I was.”

“Was it a grand house? It certainly must have been large to hold your interest for so long and you never desired to leave.” Thor said.
Tony frowned, turning back as he watched the entrance to the building disappear from view. He wasn’t sure how much he was allowed to talk about. Lotte had gave him a list of rules before he left which included not talking about his life there. That was a bit suspicious, now that he thought about it. Most of those rules he had already broken, he attacked Clint and failed to eat as much as he had promised. Still, he had a feeling she was a bit more serious about this one, even though he couldn’t understand why. If it was all true and his life really was as dreadful as they say, then he couldn’t understand why she would want him to lie about it.

“I wasn’t allowed to leave.” Tony said. Thor’s pace faltered for just a moment before he continued steadily down the hall.

“A restriction of freedom.” Thor mumbled, barely loud enough for Tony to hear. “That is a shame.”

Tony shook his head quickly. “I didn’t mind.”

“No, I suppose you wouldn’t.” Thor said loudly as he trailed ahead. “People learn to become dispassionate with their own slavery. I have seen it before, in my own travels. People don’t care about freedom when they don’t know what it is.”

“It’s not like that.” Tony said, rushing to catch up to Thor. The large man looked over at him, slowing his pace slightly and allowing Tony to walk along next to him effortlessly.

“No?” He asked. Tony shook his head. “How so? From the rumors I’ve heard you were sold away as a child and have only just returned alongside a man who turns into a giant green beast on occasion.”

“Well, that’s true but you just don’t understand. I was fine with it because they were good to me.” Tony said. Lotte was good, that he was certain of. He still remembered all of her hugs and gentle kisses on the forehead. She had never hurt him.

“If you are certain of that then I won’t argue. Still, I understand the practice is still illegal in most parts of your world.” Thor said. Tony looked up at him, raising an eyebrow. “Buying and selling people like property. It certainly is outlawed on Asgard and many other realms.”

“I’m not property.” Tony said. He stopped walking. They were headed for another set of stairs, getting ready to go up and explore the other floors.

For a moment, Tony wished he could go back to that small room he had been kept in and be alone. He was furious all of a sudden, angry and disoriented. He wasn’t property, he was certain of that. He wasn’t going to let Thor imply such things.

“I did not mean to insinuate that you were, merely that those who would pay for a person to become theirs, take them away and order them around. It isn’t right.” Thor said. They both paused and stared at each other a moment before Thor continued. “People are not property, if they treat you like such then they must be stopped.”

Tony paused. It was all so very confusing. Tony didn’t think of himself as property but he also didn’t think Mesman and Lotte thought of him as property either. He was just someone they paid to get and then took care of him. Now it was his chance to return the favor.

He didn’t feel like he belonged to them, but all things considered Tony didn’t quite feel like he belonged to himself either. He didn’t belong to anyone. He was just someone following the orders of the people who raised him. It wasn’t about freedom or slavery or anything like that at all. It was
about the debt he had to them, those two who gave him food and clothes. They kept him warm and safe. He owed them.

Mesman hurt him, frequently. That’s what everyone was telling him. It made sense to Tony, he didn’t like it but that’s how it happened. Lotte didn’t though, she was gentle and kind. She asked him to do the mission, said he would be taking care of her if he did. That’s all that mattered really.

“I don’t want to talk about it anymore.” Tony said. Thor nodded.

“Why don’t you just continue on telling me about your adventures the past few years?” He asked, turning to continue down the hall. Tony followed closely behind him.

“I told you, I didn’t have any adventures while I was there.” Tony said.

“What about anything you did before you were taken away from your family? Certainly you were a restless child.” Thor said calmly. Tony wanted to shrug.

“Before I moved into that house I was with Clint out in those woods.” Tony said. “I remember it rained a lot, I like the rain. We collected firewood once. A friend of his threatened to shoot me but didn’t. Then Clint took me inside and helped wash the mud off.”

“Sounds like he cared. Although those friends of his sound like savage beasts.” Thor snarled. Tony nodded to himself. “I’ve met the man. Rather humorous. I would hope he’d keep better company.”

“Apparently they tried to kill him. That’s what Clint told me.” Tony said. Thor looked back at him with a deep frown. “Now he’s probably trying to make better friends and trying to do better.”

“Sounds like your relationship is on the mend. Last I heard you hated the man and denied him from coming near you.” Thor said, smiling again. “It’s good to know you’ve forgiven him and have begun a friendship.”

They reached the second floor. It was still crowded, not as much as the ground floor but just enough for people to still move aside quickly as they passed and stare. They were definitely looking at Tony.

“He is not my friend.” Tony said. “And I do not forgive him. All I’ve done is allow him to see me on occasion. He seems to be genuinely apologizing and I don’t owe him my forgiveness, but I don’t want to torment him.”

Thor’s smile widened and he simply nodded. “So tell me, what did you enjoy before you were taken off to the woods and then that mysterious house?”

Tony frowned. He wasn’t entirely sure. Jarvis had mentioned very little of what he enjoyed as a child. He had mentioned Macaroni and Hotdogs. Tony wasn’t entirely sure what that meal might be like, he had had macaroni but not hotdogs, and he couldn’t comprehend it being his favorite.

“I lived in a very large house, much larger than the one I live in now.” Tony said. He looked up at the ceiling, trying to grasp on to some little memory of what it was like back then. “I had a stuffed animal. A little tiger. I think I got it at a fair. A woman won it for me. It wasn’t my mother, I know that. But I can’t quite remember her. And I think my father had a red car and I loved it. And I think I had a fish but I’m not quite sure.”

That all seemed correct enough in Tony’s head. It didn’t sound wrong but he didn’t know the facts to back it all up. He was still digging around in his brain for any sort of memory and things just seemed to start coming forward more and more easily. He saw Jarvis, towering over him as Tony
followed him throughout the house, saw the man stirring a boiling pot at a stove. Tony even remembered people he couldn’t recognize, but noted small feelings of familiarity and ease at thinking of them.

Tony shook his head. He wasn’t remembering anything. He was tricking himself. There was no proof that any of this was real.

“I think I’m ready to go back to my room.” Tony said.

Thor nodded and they made their way to another stairwell. It was a short, quiet walk back up to his floor but Tony smiled when he saw Coulson already standing by the door.

“Did you two have a nice walk?” The agent asked as he turned to open the door.

“You already know.” Tony said. “You were probably watching the whole thing.”

“Yes, but it’s hard to see how things are going when all I understand is everything Thor says and then you answering him in Dutch.” Coulson said. He opened the door and let Tony walk through. “I don’t know Dutch.”

“I told you, Tony. The allspeak allows listeners to hear everything in their own language.” Thor said, smiling brightly as he followed Tony in. “Perhaps we can convince our friend Coulson to have you meet me for dinner.”

Coulson nodded.

“Will anyone else be joining us?” Tony asked as he sat down on the bed.

“A few of those in the building I am more familiar with. You can invite anyone you wish.” Thor said.

“Okay. Hopefully the food is good.” Tony said. Thor walked back to the door, Coulson following behind quickly. “I still don’t think you’re an alien!”

Thor laughed loudly after Tony called out to him. Coulson simply smiled slightly and closed the door. Tony laid back against his pillows and focused on what he may remember, whether it was true or not.

Chapter End Notes

If there was any question on the matter, Tony is hearing everything Thor says through the Allspeak as Dutch and Tony answers him in Dutch. I just wrote the whole thing in English so it's more understandable for people who don't speak that language.

Next chapter coming soon!

Comment, please. I'm desperate for them. :)
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

You're all fabulous and amazing. Also, I made a deviantart account and posted one of my little doodles and then I got a llama badge. I have no idea what that means.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the next week the soft tissue around Tony’s shoulder had healed enough to allow him to take off the sling. He was still in quite a bit of pain and had to do small exercises several times a day, but it was nice not having to wear it anymore.

“Are you ready to go?” Coulson asked, standing by the door. Tony nodded. “Mr. Jarvis brought something for all of you.”

Tony looked up from his sketchbook and frowned. “What?”

“Jarvis, you’ve met him.” Coulson said and smiled as Tony nodded. “He made you all dinner.”

“Oh.” Tony said. He closed the sketchbook, giving one last look at the misshapen and lopsided faces he had been doodling. “What is it?”

“Macaroni and hotdogs.” Coulson said, holding the door open once Tony stood. “He says it used to be your favorite.”

Tony chuckled, he recalled Jarvis mentioning that when they had met. It didn’t seem right, he had never had a hotdog before. The ones he had seen being eaten by several different characters on tv didn’t look appealing at all. He would try it anyway. He wasn’t going to deny that he was a bit curious about the supposed ‘favorite meal’ of his younger, long forgotten self.

He followed Coulson out of the cell and down the hall. They wouldn’t be eating in the cafeteria, too much traffic, they wouldn’t get a moment of peace. Coulson lead Tony to another conference room, SHIELD seemed to have a lot of them, where a large table sat in the center of the room that was already covered in large dishes of food and plates.

“There you are, you piece of shit!” Rhodey said, rushing forward and pulling him into a firm hug. Tony melted in the embrace, letting his head fall to Rhodey’s shoulder as his arms stayed by his side and he made no move to pull away. “It’s been hectic without you. The campus is freaking out about Dr. Banner turning into a giant green monster and destroying everything. They don’t know it was him, so that’s good. They’re calling it ‘The Hulk’.”

“What?” Tony asked, smiling at his friend as he pulled away and laid a gentle hand on Tony’s shoulder.

“The Hulk. I guess it’s short for hulking I think, which just means big and heavy so I think it’s fitting.” Peter said, walking up next to Rhodey. “You doing alright? I haven’t seen you in a while.”

“Yeah. They feed me and leave me alone most of the time so it’s all fine.” Tony said. “I’m sorry I got you arrested that one time.”
“Oh yeah, that one time you got me arrested because you were a secret spy and didn’t tell anyone.” Rhodey said quickly. “And then they let me out without a word and I never heard from you again. It’s been weeks, Tony.”

“Yeah, all my fault. I did attack someone and then I was pretty difficult.” Tony said.

“Was?” Natasha muttered from her place at the table. “You are difficult.”

Tony looked around the room carefully. Peter and Rhodey were there, he had asked Coulson to see if he could let them come to dinner but he was still surprised they showed up. Natasha was there too, sitting at the table and looking at each dish of food carefully. Thor was waiting at the head of the table, smiling at everyone in the room.

He almost didn’t recognize Agent Hill. Tony had only met her once. The day Coulson had picked them up from the hospital for interrogation and then he was almost released. It was the same day Bruce, or the Hulk as he seemed to be called when he’s not Dr. Banner, threw him into a wall, cracking his ribs and dislocating his shoulder.

Steve wasn’t here. Tony had asked him to come to dinner, his first time having just a simple social event with more than one person and being constantly monitored and checked over. He wasn’t surprised, maybe a bit disappointed, but Tony didn’t expect anyone to go out of their way for anything as simple as this.

They all sat around the table slowly. Thor insisted that Tony sit next to him and he wasn’t going to argue. As he walked around the table to his seat he looked closely at each dish, several bowls of macaroni, which he expected, and he could recognize most of the vegetables.

“Tony, you have to tell me everything.” Rhodey said, sitting down across the table from him. “They’ve been good to you, right? No one’s hurt you? They’re feeding you?” Peter looked up at Tony, waiting for the answers just as eagerly as Rhodey was.

“They’ve been fine. No one here has hurt me.” Tony said, nodding slowly. Rhodey smiled but Peter just raised an eyebrow and waited. “And I’m eating. They’re pretty determined to make sure I do.”

“I’ve been very determined to get his weight up.” Natasha said. She grabbed the bowl of potatoes and scooped large spoonfuls onto her plate before passing it over to Tony. “How he expects to survive without ever eating is still a mystery.”


“Well, you’ll be eating now.” Peter said. He stood up, grabbed the large dish of macaroni and dumping small piles onto Tony’s plate.

Tony picked up his fork and poked at the noodles and the small pieces of a hotdog that had been mixed in. It didn’t look right, the texture and color didn’t seem like actual meat. Almost, but not quite.

“Is it a sausage?” Tony asked.

Agent Hill looked over at his plate and frowned as he continued to poke at his food. “It’s a hotdog.”

“Are hotdogs sausages?” Tony asked again. It was a simple question.
Hill shrugged. “I have no idea.”

Tony plopped it into his mouth quickly. “It’s not a sausage.” He muttered. It wasn’t bad though. Not the best thing he’s ever eaten and the runny cheese from the macaroni did make it more enjoyable but he doubted this had ever been his favorite meal.

The door clicked open and Tony looked up to see Steve as he slipped into the room. Tony smiled at him, waving him over. It was a pleasant surprise. He wasn’t expecting him to show up but he did and for some strange reason that made Tony very happy.

“Sorry I’m late.” Steve said, taking a seat next to Natasha. “I had a meeting.”

“It is fine, my friend. We were just getting started.” Thor said.

Everyone had settled into their seats, piling up food onto their plates, and started dinner. It was nice. Everything was good, everyone seemed to be comfortable. Peter had brought green bean casserole, an old recipe of his aunts apparently. Tony had never had it before, but it was definitely his favorite.

“Steve, what was your meeting about?” Tony asked curiously. His eyes snapped away from Steve when Agent Hill jabbed her fork into her plate forcefully. “Oh, is it secret? Am I not allowed to know, Agent?”

“No, it wasn’t particularly secret.” Steve said, looking Tony over carefully. “It was just about getting me into the field. Using my skills for good and all.”

Tony nodded. He wasn’t entirely sure what being out in the field implied, but it definitely meant he would leave, go on missions, and help people. Tony had a passing thought that it might be dangerous before he realized he shouldn’t care. But he did. He wasn’t going to be here long and he shouldn’t be so attached. It wasn’t good.

“Am I the only one who’s going to mention the fact that you’re Captain Fucking America?” Rhodey said, leaning forward quickly and waving a hand in Steve’s direction.

“I’ve heard.” Tony said. Steve blushed and quickly looked down at his plate. “I don’t see what the big deal is. He’s just Steve.”

“Tony, do they not teach you about Captain America, greatest soldier and war hero in history, where you’re from?” Rhodey asked. Tony shrugged. “God, I’m being rude. Sorry. It’s an honor to meet you Captain Rogers. I’m a big fan of your work and thank you for everything.”

Steve nodded quickly, his smile broadening. “It’s fine, I don’t think you are being rude. I get that a lot. Ever since my revival was made public everyone’s been eager to meet me.” He said. “It’s all just been rather strange.”

Tony looked between the two of them. “Is it really that big of a deal?” He asked. Peter nodded quickly. “Steve told me all about that Captain America stuff but I didn’t realize it was that huge of a thing.”

“Captain America is a huge deal. He saved the world. He’s a superhero.” Peter said. “He stands for justice and equality and protects people. He’s who all little kids look up to.”

Tony wanted to laugh as Steve’s whole face and neck turned bright red. “Aww, Steve. You’re famous.”
“If you think he’s famous and getting a lot of attention then wait until everyone finds out we found the long lost Stark kid.” Agent Hill said.


“We don’t have to talk about it.” Tony said quickly. “And Anthony sounds like the worst name ever.”

“That’s you?” Peter asked. Tony sighed loudly as he nodded.

Thor laughed. “Yes. SHIELD’s lost son has returned. We should all celebrate.”

“I don’t want to celebrate.” Tony said. He looked at Natasha and Steve for help but they both just starting talking about what color balloons to get and who should be invited to the ‘Tony Stark Homecoming Party’. “No! No party. No celebrations. Let’s talk about something else. Agent, have you killed anyone recently?”

Agent Hill chuckled. “No, but I’m considering murder right now. No parties for me. This is a serious. Our priority should be keeping you safe and healthy, not parading you around at parties.” She said. “And my name isn’t ‘Agent’.”

“I call all of you ‘Agent’.” Tony said.

“You don’t call Barton that.” Natasha cut in.

Tony shrugged. “He kidnapped me. Of course I call him by his name.”

“Wait.” Rhodey said quickly. “He did what?”

“Clint. The man Tony attacked when you both were first brought in.” Natasha said, shrugging. “Honestly, he’s been bummed about the whole thing and it was getting a bit annoying. He’s been acting better though. He seems to think that if he orders all of his favorite snacks in bulk you’ll be happier.”

“No doubt he feels guilty for what is in the past.” Thor said.

Tony groaned loudly, earning glances from everyone around the table. He pointed to Rhodey. “It was a long time ago, I’m fine. Besides, I almost beat him up. You were there.”

“Oh.” Rhodey said as he nodded slowly. “That guy. Let’s beat him up again.”

“No. I’m fine.” Tony said. He shook his head and turned back to Agent Hill. “Who do we kill first, Agent?”

“You’re not killing anyone.” She said. “And my name is Maria Hill. Not Agent.”

Tony paused. “Maria?” He asked again. She nodded.

That sounded familiar. It was definitely it. They had mentioned that name several times since he arrived here at SHILED. It was his mother’s name. He knew it was, he could recall people calling her that name, he remembered her soft brown hair, he remembered the warmth of her hugs and the thousand kisses she used to pepper his face with.

The room was filled with the soft sound of many small conversations happening around the table. Tony just stared down at his plate, at the small, half-eaten pile of macaroni and hotdogs. Everything was washing over him in large and steady waves. He remembered Jarvis standing at the
stove cooking this for him. His mother never made macaroni, whenever she cooked it was always some fancy meal he couldn’t pronounce but was delicious all the same. He remembered his Aunt Peggy, beautiful and stood so tall and proud but always paid attention to him when he wanted her to. He remembered his childhood. Tony used to be a happy child.

“My mother is dead.” He said slowly, calmly. A quick and tense silence filled the room. They were all staring at him, unmoving as they waited for him to say more. “Jarvis is okay.”

Agent Hill, Maria, nodded. Everyone was being unnaturally still, watching him carefully.

“What happened to Peggy?”

“She’s married. Has a nice house in DC.” Steve said. “I met with her last month. She’s doing well. In fact, she used to have a big fancy job here at SHIELD. I think she actually used to run the place.”

“Because Howard? He created SHIELD?” Tony asked.

Hill nodded slowly. “Partially because she was close to Howard but mostly because she was the most capable for the job.”

“What happened to him?” Tony said carefully. He still hadn’t looked up from his plate, he just continued to contemplate the macaroni as if it held all the answers of the universe. “My father. Howard. Is he dead?”

“No.” Steve said. “He alright. He’s here in Boston actually. From what I heard he showed up the day after they identified you. He lives in New York, his company is doing well, and he’s just waiting for you to be ready to see him.”

Tony looked up towards Steve, frowning slightly. “How do you know all of this?”

Steve knew Peggy. He told Tony about her when he told his story. Tony couldn’t believe he hadn’t realized it sooner. The Peggy in Steve’s story, the one he fell in love with and punched a man in the face when they first met, was Tony’s Peggy. His Aunt Peggy, who he could see perfectly in his mind who demanded attention and respect from everyone she spoke with and used to leave smeared, bright red lipstick on his cheeks whenever she kissed him.

“I know Howard. I’ve known him for a long time.” Steve said slowly. “He’s my friend. I just saw him earlier today.”

“Damn.” Agent Hill said, glaring at Steve. “You weren’t supposed to bring this up to him.”

“I’m not hungry anymore.” Tony said quickly and dropped his fork forcefully onto his plate. He knocked his chair over as he stood up and rushed towards the door. He needed to leave.

“Tony, wait.” Steve said, standing up.

“No no. You all just stay.” Tony barked out, ripping the door open. “I don’t want any of you right now.”

The door closed firmly behind him and he was alone. The hallway was wonderfully empty and quiet and Tony’s mind was moving too quickly for him to relax.

Tony was confused. It seemed to be a frequent occurrence for him lately. Tony had no idea what he was doing, what he should be doing, what people meant, he didn’t know anything. It wasn’t like
how it was back with Mesman and Lotte, he couldn’t predict these people as well as he could predict them. Everything was all wrong.

“Tony, you’re not supposed to be out in the hallways by yourself.” Coulson said from behind him. Tony turned to look at him.

“Sorry.” He muttered. “I just need to see Bruce. Alone. Can I go see Bruce?”

Coulson hesitated and frowned as he looked Tony over carefully.

“Please.” Tony said.

Coulson gave a quick nod and Tony rushed down the hall towards the elevator. Everything was wrong. Steve knew Howard. They were friends. It all had been a trick, a cruel way to allow Howard to know what was happening to him. Steve was having secret meetings with Howard that he wasn't allowed to know about. Steve didn’t want to hang out him, it was all just a trick. He would be nice to him, become his friend, and then get him to agree to see Howard. Tony was certain that was it. It was all just a harsh lie. None of them were his friend. None of them cared. Howard never came for him. Peggy never came. Jarvis never came. Maria never came. His family abandoned him.

Tony’s finger lingered on the elevator button that lead to the floor Bruce’s cell was on. He wanted to talk to Bruce, wanted to tell him all his worries and have him say it would all be fine. He wanted Bruce to tell him he was being stupid and that they were his friends.

But he had a mission, he was here for a reason. Mesman sent him here for something important and he had ignored it. Everything was wrong and falling apart so he had to go back to where things were as they should be.

He pressed the button for Bruce’s floor, but slipped out of the elevator before the doors closed. If they were tracking the elevator it would say he went to see Dr. Banner, Coulson might not have returned to whatever room they had been monitoring from yet, no one was looking for him. He had to get out.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry. I'm a terrible person. Anything can happen now.
Hopefully everyone will be okay.
* shameless self-promotion: aceofultron.tumblr.com *
Comment, I'm a feedback loving monster.
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

I finished the chapter early. There isn't all that much dialogue so sorry if that sounds boring to you. I tried. It does explain a few things though, so we'll understand a bit more of what's going on.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The door to Tony’s cell only locked from the inside, people could get in but he couldn’t get out. SHIELD must have put a lot of trust in the agents they had roaming around the building. It couldn’t be very safe but at this point Tony just thought it was convenient. He got in, grabbed his sketchbook, and got out without the door closing behind him.

Tony didn’t spend too much time questioning his motives on retrieving the book before he made his escape. It was his, he wanted it, so he wouldn’t leave it here. He held it tightly as he made his way to the stairwell and down to the ground floor.

The lobby was crowded. Dozens of people walked around the room and came in and out of the entrance. Tony could easily blend in with all of the rushing people and sneak away without anyone noticing.

It didn’t go exactly according to plan. A quick scan of the room showed little security, no one looking at him. He walked steadily towards the exit, his heart beating faster with each step. He wasn’t expecting the hand to land on his shoulder and turn him around quickly. There was just one guy, a few inches taller than Tony, certainly heavier, but he looked distracted as he held one finger to the tiny communicator in his ear.

There was a small moment of silence for the man to listen to the orders no doubt being barked into his ear and for Tony to decide what he was going to do. If he messed up he probably wouldn’t get far.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Stark. But Agent Coul--“ The man stumbled back as Tony pulled back his fist and punched him quickly in the throat. He silently thanked whatever subconscious thoughts were trying to spare him more pain and that he didn’t try hitting the guy by using his still healing shoulder.

By the time the agent had recovered and the crowd of people had snapped out of the initial shock of watching a teenager knock down a grown man, Tony was out the door and running down the street. He was a good runner, countless laps along the wall that surrounded Mesman’s yard ensured he had a steady heartrate, good lungs, and was fast enough to get away from anyone chasing him.

The main problem was that he was still injured, his shoulder and ribs jostled at the quick and harsh movements. He would only get so far. From what he could hear of the shouting and panic behind him he was being chased. He had to get far away enough to hide.

A quick glance behind him showed that he must have had quite the head start. His pursuers were at least a block away, maybe further. Tony ducked into an alley. He continued to run, weaving through streets and alleyways until the shouting voices sounded distant.
Tony walked into a nearby apartment building. The first thing he noticed was the sudden wave of warm air hitting him. It was late in the year and far too cold out to be out running in a pair of sweat pants and a t-shirt but that was all he had and it was a problem he couldn’t solve at the moment.

The building residents mostly ignored him as he sat by the mailboxes and listened carefully for any sounds of approaching SHIELD agents. No one spoke to him, no one looked at him, and most importantly, no one came looking for him. So he sat there for several hours.

Tony was scared. He was half tempted to go back to SHIELD. He was cold and alone and had no idea what he was going to do. If he somehow managed to finish his mission he would be back to the house, Lotte would greet him with a hug and gentle smile. But Tony knew what would inevitably happen, he would mess up someway and Mesman would hurt him. That was apparently wrong, Tony understood that, but he didn’t really seem to care. If he went back to SHIELD then they would lie to him, pretend they wanted to help him just to trick him into seeing who they wanted him to see and doing what they wanted him to do. At least Mesman was truthful when he hurt Tony.

It was dark when he went back outside and the cold air bit into his exposed skin. His ribs and shoulder ached at each small movement and his stomach seemed to be flipping in his stomach and he tried to figure out what he would do now. He ran away from SHIELD, he had nothing but the clothes on his back and a half-filled sketchbook. He started walking in MIT’s direction, he couldn’t go back to that apartment Mesman had set up for him but Bruce Banner’s and Betty Ross’s offices were there, what he needed was there. If he finished at least this part of his mission then maybe he would be allowed to go back to the Netherlands.

They would expect him at Banner’s office so Dr. Ross’s was his best bet at finding what he needed. It was late, no one was out on the street, she probably wouldn’t be there. He would get in, get out, and none of these people would see him again.

By the time he had made it back onto campus it was freezing, he could see the white puffs of his breath and he shivered violently. He ignored the dull pain in his feet and the throbbing ache in his chest and on his shoulder and walked straight towards the building Betty’s office was in.

Most of the lights were off inside and the building was empty. A quick glance at the clock hanging on the wall told him it was almost midnight. He was eating dinner at SHIELD at six with Thor and Steve and everyone else. Now he was sneaking into a building on a college campus. It was all rather strange.

Dr. Ross’s office was dark and empty. The door was locked, but that wasn’t an issue. He picked the lock easily and slipped into the room, closing the door softly behind him. He turned on the light and started sorting through her files. It was here, it had to be.

The first few folders were nothing but filled out paperwork that Tony barely glanced at. He was exhausted, closed his eyes every few seconds as he tried desperately to skim through the papers in search of what he was looking for.

Tony hated reading, even just skimming over words took far too long and took too much effort. He wanted to go back, curl up in that little bed, and sleep. He wanted to forget this whole thing ever happened. He wanted to go home.

“Tony?” He turned towards the door quickly, frowning as Dr. Ross stared back at him. She looked at the files in his hand and deflated. “What are you doing?”

“It is the middle of the night. Why are you here?” He said, turning back to the folders. Dr. Ross
wasn’t going to be a problem. He wouldn’t hurt her, but she couldn’t stop him.

“I always come to the office early. Particularly lately since I’m doing all the research alone now.” She said. He heard her take several slow steps in his direction. “You can’t do this. They’ve been letting me speak to Bruce lately. He won’t tell me much but he told me why you’re here and that you need help.”

Tony ignored her. He looked through file after file until he found what he was looking for. There were far fewer words and the large pictures and blueprints were easy to recognize. He closed the file and tucked it under his arm with his book.

“Tony, you don’t want to do this.” Betty said as she blocked his way to the door. “I don’t know what happened or what’s going on with you, but Bruce is terrified and upset about whatever it is. You don’t have to steal that, just let them help you with this.”

Tony shook his head. “You don’t know anything.” He said.

“I know you’re a good boy. I know that since you were arrested I’ve had people coming every other day to ask me if I know anything about where you came from.” Betty said quickly. She reached out and carefully laid a hand on Tony’s shoulder. “I know that Bruce is scared for you and thinks you need help. I know that whoever sent you to steal that isn’t a good person. Just trust all of us. People are willing to help you.”

Tony stepped away from her. “I can’t do that. I’m not what people think I am.”

Betty didn’t stop him as he stepped around her and out the door. Tony wasn’t sure what he would have done if she did, he felt ready to break down at any moment so maybe he would have just curled up and let her call the police or SHIELD or whoever she wanted because Tony didn’t think he had the energy in him do much more than take the files and leave.

He needed a phone. If he told Mesman he had the file then maybe, just maybe, he would be allowed to go back. Tony wasn’t concerned about getting a phone, he was on a college campus, there had to be phones everywhere.

Once he found a phone he dialed the number he had memorized and held his breath as he heard it ringing. Tony’s heart was pounding in his chest and his breathing grew shallow. What if he took too long? What if he accidently grabbed the wrong file? What if he accidently gave too much away while he was stuck at SHIELD? So many possibilities of what could have gone wrong filtered through his mind. He was worried.

“Do you have what I sent you there for?” Mesman asked, his voice sounded cold and disinterested and so very familiar through the phone. Tony’s muscles tensed up immediately and his head ducked down slightly.

“Yes.” He said. He sounded calm, his voice didn’t waiver.

“Excellent. Certainly took you longer than I would have thought necessary.” Mesman said firmly. Tony just nodded to himself.

“I’m sorry. I got the plans though.” Tony muttered. “For the machine. It emits specific levels of gamma radiation. It’s to make super soldiers. That’s what you wanted.”

“Yes, it is. I expect a full report once you return.” Mesman said. “How was your stay with SHIELD?”
Tony froze. He held his breath and squeezed the file and his sketchbook tightly. “I didn’t tell them anything. They asked but I didn’t say anything.”

“Did you learn anything from your stay?”

Tony wasn’t sure how to answer that. He would most certainly get into more trouble if he said they were trying to convince him that Mesman and Lotte were bad and hurting him and that he didn’t deserve it. It wouldn’t be help if he mentioned that SHIELD had wormed its way into his head, that they were slowly convincing him, tricking him.

“No.” He whispered.

“You’re an idiot. Such an opportunity and you wasted it.” Mesman said quickly. “We’ll discuss this more once you’ve returned.”

Mesman muttered out arrangements for how Tony was to get back to the Netherlands and he listened intently. He would send the plane and it would take Tony back to Europe. Once he got back to the house he was supposed to tell Mesman everything that had happened and everything he learned and saw about how the machine worked. He wanted a way to create super soldiers.

The only time he had ever seen the thing used it turned Bruce into ‘The Hulk’. Steve was supposed to be a super soldier, if he wasn’t lying, and his experience didn’t seem anything like what had happened to Bruce. Whatever Mesman was planning, Tony didn’t expect it to be good.

It didn’t matter much though, he was going back, he was okay, everything would be fine. Lotte would be there, she would hug him and welcome him home and Mesman would be proud of him for completing the mission. Everything was going to be fine.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry. The next few chapters won't be any fun for anybody. Full of sadness and no good and happy things. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry in advance. I'm a monster.
Comment, I'm going to break my own heart.
Tony was happy to be back in the Netherlands, happy to have finally returned to the house he knew so well. He had waited around Boston until his flight back to Europe, stayed close to the airport, hiding out in a warm libraries and diners until it was time to go. Still, it was cold out and he needed a shower, a long nap, and something to eat. Now that he was back they would take care of him again.

He met Mesman and Lotte in the living room, a fire in the fireplace warming the area. They sat on the couch as Tony stood in front of them. They looked exactly how he remembered, but he felt different. Tony was cold, dirty, and covered in numerous bruises and small scratches. He thought he would be happier to be back, to see them again, but he just felt like he was going to throw up.

Mesman didn’t speak, just held a hand out. Tony gave him the file quickly. He took it and placed it down on the coffee table. Then he reached out again.

He wanted to protest. The sketchbook was his, he didn’t want to hand it over, he didn’t want them looking through it. Tony pulled it closer to his chest but slumped when Mesman stood up.

Once he handed it over Mesman sat back down and Lotte stood up to come greet him. She took Tony’s head gently in her hands and tilted his head down to kiss his forehead. Tony melted into the touch and leaned into her slightly. That was good, that was what he remembered. Lotte wasn’t bad or malicious, she took care of him. She was gentle.

“What is this?” Mesman asked slowly. Tony looked over, frowning as he watched him slip through the pages of his sketchbook. Steve’s small doodles covered several pages that eventually turned into Tony’s designs for small machines and sloppy sketches.

“It is mine.” Tony muttered.

“If you bought it with my money then it doesn’t make it yours.” Mesman said, frowning at each page he saw. “It was a waste of time, you shouldn’t have gotten it.”

“I didn’t buy it.” Tony said quickly. “It was a gift.”

“A gift?” Lotte asked. Tony looked back towards her. He had a small moment of hope, Lotte would let him keep it. “Who gave you the gift?”

“Just…” Tony muttered, looking down as he pushed his hands into the pockets of his sweatpants. “It’s mine.”

Mesman shook his head. “You have become attached to those people. That was a fool’s mistake,
“They were nice people.” Tony said. “My friends.” He didn’t look at either of them as he said it. It almost sounded wrong to his own ears.

Mesman snorted. “Do you think they will spend even a moment looking for you? ‘Your friends’, you were just another boy wandering through. Now that you’re gone they won’t even think twice about your disappearance.” He said.

He was wrong, Tony knew that. He just didn’t want to say so. Calling Mesman wrong would be a mistake. Tony knew they would look for him. They spoke endlessly about how important he was, talked about his father who apparently founded their whole organization, and did nothing but devote so much time and effort into keeping him healthy and safe.

“They said I could keep it.” Tony said, his voice barely raising above a whisper.

“Tony, we talked about people lying.” Mesman said. He nodded to Lotte and held the book out to her.

Tony tensed as she left his side, watching her as she walked back over to Mesman and taking the sketchbook. He held his breath, they were going to take it from him. It wasn’t right, wasn’t fair, Coulson said he could keep it. He said it was his and no one would take it from him.

He didn’t move as he watched her walk across the room, smiling as she flipped through the pages. Then she closed it and tossed it into the fire. Tony moved instantly, dropping onto the floor and reaching into the fire. He ignored the pain lighting up the nerves of his hand until he pulled back with a firm hold on the sketchbook. The pages were singed and blackened and he worked quickly to pat out the flames still curling around the book.

It wasn’t ruined. He may not be able to use it anymore, but the pictures were still there. The empty pages in the back were burnt entirely and useless but Steve’s llama and all the other pictures and doodles were still clear on the first few page, scorched around the edges but they were okay. He flipped through the book quickly. Everything was fine. It was still his.

Tony was too focused on the book and his reddened, blistering hands and didn’t notice Mesman stand up and walk over to him. He didn’t expect the sharp flash of pain across his cheek as he was quickly knocked to the side.

“You have no respect.” Mesman said. Tony didn’t fight back, didn’t move to loosen the painful
grip on his hair, if he did it would only make everything a lot worse. Tony simply followed him. “You need to relearn what you have apparently forgotten during your time away. If I want something to be destroyed, then it will be. It is no longer yours.”

He released Tony’s hair quickly and pulled open a door, gesturing him to go inside. Tony’s head dipped down until his chin touched his chest and his shoulders slumped as he walked through it and down the stairs to the basement.

Tony hated the basement. In all honesty, he didn’t think it was as bad as the dark closet he was sometimes locked in. At least down here he could see when something bad was coming towards him. He was hurt more in the basement, hardly ever in the dark, but Tony preferred to see.

He reached the bottom of the stairs and moved to sit down on the table in the middle of the room. Tony sat perfectly still, holding his breath as Mesman walked down and approached the workbench in the corner of the room. He held his wrists out silently.

The handcuffs snapped around his wrists effortlessly and Tony dropped his hands into his lap, a habit brought on by harsh punishments from fighting back when he was still young and stupid. Mesman walked back to the workbench and sorted through the objects waiting on it. Tony held his breath as he waited, watching the man’s movements carefully. He nearly let out a sigh of relief when Mesman walked back towards him with a long metal rod. Mesman had expected much worse.

“You are not to move.” Mesman said, standing in front of him. Tony nodded, he knew that already. “What are these?” He asked as he poked at the fading yellow bruises across Tony’s shoulder and chest.

“Cracked ribs and dislocated shoulder.” Tony said calmly. “There was an incident with Banner’s machine.”

Mesman nodded and walked slowly around the table Tony was still sitting on. Tony remained relaxed as he waited for the coming blow. He focused on the soft click of Mesman’s footsteps as he walked behind him.

The rod smacked across his back quickly and firmly. Tony jerked forward slightly with a sharp inhale. The second hit landed almost in the same place, close enough to send a second burst of pain up Tony’s back. He felt the small ridges on the rod rake across his skin. His shirt was probably ripped and he was almost certain he was bleeding.

“What happened with Banner’s machine?” Mesman asked. He walked in front of Tony slowly. Tony looked up to make eye contact.

“There was a malfunction. It sent out a burst of gamma radiation when it wasn’t supposed to, turned Dr. Banner giant and green and he destroyed the building and threw me into a wall.” Tony said. Mesman raised an eyebrow. “I was hurt. Banner has developed a tendency to transform and hasn’t quite learned to control it yet.”

Mesman nodded. “The Hulk.” He said slowly and continued to walk around the table. “The whole thing was on the news, even here.”

“I don’t think the machine should be used. It doesn’t look like it has desired results.” Tony said quickly. He flinched forward with a yelp as the rod landed across his back again. It was becoming too painful now, every small movement of his back stung sharply.

“I did not ask for your opinion.” Mesman said. Tony nodded quickly.
“I’m sorry, sir.” He said. Tony couldn’t hold in the yell as the pole landed against his back again. His chin dropped to rest against his chest as he breathed heavy sobs.

Tony wished to be back at SHIELD. They lied to him, tricked him, and treated him like some stupid child who couldn’t care for himself, but they never hit him. Tony may have had to worry about a lot of things when he was with them, it was a lot like it was here. He was stuck in a room he wasn’t allowed to leave most of the time, everyone expected too much from him, but no one ever actually hurt him.

The rod smacked against his back again and again. Tears smeared Tony’s cheeks and his body rocked with each heavy breath. Tony wanted it to stop, he wanted someone to come in and save him and he didn’t care if it was Steve or Coulson or Lotte or anyone, he just needed someone.

“You are always so loud.” Mesman said as walked back to the workbench and laid the rod down. “It’s so inconsiderate. Lotte is probably getting ready to make those blueberry tarts you love so much. Remember, she promised to make them once you returned. Imagine how much you would disrupt her if she heard you.”

Tony nodded quickly. He remembered. That’s why they always did the harsher punishments in the basement, so as not to disturb Lotte.

He didn’t need SHIELD, he tried to remember anything they’ve ever done wrong to him. All the lies, the prison cell, Coulson’s annoyed and dismissive glances, Natasha’s calm anger, and Clint. Clint was the reason he was here in the first place. And everyone at SHIELD locked him away in the same building as him and ignored all of his wishes.

He didn’t need SHIELD. He had Lotte back. She was kind, gentle, and good. SHIELD wanted to take him away from her and he couldn’t let that happen. He owed her everything.

“How were you arrested by SHIELD?” Mesman asked. Tony looked up at him and took a deep breath.

“I attacked an agent.” Tony said slowly. Mesman sighed.

Tony expected the blow, his head snapping to the side from another slap wasn’t surprising. He let his head hang limply as the stinging pain lingered on his cheek. It would be done soon, Tony hoped and prayed that it would all be done soon.

“It was my fault. I attacked him and pinned him to the ground. I almost killed him.” Tony said flatly. “After that they locked me up, fed me, sent me to doctors, asked me questions, but I never told them anything.”

Mesman nodded. “What did they say to you?”

Tony opened his mouth to respond, but stopped himself. He couldn’t tell him. He couldn’t tell Mesman that SHIELD had repeatedly told him that he and Lotte were bad, horrible people who were hurting him. He could say that they told him he shouldn’t be beaten and used. It would just make things worse.

“They told me that if I gave them the names of who sent me then they would let me go.” Tony said. He blinked, shocked at himself. He lied. He had never lied to Mesman before. Tony tensed up instinctively for a blow that never came.

“How did you get away?” Mesman asked, moving on. Tony took a deep breath.
“I was behaving. They started trusting me a bit and let me wander around the building.” Tony said. “I just ran off.”

“Did you see anything interesting while they let you wander around SHIELD?” Mesman said. Tony shook his head. “We’re done here. You will go back to your room, clean yourself up, and wait there until I fetch you.”

Tony nodded quickly. He frowned as Mesman held out his hand, two small pills lying in his palm. Tony hated this part. It was for the pain, that’s what he was told. Tony could deal with the pain now that it was over, he could handle it. But Mesman always insisted on this part. He took the pills and swallowed them dry. The man in front of him smiled and turned to leave.

He slipped off of the table slowly, whining at the movements of his back. He could feel the welts, feel the multiple bleeding areas where the rod had torn the skin. He made his way slowly up the stairs and didn’t look up as he moved the familiar path down the hall and up to his room.

Tony stopped by the bathroom that was right across the hall and grabbed the first aid kit before returning to his room. It was mostly empty except for the bed. Tony did have a few things before he left but they were gone, cleared away since he would no longer be using them.

He sat down on the bed, stripping away his torn t-shirt and tossing it on the ground. First he rubbed an ointment on his burnt and blistering fingers. Then he carefully disinfected the small cuts on his back that he could reach and bandaged them sloppily. Tony was getting very tired, blinking far too quickly as the pain eased. He hated it. It clouded his mind, making thinking difficult and his movements sluggish.

He tossed the first aid kit onto the floor and pulled back the covers on the bed, slipping carefully into them. Everything was fine, he was home. Lotte would make him something for dinner and everything will go back to normal. And that terrified him.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry. I'm just really sorry. I'm a bad person.
Please forgive me.
Comment, I'm a monster.
Chapter Notes

Next chapter yay. This one gave me a bit of trouble but I'm pleased with how it came out. Once again, I'm sorry.

Tony was distantly aware of someone grabbing him. At first he thought it was Mesman, back to hit him again. Half asleep and head still foggy, Tony tried to kick him away. He wasn’t ready to be hit again, everything still hurt so bad that if he had to do it again he would probably break down.

His eyes snapped open when he kicked out again and made contact, the person he hit let out a soft grunt. First he thought he had kicked Mesman, which would have been very bad. Tony shot up in bed as he looked around the room. His fear died down as he saw Lotte hunched over in front of him.

“No. Oh no.” Tony said quickly as he scooted off the bed towards her, ignoring the sharp pain bursting across his back. He had kicked Lotte. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. It was an accident. I’m sorry.”

She reached forward and took Tony’s head in her hands. “It’s alright, Tony. I shouldn’t have startled you.” She kissed his head gently. “You’re probably still very confused. You’ve only been asleep for an hour so your medication hasn’t had time to wear off.”

Tony nodded slowly. “Is it breakfast?” He asked.

“No, sweetie. Things have changed.” She said. Lotte frowned as Tony looked up at her. “Come along now.”

Lotte waved for him to stand and he did. He wobbled slightly at first, his body aching at every small movement, before he followed her out the room and down the hall. Something was wrong, Tony knew that much. Lotte sounded stressed, whatever she woke him up for must have been bad.

Tony felt sick, his head was spinning and he barely made it down the stairs. He didn’t think he could walk much further. Fortunately Lotte stopped, turning around and grabbing him by the shoulders quickly. When she pushed him down gently to sit on the bottom stairs he went willingly.

“Mesman is packing right now. We have to leave.” Lotte said quickly, brushing back his hair. “Apparently SHIELD followed you from America. That’s not very good Tony.”

“I’m sorry.” Tony muttered. He dropped his head into his hands, only to pull back with a hiss as his forehead hit is burnt fingers. He sat there for a few seconds, staring at his hands. “I didn’t know they would follow me. I’m really sorry. When are we leaving?”

“No, dear. You don’t need to be sorry. You thought you got away and you didn’t. You are young and foolish, no one blames you.” She said, smiling slightly. “But we need you to stay here.”

Tony blinked. “You’re leaving me here?” He said, frowning. “But I just got back. I don’t want to
Lotte shushed him, pulling his head forward to rest against her shoulder. Tony closed his eyes and breathed in sharply. It was nice, calming. He liked to just be held as Lotte ran her hands through his hair.

He tensed as he heard Mesman approach. Lotte pulled away and Tony leaned back as Mesman knelt down in front of him. Things were different. He never used to be afraid when he saw Mesman, he used to just take every punishment and beating as calmly as he had every other part of his life. His time at SHIELD changed it all, Tony wasn’t happy about it. He didn’t like being afraid when he was home.

Tony’s head jerked to the side as Mesman’s hand struck his face. His cheek was still sensitive and throbbed from the hits he took the night before. Mesman slapped him often. Tony never noticed before but it seemed quite clear now.

“Focus, Tony.” Mesman said calmly. Tony nodded quickly. “We do not know how soon they will get here. They might not even know where to look just yet, they just know you’re in the country.”

“What if they show up? What am I supposed to do?” Tony said, turning around to look back up the stairs. He was tired and wanted to go back to sleep.

“You will be a distraction. To give us time to get away in case they show up soon.” Mesman said. He took a step back and pressed a handgun into his hands. Tony looked down at it, the gun was cold and heavy in his hands.

“I don’t understand.” Tony said slowly. Mesman certainly didn’t want him to shoot anyone.

Tony was a good shot, hardly ever missed when he had to fire at a target. He was also fairly good at hunting, if there was a need for that. But he had never actually shot at another person. The only people he ever saw regularly was Mesman and Lotte, if he ever pointed a gun at one of them he would have probably been killed.

“You will shoot any SHIELD agent that sets foot in this house.” Mesman said quickly. “Keep them busy.”

“Because I’m the distraction.” Tony said, nodding to himself. “What do I do when I’m done? How will I know where to find you?”

“That will not be an issue.” Mesman said as he turned and walked towards the door. “When it’s done we will find you.”

Tony stayed sitting on the stairs, staring at the door Mesman had just left through. Tony wasn’t thinking straight, something was very wrong here and he couldn’t figure out what. His whole body ached and everything was just so confusing that he wanted to go back upstairs, curl up in bed, and sleep forever.

He leaned against the banister of the staircase, resting his stinging cheek on the cool wood. He just wanted it all to be over. He didn’t want to be hit anymore, he didn’t want to be lied to, Tony just wanted to go back to sleep.

Lotte smiled at him as she walked back into the room. He hadn’t even noticed she left, but was pleased that she was back. She knelt down in front of him, kissed his forehead, and pushed his sketchbook into his hands.
“I know you liked it, so I saved it for you.” She said. “The pictures are nice.”

“Steve drew most of them.” Tony said. His hand brushed over the darkened cover and opened it up to the first page. The page was burnt only in the corner so the llama Steve had drawn for him was still clear and perfect.

“He has talent.” Lotte said. She pulled back and turned to leave. “Just do as you’re told and everything will be fine. Don’t worry.”

Tony nodded. He didn’t look up to watch her leave, his attention stayed down on his book as he flipped through the pages. It was easy to tell which drawings were his and which ones were Steve’s. Tony’s were sloppy, each line drawn with a shaky and uncertain hand. Steve’s drawings were prefect, each smooth curve came together just right to make exactly what he intended to make.

He closed the book and held it close to his chest. He was alone now. Lotte and Mesman had just left him here. There was a fleeting moment of panic where he believed they intended to abandon him here, not bother with him again. He shook the thought from his head.

They cared about him. They raised him. They wouldn’t just leave him here like a pile of trash they no longer had a use for or needed to worry about. Lotte cared.

Tony couldn’t stay sitting on the stairs anymore and he didn’t have the energy to go back up and return to bed. Instead he walked to the living room, his book clutched to his chest and the gun hanging limply in his hand. There were several plush couches in the room, Tony pulled the loose bandages off of bis back and dropped himself into the nearest one and rolled around until he found a comfortable spot that didn’t hurt his ribs or his back.

SHIELD was going to capture him again. It didn’t matter how many agents he was supposed to shoot, but he was fairly sure he didn’t want to shoot any, SHIELD would just keep sending more. They were a large organization with hundreds of people at their disposal. Tony was just Tony.

He considered briefly just running away. If SHIELD took too long then there was no need for a distraction. Then he would be free for when Mesman and Lotte came to get him.

Tony sat up slowly. He couldn’t sleep, there was one small thought that was bumping around in his head that made a lot of sense but was too terrible for him to believe. Lotte told him to do what he was told. Mesman told him to stay here and wait for SHIELD. If he did that it was obvious he would be caught and arrested again. They wanted that to happen.

Why would they want him to be arrested again? Mesman had made it quite clear he was disappointed in Tony for being arrested the first time. He didn’t want to go back to SHIELD, he didn’t want to see Steve or Coulson or any of them ever again. They did nothing but lie to him, trick him into doing what they wanted.

He gripped the gun tightly in his hand and pulled his knees up to his chest. He didn’t know what to do. He wished life was easier, that he could stay home with Lotte and Mesman without being afraid that he would be hit and beaten and locked away. He wished he could go back to SHIELD and spend time with Steve, Peter, Rhody, Coulson, and everyone else without being lied to and monitored and still locked away. Those were his options and he didn’t want either of them.

Tony was tired, he just wanted to go back to sleep. But he couldn’t with all the confusing thoughts and worries running rampant in his mind. He wanted it all to stop.
They wouldn’t really miss him. They left him here, they were getting rid of him anyway. Tony lifted the gun slowly, looking it over one last time before he pressed it against his forehead and pulled the trigger.

There was no loud band, no bright light. Just the light click of an unloaded gun. He whined loudly and dropped his head to rest on his knees. He was tired. He wanted to sleep.

There had to be another way to help him sleep, help him to not get captured by SHIELD again, and help Mesman and Lotte to finally be rid of him. It’s what everyone wanted. He just had to figure out a way to do it.

“Tony?”

His head rolled to the side to look at the figures standing by the door. Steve. He held a brightly colored shield in hand and looked about ready to kill someone. Two heavily armed and protected agents stood around him, both of them aiming their weapons at Tony.

“Put down the gun.” One of them said. Tony looked back down at the small, useless hunk of metal in his hand.

“Tony, are you alright?” Steve said. Tony shook his head. “Did they hurt you?”

Tony looked back over at him. “No more than usual.”

Steve’s shoulders drooped as his eyes continued to wander over his face and Tony’s exposed back. He seemed to notice something as he looked him over carefully.

“Tony, did they drug you?” Steve asked slowly.

Tony looked away, back down at the gun. It must have been obvious, he certainly felt different so he must have been acting different. “Go away Steve. I don’t want you here.”

“That’s okay.” Steve said. “I know you’re upset with me. I probably shouldn’t have mentioned your father, you didn’t want to talk about him with anyone so I should have known not to say so much.”

“You shouldn’t have lied to me.” Tony said, shaking his head. “It was all just a trick. One big joke.”

“No it wasn’t.” Steve said quickly, taking a small step towards Tony.

Tony stood up and walked back, putting more and more distance between the two of them. The sketchbook dropped to the floor but Tony kept a firm grip on the gun.

“Tony, you’re not thinking clearly.” Steve said. He lowered the shield and raised his hands up slowly, palms out in a gesture to show he was unarmed and didn’t want to hurt him. Tony shook his head.

“Put down the gun!” The agents shouted again. “We don’t want to shoot you.”

Tony looked at the agents, suddenly interested. His gaze dropped down to the gun he held tightly at his side. That was certainly an interesting suggestion.
Well, that made me kinda sad just writing it.
Let me know what you think, I worked hard on it.
Comment, because I'm still kinda sad for Tony.
Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

Yay. I got a lot of comments on the last chapter, glad to hear you guys are so enthusiastic about Tony being okay.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Tony, please.” Steve said. He walked slowly towards Tony, making each step as deliberate and obvious as possible. “Put the gun down and we’ll talk about this.”

Tony shook his head and continued to back up until he was at the wall. They were cornering him. Tony took a deep breath because it was happening, SHIELD was going to capture him again. He couldn’t let that happen.

“I promise, I won’t lie to you again.” Steve pleaded as he continued to walk towards him slowly. “I thought you didn’t want to talk about it, so I didn’t. I didn’t mean to withhold anything from you.”

None of this was supposed to happen. He was supposed to be back here with Mesman and Lotte and everything was supposed to be as fine as it used to be. Now everything was changed and it was wrong.

“Tony, listen to me. Put the gun down.” Steve said. He took a few slow steps toward Tony. “I’m only here to help you. I just want to make sure you’re okay, you’re hurt, you’re bleeding, and you needed to be taken back to SHIELD. You’ll be safe there.”

“I don’t want to. They lie, you lie. They’ll just keep me around until I’m no longer useful.” Tony muttered, his back still pressed against the wall. He had nowhere to go. “Then they’ll get rid of me.”

“What?” Steve asked quickly before shaking his head. “No, Tony. They won’t get rid of you. I’ll make sure they don’t. You’re special and wonderful and amazing and SHIELD would never hurt you or get rid of you.”

Tony sighed loudly and shook his head. “You’re a liar. You’re all liars.”

“I know. But I’m not lying about this.” Steve said, taking a final step and looking Tony over desperately. “I’m sorry.”

Before Tony could react Steve had reached out quickly and grabbed his arm, pulling him into the man’s chest. Tony screamed loudly as he tried to wiggle free but Steve hold didn’t lax. He couldn’t get free.

Steve’s hold on him was surprisingly gentle, he didn’t squeeze too hard and only held firm enough to not let Tony get out and run off. But Tony wiggled and kicked wildly and the scabs and cuts on his back rubbed against the rough material of Steve’s dark uniform.

He wasn’t going to get captured again. Tony refused to go back there and be locked in that little room again as they paraded him around and decided what was best for him. He raised the gun quickly, not pointing it anywhere in particular. His arm barely swung up at all before there was a
loud pop and a sharp sting on his thigh.

His arm dropped and the gun clattered to the floor. A wave of disappointment and fear washed over him. They weren’t supposed to shoot him there. How was he supposed to make it all stop if they couldn’t even shoot him correctly?

Tony’s head dropped forward as his arms hung limply in front of him. At that angle he could see where he was shot. A small dart stuck out of his leg, they didn’t even hurt him that bad.

Tony wanted to start kicking at Steve again, but his arms and legs refused to cooperate and just hung limply as Steve adjusted his weight to be able to carry him more easily. Tony’s head fell into the warm crevice between Steve’s neck and shoulder and his eyes fell shut.

He was distantly aware of Steve moving and whispering calmly into his ear. Tony couldn’t make out what he was saying and as seconds ticked by the sounds grew quieter until he fell asleep.

... 

The constant beeping that lurked just on the edge on consciousness was actually rather calming. So was the bright light that glared onto his face. Tony was warm and curled up in a soft bed, it was nice. He stayed in the comfortable space between being asleep and awake as his eyes stayed closed and he savored the warmth. It took him longer than necessary to realize he had no idea where he was.

Once he realized he wasn’t in the house, wasn’t where he was supposed to be, he became alert and focused on every sound in the room. Tony peeked one eye open slowly and looked over the areas he could see. He was lying on his side. He faced a large window that showed the dark storm clouds the just floated by. His back was to the door but he didn’t want to move just yet.

Someone was in the room with him, breathing loudly and lightly tapping their feet on the floor. Tony wasn’t sure if they knew he was awake or not but he didn’t want to risk moving and giving it away. He needed to escape, to get away.


He turned around slowly to look at her, wincing at the pain flaring up across his back. Of all the people he thought would come and get him, Natasha wasn’t exactly expected. She was angry with him, she didn’t like him, Tony wasn’t sure why she was here and no one else. Maybe they all had given up and were going to leave him all alone to figure things out by himself and they sent Natasha to let him know he wasn’t wanted anymore.

Tony looked past Natasha and towards the door. It was closed, but didn’t appear locked. If he got to it he could probably get away.

“You’re on the SHIELD helicarrier. If you ran off you wouldn’t get very far.” Natasha said, crossing her arms. Tony shrugged. “You were brought into the medical bay after we found you. The tranquilizers they had to administer to calm you down apparently reacted badly with the sedatives already in your system.”

She tilted her head to the side and raised an eyebrow, giving an unspoken question. Tony moved to sit up and regretted it instantly as a wave of nausea hit. He felt dizzy and sick, surprised he hadn’t
thrown up already. He lay back down against the pillows.

Natasha waited, still staring at him and Tony was half tempted to bury his head in his pillow and avoid all conversations until she left and SHIELD decided to let him go. She cleared her throat.

“Isn’t anything important?” Tony said. “I was a difficult child. Usually if I did something particularly bad they’d send me down to the basement, like if I refused to follow orders or tried to run away.”

Natasha’s eyes narrowed at the mention of the basement. She knew, Tony gave into the urge to hide away and pressed his face into his pillow. Of course she knew. They all probably knew. They raided the house, they probably saw all of Mesman’s little toys down there. He knew it wasn’t normal, to hurt a kid so drastically so often. But it was normal for him and although he hated it he didn’t want everyone to know. It was his life, it shouldn’t be a discussion.

“And?” Natasha asked slowly, sensing his hesitation.

“And nothing. It was just a thing that would happen. I didn’t care.” Tony said quickly, his face still pressed into the pillow.

It was a lie but close enough to the truth not to matter. He cared quite a bit when it first started happening, he had never been hit before he was taken and then all of a sudden he was being locked in a basement and beaten. He cared now, because of the stupid idea they had put in his head that it was wrong. Now that he realized how painful and devastating it all was he would be glad if it never happened again. All the years between the beginning and now it was just normal and something he learned to live with.

“I was really angry when I was a kid. I hated every minute of it. I didn’t accept it all at first because I kept expecting my parents or Peggy or Jarvis to come and get me.” Tony said slowly. He remembered sitting by the windows and waiting to see them come rescue him. He remembered seeing his face on all the newspapers for weeks. He was just a child and so certain his family would come for him. “They never did though. And I was still angry at everything so even after he beat me I would still be angry only then I would be all jumpy and energetic from the adrenaline. Then I would just get in more trouble. I was once so angry after that I tried to set the house on fire. After that Mesman started giving me pills. He said it would be for the pain but it never quite worked like that. It just made me tired.”

He turned his head slightly to look at her. She was frowning and her eyes were unfocused as her eyebrows furrowed angrily. Tony looked her over carefully before his eyes widened and he realized what he had done.

“I’m fine now. I’ve learned to live with it.” He said quickly, hoping to distract her or change the subject. Natasha looked over at him, she still looked furious but none of it seemed directed towards him. He needed to distract her, give her something else to think about and make her forget about Mesman. They may have gotten rid of him, but he still owed them. “I tried to shoot myself.” He said quickly.

Natasha’s eyes widened and a brief look of shock crossed over her face. She quickly masked emotions from her face and seemed as calm as possible as she looked him over carefully. She didn’t say anything for a long while and Tony’s body tensed slowly. It wasn’t something he was particularly eager to talk about, the whole thing confused him.

“You knew the gun wasn’t loaded?” She asked. Tony nodded and Natasha sighed. “And you still waved it around at SHIELD agents? You couldn’t shoot yourself so you would try to get them to
She reached forward slowly, keeping a close eye on his face for any signs of discomfort, and grabbed his hand. Tony didn’t pull away, he let her gently rub her thumb over his knuckles. They didn’t say anything. She didn’t tell him it would all be okay, she didn’t say SHIELD would help him. She just sat quietly and held his hand. Tony was thankful for it.

His eyes were getting heavy and he felt like he was going to fall asleep again. Tony thought it was strange, he had just woken up. He didn’t want to sleep yet, he had so many questions.

“Where is Steve?” He asked first. He really wanted to know how long he had been there, where exactly the SHIELD helicarrier was, and what they planned on doing with him now because if he was about to be dumped somewhere because they didn’t want him then he would like to know. But he asked about Steve first.

“He went to get coffee. He’s been hanging around your room since they brought you in, won’t come in though. He seems to think he’s not welcome.” Natasha said, smirking slightly. “Same with everyone else apparently. Clint’s been sitting outside your door for hours. He seems to think you still hate him but is determined to make sure you’re safe. So he’s guarding your room. Thor is joining the hunt for the people who hurt you but also seems to think he’s responsible for you running off and is giving you the distance he thinks you want.”

“So Steve is wandering around because he’s worried about me, Clint is just sitting outside my room because he wants to protect me, and Thor is looking for the people who you think hurt me because he is sorry?” Tony asked, lifting his head off the pillow slightly. Natasha nodded. “Where are Bruce, Peter, and Rhodey? Where is Coulson?”

“Coulson is leading the search. Peter and Rhodey are actually on board the ship because they’ve been freaking out and breaking into restricted areas since you disappeared. Bruce is still in Boston. He’s learning to control the Hulk. He’s made a lot of progress and we think we’ve found out the causes for his transformations.” Natasha said. She smiled at Tony.

“Why are you here?” He asked slowly.

“Director Fury asked me to keep an eye on you, make sure you don’t run off again.” Natasha said calmly. “And answer any questions you might have. For starters, because I know you’re going to ask, we’re not going to let you go. Also, it’s been decided that you’ll stay on the helicarrier due to your habit of trying to escape. Anyone here will get you anything if you ask for it as long as it isn’t hazardous to your safety or the safety of others.”

“So I’m just stuck here with all of you? A prisoner again.” Tony muttered. “I don’t want to be here. I don’t want to be with SHIELD. You all talk about helping me but I don’t need it.”

“We’re not going to hurt you and we’re going to respect all of your requests to the best of our ability. You’re going to be fed and housed and allowed to wander around and spend your free time in any way you please.” Natasha said, giving Tony’s hand a light squeeze. “All we ask is that you see a few doctors, talk to someone about how you’re feeling and what you’re thinking. We want to make sure you’re okay, we don’t have any ulterior motives.”

Tony pulled his hand from hers and turned around, putting his back to her. He stared out the window as the clouds continued to float past. If he didn’t like he would throw up the moment he stood he would walk over and look outside. The helicarriers was a flying ship, that much he knew, but he was curious about how high up they were and what he would see.
“I have to go now. I have some things I need to discuss with a few people. I hope you’ll stay in bed, if not you wouldn’t get very far.” Natasha said. He heard her stand up and expected her to leave.

“Also, you’ll be having a visitor shortly. Coulson wanted to wait until you were ready but his patience is wearing thin and insists that he see you.”

Tony turned around slightly to look at her. She frowned as she backed up slowly towards the door. “Who?” He asked.

“Your father.” She said as she turned to leave.

Tony’s heart skipped a beat as he watched her close the door behind her. He couldn’t do it, he was still too tired. He couldn’t see Howard, not after everything that’s happened. He certainly couldn’t stay here at SHIELD. He needed to get out. In a drug induced state of confusion he had a brilliant idea to make it all stop, all the pain and lies.

He would talk with Howard, which was probably going to be awkward and terrible, and then he would handle it himself. SHIELD couldn’t help him. He had a plan and he was going to see it through. Then everything will be fine.

Chapter End Notes

Well, he's back at SHIELD and they're still going to try to help him. And Howard, whether that's a good or bad thing I guess we'll see.
Tony's still trapped in a pretty bad mindset and hopefully things change before anything drastic happens.
Comment, I'm a comment loving, Tony hurting monster.
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

Here it is! Howard and Tony, reunited after so long.
Yay Family

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony wasn’t sure what he was expecting. The tall, dark haired man he remembered only a small bit of, some older gentleman like Jarvis, and a small part of him even expected Howard to look like Mesman. He didn’t though. The man that now sat in Natasha’s vacated chair right next to his hospital bed actually looked a lot like him. He was older, lines around his eyes and patches of grey hair littered his dark hair that was the same shade as Tony’s.

Neither of them said anything, just sat for a long while in silence as they stared at each other. Tony didn’t think there was anything to say. He just wanted the man to leave and never come back.

Tony had managed to sit up in the hospital bed, fighting off the nausea enough so the small movement didn’t cause him to throw up in front of the man who was supposed to be his father. Everything still hurt, his ribs ached and a fresh wave of pain flashed across his back with each minute movement. His cheek was bruised a dark shade of purple and that’s what Howard seemed to be looking at most.

Tony refused to be the first one to speak. If he was going to start talking he probably couldn’t stop, there was a lot he thought needed to be said even if he couldn’t think of a single word. Howard should speak first. Tony waited, staring at him for what seemed like an eternity until the man finally nodded and opened his mouth.

“I know you probably don’t want to see me.” He said softly. Tony didn’t know whether to laugh or scream at that. It was funny, this man was his father. Fathers were supposed to protect their kids, hold them close when they were afraid and never let anyone hurt them. Yet Tony hated him, because he never did that. Howard left him out there, abandoned him, and never ever came to save him.

Tony decided that silence was the best option. He would listen to whatever this man had to say, but he wouldn’t engage in any sort of conversation with him. He owed Howard nothing, not even his attention.

“We looked for you. The moment I found out you were taken I started making calls. I hired to most skilled people in the world to go looking for you.” Howard said quickly. Tony shook his head and looked down as he folded his hands across his lap. He didn’t want to hear this. “They insisted that I didn’t need to pay the ransom, actually said it would be better if I didn’t. Said that once I got you back people would just try to take you again after they realize I would pay to get you back. By the time they found that cabin out in the middle of nowhere everyone was long gone. We had a lot of evidence and fingerprints but we didn’t find you.”

Tony’s eyes were squeezed shut, he didn’t want to look at him. He didn’t want to hear this story. He didn’t want to hear all the reasons for why he didn’t come for him. He was exhausted, he just wanted to go back to sleep.
“As you can imagine, I was quite furious.” Howard continued. He hardly seemed to be paying attention to Tony at all as he spoke. The man seemed desperate to tell the story as if he had been rehearsing it for years. “The supposed ‘skilled professionals’ I hired to find you didn’t stick around for very long.”

“Then you created SHIELD?” Tony asked quickly, his head snapping up to meet Howard’s eyes.

Howard paused and looked Tony over carefully before he nodded. “Yes, and then I created SHIELD.”

“To help people? To protect them?” Tony continued. Howard nodded again. “So you’re telling me you created one of the most influential intelligence agencies in the world, you’re one of the most powerful men on the planet, but you couldn’t find me?”

Howard sighed loudly and he leaned forward in his chair, rubbing his hand over his face. “Believe me, it wasn’t for a lack of looking. While SHIELD’s main concern became protecting the world from large organizations of people meaning to do harm, I had a team working around the clock looking for you. I hear they had a big party when you just turned up in SHIELD custody.” Howard said slowly. Tony clenched his fists tightly and looked back down. “I’ve been looking for you for thirteen years. I half expected to not find you alive, but I needed to know what happened to you. But you’re alive and that’s one of the greatest things to ever happen to me.”

“None of that matters. You never found me and I spent thirteen years waiting for you.” Tony said quickly. “They would have given me back if you had paid that damn ransom.”

“I know. It’s my fault this all happened.” Howard said. Tony frowned at the admission. “I’m sorry we never came. I’m sorry they hurt you.”

Tony shook his head. It wasn’t good enough. Tony didn’t want or need an apology, he wanted Howard to leave. He didn’t want to sit across from his father and accept his apologies, he didn’t want to have a friendly chat with the man as if this made it all better. He was angry.

“You shouldn’t have come.” Tony said quickly. “I don’t want you here.”

“Your mother always thought we’d find you. However, she was certain we wouldn’t find you alive and that destroyed her.” Howard said. “She blamed me too.”

“Because this is all your fault. If you had actually done the one thing you needed to do to help me I would have been home, you could have watched me grow up.” Tony said quickly. “I could be some stuck up, annoying rich kid like I was supposed to be. Instead I’m stuck here, not allowed to leave, and surrounded by people who think I’m an idiot and incapable of taking care of myself.”

Howard was silent for a moment. He didn’t move and he didn’t look away from Tony. “I would change things if I could, but I haven’t figured out how to build a time machine. Yet.” Howard smiled slightly as he spoke.

“I don’t care about what you would change or about any stupid time machine ideas you have, I want you to leave. I don’t want to be here.” Tony said quickly. “How the hell did you guys even find me?”

Howard nodded towards Tony. “Subdermal tracking device implanted behind your left ear. We didn’t put it there.” He said slowly, frowning. “The doctors found it when they x-rayed your upper body to make sure you’re shoulder and ribs were healing as they should. SHIELD hijacked the frequency before you ran off, they were hoping to find who you were being tracked by.”
Tony’s stomach clenched. That wasn’t good, SHIELD wasn’t supposed to find that. Now SHIELD could track his every movement and the thought made him terrified.

“Leave.” He said quickly.

Howard stood up slowly and took a small step towards Tony. “Are you alright, son?”

“No! I’m not alright. I’m not your son. You’re not my father.” Tony yelled, standing up from the bed quickly. All nausea he had felt earlier was gone, replaced by overwhelming anger. “Leave. I don’t want you here. I hate you!”

Howard deflated slightly, his face dropped and his shoulder slumped forward. He quickly straightened his back and nodded, determination brushing across his features. Tony looked out the window as Howard walked towards the door, he didn’t want to look at him anymore.

“You need space, I understand. I just wanted to see you, knowing you were here and alive after so long. It’s overwhelming, for the both of us.” Howard said as he opened the door. “We’ll take care of you here. You’ll be okay. I hope we see each other again.”

Tony didn’t watch him leave. He heard the door close shut and he stayed standing by the window. He had never seen a view like this. The helicarrier was floating above the clouds and distantly he could make out the ocean below him.

It terrified him a bit. If the helicarrier fell and crashed into the water they were high enough in the air that the force of the impact would probably kill many people on board and tear the ship apart. He didn’t much mind that though. The most disturbing part of the view was that he really could see forever. There were no buildings to block his view, no wall to keep his perception of the world as small and compact as possible. He didn’t like it.

Then he had an idea. It was perfect and a little bit scary but it was all SHIELD’s fault anyway. They’re the ones who decided to lock him in a giant flying fortress thousands of feet in the air. It would be easy, they would be rid of him and Tony would get exactly what he wanted.

He turned away from the window and walked out the door. “I’m going for a walk.” Tony said as he stepped into the hall.

Clint was sitting on the floor just outside the room. He looked up in surprise to see Tony burst from the room and speak to him directly.

“Alright. Would you like me to get you something to change into?” He said slowly and moved to stand up.

Tony looked down at the wrinkled t-shirt and sweatpants he was wearing. They were comfortable and he wasn’t looking to impress anyone. He didn’t need to change, didn’t want to waste the time.

“No, this is fine. I just need a walk. I need to clear my head.” Tony said calmly. “Long day. Saw my father for the first time in over a decade. I need to take a walk. Alone.”

Clint nodded and stayed on the ground. Tony walked past him, noting the concern on his face, and kept on walking. Natasha said he would be allowed to wander around since there wasn’t a way for him to actually escape and no one moved to stop him as he made his way through the halls. People stared at him, whispered as he passed, but didn’t bother him.

Going up made more sense than going down. If he hit the bottom of the ship it was unlikely he would find a door. If he went up there might be a hatch leading to the top of the ship, or at least
outside.

There were maps placed on the walls for in case there was a fire or some other emergency and they needed to evacuate. They were quite useful in helping Tony find the stairwells. He knew they were probably monitoring him, they always seemed to be and if they knew he was making a straight path up they would probably intervene. So he walked slowly, looked around eagerly, and stayed on each floor for a while before moving to go up again.

Everything was going smoothly until he reached a floor that didn’t show that didn’t appear to have any stairs. However, the map did note several exits. He must have been at the top.

Tony could feel his heart beat rapidly as he slowly made his way to the nearest exit. He considered turning around and going back to that little hospital room and prepare himself for a lifetime of SHIELD and knowing that the two people he trusted to take care of him decided it was time to get rid of him. He kept on walking.

The exit was a hatch in the ceiling on the far side of the floor. Few agents were walking around and Tony had plenty of time to pry it open and climb up. The movements hurt his shoulder and he groaned loudly as he hoisted himself up.

The top of the helicarrier appeared to be one large runway. Multiple jets were tied down as the wind blew past violently. A flying aircraft carrier, now the name made sense at least. He looked around at the planes and the long expanse of the ship until his eyes landed on the edge.

Balancing was difficult, the harsh winds would sweep up under his feet and almost knock him over with every few steps. By the time he made it to the edge he was breathing heavily. The air was thin and rushed by him and made it difficult to breathe. He stepped up to the edge and looked down at the ocean. It seemed far away, such a long fall, and Tony was afraid.

He could feel the fast beating of his heart and his hands shook wildly. The impact might hurt, falling could take too long and so many thoughts could enter his mind on the way down. He wanted it to be quick.

Tony wasn’t sure when he started crying but he could feel the cool tears running halfway down his face before the wind dried them away. It wasn’t fair. He didn’t think he wanted to die, regardless of how little he cared about living. Tony had no idea what he wanted.

But Mesman and Lotte wanted him gone. They practically ordered him to die when they gave him that gun that was useless and left him behind unprotected for whatever SHIELD agents may come. They wanted him to appear threatening without actually having a way to defend himself. They wanted him gone and Tony had spent thirteen years following their orders. No point in stopping now.

He pulled his arms tightly around him and closed his eyes. He just stood there for several seconds as he held himself. Tony was terrified.

His shaking hands wound into the fabric of his shirt and he kept his eyes squeezed shut as he took a small step forward.

Chapter End Notes
I'm sorry. This is the last cliffhanger for a while, I promise.
Poor Tony, I'm sorry.
Comment, maybe I'll make things a bit happier.
Confession time. After I posted the last chapter I stayed up and wrote 800 words because that cliffhanger was just too intense for me to not keep going immediately. That’s why this has been posted so soon. But also because I have no life. Also, everyone kept commenting about what a cliffhanger it was that I ended with Tony about to jump off the helicarrier and the term 'cliffhanger' just seems so inappropriate for this situation... Also, we broke 20,000 hits. The story has been read (or looked at) 20,000 times. Thank you so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony’s eyes had been squeezed shut and the wind was so loud in his ears that he hadn’t heard anyone calling out to him. He was so focused on how the helicarrier felt under his feet and the small step he made that caused that feeling to disappear.

One moment he was sure he was falling, the next he was grabbed roughly by the arm and yanked back. Tony didn’t open his eyes, he just felt a warm body press against his and drag him away from the edge. He immediately buried his face into the shirt of whoever was holding onto him. Tony didn’t know who they were, didn’t bother to look up and see, but they were warm and solid and had their arms wrapped around him securely.

The wave of relief that washed over him was a surprise. Tony should be angry. They ruined his plan, his death. But he was happy, he loved the sensation of having hard ground beneath him and loud beating of his heart. It became clear in that very instant, Tony didn’t want to die. He wanted to live. His mind had focused instantly on what he almost did, on what that all would have meant, and felt grateful to be alive. He wondered where that feeling was ten minutes ago, but he was glad it was here now.

“It’s okay. You’re okay, I got you. Jesus, you huge dork.” The man holding him said. Tony had never been more comforted to hear Clint’s voice. “Don’t ever do something like that again.”

Tony nodded, heavy sobs shaking his body as his face stayed buried in his shirt. Whatever residual resentment he felt towards the man almost disappeared. It was probably temporary, the anger would return as soon as he calmed down, but he was so very happy to have the man holding him tightly.

He hadn’t realized they were sitting until Clint moved to take Tony more firmly in his arms and stood up. Tony could count on one hand all the times he remembered being carried so gently, Steve had not too long ago when they captured him again and he was too drugged to walk. Tony’s body was half wrapped around Clint’s in a way that must have made him awkward and difficult to carry but he didn’t complain.

Tony pried his hands off of his own shirt and wrapped his arms around Clint’s shoulders, clutching his shirt tightly. He was crying, his eyes stayed as tightly closed as possible but tears still got out and smeared his cheeks and his breathing was rapid and heavy.
“You’re okay kid, I got you.” Clint said and Tony nodded into the man’s shoulder.

The only indication that they were back inside was that the air stilled around him and he was immediately warm. He could finally hear how loud he was being, whimpers leaving him with each breath. He tried to quiet down, stop his crying and calm his erratic breathing and heart. It took him longer than necessary but Clint held him the entire time and never stopped rubbing lightly at Tony’s back.

“How?” Tony asked as soon as he was able to speak without breaking down and sobbing again. “I did everything they asked. Why didn’t they want me?”

Clint was silent for a while. Tony didn’t expect him to answer, Tony had spent his whole life with Mesman and Lotte and didn’t know why they left him. He didn’t understand why his family didn’t come to rescue him and then tell him that they looked. Looking and finding were two different things.

Tony felt exhausted. His limbs felt heavy and he didn’t think he could open his eyes now even if he wanted to.

“I don’t know, kid. They’re cowards who use people and then toss them aside.” Clint said softly. “But we want you. We care about you, we’re going to take care of you, and you don’t have to do anything.”

Tony nodded. “Thank you.” He whispered lightly.

“It’s okay. Everything is fine. Just don’t do anything like that again, please. Damn near gave me a heart attack.” Clint said. Tony nodded again.

“How’d you get to me so fast?” Tony asked. He probably sounded as exhausted as he felt and his words were likely muffled since his face was still pressed against Clint’s shoulder.

“Nat asked me to keep an eye on you. She said you weren’t doing too good and to make sure you didn’t do anything stupid until she talked to Fury.” Clint said. It made sense to Tony, even though he didn’t know who Fury was or what she was going to tell him, he was grateful to have Clint there. He was grateful he was there to pull him back from the edge. “You also said you wanted to be alone so I just followed from a distance. You wanted space, so you got it but I had to make sure you’d be okay.”

Tony didn’t say anything, he was just so tired and his head hurt from all the stress and crying. He hoped then when he calmed down and his head was clearer and not hyped up in the post near-death haze, he didn’t hate Clint anymore. At the moment he was probably Tony’s favorite person.

He squeezed his arms tighter around Clint and buried his head further into his shirt and just let exhaustion wash over him. His whole body slackened and he melted into Clint’s hold.

“Don’t go anywhere.” Tony whispered.

“I won’t. I promise I’ll stay right here.” Clint said. Tony sighed in relief.

He trembled violently and felt almost as if his body was trying to shake itself apart. Clint just kept on holding him tight as he was carried through the helicarrier. Tony felt so damn grateful.

He didn’t want to do any of that ever again. He didn’t want to stare over an edge and find that he’s thousands of feet in the air and plan to jump. He didn’t want to fall to his death and have his body be swept away. Death was terrifying and he doubted he deserved to go to whatever wonderful
place all the good people went to and he didn’t think he belonged with all the bad people either. Death for him would probably be nothing and Tony didn’t want that.

If it turned out no one really wanted him then it would be fine. He would be okay. He was perfectly capable of taking care of himself, even if SHIELD doubts he can. There was a problem, probably a multitude of problems but this one stood out in his mind. He still wanted to go out and find Mesman and Lotte and have everything go back to the way it was. Tony didn’t want to be hurt though. He has spent thirteen years being beaten and he wanted it to stop. He wasn’t sure if he preferred familiarity or safety.

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.” He said quietly.

“That’s okay. No one really knows what they’re supposed to do.” Clint said. Tony heard a door open and close and suddenly Clint had stopped walking. “Do you want me to keep on holding you or do you want to sit down on your bed?”

Tony didn’t know the answer to that. He like being held, it felt safe and grounding. It would definitely be embarrassing later and make everything awkward for everyone, but Tony was just felt so desperate for the gentle embrace and he felt like if he was put down now he would probably start crying again.

He shook his head, it wasn’t technically an answer but Clint seemed to understand. He continued to hold Tony.

“What do I do?” Tony asked.

“What do you want to do?” Clint said.

Tony had no idea how to answer that. He knew exactly what he wanted and still had no idea. He didn’t want SHIELD to be controlling his whole life, but they told him they would take care of him and never hurt him and he wanted that. He wanted to go back to Mesman and Lotte but he also didn’t want them to every hurt him again just like he didn’t want to worry about them abandoning him. He had no idea.

“I don’t know.” Tony whispered. “I just want to be okay.”

“You’re okay. I won’t let anything happen.” Clint said quickly. He shifted uncomfortable as he readjusted Tony in his arms.

“You can put me down.” Tony muttered.

“You sure?” He asked. Tony nodded. He didn’t expect the man to be able to hold his weight for extended periods of time even though he was disappointed to feel himself be lowered down onto the same hospital bed he had slept in earlier that day.

He turned away quickly, only opening his eyes once he had his back to Clint. He crawled under the blankets and watched the clouds continue to float by outside the window. He wished there were blinds, he didn’t want to see them.

Tony could hear Clint fidgeting behind him. It was awkward now, just like he knew it would be. The man who he swore he hated had just pulled him to safety after he tried to end his life by jumping off of the helicarrier and then he let the man carry him all the way back to his room. Things were different now.

“Do you want me to go?” Clint asked softly.
“Stay.” Tony said. His body melted into the bed as he heard Clint fall into the chair that still sat by his bed. “What’s going to happen now?”

“What do you want to happen?” Clint said.

Tony groaned and buried his head into his pillow. “I don’t know. I don’t want anything to happen.”

“Well, a lot of powerful people here are rooting for you to pull through. I’m sure if you can figure out what you want to happen, we can make that happen.” Clint said calmly. “There might be some things they insist on but I’m sure we can make it something you’re comfortable with.”

“I don’t want to be on the helicarrier anymore.” Tony said.

“If I can get them to agree to take you back to the Boston Base do you promise not to run away and get hurt?” Clint asked.

Tony knew what was happening. They were negotiating. It was definitely preferable to any of the alternatives he could think of. Tony nodded.

“I don’t want to be treated like an idiot. I can feed myself.” He said calmly.

“That will be easy. I can definitely get that done.” Clint said. Tony sighed in relief. “But you have to promise me that even if you do run off, which hopefully you won’t because you promised, you won’t go back to those people. They hurt you and you don’t deserve that.”

Tony rubbed at the dark purple bruise on his cheek and nodded. He could definitely do that. He didn’t want to be hurt anymore. He didn’t want anyone to ever hit him again.

“I want to be able to go outside whenever I want, to go out to the store or to the park. I’ll even extend my promise to not run off.” Tony said slowly.

Clint hesitated, probably thinking it over and Tony tensed up slightly. He actually really did like going out sometimes. The world was a large place and it was sometimes intimidating to just see it go on forever, but he also remembered going out to a few restaurants with Peter and going to see that movie at Rhodcy’s dorm. It seemed like that all happened a very long time ago, but they were some of the only good memories he had.

“Alright.” Clint said eventually. “But you’ll have to take one of us with you. I hope you understand but I think it’ll be a while before you’re allowed to wander around on your own.”

Tony was actually a bit relieved by the suggestion. He liked going out but the last time he was allowed to wander around by himself he tried to jump off the side of the helicarrier. He was afraid he might do it again.

“Okay. But I want to be able to visit Bruce, Peter, and Rhodcy whenever I want.” Tony said.

“Deal.” Clint said quickly. “I’ll talk it over with the boss later. I’m sure he’ll have no problem with it. Besides, you have some powerful people on your side so if this looks like it’ll be in your best interest it’ll go through.”

Whoever the ‘powerful people’ Clint had mentioned that would be on his side and help take care of them, he assumed one of them was Howard. He was supposed to be one of the richest, most powerful men in the world so if he cared enough to help Tony then he could make it happen. Tony didn’t want to owe Howard anything, didn’t want to take any favors from the man.
Tony nodded anyway and went back to looking out the window. He was tired. It had been a long day and he wasn’t sure how much sleep he had been getting lately but it didn’t feel like enough. He yawned and relaxed further into the bed. He probably wouldn’t be able to get up now even if he wanted to.

“Go to sleep, kid.” Clint said softly. “We’ll talk more when you wake up.”

“You’ll stay?” Tony asked. He felt stupid, he had yelled at this man and blamed him for everything and now he was asking him not to leave him alone. He sounded pathetic, but he was exhausted and afraid and just wanted him to stay.

“Yeah. I’m not going anywhere.” Clint said.

Tony smiled softly and closed his eyes. He fell asleep in just a few seconds.

Chapter End Notes

There we go. As promised, no cliffhanger. Things are going to slowly start looking up now. Getting a bit better. THE STORY IS NOT OVER YET!!! More chapters are going to continue to be posted every few days!!! This story is going to be crazy longer than I anticipated so sorry about that, but we have a bit more to go before the end. I just made this a series so I have a place to start adding oneshots to further the story along, such as different POV’s of events in the stories and little glimpses into the past. I hope you enjoy them when I start posting.

Comment, things will get a bit better and Tony might just be okay one day!
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Here it is, loves. I hope you like it. I have been super busy the past few days but it's also spring break! I love you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint was speaking with Natasha out in the hall. He had stayed all through the night and when Tony didn’t immediately banish him after waking up he decided to just stay for the rest of the day. But what had happened the day before was serious and needed to be discussed with more people than just the two of them. Natasha technically already knew, telling her wasn’t a big deal. The problem was that she would have to report it.

Clint and Natasha also didn’t trust him enough to let him sit by himself in his small room in the helicarrier’s medical wing for a few minutes so they had Peter and Rhodey wait with him. Tony was pleased enough to see him to not be annoyed that he was essentially assigned babysitters.

“You’re an idiot.” Rhodey said as soon as he entered the room. Tony smiled and opened his mouth to greet them but was quickly cut off. “Next time we all have dinner, you’re not leaving before dessert. I don’t know if it’s a custom in Europe where you’re from, but in America when someone runs away from a government facility, dessert gets cancelled.”

“Sorry about dessert. We’ll go get some pie later.” Tony said quickly. “Also, technically, it seems I’m an American.”

“I also heard you were from New York.” Peter said, following behind Rhodey quickly. He walked over to Tony’s hospital bed and sat down. “Which is great. I’m from New York too, we can bond over New Yorker things.”

Tony chuckled softly. “I don’t know any New Yorker things.” He said.

He was almost relieved. They didn’t know. If they did they would have brought it up. Peter and Rhodey always mentioned if they thought he was being hurt or not taking care of himself. If they knew what he tried to do the day before there would definitely be a conversation.

“It’s fine.” Peter continued. “We’ll make a list. You’ll be the New Yorker you were always meant to become.”

Tony shrugged. He didn’t feel like a New Yorker, he didn’t feel like much of anything. But it seemed important to Peter, for whatever reason he couldn’t guess. He always got a bit misty eyed whenever he talked about his home, Tony figured it must be a special place.

“I was told you guys are on the ship because if they leave you alone for too long you start breaking into restricted areas.” Tony said quickly. “Explain.”

Peter’s face went bright red and Rhodey just laughed. “I wasn’t my idea.” Rhodey said. “This giant idiot, for some reason, knows how to pick locks and then sneak around a maximum security facility without getting noticed.”
“I just got lucky.” Peter said with a shrug. “And if you hadn’t disappeared off the face of the Earth I wouldn’t have went snooping. Good thing too because it was all a setup.”

The smile fell from both of their faces instantly. Tony raised an eyebrow. “A setup for what?”

Rhodey frowned, looking absolutely furious. For a moment Tony thought he had said something wrong, that the anger was directed towards him. He tensed up slightly and Rhodey slowly walked closer.

“They let you go. They figured out you were being tracked and that they could track you too and then just let you walk out of the building.” Rhodey said loudly. “I get that they wanted to find out who sent you but you got hurt because of those idiots.”

“We were arrested, which probably wouldn’t have happened if we left when I suggested.” Peter cut in. “Rhodey wanted to go confront them and maybe yell a lot. I had the perfect escape route too.”

“Peter’s pretty weird. I have never seen anyone climb up the side of a building as fast as he does.” Rhodey said.

“I did a lot of climbing when I was younger.” Peter said quickly. “Took a gymnastics class.” He looked off to the side quickly with a confused look on his face. If he was surprised that he said he took a gymnastics class then he was probably lying. Tony decided to ignore it, he keeps secrets all the time.

“Anyway, we were taken to this bald guy dressed in leather and had an eyepatch. No, he wasn’t a pirate. Apparently he was the Director of SHIELD and doesn’t like college students breaking into his facilities.” Rhodey said. “I almost punched him.”

“He said that he didn’t make you leave, you left on your own and that was your choice.” Peter said. Tony kept looked back and forth between them as they took turns speaking. “Which I guess it was, so we’re a bit upset.”

“Also, the plan was to have you back before you got hurt, but they failed and now you’re here and you’re not going back there.” Rhodey said. “We’re your friends. We care about you.”

“It is sorta my fault.” Peter said. “I noticed something was off. I saw that you were being hurt and I didn’t do anything.”

Tony sighed loudly. “It’s not your fault. I’m just messed up. I do things that aren’t good for me.”

He looked down, his pale hands were folded together on his lap and a small hospital band was around his wrist. Tony didn’t see Peter and Rhodey lean in and pull him close. It was an awkward hug, too many arms surrounded him and held him so gently as if he would break. It was nice though, warm and comfortable.

“Aww, you guys are adorable.” Clint said as he walked back into the room. He seemed relaxed. That was probably good, it meant his talk with Natasha had went well. “Natasha’s going to talk it over with Fury. If it all works out, which it will, then they’ll drop us all off in Boston in a few days.”

Rhodey and Peter pulled away slightly, they stayed very close to Tony as they looked over to Clint.

“We’re going back to Boston?” Rhodey asked. Clint nodded. “Great! Maybe I can finally go back to school and actually get a degree like I originally planned.” Tony smiled as Rhodey elbowed him gently.
Peter and Rhodey couldn’t stay long. They had to report to the agents in charge of them to make sure they weren’t breaking into anywhere they weren’t supposed to again. They gave him another quick hug, made him promise to take care of himself and not run off again, and then waved goodbye.

Clint sat down in the chair next to his bed. They hadn’t actually talked about what happened, not yet. Tony knew the conversation was coming but he wasn’t entirely sure he could discuss it.

“Is it true?” Tony asked quickly. He would put it off, at least for a few more minutes. “Did they really just let me walk out of the building? They used me to find out where I came from?”

Clint hesitated, frowning. “If they did, they didn’t tell me about it. Neither did Nat. The minute we heard you got out we took off looking for you. Didn’t find you anywhere though.” He said flatly. “If they did, I can promise they won’t do something like that again. No one’s going to hurt you anymore.”

Tony nodded. He didn’t quite believe it. People always hurt him. It had become something he learned to live with, something he expected. It had become just a normal part of life, he couldn’t imagine life without it happening. He wanted to never be hit again, but he also never wanted to have a headache again. Both seemed unlikely.

“So, Natasha’s going to convince the bosses to let us go? I’ll get what I want?” Tony asked slowly.

“She’s certainly going to try, and her trying to do something is almost a confirmation that it will be done. Besides, she already convinced Howard that it would be best for your well-being.” Clint said, giving Tony a small smile. “The two of them together are practically unstoppable. Fury might make his own demands though, probably nothing too inconvenient.”

Tony laid back against the pillows, staring up at the ceiling. “What if his demands involve me having to learn how to do a backflip? I already know how to do a backflip and I certainly won’t perform for him.” Tony said calmly.

“That makes no sense. He isn’t interested in backflips.” Clint said, his smile widening. “Most likely he’ll ask you to spill all the secrets about what happened the past thirteen years.”

Tony shook his head. “I can’t do that.”

“I know.” Clint said slowly.

Tony took a deep breath. He was still protecting them and he knew how stupid he was for doing it but it didn’t matter. He should forget about them, leave them for SHIELD just like they left him to die. He couldn’t do that though, they were the closest thing to family he had ever had. Tony needed to protect them.

“It’s very strange.” Tony said. Clint raised an eyebrow and remained silent as he waited for Tony to elaborate. “I miss them.”

“That’s okay. We all miss things we shouldn’t.” Clint said.

“I know I shouldn’t miss them, but I still do.” Tony said quickly. He didn’t look over to Clint, instead he turned and looked out the window. “I wouldn’t want to go back, wouldn’t want to do it all over again. But everything has changed, I don’t know what’s going to happen or what I’m supposed to do.”

It was quiet for a moment, Tony assumed, hoped, it was the end of the conversation. He was
startled when Clint’s hand landed gently against his back, it was unexpected and he hadn’t heard
the man move. When he jumped Clint backed off, raising his hands slowly to show that he meant
no harm.

“Sorry. If you don’t want to be touched it’s fine.” Clint said. “I shouldn’t ha-“

“It’s okay.” Tony said quickly. “I’ve just been getting a lot of physical affection today. I’m not
really used to it.”

Clint nodded, forcing a smile and slowly returning his hand to rest on Tony’s shoulder. Tony
wasn’t quite sure what the touch was supposed to mean, support, care, or just sympathy. He didn’t
need an explanation.

“Can I ask you something?” Clint said slowly. Tony hesitated and tensed slightly. He nodded.
“Why did you try to do it?”

Tony whined as he dropped his body fully against his pillows and rolled over to face away from the
man, pulling the covers over him quickly. He didn’t want to have this conversation, he wasn’t even
entirely sure of the answer.

“I don’t know.” Tony said. “Maybe because that’s what they wanted and I’ve always did what they
ordered. Maybe because they left me and I’m alone. Maybe I’m just tired of everything and so
confused about what I’m supposed to do now that they don’t want me.”

Clint didn’t say anything, but he gave Tony’s shoulder a light squeeze and he relaxed slightly. If
the purpose of all the hugs and gentle touches he had been receiving today was to help him calm
down then he appreciated it and it was working. He closed his eyes and grasped onto the small
amount of comfort he was given.

Tony thought he should apologize, for attacking him and yelling at him. He also thought he should
thank him for saving his life. He just wasn’t entirely sure how to say it without making the whole
situation more awkward than it already was.

“I’m not mad at you anymore.” Tony muttered under his breath.

Tony didn’t roll over to look at the man and kept his gaze firmly on the window in front of him,
but he smiled when he heard Clint sigh softly behind him, relieved. Everything was okay,
yesterday it felt like everything was falling apart but right now he felt like everything was
somewhat in control and that he would be okay.

The door opened loudly, heavy footsteps storming into the room. He didn’t bother to turn and see
who had come in. He was familiar enough with Natasha’s obviously forcefully noise walking
whenever she came near him.

“It went great.” She said as she walked up to Tony’s hospital bed. “We’re cleared to take you back
to Boston. Clint and I are going with you, we’re taking your friends back as well, Thor and Steve
are going to meet us there. They both say they want to apologize to you. I called Banner, he’s
pleased to hear you’re coming back as well.”

“He’s not mad at me?” Tony asked quickly. He had assumed he would be. Tony had gone through
his research, stolen his machine blueprints from Dr. Ross’s office. By all rights, Bruce should have
hated him.

“No, he’s not angry with you. He’s just been worried.” Natasha said. “How are you feeling?”
It was a loaded question. She was the only person he told about that unloaded gun and all of his intentions with it. She probably had told whoever was in charge, reporting information she had gathered for everyone to figure out the best way to deal with him, but she was the only one he actually told. Tony didn’t doubt Clint also told her about what happened the day before.

“I feel okay.” Tony said slowly.

“Do you want to talk about what happened?” She asked.

“Already have.” Tony said. “You can ask Clint about it, I don’t mind.”

Natasha hummed softly. “So you two are doing okay?”

“Yes, he forgave me.” Clint said happily. “The two of us will no doubt be best friends in no time. Then with his genius and my classic good looks we can take over the world.”

“Looking forward to it.” Tony muttered. He rolled over slowly to look at the two of them. They seemed relaxed and so pleased to see him facing them that he gave them a small smile. “What now?”

“They’ll drop us all off in Boston in a few days. Once we settle back down in base they want you to speak to a therapist and allow your father to visit you occasionally.” She said calmly.

“He wants to visit me?” Tony asked. Natasha nodded. “Why? What if I say ‘no’?”

“He probably wants to visit you because you’re his son and you’ve been missing for a very long time. He’s probably afraid he’s going to lose you again.” Natasha said. “If you say ‘no’ I’ll make sure he backs off.”

“If he says anything to upset you then I’ll fight him.” Clint added.

Tony chuckled softly. “Okay, but not for a little while. I don’t want to see him right away.” He said. Natasha nodded. “What’s a therapist going to do?”

“Their job is to listen to you talk about your thoughts and feelings without judgement and then help you get to a point where you’re okay.” She said. “I don’t think this one is as negotiable as seeing you father.”

“What if I don’t know what to talk about? Or I don’t feel comfortable enough to say anything.” Tony asked.

Clint shrugged. “Then you don’t have to talk. No one’s going to make you do anything you don’t want to do.” He said.

Tony frowned. They were going out of their way to make sure he was comfortable. It was an odd, unfamiliar feeling to have people so genuinely concerned with how he felt. He honestly didn’t have the energy to fight them anymore and didn’t even think he wanted to. He was just going to let them take care of him and see how it goes.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, yes. The beginning of the long and complicated road to recovery. It's going to be a
journey, an interesting, complicated journey.

* shameless self-promotion: aceofultron.tumblr.com *

Comment, I thrive on comments and therefore write faster and better.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I hope you like this chapter. I'm on spring break now so I'll probably have time to write more. I also have three papers do at the end of spring break though so no promises.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony hated it. He absolutely hated being back in that SHIELD building and being escorted from the hanger where they landed all the way to his room. He hated everyone who stopped to stare at him as he walked by with curious, pitying glances.

He was still tired. He wanted to just curl up in bed and sleep for days. So when they finally arrived in the room he would be staying in, it was different than the one he had been in before, he immediately went for the bed in the corner and crawled under the covers.

He had several pillows that were thick and fluffy and the blanket he threw over himself was warm and soft. SHIELD was definitely trying to make him more comfortable, which he could appreciate.

Tony had felt like he was on the verge of tears all day. The night before he had a dream, Lotte was singing to him as he lay outside in the sun. Mesman sat off to the side, a constant presence but he didn’t appear angry or dangerous at all. It was nice. It reminded him about good it was sometimes. He woke up crying.

“Going to bed already?”

Tony peeked out from under the covers to see Steve standing by the door. He was shifting his weight from one foot to the other as he waited, looking extremely uncomfortable. Tony sat up slowly.

“Not really. Just wanted to lie down.” He muttered. “What do you want, Steve?”

Steve hesitated, looking away and staring at the carpet for several seconds. Eventually he walked forward quickly and held out Tony’s burnt, ruined sketchbook. He smiled when he saw it and took it gently from him.

“I thought you would want it. You took it with you when you left.” Steve said. He didn’t look Tony in the eye. “I just wanted to return it. I’ll go now.”

He turned around and started walking back towards the door. Tony watched him and frowned.

“You don’t have to go.” Tony said quickly. Steve stopped at the door, not turning around. “I don’t mind.”

Steve sighed loudly. “Are you sure? I lied to you.” He said.

“Happens all the time, it’s okay.” Tony said, forcing a small smile. “But you did promise not to grab me again, but you did. If you want to apologize for that then I won’t stop you.”
“I’m sorry.” Steve said quickly. He turned around and looked at Tony. “I’m sorry I made you uncomfortable and afraid, but I don’t regret trying to stop you from being injured. You weren’t thinking straight and I won’t let you get hurt again.”

Tony looked back down at his sketchbook and flipped through the pages slowly. He smiled at his little llama and the different doodles of landscapes and people that Steve had made for him. “You have a lot of work cut out for you. I never think straight and I always tend to get hurt.” He whispered. “You can stay.”

Steve stayed by the doorway, debating on whether or not he should leave. Tony waited patiently. He was happy when Steve nodded to himself and sat down on the edge of Tony’s bed, a bit further than an arm’s length away.

Neither of them spoke. Steve sat quietly as his eyes scanned the room and Tony just continued to flip through the book. He came to the page with the robot he and Steve had designed together and ran his fingers over the outlines and colors.

“Why did you lie to me?” Tony asked softly. “I’m not angry anymore, I just want to know why you would lie about being friends with Howard? Why you would be having meetings with him that you weren’t supposed to tell me about?”

“I wanted to tell you. I’ve known Howard for… a long time. He was a friend during the war, before I was frozen and woke up to find that the world has changed without me. He is one of the few people I have left from before. Then I met you and you were the only person who knew me as Steve and not Captain America and you treated me like a normal guy.” Steve said slowly, planning out each word. He still hadn’t looked over to Tony. “I care about you and I figured that eventually we could talk about Howard. He’s my friend and you father and it’s just a discussion I thought we would have. But everyone kept saying how upset you got whenever he was mentioned so I decided not to bring it up. Then you asked about him and I took it as an invitation to start the conversation. I’m sorry.”

Tony listened carefully as he spoke. He sounded sincere, desperate. If it was the truth then it didn’t seem as horrible as he had imagined.

“And the secret meetings?” Tony asked. Steve’s answer could possibly end the conversation. If he spent time with Tony, called him a friend, and then went off to speak to Howard about what he was doing then Tony wasn’t sure he could forgive him. He didn’t want to be spied on by his friends.

“I actually meant what I said at dinner when I said it was about getting me back into the field. SHIELD wants me to become an agent and help people again.” Steve said. “No one knows my skills and abilities better than Howard.”

“Did you become a SHIELD agent?” Tony asked, smiling slightly. Steve was probably telling the truth. He looked Tony in the eyes as he spoke and sounded genuine.

“Yes, actually. That’s how I got cleared for the mission to go rescue you.” Steve said, giving him a small smile. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

Tony nodded and looked back down at his sketchbook. His fingers ran over the darkened edges of the page and the burnt away corners. He loved this book, even if it was ruined and useless now. It was his and Lotte had saved it for him.

It really wasn’t that bad now that he kept looking back on it all. Most of the time he had been left alone in his room. He was allowed to watch tv every once in a while. They only ever hurt him if he
had made a mistake so technically it was his fault. But he knew it was wrong, even if it didn’t seem like it.

“I miss them.” Tony muttered.

It was quiet. Tony didn’t expect an answer. What was someone supposed to say when some messed up teenager missed his abusers, Tony wondered. They were probably supposed to tell him how wrong he was and how stupid he was being and then go on about how he was better off with them.

Tony was relieved when Steve didn’t say anything. He reached out slowly and gently took Tony’s hand, stroking his thumb over his knuckles. A small drop of water fell onto his sketchbook and Tony reached up quickly to wipe away the tears that were running down his cheeks.

“It’s not fair.” He said.

“I know.” Steve said. “Can I hug you?”

Tony tried to laugh but it came out sounding like muffled whine. It was sweet, considerate. He had told Steve not to grab him and now he was asking for a hug. Tony nodded quickly.

Steve scooted towards him slowly and wrapped his arms around Tony as gentle as possible. He was warm, large enough to completely encompass Tony’s body, and smelled faintly like vanilla. It was all rather comforting. Tony liked being warm. He also liked that Steve could practically cover him with his body with his own and that made him feel a bit safe. Vanilla just smelled really nice.

“Is this okay?” Steve asked.

Tony nodded quickly as he wrapped his arms around Steve’s back and buried his face into the front of his shirt. It was okay, it was more than okay. Steve asking just made him cry harder.

He had been crying a lot the past few days. It was rather embarrassing, he was putting all of his out on display. It wasn’t a good idea but he just couldn’t hold in all of the conflicting feelings anymore. He wanted to go back, he wanted to stay, he wanted to hate Mesman and Lotte, and he wanted them to protect them. His mind wasn’t making any sense.

“Why do I miss them?” Tony muttered.

“Because they’re familiar. Familiar can be comforting, but not always right.” Steve said. “It’s okay to miss things we shouldn’t.”

“But sometimes I don’t miss them. Sometimes I’m certain I wouldn’t go back even if I was offered anything in the world and other times I feel like I would go back if they simply asked me to.” Tony whispered softly. “What am I supposed to do?”

“You can do what you think is right.” Steve said. “I’m just going to ask you not to go back to them.”

Tony nodded. “Already made that promise. It doesn’t stop me from missing them though.”

Steve started to rub his back slowly and gently, avoiding all of the healing cuts that he couldn’t see. Tony melted against his chest, silently wiping away the last few tears. He felt comfortable, safe.

“Do you miss anyone?” Tony asked. He felt Steve nod.
“Yeah. A lot of people.” Steve said. “I miss parents, but they’ve been dead a long time. My mama used to give out the best advice and lately I feel like I could really use her guidance. I don’t know what I’m doing here, in the future.”

Tony shifted slightly, moving his head so that it was resting on Steve’s shoulder and so he was no longer burying his face into his shirt. He squeezed Steve tighter and took a deep breath. He wanted to tell him that it was okay, no one knew what they were doing. Tony had no idea what he was supposed to do and from he could see from everyone else, neither did they. Everyone just followed orders or did what they thought they should do, it didn’t mean they knew anything.

“I miss Bucky.” Steve said.

He didn’t say anything more, but Tony understood. Steve had told him all about Bucky and what had happened a while ago, back when they were just sitting around and doodling while eating cookies. He gave Steve’s shoulder a light squeeze and hoped it would comfort him.

“It’s weird.” Steve muttered. “Just a few months ago I was with my friends, laughing and fighting in a war, and now I’m here in the future. A few months ago I had Bucky and Peggy and the commandos and now it’s 70 years into the future and everything is different.”

Tony nodded. He knew a little bit. He had never travelled through time and had never lost his childhood friend, but he was stuck in a world he didn’t understand. If Steve wanted to keep on hugging him then Tony would let him, it was the only comfort he could offer.

“Do you ever miss anything you know you shouldn’t?” Tony asked slowly.

“I miss the war.” Steve said. Tony blinked, he hadn’t quite expected that answer. “Things made sense, I knew who I was fighting.”

Tony hummed. “For what it’s worth, I’m glad you’re here.”

Steve laughed, and Tony smiled as he heard it. It was a beautiful sound and it almost seemed like just by hearing it then everything would be okay. Things were going to work out just fine.

“I’m glad to be here too.” Steve said.

Tony pulled away and Steve let him, slowly moving his arms from around Tony’s back and scooting away slightly. They stared at each other for a few seconds before Tony picked up his scorched sketchbook and returned flipping through it.

Steve leaned forward slightly to look at the pictures. He ran his fingers gently over the lines of each drawing and avoided all the delicate paper around the edges.

“I’m sorry it was ruined. I tried to save it.” Tony said. He looked down at his reddened, healing fingers and frowned. “I might need a new one.”

“Alright. As many as you want.” Steve said.

Chapter End Notes

I posted a little oneshot of Steve's POV during the events of Ch. 27 if you want to read it. It's rather short.
Also, yay for Steve/Tony bonding time.
Comment, your enthusiasm fuels my creativity.
I have finished one of my papers! It was long and exhausting but it's finally done and turned in. Now I can focus more on you all, my lovely friends.

“**You’re putting on weight.**” Steve said, smiling at him.

Tony couldn’t help but smile back. It had been two weeks since they brought him back and Steve had visited him almost every day. He always brought more sketchbooks or small piles of art supplies, books, and snacks. Since Tony had been refusing to leave his room Steve’s visits had become the highlight of each day.

“Wow, Steve. Don’t you know it’s rude to point out someone’s weight?” Tony said sarcastically. “I happen to think I look great. Absolutely amazing.”

“I’m not saying you don’t.” Steve said. He looked down quickly to focus on whatever he was drawing and frowned. “You’re just looking healthier. I think you’re getting taller too.”

“Catch-up growth. That’s what they keep calling it.” Tony said as he looked back down at his own drawing. He didn’t understand why Steve liked to draw with charcoal so much. It smudged too easily and covered his hands.

Tony tried to focus back on his small doodles. He dropped the piece of charcoal and grabbed a pencil instead. Pencils were easier, his lines came out smoother and he found it easier to get all the little details.

He was actually getting a bit better at drawing. His hand was steadier and everything seemed to actually have a shape, instead of the previous scribbles and lopsided blocks he used to draw. His people still looked completely wrong but at least now when he drew machines everything came out making sense.

“You’re doing better?” Steve asked, not looking up.

Tony frowned and glanced over to him. He was staring intently at the sketchbook he held in front of him as he sat across from Tony. Although he held his small piece of charcoal, he wasn’t actually drawing.

“Yes, I think I’m doing okay.” Tony muttered. “Like you said, I’m putting on weight. They have me eating all these super nutritious meals.”

“Yeah, that’s good.” Steve said quickly. He still hadn’t looked up. “You doing better with the other stuff?”

Tony sighed. He had been getting different variations of the same question almost every other day. All of them revolved around his mental state and whether or not he had fully wrapped his head around everything that had happened. The terms he kept hearing SHIELD agents mutter in passing still didn’t sound right. Words like ‘child abuse’ and ‘brainwashing’ didn’t have much meaning.
All he knew was that he felt horrible every time he thought about all of it. He would think about the dark closets with locked doors and walls that kept his view of the world far too small and the healing cuts on his back that were slowly becoming less painful. Then he would get that horrible feeling he couldn’t quite explain. His stomach clenched and made him nauseous, his hands would shake more than they should, and his breathing would become far too shallow and rapid.

So when he asked if he was feeling any better with all of that his answer was always the same.

“Not really.” He said.

Steve finally looked back up at him and frowned. “Well, they did get you a great therapist.”

“I don’t want to talk to anyone, Steve.” Tony said quickly. “Not yet anyway. It doesn’t make sense yet. I wouldn’t know what to say.”

Steve hesitated, working his jaw around as if he was going to say something more, but eventually just nodded and looked down at his sketchbook. Tony liked that about Steve, he didn’t push anything. If it wasn’t something that was dangerous to his health, he usually just let Tony make his own decisions. It was rather refreshing.

They went back to their work. Tony showed every small doodle and mediocre sketch to Steve, who smiled and told him they was beautiful and talked about how much he was improving. Steve never showed Tony what he was drawing, never had, and always angled the book slightly so Tony couldn’t look over and peek. He thought it was cute. Every time Tony asked what Steve was working on a deep red blush sprouted on his cheeks and down his neck.

“What are you drawing?” Tony asked. He looked over to Steve to see his face flush. He didn’t know why but his heart picked up slightly when he saw it and he couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face.

“Nothing.” Steve said quickly. “Just some scenery and stuff. Speaking of which, you haven’t been outside in a while.”

Tony laughed at his sudden change of topic. “Don’t really know what I want to do yet. Maybe IHOP.”

“Why haven’t you gone? It sounds fun.” Steve said. “Breakfast food is the greatest food.”

Tony shrugged. “I don’t know. I’ve never been to one.” He said slowly. “I don’t get out much. I got Clint to convince whoever’s in charge to let me out whenever I want, which is great, but now I don’t really know if I want to.”

“That’s okay.” Steve said. “No one is going to make you.”

Tony nodded quickly. That was good, he didn’t want to be forced outside. He didn’t want to be forced to do anything. He really did want to go out and go back to the little restaurants Peter had dragged him to a few times but every time he made plans to do so he would change his mind.

There was probably some deep psychological reason he didn’t understand for why he refused to go outside even though he really did want to. The therapist they had gotten him would probably know but he didn’t want to talk to them. He didn’t know them, didn’t trust them.

“Do you think I can see Bruce today?” Tony asked as he closed his sketchbook.

“Of course.” Steve said, smiling brightly. “You can see him whenever you like. He’s been asking
about you too. Wants to make sure you’re okay.”

Tony nodded and stood up. “Thanks for coming to spend time with me. But I need to go talk to Bruce.”

Steve stood up to and spread his arms, silently asking if it was okay to hug him. That had become a habit of his. Before Steve left he would ask Tony if it was okay to touch him and Tony was getting more and more comfortable with the gentle embraces. He stepped into Steve’s arms and leaned into the hug.

“Don’t bother cleaning up.” Tony said as he looked over the piles of pencils and other various kinds of art supplies around the floor. “I’ll get it when I get back.”

“You sure?” Steve asked.

Tony nodded and turned towards the door. Natasha was waiting for him out in the hall and Steve said goodbye. He didn’t ask how she had gotten there so fast, she was probably sent to come get him as soon as he started talking about going down to see Bruce. There were still cameras in his room and whenever he wanted to walk around all he had to do was say so and someone, usually Clint or Natasha, would come and walk with him. He wasn’t allowed to wander by himself, they thought he would try to run away again.

The elevator ride down to Bruce’s floor was quiet. Usually if Clint was around he would speak endlessly about rumors he heard or new movies that were coming out or dogs he passed in the street. Natasha just watched him silently, smirking every now and then.

They walked together down the hall and towards the room holding Bruce’s cell. Tony was only a bit nervous. It was the first time he had seen Bruce in weeks and so much has happened in that time that Tony wasn’t quite sure where to start.

“He doesn’t know, if that’s what you’re worried about.” Natasha said as they stopped outside the door. “That information is classified and the only people who know are those who need to know.”

Tony nodded. No one knew about his little trip up to the top of the helicarrier, which would explain why Steve never brought it up. It actually did make him feel a little better. It was one thing he didn’t have to worry about being brought up.

“Take as much time as you need. I’ll be waiting out here for you.” She said.

Tony walked in and walked right up to the large, transparent cell that Bruce had apparently decorated to look as similar to an actual bedroom as possible. Stacks of books littered the cell, small tables covered in lamps as well as trinkets and knick-knacks stood in each corner. His bed was piled high with blankets and pillows and Tony thought he looked almost comfortable.

Bruce looked up as he entered, dropped the book he was reading, and rushed towards the wall separating them. His eyes wandered over Tony’s face quickly.

“Where have you been? You just disappeared off the face of the Earth and everyone was freaking out looking for you. They asked me if I knew where you were but I had no idea.” Bruce started rambling. Tony might have found it amusing if not for the topic. “Then they find you and they put you in the hospital and it takes you two weeks to finally come visit me. Do you know how worried I’ve been?”

“Good to see you too.” Tony said. “I just wanted to stop by and apologize. I’m sorry I stole the blueprints for your machine. I know it’s dangerous and I still gave it to some… bad people.”
Bruce sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose and looking down. Tony could feel his heart start beating faster, Bruce was angry with him. He had to be. This conversation was about to end before it even started.

“It’s okay, Tony. I’m not upset with you.” Bruce said slowly. Tony sat down on the floor, looking up to him. “You did what you thought you had to do.”

Tony shrugged as Bruce sat down too. They were only a few feet away from each other now, separated by the large wall of Bruce’s cell. It didn’t quite make much sense. Bruce should definitely be angry with him, just like Natasha was angry with him when he attacked Clint, but no one ever did what normal angry people do. They all just dealt with him in a patient and calm demeanor he wasn’t familiar with.

“How are you doing?” Tony asked. “Are they treating you well?”

“Well, they finally figured out what causes the changes. If my heart rate goes over 200 bpm the other guy comes out. So I just have to remain as calm as possible.” Bruce said. “They said that if I can go a month without an incident and prove that I’m learning to control it they’ll move me into an actual room. Then if I go another period of time without transforming they’ll let me go. Which is great. As you can imagine being locked in a cell all day isn’t very fun.”

Tony nodded. He understood.

“Did they hurt you?” Bruce asked, eyeing the yellowing, fading bruise on his cheek. Tony rubbed at it.

“It’s not as bad as it looks.” Tony said. Bruce raised an eyebrow. “I’m really fine. Yeah, he hurt me when I got back but it wasn’t as bad as it could have been.”

Bruce groaned and rubbed his palm over his face. “And you understand that’s wrong, right? People shouldn’t do that to you.”

Tony nodded. “I suppose.”

“You suppose?” He asked.

“Well, I get that people shouldn’t hit me for no reason but what if I messed up or did something to make them angry.” Tony said.

“No, Tony. People should never hit you, especially not when they’re angry.” Bruce said quickly. “No matter what you did.”

“Okay.” Tony said. “That doesn’t sound so bad.”

Bruce smiled then, looking as if weeks of worry and frustration had just washed right away. “No, it doesn’t. I’m glad we’ve come to an understanding. What else is on your mind?”

Tony frowned and looked down at his hands. “I’m just really confused. My feelings don’t make sense.”

“Well, you can tell me all about it. Be warned though, I’m not that kind of doctor. I don’t know much about feelings.” Bruce said slowly. “Didn’t they get you a th-”

“I don’t want to talk to them!” Tony cut in, his voice slightly louder than he intended. “I don’t know them, I don’t trust them. SHIELD got them for me and I can’t trust SHIELD. They let me go...”
back there, they had a big plan and everything.”

“Wait, what was SHIELD’s plan?” Bruce asked, raising a hand slowly to stop Tony’s rambling.

“They figured I would try to escape so they just let me go to see if I would lead them back to where I came from.” Tony said. “They tricked me and then I got hurt. I don’t trust them.”

“But you trust me?” Bruce said softly.

Tony nodded. “I trust you and a few of the other agents they have around. I don’t necessarily trust everyone else.”

“I’m so sorry they did that. I have no idea what they were thinking but they should have known that it would be dangerous for you!” Bruce said, a quick flash of green shone in his eyes before he shook his head and took a deep breath. “I’m fine. I’m honored that you trust me with this. What did you want to talk about?”

Tony sighed and looked around the large room containing the cells. He wasn’t entirely sure how he should phrase it, wasn’t sure what was really wrong but there was definitely something.

“They’re letting me go outside. Which is good, that’s what I asked for. But now that I’m allowed to and I have that opportunity I’m not sure what to do with it. Where will I go? What will I do? What if I go out there and hate the whole world?” Tony said. “The only times I was every actually outside for an extended period of time was when I was pretending to be a college student and when I was running away.”

Bruce nodded along as he spoke. “So, you wanted the freedom to go out and see the world, but now that you have it you don’t know what to do with it?”

“Sounds about right.” Tony muttered.

“Okay, makes sense.” Bruce said. He leaned forward slightly and gave Tony a soft smile. “It’s okay to be nervous about things you’ve never been exposed to before. But the world is a beautiful place, you should see it when you’re ready. A ship in harbor is safe, but it’s not what ships are built for.”

Tony smiled, looking back towards the man in front of him. “That was beautiful, Brucie. Did you come up with that?”

“Nope. John A. Shedd came up with that. I actually found it in a fortune cookie once though.” Bruce said, chuckling lightly. “The point still stands.”

“Well, I don’t own a ship but you’re probably right. I should go out and do something.” Tony said. He felt calmer now, more determined. He wanted to go outside and if everything went horrible then he would be fine. He’s always been fine. “I’m going to go to IHOP and get pancakes.”

Tony jumped up and smiled, thanking Bruce for his held before turning and walking out the door. As promised, Natasha was waiting for him. He wanted pancakes and bacon and coffee. Steve liked breakfast food, Tony figured he could go with him.

Chapter End Notes
Bruce is magical. I love him.
Steve is a sweetheart. I love him too.
Natasha is perfect. I love her.
These are my children.
Tony's doing a bit better. He's figuring things out but he's still confused and nervous and needs more hugs.
Comment, I like feedback. It's a good motivator.
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

Here is a lovely chapter, came out a bit longer than I thought it would but oh well. A few things happen. Nothing too serious. Hopefully you like it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Do you know what you want?” Steve asked as he scanned the menu.

Tony shook his head. He looked over the menu that lay open in front of him. He had no idea what he wanted to order. He ignored the more detailed descriptions in favor of looking at the pictures and choosing which one looked best.

“How do you pronounce that?” Tony asked, pushing his menu across the table and pointing at the dish he wanted.

Steve leaned forward to look. “Rhubarb.” He said.

Tony nodded and took the menu back. He knew most of the other words in the title. “What’s rhubarb?” Tony asked.

“It’s this plant that they use to make desserts.” Steve said, humming as he put down his menu. “It’s rather tarty. You cook it with sugar and it’s delicious.”

“How do you cook a lot?” Tony asked. “You seem to know a lot about dessert plants.”

Steve shrugged. “I’m not really all that great at cooking. I just used to bake a lot with my ma when I was a kid. She made the best rhubarb pie on the planet.”

Tony nodded and looked back down at the menu, slowly reading the name of what he wanted over and over again to make sure he got it right. When the waitress came up to take their order Tony recited what he wanted perfectly. As soon as the waitress left with their orders Steve turned a large smile on him.

“Should you really be having coffee this late?” He asked.

Tony shrugged. “It’s only six and it’s swiss mocha.” He said calmly. “It has whipped cream, Steve.”

Steve laughed and Tony looked away, glancing down at the too long sleeves in the SHIELD issue winter coat Natasha made him put on before he left. Natasha had given him a whole speech before Steve came to get him. She told him to be back by eight o’clock, to stay within the city limits, and to not break any laws or attract too much attention. He told her they were just going to IHOP, everything would be fine.

Then Tony’s eyes widened as he remembered a very important element about eating at restaurants.

“Steve, I don’t have any money? You have to pay to eat here.” Tony whispered quickly, leaning
across the table towards Steve. “We should go now before we get our food and have to pay.”

The smile Steve gave him was the brightest and most beautiful thing Tony had ever seen. It immediately confused him. He was talking about not being able to pay for dinner, which was really something he should have thought about when he asked Natasha to see if he and Steve could go. Now was not the time to start thinking of Steve’s smile as beautiful, it would just distract him further and he needed to focus.

“Stop smiling at me, Steve.” Tony whispered across the table. “We don’t have money to pay for the meal and tip the waitress and you always have to tip the waitress.”

“Tony, it’s fine. Clint gave me this card thing that’s supposed to pay for everything, curtesy of SHIELD.” Steve said. “And then he threatened me but I’m not going to look too deeply into that.”

“Clint threatened you?” Tony asked, leaning back against his seat.

“Yeah, he thought I would say or do something that upset you and told me that if I did no one would ever see me again.” Steve said. He smiled at the waitress and thanked her as she brought their drinks. Once she left he turned back to Tony. “I didn’t really mind.”

Tony shook his head. Clint was still trying to look out for him. It was like when he and Natasha had threatened Thor before Tony met him. Or when Clint had sat outside his hospital room for hours after they rescued him, and how when Tony asked him to stay after what he now called ‘the incident’ on top of the helicarrier, Clint actually stayed.

“Before we left Natasha actually told me that if you do anything that makes me uncomfortable then I should just tell her and she’ll ‘take care of it’. I get that they care but I wish they would stop sometimes.” Tony said, shrugging. “It’s not like you’re going to do anything bad, you’re Captain America.”

Steve laughed and Tony felt a warm feeling settle in his stomach, which only served to confuse him further.

“Well, I do try to be gentle and friendly. I’m a national icon now.” Steve said calmly.

The waitress came and set their plates down in front of them. Tony frowned at Steve’s two large plates of scrambled eggs and another plate stacked full of pancakes. He still thought scrambled eggs were strange and no matter how many vegetables Steve asked to have added in would make them appear appetizing.

Tony had a waffle that was covered in berries and crème and what was probably the rhubarb. It was actually delicious. He secretly hoped Steve remembered how to make that pie he mentioned because he wanted it.

“I looked it up. You’re not even a real captain.” Tony said as he cut his waffle into small pieces with his fork. “You were just a regular soldier, with the serum to make you super, and then got the stage name of ‘Captain America’. After you did that solo mission into the HYRDA base everyone just didn’t question your ranking but it never became official.”

Steve’s smile came back. “Well, when you singlehandedly rescue a couple hundred soldiers they don’t really want to contradict you when you declare yourself a captain.” He said.

“Oh, yeah? How long has America believed these lies, Steve?” Tony asked. “I bet you’re not even a real blonde either.”
“You caught me. Secretly a redhead.” Steve said, holding in a laugh.

Tony shook his head slowly. “The lies just never end, do they?” He deadpanned.

This time Steve laughed loudly as he slapped his hand against his chest and his body jerked with each harsh breath. Tony’s heart fluttered at the sight, he wasn’t entirely sure why that happened and had no idea what it was supposed to mean.

Tony looked away and shoved a large piece of his waffle into his mouth. It was all the sugar, that was probably it. Natasha had been bringing him nothing but healthy food the past few weeks and now he’s consuming so much sugar it’s making his heart beat faster.

Steve had slowly stopped laughing and was now rest his chin in his palm as he smiled at Tony and lazily ate his eggs. Tony looked away quickly and started gulping down his coffee.

“You got a little bit of whipped cream on your chin.” Steve said, a small smile spreading across his face. Tony wiped quickly at his chin until Steve shook his head and slowly reached forward. His hand stopped inches from Tony’s face, his eyes widening slightly. “Is this okay?”

There he went again, asking Tony’s permission before touching him. Which was just even more confusing because people never used to ask for permission. It was never something that they needed to ask about, wasn’t a big deal. No one ever cared enough about what Tony thought or wanted to ask him if he was okay with little touches such as hugs or comforting hands on his shoulder or a finger to wipe away the whipped cream on his chin.

Tony didn’t move, he didn’t say anything like he usually would. Most of the time when Steve asked this Tony would say it was fine, but he kept asking. Steve must have noted Tony’s hesitation because he pulled his hand back quickly.

He was crying. Tony didn’t know when he had started crying but he quickly worked to wipe them away as well as anything left on his chin. Steve didn’t move towards him, he just sat completely still in his seat across the table and stared at Tony with such a concerned expression that it only made him cry harder.

It was a very bad decision. He was never supposed to cry, it was annoying, it made him look pathetic. Now he was crying in front of Steve and in public. He took several deep breathes and pushed his plate away.

“We should probably be heading back soon. It’s after seven and Nat wanted me back by eight.” Tony muttered. He ruined it. They were having a fun night and then he just had to start overthinking things and crying for no reason.

Steve nodded quickly and waved over the waitress, handing her the card Clint had given him to pay for everything and making sure to leave a tip. They got in the car and started driving back in silence, Steve focused on the road and Tony went back to fiddling with the sleeves on the SHIELD issue coat Natasha had made him wear, the SHIELD logo stuck to the shoulders and Tony immediately started trying to pick it off.

Tony stared out the window, watching the buildings and people rush by. He wanted to apologize for ruining their night, for making them leave dinner early, for just screwing everything up.

It was no wonder Mesman and Lotte had left him.

Steve sighed next to him as they pulled to the SHIELD building. “I’m really sorry.”
Tony looked over to Steve. “Why are you apologizing?” He asked quickly.

Steve shrugged. “Because I upset you, that was the thing they told me not to do. We were having fun, I thought you were more comfortable around me. I’m sorry.” He said, keeping his eyes forward as he drove slowly into the large parking garage.

Tony shook his head. “That’s not… what?” He said slowly. Steve wasn’t making sense. Tony should be apologizing because he was messed up and confused and things didn’t go right with him around.

The car stopped slowly into an empty parking lot as Tony buried his face in his hands. Somehow he had screwed up so much that now Steve thought it was his fault, he felt like he was going to puke.

“Tony, do you want me to go get someone?” Steve asked slowly.

Tony shook his head as he climbed out of the car and walked towards the elevator that led into the building. Steve followed behind quickly and silently. Tony’s hands were shaking and his breathing had become rapid and shallow. If he was going to throw up then he vowed to wait until he was in the privacy of his bathroom, away from Steve and the cameras. He didn’t think he would though, he felt very strange and his stomach felt like it was doing flips but he didn’t feel so sick he might throw up.

Clint and Natasha met them as the elevator doors slid open. Steve shouldered past them and rushed down the hall, looking back only once with a sad frown. Tony dropped his head with a sigh and started walking back to his assigned room.

“What happened?” Clint asked firmly. “What did he do?”

Tony hated it, now they were going to blame Steve too. Steve already thought it was his fault and Tony had to figure out how to make this right.

“He didn’t do anything.” Tony muttered. “I’m just stupid.”

“You’re not stupid.” Natasha said quickly. “Do you want to talk about what happened?”

Tony shook his head. “Not with you.” He said. They would blame Steve and they had already threatened him. Tony didn’t want them to follow through on any of that.

He needed to think, he needed to figure out how to make this right. He needed to understand what was going on. The last thing he wanted was for them to hurt Steve because he ruined everything.

Thor turned the corner and smiled when he saw the three of them. They all stopped as the met in the hallway, just a few yards from Tony’s room.

“Hello, Anthony. How was your day out with the Captain?” Thor asked with a large smile. Tony frowned, Thor’s smile did nothing.

“You know about things, right?” Tony asked.

Thor nodded. “I like to think that I do.” He said.

Tony grabbed Thor by the wrist and dragged him over to his room. Natasha and Clint followed quickly but stopped just outside his room as Tony wished them a goodnight and promptly shut the door.
He dragged Thor into the bathroom. Tony moved to the far corner and sat down against the cool tiled floor.

“My feelings don’t make sense.” He said quickly.

Thor looked around the bathroom slowly. “Is there a reason we’re discussing this in here?” He asked.

Tony nodded. “There’s a camera in my room. I don’t really mind it, they put it there to make sure I don’t hurt myself or whatever. The bathroom’s safe though.”

“Ah, it appears so.” Thor’s eyes continued to scan the room for a few minutes before he came and sat down on the floor in front of Tony. “It must be something important if you want to discuss it here. Why have you come to me with this?”

Tony shrugged. “You were here, you didn’t threaten Steve over anything, if I went to Bruce then they would definitely know what I’m saying, you said you know things, and I’m going out on a limb and trusting you with this.” Tony rambled quickly.

“You have my word, I will share your secrets with no one.” Thor whispered, leaning in close to him.

“I like Steve, he’s a good friend and he’s nice.” Tony said.

“He certainly appears to be a fine man.” Thor agreed.

“Yeah, but he does these weird things and it makes me do weird things. He comes by almost every day to visit and that makes me happy and then he just smiles all the time and that makes me smile. And he has the most ridiculous laugh that makes my heart beat a bit faster, not in the usual way it does when I’m upset, but in a nice sort of way.” The concern of Thor’s face slowly melted away and a pleasant smile grew in its place. Tony wanted to smack it away, this was serious. “I don’t understand. I’ve never felt like this before.”

“I do not want to push my opinions, but this doesn’t sound like a problem.” Thor said.

Tony shrugged. “It’s not really a problem, it’s just confusing. I don’t normally feel like this.” He said slowly. “Thoughts keep popping up in my head whenever I see him. I keep thinking of his smile as beautiful, and he does it all the time so it’s nice. I keep thinking of his eyes as perfect. Sometimes he blushes and his whole face goes red, even his ears, and you can see it running down his neck. I feel happy whenever I see it.”

“Sounds quite pleasant actually. Would you like my opinion?” Thor asked. Tony hesitated before nodding. Thor knew a lot more than he did, he could figure it out. “I think you’ve developed quite the intimate attachment towards him.”

“What does that mean?”

“Perhaps, and correct me if I am overstepping my bounds, you are in love with the good Captain.” Thor said slowly, joy spreading across his face with every word.

Tony nodded slowly. “Okay.” He said. “Like on tv?”

He had watched tv before, he wasn’t allowed to watch certain shows or certain episodes of approved ones but it did show people in love. People with bright eyes and large smiles who hugged each other and made sure the other was happy and okay. The characters in the shows always spoke
about how being with the other was the greatest feeling in the world.

So maybe he was just a little bit in love with Steve, probably had been since their first meeting and Steve had wrapped his arms around a terrified Tony and whispered calming words into his ear. But that was weeks ago and now Tony has the constant smiles he had to fight off every time he had seen Steve and the horrible betrayal he had felt when he thought Steve was only pretending to be his friend because of Howard that was washed away but Steve’s simple reassurances and promises to not lie to him again. Tony was in trouble.

“What do I do, Thor?” Tony asked. Thor opened his mouth to answer but Tony cut him off to continue. “The guy is great. He’s funny and nice and considerate. He asks permission to do something as simple as give me a hug. And sometimes he seems just as happy to see as I am to see him.”

“You should probably discuss this with Steve. He certainly does care about you.” Thor said slowly. “I have no doubts that he feels the same for you.”

“No, he doesn’t.” Tony said, shaking his head.

Thor chuckled and leaned forward with a small grin. “Many times I have found him with a far off expression and an adoring smile. If that is not the mark of a man in love then I do not know what is.”

“He was probably thinking of someone else.” As the words left his mouth he felt his stomach drop. Of course Steve would have someone else, he was perfect. Tony was broken and lost and ruins everything. He was just a kid whose parents never came for him, who was left to die by his caretakers, and was now the burden of SHIELD. “No one loves me.”

Chapter End Notes

On that note, I keep getting comments from you guys because you're expecting something horrible to happen. So soon after the all the tension and action of Tony running away and getting hurt. You guys are angst addicts. There will be another oneshot soon from a different POV (probs Natasha) again. I will probably have it up by the next update. Comment, Tony realized his feelings but that just makes him sad and needs a hug.
Tony went to sleep after Thor left, with many assurances that he was loved by many and promises that he would be back. As soon as he was alone he curled up on the bed, buried under the many blankets, and thought of as many happy memories as he could until he fell asleep.

He slept peacefully through the night but when he woke up the next morning his body felt drained. Tony didn’t think he had much energy to move, let alone deal with the fallout of his confessions to Thor, the revelations of his feelings, and the general bad day that happened yesterday.

Hours probably passed as he just lay flat on his stomach and his head was turned to the side so he faced the wall. He was perfectly comfortable and couldn’t think of a single reason to move. He was just tired, perhaps if he laid there long enough he would just fall back to sleep. He didn’t though, no matter how long he just stared at the wall he didn’t go to sleep.

No one had come to see him. Natasha hadn’t brought his breakfast yet, Thor hadn’t come back, and Steve, who had come by to see him almost every day for the past two weeks, hadn’t made an appearance. Tony immediately expected the worst. Maybe they were angry with Steve for what Tony had done to mess things up and followed through on their threats. Perhaps they all decided that Steve was far more valuable and perfect and that if he was having problems with Tony then they could just get rid of him. They finally decided that Tony was a lost cause. They would send him away because they decided they didn’t want him anymore. But that was fine. Tony was perfectly capable of surviving on his own.

The door opened behind him and Tony tensed immediately. This was it, they were here to tell him to leave. It was silent for a few seconds but Tony kept waiting. Worst case scenario, they get rid of him. Best case scenario, it’s just Natasha with his breakfast.

He sat up and turned around slowly. It wasn’t Natasha.

“You’re certainly sleeping late.” Howard said, sitting cross-legged in a chair that definitely wasn’t there what Tony had gone to sleep.

“What are you doing here?” Tony asked slowly.

Howard held out a newspaper and Tony took it hesitantly. “Your little outing with Steve made the papers, as was expected. ‘Captain America on a Date’. The media was going crazy, but it was nothing that couldn’t be handled.” Howard said calmly. Tony opened up the newspaper to look at the front page. There it was, a blurry photo of him and Steve smiling at each other across the table at IHOP. It was actually a nice photo. “No, what is the problem is that almost immediately your identity was leaked to the public. I’m sorry, son.”
“They know who I am?” Tony asked as his eyes stumbled over the small text of the article.

Howard nodded. “We were going to leave it up for you to decide on whether or not you wanted the world to know you were alive and found. I would have completely understood if you wanted to stay under the radar.”

Tony shrugged. “I don’t see how it matters. It’s just me.”

“Yes. And you’re my son.” Howard said.

Tony’s head snapped up as he glared at the man. “I am not your son!” He snapped.

“Well, believe what you like but DNA doesn’t lie.” Howard said.

Tony frowned and looked back down at the paper. He skipped most of the words as he tried to read it but there were also several more on the front page about him so he tried to read as much of them as he could. From what he gathered, they weren’t entirely negative. One was entirely made of speculations that he was pretending to be the missing Stark boy, which was understandable. The others were mostly theories on how they found him and what had happened to him over the years. A few even wondered what he and Steve were doing together at the IHOP.

He handed the newspaper back to Howard, who smiled and took it back from him.

“You still haven’t told me why you’re here. I didn’t ask for you.” Tony said quickly.

Howard nodded again. “True, but given the fact that we can probably be seen in public now I thought maybe you would like to join me for breakfast. I know you’re still upset with me but it would be nice to talk.”

Tony paused, eyeing Howard closely. It was probably a trick. He had already decided that they were going to get rid of him and this was their way to get him out of the building easily. “Why would I go anywhere with you?”

“Because Jarvis has been fixing the meal and you always loved his cooking more than anything.” Howard said slowly. “And I brought the Camaro. Do you remember that? You would come into my workshop and just sit in the thing for hours.”

Tony looked away from Howard and down at his intertwined hands. The car must have been important to him once, otherwise Howard wouldn’t have brought it up. “Was it red?” He asked quickly. Howard smiled.

“Yes it is. You remember.” He said.

Tony shrugged. “I remember some things. Little bits and pieces of a few events. I think I was happy.”

“You did seem rather happy with us. You were always running around and getting into things. You laughed at everything.” Howard said, letting out a soft sigh.

Tony looked up at him, studying his features closely. He never really got a good look at the man everyone said was his father. He had never noticed the deep lines that had formed on his face or the greying hair around his temples. He never noticed how straight his back was kept. Tony certainly hadn’t noticed before how sad Howard looked. The man’s eyes drooped downward and a permanent frown was plastered on his face.
“What’s Jarvis making?” Tony asked. If Howard’s face visibly brightened then Tony decided to ignore it.

“Everything. I asked him to make breakfast because I wanted to see if you would like to come by the townhouse and spend the day with us while SHIELD tries to figure out who leaked your identity.” Howard said quickly as he leaned forward in his chair. “He started making pancakes, waffles, hashbrowns, eggs, french toast—”

“What kind of eggs?” Tony asked, cutting in.

Howard paused, looking down quickly as he thought. “He usually makes every kind of eggs. Fried, boiled, scrambled, eggs in a basket, deviled eggs.” Howard said. “Jarvis is a miracle worker, if he’s fixing a meal he’ll go all out.”

Tony frowned as he thought. If this really was just a ruse to get him out of the building to get rid of him, which now that he was awake enough to think clearly about it he realized how incredibly unlikely it was, then who was he to fight their decisions. Maybe Howard just wanted to have breakfast, Tony loved breakfast.

“What are you doing this?” Tony asked slowly.

Howard shrugged. “Because you’re family and you’ve been gone for a long time and now I want to get to know you again. You’re my kid.” He said. He sighed loudly before continuing. “I should have been there to protect you, but I failed. Now I just want to have breakfast. I understand that you’re upset with me but I want to make it up to you.”

Tony hesitated. Jarvis would be there and few dishes he had made that Tony had tried were delicious. Also, Tony didn’t really mind his company. They had only met in person once and all things considered it wasn’t that bad of a meeting.

“Please, Tony. I’m asking you to breakfast, not to take over the company.” Howard said, forcing a smile that almost looked real.

“Okay.” Tony said. Howard’s smile relaxed into something more natural.

“Excellent.” He said, clapping his hands once as he stood. “I’ll meet you down at the car in ten minutes.”

He turned to leave quickly, leaving the chair sitting in the middle of the room. Tony stretched quickly and moved to stand up. He dragged the chair into the corner, grabbed a spare set of clothes from the corner, and went to change in the bathroom.

When he came back out Clint was sitting in the now vacant chair. He was looking around the room slowly and when his eyes settled on Tony he smiled.

“Hey, kiddo. We need to get you more furniture.” Clint said as he stood up and strode across the room towards him. “Maybe a little table or a lamp or something. It’s too bare in here.”

“What do I need furniture for?” Tony asked. He had a perfectly good bed to sleep in, that’s all he needed.

Clint shrugged. “I don’t know. No furniture is boring.” He said. “Whatever, let’s go.”

He nodded towards the door and Tony followed him out. Tony didn’t say anything, but Clint also didn’t look angry, not towards him or anything else. If he wasn’t angry then Natasha might not be
angry and then Steve wouldn’t blame him if they followed through on their threats.

“Good luck with Howard. I’ve never had an actual conversation with the guy, but I hear he’s a prick.” Clint said quickly as they climbed into an elevator. “I also heard he was actually a lot nicer before you disappeared. Then he just became stern and didn’t go to many social events. Then after Maria died he just holed himself up either in his house or at the office. Don’t get me wrong, Stark Industries has never been this successful but the guy probably needs a vacation.”

“You don’t have to convince me he’s a good guy. It’s just breakfast, there will be no hugging and crying in each other’s arms about all the years and family bonding we lost.” Tony muttered. “I’m going to eat and then come back.”

Clint shrugged. “Not yet, I suppose. But when you cry because you’ve finally realized you’ve been reunited with your family and all of those emotions set in, I want to be there. It’ll be a beautiful moment for all of you.”

They stepped out of the elevator and into the large parking garage. Howard was a few feet away, leaning against his red Camaro with his head down and phone in his hand. Tony took a step towards him, only to be held back quickly by Clint.

Clint ducked down as he placed both hands on Tony’s shoulders and looked him in the eye. “Did Steve do anything?”

“What?” Tony asked.

“You guys got back yesterday and Steve’s been sulking and seems to think you’re upset with him. Then you refused to talk to anyone besides Thor so I didn’t get a chance to ask.” Clint whispered quickly, glancing across the garage to Howard, who hadn’t looked up from his phone. “I wanted to make sure you were okay before you left.”

Tony sighed. He didn’t really want to talk about it. He wanted to forget. He wanted to feel differently so being around Steve, who was far too sweet, considerate, and beautiful, because then maybe there wouldn’t be an issue between them. He didn’t want a lot of people to know how he felt. If Steve found out Tony might be in love with him then he would probably leave.

“Steve didn’t do anything. I just got a bit freaked out.” Tony said calmly. “It was my first time actually outside in a while so it should have been expected.”

Clint frowned as he scanned Tony’s face, looking for some sign or tell that he was lying. “Fine. But if that’s so then are you sure you want to go out now?”

Tony shrugged. “If I don’t do it then I’ll never get used to it.” He said. “I’ll be fine.”

Clint sighed but nodded. They walked the rest of the way, stopping right in front of Howard. The man didn’t seem to notice them, he just continued to frown down at his phone and typed furiously.

Clint cleared his throat and Howard’s head snapped up instantly, a smile appearing on his face. He nodded towards Clint and opened the passenger door, waving Tony towards it.

“I can open my own doors.” He muttered, climbing into the car. Clint waved quickly before the door closed.

Howard sat down in the driver seat. The doors were closed and the windows rolled up and suddenly Tony felt that the space was far too small. Too dark and they were sitting too close together and he knew that once they got driving then there would be no getting away.
“Seatbelt.” Howard said as he put the keys in the ignition. Tony nodded and pulled the seatbelt around him and buckled it.

The car slowly started to move from its spot and towards the exit. Tony kept thinking that everything would be fine, desperately trying to silently convince himself that no one was getting rid of him and that they just wanted him to be okay.

“I’m not allowed to leave SHIELD without an agent to watch me.” Tony said quickly as the car pulled outside and into the sunlight.

Howard chuckled. “Don’t worry, son. I own SHIELD.”

Tony frowned and turned to look out the window. He tried not to think too much about it all. Tried not to think that if Howard owned SHIELD and SHIELD was currently controlling his life. He didn’t trust Howard, but it was just breakfast. Things were going to be fine.

Chapter End Notes

I really did mean to make it longer than it turned out to be. I meant to have this whole thing going on and a few happy moments but then things just got a bit longer than I expected.
Also, I wrote another oneshot for you. It's from Natasha's POV.
Comment, because I love hearing from all of you!!!!!!!!!
Chapter 35

Been an interesting past few days since the last update. I got a B on my big paper (holla), I got a kik and then realized I have no friends (it's whateves), finally got caught up on Once Upon a Time (such a great show), and this fic has surpassed the 1000 kudos mark (holy crap this is amazing thank you so much). Anyway, here's the next chapter. It gets a bit emotional.

When Howard had said that Jarvis was making a lot of food, Tony didn’t quite prepare himself for just how much food that really meant. The entire table was covered with different dishes full of so many different breakfast things Tony didn’t even recognize most of them but smelled delicious.

Howard hadn’t joined them right away, he stood out in the hall and argued into his cellphone. Tony didn’t care, he actually relaxed a bit because Jarvis was sitting next to him at the large dining room table and was slowly explaining to him what was in each dish. He frowned as Tony filled his plate with nothing but sugary pastries.

“Sorry, had to take a few calls.” Howard said as he walked into the dining room. He sat down at his seat and began filling his plate with different foods. “They want me to do a press conference soon, to confirm or deny the speculations that you’re actually my son. What do you think?”

“I don’t care.” Tony muttered as he shoved a forkful of hash browns into his face. “What’s the big deal?”

“Well, I’m a rich and famous businessman who everyone knows everything about. It’s public knowledge that you’ve been missing, that I’ve been looking for you, and has been desperate to find out what happened.” Howard said, putting down his phone briefly as he took several small bites of the fruit on his plate. “The public’s been very invested in your story.”

Tony chuckled, accidently spitting out a few crumbs. It was funny, the thought of any number of people actually being interested in what had happened to him. He’s still surprised that SHIELD cares as much as they seem to.

“Manners, Tony.” Jarvis whispered to his quietly.

Tony paused, then quickly grabbed a napkin and wiped off his chin. He had forgotten his table manners in just a few short weeks. It was one of the first things Mesman had taught him, to keep his elbows off the table, not to speak with his mouth full, not to try to eat too much in one bite, and he had forgotten all of that after weeks of Natasha bringing him his meals and never telling him how to eat.

He put his fork down slowly and took a deep breath. He quickly finished chewing his food before sitting back in his chair and carefully taking a sip of his orange juice.

“Leave the boy alone, Edwin.” Howard said as he continued to scroll through his phone. “We should be lucky he’s eating at all.”
Tony froze as Jarvis grimaced. “Mr. Stark, I don’t thin-
“What do you mean?” Tony asked quickly. Of course it was going to be like this, they had hardly said ten words to each other since they had arrived to Howard’s large and probably ridiculously expensive townhouse and he already wanted to discuss things Tony didn’t want to talk about.

Howard frowned as he glanced up from his phone. “Well, nothing too serious. We were just informed about your issues eating.”

Tony dropped his fork onto his plate and pushed his chair back from the table. “I don’t have ‘issues eating’. You wouldn’t know, you don’t know anything about me.” Tony said quickly. He shouldn’t have come. He hated Howard, a man who has done absolutely nothing for him his entire life.

Jarvis sighed loudly as Howard leaned forward, putting his phone down. “I know I don’t know anything about you, that’s why I invited you, my son, to have breakfast with me.” He said slowly. Tony just became angrier and angrier with each word. “I want to know about you instead of learning about you from SHIELD.”

“You’re using SHIELD to watch me?” Tony asked.

“No! I’m using SHIELD to try to help you.” Howard said. “Why can’t you understand th-

“Enough!” Jarvis shouted loudly. All attention snapped to him from his seat. Tony hadn’t noticed that their argument had gotten louder until they were both yelling. Jarvis, satisfied with the sudden silence, nodded and continued. “Honestly, you’re both acting like children.”

No one said anything for several seconds as Jarvis switched his glare between them. Tony’s head dropped and he pulled his chair back up to the table. So much for manners, he couldn’t even handle one small conversation with Howard without arguing.

“I’m just trying to talk to him.” Howard muttered. “I have a right to know what how he is, he’s my son.”

Jarvis sighed as the anger fueled back into Tony.

“I’m not your son, I’m not anything to you.” Tony said, this time trying to keep his voice low. He was sick of the yelling already. “You lost the right to know anything about me when you abandoned me.”

Howard’s face fell, as if whatever argument he had been preparing suddenly left him. “I looked for you. I put my life on hold and put all of my efforts into looking for you. I let someone else run the company for over a year while I looked, my wife shut down emotionally, half the staff left the mansion, and all I did was look for you.” Howard said quietly.

Tony shook his head. “It wasn’t good enough.”

Howard nodded slowly. “I know. I’m your father.” He said. “It was my job to protect you and I failed. I’m sorry.”

Tony stood up quickly, knocking over his chair as he walked out of the dining room. There were too many rooms in Howard’s townhouse and it took him several minutes to find the front door. He didn’t bother grabbing his coat, which was still hanging up in the kitchen from when they had come in through the attached garage, and instead just marched straight out into the cold.
He didn’t exactly know which way to go, wasn’t sure if he wanted to go back to SHIELD or not, but he needed to get away. He honestly shouldn’t be as surprised as he is. The first thing they do when they settle down for breakfast is argue, he hadn’t expected that after the somewhat pleasant, although short, conversation back at SHIELD.

“Tony, what are you doing?” Howard called as he followed behind him down the sidewalk.

“I’m leaving.” He said.

Howard sighed and rushed forward until they were walking next to each other. “I could have guessed as much, but where are you going.”

Tony shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe I’ll find a colony of dogs and just hang out with them because they’re probably the only ones who actually want me!” He said loudly, ignoring the glances from other pedestrians.

“No one said no one wanted you?” Howard said quickly as he grabbed Tony by the arm and pulled him to a stop. Tony yanked his arm back. “Of course we want you. I’ve been looking for you for over a decade, I’ve worried about you every single day, and everyone at SHIELD adores you. I’m always hearing about you making friends with a few of the agents. Even Steve likes you, I thought you were good friends with him.”

“They hate me. Everyone always hates me.” Tony said. “Steve dropped me off at SHIELD as soon as he could and then left without a word, Natasha’s been angry with me since the moment she met me, and Clint is only my friend because he feels guilty. And you, you never came. I waited for years and you never came. Then I just gave up.”

Tony blinked away the tears before they had a chance to fall. He had been crying way too much recently, he needed to get back in control.

“That’s not true.” Howard said, shaking his head lightly. “We all care about you.” Tony scoffed and turned to continue walking down the sidewalk. Howard rushed to keep up with him. Tony just wanted him to leave him alone, if he kept following then he would just make a run for it. “If you’re this upset with me then why did you even agree to come to breakfast.”

He turned around quickly, Howard stopping right in his face. Tony resisted the urge to just punch him, knock him to the ground and then run until everything stopped being so painful. Instead he just shouted. “I needed a distraction, I needed to stop thinking, and I needed to get out of that damn building where they watch everything I do and then condemn me for not doing something ‘normal’. I’m sick of all the looks of pity when I don’t understand something that’s supposedly common knowledge or when I drop even the slightest hint of what my life was like. I’m sick of waiting for you all to be sick of me and throw me out on the street or send me out to die.”

Howard reached a hand out slowly. “It’s alright, Tony. We only want to help you.” He said, his face looking desperate and sad. “No one’s going to abandon you or hurt you ever again.”

“I don’t need you! I don’t need SHIELD. I’m fine. You’re all making these big plans on how to help me and make me better. All these ideas on how to turn me into a normal person but as soon as you all realize how useless it all is you’ll be done. I’m a sad, broken man that no one can fix. Then you’ll get rid of me, because what’s the point in keeping me around if I can’t be who you want me to be.” Tony was back to shouting, but now he couldn’t stop. It was like a damn bursting open and letting lose all the small thoughts, insecurities, and worries that had been implanting themselves in his mind for weeks. “I can’t be your perfect long lost son. I can’t be the kid Clint took care of thirteen years ago. I can’t be this miraculous example of human perseverance by having all these...
horrible things happen and then just be okay. I’m not going to get better, I’m not going to be able to eat normally, I’m not going to stop looking at a high ledge or a sharp object and wonder if it’ll make everything easier even if I don’t want to die, and I’m never going to stop being surprised by simple acts of kindness. You’re all going to realize that one day and give up and I don’t care. I don’t care that no one loves me, that no one wants me. I want me. I’ll be just fine without all of you.”

Tony wasn’t crying, for that he was proud of. If it meant he was leaning into Howard’s embrace as he hugged him tightly, then it was okay. He’ll just blame it on the cold and being out without a coat. It was nice though, just to be hugged. He should pull away, he should leave and never look back. He didn’t need SHIELD or Howard or anyone to tell him that things will get better and then just confuse and frighten him.

“It’s okay, you’re okay.” Howard whispered in his ear. “I’m so very sorry. None of this should have happened to you and it infuriates me that it did but no matter what you’re not broken and wanted to see you happy and okay would never be a pointless task.”

“I can’t trust you.” Tony muttered as he pulled back.

Howard nodded quickly. “I know. I’m a dick, I wouldn’t trust me either. But never doubt that I don’t love you, because I love you more than anything.” He said, resting his hands on Tony’s shoulders and relaxing slightly when he didn’t pull away. “I want you. You’re my family. Besides Jarvis, you’re the only one I have left. I can’t lose you again, please don’t leave.”

There is was again, that sad and pathetic look that Howard always somehow manages to hide so well under professional indifference or smug amusement. He looked desperate, sincere.

“And I know everyone else at SHIELD cares about you too. Steve’s always talking about how great you are every time I see him. You’re practically his best friend right now, I’d be jealous if I wasn’t the rich and amazing Howard Stark.” Howard said, giving Tony's shoulders and gentle squeeze. "And trust me, many other people like you too. Natasha watches the chef’s prepare your food to make sure no one tries to hurt you and, from what I heard, is threatening half the agents in the building to see who leaked your identity. Clint’s always coming up with these ideas to help you feel more at ease with them, he’s thinking of getting you a puppy. Then there were your two friends who broke into the building, they definitely care.”

Tony melted against Howard, he still didn’t trust him but right now he just wanted to enjoy a hug for a few more minutes and figure out what he should do. Howard made a few excellent points, as much as Tony would hate to admit it. People who didn’t want someone didn’t go through that much effort to make sure they were okay.

“Fine, I’ll stay.” Tony muttered and pulled away. “But not for you.”

Howard smiled and motioned back in the direction of his townhouse. “Want to go finish breakfast? We definitely owe Jarvis an apology.”

“Yeah. He’s okay. I’ll apologize.” Tony said as he started to follow Howard back down the sidewalk.

“He’ll forgive you instantly, but he might want you to sit through a few stories about how cute you used to be and how much time you had spent together.” Howard said with a relieved smile.

Tony nodded. He could do that. He could do a lot of things, everyone was going through such great efforts to make him comfortable, making him large and delicious breakfasts, giving him
coats, getting him things so he wouldn’t be bored, and just generally being nice and caring and gentle. He may hate a lot of things about staying with SHIELD but if he brought them up then they would probably change, Clint and Natasha were very concerned with him being comfortable there. The least he could do to pay them all back is to follow through with his promises to try to get better. If that meant speaking to a therapist, dealing with Howard, even though Tony was still angry with him, and seeing whatever doctor they thought was necessary then so be it.

Chapter End Notes

If it's awkward and weird just let me know. It's 1am and I'm exhausted so I may not have noticed how strange it is.
You're all wonderful and fabulous and this one little part of the story is taking a while.
Why do I have to write so much?
Comment, there were emotions and
Howard was right about Jarvis forgiving him almost instantly. When it was time for him to be driven back to SHIELD, Jarvis had come along. He had packed countless covered dishes for him to eat later and was currently sitting in the back seat of Howard’s car as he described all the wonderful things about the townhouse. He mentioned the property value, the square footage, how he loved that it was smaller than the mansions and therefore easier to take care of, and Jarvis’s favorite part was that the press didn’t know about it.

“There are too many bricks for my liking.” Tony muttered as he looked out the window. It was true. The lines of connected buildings were all made of the same hideous red bricks. To make matters worse all the sidewalks in the area seemed to be brick as well. It was all too excessive.

“I suppose so but I think it gives the neighborhood a rather rustic feel.” Jarvis said as he continued to list off the benefits of living there. “There are five bedrooms and five bathrooms, three of which are full bath and the other two are half bath. All the rooms have been perfectly decorated, by me of course. The one time I let your father decorate he tried to put up curtains with a checkered pattern.”

“Hey,” Howard said quickly, cutting in. “They were great curtains.”

“They were an abomination.” Jarvis said as he shook his head. “I swear, I almost quit right then and there.”

Tony rested his head against the window of the car. Everything seemed fine now, they had all calmed down and no one brought up all the yelling or the things that were said. It was like all three of them had collectively decided to forget about it, which was a bit of a relief but also a disappointment. He didn’t want to bring up any of the things he had said, but he also felt that he should say more. It was alright though, if he wanted to talk about it then SHIELD had already hired him someone to talk to.

“I’m going to take you shopping.” Howard said calmly. “You need new clothes.”

Tony raised an eyebrow as he watched the car slow down as it approached the SHIELD building. “Right now?” He asked slowly.

“What? No, not right now. I have a few meetings with a few lawyers and then I have to deal with some reporters and then I have to finish the prototype for the thing.” He said, pulling into the parking garage. “But definitely soon. You need clothes that fit you.”

Tony frowned and looked down at his hand-me-down SHIELD coat and only slightly rumpled sweatpants. “These fit.” He said.
Howard groaned loudly and shook his head just as the car stopped in an empty parking spot. “No, son. They really don’t. They’re too large and baggy and it just looks ridiculous.” Howard said. They all climbed out of the car and walked towards the elevator. “You’re on my side, right Jarvis?”

There was a small moment of silence as Jarvis looked at Tony carefully, not even glancing at his clothes but scrutinizing his face. He must have been satisfied with what he saw because he relaxed slightly and nodded.

“Of course, Mr. Stark. Perhaps Anthony would benefit from a visit to your tailor.” Jarvis said smugly. “After all, clothes do make the man.”

Howard chuckled as they all piled into the elevator and headed up. Tony thought he should say something. Apologize for the yelling, thank them for breakfast, ask them to never come back, ask them to come back soon, Tony had no idea what he wanted to say. But he was tired, needed a nap, and wanted to figure out what was going on in his head.

Once the elevator doors slid open he walked quickly down the hall towards his room. It’s wasn’t necessarily that he wanted to get away from them, it was just that he found their false cheeriness and ability to pretend like nothing had even happened a bit disconcerting.

It was also a bit worrying as well. One moment Tony was screaming in the middle of the street about all of the dark thoughts that clouded his mind and within an hour Howard is driving him home and calmly tells him he needs new clothes. It didn’t seem quite right.

“So, shopping?” Howard asked as they reached Tony’s door.

Tony shrugged. He wouldn’t necessarily mind getting new clothes, all the clothes he had ever had were bought for him and no one would know how they fit him until he put them on at home. He was nervous about spending more time with Howard. He didn’t trust him, didn’t like him, and couldn’t forgive him. A breakfast and apology doesn’t make up for the thirteen years Tony waited.

“It’s probably not the best idea right now.” Tony said as he walked into his room. “I’m pretty tired right now and things have been confusing. I just need a break.”

Howard’s face fell slightly and his eyes darkened, but he nodded slowly. “Of course, you definitely need a break. You’ve been under a lot of stress lately.” He said calmly.

“Well, if we’re going to be leaving soon.” Jarvis said, smiling at the two of them. He raised the covered dishes and nodded. “I’ll just go find a fridge to put these in for you.”

Tony watched as he walked away. Howard stared at him and Tony felt like curling away and hiding from the dark expression on his face.

“I’m sorry. I really wanted us to get along.” Howard said calmly. “Just promise me you’ll take care of yourself, let these people help you. No matter what your opinions are of me, you truly do have friends here.”

Tony nodded. “Right. Thanks.”

He turned to enter his room and closed the door quickly behind him. Tony almost felt bad, for leaving without saying goodbye, but he was tired and confused and just ready to escape. He ripped off his coat and his shirt and immediately walked into the bathroom, turning on the shower with water as hot as he could handle. His back and neck ached, his head was pounding, and a nice hot shower would do him good.
He just let the water wash over him and his mind wander. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do. He didn’t really expect Howard to bring him back. As ridiculous as he knew it was, he assumed they would just leave him somewhere. Why were they so insistent on keeping him, on making him believe that they were going to help him?

Tony quickly washed away the sweat and dirt from his hair and began rubbing at the sore muscles on his back. The cuts from a few weeks ago were healing, the thin, pink lines of skin were still quite large, but smaller than he had originally feared. Usually beatings with that metal rod Mesman loved so much left him with horrible, jagged scars that didn’t appear to be likely to fade.

Once he was warm enough and clean enough he climbed out of the shower, pulling on a clean pair of sweats and a shirt and looking at himself closely in the mirror. He was definitely putting on weight. Not that he was overly small and fragile before, but his arms used to be a tad too thin and he had just seemed lanky. Now his muscles were becoming more defined and his cheeks were filling out a bit. He was definitely a bit tall, just by a few inches, but noticeable. It was amazing what a month of healthy eating could do.

Tony shook the excess water from his hair and walked out into the main room. He froze instantly. Steve was sitting quietly on Tony’s bed, head down as he stared at a pie in his hand. Tony had to stop himself from screaming. This was the first time he had seen Steve since the disaster that was IHOP, since his talk with Thor had opened his eyes. Steve just looked so beautiful just sitting there, staring down at a pie and wildly tapping his foot.

“What are you doing?” Tony asked quickly.

Steve’s head snapped up and his eyes widened. “Oh, well I came by and wanted to talk but you were in the shower so I just waited.” He said. “I hope that’s alright.”

Tony looked between Steve’s panicked face and the pie he was holding gently. Steve stood up and walked up to him, carefully holding out the pie like a peace offering.

“I made my ma’s special rhubarb pie. I remember that you liked the rhubarb at IHOP and I remembered telling you about baking sometimes.” He said, smiling slightly. Tony reached out and took the pie. The pan was still a little warm and it smelled delicious. “I also came to apologize.”

Tony’s frowned. “What are you apologizing for?” He asked slowly. It couldn’t be good, he hadn’t done anything wrong. The only thing Tony could think of was Steve apologizing for being friends with Howard and not telling him, but they had moved past that.

“Yesterday, when we went to IHOP I thought you were uncomfortable around me. I figured you’d feel better if I left you alone.” Steve said and gave a small smile when Tony rolled his eyes. “I shouldn’t have just left like that. I was confused and just wanted you to be okay. So I made an apology pie.”

Tony looked back down at the pie in his hands. It was incredibly kind and Tony’s heart warmed at the thought of it. Steve was fine, Natasha and Clint hadn’t hurt him like they threatened to, he wasn’t angry. Tony wanted to laugh at the idea of thinking he had done wrong.

“It’s fine. Thank you.” Tony said, grinning as Steve’s smile brightened and widened. “I actually thought you were mad at me.”

“No. I wasn’t mad at you.” Steve said. His features hardened briefly as he broke eye contact and shrugged awkwardly. He was nervous, Tony had no idea why but he could see the tension in his features. “I… care about you. A lot. You’re my best friend.”
Steve’s eyes found Tony’s again and a deep red blush burst from his cheeks and down his neck. It was the same adorable blush he had whenever Tony asked him what he was drawing. Tony never could stop himself from smiling whenever he saw it.

“Okay, then. I forgive you.” Tony said. He walked around Steve and sat down on his bed. Steve hadn’t brought plates or forks or anything to actually eat the pie with, just the pie itself. “Do you want some pie?” He asked slowly.

“Yeah.” Steve quickly nodded and rushed forward to sit down next to Tony on the bed.

Tony handed the pie over to him and Steve took it with a large, enthusiastic smile. As he looked down at the pie, his brow furrowed and he sighed as he realized everything he forgot. Steve continued to frown at the pie as he started humming.

“I guess we can eat it later.” Steve said slowly. He stood up, handing the pie gently back to Tony. “I’ll go get forks or something.”

“Thank you, Steve.” Tony said as he watched Steve walk towards the door. He turned around and smiled at him and Tony was starting to notice just how much Steve smiled and how he loved every single one of them.


Tony nodded slowly, eyes dropping down to his hands and the delicious treat Steve had made for him. “Do you want me here?” He asked quietly, voice barely rising above a whisper.

The silence was only a few seconds long but to Tony it felt like it was running on for hours. He didn’t look up towards Steve, but he knew he was still standing there. It was a stupid question, probably rude to ask, but he had to know. Tony had to know these people actually wanted him here, weren’t planning on getting rid of him anytime soon.

“Tony, of course I want you here.” Steve said. Tony heard his footsteps as he walked back up to him and dropped to his knees in front of him. Now that he was so close, kneeling down to be on his level, Tony could glance up quickly and frown at the devastation on Steve’s face. “I care about you so much. I want you here close to me and I want you to be happy and I want you safe.”

Tony looked away as Steve spoke. It was nice to think that Steve, and hopefully everyone else, really did want him here. He was hopeful, but not entirely sure.

“And Natasha and Clint? Thor?” Tony asked slowly. “Agent Hill and Coulson and that one guy who always brings me fresh sheets and that other guy who gets mad that I leave the lights on all night but never actually does anything about it.”

Steve smiled as he sat and listened to Tony. “Can I hug you?” He asked slowly. Tony nodded. Steve’s large arms wrapped around him gently and then he was engulfed in warmth, his face pressed against Steve’s chest. “Is this okay?” He said. Tony nodded again. “They’re all crazy about you. Coulson’s working hard to get the people who hurt you so he will know that you’ll be safe. Hill is running the whole department that’s dedicated to taking care of you. I think Natasha’s just as interested about what you want as you are. Clint likes to think you haven’t seen any Disney movies so he’s taken it upon himself to show all of them to you.”

“I’ve seen Beauty and the Beast.” Tony said, shrugging. “It was okay.”

“It was decent enough, I prefer The Little Mermaid.” Steve said. “We all want you here. The guy who brings you fresh sheets is always talking about how polite you are to him and the guy who
complains about the lights, I’ve met him too. He doesn’t do anything about it because he thinks you hate the dark. Everyone here adores you.”

“So you guys are okay with me being here and messing everything up?” Tony asked, burying his face deeper into Steve’s chest. He always smelled like vanilla and it was comforting.

He could feel Steve shake his head. “You don’t mess anything up. You make it so much better and far more interesting.” He said. “We all care about you. I care about you a lot.”


Steve laughed. It wasn’t even that good of a joke, but Steve laughed so it was probably the greatest joke Tony had ever made.

“I’ll have to agree with you on that.” Steve said.

Tony nodded and pulled away slightly. He felt relieved, as if Steve simply telling him that they wouldn’t abandon him or get sick of him would make it all true. Steve waited, watching Tony’s face closely to make sure he wasn’t upset or anxious. Tony was grateful.

“Okay, I’m going to go get some forks now. Okay?” Steve said slowly. Tony nodded. “I’ll be right back.”

“I know.” Tony said. Steve stood up and walked back towards the door. “Hey, Steve. If you see Natasha can you tell her I’m ready to meet with the person they got me?”

Steve smiled again, a bright and wide one that sealed in all the promises that they truly did care into Tony’s mind. He nodded and walked out the door. Tony got up and placed the pie gently on the chair that still sat in the corner of his room. He went and sat back down on his bed, resting his head in his hands.

Everything was fine. It was okay. They cared about him, it would not be like it was before. They wouldn’t hurt him, they wouldn’t leave him, and everything would be okay. Tony believed most of it, but wasn’t quite sure what he would do if it all ended up being a lie, a trick. He would be okay. He had to be okay.

Chapter End Notes

Tony's doing a bit better but he still has a long way to go. He's on the edge of trusting people again and genuinely believing without a doubt that people can care about him and now he just needs some help to fully come to the conclusion that he might actually be safe now.

More chapters to come, more Steve, more Peter and Rhodey (I love them so much, my babies), and more of Tony's recovery to come.

Comment, comments really do make writing a lot of fun so please leave feedback.
Chapter 37

Yay, chapter updates. Thank you so much you guys, I’ve been getting so much great feedback and I just want to tell you all it means so much to me that you like it and that you take the time to tell me such wonderful things. I love you all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Tony. I’m Dr. Charles Thomas, but you can call me whatever you’re comfortable with. Charlie works just fine if you want.” The man said. Tony refused to take his eyes off of him. He was a stranger and he was supposed to talk to him, about what he still had no idea. Tony didn’t trust him but he knew he wouldn’t trust him when he agreed to come so he would have to find a way around that. “Since this is our first meeting we’ll just focus on finding out what you think the issues are.”

Tony shrugged. He didn’t know how they were supposed to do this, what he was supposed to talk about, what he was supposed to say. Clint had just told him to talk about what he thought were problems and the doctor would help, but Tony wasn’t even sure what most of his problems were, he just knew he had some.

He scanned the room slowly for the fourth time since he had come in. The computer on his desk was old and outdated, it almost physically pained him to just look at it. He could, actually he had, build a better one out of a box of scraps. There were several degrees hanging on the walls from universities giving Charles Thomas his clinical psychology degrees.

“Whenever you feel like you’re ready you can just tell me whatever you think is important.” Dr. Thomas said.

Tony looked him over closely. He didn’t seem dangerous, he was thin, not very muscular, he was definitely taller than Tony but he didn’t look like someone who had any kind of fight training. If this man was going to attack him physically then he wouldn’t be much of a problem.

But Tony was sent here to tell this man all of his thoughts and feelings, to give him ammunition to destroy him without actually hitting him.

Clint and Natasha had told him it would be alright, that this man was trustworthy. But he wasn’t, he was a stranger. He had done absolutely nothing to earn Tony’s trust.

“Why do I have to tell you things?” Tony asked slowly.

“So I know what the problems are. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what you need help with.” Dr. Thomas said. Tony blinked, keeping his face blank.

“How do I know you’re not going to trick me?” He said. He wasn’t convinced. Even if Clint and Natasha told him it was okay there was no way to know for sure. They could be wrong.

“Well, that would be completely unprofessional of me. I’m not here to trick you, I was hired to help you and that’s the only thing I want to do.” He said. Tony leaned forward slightly, studying
the man’s face slightly. His dark brown eyes seemed curious, not threatening or malicious.

He nodded slowly. “Alright. But I won’t answer something if I don’t want to.” Tony said, leaning back in the chair.

Dr. Thomas nodded, giving Tony a reassuring smile as he glanced down at the paperwork on his desk. “Why don’t we start with the simpler things?” He said slowly. Tony nodded. “Remember, I’m under multiple confidentiality agreements so absolutely nothing you say to me will be passed on to anyone else unless there is suspicion that you are a danger to yourself or others. What you tell me will stay with me.”

Tony nodded again. That sounded just fine. It could very well just be another lie, but he was going to do something stupid and try to believe this guy. Clint said it would be okay, Natasha said it would help. He was going to attempt to ignore all the alarms going off in his head and the tension that had embedded itself into the pit of his stomach and talk about things as best as he could.

“I think I’m scared.” Tony said calmly. “No, I’m definitely scared.”

Dr. Thomas nodded slowly, urging him to continue. “What are you afraid of?”

“Jesus, I don’t know. Nothing.” Tony said. “Everything, probably.”

Dr. Thomas hummed as he continued to stare at Tony. “And what does that mean?”

Tony paused, blinking slowly. He didn’t know what he was supposed to do. It made sense in his mind. Tony was scared of nothing, Tony had no idea what he was afraid of. He just felt an overwhelming fear curl around him and refuse to let him go. He didn’t know what he was afraid of, but he was certainly afraid so it also made sense that he would be scared of everything.

He shrugged. He had nothing to say. Everything that ran through his mind made a bit of sense but the problem was he couldn’t find the words. There was nothing to translate his feelings into something understandable for this stranger.

“Let’s talk about something else.” Tony said quickly.

Dr. Thomas nodded. “Okay, what do you want to talk about?” He said, smiling softly at Tony.

Tony’s eyes dropped down to his intertwined hands as he thought. He wasn’t sure what was okay to talk about. All the things he thought were probably what he needed to talk about, all the things that still bothered him almost every day, were at the forefront of him mind, but they all seemed like things that shouldn’t be discussed. They seemed like things to keep secret.

He took a deep, shaky breath. “I don’t know. What am I supposed to talk about at these things?”

“Well, some people like to talk about their feelings, you told me you were scared so that’s a great start. Some people like to talk about their worries. Other times people talk about things that have happened that bother them a lot.” Dr. Thomas said, nodding slowly. “Anything you want to talk about, you’re allowed to talk about.”

“Oh...” Tony said. “They put a tv in my room. They’re letting me watch whatever I want, it’s pretty nice.”

The doctor nodded as he spoke. “And you like watching tv?”

“Yeah. I used to watch it sometimes with... back in the Netherlands. In that house.” Tony said...
slowly. He ran his thumb carefully over his knuckles. “They wouldn’t let me watch some shows though. And only certain episodes of the ones I were allowed to watch. Now there are so many shows I don’t know where to begin. I’ve been watching a few cartoons. Those are interesting.”

“I’m glad you’ve discovered all the wonderful things that can be found on television.” Dr. Thomas said, leaning forward in his chair as his fingers began tapping lightly on a notepad on his desk. “What else do you do to entertain yourself?”

“Steve comes over a lot. He likes to draw and I like to watch him draw. I’m not much good at art or stuff like that. He’s really nice, I like having him around.” Tony said, a small smile spreading across his face.

“He sounds nice. He’s a friend?” The doctor asked. Tony nodded. “Tell me about your friends.”

Tony hesitated for just a moment, wondering why he would want to know about his friends. He already mentioned Steve, which was probably fine, but why was talking about all of this important? What was the point to it?

Dr. Thomas was waiting patiently, appeared in no way annoyed about the time Tony was taking to answer. It would be okay, the people he trusted told him it would be. Clint and Natasha both said this would be fine, that he would be safe. He could talk about a few things.

“I guess Peter was my first friend. We met in a class when I was pretending to be someone else. Even after he found out what I really am he’s still my friend. That’s pretty strange, isn’t it? I assume normal people upon finding out someone they thought was a cool college student is just an equally cool spy whose lied to them about everything usually get upset.” Tony said, tilting his head to the side. “Why isn’t he upset with me?”

Dr. Thomas hummed quietly. “From what I understand, he probably cares about you and was more worried than angry.” He said.

Tony nodded. “That makes sense. Peter does worry about things a bit too much. But Rhodey, he did get angry. He yelled at me for a while because I got us both arrested.” Tony said, recalling what seemed like so long ago. “Now he’s just like Peter, constantly thinking I’m not okay and something’s wrong.”

“Does that bother you?” Dr. Thomas asked.

“Not really. It’s kinda nice having people who just want the best for you.” Tony muttered. “I’m actually meeting them for lunch after this.”

“Well, your friends sound lovely.” He said. Tony nodded. “Why don’t you tell me about a few of the things they worry about?”

He didn’t want to do that. Everything Peter and Rhodey worried about was pointless, unimportant. They worried about him eating, when his eating habits were just fine. They worried about all his scars, which were just signs of him being hurt in the past. All that really mattered was him not getting hurt in the future. People worry too much.

It is true that he’s been crying more than he ever used to, that if he thinks too hard about the past his chest will seize up and make his breaths quick and shallow while his hands start shaking too much, and some nights he just couldn’t sleep for fear that it was all just a dream and he would wake up back there. Those were all probably problems that he was supposed to talk about, but they were also never mentioned by anyone. Everyone always worried about the unimportant things.
Tony shook his head. He didn’t want to talk about what his friends worried about.

“Actually, I think I should go now.” Tony said slowly.

He was expecting an argument, a disagreement, demands for him to stay and talk about things he wasn’t even comfortable talking about with the people he did actually trust. Instead he got a soft smile and a nod.

“That’s just fine, you’re allowed to leave whenever you like.” Dr. Thomas said.

Tony was standing and walking out the door before the doctor had finished his sentence. Natasha was out on an assignment and Clint had paperwork to do, so it was Agent Hill that brought him here. He had only met her a few times, didn’t really know her, didn’t trust her. But she was just another person the people he did trust told him was okay.

She didn’t seem all that bad. They few times he had met her were just fine. She was the one who had interrogated him when he was first arrested, before they figured out all of his lies. She was also there for Thor’s dinner that had ended so terribly. Agent Hill wasn’t that bad, she never threatened him and never hurt him. He felt somewhat okay with her just driving him to this appointment.

Hill nodded when he came out of the office, standing up and walking with him back down to the car. He climbed into the passenger seat and leaned against the window as she silently started the car and began driving back to the SHIELD building.

It would be a short drive and Tony enjoyed watching all the buildings they passed. He liked watching the people outside going about their lives and he liked the endless sky. It was nice.

The quiet only lasted a few minutes. Agent Hill cleared her throat, signaling that she was about to speak, and Tony raised an eyebrow.

“How did it go?” She asked.

“We didn’t talk about a lot.” Tony said, shrugging. “I’m not quite sure what I’m supposed to say to him.”

“That’s okay. You’re supposed to talk about all that stuff when you’re ready.” Hill said, not taking her eyes off of the road. “The whole point is to make you feel better.”

“Awesome. I’m a bit relieved. I thought he was going to make me talk about everything, like when I ran away or the incident on the helicarrier.” Tony said as he went back to looking out the window.

“What incident on the helicarrier?” Hill asked calmly.

“Oh, uh. You know…” He muttered. He just said he was relieved to not talk about it, why would she press further? “When I tried to jump off.”

The car stopped suddenly, Tony’s body lurching forward and held in place by his seatbelt. “You did what?” Agent Hill asked quickly, her head whipping around towards him.

“You didn’t know? It should be in a file or something somewhere.” Tony muttered, leaning away slightly. She was angrier than he expected her to be, her eyebrows turned down as her breath puffed in rage.

“I’ve read every file available to my clearance level, which is pretty damn high, and I have not read
anything about you trying to jump off the helicarrier.” She said quickly. The cars behind them were honking loudly and Tony just stared at her until she started driving again.

“Natasha told me the only people who knew were those who needed to know.” Tony said, turning back towards the window.

“If that didn’t mean me then it didn’t mean a lot of people.” Hill said, her voice losing a bit of its edge. “If you wanted it to be a secret then it’ll be a firmly kept one.” Tony nodded slowly as he continued to watch the buildings pass by outside. They were almost back to SHIELD. “So, why did you do it?”

Tony froze quickly, his shoulders tensing immediately. “I just felt like I had to.” He muttered quietly. He hoped she would just take that answer, not press any further because right now he had no answer to give. He didn’t even think he had the strength in him to keep on talking about it. He shouldn’t have even brought it up.

Much to his relief, she didn’t ask anything more. The car ride was silent the rest of the way, all the way up to the point where they pulled into the parking garage connected to the building and climbed out of the car.

“Tony, please take care of yourself.” She said as they started walking to the elevator. “You may not believe it but a lot of people here are really rooting for you to be okay. Also, a lot of my work has become keeping you alive and happy, which makes me a glorified babysitter. I’m more qualified than that.”

“I’ll try not to make your job harder than it has to be.” Tony said, watching the small numbers on the elevator slowly climb until they reached his floor. “I’ll be okay.”

“Good, because I don’t want to have to sit through the meetings that would be involved if anything happened.” She said slowly. “The meeting we had after you ran off was too long and tedious for my liking.”

They stopped outside his door, Agent Hill looked him over carefully for a moment before reaching a hand out. Tony took it and shook it firmly. She nodded to him slowly, and Tony understood she was probably asking him of a lot more than sparing her meetings.

He walked into his room without another word. As expected, Peter and Rhodey were already there, waiting for him. Several closed pizza boxes laid on the floor next to Rhodey as Peter stood by Tony’s new, rather small, tv trying to plug in a large black box.

They smiled when he came in, greeting him loudly, and then went back to the middle of their argument about which wires went where.

“We brought a dvd player.” Peter called out as he poked his head behind the tv. “We’re gonna watch ‘Planet of the Apes’. It’s an American classic.”

“Yep, big plot twist at the end. You’ll never see it coming.” Rhodey said. Tony sat down next to him on the floor as Peter continued to fiddle behind the tv, cursing every few seconds. “Maybe if Parker here can actually plug in the dvd player.”

Tony smiled and stood back up, gently pushing Peter out of the way to have a look. It seemed simple enough, the different colored cords probably went into the different colored plug-ins. They were a bit hard to see and difficult to reach but a few minutes of carefully pulling the tv away from the wall and getting a better angle and it was in.
“Seemed easy enough and I’m not even an engineering student anymore.” Tony said as he went to sit back down. Peter forced an obviously fake laugh as he put in the dvd and skipped through the trailers at the beginning.

Once they reached the dvd menu, Peter pressed play and sat down on the floor with them. The pizza started being passed around then, Rhodey mentioning eagerly that he got stuffed crust. Tony looked at it carefully, noting the excess cheese he saw in the crust.

“The movie gets pretty weird later on because a guy makes out with a monkey lady.” Peter muttered as he shoved the pizza into his mouth. “But that’s a spoiler and I’m going to stop before I ruin the plot twist.”

“You should stop talking more often.” Rhodey said. Tony laughed, quickly trying to cover his mouth. “But it’s unlikely to happen so let’s move on. So, Tony how was your day?”

Tony shrugged, trying to focus on the movie. If he looked over at his friends now he would probably say or do something stupid, like cry again. “It was fine. Just spent a lot of time thinking about stuff.”

“Hmm, like what?” Rhodey asked as he tore open the crust on his pizza and just pulled out the cheese to eat it separately. “Like how to get into Peter’s gymnastics class? Same, this kid is too athletic and I’m a bit jealous.”

“I haven’t taken any gymnastics classes.” Peter muttered, focused on the movie. Rhodey simply shrugged, but Tony frowned. He wasn’t entirely sure what Peter was lying about, but it was something and it had been a secret for some time. Tony didn’t much care though, who was he to be uncomfortable with someone keeping secrets.

“Nah, I’ve been thinking about what to do with Howard. He wants to take me shopping and buy me stuff.” Tony said calmly. “I don’t know how I feel about that.”

“Do you like him?” Rhodey asked, glancing over quickly. Tony shrugged. “Well, I’m not going to pick a side, because I’m already on your side, but it sounds like the guy has been trying to reach out. If you want to hang out with your dad, that’s awesome, but if not then don’t just say so and he’ll probably stop.”

“Before you throw him out on the curb, can you maybe ask him to pay for my health insurance?” Peter asked.

Tony didn’t know if he was joking or not, but he nodded anyway. “I don’t think I’m going to throw him out on the curb, Peter. I just don’t know what to think of him. He just left me out there, he didn’t find me, stopped looking. I don’t think a couple of new shirts will make up for that.” He said slowly. “But he’s also a kinda alright guy. I yelled at him and said a lot of pretty… scary stuff and he apologized for everything.”

Peter reached over and gave Tony a light pat on the back. “Whatever you want to do is up to you. We’re here for you, we got your back.” Peter said. Rhodey nodded quickly.

“Yep, we love you, you giant loser.” Rhodey said.

Tony looked over to the two of them. No one had really looked away from the tv besides a few hasty glances during the conversation and even as they continued to stare at the tv Tony felt a wave of warmth wash over him at the fact that they were actually here. After all the times he lied and screwed up these two, his friends, keep coming back.
“You guys do?” He asked slowly. This finally caught their attention and they both looked at him.

“Of course we do.” Peter said quickly, reaching out and pulling Tony into a hug.

“And you want me here?” Tony said, closing his eyes as he felt Rhodey’s arms curl around him too.

“We certainly don’t want you gone.” Rhodey said.

Tony smiled, reaching up and squeezing the shoulders of the two men hugging him. “Alright, good to know. Now let’s stop being sappy weirdos and actually watch the movie.”

They both nodded and pulled away hesitantly. Tony looked down at his half-finished slice of pizza and smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Back by popular demand (and because i love them, my babies) Peter and Rhodey. Definitely more of them to come. The story's been pretty happy lately, things have been going smoothly. It would be a shame if... something were to... happen... maybe Comment, next update will be up soon and I'll try to make it a good one.
“It’s nice.” Tony said as he helped Bruce sort through his things.

He had reached the designated number of days without an incident and Bruce was now being moved into a far less secure room. It looked exactly like Tony’s, small and plain, but without a tv or even a small pile of dirty clothes laying in the corners. However, the room was isolated, a bit of a ways away from all other people and work going on in the building.

“It’s okay. I miss my apartment though. Hopefully Betty hasn’t gone through my files. She says I’m messy, but I have a system.” Bruce said as he placed a small stack of books into a corner.

“They were pretty messy when Rhodey and I went through them.” Tony muttered. He smiled as Bruce sighed loudly.

“That’s different. Those were my office files, my home files are all perfectly organized.” Bruce said.

Bruce starts humming lightly as he walked across the room to look out the window. It’s a different view than Tony’s. If he looks out the window all he can see is a large building just across the street and just a few feet on either side of it. Outside Bruce’s window is just a large view of the city, open and lively.

“Just a little while longer and they’ll let me go.” Bruce said quietly. Tony nodded even though no one was looking towards him. “What should I do when I’m free?”

Bruce turned back to him, a hesitant smile on his face. Tony shrugged. “I don’t know. You’re asking the wrong person.”

An awkward silence fell between them. Neither of them seemed to talk much anymore. Bruce always went strangely quiet whenever he started to talk about how his life was and Tony was too busy trying to ignore most of his feelings to even try to maintain a normal conversation. It probably wasn’t healthy, but Tony had already talked about a few things with Bruce and he still wasn’t entirely sure what was and was not acceptable topics for discussion. He didn’t know what he was allowed to talk about.

“Where did you get so much stuff?” Tony asked. “I don’t think you’ve had much opportunity to go out and buy it all.” He looked up quickly, waiting for Bruce’s nod of permission, before going through one of the boxes of stuff brought up from his cell.

“Nah, Betty’s been bringing me things every few days when she comes to visit.” Bruce said.
He walked over to where Tony sat on the floor and took everything handed to him. It was just more books, newspapers, and magazines. Tony didn’t bother trying to read them, he just picked them up out of the box and handed them to Bruce to be put away.

He paused for just a second when he noticed several of the papers torn to pieces, whole articles ripped away violently. Tony raised an eyebrow curiously as he handed them up to Bruce, who took one look at them and threw them in the nearest trash can.

“"I keep forgetting to throw those away. It’s nothing. Nothing important, just some issues with Betty’s dad.” He muttered, taking another stack of magazines and putting them on the bedside table he had carried up. Tony’s gaze lingered on the newspapers for a moment before he turned back towards his work. It wasn’t his business to question anything.

The box was almost empty and they were almost done moving Bruce’s things into his new room when Tony saw the newspapers at the bottom of the box. They had his face on them. Technically, most of them had a blurred picture of him on the few times he had gone outside right next to old photos of him as a young kid.

He looked like a happy kid, smiling and wide-eyed as he looked off to something just out of view. That compared to the grainy close up of how he looked now was a bit disturbing. From what he could make out from the more recent photo of himself, he still did look a lot like that little boy. The eye shape was still the same and the hair still had the same messy, dark curls.

He looked sadder though, more run down. His shoulders were more hunched, his mouth was turned down at the edges, and he looked a bit thinner than average. Tony wasn’t entirely sure what he looked like now, several weeks after this photo was taken, but he certainly hoped he looked better.

“What do you want to talk about it?” Bruce asked. Tony looked up to see the man standing over him with a soft frown on his face. “Are you sure?”

“There is nothing to talk about.” He said.

Bruce sighed and sat down next to him on the floor. “I keep telling Betty to stop bringing me newspapers. I don’t want to hear about how the army thinks the creature that attacked MIT is a national threat and needs to be hunted down because I’m controlling it.” He said slowly. Tony frowned as he spoke. He didn’t know the army was threatening Bruce, he didn’t know what to say. “I also don’t want to read about how one of my students, my friends, has become a public spectacle and another means of entertainment when none of them know what’s going on.”

“"No one knows what’s going on.” Tony said as he looked away from Bruce and back down at the two photos on the paper.

Bruce shrugged. “You know. You can tell me if you want.” He said. “I may not be much help but I’ll listen and if you want to keep it all a secret then I will.”

Tony laughed, looking up at the camera in the corner. Bruce may not repeat whatever Tony tells him but it won’t stay a secret for long. Bruce followed his gaze until his eyes landed on the camera as well, his posture visibly tensing as he let out a low shrug.

“If I asked, do you think they’d let me take the camera out of my room?” Tony asked quietly. He wasn’t sure how sensitive the microphones on the camera were, agents always came in to stop him before he got a close enough look, but maybe if he whispered they wouldn’t hear.
“I don’t know, but if they do let me know. I don’t like the cameras either.” Bruce said as he turned his attention back to Tony. “Really, if something’s bothering you, I’ll listen.”

“I’m not sure what I can talk about.” Tony said, not taking his eyes off the camera. “I don’t know what’s allowed to be discussed, I don’t know what’s appropriate to be discussed, and I honestly don’t understand anything long enough to be able to actually talk about it. Nothing makes sense.”

Bruce was silent while Tony talked and continued to be silent a few minutes after he stopped. He was working his jaw around in tiny circles when Tony did finally glance over to him, as if he was struggling with finding the right words to say.

“You can talk about anything. Nothing is taboo, it’s all on the table. Even if it doesn’t make sense I’ll listen, your feelings are important.” Bruce said, nodding slowly. He must have been satisfied with how it came out, even though it only made Tony more confused.

A lot of things were taboo, there were a whole list of things he had learn not to discuss because no conversation was worth the consequences. Of all the things that had changed drastically, this was one of the few that Tony knew would stay the same. Bruce may believe what he’s saying, may truly not think there won’t be a single thing that Tony brings up that won’t make him upset, but once that line is crossed he’ll change his mind.

“It’s okay, Tony.” Bruce encouraged. “It’s good for you to talk about things. If not with me then please talk to someone.”

Tony took a deep breath. He could do it, he could talk about the little things and everything will be fine. Dozens of topics flooded his mind, the reasons he doesn’t like to turn off the lights, the fear that he would one day have to go back to Mesman, the fear that he’ll never see Lotte again, the discomfort he feels as he keeps eating every few hours even though it’s long past the time he would decide to stop for a little while, but Tony couldn’t find the strength or patience to hold on to any of those. Bruce was waiting for him to say something, so Tony looked for a problem he was having that was probably the easiest to deal with.

“I don’t know what to do about Howard.” Tony said quickly. That was it, the default discussion he seemed to be having with everyone. “He’s being nice, I don’t like it. It’s hard to hate a man who keeps trying to be nice to you.”

Bruce shrugged. “Why are you angry with him?”

“He never came for me. He just left me out there.” Tony said quickly. He knew those words by heart, he had repeated them to himself over and over the past few weeks. “I waited for him.”

“He did look though.” Bruce said, reaching forward slowly to lay his hand on Tony’s shoulder. “I remember, it was all over the news. Howard spent millions of dollars to look for you and the search went on for years. Then after a while he returned to his company and focused on his work but from what I heard he did keep the search for you funded.”

“So, what? I’m supposed to forgive him because he didn’t find me?” Tony asked. “I’m mad at him because he didn’t find me.”

“I know he didn’t find you, I know how much that must have hurt you over the years, but he did look. Not finding you certainly wasn’t because he didn’t look hard enough, it was probably because you couldn’t be found.” Bruce said, giving Tony’s shoulder a light, reassuring squeeze. “You’re mad at him for something he couldn’t control.”
“You’re on his side.” Tony muttered.

“I’m on your side.” Bruce said quickly. “I just don’t want you to distance yourself from the only family you have left.”

Tony frowned and looked away as his gaze dropped down to his palms, looking at his hands was becoming a habit and he had no idea why nor did he care. He took a slow, deep breath as he thought. Bruce made sense, he hated that Bruce made so much sense because Tony wanted to stay angry.

Howard left him, he and Maria went on some trip and left him at home, alone and vulnerable. Sure, he had his nannies and he had Jarvis, but they all slept soundly as Tony was dragged from the house and taken away forever, then sold away like an object they had no use for. He was property, Mesman owned him, and Howard had never come for him.

“You think I should forgive him?” Tony asked.

“I think you should do what makes you feel comfortable and happy.” Bruce said quickly. “But don’t punish him for something he couldn’t control.”

Tony nodded slowly, taking in Bruce’s words. He could forgive Howard, could accept all of his apologies and everything he’s trying to do to make up for it, but he’s not quite sure what would happen then. He doesn’t know how to feel about Howard, he doesn’t know what family is supposed to feel like. Tony has no idea how he would fit himself into the role of a son and what that would do. Maybe if he understood things better, forgiving would be easier.

“What was your dad like?” Tony asked.

That was apparently the wrong question to ask, the line had been crossed, and Bruce had tensed up immediately. His hand jerked away from Tony’s shoulder as if it had been burnt.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have asked.” Tony said quickly. He stood up and took a step away. “I should go.”

“No, it’s fine.” Bruce said, jumping up and walking up to Tony. He froze momentarily, Tony wasn’t sure what punishments he would get for bringing up something he shouldn’t but he didn’t expect to be hit. Bruce had always told him people shouldn’t hit each other and he didn’t take Bruce for a liar. “You can stay. I’m not upset. I just didn’t expect that question.”

Tony shook his head. “You don’t have to answer.”

Bruce relaxed slightly, relieved. He didn’t want to talk about it and Tony didn’t want to force him. He could figure it out on his own.

“I don’t mind talking about it. Like I said, it’s good to talk about things.” Bruce said, pulling Tony into a quick hug. When he pulled away he was quiet, just for a few seconds as he thought. “My dad wasn’t a nice man. He was violent and dangerous and a liar and a murderer. He was all the things a father shouldn’t be and I’m happy to be away from him.”

“Oh.” Tony said softly. Bruce was being honest, he could see it in the raw and vulnerable intensity in his eyes. He didn’t know how to reply to that. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Everything got better, I met a lot of wonderful people, and I was happy for a long time.” Bruce said. “And when I get out of here everything will go back to normal and it’ll be fine. And you’re going to be okay too. That’s not how dads are supposed to be, they’re supposed to love and...
take care of you, not hurt you and make you afraid.”

Tony nodded, rushing forward to give Bruce one last hug before leaving. He knew what he was going to do now. It wasn’t quite forgiving but it was pretty close. It was certainly providing an opportunity to himself to forgive.

He walked to Agent Hill’s office, escorted by an agent he didn’t know the name of, and made the call before he had time to rethink if and run away. Everything was going to be fine, Howard had never hit him, never hurt him, and had only seemed to want to give Tony everything he wanted. If that meant family then Tony wasn’t sure what he was supposed to give in return but he could figure something out. Howard was there in an hour. Tony climbed into his car and they headed into a part of the city Tony hadn’t been to.

How kept rambling on and on about tailors and designers while Tony watched the buildings speed by the windows. Tony tried to suppress the shaking of his hands and the fast beating of his heart. He was nervous, but he wanted to appear as calm as possible. It was less than ten minutes before they pulled up to a small shop. They walked in and were greeted by a smiling man.

“Tony, this is Bernard. He’s one of my tailors. I have one in every city.” Howard said happily. He hadn’t stopped smiling since he had come to pick Tony up. “Bernard, this is my son. We’re here to get him his first suit.”

“He looks just like you!” Bernard exclaimed. He was a touch shorter than Tony, which was really saying something since Tony was still shorter than average. “Come Tony, we’ll find you something to make you look like a king.”

Tony let himself be dragged away from the front of the store, Howard following behind closely. He was malleable in Bernard’s hands as he let the man move his arms into different positions to measure him.

“I don’t need a suit.” Tony said.

“Everyone needs a suit.” Howard replied from his seat off to the side.

“Why?” Tony asked. “I’m sure I look just as good without one.”

Howard chuckled softly and shook his head. “No, suits aren’t about looking good. They’re about looking sophisticated, important.”

“But I’m not sophisticated or important.” Tony muttered. Bernard dropped his arms and walked away, done with the measuring and promising a suit by the end of the week.

Howard threw an arm over Tony’s shoulders as they walked out of the building. “You’re important. You’re one of the most important people in the world.” Howard said softly as he led Tony back to his car. “You’re my son. People are expecting things from you. A suit could be your protection, to set you apart from all the rumors and assumptions.”

“It’s just clothes, but okay.” Tony said.

Howard smiled and led Tony down the street, not back to the car to drag him to one of the many other clothing stores he had been talking about on the drive over, but toward a small diner on the corner. They walked right in and slipped into a booth in the corner.

“Is there anywhere in particular you want to go? Anything you want to get?” Howard asked as he glanced over to Tony.
“Coffee.” Tony mumbled.

Howard breathed out a soft laugh and smiled up to the waitress as she walked up. She passed out the menus and smiled at them, pausing momentarily as her intense gaze passed over Howard before shooting over to Tony. Her face went pink.

“Uh, welcome.” She stuttered quickly. “I’m Janie, I’m your waitress. What can I get you?”

“Hello, Janie. You look lovely today.” Howard said, his smile going from soft to something much larger that made the waitress blush harder. “I would like a cheeseburger, hold the onion. And just water.”

He looked over to Tony and waited. “Coffee.” He said simply. Howard cleared his throat and Tony continued with a quick glance to the menu. “And a… baked potato.”

The waitress nodded quickly and left. Howard glanced around the diner. Tony followed his gaze as he looked over the few other patrons, the waitresses behind the counter, and the tv hanging on the wall, which was sadly enough showing another news report of ‘The Lost Son of Howard Stark Found on Date with Captain America’.

“They know you, I made a public statement saying you were my son and they had gotten a hold of the DNA test results. There’s no stopping them now.” Howard said calmly. Tony shrugged, he had said he didn’t care if Howard announced the truth but he was still confused on why everyone cared so much. “Why they keep insisting you’re in a relationship with Steve, I’ll never know. You guys just had dinner. Why did you guys have dinner?”

Tony shrugged. “I was hungry. I wanted food, Steve mentioned that he liked food, he’s my friend, we got food.” He said simply.

Howard stared at him for a few quiet minutes. Janie had returned and gently placed their plates in front of him, smiling brightly and insisting that if they need anything just call her over.

Tony didn’t look away from Howard, the man just continued to stare intently at Tony, trying to unravel some mystery that must have been going through his head.

“You care about him.” Howard said eventually.

“Well, yeah.” Tony said quickly. He didn’t want to have this discussion, he had only ever talked it over with Thor. “He’s my friend.”

“No, it’s more than that.” Howard said. He was frowning, which probably didn’t mean anything good. Tony didn’t know if he was angry or disappointed. “That’s the same look I had on my face when I first fell in love with your mother.”

“What was she like?” Tony asked. It was a horrible deflection, but it seemed to work. Howard’s face softened visibly and he leaned back against his seat.

It was a legitimate question, not just a cheap trick to change the subject. Tony didn’t know a lot about his mother. Just a few glimpses of her face in his memory and a soft, gentle voice.

“She was wonderful. She loved her work, she loved everyone she met, and she loved you more than anything.” Howard said, looking away from Tony and down at his untouched burger. “Maria did a lot of charity work. She figured that since she had more than she needed she could give so much to those who didn’t have enough. She did a lot of good. Though the one thing that made her the happiest was you.”
Tony frowned. He wasn’t quite sure what to say, if he should say anything. He might just mess up and say the wrong thing again and Howard would be upset with him, just like Bruce was when he mentioned something he shouldn’t. Howard didn’t notice his silence or apprehension, just continued talking.

“You were a very theatrical child. You one time draped yourself over the dining room table because I was going to miss your birthday one year. I had Jarvis take you to Disney World instead. You sat me down and showed me all the pictures once I got back because you were convinced I had missed the best day ever.” Howard said, smiling gently. “You were a fantastic child, you did the greatest, funniest things and your mother adored you. You went to a very nice pre-school and one of the little girls gave you a babydoll and you started crying and when I asked what was wrong you said you were ‘too little to be a grandmother’. Your mother just held you as you cried and told you it would be okay, that she would help you raise the doll.”

Tony laughed at that. He didn’t remember, but he wished he did. Maria sounded wonderful and Tony thought that maybe she really did love him. Not the harsh and cruel love he had thought he felt with Mesman and Lotte or the confusing and terrifying love he felt with Steve, but something pure and safe that was unlikely he would ever feel again.

“What happened to her?” Tony asked slowly. Howard looked up then, his eyes sorrowful.

“After we lost you she just shut herself away. She used to be this social butterfly, the highlight of every party. Then the only party she ever went to was the few galas for her charities. She stayed in that house, made sure your room was clean and prepared for when we found you. I came to visit her as often as I could but I couldn’t stay in that house for longer than a few days.” Howard said quietly, he barely spoke above a whisper. “I couldn’t sit in those rooms without wondering when you’d come soaring into the rooms in your footie pajamas that you always wore because you said they made you feel like a dinosaur. I couldn’t stay there, but your mother couldn’t leave. She had an aneurysm and I wasn’t there for her. She had the maids, sure, but I should have been there.”

Tony didn’t say anything, just took a small sip of his coffee as he reached forward and lightly tapped Howard’s hand. “She sounds amazing.” Tony said.

Howard smiled then. “She really was. She would be so happy we found you.” He said as he stood up.

He dropped a hundred dollar bill on the table and started walking away, ushering Tony along with him. They hadn’t even touched their food, a meal that at most cost twenty dollars, but Tony heard the delighted screech of the waitress as they walked out the door.

“She recognized us. At least now when she talks to the press she’ll have nice things to say.” Howard said. “Now, about your feelings for Steve, I can’t say I approve.”

Tony sighed, he thought Howard had forgotten. The turn in the conversation was enlightening and he was glad they had it, but he didn’t really want to talk about Steve. If Howard didn’t approve it didn’t matter, how he felt was unimportant because nothing was going to happen.

“He’s decades older than you, really just a few years older than you, but you’re from different times. You both think different ways.” Howard said quickly. “And you’re not in the right state of mind for a serious relationship, you shouldn’t rush into any major changes. Now, Steve is a good man so I don’t think he is likely to hurt you, but you need time.”

Tony smiled as he walked slowly behind Howard and towards where the car was parked. He felt relaxed, okay, not at all like the stress and discomfort he usually felt around the man. Tony had
forgiven him, if just a little bit. He may not be able to call Howard ‘dad’ or do all the family things normal people did, but he wasn’t that mad anymore. He had forgiven Clint for something he had done when he was ten, he could forgive Howard for something he had no control over.

They had made it across the street and Tony leaned in towards Howard quickly. It was stupid and unnecessary, but Tony felt like he should hug Howard. The man had talked to him about something that was clearly uncomfortable with him and Tony was grateful. He had learned about Maria and that seemed like a gift better than any suit or object.

Howard squeezed his shoulders, breathing heavily against Tony’s hair. The hug only lasted a few seconds but it felt nice. Tony liked hugs, liked the gentle touches of people who seemed to care about him. When he pulled away he meant to say ‘thank you’ so they could walk the rest of the way to the car and continue on with their day, but something caught his eye.

It was just a small distraction, a brief flash of light from across the street that captured Tony’s attention. His eyes scanned the windows and rooftops, there was something familiar about that light that was so quick to appear and then vanish. It was almost like the glint off of binoculars as they looked their way. Or the lens of a rifle scope catching the light from the sun as it took aim.

The flash of light shone again, across the street and on the rooftop of the diner they had just left. Tony barely had time to grab Howard by the shoulders and force him down before the shot rang out.

Chapter End Notes

OOOooOOooOoOh.
Bruce’s scene ended up being longer than planned and Howard’s scene ended up being longer than planned but I hope it worked out and you guys like it.
I’ll try to update again on monday. (it’s my birthday on monday so you guys can have a big long chapter as a gift from me, for my birthday)
Comment, everything might be okay.
Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

I finished it early and I have no self control so I'm posting it today. My birthday is in a few hours so we'll just pretend it's my birthday today. Happy birthday to me, have a chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Holy shit. I’ve been shot.”

Tony looked over to Howard, eyeing the small stream of blood trickling from between the man’s fingers. He had a strong hold on his shoulder as blood dripped sluggishly, but steadily, from a wound he was covering. It could be a problem if he didn’t get Howard to a doctor soon, but for right now it was fine.

“It’s not that bad.” Tony whispered. He peeked up over the car they were currently hiding behind. There was a dark figure that had dropped down from the rooftop and was now making a slow progression towards them, a large weapon Tony couldn’t quite make out at the distance was in the assailant’s hand. He was a man, as far as Tony could tell. “You’re going to be fine. Call SHIELD.”

Howard grunts as he pulls out his cell phone and furiously begins to type in the numbers. There wasn’t enough time, their attacker was getting too close too quickly.

“Do you have a gun?” Tony asked calmly.

“What?” Howard said, his eyes shooting up towards Tony. “Yes, I have a lot of guns. I build weapons for a living. But the closest one is in the car.”

“Go get it. He’ll be here in a few minutes so you gotta make a run for it.” Tony said quickly, his voice going eerily calm. He had trained for situations like this, it’ll be fine. “I’ll hold him off while you get to your car.”

“What? No!” Howard barked out. “You’ll be killed.”

“If you don’t go get that gun now then we’ll both be dead and this whole conversation will be pointless. Now go get it. You called SHIELD, they’ll be here soon.” Tony said quickly. The man was halfway across the street now, close enough to hear the sound of his boots hitting the pavement heavily. “I’m prepared for situations like this, I’ll be fine! Go!”

Howard hesitated for just a second before firm determination settled in his eyes and he nodded. Tony waited until he heard their attacker stop just on the other side of the car they were using as a SHIELD before jumping out and hoping Howard had taken that as his cue to run. The man’s attention had snapped to Tony the moment he jumped out from behind the car which had given Howard all he needed to get away.

Tony smacked away the gun that had been thrown up in his direction. It was easy, his movements were as natural as breathing, a quick twist of the man’s wrist and the gun fell from his hand and into Tony’s. A small flash of relief bloomed in his stomach as he took a small step back and raised
the gun, expecting a quick end to the fight. However, he did not anticipate the man’s torso shooting around almost inhumanly fast and swinging his left fist towards Tony.

Something hit the side of his head, something harder and colder than a fist, and he fell to the ground as his skull cracked loudly against the pavement. He was dazed immediately, but tried to maintain as much focus as possible as he quickly rolled to the side as a metal fist broke apart the street where his head had been.

Tony tried to get a good look at his attacker as he rolled away. Long, messy brown hair had fallen over his face so Tony wasn’t able to make out any of the features well, but the large cybernetic arm was quickly ripped from the concrete and grabbing Tony’s attention. It was large, with many metal plates sliding into one another with loud whirring sounds of machinery.

It looked heavy, probably a titanium alloy, which was certainly lighter than a steel alloy, but heavy in such a large amount needed to build an entire limb. Tony couldn’t see the circuitry inside but he would guess that it was extensive, given its quick and almost natural movements, which would add a bit more weight. There were too many variables and no time to consider them all, but the arm was heavy and it was throwing off his weight so Tony was going to take a shot.

The man reached for another gun from belt, leaning a bit further to his left. Tony, still lying on the ground, swept his legs out to knock the man off of his feet. His attacker’s legs jerked right and the weight on the left side of his body pulled him down.

Tony stood up quickly as the man fell, only to stumble back to the ground the moment he got his legs under him. His mind was swimming, black spots were dancing in front of his eyes, and his head was pounding. He was going to throw up. He could probably hold off all the nausea if he stayed completely still, but seeing as the man trying to kill him was already getting up it wasn’t likely.

Tony tried to stand again. He moved slower than normal, but most of his energy was focused on staying upright. The man was staring at him, his metal fist clenched at his side. He looked angry, his head was tilted down and his hooded eyes glared at Tony like something straight out of a nightmare.

“Fuck.” Tony whispered, breathing deeply. He wasn’t ready for this, he had only just recovered from a few cracked ribs and a dislocated shoulder. He hadn’t trained for something like this in months, he was probably going to be killed within the next few minutes.

He was halfway tempted to just sit down and accept whatever fate was coming. He was tired, confused, and didn’t feel like he had much energy left to keep fighting. But Howard was running somewhere and Tony had to keep this man distracted, at least long enough for SHIELD to show up.

Instead of bending down and grabbing one of the abandoned guns that lay at their feet, the man grabbed a knife from his belt and sprang forward. Tony jumped back as the knife barely missed slashing down his chest and tried to hit the hand away as it flew back around and catching the fabric of his coat around his stomach. The assailant grew annoyed quickly and connected his boot roughly against Tony’s sternum and kicked him back. He was in the air, no one had ever kicked Tony hard enough that he actually flew several feet backwards.

All breath was knocked from his lungs when his back connected against the pavement. He couldn’t move, didn’t have the energy to even lift his head. His body hurt, all the aches and pains just suddenly washing over him all at once.
The man walked was standing over him. Tony blinked up at him, flinching slightly as the sun reflected off of his metal arm and sending light into Tony’s face. This was probably it, the end of everything. He was going to kill him and all Tony could do was lay motionless in the middle of the street and try to catch his breath.

Nothing happened for what seemed to Tony like an unnecessarily long time. The man didn’t seem so angry anymore, or even aggressive. He simply looked curious as he looked down at Tony, his eyebrows furrowed and a slight tilt of his head. Before he could lean down and finish the job, killing Tony as he had just seemed so determined to do, the man jumped to the side and lifted his metal arm up to protect him as a bullet bounced off of it.

Howard stood several yards away, looking like an idiot with a gun raised and his wide eyes bouncing between Tony and the stranger’s face. The man turned, leaving Tony forgotten on the ground, and ran towards Howard.

“God damn idiot.” Tony whispered to himself. “I had it completely under control.”

He tried to push himself up, to stop the man from attacking Howard and bring the attention back to him. Tony was fine, he just needed a few minutes rest and lying on the ground had done just that. He could hold this guy off a bit longer.

Tony gasped as pain erupted from his stomach and he quickly put a firm hand on where the pain was coming from. His gut was warm, sticky. He could feel where the skin had been cut open from the tear through his coat and shirt and blood flowing too quickly from between his fingers. The man’s knife must have gone deeper than he thought. Tony would blame the adrenalin on why he didn’t feel it sooner.

He couldn’t focus, he could barely stay sitting up as his vision blurred and his head swam. Tony couldn’t hear anything over the ringing in his ears but he hoped Howard was smart enough to run. He was supposed to be this big famous genius so Tony prayed he wasn’t so stupid as to shoot at an assassin with a super strong cybernetic arm and then not run.

Tony’s vision went black and he was distantly aware of his head falling back against the pavement, but he was pretty sure he was still conscious. He could feel the immense pain circling his head and the harsh stinging on his stomach. He could feel the rough pavement scratching at his bruised and beaten muscles.

He wasn’t sure if the ringing in his ears were getting louder or if it was the sound of sirens approaching. There was a difference but Tony’s mind could just be playing tricks on him, making him hear things that weren’t really there.

He pried his eyes open, not entirely sure when he had closed them, and blinked slowly as he turned his head to the side. He couldn’t focus his vision but if the many large, dark shapes that were rushing around meant anything he hoped it was SHIELD.

Someone knelt down beside him, grabbing a hold of his wrist and squeezing lightly. They didn’t say anything to him, but the ringing in his ears was slowly dying down into a low murmur from everyone running around him.

“I need a medic!” The person yelled above him. He knew that voice.

“Hey.” He mumbled.

“Oh, good. You’re awake.” Agent Hill said. “For a second I thought you had died and that would
be horribly inconvenient.”

Someone yelled something from a few feet behind her. Tony could hear the voice but not make out the words, but whatever it was caused Hill to freeze up, her grip on his wrist becoming painful.

Tony didn’t care about what it was, his mind was wandering off again and all he knew was that he was going to pass out. He felt hands on his body, gentle and moving quickly, and before he could even comprehend what was happening his body was being carefully lifted off the ground. He blinked one last time and fell asleep.

…

Tony heard the beeping before anything else. He knew what it was immediately, a constant and very prominent sign that he was alive and still breathing. That was good, that meant he was okay.

Opening his eyes was more of a struggle than it should have been. They felt heavy and almost as if they were stuck together. Once he did manage to pry them open he blinked quickly at the bright lights shining down on him.

He wasn’t in any pain, nothing hurt although he figured things probably should. He was uncomfortable though. The side of his abdomen felt tighter than it should be, his eyes didn’t focus right, and he felt like something was wrong.

Steve was sitting right next to his bed, drawing in his sketchbook with shaking hands and red-rimmed eyes. He hadn’t noticed Tony had woken up. Peter was also there, passed out on a couch that was pushed into the corner of the room. No one else was there, but there was enough evidence to show that others were around.

Natasha’s coffee mug sat on the window sill and Clint’s shoes in the corner. One of Bruce’s sweatshirts were hanging over the back of the couch and there was so many candy wrappers in the trash can that Tony didn’t doubt they were all here.

“Hey, Tony.” Steve whispered quickly, leaning forward in his chair. “I’m so happy to see you awake!”

Tony was thankful for Steve’s quiet whispers. His head felt weird and he didn’t know if he would enjoy yelling all too much. Steve didn’t look too good, his hair was sticking up in several directions, his eyes looked bloodshot, he seemed too pale and exhausted.

“I think I fought a cyborg.” Tony muttered. His words slurried more than he thought they would, but the sentence was still understandable. “I’m tired.”

“That’s surprising, considering you’ve been asleep for two days.” Steve said quietly, sparing a quick glance at Peter still sleeping on the couch.

Tony’s eyes widened, confused. He didn’t think he had been sleeping that long. He would swear that five minutes ago he was being attacked by a half robot man wearing all black leather. Now that he thinks about it, it had been rather chilly out. The man didn’t wear anything warm and yet didn’t seem bothered by the weather at all.

“You slept through a lot. Like your emergency surgery from the pretty deep laceration on the left
side of your abdomen and then you slept through your MRI.” Steve said. His voice shook as he dropped his sketchbook onto the floor and reach forward for Tony’s hand, only to stop just inches from it. Tony wasn’t in the mood for Steve’s usual need to ask for permission first so he just raised his hand and flopped it in the man’s direction, smiling when he felt Steve’s larger and warmer hands encompass his. “They thought you weren’t gonna make it. You had lost a lot of blood, the cut on your side did a lot of damage, and you had a pretty bad concussion. Whoever attacked you guys must have been pretty important and terrible because SHIELD’s been in an uproar since it happened.”

“I was holding him off.” Tony said, his eyes starting to feel heavy again. “I almost had him.”

“Yeah, I’m sure you had him on the ropes.” Steve said, forcing a small smile.

“Did you guys get him?” Tony asked. Steve shook his head. “Where’s Howard? That idiot better have ran off.”

Steve’s face fell and he shook his head. “Let’s not talk about that right now. You’re tired and you should get some rest.” He gave Tony’s hand a light squeeze and lifted it to his mouth, giving Tony’s knuckle a soft kiss. Tony’s heart probably would have beat right out of his chest had he not been so confused by the deflection. “Please, we’ll talk about it in the morning. Just go to sleep Tony.”

“What’s going on?” Tony said slowly, trying to focus on the conversation and not the slightly faster beeps that signal is heartbeats.

Steve sighed and rubbed his face with his freehand. “When we got there you were looking pretty bad, but alive. We got there fast enough to save you.” Steve said, whispering so softly Tony almost couldn’t hear. “We didn’t get there fast enough to save Howard though.”

Tony blinked several times, processing the sentence over and over in his mind. "What does that mean?"

"He died, Tony." Steve said, burying his face in his hand and giving Tony's a gentle squeeze. Tony looked at Steve's shaking, heaving shoulders and frowned. "I'm so so sorry."

Chapter End Notes

Happy birthday to me! I'm 20 years old now.
Some of you guys are really good at guessing things, like who the attacker is and what's going to happen.
I'm sorry.
Comment, it's my birthday and I killed Howard.
Chapter 40

Tony did exactly what he was told to do. He stayed in his hospital bed all day, he slept occasionally, he took all the pills the nurses pushed towards him, and he let everyone hover around the room and keep an eye on him.

Natasha didn’t think he should be alone in the room, so there was always at least one person there to watch him. Tony didn’t think it was necessary, he was in the ICU and hooked up to so many machines he wouldn’t be able to go anywhere undetected even if he wanted to, but he didn’t bother telling any of them it was pointless. He was too tired, his mind couldn’t focus, and he didn’t think he had much energy to do much of anything besides lay on his side and blink at a wall.

“We’re worried, Tony.” Peter said. He was sitting in the chair that was right next to his hospital bed. Tony was facing away from him.

It wasn’t that Tony didn’t want to look at him, but if he rolled in Peter’s direction he would end up on his left side, which had a long, jagged cut through it. If he laid on his back it would disturb the bruising there and the tenderness on the back of his skull. So lying on his right side was easiest, he still had to be gentle with the large, deep purple bruise that engulfed the right side of his head, but it was more comfortable than the alternatives. However, it made him look like he was avoiding eye contact with whoever was sitting in that chair at any particular time.

He hummed softly. Of course they were worried, he had been awake for less than a day and was on so a large amount of medications, his mind was clouded and unfocused, and he had just found out that Howard died. He may not have known the man long, but he certainly felt his absence.

“Have I ever told you about my uncle Ben?” Peter asked softly. Tony didn’t answer, he just continued to breathe in and out slowly as he felt the burning in his stomach start to tingle back to life. He probably needed more painkillers that he was actually getting. “He was wonderful and smart and I loved him. My parents dropped me off with him and aunt May, I know I mentioned her at least once, which I was a kid. They never came back so May and Ben raised me.”

Tony was paying attention. He didn’t know if Peter was aware that he was listening, but Tony was not willing to talk just yet. He wasn’t sure he could if he tried.

“He died a few years back, it’s kinda my fault.” Peter said slowly. He sounded sad, heartbroken. Tony didn’t like that tone in Peter’s voice.

He rolled slowly, carefully so as to not pull on his stitches. Lying on his back was uncomfortable, only slightly painful as the mattress pressed into his bruises. He didn’t want to fight that man again, the one with the metal arm. He packed a punch and even just tossing Tony to the ground had left a canvas of dark purples and blues across his skin.

It was his head he wanted to look out for. The back of his skull had taken a pretty bad hit from where it cracked against the pavement and the right side of his face was a large mass of bruising and deep scrapes from where the metal fist made contact. It was more uncomfortable than painful, but he really should have stayed on his side.

“Oh, so you are awake.” Peter said, smiling when Tony faced him. “I figured you fell asleep again,
“No, I haven’t.” Tony whispered quietly. He blinked quickly as Peter just shook his head with a light chuckle.

“You really have. You’ve just been lying quietly in bed and staring at nothing and sometimes you nod off to sleep. Which is good.” Peter said. He looked as bad as he sounded, the edges of his mouth turned down into a frown and his eyes were red and puffy. “You need rest, you’ve been through a lot.”

Tony just hummed as he continued to blink at Peter. He wasn’t sure if Peter wanted him to fall asleep so he could talk about wherever he was going with his story or if he really wanted Tony to listen, but he would do either if it made him feel better.

Peter waited for a few seconds, apparently seeing if Tony really was going to go back to sleep or not, before continuing. His words were soft and gentle. Tony was thankful for the quiet sounds, his head not quite prepared for loud noises yet.

“We got in a fight that day. It was my fault, I was being stupid and didn’t do what he asked of me. He gave me something important to do and I neglected it.” Peter said slowly. “He just went on and on about responsibilities and it turned into a big fight and I stormed out of the house. He came after me.”

Peter wasn’t really looking at him anymore, just staring at some spot on the wall as he spoke. Tony didn’t mind. The discussion was distracting him from the gradually growing pain on his stomach and circling his head.

“I was in a convenience store, there was a robbery, and I didn’t stop it. Uncle Ben was out looking for me. When he showed up the guy shot him.” Peter said slowly. His eyes were unfocused and his hands trembled slightly.

“Why didn’t he run?” Tony asked, his voice hoarse.

“I told you already.” Peter said, smiling slightly as he looked back to Tony. “He was big on responsibility.”

Tony hummed softly and looked away. He stared up at the ceiling, the white panels were dusty and the bright florescent lights burned at Tony’s sensitive eyes. “He should have run.” He whispered softly.

“I know you cared about your dad. You guys were just starting to connect.” Peter said.

Tony sighed. “He should have run.” He said again.

“Well, he didn’t.” Peter said. Tony looked back at him with a frown. “Ben didn’t run and Howard didn’t run, they did what they thought was right. Now we’re both here.”

Tony was tired, he was in pain, and he wasn’t really in the mood to have Howard’s actions once again excused away. Peter’s whole story was just a way to open up a way to get Tony to talk and he didn’t want to. Howard should have run off and saved himself, Tony had the whole thing under control.

“No. He’s gone. He left me again.” Tony muttered. He tried to gently turn himself back to his side, to face away from Peter, but the moment he moved even the slightest amount pain shot across his chest and stomach. His vision whitened out and he fell back onto the bed.
He closed his eyes. His ears were ringing, the lights were too bright, and everything hurt. He didn’t want to talk about it, didn’t want to think about it. It was a lie, a trick, Howard was too loud, too stubborn, and too annoying to be dead. The world would be too quiet and boring without him.

“He saved your life, Tony. I know it must hurt.” Peter said slowly.

Tony didn’t say anything, didn’t do anything, he just lay perfectly still as he kept his eyes closed. He tried to focus on the quiet sounds of Peter shifting in the chair next to him, the quiet hum of the florescent lights, and the constant beeping of the machines he was hooked up to.

It was nice, calming. He was warm and comfortable under the somewhat scratchy hospital sheets and the thick quilt Clint had thrown over him during the night. Tony just wanted to focus on that, not the fact that everyone kept telling him that Howard was dead and how lucky he was to be alive.

His eyes were heavy when he opened them again. All of his bruises were throbbing harshly and sharp, stabbing pains were shooting through his skull. He must have fallen asleep. On one side of him a nurse smiled gently as she increased the amount of painkillers he was getting. That was good. On his other side, Steve sat in Peter’s place, humming as he continued scribbling in his sketchbook.

“What are you drawing?” Tony asked, his throat hurt and his voice was shaky.

Steve’s face went bright red almost instantly as his eyes snapped up to Tony. He loved the way Steve would blush and the color would run down his neck and to the tips of his ears. Steve closed his sketchbook quickly and leaned forward.

“Nothing.” He said. He reached forward slowly and took Tony’s hand in his. “Is this okay?” Tony nodded. It was fine. Steve’s hands were large and gentle and safe. He cradled his hand so carefully Steve probably thought it would shatter to pieces with any wrong move.


Tony smiled. “I’m fine.”

Steve gave Tony a small smile. He didn’t look too good, he liked tired and stressed. Dark circles were appearing under his eyes and his hair was sticking up in several different directions as if he’s been running his fingers through them too much.

“I’ve been so worried. I mean, you’re probably having a tough time with all of this.” Steve said quickly. “Just know I’m here for you, I’m not going anywhere. If you need me I’ll do anything.”

Tony smiled at that. Steve was too sweet. Tony shifted his hand, curling his fingers around Steve’s. He was probably having a hard time too. Howard was Steve’s friends. They knew each other from back before Steve was frozen. He was probably having a tougher time of this than he was.

“Are you okay?” Tony whispered. The drugs were hitting him now, his words were slurring a bit and his body felt heavy, but the pain was fading away.

Steve nodded quickly. “I’m fine. I’ll be okay. I’m just relieved you’re okay.” He said. He did it again. Steve gently pressed Tony’s hand to his mouth and Tony flooded with warmth. “We can work it all out later. Everything will get better. We’re going to be okay.”

“I love you.” Tony blurted out. He didn’t quite understand, he was thinking it and he certainly didn’t mean to say it out loud. Steve froze instantly and Tony pulled his hand away. Tony
panicked, his mind racing from one solution to another as his words defaulted back to Dutch. He wasn’t quite sure what he was saying, just that fast murmurs were escaping his lips.

“Oh.” Steve said, the deep red blush returning to his face. He looked away, his eyes scanning the room quickly. “That’s good to hear. Um, thank you.”

Tony blinked a few times, confused on what had just happened. It was a rejection, a dismissal. The pain was mostly gone now so it wasn’t very difficult to turn back on his side. On his right side was definitely better. As the painkillers rushed through his system and turned all pain into a slight discomfort he was able to press his bruised up face into his pillow and try to block everything out.

He started crying then, a dam had burst in him and the tears flowed freely from his face. Everything was terrible, Howard was gone. He had loved Tony, he was sure of it. Tony was positive his mother loved him, so why not Howard? He may not have ever come to rescue Tony, but he made sure he had everything he needed once he came back. Tony had been too difficult, too angry, he should have forgiven him. It was too late now though, Howard was gone.

Why did he have to leave? Why did he leave Tony alone again? He should have done more, should have saved him. It was Tony’s fault, Howard came back for him and now he’s gone. Why would he do that? It didn’t make sense, he could have ran away and be alive. But no, he had to come back and get himself killed and abandon him all over again.

“Why?” Tony asked between breathy sobs, his voice muffled by his pillow. He felt a strong hand rubbing gentle circles up and down his back. “Why did he leave? Why doesn’t anyone want me?”

“Oh hell, Tony.” Steve said from behind him with a shaky voice. “I want you. He didn’t leave, he came back to save you. You are his son, he tried to protect you. He wants you too. He loves you. And if you hadn’t caught me by surprise I would have told you I loved you too, because I do. And you’re going to be okay. I know it hurts now. I know you feel confused and afraid and alone, but I’ll always be here for you and I want to see you happy again. But never doubt that people do want you.”

Tony could feel him, Steve’s head was resting lightly on Tony’s shoulder with his hand still trailing up and down his back. He rolled over quickly, probably too quickly, and buried his face in Steve’s chest. The stitches on his stomach pulled uncomfortably, sending a quick stab of pain across his side, and his head spun wildly, but he was safe and warm in Steve’s arm.


Tony nodded against Steve’s chest. He would be okay, but right now it just hurt too much.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the chapter. It took me a bit longer to write than I intended. I’m not too sure about how it came out but I hope you think it’s okay.

More of Tony in mourning to come, more about Howard, and a bit more Peter.

Comment.
Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

Here it is, the next chapter. It ended up longer than planned.
I’ve been watching Daredevil and it’s amazing

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony hadn’t spoken in 47 hours. It wasn’t a big deal, he just had a lot on his mind that he decided to work out in silence. He still had to wrap his head around the fact that Howard was really gone, which just sounded wrong whenever he thought about it. He had only known the guy for several weeks but already the world seemed far too quiet and far too empty. It was wrong.

Steve stayed with him. He had dragged another chair to the other side of the bed so Tony could still see him even when he moved to a more comfortable position. That was another thing that didn’t make sense in Tony’s head. He had told Steve he loved him and Steve said it back and now they were just lying around quietly. Tony didn’t know what to do, didn’t know if he was supposed to say anything. Steve probably didn’t mean it like Tony had, but it didn’t matter. Someone loved Tony and he was just happy for that.

“You’re going to have some visitors today, if you’re up for it.” Steve said. Tony glanced over to him. “It’s Jarvis and Howard’s lawyers. I don’t know if anyone else will stop by or not but I’ll let you know when I find out.”

Tony nodded. He could see Jarvis. He wanted to see Jarvis. He missed the older man with his peppermint smelling hugs and tendency to just cook Tony an obnoxious amount of food. The man was caring and protective and Tony felt like being taken care of. He liked Jarvis, missed him.

“I’m not entirely sure who they’re bringing in exactly, besides Jarvis. Nat seems pretty excited thought so they’re probably trustworthy people.” Steve said. He smiled softly towards Tony. “She wouldn’t let anyone hurt you.”

Tony sighed and turned his head into the pillow. It was soft. Tony liked his pillow and he liked the warm blankets that were piled on top of him. He couldn’t get comfortable though. He tried not to move too much, he stayed in the least painful position he could, but it wasn’t good enough. His heart felt like it was beating too fast all the time, the nurses had to run in to check on him a few times. The deep cut on his side had reopened the one time Tony tried to stand up on his own. Steve had gone to the bathroom, promised to be right out within a few minutes. But Tony felt restless, like he couldn’t stay still any longer or his skeleton would claw its way right out of his
skin. If given the opportunity he would say he fell after he was able to stand up, but that would be a lie. Tony barely even got himself to sit up straight before he leaned over to the side and fell straight to the floor. Steve ran out of the bathroom, Natasha came in and yelled at him, and his side had to be re-stitched. No moving for a while.

He still couldn’t think right either, whatever drugs they had pumped through his IV made his mind scatter and Tony could only grasp on to a few pieces at a time. The one time he told the nurses to stop giving him painkillers everything had hurt so much that he couldn’t focus anyway. Everything felt wrong, flashes of thoughts relating to Howard’s death, the metal armed man who had attacked them, all the years he had spent with Mesman and Lotte, the few months he had been away from them, and what he was supposed to say to Jarvis when he got here was rushing through his head and he couldn’t focus on one long enough to figure out a solution. The world was falling apart and all he could do was wait until he was better enough to deal with it.

His heart rate was picking up again, the usual quick beats becoming rapid. A large, warm hand gently gripped his and a thumb ran over his knuckles.

“Tony, are you okay?” Steve asked softly. “Do you need anything? Do you want me to get a nurse?”

Tony shook his head, his face still pressed into the pillow. He took several deep breathes, willing himself to calm down and relax. Everything was okay. He was alive, he was breathing, and everything would work itself out somehow.

There was a soft, quick beeping off to the side. It was quieter than the medical equipment but Tony didn’t lift his head to see what it was. Steve shifted in his seat and the hand he had on Tony’s gave one final, gentle squeeze before letting go.

“Jarvis and the lawyers are here, if you’re up to see them.” Steve said slowly. Tony lifted his head slowly, turning to look at him. Tony nodded. “Okay, do you want me to stay?”

Tony didn’t want that. Steve looked tired with the circles under his eyes and drooped shoulders. He needed a break from Tony and the stress he was probably causing him. Tony shook his head.

“Okay, do you want me to get someone to sit with you while they’re here? I don’t know much about Howard’s lawyers but I think they’re here for something important. I don’t want them taking advantage of you while you’re like this.” Steve said seriously. That would probably be smart. Tony didn’t know the lawyers, didn’t trust them, and right now he could hardly think straight. Tony nodded quickly. “Okay, how about Natasha? She might know how to handle
Tony nodded again. That would probably be best. Tony moved slowly as he rolled onto his back, Steve’s hands had found their way to his shoulders to keep him steady so he wouldn’t roll off the bed again. Once he was lying still, frowning at the slight pressure on his bruises and tug on the cuts and scrapes around his head, Steve paused. Tony felt like he was being studied, like every small twitch of his face was being categorized. He leaned forward and placed a soft kiss against Tony’s bandaged forehead.

“Just stay put.” Steve whispered.

Tony smiled as he turned and walked out of the room. Steve had stopped asking to touch him, which was relieving, but now he was constantly on watch for anything that made Tony uncomfortable. His overprotectiveness and constant effort to not do anything Tony wanted was annoying, it made each small and gentle touch planned and careful. It felt unnatural. He was handling Tony like a broken thing. Also, Tony still wasn’t used to people asking him what he wanted instead of just doing what they pleased.

He blinked up at the ceiling for a few minutes, lying perfectly still and waiting. His eyes scanned the patterns above him and he listened to the muffled hum coming from the vents. He wasn’t waiting long before Natasha walked in, three men trailing along behind her. One of them was Jarvis, he didn’t recognize the other two.

“Oh, Anthony. What have they done to you?” Jarvis elbowed past the two other men, probably the lawyers based on their expensive looking suits and the obnoxious way they held themselves.

Tony smiled softly and reached his hand out. Jarvis took it quickly and dropped into Steve’s vacated chair. With one hand gripping Tony’s hand he reached over with his other and gently brushed the hair back from his forehead.

“Tony, you look absolutely dreadful. If I didn’t know any better I would say you were hit by a very ambitious truck.” Jarvis said, forcing a smile. Tony breathed out a soft laugh. One of the two men standing off to the side cleared his throat. “Ah, yes. Tony, these are a few of Mr. Stark’s lawyers. They’re here to discuss the matter of his will.”

“We’re two of his more… important lawyers. As you can imagine he has quite a few.” One of the men said, the shorter one who wore a grey suit as opposed to the taller one’s black suit. “And we’re just honored to finally meet you, the famed son of Howard Stark, finally back after all these years.”
There was a pause. Natasha sighed, Jarvis rolled his eyes, the short lawyer glanced around awkwardly, and the tall one just stared directly at Tony, unblinking. Tony stared back and didn’t say a word.

“Mr. Stark hasn’t been very talkative today.” Natasha said, breaking the short silence. “It’s completely normal, he’s had a tough week. He’s tired.”

“We’ll only be a moment.” The short one said. They hadn’t introduced themselves, hadn’t given their names, and Tony didn’t feel like asking. “We’re just here to tell young Anthony what he’s inherited.”

Tony blinked a few times, waiting to hear what they had to say. He already knew, he would get nothing. It didn’t matter. He didn’t want anything. After all those years Howard’s life had kept on going and Tony had played no part in it, they had known each other for just a few months before this happened. It wasn’t enough time to even figure his father out, let alone get a spot on the will.

“Everything.” The tall lawyer said, speaking for the first time. Tony’s attention snapped to him. “Howard Stark left you with everything. All of his properties, all of his money, and even his company.”

“Although, he had stated that Mr. Stane would be taking over as CEO. You now own a majority of the stocks however, so the company is yours.” The short one said. He gave a quick smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “There will also be a large sum of money being donated to various charities, but it will hardly make a dent in the total sum of cash.”

The shorter one looked down at his watch while the taller one walked up to Tony’s hospital bed and held out a folder. “A list of everything you’re inheriting. It’s quite extensive so read it when you get the chance.” He said. He hadn’t taken his eyes off of Tony since they had come in, it was unsettling. “It’s rather convenient that he updated his will just a few weeks before he died. Congratulations.”

“There will be a lot of paperwork, but we’ll save that for when you’re more focused.” The short one said.

They both turned to leave quickly, leaving behind a trail of expensive smelling cologne and uncomfortable feelings. Jarvis took the folder from Tony gently and placed it on the table just off
to the side.

That wasn’t as difficult as Tony expected. They had just come in, said a few things, and left. He was glad they were gone, he didn’t like the way they looked or how they spoke. He was glad Natasha was there to scare them off just in case.

Tony struggled to roll back onto his side, but Jarvis’s gentle hands supported him as he moved and before he knew it Tony’s face was pressed into the soft pillow again and Jarvis was running his fingers through his hair as he murmured soft words Tony couldn’t quite make out. Jarvis still smelled like peppermint and Tony found it comforting.

He should probably say something, at least to Jarvis, the man who had known his family since before Tony was born. Tony didn’t know what he should say though. An apology for not protecting Howard? Promise him that everything will be okay?

“Jarvis…” Tony whispered softly, his voice hoarse from disuse. It would probably hurt if not for all the tiny pains in his body being flushed away and the major pains turning into slight, annoying discomforts by all the medications he was on.

His head was carefully lifted up and a cup of ice water was brought to his lips. Tony drank it thankfully, cherishing the coolness that washed over him. He drank his fill and the cup was placed just out of reach.

“Are you alright, Anthony? Anything you want to discuss, you can.” Jarvis said quickly. Tony looked him over. His eyes were red with purple bruises forming under them from lack of sleep, his shoulders were slumped forward, and he just seemed so tired and run down that for the first time Tony noticed how old he was.

“What am I supposed to do?” Tony whispered.

Jarvis shook his head. “I don’t know, but I’ll be here to help you.” He said.

“I’m sorry.” Tony said. He had broken his silence. For over two days Tony had stayed perfectly silent, nodding and shaking his head to questions, listening but not taking part in conversations, it had been confusing. Tony was left alone with the thousands of thoughts running through his mind and the fear that if he opened his mouth he would say something stupid again. Now he felt like he needed to speak. “I couldn’t… I tried. I told him to run but he came back. What kind of moron
“He made his choice.” Jarvis said, pulling Tony close and into a firm embrace, still careful of his injuries. Tony was still mostly lying down, but his shoulders had been lifted slightly and pulled towards Jarvis’s chest. “Yes, he’s an idiot. But you’re alive and I’m so incredibly thankful for that.”

“Jarvis?” Tony said slowly. The man hummed above him. “Am I an orphan?”

Tony knew the word, he had heard it on tv shows, read it in books, and knew it was sad and used for kids who were alone. Tony felt alone. He was surrounded by people who promised to take care of him and yet he felt so isolated and afraid he didn’t know what to do. He heard Jarvis inhale sharply above him, but no one answered. They all stayed where they were. Tony twisted himself slightly so his head was resting on Jarvis’s arm instead of hanging where it was. It was warm and Tony’s eyes were starting to droop down again. He had been sleeping a lot recently.

“Hey everyone, I’ve brought pudding cups.”

Tony’s eyes snapped open at Peter’s loud entrance. He looked over and saw that he was in fact carrying several pudding cups. Tony wasn’t particularly hungry but he was thankful. He pulled away from Jarvis and moved to sit up. Jarvis immediately began fluffing the pillows and using them to help Tony prop himself up.

“Do you want chocolate or vanilla?” Peter asked walking up to the side of Tony’s hospital bed.

“Neither, thank you.” Tony said, smiling at his friend.

Peter shrugged and sat down on the edge of the bed. Natasha stepped forward and grabbed a chocolate pudding before giving Tony a gentle pat on the shoulder and leaving the room. It was a shame to see her leave, she hadn’t done much talking, not that Tony was in a talkative mood, and they hadn’t seen each other much the past few days.

“Rhodey and I are doing well in our classes, no one is questioning the fact that after the Hulk attacked MIT our attendance has gone down and you disappeared.” Peter said as he ripped open one of the tiny cups. “The homework is kinda boring compared to all the spy stuff I’ve been exposed to but I’m not complaining, I’m loving it. How are you doing?”
“Howard’s lawyers stopped by.” Tony said. He reached over to grab the folder they had left.

His eyes scanned the list of things he was inheriting, he skipped the longer, more complicated words and instead focused on the things easier to read and the few pictures. There was a lot. Photos of beachside mansions, city apartments, expensive looking vehicles, cars and planes lined a few papers. It was all a bit much, he couldn’t understand why Howard would give it all to him.

“How much money did he give you?” Peter asked. “Enough to pay my health insurance? Eh, best friend?” Tony laughed and Peter gave him a playful smile. He glanced at the numbers.

“A couple billion, I suppose.” As soon as Tony said the words Peter choked on his pudding, sending it dribbling out of his mouth. “I suppose that’s a lot.”

“You suppose? That’s so much money! You never have to worry about anything every again. Your bills, groceries, tuition, anything you want.” Peter said quickly.

“I think I might still have to worry about all the people who want me dead.” Tony muttered. “Besides, I’ve never had money before so I don’t know how much a lot is.”

Peter’s face fell quickly. “Well, you have a lot. Are you okay?” He said. “Are they really after you? You need security, where were all the super spies that were supposed to be watching your back? I suggest you get a body guard, I can do it if you want. You don’t even have to pay me, but we’ll have to discuss the health insurance thing again.”

Tony shrugged. “I don’t know how to pay healthy insurance but if I’m really getting a lot of money I can pay it no problem.” He said, glancing over at Jarvis. “Will you help me with that?”

“Of course, Anthony. I will help you with anything you require.” Jarvis said and he smiled. Tony relaxed further into his pillows.

“I was joking.” Peter said, waving his hand around quickly. “No need to pay any of my bills.”

“Too late, I’m doing it.” Tony said.
Peter opened his mouth to continue arguing when Natasha knocked on his door. She looked them all over carefully, focusing particularly on Tony. There was a silent moment as she gauged the situation before nodding.

“Tony, your other guest is here. If you’re up for it.” She said calmly. Tony frowned but nodded anyway. She was being hesitant, but Tony trusted her not to send in anyone who would be potentially dangerous or unhealthy for Tony to see.

Natasha walked back out the door. Tony took a deep breath and rubbed his palm over his face. Everything was fine, he would be okay. He kept telling himself that every few hours and hoped eventually he would believe it. Everything was fine, he would be okay.

“Hello, bright eyes.” A female voice said from the doorway.

Tony looked over to see the woman entering. She seemed harmless enough. Her brown hair was pulled up into a bun and her lips were bright red. The woman watched Tony, couldn’t take her eyes off of him as her face seemed to flash several different emotions. She appeared almost as nervous as Tony felt as she rubbed her hands together and took a few careful steps forward. Tony didn’t think this woman would hurt him.

Jarvis smiled at her. “Hello, Peggy.”

Chapter End Notes

Yay. Peggy's here.
* shameless self promotion: my tumblr *
Comment please, let me know what you think of it.
Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

I'm exhausted. I would say I'm going to take a nap but it's 1 am so that's probably just regular sleep.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Peggy wasn’t what Tony expected, what he remembered. The few blurry, faded memories of the woman he had were always happy, with large red smiles and bouncing brown hair. They were full of laughter and always seemed bright. Now, it all seemed different and she seemed out of place.

Her face was bare, only minimal make up that highlighted her eyes and cheekbones. That alone made her almost unrecognizable to Tony. Her brown hair was streaked grey and pulled up away from her face. She wasn’t smiling and her eyes seemed red as if she was crying. She didn’t look like the Peggy Tony remembered.

“Well, look at you.” Peggy said as she took a few careful steps towards Tony. “I certainly wish we could have met under better circumstances, but I came as soon as I heard the news.”

Tony looked away from her, his eyes glancing around the room quickly as he tried to find something to distract himself with. He settled on the window, where it looked like it was snowing. His muscles were becoming too tense, his stomach turning over and his heartrate was picking up slowly.

“Why are you here?” He asked slowly.

“I wanted to come sooner, but everyone kept saying they didn’t want to overwhelm you. You’ve been going through a tough time.” Peggy said. He heard movement and saw from the corner of his eye Jarvis standing and offering Peggy his seat. “I was so thrilled to hear that you had been found, that you came back. Howard called me often, just going on and on about how wonderful you were.”

“Yeah?” Tony said softly, the word hardly more than a breath. He continued to stare out the window and tucked his shaking hands under his blankets.

“Oh, yes. Howard adored you from the moment you were born.” Peggy said. “I’m not going to excuse anything he does - did, he was always too busy and too distracted to be the father you needed. But he considered you one of the greatest things in his life.”

“Okay. You still haven’t answered the question.” Tony said slowly. His gaze gradually drifted back to the window. The carefully falling flakes of snow were mesmerizing as the danced around outside. He blinked a few times, trying to stop his fuzzy mind from once again wandering away from the important things. “Why are you here? What do you want?”

Tony didn’t like how his voice sounded. It was too soft, too shaky, not nearly as firm and determined as it should have been in this situation. He was losing control of everything. His body didn’t move or feel like it should, his mind couldn’t focus, and everyone around him represented too many unknown variable, he didn’t know what they were going to do or how they would react.
to him. Tony wasn’t sure if he should be afraid or not.

“I don’t want anything.” Peggy said. Tony looked back towards her as she gave a light shake of the head.

“Yes, you do.” Tony muttered. “Everyone wants something. Howard wanted me to be his son, SHIELD wants me to be Tony Stark, people want me to steal information, they want me to eat all my food, they want me to be good. I’m not sure I can give everyone everything they want, but they all want something. What do you want?”

Peggy was silent, frowning as she analyzed Tony’s face. He was familiar with the express, with the careful way she held herself and contemplated all of his little micro expressions. She was a spy, Tony seemed to be surrounded by them.

“Well, I suppose I’m part of the group that wants you to eat, sleep, and be generally alright.” Peggy said, giving him a soft smile. “I could also go for the names of the people who’ve been keeping you all these years, a description of the man who attacked you and Howard, and perhaps you could let me buy dinner for you and your friends.”

Tony leaned away. He wasn’t really hungry so dinner didn’t sound appetizing. Actually, he felt like if he tried to eat anything he would just curl up in a corner and vomit, not something that sounded too appealing to him. Also, he wouldn’t dare be able to utter Mesman and Lotte’s names to these people. He remembered slipping up once, telling Mesman’s name to Natasha but she had never brought it up again. He hoped she had simply forgotten.

“He had brown hair, went down to his shoulders. Dirty, like he hadn’t showered in a while.” Tony said slowly. “It was kinda gross really. The longest I ever went without bathing was probably a week but that was because I was currently living in a tree and the water in the area was freezing. Why does Canada get so cold? It wasn’t even winter anymore, it was like early spring.”

“Well?” Peter said, cutting in on Tony’s Canada rant. Tony looked over to him, raising an eyebrow. “You’re going off topic. It’s cool, it happens. We’ll have to talk about your trip to Canada sometime because it sounds like an interesting story, but right now you were going to describe the man who attacked you.”

“Oh, yeah.” Tony said. He nodded slowly as he continued. “He had a metal arm with a red star on it. It was pretty neat. He was taller than me. He had a nice face, wouldn’t have been so bad to look at if he hadn’t been trying to kill me.”

“Tony.” Jarvis said.

“Right, right.” Tony said. “I don’t know what you want me to say. I only got a somewhat decent look at the guy after he bashed my head into the asphalt. It was a guy.”

Peggy smiled, wider this time. She reached out slowly, resting her palm gently on Tony’s face. He didn’t turn away, but the idea did enter his mind. He wasn’t too thrilled about this stranger touching him, no matter how familiar they had been when he was younger and life was simpler. Her hands weren’t as soft as he expected, they were rough and calloused. She patted his cheek lightly and gently moved her fingers up to brush his hair off of his forehead.

“Now, I want you to tell me all about your interests, hobbies, favorite color, your friends, anything. I missed you so much, Tony. We really do need to catch up.” Peggy said quickly, pulling her hand back. “I’ll tell you about my day as well because let me tell you, parking at SHIELD has certainly gone to hell since I retired.”
Tony’s attention had returned to the window. It was still snowing, Tony liked that. It was calm and slow and it was distracting enough that he could no longer hear the other people in the room talking. The patterns of the falling flakes burned into his mind as he watched them.

The world was falling apart, which he shouldn’t really be surprised by. His world had always been shaky and unstable, always at risk of crumbling down if someone or something put too much pressure in the wrong places. He just hadn’t really seen it before.

“We should go outside.” Tony muttered. Everyone looked over to him, silent and surprised. “Yeah, let’s go outside.”

He threw his blankets off of him and swung his legs off of the bed, his balance was only thrown off slightly and he was thankful for Peter’s steady hand that shot up to stop him from falling. Tony reached over and squeezed his hand. He wasn’t stupid, he knew that the moment he tried to stand up on his own he would fall flat on his face and into the cold linoleum of the hospital floors. That would probably be more humiliating than the alternative. He would need help, everyone was always offering to give that to him so it was time to see if they were being honest about that.

“Go get a wheelchair.” Tony said, leaning over and resting his head on Peter’s shoulder.

“You sure?” He asked calmly. Tony could hear the uncertainty in his voice, but he nodded anyway.

Peter stood up and made sure Tony was as steady as possible before leaving the room to hunt down a wheelchair. It should be a simple enough task. Either they were in a hospital or SHIELD medical, no one had told him which and Tony didn’t ask, so wheelchairs should be everywhere.

Jarvis watched Peter leave before turning back to Tony quickly. “Mr. Stark, Tony, I’ll have to ask you to please lay back down. You haven’t had enough time to properly recuperate from your injuries.” He said, raising his hands to Tony’s shoulders. “Please, stay in bed.”

Tony pushed Jarvis’s hands away from him. “No, J. I don’t want to. Outside.” He whispered with a quick nod.

“Tony, there was just an attempt on your life. You shouldn’t be up and about at the moment.” Jarvis said. “Please, just lay back down.”

“I don’t want to lay back down. I don’t want to spend the day laying there and just listening to everyone who walks into the room drone on and on about what’s good for me and what I should and should not do.” Tony said, the volume of his voice rising slightly with each syllable. “I just want to go outside. I won’t run off or do anything bad. Just outside.”

Jarvis sat back in his chair, squeezing his eyes shut and pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers. He was stressed, but it didn’t matter. Tony needed to get outside. The room was too hot, too stuffy, it was suffocating him. Outside would be good. There was fresh air out there and he could get a better view of the snow.

“You can’t stop him, Mr. Jarvis. When was the last time you were able to stop a Stark from doing anything?” Peggy said, standing up. She started to dig through her purse, pulling out a note pad and writing quickly before ripping out the paper and holding it out to Tony. “These are all my numbers. I want you to call me if you ever need anything. And I mean anything. Your father certainly had no problem with crashing into my life and asking for favors and I would encourage you to do the same.”
Tony took the piece of paper, his eyes barely registering the numbers as he scanned them. He nodded anyway. Based on how she moved and looked at him Peggy was definitely a spy, a good one too. But she didn’t seem dangerous. He didn’t plan on calling her for anything but the numbers were nice to have. He tuck them under Steve’s sketchbook, which was sitting abandoned on the small stand next to the bed, ready for his next visit.

Peggy smiled, it was stiff and small, as she leaned forward and planted a gentle kiss to the bandages around his forehead. Then she turned and left. Tony didn’t watch her leave. Instead he went back to looking out the window. It was still snowing, that was good.

It wasn’t long until Peter was back, smiling brightly as Clint followed behind him with a wheelchair. “Now, you’re not allowed out by yourself because you’re still hurt so I’m coming with you.” Clint said.

The chair stopped a few feet from the bed. Tony looked across the distance with anxiety gripping onto his stomach, he couldn’t walk that far. He was surprised, but relieved, when Clint walked around the chair and gently lifted Tony into his arms as if he weighed nothing at all. Then he was carefully placed into the wheelchair, the IVs he was attached to were attached to a hook on the side of the chair, and pushed out of the room and down the hall. Tony was going to guess they really were in SHIELD medical, there were enough agents wandering around the halls to make it a SHIELD building or for some reason they just poured dozens of people into a single building.

Natasha met them at the end of the hall. She didn’t look happy, but said nothing as she held out a winter coat. Tony reached out and took it, nodding to her as Clint continued to lead him towards the elevator.

“Well, I hate the cold. I’m just going to head over to see Banner and see if he’ll tutor me.” Peter said. “College is hard.”

“Make good choices.” Tony called after him, flinching at the pain that flared quickly in his throat but disappeared almost immediately.

The elevator ride didn’t take much time at all and soon he could see the large glass doors that were the exit. But Clint turned sharply and down a hall, away from the windows. Tony whined softly, this wasn’t what he wanted. He wanted to go outside, not be led down windowless, daunting hallways. He just wanted to go outside.

There was an exit towards the back of the building, marked with a sign that said it was for emergencies but Clint pushed it open without care. Finally, he was outside. It was better than he thought it would be. Tony pulled the coat Natasha had given him over himself like a blanket and watched the large flakes of snow fall all around him. It was strange. All the things he used to find new and terrifying, such as the large buildings and never ending sky, had become calming and beautiful.

They just sat there for a few minutes, Clint fidgeting awkwardly at Tony’s left. He hadn’t known Jarvis had followed them until the older man placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. Tony leaned his head against the arm.

“I have to leave soon, Tony. Business I need to attend to.” He whispered softly. Tony nodded. “I promise to come back in no time at all.”

Tony smiled, letting the man ruffle his hair gently and walk away towards the parking garage. It was just him and Clint now, waiting out in the snow as it gradually piled up on the ground. Soft winds blew by and sent icy air up under the coat he had laid across him. He shivered slightly but
didn’t dare ask Clint to take him inside. Instead his head just lolled to the side and he continued to watch the seemingly random pattern of the snowfall.

Chapter End Notes

I think that turned out cuter than I intended. But that's probably a good thing. Comment please, I love you all.
Tony didn’t cry. Not when Jarvis came by to tell him when the funeral was, and certainly not when his doctors told him he was still too injured to attend. Tony definitely didn’t cry when everyone left and he was alone.

It was the first time since the attack that Tony was actually alone. Natasha and Clint went to do some extra work while several upper level agents attended the funeral. Since there was less security in the building Bruce wasn’t allowed to leave his room and Rhodey and Peter weren’t allowed to visit. Steve was Howard’s friend. He went to the funeral. Stayed the night with Tony the day before, curled up in a chair that was too small for him, and said goodbye before he left.

Tony spent a great deal of time just blinking at the wall. Memorizing the small patterns in the paint. His mind was silent. Usually thousands of thoughts would pour through his head, even with all the morphine in his system his thoughts weren’t organized by they were still present and often times overwhelming. Now his head felt too quiet. It wasn’t necessarily a bad thing, it probably just meant he was tired.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Stark?” The nurse asked softly as she walked into the room. Tony closed his eyes. “Are you in any pain?”

Tony took a deep breath and shook his head lightly. He wasn’t in any pain. He didn’t feel anything. He waited until the nurse left, listening to the soft sounds she made next to him and hearing her leave. Opening his eyes, he pushed himself up until he was sitting. No one was here. Everyone was gone or busy, no one was interested in what he was doing.

Tony wanted to go for a walk. He hadn’t done much walking these past few weeks. He either laid in bed or was pushed around in a wheelchair. He wanted to go for a walk, by himself. It would be good for him, help him focus, figure out what the hell was going on in his head.

“Mr. Stark, I highly suggest you lay back down.” The nurse said quickly, rushing in as he started pulling out his IVs, disconnecting himself from the numerous machines. Tony ignored her until he was free from all the wires. “Lay back down or I’ll call security.”

“Go ahead. They won’t come. I’m not the priority right now.” Tony said, smiling to himself. “It’s wonderful. I can just get up and walk around like any normal person and be fine. Walking’s great, that’s what I’m going to do.”

“Get back in that bed.” She said, her voice sounded both serious and flustered.

Tony shook his head quickly. “You can’t make me.”

He kept a firm hold on the hospital bed as he tried to push himself up. His vision started
swimming, the room spinning around him, but kept going. Tony wanted to just go for a walk. Everyone was out doing other things and Tony wasn’t going to let these people lock him in this room anymore. He didn’t want to be watched every moment of every day anymore, he didn’t want to listen to these people as they lectured him about how wrong Mesman and Lotte were while trying to convince him how life should be, he didn’t want to be confined anymore, not in a dark room, not in a house, and definitely not in a hospital room.

Standing wasn’t as difficult as Tony anticipated. Once he got his feet under him and took a few seconds to stop wobbling, he was up. He wasn’t particularly steady, but he was standing on his own.

“Get back into bed.” The nurse said, she hovered a few feet in front of him. Her hands were held out as if she was planning on catching him if he fell. “You’re going to pull your stitches. Please, sir.”

“Don’t –” Tony said quickly, shaking his head. “I’m just going for a walk. I should be allowed to do that.”

A doctor came in then. Tony held in a sigh, trying not to smack away all the hands that were slowly reaching towards him. Tony just wanted to go for a walk. It shouldn’t be that big of a deal. He wanted to stretch his legs and go wherever he wanted without being escorted or watched.

“Tony, please get back into bed.” The doctor said.

Tony shook his head at him. “No. Not right now.”

He took a step forward, ignoring how blurry his vision had become and how the world seemed to be tilting on its side. Or maybe it was just him because the moment the doctor reached out and grabbed his arm to yank him upright the world was straight again. The doctor’s grip was a bit too tight and forceful as he tried to push him back towards the bed.


If he was thinking straight he probably would have realized that punching the doctor was a bad call. Tony just didn’t want to get back into bed. The only time he had been out of that bed for longer than three minutes was when Clint took him outside. Tony didn’t even want to go outside this time, he just wanted to have a short walk around the building and these people weren’t letting him. He could recall the dozens of lectures he had been given about how it was wrong for someone to control him, but they just wanted to keep him immobile in a hospital bed. He didn’t even notice he had punched the doctor until he was lying on the ground.

A single guard came rushing into the room. He marched right up to him and grabbed him by the arms, yelling words Tony couldn’t make out. He squeezed his eyes closed, waiting for any hit or blow for attacking the doctor, for not listening when they told him to get back in bed. It didn’t come. Instead the hands on his arms disappeared.

“Tony, what’s wrong?”

Tony opened his eyes slowly and smiled. Steve was here, still in his tux.

“I just wanted to go for a walk.” Tony said. “I should be allowed to do that. Why am I not allowed to do that?”

Steve frowned, hesitating for a few seconds as he gathered his thoughts. “I think it’s more of a ‘you’re badly injured and they don’t want you to be hurt more’ type of thing rather than a ‘you’re
“But I want to go for a walk. I’m an adult. I’m one of the smartest people on the planet.” Tony said quickly, leaning into Steve’s touch. “No one can tell me what to do. I don’t want to be stuck in this room anymore. I want to go for a walk.”

It wasn’t going to work. They were probably going to make him go back to bed. It wasn’t fair, but he should have expected this. He should have expected all the demands and rules, strict guidelines of what he was and was not allowed to do. It was his normal way of life, why should he have expected things to change?

“Alright. Let’s go for a walk. I’ll help you.” Steve said, sliding an arm around Tony’s shoulders to steady him. Tony was thankful. He still felt shaky and didn’t trust himself to get very far on his own legs. The doctor had picked himself up off the floor, opening his mouth to argue. Tony glared at him and let Steve lead him from the room. “Just tell me where you want to go and when you’d like to head back to your room.”

Tony nodded, leaning into Steve. They made their way down the hall slowly, turning when Tony suggested they should turn and stopping when Tony needed to stop. Although Tony really wanted to go on a walk by himself, sick of all the surveillance and babysitters, he probably wouldn’t have made it this far without him. Besides, Steve was great.

“I thought you went to the funeral.” Tony said. He nodded towards a bench up by the wall. There were in a part of the building that seemed to get a lot less traffic, few people walked by them. Steve sat him down gently, careful of his stitched up side.

“I did.” Steve said, sitting down next to him. “I stopped by to pay my respects, say goodbye to an old friend, and then I came back. I didn’t stay for the whole service.”

Tony glanced up to the SHIELD logo hanging at the end of the hall. Tony wasn’t sure of its purpose but it hung in almost every hallway, marking the building as SHIELD’s. He leaned back against the wall and listened to the quiet hum of the fluorescent lights.

“I’m going to be in trouble.” Tony said slowly.

“No, I don’t think you will be.” Steve said, reaching over slowly and taking Tony’s hand.

“I punched a doctor. Disobeyed them.” Tony said. “What do you think they’ll do to me?”

“Nothing.” Steve said, giving Tony’s hand a quick squeeze. Tony opened his eyes and glanced over to him. “No one is going to do anything to you.”

Tony smiled. Steve was wrong. They were going to do something. Tony would get some form of punishment for what he has done and then he wouldn’t do it again, unless he was feeling stubborn or angry. That’s how it worked with Mesman. After a punishment he would talk back, act out in little ways he knew he wouldn’t be noticed for. He never understood why he did it, but he felt better afterwards. Even the day before he left he was acting out. Lotte had let him out of the dark closet and they went down to breakfast, where Tony was angry and spoke like a bratty child.

“Thank you for letting me go on a walk.” Tony said. “I needed it. I had to get out of that room or I swear I probably would have suffocated.”

“You’re welcome.” Steve said as he leaned slightly towards Tony. “You looked like you needed to get around and I can never say no to you.”
Tony sat up and pressed his body into Steve’s. The larger man was always warm and soft. He was comfortable. “So if I ask you to break me out of here and take me to an all you can eat buffet?”

Steve chuckled. “Maybe. As much as I like giving you what you want I think I’d prefer for you to stay alive. You damaged several internal organs when you were attacked, had emergency surgery, and I don’t think a buffet would be very healthy.”

“Good point.” Tony whispered as he turned his face to press into Steve’s shoulder. “How about we run off and go someplace warm where there are beautiful people all over the place wearing bikinis.”

“You want everyone to be wearing bikinis? Or just the beautiful people?” Steve asked, amusement very clear in his voice.

“Everyone’s beautiful.” Tony said, smiling. “Honestly, I could probably rock a bikini.”

Steve laughed again, the most wonderful sound in the world. It made Tony’s heart pick up and his whole body seemed to relax. Tony would probably sell his soul if it meant he could hear that sound for the rest of his life.

“Thank you for getting those people away from me.” Tony said, leaning his head back to look up at Steve. “Although I could have definitely handled that guard by myself it was nice for you to help.”

“No problem.” Steve said, smiling as he carefully slid his arm around Tony’s shoulders again. “I want you to be okay, guys grabbing at you like that definitely won’t help. Besides, I love you.”

Tony could feel his body tense at the words, the soft pain slowly coming back to him now that he had taken out his IVs. Steve’s face was blushing again and Tony watched the soft pink run through his cheeks and ears and down his neck. “You don’t have to keep saying that, you know. I’ll be just fine.”

“I want to say it, Tony. And I mean it. When you said it to me it was probably the greatest moment of my life.” Steve said, looking away from Tony and turning his head to stare at the SHIELD logo nailed to the wall. “I’ll always mean it and you deserve to hear it.”

“Thank you.” Tony said carefully.

Steve sucked in a breath and shook his head. His hand squeezed tighter on Tony’s shoulder. “No, you’re not. Don’t ever say that again. That’s those people still in your head, lying to you. You’re amazing, funny, and kind. You treat me like a person, not some big, genetically altered hero from World War II. You’re one of the best people I’ve ever met.”

Tony smiled, pushing himself off of Steve. “Aww, you don’t have to say these things to get me to put out.” He joked. Tony really meant it as a joke, to lighten the mood and get Steve to laugh again. It didn’t seem to have the desired effects.

“Don’t- Jesus Tony, don’t say things like that.” Steve said. His head fell forward and he covered his face with his hands. “It’s not like that. I wouldn’t say nice things to you in hopes that you would…. put out. You’re not an object, people can’t expect that if they say nice things to you you’ll do what they want.” Steve said quickly, looking scandalized.

“I’m sorry.” Tony said. He leaned away, not sure if he should apologize more or ask to be taken back to his room.
Steve didn’t seem to hear him. “People should say nice things about you because you’re amazing and wonderful. Because you’re brilliant and beautiful and funny and should hear nice things.”

Steve said, his eyes snapping back to Tony. “When you ran away I was terrified. I was so afraid something terrible would happen to you and I would never see you again. You’re my best friend, you’re always happy to see me, and you treat me like a person. I can’t go back to what my life was before I met you, I can’t lose you. I really do love you.”

Tony blinked at him a few times. His once quiet thoughts now pouring through his head faster than he could comprehend. He tried to make sense of everything Steve had said, tried to figure out what he was supposed to do now, he tried to ignore the slowly growing pain all over his body, and tried not to think about any bad things.

“I love you too.” Tony said softly.

Steve smiled. “You’re going to be okay, Tony.” He said slowly.

Tony nodded, his eyes scanning over Steve. He took in Steve’s ruffled appearance, his tired eyes, his wrinkled black suit, and his messy blond hair. His heart was beating rapidly, had he still been hooked up to those machines it probably would be wailing loudly.

Steve leaned forward, touching his forehead to Tony’s and closing his eyes. Tony stopped breathing while Steve took several deep breathes. He didn’t know what to do. He wasn’t sure if he should turn away. There had to be something though, something to make this day make sense and figure out why he was feeling so strange, confused, and numb.

Steve opened his eyes and blinked a few times. “Is this okay?” He asked. The same words he always used to ask Tony before touching him.

Tony gave a small nod, barely moving his head at all in fear that Steve’s forehead would leave his. This was the closest they had ever been. It felt warm, safe, and completely strange. Steve’s head tipped down and his lips gently pressed against Tony’s. They were soft and it was unlike anything Tony had ever experienced before. A wave of adrenaline rushed through him and his senses went into overdrive. His mind started memorizing the feel of Steve’s mouth on his, the warm, dry feel of his lips, the gentle pressure that Steve added when Tony didn’t pull away, the feel of his breathing up against his face. It felt good.

Tony closed his eyes and leaned into it. He could feel Steve’s large hand wander its way into his hair. It was an interesting sensation, to be held so gently as if he was something precious. Tony reached up and grabbed hold of the coat of Steve’s suit. The fabric was rough under his hands and seemed to snag Tony’s attention. Why was Steve wearing such a rough, scratchy, and probably uncomfortable suit? Then he remembered, there was a funeral. Howard’s funeral.

Tony pulled back, attempting to take a deep breath. Steve’s mouth pulled back from his and gently started peppering kisses on his face. Tony couldn’t seem to get his lungs to work because his mind had slowed down just enough to fit a few thoughts in. It made sense now, why he had felt weird all day, why he felt like he needed to run away, why he couldn’t think. Howard was dead. Tony knew that, had known it since he had first woken up in the hospital, but now it all seemed too real.

“Tony? Are you alright?” Steve asked, his eyes growing wide with concern.

Tony slid back, further from Steve and pressing himself against the wall until he felt the bench disappear from under him. He tried to press himself into the small corner between the floor, wall, and bench, curling into himself. Howard had died, it was his fault and now he’s gone. Why had it never been as big of a deal before? Why hadn’t he realized?
Breathing was too difficult. Little air seemed to be getting to him in his quick, shaky breaths. He needed to calm down. He needed to figure out what had happened, why had he just ignored Howard’s death.

“Tony, what’s wrong?” Tony could hear Steve, somewhere above him. “I’m sorry. Tell me what I did, I’ll fix it.”

Tony shook his head quickly. It wasn’t Steve’s fault. Tony just needed to breathe. He needed to understand. His father had died and grief was only just now hitting him. Tony buried his face in his hands in an attempt to hide the tears.

Chapter End Notes

look at what I did. I did a thing.
Was it a good thing? Did you guys like the thing?
Comment, how did you guys like the chapter. I must know.
Chapel 44

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took longer than usual. Finals week is coming up and I’m just getting swamped with work. Hopefully you like this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There are no lies in this world. There are no make-believes or fairy tales. This was reality and Tony felt anchored to it like a ship anchored to the bottom of the sea. All he had now was the pale white wall that he kept his eyes on, the dull, drug muffled aches and pains around his body, the sounds of shouting in the halls, and the truth. Howard was dead, he was nowhere in the world, and the full meaning of that had come crashing down around him.

The shouts in the halls were clear. It was Clint and Steve, yelling about him, about things happening too soon, and how this wasn’t good for him. No one seemed to think to come in and ask him what he thought was best.

“Are you alright?” Natasha said. She was sitting cross-legged on the end of his bed, watching him intently. “How are you feeling?”

“As to be expected.” Tony muttered. He really didn’t know what was to be expected in situations like this. He hadn’t really been exposed to grieving people, wasn’t sure how they normally behaved, but if they felt like he did now then hopefully his behaviors weren’t too off. “I don’t know what to do.”

Natasha reached forward and gently rested her hand on his ankle. “You can do anything you want. There is no ‘allowed’ anymore because no one can give you permission anymore. If you want something, you do it.”

“And if I want to be left alone?” Tony asked. That would actually be kind of nice. He needed to get away from all the noise and people, there were constantly people, he had never been constantly exposed to people before. He missed the quiet.

“I can leave the room if you like, make sure no one else gets in, but I’ll still like to keep an eye on you.” Natasha said slowly.

“Why?”

“Because when you thought those people abandoned you the idea that you should try to jump off the helicarrier popped into your head.” Natasha said. She gave his foot a gentle squeeze. “You’ve lost someone important and I want to make sure you’re okay.”

Tony was silent. He kept his gaze at a particular spot on the wall. She thought he was going to try to do it again even though he already promised not to do it. Although it had occurred to him he wouldn’t do it. He couldn’t do that again, he wouldn’t be able to stand on the edge and will himself to take that final step. It terrified him that he actually tried to do it, that he still thought every few weeks about trying again, and that next time Clint might not be there to drag him back to solid ground.
His world wasn’t making sense, it wasn’t staying in focus. All that was clear in his head was the reality that Howard, his father, was dead and never coming back. Tony’s body went numb, his thoughts wandered, and he could feel himself dip down into some horrible, dark place inside his head where his parents were dead and the people who raised him just didn’t want him anymore. Then the world would come back to him in a dizzying flash as something in his peripheral vision moved or someone made a noise and it pulled his attention away from the pain and grief. At least for a few seconds. Then it happened again, a sick cycle of bone crushing sadness and a few seconds of distractions.

“I know it hurts.” Natasha whispered softly. “But this will pass. Times will change, things will heal, and one day this will all be a distant memory.”

Tony closed his eyes as she spoke. “One day? It’s taking too long.”

“It usually does.” Natasha said. “But it’ll be worth the wait.”

Tony turned his head slightly so his face pressed in against the soft pillows. His senses were dulled but he could still faintly smell the detergent in his sheets, he could feel the slight pull of the stitches on his side along with the awkward pressure in his skull. Natasha was tracing patterns into the exposed skin on his ankle, it was ticklish but oddly calming. There was still shouting outside his room, Clint’s voice rising above Steve’s as the sounds, but not words, drifted into the room. It all simultaneously felt like a dream and reality.

Nothing hurt, even though he knew it should. Too many medications to count were rushing through his veins and taking care of his body, making him forget about all of his injuries and where he was bruised and cut into. It didn’t take make him forget about Howard though and how wrong it felt knowing this man was gone. His mind was dipping down again.

“I don’t know what to do.” He said in an effort to distract himself. Tony had said those words before, so many times. It was true every single time.

“I know.” Natasha said, she sounded like she did know, like she understood, and Tony had no idea how she could sound like that simply by the tone of her voice.

If she understood then maybe she could make it better. Tony needed to know what to do. He needed someone to tell him, to lay out the rules, to give him structure so he knew what would happen if he did something. It was simple. That was what it was like with Mesman and Lotte, he loved it at times and hated it at others, but it was comfortable and familiar. He was so angry sometimes and he usually didn’t even know why, he would hate them and snap at them. They had raised him and he would just look for ways to lash out. Then other times he was calm, malleable, willing to bow down and do whatever they wished at a moment’s notice. He didn’t miss that. He wouldn’t want those changes in behaviors and confusing thoughts back. He didn’t want to hate these people, but didn’t want to be blindly submissive either. He just wanted to know what to do.

“I’m afraid.” He said softly, hoping Natasha would hear him and distract him from his thoughts. “There are too many possibilities, I don’t know what to do.”

“Yeah, that’s the sucky thing about freedom. There aren’t any yes or no answers, no door number one and door number two. There’s just an infinite number of choices and paths and no one ever really knows what to do.” Natasha said. Tony could feel her weight shifting on his bed until the warmth at his feet moved away and she stood up. “I can understand that going from no choice in anything to almost complete freedom so I can help if you’d like. Make the decisions easier.” She said slowly. Tony nodded, he desperately wanted it to be easier. “Okay. The choice is yours. Option number one, the camera stays in your room, we keep an eye on you to make sure you’re
Alright and if you need anything agents can be there in seconds to help you. Option two, we take the camera out of your room, you don’t do anything that’s dangerous or harmful to yourself, we put a call button in your room for you to press if you need one of us. Option three, you come up with what you want on your own terms and I’ll see if I can make it happen.”

Tony listened to her carefully, paying special attention to each word she said. This was definitely better, at least for now until he got used to it. He had choice, but stability.

“Option two.” He muttered. It was a relief. They were going to get rid of the camera, he would be less like an monitored animal in a cage and more like a person they’re actually trying to take care of. This was better. “Thank you.”

It had been a distraction, it hadn’t lasted very long but for a few minutes he didn’t have to think about how the world seemed so off and empty without Howard in it. The man had always seemed so much larger than life to Tony, his absence was overwhelming. Now that the distraction was over with he could feel himself start to slip out of focus again and back into that dark place in his mind.

“You’re welcome, solnyshko. I’ll always be here if you need me.” Natasha said. She walked up to the edge of Tony’s bed and kissed his temple softly, mindful of all the bandages and scabbing wounds. “I think they’re done fighting out there. Would you like me to send Steve in?” Tony nodded. “Okay, but if he does anything you don’t like you know you can call me and I’ll take care of it.”

“I know.” Tony said. He couldn’t help the small smile that pulled at his cheeks but didn’t reach his eyes. Natasha smiled back and turned to leave.

A few seconds after he heard her footsteps left the room a machine next to his bed beeped and whirred. It wasn’t the ones that indicated something was wrong, he wasn’t in danger. A quick glance told him it was for his medications. The beep of the machine usually signified when he meds were changing to either his antibiotics, pain medications, or whatever else he was on to take care of his abused body. The doctors didn’t want to give it to him all at once but they still needed to have all of his pains, discomforts, and medical needs taken care of so the medications changed every few hours.

Warmth flooded over him, like the room temperature went up several degrees to go from being nice to toasty and cozy. The jumbled mess in his head died down. He forgot about his fears. He still didn’t know what he was supposed to do in the long term, but now he wasn’t even thinking of the future. The pain and emptiness that had nothing to do with his injuries seemed slightly muffled, not gone but less intense.

“Hey sweetheart.” Steve said, appearing in the doorway. He was still wearing his rumpled suit and Tony looked over to him and smiled. “Nat said you two were done talking and I could come see you.”

He stayed at the door, he didn’t move until Tony lifted a shaky hand to wave him over. Then he rushed forward, taking Tony’s hand in his and pulling the chair up closer to the bed. Steve kissed his knuckles tenderly, something he had been doing quite often since the attack.

“I’m sorry. I talked with Clint and he was absolutely right.” Steve said quickly. He squeezed his eyes shut and his breath hitched. Tony didn’t like that. “I shouldn’t have taken such liberties with you. You’re injured, concussed, grieving, and drugged up to your gills. It wasn’t right of me to just kiss you like that. Even if I asked and you said it was okay, you’re in no condition to make decisions like that. I shouldn’t have done that, I was being stupid. I didn’t mean to make you panic. I’m sorry.”
Steve was stammering, his face going red as he nervously rushed through the words. It was adorable. It was also devastating. Steve was so amazing and wonderful and here he was blaming himself because Tony had somehow managed to not feel his father’s death until that moment. Because the universe hated him and wanted to ruin everything when things went right.

“I wasn’t upset about that, you huge dork. Not everything’s about you Steve.” Tony said, forcing a joke. He blinked slowly, his eyes growing heavy. Neither of them laughed but the mood did seem to lesson some. He raised the hand that wasn’t currently being held by Steve’s much larger ones and started gesturing randomly. “I was just hit with this weird thing and it made me feel everything.”

He wasn’t making sense. He realized that when Steve’s head tipped slightly to the side and just gave him a confused look.

“My dad is gone and I didn’t realize it until you came back from his funeral. I was left alone for hours and I just didn’t think at all.” Tony said. He wasn’t sure how much of that was making sense because Tony was just starting to feel weirder by the minute. “It wasn’t the kiss. The kiss was amazing. Warm and soft. We should do it again, but later because I think I’m going to fall asleep. Which is probably good, it’s been a long day.”

Tony didn’t know what was wrong with him, but now he was trying to blink away the tears before they fell. Steve’s confused face smoothed out and he reached forward slowly to stroke at Tony’s cheek.

“It’s okay. You can cry.” Steve said.

Tony leaned towards him, seeking out Steve’s warmth and breathing a sigh of relief as he felt the man’s strong arms wrap around him. They he couldn’t stop the tears from spilling over and running down his face.

“I don’t understand. Why did he leave?” Tony stammered, his voice shaking as his chest jerked between sobs. He felt like he was drowning, not getting loss in some dark recession of his mind that was filled with his grief like he had been doing a few hours ago. Now all his emotions were coming to him, rushing through him and breaking free. “Why did Howard leave me? What did I do?”

“I don’t know, baby. I don’t know why, but I do know it wasn’t your fault.” Steve said, his voice soft and gentle. “You tried to save him, you got hurt protecting your family. You’re a hero. I’m proud of you. It’s not your fault. Someone else did this.”

It was easy enough to get lost in Steve calm whispers, to let it wash over him until he felt more exhausted than hurt. He was probably going to fall asleep soon.

“What do I do?” Tony asked softly. He wasn’t sure why he was asking, no one ever had an answer for him. Natasha may be able to temporarily help with the unbelievable complexity that came with that question, but in both the short term and the long term everyone was expecting him to become comfortable with all of this and figure out what he wanted.

“You just keep going.” Steve said. That seemed like answer enough because Tony finally closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes
That wasn't so bad. It was just a lot of sad and confused Tony and the people who love and care about him.
They're going to be okay.
Comment, because finals are coming up and I need moral boosts.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

I saw Age of Ultron yesterday and I won't say anything in case you guys haven't seen it. I just so you all know I will not be writing any fics around the events of that movie. I may include a few things like the characters that were introduced, but I will probably be ignoring any major plot points in that movie.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We’re busting out of here.” Tony said loudly as Rhodey pushed the wheelchair through the door.

“We’re not ‘busting out’.” Bruce said, a fond smile spreading across his face. He had come to see him, which thrilled Tony because Bruce didn’t stop by nearly as often as he should have. Bruce’s days were mostly filled with trying to figure out where he went wrong, where this ‘monster’ had come from, and how to get rid of it. “You’re being released. You can go back to your room and do whatever you do.”

“Contemplate the deeper meanings of life and the universe mostly. I’m thinking about dropping everything and becoming a philosopher.” Tony said, his eyes on the wheelchair. He had expected everyone to be there to see him off even though he was just going a few floors up. Instead he was relieved to see that it was just Peter, Rhodey, and Bruce. There wasn’t an army of spies and soldiers standing around his hospital room, scaring the staff, and making it even more difficult to get him out. “I would be the best philosopher. Better than Foucault, he was always so dull.”

That earned a soft chuckle from everyone in the room. Steve wasn’t here either, which was fine. Tony didn’t expect him to constantly be here and he was now officially a SHIELD agent so he had other responsibilities. Tony had no idea where he was, but that he promised to be back within a week. Thor and Coulson were back from Europe, they’re searches for his previous captors had run dry. Everyone around SHIELD seemed more worried about that than Tony was so he just didn’t both to pay attention when they wanted to brief him on the situation. Clint and Natasha were up in his room, making sure it was suitable for an injured young man to be safe in.

“I didn’t think you would know about Foucault.” Bruce said as he took several steps back to let the nurses do one last once over to make sure he’s physically well enough to be moved. Then they helped him up and into the wheelchair.

“Oh yeah, all that stuff about the cruelty in human nature and punishing people as a spectacle. I know all about that.” Tony said smiling as Rhodey appeared behind the wheelchair and started pushing him out of the room.

“That’s kinda dark.” Peter said, following quickly behind them. “Why don’t you be a happy philosopher? Those are a thing. Like an old guy who sits around all day and talks about how beautiful and wonderful humanity is.”

Tony chuckled. He waved at the nurses as they passed through the halls. All the nurses smiled and waved back, some of them even blushed. Tony didn’t recognize half of them but he had spent a lot of time on so many pain medications that he was out of it most of the time, but he remembered the staff being very kind and gentle and waving them goodbye seemed like an appropriate thing to do.
“Nah, I changed my mind. Philosophy is boring.” Tony said as the elevator doors closed behind them.

“I thought you were going to be an engineer.” Peter said. “That’s at least what you were doing back at school. Learning engineer stuff.”

Tony shrugged. He didn’t know what he was going to do. Honestly, he hadn’t thought about what he was supposed to do in the future. Right now his whole life seemed to be focused on his tiny little room in some SHIELD building. He didn’t even know if they were ever going to let him go, let alone what he would do if they did.

“I don’t know. It wasn’t really my idea to go to science school.” Tony said. “Before this whole thing happened I would have been perfectly fine just staying in that house for the rest of my life. Now I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“You could always come back to school. I’m sure MIT would be thrilled to have you back, minus all the lying and espionage.” Peter said, smiling softly at Tony. He shrugged. It was an idea. “Plus, I saw your math. You’re practically a genius.”

“Practically? I am a genius.” Tony said as he sunk back down further into the wheelchair. It was oddly comfortable. “Maybe that’s what I’ll do, travel the world and spread my genius to everyone. Grow a beard and live on a mountain.”

“You can’t do that. I hate the cold, I could never visit.” Rhodey said calmly.

“Maybe that’s the point.” Tony said, laughing as Rhodey gave his wheelchair a playful jolt.

The elevator doors opened and Rhodey pushed him out into the hallway. Peter exited first, leading the way as the rest of them followed. Bruce was quiet as he walked along next to them, dropping his head and stepping out of the way whenever a SHIELD agent passed. Tony didn’t like it.

When they finally made it to Tony’s room it was a relief. Bruce visibly relaxed and Peter dropped himself onto the bed unceremoniously. The room looked mostly the same, except for the holes in the walls that looked as if the cameras had been ripped from them and hastily patched back up. It was a calming sight. He was finally free from all the cameras, all the eyes watching him. It was just a tiny liberty but he cherished it.

“Is anyone gonna help me up?” Tony asked. “I’m still injured.”

Bruce shook his head and wrapped an arm around Tony’s shoulders, gently helping him up from the wheelchair and over to the bed. Peter didn’t get up, just scooted over to give Tony room. It was a short trip, but he was already exhausted. He hadn’t even done much moving, just sat down in a chair the whole time as they went from one room to another. He had gone farther and done more the day of the funeral, where Steve let him lean most of his weight on him as they slowly walked the halls.

“Are you in any pain?” Bruce asked. He dropped Tony’s bag into the corner, it was filled with a small assortment of stuffed animals, cards, and letters from agents and strangers who wanted to send him well-wishes. “You’re not on the really good stuff anymore but they did write you a nice prescription.”

“No no. I’m fine right now.” Tony mutters. He curled up on his side, taking the pressure off of his still slightly tender head and moved onto his right side so he wouldn’t have to lay on his stitches. The fact that he was now curling into Peter’s side was purely coincidental, but his friend was warm
and comfortable and served as an outstanding pillow. Rhodey sat down gently onto the bed too, laying down to wrap himself up around Tony’s other side so that he was now completely surrounded by his friends, the coziness almost enough to lull him to sleep.

“What are you doing?” Tony mumbled. He tried to blink the heaviness from his eyes as he felt the two of them settle into the mattress.

“Taking a nap.” Rhodey said. “I think we could all use one.”

“But why are you doing it in my bed?” Tony asked softly.

“Well, we kinda like not having our best friend in the hospital because he almost died.” Peter snapped back. “Indulge us.”

Tony shrugged and rested his head on Peter’s shoulder, letting them wrap their arms around him gently. Bruce went to the chair in the corner, pulling a small book from under his jacket and settling in. Tony couldn’t help smiling to himself as he closed his eyes.

He didn’t dream. When he opened his eyes again it was dark and he was very warm. He lifted his head slowly, ignoring the dull pain, and looked around. Peter and Rhodey were still circled around him and snored softly as they kept Tony trapped between them, their limbs thrown out haphazardly all over the bed and over him. It was actually strangely comfortable.

Bruce was still sitting in the chair in the corner, a small flashlight in hand as he continued to read his book. He didn’t look over when Tony stirred and Tony didn’t want to make too much noise because he didn’t want to wake up Peter and Rhodey, but he had to use the restroom and he couldn’t get there on his own. He lifted one arm into the air and waved it lazily.

At first he didn’t notice, just kept his eyes scanning each page quickly. Tony made a low whining sound before going back to waving his arm around, hoping to catch Bruce’s attention. It must have worked because Bruce finally looked up at him and put his book down to walk over to the bed.

He knelt down slowly and whispered. “Tony, are you alright?”

“Yeah.” He said as he tried to push himself up slowly. “Bathroom.”

Bruce relaxed, smiled softly, and reached forward to gently grab Tony’s shoulders and help him up. It was difficult to get out from between Peter and Rhodey without waking either of them. They had lax holds on him but they were both half sleeping over him that he was afraid any small movement would wake them up. They managed it though and within a few minutes he was leaning on Bruce heavily as he was led to the bathroom.

“Do you need any help?” Bruce asked when they entered the bathroom and stopped just in front of the toilet.

“God, no.” Tony said quickly. He was fine, he could use the restroom on his own.

Bruce nodded and stepped outside. There was still no door, he would have to ask for that next, but Bruce stopped right by the entryway to the bathroom and turned around, ready to rush in and help Tony at a moment’s notice.

Tony rubbed unconsciously at the stitches on his side, the long and jagged cut that will surely scar and be with him forever. It was like a souvenir of one of the most horrible and terrifying moments of his life, a constant reminder of what he failed to do.
“Bruce, what was your dad like?” Tony asked softly.

Bruce stiffened and dropped his head. That wasn’t a question that was okay to ask, he knows because he had asked that before. Tony held in the urge to just apologize and slink away to hide. It was fine. Bruce wouldn’t hurt him for asking the wrong questions, no one here seemed to have any interest in hurting him.

“Didn’t we already talk about this?” Bruce muttered, not turning around.

“Kinda. All you said was that he wasn’t a nice person, that he was dangerous and violent, but didn’t say much else.” Tony said slowly. He stopped rubbing at his stitches, everyone would probably be angry if he messed them up. “You don’t have to tell me anything.”

“No, it’s fine. I’ve had a long time to come to terms with everything.” Bruce said. He didn’t sound angry or distressed, his tone was calm. “What do you want to know?”

Tony hesitated, just for a small moment to gather his thoughts. “Did you love him?”

Bruce’s pause was longer than Tony’s, he was silent for what seemed like too long of a moment. Tony once again held in his desire to apologize and backpedal the conversation to ignore it ever happened.

“I loved my mother.” Bruce said finally. “She was always kind to me, gentle. She was supportive and only wanted what was best for me. My dad was different. He hurt me every chance he got, hurt my mother, and eventually took her away from me. I didn’t love him.”

“But he was family.” Tony said slowly. It was all very confusing. Tony didn’t know who his family was, who he should love unconditionally. He felt divided between the strangers he was related too and the monsters that raised him.

“In a biological sense.” Bruce said, his head turned slightly but he didn’t turn all the way around. “You’re under no obligation to love anyone, even if they are family. If people in your family hurt you, make you feel bad about yourself or scared over little things, or simply makes you uncomfortable, then you do not have to love them.”

Tony nodded. Bruce always made a bit of sense, even when he was talking about things that Tony had never thought about or even considered before. He didn’t think he loved Mesman, but he did feel like he loved Lotte. SHIELD might think that was a problem if they knew but Tony didn’t think it was.

“I think I could have loved Howard one day.” Tony said slowly.

“That’s nice.” Bruce said. “Was he nice to you?”

“He was an asshole.” Tony said, smiling slightly. “He pissed me off and made me uncomfortable most of the time, but he wasn’t so bad. I get that he was just trying to do his best in a situation he didn’t understand.”

He heard Bruce chuckle softly. “I don’t think anyone understands this situation. One moment you were dead and then you come out of nowhere to make a grand reappearance.” He said. “Took everyone by surprise. Are you done?”

Tony nodded. “Yeah.”

He moved over to the sink slowly and washed his hands quickly. Bruce walked back into the
bathroom, stopping just behind Tony and waiting. He shook his hands dry and turned around to lean into Bruce. The man was warm and did a great job at holding him up.

“You know, I would have forgiven him.” Tony said, pressing his face into Bruce’s shoulder. “I would have let him be my dad again. I just didn’t get the chance.”

Bruce nodded. “It would have taken a lot of time.” He said. “A lot of time and effort to get to that point. But I believe you.”

Bruce was right. Tony was starting to think that Bruce knew everything. He didn’t want to talk about it anymore. He was ready to go back to bed and try to get another day closer to feeling okay again.

“Am I allowed to have a new family?” He asked as Bruce started to slowly walk Tony back to bed. It was an important question but whatever the answer was it probably wouldn’t matter. If Tony was allowed to have a new one he wouldn’t know where to look and if he wasn’t then he would just be alone but okay for the rest of his life.

“Of course you can. Just make sure they’re good people who care about you.” Bruce said firmly. Tony nodded. That was probably sound advice.

By the time they made it back to Tony’s bed Peter and Rhodey had taken up the space he had previously been sleeping in. They had scooted closer together and were snoring loudly with their arms and legs hanging over every inch of the bed. Bruce sighed and shook his head as he leaned forward to throw Peter’s arms and legs out of the way to make a spot for Tony.

He laid back down, resting his head on his pillow and feeling Peter’s body heat on his back. Bruce returned to his chair to continue reading his book. He felt safe with these people, they took care of him. Clint and Natasha would be back soon to check on him and Steve would come back from whatever he was doing for SHIELD and Thor will come to visit soon since he was back. Coulson will probably team back up with Agent Hill to make sure SHIELD was doing everything it could for him. He was around good people now, people who treated him incredibly differently than he was used to.

Tony closed his eyes and fell back to sleep. He would be alright.

Chapter End Notes

Finals are next week but I was able to squeeze this chapter in before I went back to studying.
Thanks for reading. Everything will be back in action next chapter.
Comment, if you saw the new avengers movie tell me what you thought but be sure to warn for spoilers in case people read your comments who haven’t seen the movie. I love you guys.
Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

New chapter. Yay. I didn't have any finals today so I had time to do a bit of writing. This chapter is mostly a filler chapter but there are things to come.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We should all take a vacation.” Tony said. He was flipping through the lists of everything he was inheriting. He laid back against the pillows of his bed and looked over the papers Howard’s lawyers had left a few weeks back when he was still stuck in that hospital bed. “Apparently I am going to own about three islands.”

“Are they tropical?” Rhodey asked.

“I suppose.” Tony said. He still didn’t know if everything he was supposed to inherit was actually his yet, he didn’t know a lot about inheritance laws but he assumed things would show up soon enough. At least he still had the list of everything Howard wanted to give him. It came with photos of some of the more expensive properties, including the islands that were somewhere in the pacific with grand houses surrounded by wilderness and views of the startlingly blue ocean.

“Can I bring my Aunt May?” Peter asked, looking up from his textbook to smile at Tony. “I usually spend breaks with her and if we’re going on a vacation it has to be when we don’t have classes. We’ve missed enough already, what with the whole our best friend has been arrested by an intelligence agency.”

“So winter break.” Rhodey said. “That sounds good. Can I bring my mom?”

Tony nodded. It actually sounded fantastic. When he mentioned a vacation it was mostly just wistful dreaming. Whenever he saw people on tv going on a vacation it was beautiful, a bunch of people relaxing without a care in the world. It was always peaceful, calm, safe. Tony wanted that and he couldn’t believe these two, his very best friends, were agreeing to go with him.

“Yeah, bring your mom. We should bring everybody.” Tony said. It sounded like the exact opposite of a relaxing vacation. He really was thinking about bringing everyone, from the descriptions of some of the properties there was definitely enough room for all Peter, Rhodey, their families, and everyone he had become friends with at SHIELD. It wouldn’t be very calm, but it would be nice. He would rather have a chaotic vacation with all of his friends, the people he cared about and who seemed to care about him, than a calm one where he was alone on a beach without having to worry about spies or anything. “We should definitely do it.”

“I’m in.” Rhodey said. He hadn’t looked up from his book. Somehow Tony’s cramped room in the SHIELD building had become the place Peter and Rhodey came to study at every other day. There were always books lying around now, all of them a bit too complicated for his poor reading level. Usually just glancing at the books were enough to give him a headache. Tony didn’t mind much, they kept him company when everyone else was busy. He liked these guys, he enjoyed knowing that they also liked hanging out with him.

“We can have Christmas!” Peter said loudly. “My Aunt May makes delicious ham and gets really
enthusiastic about decorating. It’ll be great.”

Tony nodded quickly. The plans were getting better and better every second. He didn’t think he’s ever had an actual Christmas, but he always wanted to. He didn’t know a lot about it but everyone always seemed so happy whenever it was mentioned. He needed this vacation.

He wasn’t entirely sure the islands were actually his yet. He hadn’t heard from Howard’s lawyers since they had stopped by to see him in the hospital to tell him what he was getting, but not when he was actually getting it. He didn’t know if he had to do anything for it to be passed over to him. There was probably paperwork involved. Tony shivered at the thought.

“I’ll be right back.” Tony said. He pushed himself off of the mountain of pillows he had been propped up against and stood. One hand was clutched to his side, his stitches had been taken out not too long ago but the area still hurt, and he made his way to the door. “I’ll be back. I need to talk to Coulson.”

“Do you need our help?” Peter asked. Tony shook his head.

Peter nodded slowly, a small frown etched on his face. Rhodey leaned over and smacked him lightly on the arm. “He’ll be fine. Our baby boy is growing up.”

“I hate you both.” Tony said.

He walked out of the room. Since he had been released from SHIELD medical he had been well behaved. He gave all the agents responsible for his safety a break and didn’t try to escape or hurt himself or others, he did exactly what he was supposed to do. He ate all the meals Natasha continued to bring him without complaint and he went to all of his checkups with the doctors. Tony was following orders so they had expanded his privileges. He was allowed out of his room and to wander around.

He found Coulson where he usually was. Ever since he had come back from Europe he was either still working on Tony’s case or in his office. Agent’s office was just a floor below Tony’s room, it was a bit bland with beige colored walls and a few blank, clean marks on the walls from where frames used to hang but had recently been taken down. Clint said he used to have a lot of Captain America memorabilia in his office but hid it away once Steve was found. There was a large assortment of knickknacks from all over the world sitting on every shelf. Tony liked Coulson’s office and was thankful the man was there. He really didn’t want to have to track Agent down only to find him whispering softly to Agent Hill about something serious.

“I need a favor.” Tony said, not even knocking as he walked right in.

Coulson raised an eyebrow and nodded towards the empty seat in front of his desk. “I told Clint, you guys can’t use SHIELD funds to take you to Disney World.” He said quickly. “I don’t care if it’s the ‘Happiest Place on Earth’.”

“It’s not about that, but I’m intrigued.” Tony said. Coulson just sighed and closed his eyes. “This is about Howard.”

Agent put down the files he had been holding and leaned back in his chair. He was waiting for Tony to continue, which wasn’t ideal because Tony wasn’t sure how he should go about asking.

“He left me some things in his will. I just want to know if they’re actually mine now and if I’m allowed to use them.” Tony said calmly. “Honestly, I’m surprised he left me anything at all. He hardly knew me.”
“You’re his son. He wanted to make sure you were taken care of.” Coulson said. He was frowning, deep creases forming along his forehead. Something wasn’t right. Coulson always looked calm whenever Tony saw him, sometimes it was forced and other times not, but with every one of their encounters the older man always seemed to be relaxed when Tony saw him. Now he just looked distraught, not panicked or upset, just worried. “I’m glad you brought this up though. There has been an issue with Howard’s will.”

Tony was taken aback by that. Did something go wrong? Did Howard make a mistake in the paperwork? He didn’t know what this meant. Millions of thoughts were flying through his head. What if SHIELD was only helping him because it was what Howard wanted? SHIELD was Howard’s creation. They might not care about him anymore if he had no connection to the man. He didn’t want to think about what that would mean for all of his friends who were SHIELD agents.

“What kind of problem?” Tony asked slowly, focusing on keeping his voice steady.

“Your father’s business partner, Obadiah Stane, is challenging the will. He’s saying that when it was revised he wasn’t in his right mind due to the incredibly overwhelming emotions of finding his son after thirteen years.” Coulson said. He squeezed his eyes shut and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I wasn’t going to mention it now, you’re still healing and shouldn’t be stressed.”

“So, what does he want?” Tony asked. If Stane was challenging the will then that could mean that Tony would get nothing. It wasn’t that horrible of a thought, he had grown up with nothing. But he had plans. He wanted to just escape from the world, forget about SHIELD and spies, assassins and kidnappings, and just relax somewhere far away from this mess with his friends. He couldn’t do that if he had nowhere to go.

“Not everything. Just the money and the company.” Coulson said. “SHIELD is willing to give you the legal assistance you’d need.”

“What if he’s right?” Tony said. He looked away from Coulson as his gaze dropped to his fingers tracing patterns into his jeans. “I mean, Howard was a bit enthusiastic about having me back. He hardly knew me. We shared blood but we knew nothing about each other and then he leaves me with everything.”

Coulson rubbed his palm over his face and shook his head. “I’ve worked with Mr. Stark before. He was always focused, always brilliant. He knew exactly what he was doing when he revised his will.” He said firmly. Coulson sounded angry, Tony wasn’t sure if that anger was because Tony had said the wrong thing or if he was angry with Stane. “SHIELD has great lawyers. We can-“

“No. I don’t want SHIELD lawyers.” Tony said quickly, cutting Coulson off. “No offense, but I don’t want a SHIELD lawyer. It’s not that you guys aren’t great and I’m not thankful that you guys are taking care of me, I just don’t… trust you.”

Tony was willing to trust SHIELD with his life, he would let them feed him and get him medical attention if he needed it, but these are the same people who let him run back to Mesman and when he got back he was drugged and in pain. They had used him. Tony was willing to trust them with a lot of things and ignore that incident, but this was Howard’s legacy and what he chose to do with that. Tony didn’t want to be used by SHIELD again, he didn’t want them to take advantage of him or what he had left of Howard.

“Alright.” Coulson said, nodding slowly. He was frowning again. “I understand. We’re an organization of spies, you’d be crazy to trust us. But are you just planning on letting Mr. Stane take everything?”
“No, I’m going to fight for it.” Tony said quickly. He had no idea how, not a single thought of what he should do passed through his head. “I can use Howard’s lawyers.”

Coulson cleared his throat. “They now work for Stane.”

“Okay, wow. It’s so hard to find a trustworthy lawyer these days.” He deadpanned. This earned a small smile from the Agent. “I’ll get my own lawyers. Which I guess leads us to the reason I’m here. Will you let me go?”

There was a pause, a small moment of silence as confusion washed over Agent’s face. “What?”

“I’ve been doing everything you guys want. I stayed in medical until I healed, I haven’t ran off, I’ve been seeing your doctors and therapists, eating, sleeping, everything.” Tony said quickly. “I’ve been doing everything you guys want, trying to learn how to be a good, normal person. I just don’t want to live here anymore. I want you to let me go.”

“Tony, you do understand that you could be in danger, right?” Coulson said slowly. “A man attacked you just a few weeks ago.”

“Yes, but he killed Howard. He didn’t kill me.” Tony said, shrugging.

Coulson sighed loudly. “But we got there in time to save you. We don’t know who the target of the attack was, you or your father.” He said. “If you go out you could be in danger. There is also the fact that those people you were with for all these years are still in the wind. What if they come back for you?”

“Then they come. I don’t know what I’ll do, but I already promised not to go back to them.” Tony said. “If you want to keep me locked up in here, its fine. I understand. Just tell me.”

Coulson looked slightly panicked. His eyes darted around to scan the room as he took several deep and slow breaths and ran his fingers through his thinning hair. He was conflicted, Tony just hoped he had behaved enough to be let out.

“I’ll see what I can do.” Coulson said. Tony smiled. It was almost too good to be true. “But, if you are let out SHIELD will still be keeping a close eye on you. You’re not a prisoner but we are invested in your safety. It’ll just be until we can confirm that no one is going to make an attempt on your life.”

“You’ll consider it?” Tony asked. He cheered when Coulson nodded.

“That’s not a guarantee. I have paperwork to fill out, people to assign to your protection, meetings to attend, figure out where you’ll be staying. It’ll be a lot of work.” Coulson said. “It might not happen.”

Tony nodded and stood up. He reached forward to shake Coulson’s hand, excitement coursing through him as he thought of that little, unfurnished apartment he had near MIT those first few weeks of his mission. There had been no cameras then, no agents watching his every move, no judgement, no orders, no expectations. It was just him and he missed that.

“And find a lawyer. A good one.” Coulson said.

“Alright.” Tony said. “I’ll ask around.”

He rushed back to his room, barely able to hold in his energy as he bounced on the balls of his feet in the elevator and walked as quickly as his aching body could go. He couldn't wait to tell his
friends that he was being let out. Months of being treated like an invalid who couldn't care for himself and he was finally being given the freedom to leave. He made it to his bedroom quickly and pushed open the door.

He paused, unsure of what he was seeing. Frozen in the doorway he had a perfect view of his room, and Peter and Rhodey sitting up in his bed with their faces pressed close together, eyes closed as they kissed gently.

"Oh my god." Tony said loudly. At the sound the two of them jerked away from each other and stared at him in horror. "How long has this been going on!?"

"Uh..." Peter said slowly, his face going a deep shade of red. "About two minutes."

"It's not an official thing." Rhodey rambled quickly. "It's not even a planned thing. We've just been spending a lot of time together, we get along, and then you ran off to do your thing and it happened. In your room. It was just a kiss."

His friends looked like they were embarrassed, panicked. Peter had jumped off of the bed the moment he realized they had been caught and Rhodey was trying hard to bury his face into his textbook. Tony didn't know what they were so scared about. "This is great." He said, smiling. His two best friends were getting together. They were happy.

Rhodey and Peter relaxed.

Chapter End Notes

Things to come. Peter and Rhodey are fantastic. Coulson is back. All is right with the world. Comment, a little while ago I got several comments from people saying they shipped Rhodey and Peter in this story and I, being a caring author, decided to give the people what they wanted. What do you think?
Tony stared at himself in his bathroom mirror, looking at the mangled patchwork of his torso. He trailed his fingers over his numerous scars, some were mostly faded away and others were fresh and pink, the skin barely knitted together. It was ugly, he looked disgusting. His fingers stopped on the line that curled around his side. The stitches were gone, leaving behind a fresh scar that didn’t look like it was likely to fade into nothing over the years. This was probably one he would keep forever.

He turned away and slipped on his shirt, slowly buttoning it. Coulson had started working on getting him out of SHIELD custody and on his own. It was a long process, it would involve psych evaluations, hearings with different committees, paperwork, and who knew what else. But there was a plan, he had a set path and at the end of it they would let him go. Tony didn’t want to think about what he would do once he was free, he had never been entirely liberated before. He spent his whole life locked away with bad people and when they let him out there was still their influence and power in Tony’s head. Now he was locked away with SHIELD and if they let him go they may just leave him alone. He could do whatever he want and that was both terrifying and exciting.

There was a soft knock on the door. Coulson walked right in a smiled at him. He appeared calm, focused, not at all like the nervous wreck Tony was. Tony couldn’t barely hold in the shaking of his hands and he tried to hide the rapid beating of his heart and his breaths that came much too quickly. He needed to keep it together. He had a hearing, they were going to question him about so many things, he had no idea what, but he had to prove that letting him go wouldn’t hurt anyone.

“You look great.” Coulson said as Tony walked out of the bathroom. He placed a hand on Tony’s shoulder and squeezed it lightly. “How are you feeling?”

“I’ll probably throw up later but I got it handled. I’m good.” Tony said, nodding quickly.

“You’re sure?” Coulson asked. Tony simply nodded again. “Alright, let’s go.”

Tony didn’t hesitate as they left the safety of his room and followed Coulson down the hall. It was just a hearing, he just had to answer questions to a committee of people who would then decide whether or not they think he deserves to be let go. It didn’t sit right with him, these strangers were going to decide whether or not he was allowed to be set free. After constant lectures telling him that no one was allowed to tell him what he could and couldn’t do, it felt strange. It almost felt like a betrayal.

“Don’t worry about these guys, they’re old bureaucrat who’ll give you a hard time but are just old and bitter.” Coulson said as they stopped just outside of a large set of doors. He put two gentle hands on Tony’s shoulders and nodded to him encouragingly. “This is just the first hearing, if it goes terribly it won’t mean much.”

“Then why do I have to do it at all?” Tony asked slowly.
“It’s part of the process. The first step towards the goal.” Coulson said. “Good luck. Remember, you’re going to be fine.”

Tony nodded and turned away from him, walking through the large set of doors. It was a round room, uncomfortable looking chairs sat in a semicircle along one side of the room and the other side of the room was wooden desks and podiums with a group of ten people behind them. They looked intimidating. They all seemed older than most of the people Tony had come in contact with at SHIELD, these people were old and graying and looked at him with either scorn or disinterest. Tony sat down without a word.

There was silence for a few minutes. No one spoke, no one looked away from each other, Tony even tried not to breathe too loudly. There was nothing but the loud ticking of a clock and the soft sound of papers being shuffled. Finally the man that sat in the center spoke.

“We’re here today to discuss the case of Mr. Anthony Stark’s release from SHIELD custody.” He said loudly. “Do you have anything to say before we begin?”

He gave Tony a cold, unfeeling look that almost made him shiver. These people seemed lifeless, without thought or emotion. It was concerning.

“Um, yes.” He said slowly before nodding and repeating it firmly. “Yes, I would like to say something.”

They all paused, looking at him. Tony’s mind raced from one phrase to the next. This wouldn’t be as important to the whole process of getting him his freedom, but it was the first step. He could start off strong or flop and hope it gets better. Coulson said he would have this hearing so he could state his case, a psychological evaluation so they can tell if he’s mentally capable of living a happy life on his own without being a danger to himself or others, a medical exam, and a final hearing where they would go over everything and make a final decision.

“What do you want to say, Mr. Stark?” The man asked again, waving his hand dismissively.

“I wanted to say that…” Tony said slowly. “I have lived under the command and surveillance of people who didn’t have my best interests at heart my entire life. I don’t really want to do that again. I have no interest in anything illegal or dangerous to SHIELD, I just want to be okay. I want to know I’m going to be okay and safe and I will be more open to feeling that if I wasn’t locked away.”

A few of them nodded slowly, all of them started writing things down. None of them seemed particularly interested in being there, none of them even seemed to care about how their decision could affect him. All ten of them either looked tired and bored.

“You do understand you are in custody for not only attacking a field agent but also for handing over sensitive information to potential enemies, correct?” One of them asked. Tony didn’t bother looking at their name plates or even look at their faces long enough to find anything distinguishable about them.

Tony nodded. “Yes, I do understand that.”

“So you also understand we’re a bit hesitant to release you into the general population.” They said back at him.

Tony blinked, frowning slightly. “From what I understand, that agent wasn’t really expecting an attack and wasn’t prepared for it. That sounds like a problem on his part. Maybe SHIELD should
focus on training their field agents in emergency preparedness.” Tony said quickly. “Who knows, maybe I did you guys a favor and helped your agents realized they need to be more ready for these kinds of things. Certainly wouldn’t want any other teenagers to walk right in and surprise everybody.”

One of the women chuckled. Tony would have been more relaxed at that if everyone else didn’t look either annoyed or angry. He probably shouldn’t have said that. He shouldn’t say a lot of things, this was a problem he continually reminded himself to take care of. If he said the wrong thing to the wrong people it could be very bad, he didn’t want to think about what could possibly happen.

“And your thoughts on you giving information to your… employers?” They asked.

Tony inhaled sharply and looked down. His side was starting to throb, the pain in the back of his head was starting to flare up. He had healed enough for it not to be inconvenient. He could do almost everything he could do before, but sometimes it hurt a lot. He still had his prescription of painkillers but he was hesitant to continue taking them, even though sometimes the delicate pink skin that covered his scar sometimes felt like it was going to rip apart and tear him in half, or that his head felt about ready to split open. Physically he would be fine, he’s healing as he should and in a few weeks there’ll be no pain at all. But at times like these it just hurt far too much.

“I wouldn’t have called it employment.” Tony muttered, just loud enough for them to hear.

“Then what would you have called it, Mr. Stark?”

“I would have called it…” He said slowly. He knew what everyone called it. Coulson called it human trafficking, Clint and Natasha sometimes muttered about ‘forced child labor’, Bruce called it abuse, Peter and Rhodey didn’t call it anything at all, and he hadn’t spent much time around Thor to get his opinion and he didn’t like bringing it up around Steve. Tony didn’t know what he would call it though, it was just his life. “I don’t know.”

A few of them hummed disapprovingly. He had lost them. There was no chance at all that this would go well. They already didn’t like him, they despised him from the moment he set foot in the room, possibly even before that. They would vote down his case and that could possibly cause him to lose his plea for freedom.

“And the information you gave them? Do you know what that was?” They asked coldly.

“I knew what it was. I knew it could potentially be bad.” Tony said slowly. “But they wanted it. They sent me to get it and my history with disobeying their commands didn’t end well. Technically, I was just following orders. Isn’t that exactly what you expect from your agents? To have them follow orders?”

“I do not think what we expect from our agents is of any concern in this matter.” They said.

Tony shook his head. It really was. They commanded people around, expected nothing but blind loyalty, and called themselves different. These people were the same. They keep him here, expect him to behave, refuse to let him out without supervision, and then act like they’re doing him a favor. He hadn’t really thought about it before, but besides being physically safe, little fear of beatings or violence now, not much has really changed. It was disturbing to think about.

He really did feel like a few of these people genuinely cared about helping him, but he didn’t think it was working anymore. Coulson and Hill cared, he trusted them more than the rest of SHIELD, but it was getting difficult. Tony just wanted to be let go.
“Let’s move on.” One of them said. Tony still didn’t bother to distinguish them. They were just blank faces here to decide what to do with him. “Why do you desire your release?”

Tony glanced up at that. “Are you being serious?” He said quickly. “Did you really just ask why I don’t want to be locked up anymore?”

“It’s a valid question.” Another of them asked, someone sitting off to the side. “You have a history of hostile behavior. We just wish to be sure your intentions aren’t in anyway dangerous to SHIELD or the community.”

“I’m not planning on hurting anyone, if that’s what you’re asking.” Tony snapped. He wasn’t in the mood for this. He didn’t want to sit around and listen to these people come up with reasons why he should stay with them. They weren’t going to let him go. He was stuck here. “Can I leave now?”

“Mr. Stark, we’ve only just started reviewing your case.” The man in the middle of the group said.

Tony shrugged. “Let’s be honest here. You’re not planning on letting me go.”

They paused, frowned at him in silence. Tony started thinking of the consequences of just getting up and walking out. They wouldn’t be happy, but what could they possibly do to him? There was always the chance that they could all turn on him, SHIELD would turn into this malicious thing ready to tear him apart, but right now it showed no intent or capability to try to hurt him.

Finally, one of them spoke. The man in the center gave a small, forced smile and shook his head. “No, we’re not.”

Tony stood up at that. They weren’t here to help him, they were just trying to humor him, give him false hope. He was out the door before any of them had time to object. He turned down the hall and began walking in the general direction of the elevators. He might as well go back to his room, he was going to be stuck there for the foreseeable future.

Coulson appeared beside him, effortlessly keeping pace and a tablet in hand. He didn’t look up from whatever he was reading but addressed Tony anyway.

“I suppose it didn’t go well.” Coulson asked.

Tony shook his head. “They don’t want to let me go, Agent.” He said slowly. They stopped in front of the elevator and Tony pressed the button, tapping his foot loudly. “They want to keep me here forever. Did you know that?”

Coulson hummed before finally looking up to meet Tony’s eye. “I had an idea. Now that Howard’s gone a lot of the higher ups see you more of an asset than anything else.” He said. He sounded calm, which was reassuring. “That’s why we have multiple hearings with different people before we come to a decision.”

“It shouldn’t be a decision. No one ever pressed charges, I haven’t been convicted, I shouldn’t be a prisoner.” Tony sighed. He was tired. It wasn’t that late in the day but he felt exhausted and ready to just crawl into bed and not come out. “Isn’t that the law of the land? Everyone has the right to a fair trial or whatever.”

“That is a law, correct. But SHIELD’s not always fair.” Coulson said. He reached out and laid a hand on Tony’s shoulder. “Don’t worry. There are still plenty of powerful people here who are on your side. Peggy Carter, for example. She may be retired but she has a lot of pull here. Even Fury still takes orders from her.”
“Peggy? Do you think she’ll let me go?” Tony asked.

“Yes. She wants what’s best for you.” Coulson said, glancing back down at his tablet. “You might have to let her take you to dinner though. She’s worried and wants to see you.”

Tony frowned. He didn’t know Peggy. Howard and Jarvis knew her so maybe she was safe. If she could help him get out then so be it. Tony was ready to be on his own. He could do that. “Okay.” He said. Now he just wanted to get back to his room because he was fairly certain he needed to calm his stomach, which felt like it was doing backflips, and take a long nap.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys liked that. Peggy and Jarvis next chapter. I hope you guys are as excited as I am.
Thank you all for reading.
Comment, I'm tired and I finally finished this chapter.
“I do not understand.” Thor said slowly. “You’re his only son, do you not inherit what was his?”

Tony shrugged. “I think that is the law, but these are unique circumstances. I’ve been gone for most of my life, I’m a stranger, and Howard changed his will just weeks before his death.” Tony said. His eyes glossed over the too long words of Rhody’s textbook before putting it down. “I guess the guy who was set to inherit everything has problems with Howard giving everything to a kid he hardly knew. He might actually have a good case. I need to get a lawyer and I need to get out of here.”

“My mom is a lawyer. I’m sure she’ll be happy to help once she finds out you want to take us all on vacation.” Rhody said calmly as he scribbled away in his notebook. “She’s actually specializes in inheritance law so there you go.”

“Do you think she’ll help me? I have nothing to pay her with.” Tony said. He glanced at everyone in the room slowly, waiting for opinions that could help him.

Natasha and Peter were curled up in a corner trying to decipher one of his more advanced textbooks, Thor was scribbling corrections into someone’s physics book, and Rhody was propped up against Tony’s headboard taking notes. Everyone was working on something, but did still seem interested in helping him.

“Sure, my mom will have no problem helping you for pro bono until you get those billions.” Rhody said. He chuckled lightly and shook his head.

“What does ‘pro bono’ mean?” Tony asked. It didn’t sound like English but it very well could be for all he knew. There were still a lot of words he didn’t know.

“It’s a Latin phrase people use a lot when their donating their cervices free of charge.” Rhody said. He closed his notebook with a sigh and wiggled around a bit until he was lying down on Tony’s bed, his legs thrown over all the books casually.

“Oh.” Tony said. He was sitting on the bed as well so he playfully pushed Rhody’s legs off of him. “I don’t speak Latin.”

“No one speaks Latin.” Rhody said. “It’s a dead language.”

“I speak Latin.” Natasha said. She didn’t look up, just continued to frown down at Peter’s book. “Also, Stane has an army of lawyers. Not to doubt the capabilities of Mrs. Rhodes, but you might want to get a few more to broaden and strengthen your case.”

Tony sighed. There was so much he had to do. He had to think of a way to get out of SHIELD, he had to find lawyers so he can do what Howard’s will wanted, he had to figure out what he wanted to do with his life, and all of that with the constant hope, worry, fear, and wish that Lotte and Mesman might find him again. He didn’t know what he wanted, he didn’t know what to do. The only things he was sure of was that he didn’t want to live with SHIELD anymore and he didn’t want anyone doing anything different with Howard’s will other than what he had chosen for his property.
“I don’t know any lawyers. How do I find any good ones?” Tony asked.

“I know a few trustful lawyers. Clint might know a few too. We’ll make a few calls, see if they’ll come here to Boston. You can meet them and make the decision to hire them yourself.” Natasha said.

Tony shook his head. “I don’t want SHIELD lawyers.”

“These aren’t SHIELD lawyer. Don’t worry so much.” Natasha said slowly. “You’re not alone in this. If you need help we’ll be here.”

She stood up and walked towards the bed, knocked Rhodey’s legs out of the way, and plopped down next to Tony. Moving slow as if he would become startled and run away, she reached out and took his hand. Tony liked Natasha, she was blunt, honest, and was always subtle with her affections. He never felt overwhelmed with her.

“I am getting help though. Peggy might help convince SHIELD that I’m okay to be let go. They don’t want me to leave, but I have to.” Tony said. SHIELD thought they owned him, that if they kept denying his appeals to leave they could keep him forever. It was terrifying. He didn’t understand it, he wasn’t as useful as they probably thought he would be. “I’m actually having lunch with her in about fifteen minutes.”

Natasha’s eyes widened as she squeezed Tony’s hand harder. “Fifteen minutes? You’re having lunch with Peggy Carter in fifteen minutes and you’re going out like that?” She said quickly.

Tony looked down at himself. He was in simple jeans and a t-shirt. They didn’t fit particularly well and were just handed to him by a random agent one day, but he didn’t think there was anything wrong with them. “Yes.” He said calmly. “Why?”

“Peggy Carter was the first Director of SHIELD. She’s the one who built this organization, set the foundations for what it will do and what it stood for.” Natasha said. She got a slight gleam in her eye but otherwise looked completely calm. “She’s probably the most powerful woman in the world, she can even give Fury orders.”

“Everyone keeps mentioning a Fury but I have yet to meet him.” Tony said, shaking his head lightly.

Natasha shrugged. “He’s the new director of SHIELD, he’s in charge. Not as cool as he thinks he is.”

“Oh, yeah?” Tony asked.

Natasha grinned and nodded quickly. “He wears a lot of leather and has an eyepatch. It’s a bit much but the only one willing to tell him that is Coulson.”

“That actually sounds pretty cool.” Tony said.

Natasha nodded again, looking up quickly when someone knocked loudly on the door. It was an agent, not one he was overly familiar with but still recognized. She indicated that it was time to leave, his ride had arrived. He stood up, once again knocking Rhodey’s feet off of his bed and waved at everyone.

“Okay, guys. Have fun messing around in my room. Without me.” Tony said, standing up and slipping on a coat. He pointed at Peter and Rhodey and forced the deepest frown he could. “You two better not make out on my bed again. I sleep there.”
He didn’t stay to hear what they had to say, he closed the door to the sounds of annoyed shouts and amused chuckles. He followed the agent down into the parking garage, where he had to wait next to her until an older looking black car, shiny and clean with an engine that sounded so beautiful Tony briefly thought about stealing it. He wouldn’t though, it was Jarvis’s car.

He climbed inside, smiled at the older man behind the wheel, and then they drove. Neither of them really spoke, they just hummed along to whatever song was on the radio as they left the SHIELD building and started making their way across town. The restaurant they pulled in front of was definitely nicer than the small diner Howard had taken him to and perhaps he should have worn something nicer. The suit Howard ordered for him when he took him out to get his measurements had come in, it had been paid for when it was ordered and now it just hung on the curtain rod in Tony’s room. He had no idea what he would do with it, maybe he should have worn it out today, but regardless Tony never really cared about what he wore. Peggy might though.

“Don’t worry. She already loves you.” Jarvis said as he pulled the car into the parking lot. “She just wants to talk. She missed you very much.”

“I don’t remember her.” Tony said softly. “She’s a stranger.”

Jarvis was silent as he got out of the car and slowly started leading the way to the entrance of the restaurant. “That’s fine, Anthony. You don’t remember us, you were very young and have been away for a very long time. I hope you’ll come to trust us one day like you used to all those years ago.” He said, his voice hushed. “If my word means anything to you, I can assure you that Peggy and I have nothing but your best interests in mind. We care about you very deeply, we love you.”

“Yeah?” Tony asked, glancing over to Jarvis with a small smile. Jarvis nodded. “Of course you do, I’m incredibly loveable.”

They entered the restaurant and walked right up to Peggy’s table, she was sitting by a window and looking over a menu. When she saw them walking up she stood and greeted them both with firm, affectionate hugs as she kissed both of their cheeks.

“Tony, I’m so glad you could make it. I was surprised when you said you would be willing to get lunch, but I’m so happy.” Peggy said, gently taking Tony’s face in her hands and kissing him again on his forehead. She continued to smile as she turned to Jarvis. “Thank you, Mr. Jarvis. I’m glad you could join us. How is Anna?”

Jarvis leaned forward kissed her cheek. “She’s lovely, thanks for asking. She is very excited to hear that Anthony has been found and looks forward to seeing him around the house.”

“I’m going to your house?” Tony asked as he sat down.

“Not now.” Jarvis said. They all sat down around the table. “Our home is in New York, but she hopes that once you’re released and have the time you would come visit. She did adore you.”

“Anna?” Tony asked.

“Yes, my wife.” Jarvis said, smiling brightly as he picked up a menu. “She adored you and you loved her. Oddly enough, when it came to taking care of you I was the responsible one. I made sure you ate healthy, were bathed, had all your schoolwork finished, and in bed at the appropriate time, no exceptions. Anna however, all you had to do was flap your eyelashes at her and she would do anything you asked. She once made you a whole chocolate cake one Sunday while I went to the city to go shopping because you said ‘please’ and hugged her.”
Tony chuckled. He didn’t remember that, but it sounded like a nice moment. Sometimes he didn’t believe all the things these people told him about when he was young. They all seemed too good and magnificent to ever be part of his life. But everyone always spoke of these memories with such sincerity and joy that he almost believed them. He wished they were true.

“She sounds like a wonderful woman. If I ever get released from SHIELD I’ll definitely stop by.” Tony said. With that, his mood dropped slightly. He remembered why he was actually here, to ask for Peggy’s help. He’ll ask later, right now everyone was enjoying a nice relaxing talk about the past. “What about you, Peggy? Are you married?”

Peggy nodded. “I am. I met him after the war, I’ve only had a few relationships in my life. One with a lovely young bloke in school years, another with Steve during the war, one with a waitress named Angie, you would have adored her she was fabulous, and the last with my husband. I met him through my work.”

“Tell me about your work.” Tony asked. The waitress came then, smiling enthusiastically as she took their orders and left. Now that Tony had looked around he figured a suit would have probably been a bit too flashy for this place. It was nicer than a diner but probably not so nice you had to wear a suit. Tony liked the place. “My friend, Natasha, seemed really excited about it.”

“Well, I’m retired now.” Peggy said, shaking her head. “But since I brought it up just now, I want to hear about your relationships. Tell me, how are things going with Steve?”

Tony froze up, he could feel the blood rushing to his face. “There’s nothing going on with Steve.” Tony said quickly. Peggy frowned and raised an eyebrow. “Well, there was almost something going on. But I kinda messed it up.”

“Listen here bright eyes. Steve is very loving, very sweet, and very understanding. No matter what you did, well besides become a Nazi probably, he still cares about you.” Peggy said. “And from what I heard from that boy he really does care about you a lot.”

Tony hesitated, his mind racing from one thought to the next. “No, he doesn’t.” He said finally. Peggy and Jarvis both got a look of hurt and rage. Tony cut them off before they could say anything. “It’s fine. I don’t mind. I’m a bit broken and lost so if he doesn’t want to be with me I’m not going to be upset, I understand.”

“My darling boy, no.” Jarvis said quickly. “You’re fantastic. Steve adores you. I’ve seen him smile at you with those dazed, far off looks. He’s absolutely gone for you.”

“What happened?” Peggy asked. “You said you were almost something, but you messed up. Did he tell you that?” A certain cold tone laced her voice now.

Tony shook his head. “No, Steve would never say anything like that.” He said. He bit his lower lip and shrugged. “He kissed me. It was amazing and wonderful and I loved it. But I freaked out. Everything sort of hit me all at once and I couldn’t handle it.”

“He kissed you?” Peggy asked, she blinked quickly. “Well, if he ever does anything you’re not comfortable with or anything without your expressed permission, you let me know.”

“Steve wouldn’t do that.” Tony said slowly. “Would he?”

“Absolutely not, but if anyone does anything you let me know and Auntie Peggy will take care of it.” Peggy said. She smiled as she reached forward and patted Tony’s cheek. “I’m sure he still loves you.”
“Well, he left. I haven’t seen him in days.” Tony said. “It’s a mission, but I’m starting to think he might not want to come back.”

“Anthony.” Jarvis said slowly. “You’re fantastic and you deserve him. You deserve happiness. He’s going to come back and when he does you do what feels right.”

It all sounded too fantastic. Steve couldn’t love him. Steve was glorious and beautiful and so damn good. Tony was just nothing, he was a wet paper bag left on the side of the road compared to Steve. “Okay.” He said.

The waitress came back and gave them all their meals. He took several bites, it was delicious, and then glanced back up to Peggy.

“Can I ask you a favor? It’s kinda important.” Tony said. “I don’t really want to ask you for anything, but I could really use your help.”

“What about, love? I’ll do what I can.” Peggy said, she picked up a napkin and wiped her mouth. She leaned forward, intent on listening.

“I want to be let go, released from SHIELD custody, but they won’t do it. They want to keep me.” Tony said. “I just can’t live there anymore. It’s nothing but orders and surveillance and people who control everything because they think it’s good for me. I can’t live like that again, I won’t.”

Peggy listened. She didn’t move for several long seconds, didn’t blink as she started at Tony. “What will you do if you’re released?” She asked softly.

Tony shrugged. “I have no idea. I wouldn’t hurt anyone, I wouldn’t go back to the people who hurt me, and I probably won’t even do much of anything.” He said. “Maybe I’ll find a place to live, get a job, and live my life. Maybe I’ll go back to school, for real this time. I just want the opportunity to live my life how I want to live it.”

Peggy and Jarvis both smiled. “Fantastic.” She said. “I’ll see what I can do.”

Chapter End Notes

As promised, Peggy and Jarvis. The two greatest people on Earth.
Steve is next. He’s coming back.
Comment, also feel free to read the two other stories I’m working on right now. Stepping Stones (Bucky takes care of and falls in love with Tony) and I See the Moon (Tony is badly injured in battle and a guilty Steve and Bucky help take care of him)
His medical evaluation turned out fine, no one told him how he did on his psychological evaluation. He didn’t think he did very well, there were too many questions he either had the wrong answer for or no answer at all. He couldn’t explain his behavior, his thoughts, it all just happened.

It was the day of his final hearing, the one that would decide if he was stable enough to be out of custody. A completely new set of judges would look at the decision the first committee made, look at the results of his evaluations, interview almost everyone he had come in contact with, and then decide if he deserved to be let go.

Clint had convinced him to wear the suit Howard had gotten for him. It didn’t feel right wearing it, it should be special and worn only when good things were happening. Howard had bought it for him on the day he died, there were so many bad things already associated with it that Tony wanted his only gift from his father to be full of good memories. He had to admit though, he felt good wearing it. Howard had said that wearing a suit was almost a way of protecting oneself and now that he was wearing one in front of a group of people ready to choose for him whether or not he should be set free it felt like it was working.

“The council would like to call forth Agent Clinton Barton for testimony.” The older woman in the center of the group said.

This was how it was going to be. Tony had to listen to all of the people he considered to be his friends tell the God’s honest truth about him and whether or not he’ll be a danger to himself or others. That was the most terrifying thing about the whole hearing, these people he trusted were either going to lie for him, lie against him, or speak the truth which could be as harmful as it could be helpful. Whatever they chose to do would certainly be telling.

Clint took his seat in front of the group. He looked like he normally did, jeans and a t-shirt. Almost everyone else was sitting behind Tony in one of the numerous uncomfortable looking chairs and looking like they had dressed up for the occasion while he sat at a table directly in front of the analytical group of judges.

“Where did you first meet Mr. Stark?” One of them asked.

“About thirteen years ago.” Clint said calmly as he glared at each of the ten members on the committee. “I helped my… mentors break into the Stark mansion. They were looking to steal enough valuables to pay off their gambling debt. They also had a buyer willing to pay a lot of money for whatever was in Howard’s lab back at his home. They couldn’t get in so they took Tony.”

“What happened then?” Another asked. “What did your mentors do to Mr. Stark?”
“Nothing too serious. Well, it was pretty bad.” Clint said. It seemed he was going with the honesty approach. “They knocked him around a bit. Once they realized Howard wasn’t going to pay the ransom one of them even dragged him out into the woods to put a bullet in his head.” Tony shivered at that. He remembered, it had been absolutely terrifying, the first time he had ever been close to actually dying. He hated it when people pointed guns at his head. “Obviously, they didn’t do that. So I took him inside, cleaned him up, and took care of him. That was our relationship at first, he was a scared little kid who didn’t understand what was happening and I took care of him. Then they sold him.”

Tony clenched his fist. It was really the most accurate way to say it, it was literally what had happened, but Tony hated it. He was sold away, that was the truth, but it made Tony feel like property. Half the time he felt like it was true, but he didn’t want to think like that anymore. He didn’t belong to anyone.

“What did they sell him to?”

“I don’t know.” Clint said calmly. He kept his eyes forward, staring at the group of people and not once glancing back to Tony.

“When did you see him again?”

It was just an endless list of questions. It was annoying, they were all just questions about things that didn’t even seem to matter. They weren’t asking what Clint thought about whether or not he should be released.

“I saw him again about four months ago. He was brought in to SHIELD and attacked me.” Clint said. One of the committee members leaned forward and opened their mouth, but Clint quickly raised a hand to silence them and continued. “He caught me off guard, the kid has some moves. I was impressed. I understand why he did it because the last time we saw each other before that I was all buddy-buddy with the people who ripped him from his home and sold him off to some kind of monster. He was rightfully angry with me. No charges were pressed against him but he was brought in to custody. I think it’s time we let him go.”

There were a few quiet murmurs amongst the group. “The council will decide if he’s ready to go out not.” The woman in the middle said firmly. “Now, Mr. Stark escaped at one point to return to his previous employers. Describe that situation and tell us if you feel that letting him go would lead to the same result.”

Clint sighed, almost as if he were bored. “Yes, Tony went back to them. Might I remind the council that he was able to go back because SHIELD had made it possible for him to do so, if not actively encouraging it.” He said quickly. The committee started grumbling. “And it was a very bad experience for all involved. He’s a good kid, he didn’t deserve that. They had hurt him. He was back for not even 24 hours and they had beaten him and drugged him up to his gills. And there isn’t a doubt in my mind that that he only went back because he felt like he had no other choice. He’s a kid who has not been allowed to have a life outside of his abusers and he was just desperate for what was familiar.”

Everyone in the room silently contemplated that. Tony had never considered why he went back all that important, he wasn’t even 100% certain why he went back, just that he felt the need to be back with Lotte in that house where everything made sense. He had always figured that these people would only care about the fact that he had simply went back to them and take it as a sign of where his loyalties were.

They stopped muttering amongst themselves and the woman in the center spoke again. “How do
“Better. Definitely better.” Clint said quickly, he finally glanced over to Tony with a soft smile. “He’s eating more, he seems happier. He’s healing, the last few months have been good for him, but now it’s time to let him go and live his life.”

“One final question.” The woman said. “Do you feel he could be a threat to himself?”

Tony’s heart froze. Clint knew, he had been there on the helicarrier when Tony was at his worst. He had been honest throughout the rest of his interview, there was no reason for him to stop now, even though it would be pretty much guaranteeing that Tony wouldn’t be let go.

“No.” Clint said almost immediately, much to Tony’s surprise. “I do not think he is a threat to himself.”

Clint’s testimony was over then. Natasha would have a turn now. Following in Clint’s footsteps, she was also honest up to the point where they asked if he was at all in danger of harming himself. They probably shouldn’t be lying about that because he probably was very likely to try something like that again. The thoughts were still there, popping up every once in a while, but none of his previous motivation to actually do it. It could all change though.

After Natasha spoke it was Coulson’s turn, who didn’t know about the incident on the helicarrier and was also completely honest throughout the whole thing without making it sound like releasing Tony would be a mistake. He didn’t drop opinions about how his feelings on keeping Tony in custody so he was also the most professional.

Agent Hill went next, she simply reconfirmed what those before her had said multiple times. Everyone had a chance to speak, even Tony’s doctors and psychologists. If they worked for SHIELD and Tony had spent more than five minutes with them then they had to answer the same set of questions. Although everyone seemed to be taking his side it was all getting very tiring.

“We would like to call Captain Rogers to testify.” The woman called.

Tony looked behind him, he never really studied the group of people waiting in the room but he didn’t know that Steve was there. He saw him when he stood up, still in his red and blue uniform that didn’t make any sense to Tony, it probably didn’t do much for camouflage because he always thought Black was the best color for that, and he still looked dirty and tired from whatever mission he had been on the past few days.

He smiled at Tony as he passed, it was calm and reassuring and absolutely beautiful. Steve had been gone for longer than Tony realized, over a week, and seeing him again was like a punch in the face because a wave of affection just washed over him and the tension leaked out of his body. Even if SHIELD decided to keep him forever he could handle it because Steve was back and he was safe.

“I’m not gonna answer any questions. I’m just gonna make a statement.” Steve said once he reached the front of the room and was standing in front of the committee. They all seemed taken aback in surprise, but nodded for him to continue. “Tony was kidnapped and kept locked away almost his entire life. If what I heard is true and SHIELD wants to keep him here regardless of his innocence simply because you think he’ll be useful one day then you’re no better than they are. They took a sweet child and hurt him, isolated him from the world, and SHIELD is doing the exact same thing. If you don’t give Tony the freedom that is rightfully his then I’ll hand in my resignation.”
Tony didn’t know what to say, what to think of that. Steve turned away from the long line of people sitting at the front of the room and gave Tony a bright, hopeful smile and returned to his place at the back of the room. He could feel his heart beating wildly, all the love and affection he had felt for Steve all overwhelming him in a content warmth.

The council then took a vote, at least six of the ten members had to agree to Tony’s release for it to take effect. They muttered amongst themselves for several long minutes before the vote was called for, the older woman at the center stating that those who approved of Tony Stark’s release from SHIELD custody should raise their hands. Tony crossed his fingers and prayed silently for those six. There were seven.

That was it, the whole thing seemed so simple now. Seven out of ten people had voted on his release and they were going to let him go. He had no idea what he was going to do now, but he was thrilled to have the chance to figure it out. He had to get to Steve, to thank him. He should really thank everyone, but right now his mind was telling him to get to Steve.

Tony stood up quickly and turned around, only to run straight into Peggy. She laughed softly as she hugged him. “Congratulations, Tony. I’m so happy for you.” She said with a wide smile.

“You talked to them, right?” Tony asked, smiling back up at her. “You helped convince them to let me go. Thank you.”

She leaned down slightly to give him a gentle kiss on the forehead. “Of course, Tony. You asked for my help and I would do anything for you. Anyway, I think your friends did most of the work. They truly do care about you.” She said. “Now, the next thing we must consider is where you’re going to live.”

“Thank you. I’ll figure something out. Howard had a few properties here in Boston that I can probably stay in, if not I’m sure one of my friends will help me.” Tony said, his smile widening at simply mentioning his friends, all the people who were looking out for him and helping him.

“If you ever need anything, don’t hesitate to call me.” Peggy said. “I have known the Stark family for decades, I’m practically their go to problem solver.”

Tony nodded and gave her one last hug before excusing himself. He could see Steve at the back of the room, wiping the dirt and sweat off of his forehead as everyone else was filing out. Tony rushed up to him, grabbing on to the back of his uniform and yanking to get his attention.

“Oh, Tony.” Steve said, turning to him. His voice sounded fond and happy, like he was glad to see Tony as well. “I am so happy you’re being released. You’ll be able to see everything now, whenever you want. It’s going to be amazing, Tony.”

“You’re back.” Tony said. Steve nodded quickly.

“Yeah, I had a mission in Europe. It took longer than expected.” He said, reaching over to grab Tony’s hand and gently pull it off of his uniform so he was holding it. “I’m glad I made it back in time to help you. You look great, by the way.” Steve started blushing slightly, a beautiful pink blossoming on his cheeks. “Nice suit, it’s a nice suit. It looks amazing on you. I’ve never seen you so dressed up, but it’s a good look.”

He gave Tony a lopsided smile and hummed softly. Tony couldn’t help himself, he pulled his hand from Steve’s and raised it so he could curl his fingers into that greasy blond hair, his other hand going up as well. Then he pulled Steve’s head down and slotted their mouths together. He half expected Steve to jerk away, but instead he leaned into it. His hands found their way to Tony’s hips
and gently pulled him closer. It wasn’t at all like their first kiss, where Tony had been confused and grieving and panicked. He was still all of those things, but had it all under control now. This kiss was gentle, loving, and didn’t bring forth any cause for panic, but instead sent a warmth through him. Now he finally knew what he wanted and he wanted to continue kissing Steve. At least for a little while longer.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the end of the chapter. I liked the end. Now we get to see him all free and happyish and making his own choices.
Comment please, did you like the chapter?
Hey guys! It's May 29th, which is Tony Stark's MCU birthday! Happy birthday to that lovable little baby. I hope wherever he is in the fictional world he's happy and healthy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony liked kissing Steve, it was always soft and warm and gentle and he was allowed to do it often. Steve smiled and leaned forward to press his lips against his whenever he stopped by to help Tony pack his few possessions. He pecked him on the lips when he came to help carry Tony’s single suitcase down to the car, another when they arrived at his new home. It was a good day.

He would be staying on one of Howard’s old townhouses, Steve, Peter, and Rhodey came with him to make sure it was okay and reassure him that if he didn’t want to stay they could find someplace else. Tony didn’t care, he just wanted a place to sleep that was safe, Howard’s house would do just fine. Technically it was Jarvis’s, the property was in his name and therefore there wouldn’t be any issues with the will about whether or not he was allowed on Howard’s old properties. From what he heard Howard bought it under Jarvis’s name so he would have an emergency residents in case something happened, had several in almost every city. It would be Tony’s home until everything Howard wanted to give him officially became his.

Steve held his hand as he walked through the house, Jarvis led them from room to room as he discussed all of its features with a strange sort of disconnection as if he were just a realtor showing it off. The house cost over three million dollars, a price that meant nothing to Tony but shocked Steve.

“Three million? On a single townhouse?” Steve said loudly. Tony was going to assume that was too much to spend on a house, but he wasn’t sure. Tony had never had money before so its value wasn’t something he has knowledge of. “I mean, it’s a really nice place, but with that amount of money people can live their entire lives in comfort. And he blew it on a house.”

“You’d think with all that money they would have gotten nicer paint.” Rhodey said slowly. He was looking at the bright yellow walls of the living room. Tony didn’t mind it, it was a bit too harsh of a color, but it wasn’t terrible. “Is there a pool?”

“No.” Jarvis said as he shook his head, a soft smile brushing his face. “But there is a large, whirlpool tub in the master bath.”
Peter cheered. “Tony gets a hot tub! Good. Tony needs a hot tub, you need to relax buddy.” Peter said quickly. He threw an arm around Tony’s shoulders and smiled. “And the best way to relax is to have a sleepover with your best friends.”

Tony didn’t shoot down the idea, he would love for them to stay. The only time he had ever been alone was those few weeks in that little, empty apartment Mesman gave to him to stay in while he went to MIT. He hated it, except for that last week when Peter stayed with him.

The downstairs of the townhouse held the living room, a kitchen, a full bathroom, what looked like an office, and a small garage. Everything seemed to have a place, a large tv over the fireplace, shiny new appliances in the kitchen, and all the ornaments and bits of decorations carefully placed on every shelf and in all the corners. It felt detached, emotionless, but not altogether bad.

The upstairs was looked about the same. There were three bedrooms, almost as many bathrooms, and a large, empty room that Jarvis said could really be used for anything. Tony didn’t pay any of the rooms much mind. Steve was still dragging along his suitcase and he dropped it on the bed of the master bedroom once the tour was finished.

He yawned and plopped down on the bed. There was a lot of furniture in the room, too many chairs and shelves and it seemed off for a bedroom. It wasn’t like any of the rooms he had been allowed to sleep in before.

“Are you tired?” Steve asked, smiling down at him as Tony buried his face in a pillow that seemed almost too soft and comfortable.

“Long day.” Tony muttered. “I’ve moved homes about five times the last few months and I just want to take a nice long nap and then get used to this one. It’s not so bad.”

Tony peeked up from the pillow to look at him. Steve looked around the room and shrugged. “I don’t know. It seems kinda… sterile. Empty. Not really a place people actually live in.”

As if on cue, Rhodey and Peter shouted loudly and passed by the door, racing each other down the hall. It didn’t feel empty to Tony, it felt large and overwhelming, with too much stuff and no idea what to do with it all. It didn’t really bother him. It felt familiar, an odd comfort in the back of his mind that he couldn’t quite place.
“I don’t mind it.” He said. He yawned against and kicked off his shoes.

He could hear Steve shifting behind him, unsure of what to do. “Your friends are going to stay?”

“Looks like it.” Tony muttered. His eyes were growing heavy. He didn’t usually take naps but he also didn’t usually get released from an intelligence agency’s custody. It was exhausting. He didn’t even have to do that much, there was just so much going on he needed a break. “They can stay as long as they like. I meet the lawyers tomorrow but I’m sure they can come along.”

“Alright.” Steve said hesitantly. “I’m needed back at SHIELD. We have a few things to discuss about my latest mission.”

“Oh.” Tony said slowly.

“I can come back later, if you want. We can all have pizza or something.” Steve said. Tony smiled and nodded. “I’ll call before I come over. We should also probably discuss… this thing.”

Steve made a gesture between them, waving his hands back and forth towards Tony and towards himself. Tony understood. This ‘thing’ between them was new, hadn’t had much discussion. It was hardly even a thing, just a few soft kisses, hand holding, and also Steve helped him move his one suitcase up to the room. It was a nice thing, Tony was sure he was going to ruin it.

“I’ll call you.” Steve said. Tony held in a chuckle, it was like all the other lines people said in those cheesy romance movies Peter pretended not to enjoy. He still picked the films anyway when it was his turn on movie night.

Steve left and Tony finally allowed himself to drift off to sleep. He was comfortable, warm. Everything was fine, so if he dreamed of a small dark room with locked doors and loud voices then it wasn’t a big deal. He wasn’t there anymore, they couldn’t hurt him again. He wouldn’t pay attention to the loud banging on the doors or the pounding footsteps that came steadily closer. If he was curled up in a small corner in the darkness that was his business. He was dreaming. It was a dream. He was safe. But he wasn’t. Everything was bad again and a blinding light engulfed him as the door burst open.

He was awake the second the bed jerked under him. His eyes darted around the room, looking for something, he wasn’t sure what, but it was just Peter and Rhodey, laughing and out of breath. A tension had wound itself into his muscles, his heart beating loudly, and he was half tempted to yell
at them both for waking him so suddenly. That would just make things worse though. He wasn’t supposed to yell. He wasn’t afraid, he refused to admit that he had been scared being woken up by his friends in a house that was kind of his.

“I love your house, Tones.” Rhodey said quickly. “I’m moving in.”

“Oh, Tony. All the cleaning services for the house have been cancelled so your residency here will be unknown for the time being.” Jarvis said, walking into the kitchen. “I will be staying in the guest room for as long as you need me and my wife, Anna, is coming up from New York later in the week.”

Tony nodded. He didn’t care. Anyone could stay here if they wanted. He tried not to think about it too much. These guys were his friends, they weren’t here to watch him, make sure he did what he was supposed to, keep him in line. They were his friends. They just wanted to hang out with him and have fun.

“And Peter and Rhodey. They said they wanted to move in.” Tony said slowly.

Rhodey laughed, Peter shook his head. “We were joking, kid.” Rhodey said, smiling brightly.

“I don’t see why. It’s not far from the campus, they don’t even have to know you’re here.” Tony said calmly. He put down his glass of water and stared at it. The house seemed different somehow, not the large decorated place he thought it was. It seemed smaller.

“I don’t think it works that way.” Peter said.

Tony shrugged. He wasn’t going to argue with them. He didn’t feel like it. The kitchen didn’t
feel right anymore either. It was too shiny, everything was too new. The specific style of the whole place had struck a chord with him now, all the carefully picked pieces of furniture were disturbing. Familiar.

He kept closing his eyes and seeing the house, the house, where he had spent his entire life and all of its beautiful decorations hand-picked by either Mesman and Lotte. They had a specific taste, one that Howard, or whoever decorates his homes, probably shared. It wasn’t identical but it was close.

“Can I change things?” Tony asked quickly. There was a large window in the kitchen that looked out to a small garden area. It wasn’t as large as the old backyard where he would be forced to run laps if he misbehaved. It was small, just a few feet across. This house was different. He was safe.

“We can redecorate if you’d like.” Jarvis said calmly.

Tony nodded. He needed to change it. The shaking in his hands came back, he shoved them in his pockets to hide it. He kept running it through his mind over and over that he was safe, these people were different. No one was going to hit him and no one was going to hurt him.

They might though. If he thought about it too much, which he tried not to, it wasn’t really all that different. These people, SHIELD, were trying to lock him away, hide him from the world, and control everything about his life. They were the same.

The phone started ringing. Tony didn’t even glance over as Jarvis picked it up. “Tony, it’s for you.”

Tony nodded and took the phone. His breathing felt shaky, his heart felt like it was going to fast. “Hello?”

“Hey, sweetheart. I’m getting ready to head over.” Steve said on the other end of the call. “Is there a specific kind of pizza you want? Did you want me to get a movie? What would you like to do.”

“Um.” Tony muttered. His mind was going a mile a minute. He needed a change. He couldn’t have these people controlling him anymore, messing with his head. Everything had been fine, then he had to have that short, stupid dream to remind him about everything. “No, I want to move the house around a bit. You can help if you want. I don’t want to do much else.”
“Okay.” Steve said. “I can help. And the pizza?”

Tony shook his head. “Nah. I’m not hungry.”

Chapter End Notes

Kinda short but it's setting things up. Tony is free and mostly on his own now, who know's how he'll handle it.
Comment, do you think it's going well?
“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Stark.” The blond one said.

Tony had met Mrs. Rhodes, Rhodey’s mother, and she had walked in through the door of his townhouse and pulled Tony into a hug and treated him like she had known him his whole life. Apparently Rhodey talked about him a lot on his calls home and he only ever talked about the good things about him. Tony didn’t think there were so many good things about him worthy of telling a mother about, but Rhodey seemed able to come up with a few.

It was strange since Rhodey was in class and his mother stopped by to see Tony anyway, not even to talk about the issues with Howard’s will, she genuinely seemed interested in how he was doing. She asked him about how he was feeling, how he liked his new home, every sort of casual question without once mentioning anything serious.

Now she sat next to Tony as they met the other two lawyers Clint and Natasha managed to scrounge up. If Tony decided to take these guys on, if he trusted them to help him fulfill what his father wanted with his will, then he would have three lawyers. That against the dozens Stane had didn’t sound promising.

“My name is Foggy Nelson and this is my associate, Matt Murdock.” The blond one, Foggy, continued. “Usually our specialty is Criminal Defense, but Natasha has asked us to help.”

“We think you have a very strong case.” Matt said, leaning in forward and adjusting his glasses. Tony glanced between them, they didn’t look threatening. Foggy Nelson looked, as far as appearances go, like a pretty nice guy and not at all like someone who would try to hurt him. Matt Murdock on the other hand held himself firmly, his shoulders squared and his head high, his posture indicating discipline. Murdock was a fighter of some sort and Tony didn’t trust that. “Stane can only gain rights to whatever your father left you if he can prove that Howard wasn’t in his right mind when writing out his will. There’s no judge and jury alive that will say Howard Stark wasn’t in his right mind when he decided to leave most of his assets to his long lost son.”

Tony blinked, taking in all the information. Matt seemed to nod along as Foggy spoke. “Our main problem would be whether or not you’re really Tony Stark, but since the DNA tests were made public that will be less of an issue that could have been. The court may have you take another DNA test and if you pass that then we’re practically set.” He said calmly, his head slightly tilted to the side. “So if you’re really Tony Stark everything else should be pretty easy.”

The way that was said didn’t quite sit right with him, almost as if Murdock was implying something he didn’t want to look too deeply into. “As far as I know I’m really Tony Stark.” He said softly.

Foggy leaned over to whisper to Matt. “He shrugged.” Tony didn’t understand the point of the sentence, but it was true so it didn’t matter.

Matt was still for several long seconds, appearing to be focusing on something important. He looked like he was listening for something, Tony tried to hear what it was but the house was silent except for the soft humming from the vents as warm air heated the building. Whatever Matt was listening for or thinking about or whatever he was trying to do, he must have been satisfied with
what he found because the ends of his lips turned up and he nodded.

“‘You’re from New York?’ Tony asked quickly. Foggy and Matt both smiled.

“‘Hell’s Kitchen, to be precise.’ Foggy said fondly.

Tony nodded, he hadn’t ever heard of that part of New York but he was fairly certain it was a tv show. “‘I think I’m from New York.’” He muttered. “‘At least, I was. I used to live around there before everything went to shit.’”

“Do you ever think about going back?” Matt asked. Tony didn’t know how to answer.

“He shrugged again.” Foggy said quietly, once again leaning over to whisper to Matt.

“Why do you do that?” Tony said, voicing his curiosity. Foggy raised an eyebrow in question. “Why do you tell him whenever I’m shrugging?”

Matt chuckled softly. “I’m blind. Body language is an important way of communication that my associate, Foggy Nelson, doesn’t want me to miss out on.”

“Oh.” Tony said. He knew what blindness was and now felt like an idiot for not putting it all together. “That explains your cool sunglasses. I’ve never met a blind person before.”

It was the truth, Tony never had met a blind person, never even seen one on TV, what he was allowed to watch had always been strictly monitored and he guessed that there just so happened that none of the approved television programs featured blind characters. That didn’t sound all that great.

“You think they’re cool?” Matt asked.

Tony nodded, not realizing his mistake until Foggy leaned in to tell Matt that he had nodded. The conversation lulled then. He wasn’t quite sure what he wanted, if he trusted these men to take care of this. Natasha had found them, they weren’t SHIELD lawyers as far as he knew but Natasha was a SHIELD agent so there was really no knowing for sure.

“Do you ever think about going back? To New York?” Mrs. Rhodes asked, the first she had spoken since the other lawyers arrived.

Tony shrugged. “Maybe, I don’t know. I don’t remember New York.”

“Well, I’m sure if you ever do come back the city will welcome you with open arms.” Foggy said, smiling. “There’s nowhere else in the world quite like it.”

Tony wasn’t sure what he wanted. He knew the house, the great big one he remembered from so long ago where he used to live with his parents before his whole world fell apart was in New York. The house was definitely still there, he had seen it on Howard’s property listings and it had been mentioned to him that it was still standing and if he won the case it would belong to him. He didn’t want to go see it though. What little he could remember of the place was so happy and special, like wandering through a wonderland full of happy memories. If he went now the place would be tainted.

“Well, let’s get back to business, shall we?” Mrs. Rhodes said quickly, all attention snapping to her. “Since it’ll be easy enough to prove that you really are Tony Stark, our next big issue would be convincing everyone that Howard wasn’t coerced or manipulated in any way into changing the will.”
Tony blinked, trying to understand exactly what she had just said. “Wait, do they think I threatened him? I didn’t. I just wanted him to leave me alone, I didn’t threaten him about anything.”

“No one thinks you threatened him.” Matt said, raising his hand as if to calm him. “But there are a few suspicious circumstances surrounding this whole ordeal. You’ve been gone for thirteen years, no one knew what happened to you, and then you show up out of nowhere right before Howard’s death.”

Tony sighed, dropping his head into his hands. He didn’t know what to do. Howard left a specific set of instructions for his will and everything he owned, it’s what he wanted done with his legacy, Tony didn’t care if he got nothing in the world but he wasn’t going to let anyone say that Howard was incapable of deciding what he wanted done with everything he had in life.

Everyone was assuming the worst of him. They thought he would just willingly threaten Howard just get to his money. His heart felt like it was beating way too fast, air didn’t feel like it was getting to his lungs. He hated feeling like this and it was happening far too often for him to feel comfortable.

“Perhaps you should go sit down in the other room.” Matt said. “We’ll finish discussing everything with Mrs. Rhodes and we won’t come to any final decisions without your input later on.”

As soon as he was finished talking Tony was out of his seat and leaving the kitchen. They decided it would be best to meet the lawyers in his townhouse so he wouldn’t have to go out in public too often. Tony had become a public spectacle, nothing was private anymore and he couldn’t even walk down to the gas station without someone recognizing him and causing a scene. Tony hated it.

Most of the furniture was gone, donated to one charity or another. It was nicer now, easier to live in. There were far fewer useless decorations that reminded him of things he would much rather forget. He once had a life that he was so willing to cling to, willing to put up with so much abuse and mistreatment simply because he didn’t know better, and now he just wanted to forget.

He walked through the now empty rooms until he ended up back in his, almost as bare as the rest of the house. Tony let himself fall back onto the bed and stare up at the ceiling. He didn’t know what to do, life wasn’t what he always thought it was. The world was something he didn’t understand and he didn’t know how he was supposed to go about living in it. So far it was just one problem after another, he had to go through committees before he was allowed to be let go and now he had to go to court just to get the things his father left for him. The whole universe seemed to be against him.

Tony glanced over as the phone started to ring and considered just ignoring it. The way things seemed to be going it was probably someone offering him bad news and Tony didn’t think he could handle any bad news at the moment. It had been ringing for what seemed like far too long when he decided to actually answer it.

“Hello?” He muttered as he picked up the phone and pressed it to his ear.

“Hey, sweetheart.” Steve said on the other end of the phone. “Are you done with the lawyers? Clint, Natasha, and I were planning on getting lunch and we were all hoping you would come with.”

“No thanks.” Tony said. He fell back onto the bed with the phone still pressed to his face. It wasn’t bad news. It was Steve, beautiful and perfect Steve, was just calling him to see if they could spend time together. “I’m not that hungry. But yes, I’m done with the lawyers.”
“Did it go well?”

“No. They think I’m some sleazy little freeloader who showed up to kill Howard and take his money.” Tony said softly. He was exaggerating, the lawyers brought it up but they didn’t outright say anything like that.

“They called you that?!” Steve asked quickly, his voice rising softly. “What are their names?”

“No, they didn’t call me that. They just implied that that’s what everyone else thinks of me.” Tony said.

He could hear Steve make a displeased sound on the other end of the line, it was so soft and full of annoyance that Tony couldn’t help the small smile that broke across his face. “No one thinks that of you, darling. I’m out in public all the time and almost everyone thinks you’re a guy who had it rough and has finally come home. They’re rooting for you.”

Tony took a deep breath. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright.” Tony said. He sat back up and walked over to the master bathroom. He checked himself over in the mirror quickly. “I’m still not hungry but maybe we can all go to the park or something when you guys are done eating.”

“Great!” Steve said, excitement clear in his voice. “I’m not that hungry either so maybe you and I could have a chance to hang out and talk before Natasha and Clint are done eating.”

Tony agreed. They really did need to talk. They haven’t discussed much of anything the past week since this thing between them actually became a thing. Tony strategically avoided all conversations about it, using distractions like lawyers and lawsuits and rearranging furniture to put it off. It was a discussion that needed to be had though. As much as Tony would like to stay in this little bubble where he could pretend to be loved and cared for by Steve and nothing else in the world mattered, it wasn’t fair to Steve. Whether he wanted to end it now before he got sick of all of Tony’s problems or behaviors or if he wanted to go deeper into this and see if they could stay happy forever, Steve deserved a say.

“Sounds perfect.” Tony said slowly. He tried to comb out his dark curls with his fingers, but they weren’t cooperating. “Come pick me up?”

“I’ll be right over.”

Chapter End Notes

Meeting the lawyers could have gone better but it also could have gone a lot worse. Surprise (not really because you were all expecting it) Matt and Foggy. And also more Mrs. Rhodes because she was a bit glossed over in this chapter but I really want to write more of her being amazing. Interesting stuff happens next chapter. I hope you enjoy.
Comment, it'll make me happy.
Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

Sorry guys, I've hit another slump. I'm trying to write but the motivation and inspiration isn't there. I'll still be trying to get these chapters out as often as I can but it'll be a little longer than usual. Sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The park was nice, but cold. It took them a while to find a bench that wasn’t covered in snow or ice, but once they did Steve wrapped his large arms around Tony’s much smaller form. Steve was warm. He was always warm and on days like this Tony was immensely grateful for that.

“You don’t look happy.” Steve said slowly as they watched several pedestrians walk by. “What’s wrong?”

Tony shrugged. Nothing was really wrong, but nothing was really okay either. Everything was just falling into place and if they didn’t work out very well for him then it’ll be fine. Tony would be perfectly okay with failing Howard’s last wishes by not saving his will, he could live with everything thinking he came back and killed Howard just to get his money, and Tony would be okay when everyone became sick of him and decided to leave. Things could get bad but it’ll never be as terrible as it used to be.

“I just don’t know what to do. It’s all just fine, I never know what to do.” Tony said, smiling up at Steve when he squeezed Tony’s shoulder.

“It’ll be okay, sweetheart. No matter what happens you have people on your side.” Steve said as he leaned down to kiss Tony’s forehead. “Clint and Natasha are planning on stopping by to visit you to make sure you’re doing okay. And Peter and Rhodey definitely adore you, I think they appointed themselves to be your best friends. That’s good, they seem like good people. And you know I’ll always be here for you.”

“Yeah?” Tony asked.

He smiled when Steve’s head dipped down again, this time to brush his lips against Tony’s. “Of course, love. I’ll be here as long as you’ll have me.” Steve said, smiling brightly.
Tony blinked, his mind unable to have a single recognizable thought. Steve always managed to do that to him. Usually his mind couldn’t be quiet, constant ideas and doubts coming and going nonstop, but with Steve there was nothing but a calm sort of confusion where none of his thoughts were as loud and assaulting as they usually were.

“Why?” Tony asked quickly. “You do understand that although I’m devastatingly handsome I’m not that stable. A strong wind could likely tear me apart. I’m a lot of trouble.”

Steve just smirked at him. “Well, maybe I like trouble.” He whispered softly. “And yes, you are devastatingly handsome but you will never be anything other than amazing.”

“Captain Rogers, you’re definitely a charmer.” Tony said. He had to look away from his wide blue eyes that were so filled with nothing but positive emotions. He glanced down at his hands and held in a smile. “Why do you like me so much? It doesn’t really make much sense. I’m kinda a weird kid.”

“Well, maybe I like weird kids. I’m a bit of a weird kid too.” Steve said. He reached over slowly and grabbed Tony’s hand. “Are you okay? You’ve been a bit off today.”

Tony nodded. “I’m okay. I just don’t know what’s going on.”

Steve paused, the silence causing Tony to look up. Steve looked deep in thought, his brows furrowed in confusion, but he never let go of Tony’s hand. “With us? You don’t know what’s going on with us?” Steve asked. Tony shrugged. “Well, I don’t know what you want to happen between us but I know what I want. I love you. I enjoy being with you. I will always be here for you, whether you need help or not. If you want me to leave I will and I’ll only go as far as you’re comfortable with.”

“So if I want us to stay friends?” Tony asked, biting his lip.

“If you want I’ll respect that. You’re important to me and I want you to be happy.” Steve said, his smile faltering for a moment. “Is that what you want?”

Tony paused. He looked away from Steve and watched everyone else who decided to go to the park in the freezing cold. There were a few people walking their dogs, a family had brought the kids to build snowmen, and then there were couples. Quite a few people were walking down the paths, hand in hand, and smiling brightly at one another as if the one they were with had hung the
moon and stars in the sky. It was the same look Steve always had on his face. It was probably the
same look Tony had on his face often as well.

“No. That’s not what I want. I mean, of course I want to be your friend.” Tony said quickly. “But
I kinda want to be more than that as well. I kinda love you and will probably do something
embarrassing like sing Taylor Swift at your bedroom window and cry when we get married.”

For a small moment, Tony had thought he had said too much. But then Steve smiled and leaned
down close enough until their faces were inches apart. “Is this okay?” He asked. Tony nodded,
reaching up to grab the side of Steve’s head to pull him down the rest of the way.

Kissing Steve never failed to blow his mind. His lips were always so soft and his body was always
warm against him. Mostly though, it was the sparks that always flew through his skin whenever
they touched. Steve was this perfect person, whoever was in charge of the universe must have
been feeling really generous when they decided that Tony deserved him. Also probably really
cruel when they decided that Steve deserved him.

Steve moaned against his mouth, banishing all thoughts from Tony’s mind. He sounded so
beautiful. If he could stay curled up around Steve forever then it’ll be the greatest life Tony could
have ever been given.

They pulled apart when Steve’s phone started loudly, it was some rap song that Tony didn’t
recognize. “Nicki Minaj, I will not apologize.” Steve muttered quietly as he started digging
through his pockets. Tony didn’t say anything but he smiled anyway. He wasn’t familiar with the
song but it sounded fun. “Clint and Nat are done getting lunch and they want to know if we want
to all get together to go see a movie or museum or any activity that’s in the warm inside.”

“A museum sounds fun. I’ve never been to one.” Tony said. “I would like to hold your hand
while we go but I heard you’re not allowed to touch the masterpieces.”

Steve blinked. “That’s the worst line I’ve ever heard.” Steve said, smiling brightly. “But the in
love artist in me is thrilled.”

“Good. More terrible lines to come.” Tony said. He laughed as he leaned forward to give Steve
one last peck on the lips. “If it’s flirting you want then I can do so much flirting.”

“Sounds great. I’ll be sure to buy you flowers and take you to dinner every chance I get.” Steve
said. He pulled Tony close and sighed happily. “I’ll just use the rest room really quick and then we’ll go meet up with them.”

Tony nodded as Steve gestured to the small building that held the toilets in the middle of the park. He watched him walk across the park to get to hit, smiling fondly as Steve greeted everyone he passed. This man had chosen to love Tony for all his faults and all of his problems and Tony felt safe and secure knowing this and knowing that Tony loved him with all he had.

He closed his eyes and started humming to himself as he waited. Everything was going to be okay. He’ll figure things out. He had three lawyers who seemed to know what they were doing working around the clock to help build his case, they were going to be ready when the court date comes around. He had great friends who seemed like the genuinely cared about him and wanted him to be safe and happy. Everything was just fine.

Tony opened his eyes when he heard footsteps plowing through the snow and a weight dropping down onto the bench next to him. He turned to greet Steve but froze, the blood draining from his face.

“America isn’t as horrible as I thought it would be, but it’s not terrible I suppose.” Lotte said calmly as she glanced around the park, a small frown on her face.

Tony didn’t say anything, no words came as his mind jump from one scenario to the next. He didn’t know what to do, what to say, if he should run away as fast as he could or fall into her arms and cry.

“Don’t look so surprised, my darling.” Lotte said. She reached out and took Tony’s face in her hands. “We would have come to get you sooner but circumstances haven’t been preferable. But we’re here now and we’ve come to retrieve you. We’ve had you under surveillance for a while, we’re very proud of you for getting away from SHIELD. Now the perfect opportunity has finally come up for us to speak with you again.”

“Wait.” Tony said quickly as she finished. He looked away from her and down at the ground. She came back for him, she was here. They didn’t want to get rid of him at all because now here she was to bring him home. “Is he here too? Is Mesman here?”

“We both entered the city last week. Certainly we would have gotten here sooner if SHIELD hadn’t been as busy as it has been recently.” Lotte said, annoyance flashed across her face. “Whatever you’ve been telling them has made them a bit unhappy with us.”
“The truth!” Tony said quickly, getting out the few words he could manage. “All I’ve been telling them is the truth.”

Lotte hummed. “An exaggerated version of the truth, no doubt. You always were one for the dramatics.” She said dismissively. “It doesn’t matter now. Now that you’re finally out and alone I can take you home. Come along dear.”

Tony stayed seated on the bench as she stood, holding her hand out for Tony to follow. His heart was beating far too fast, his breathes coming rapid and shallow. He was panicking, he could recognize the symptoms now but knowing that wasn’t in the least bit helpful. He was tempted to just reach forward and take her hand, to go home and back to the life he had growing up and have everything be as it should be. But he didn’t want to do that, he didn’t want to go through all of that again.

But this was Lotte. This woman had never lied to him, never hurt him, and was always there to take care of him. She had raised him and he loved her so much. He missed her. Tony wondered if he could handle it all, the yelling and beating, if it meant he could be close to the one person who had taken care of him from the beginning.

“No. I can’t.” Tony muttered. He didn’t sound very convinced which was probably because he wasn’t, if she insisted he didn’t know if he continue to say no. “I can’t go back.”

Lotte blinked, surprised. Then she smiled again and leaned in close to him to wrap him in a gentle hug. “Of course, darling. Whatever you want.” She said softly. “We will be in touch though. There are a lot of things that still needed to be discussed about your future.”

Tony made a desperate whine as she pulled away. He dropped his head into his hands and tried to catch his breath. This was bad, this was very bad. They were back again, here to ruin the good thing he was trying to build for himself. They were right. Steve, Coulson, Clint, Natasha, Peter, Bruce, Thor, and Rhodey were all absolutely right. His life before with Mesman and Lotte hadn’t been safe or healthy for him. But right now, knowing they were in the city, that they had come back for him, and that things could possibly go back to the simplicity of what it was before, he was doubting it all over again in the face of that temptation.

Instead of waiting for Steve to come back and trying to figure out what he should do, Tony stood and ran as fast as he could, leaving the park and panic behind him.

Chapter End Notes
Yay, look who's here. Poor Tony is trying to find some stability in his life and the past has come calling. Steve needs to hug him more. Comment, pretty please.
Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

Shoutout to exploreworlds for beta reading!
I hope you guys enjoy the chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony didn’t stop to think about anything until he had safely returned to his townhouse. No one was there, Jarvis was probably at his own home since Tony didn’t ask him to move in with him even though the man spent enough time around the house that Tony sometimes forgot he didn’t live there. Peter and Rhodey were in class. Everyone else was somewhere doing something and he probably had at least a little while before Steve came looking for him, if he did at all.

Howard had an office in the house. It was small, plainly decorated, but had a large desk with several photos hidden in a few of the drawers and sometimes Tony just liked to lock himself inside that room and look at them. Jarvis had told him Howard made dozens of copies of those photos, keeping a few hidden on all his properties. The fact that there was a fully stocked liquor cabinet in the office only added to the appeal.

He hadn’t drunk anything since that big movie thing Rhodey had on campus, it hadn’t been a fun experience, the next morning was terrible, and it had tasted disgusting. But it had been nice as well, for a few hours he watched a movie he didn’t understand and almost forgot about all his problems. So he opened the cabinet and grabbed the nicest bottle he could find. He didn’t bother trying to read it and just plopped himself down at the desk.

“Oh god.” Tony said to himself after taking a sip. If he had to think of what it was like he would describe it as eating wood while getting punched in the face. It was disgusting and burned on the way down his throat and into his stomach. His second sip wasn’t much better.

The first photo in the bottom drawer under a pile of complicated looking paperwork was of a younger Howard with a beautiful woman he didn’t recognize. Jarvis had told him it was Howard and Maria about three years before he was born. It was strange, Tony had to take another horrible sip of whatever he was drinking as he studied it closer. Tony had a very vague memory of his mother, all he could see when he tried to think back to her was dark hair, a gentle voice, and a beautiful smile. Anything else about her there might have been somewhere in his head was distorted or polluted in such a way that it was practically nothing at all.

He looked at the second photo some time later. Tony couldn’t tell exactly how many minutes later
because the bottle had become significantly lighter and emptier as he studied his mother’s features and lazily wondered if he looked like her in any way. The second picture was still of a younger Howard sometime after the first photo was taken, he looked tired and disheveled as he held a very small baby awkwardly in his arms as he smiled down at it. This one was Tony’s favorite, not because the newborn was clearly him with its dark hair and wide eyes, but because Howard looked genuinely pleased to have him. At one point or another Howard had loved him, he did when he was born and hopefully he did, though Tony wasn’t positive, for all the years he was gone and up until his death. And tiny, innocent baby Tony had probably loved Howard back when everything was so simple. Little baby him probably thought the world of Howard. Maybe he still did.

“You know, no one likes to get a call from a panicked Captain America because his boyfriend disappeared on a trip to the park.” Tony looked up to see Clint standing by the door. “I swear, I thought the guy was gonna cry, he thought you were kidnapped again.”

“No, not this time.” Tony muttered as he quickly dropped the pictures back into their drawer. “Did you break into my house?”

“Yes.”

Tony rolled his eyes. “Why did you break into my house?”

Clint shrugged and pulled a chair up to the other side of the desk. “No reason. Why did you ditch Rogers to get drunk by yourself?”

“I’m not drunk.” Tony said. It was a lie, he was about 76% sure he was drunk. There was a light burn that he could feel all over himself, his vision blurred if he stared at something for too long, and his head didn’t want to stay upright and instead lulled around on his neck. Alcohol on an empty stomach probably did that to a person.

“Fine, you’re not drunk.” Clint said, sighing in exasperation. “Can I get not drunk with you?”

Tony nodded, sliding the bottle across the desk towards him. He watched quietly as Clint put the bottle to his mouth and threw his head back. He took several long sips before plopping it back down on the desk with a soft grunt.

“I bet that’s vintage. Kinda oaky.” He muttered. “A little sweet. Knowing Stark that’s probably like a $600 bottle of bourbon or something. Outrageously expensive, but I certainly do feel classy
“Yeah, we’re classy little shits right now.” Tony said softly. He grabbed the bottle again, this time trying harder to stop himself from grimacing at the taste.

Clint smiles at him. “So what’s up? Why’d you ditch Cap? He was really worried, you know.”

Tony sighed and took another sip. “Word of warning, I might throw up later.” He said. Clint chuckled and nodded. “And I didn’t plan on running out on him. Something just… came up and I had to get away. Clear my head.”

“And get drunk.”

“Yeah, that too.” Tony said. He wasn’t going to deny it. “I don’t know what to do.”

“About what?” Clint asked. He leaned forward and took the bottle from Tony’s hand, placing it down on the floor by him without another word. Tony glared at him. “No more for you. You’re not legally allowed to drink yet. I don’t care what European country you sprouted up in, you’re in the US now and the US has different laws.”

“Oh, yeah. And you care so much about laws.” Tony said, rubbing the heel of his hand into his eyes.

Clint frowned slightly, but didn’t comment. Him not commenting just made a surge of satisfaction race through his head. Of course Clint didn’t care that much about laws, he used to hang out with a gang of criminal circus people. Tony remembered that and he wasn’t as bitter about it now, which made it a bit funny.

When he started laughing Clint’s frown softened into a look of concern. Everything was just so funny. His whole life was one big joke and if he wasn’t going to laugh about it then who would? He deserved to laugh about his own life, after hating it for so long he thought he was entitled to a bit of humor.

“Are you okay?” Clint asked slowly. Tony nodded. “You’re a weird drunk.”
“I told you, ‘m not drunk.” Tony said after his laughter died down. “I’m just tired and confused. And hungry.”

“We could go eat.” Clint said. “I’m sure your kitchen is perfectly fine.”

Tony paused, taking a moment to mentally count the days before nodding. He stood up slowly, pushing away Clint’s offered hand of support and stumbled out of the room and down the hall towards the kitchen. Standing was probably a bad idea, the world seemed more off center now.

They made it to the kitchen, which was as clean and fully stocked as he remembered. Clint quickly made himself at home, opening all the cabinets and the fridge and digging out a mess of ingredients. He muttered to himself the entire time in a language Tony didn’t know.

“What are you doing?” Tony asked.

Clint shrugged as he glanced back at Tony. “Making some Korean food. I love Korean food. You don’t have the right kind of noodles but we’re both not in any state to drive to the market so Spaghetti will have to do.” He sounded annoyed by that, but Tony didn’t comment.

Tony watched him move around the kitchen for a while as Clint set several pots on the stove and started cooking. In no time at all the whole room smelled exotic and his mouth salivated at all the new scents he didn’t recognize, but enjoyed. They didn’t speak to each other as some of the ingredients were dropped into various pots and Clint went about chopping vegetables. It was too quiet, Tony couldn’t stand it.

“I didn’t mean to ditch Steve.” Tony said softly. Clint hummed in acknowledgement but didn’t look over to him. “I really like him, I wanted us to have a nice time out. But something came up and I panicked.”

“What came up?” Clint asked as he tossed the last handful of vegetables into the pot and turned towards him.

Tony hummed slowly and debated just how much of the truth he was willing to tell. “The past.”
Clint seemed satisfied with the answer and nodded. “So what, you thinking about going back to them?” The question threw Tony off because yes, he was thinking about going back. Back to the familiarity of it all, back to the simplicity. Back to when Lotte took care of him without any hidden, malicious reasoning behind it. But some other part of him never wanted to go back. Tony nodded. “What was the plan? You find something of Howard’s lying around so you can give it to them as a ‘please take me back’ gift?”

It was a cruel thing to say, that he would so quickly betray his dead father in favor of the people who mistreated him for years. Clint didn’t say it harshly though, it spoke softly and curiously. Tony shook his head.

“No. Howard would never keep anything important in a place like this. I don’t want them to have anything of his.” Tony said slowly. “Besides, I can’t read any of his files anyway.”

“Why?” Clint said as he turned back around to stir the pots. “A strong sense of morals keeping you from snooping?”

“No, I can’t read that well.” Tony said, recoiling quickly. He really must have drunk more than he anticipated. He really should stop drinking, but at least he remembered to speak English this time. Last time he had just been rambling in Dutch and poor Peter had to drag him home. “I mean, I can read. It’s just hard and takes a while and all the letters just run together when words get too long so I hate it. I hate it so I don’t practice and practice makes perfect so I suck at reading.”

Clint turned back around and stared at him. His eyes piercing but nonthreatening as they scanned over his face. “You need any help? I knew a lot of people who had trouble reading, quite a few have had similar problems to what you’re talking about. I may not be an expert but I can still help you if you want.”

Tony shook his head quickly. “No. I don’t need help. You guys keep offering help, but I’m fine.” He said. He blinked quickly, frowning as Clint continued to stare. “Give me noodles. I was promised noodles.”

“They’re coming. Keep your rich boy pants on.” Clint said. He started scooping out stringy noodles and vegetables and whatever else he fixed up before sliding it over to Tony. “They’re supposed to be eaten cold but whatever. And if you don’t want my help we could always get Bruce to help you. He’s about to be released anyway. No incidents with the Hulk, he’s showing he has at least enough control to stop bad things from going down, and he is a teacher after all.”
Tony slurped a forkful of noodles, they were amazing, and thought about it. “Alright. I like Bruce.”

Clint scoffed and sat down next to him with his own bowl. “I’m offended. I always thought I was your favorite.” He said. He smiled smugly as he dug his fork into his bowl of noodles. “Or, at least second to Cap. Clearly, he’s your favorite. You’re head over heels for that guy even if you run out on him during dates.”

Tony sighed and dropped his head into his hands. “I didn’t mean to do that. I wasn’t thinking. I should probably apologize.”

“Yeah. He looked absolutely destroyed last time I saw him.” Clint said. Tony groaned and buried his head deeper into his hands. “But in like a worried way. Like a ‘the man I love has disappeared and I need to find him’ kind of way. I’m sure once you talk it out it’ll all be great.”

Tony shrugged. He had no idea what he should talk about. Apologize, definitely, but he had no explanation. All he had was the truth and he couldn’t tell anyone that. They couldn’t know Lotte was in the city. They couldn’t get to her, she was good. Tony let his head fall from his hands and rest on the cool marble of the countertop. It chilled his head and helped calm the headache he could feel forming. It wasn’t long until he got just comfortable enough to let his eyes slide close and for him to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that was fun. More coming soon.
Comments are greatly appreciated and have a special place in my heart.
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

Bit of a serious tone in this chapter. Nothing that hasn't been brought up before in the story but be warned, it's not that happy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Tony noticed as his mind drifted back to consciousness was the gentle fingers stroking his hair, carefully avoiding all the tangles that had formed in his unruly curls. The second thing that grabbed his attention was soft, hushed whispers directly above him. Tony’s eyes almost snapped open, becoming awake right then and there.

He hated it when people snuck up on him while he was sleeping, after over a decade of not actually being safe in the place he went to sleep he had gotten quite skilled at hiding his sudden panic of not waking up alone. All his fears and anxieties mostly washed away when he recognized the voice as Steve’s and decided to keep his eyes closed a little bit longer, reveling in the gentle contact.

“Thanks for calling me, Clint.” Steve muttered softly, his hand still running over Tony’s hair. “I was so worried.”

Tony heard a few a few things moving somewhere in front of him. It sounded ceramic, probably the bowls they had been eating out of. Tony was still in the kitchen, his whole body leaning over the kitchen island with his face buried in his arms and resting against the cool countertop. Now that he was no longer resting all the relaxation slowly left his muscles and he could feel a painful ache settle over him from the uncomfortable position he had fallen asleep in.

“It was no problem, man. I’m just glad he’s doing okay.” Clint said, his voice a hushed murmur. “I was a bit nervous too. I was worried he was going to do something stupid and we wouldn’t find him in time. He’s alright though.”

The ice that formed in his stomach at the vocal worry that he would try to hurt himself made him want to curl away and hide. He wouldn’t do that, he promised he wouldn’t. Tony didn’t want to die, even if it did seem like the best option at the moment. Tony was terrified with the knowledge that the two people who had hurt him, had owned him, for thirteen years were here in the city. They wanted him to go back, which he knew now was probably the worst thing he could ever possibly do, but he wasn’t entirely certain he could continue to say ‘no’ if they kept asking. His resolve wasn’t as strong as everyone else’s, all Lotte really had to do was come back and tell him that everything could be just like it was and he would probably agree.
Everythi... before they had sent him here. Before all these ideas that SHIELD and everyone else crammed into his head told him that his former life was something bad. Back before he learned terms like ‘child abuse’ and ‘human trafficking’ everything was fucked up but it was familiar and comfortable. Tony was happy he knew the things he knew now though, back when he was ignorant and his brainwashed mind told him to stay and do everything he was told he’d still known it was wrong, he just hadn’t wanted to admit it.

Tony was pulled out of his thoughts as Steve gently wrapped his arms around Tony and lifted him into the air. His eyes slid open and they snapped up to Steve, quietly questioning him. Steve greeted him with a smile as he leaned down to brush his lips against Tony’s forehead.

“Go back to sleep, sweetie. You’ve had a long day.” Steve said softly. Tony could feel himself relax again, reveling in the warmth, comfort, and… safety that came with being held by Steve.

“Are you mad?” Tony asked. He had to know, he had been stupid and ran off on Steve without a single word. If their places were switched, Tony would be heartbroken. “I’m sorry.”

“No, it’s okay. I’m not mad, just worried.” Steve whispered to him. Tony buried his face into Steve’s shoulder and allowed himself to be calmed by the familiar scent of vanilla. Completely surrounded by Steve, it was almost easy to forget what was going on. “You don’t have to tell me what happened. Just promise you’ll text me next time you feel like you need to run away. Let me know you’re alright.”

Tony nodded and removed his face from the soft fabric of Steve’s shirt. That was a mistake. A quick glance at the rooms around him and he felt like throwing up. Steve carrying him upstairs wasn’t a problem, but watching the world shift and tilt as he was carried made him feel sick. His vision was still wobbly, his mind too unfocused, and he clearly hadn’t been asleep enough to get rid of the alcohol in his system.

He kept his eyes closed the rest of the trip up to his room, where Steve was incredibly gentle about laying him down on the bed, pulling off his shoes, and reaching for the covers. Tony couldn’t stop himself from smiling at the soft humming coming from Steve as he took care of him. The smile slipped away as he heard Steve’s footsteps head for the door.

“You’re not gonna stay?” Tony asked, lifting his head off of his pillow. He glanced over to where Steve was standing by the door.
“I’ll be right downstairs. I’m not going anywhere.” Steve said slowly. “Unless you want me to leave, of course.”

“No, I want you to stay.” Tony said and patted the large empty space on the bed next to him. “You smell nice and if you’re hanging out while I’m sleeping I might actually get some rest in this house.”

Steve’s face did that adorable thing that Tony loved so much where it turned bright red, it went from the tips of his ears and down his neck until the blush disappeared under his shirt. He shifted from foot to foot as his mouth opened and closed silently. “Are you sure? It might actually be better if you get some space. Clint said you were pretty freaked out earlier.”

“Relax, Rogers. I’m asking you to cuddle with me while I sleep, not suck my dick.” Tony said. Steve seemed to choke on air as the words left Tony’s mouth, his face turning impossibly redder. Tony laughed. “Sorry.”

“Who the hell has been teaching you these gross sex jokes? It was Clint, wasn’t it?” Steve asked quickly. He was skillfully avoiding eye contact but did take a few steps back in Tony’s direction.

“Nope. It was Rhodey.” Tony said. Steve sighed slowly and finally he was standing at the side of Tony’s bed. “And he wasn’t teaching me jokes. He just thought I might need an extensive sexual education lesson just in case. Which he was right, they never thought to teach me about shit like safe sex and asking for consent and different kinds of sexualities and whatever.”

“I bet that was weird. SHIELD assigned me an agent to give me the rundown too.” Steve said, the amusement in his tone barely masking the concern that was there. “Most awkward conversation of my life.”

“It wasn’t too bad. Educational.” Tony muttered. He patted the empty space again and waited. Steve frowned, his eyes trailing over the bed as if it was a trap of some kind. “Please, just stay. We won’t do anything. Just stay.”

Steve’s resolved seemed to disappear and he nodded. Very slowly he kicked off his own shoes and slide into the bed next to him. Tony rolled onto his side and wiggled closer to Steve until he felt his back hit him and the man roll over to throw an arm over him. It was comfortable, warm.
“See, not so bad.” Tony muttered.

“Sleep, Tony.” Steve said.

To give himself credit, Tony really did try to sleep after that. He was significantly less intoxicated, even if he was probably still over the legal limit, and his mind refused to shut off long enough for him to actually rest. His back and neck hurt so he tried to figure out how long he had napped on the kitchen counter, he kept thinking about how incredibly warm Steve was behind him, he kept thinking about how cold the townhouse was now that it was the middle of winter. Tony thought about getting his GED, going back to MIT, he thought about just packing his bags and disappearing for a while.

Sometimes he thought about how much alcohol his body would need to poison him, how fast a car would have to be driving for it to kill him on impact, or how much pressure he would have to put on a razor blade for it cut deep enough. Tony was shaken, frightened even. All the options always seemed so much easier, but not really what he wanted.

Mostly he thought about Mesman and Lotte, about that house he was locked away in for thirteen years, and what he should do. He missed it, missed knowing exactly what he was supposed to do, what he would be punished for, knowing the rules, knowing the routines. Tony missed Lotte’s gentle smiles and touches and Mesman’s commanding presence and demands so Tony knew exactly what he should do and when. But he didn’t miss the beatings, he didn’t miss the dark rooms he would be locked in, and he didn’t miss the fear.

“I don’t know what to do.” Tony whispered. He felt Steve shift behind him.

“You do what feels right for you, not what anyone else says you should do.” Steve said, his breath tickling the soft skin behind Tony’s ear. “Though you should definitely consider advice and suggestions from others. My advice is to wait to have sex until you feel absolutely ready.”

Tony sighed loudly. “This isn’t about sex.” He said frustratingly. Steve chuckled. “This is about whether or not I should go home.”

He could physically feel the tension flooding into Steve, the arms around him pulled him closer and tighter and the ticklish breathing against his ear stopped. “You are home, Tony.”
“No, I’m not.”

“Then do you want to go back to New York?” Steve asked. “I heard Jarvis’s wife is going to be in Boston in a few days so you can ask her about the house there. I’m sure no one will have a problem with you going back. I mean, it’s your house. You had your childhood there. It’ll probably be good for you to go back and see it.”

Tony shook his head. “You know I’m not talking about New York.”

There was a pause. Neither of them spoke for several long minutes as Steve grabbed Tony’s hands and squeezed, not hard enough to hurt but just enough to make it seem like he was afraid to let go. He placed several delicate kisses to the nape of Tony’s neck that sent warmth exploding across his body.

“Please don’t go looking for them.” Steve whispered. “They’re not good for you.”

“I know that.” Tony said. It was an obvious statement that countless people had repeated back to him until the words finally made sense. “They’re not good for me, but they’re familiar. As if you don’t miss your life before the whole ‘Captain America’ thing came about.”

Steve hesitated for a small moment. “Yeah. I miss it. I wouldn’t want to go back though.” He sounded confident and certain, as if he believed his words with everything he had. Tony opened his mouth to question it, because surely things were better before a war tore the world in half and he lost everything he once knew, but Steve spoke again before he managed to utter a sound. “If I didn’t end up leaving all that stuff behind I probably would have married Peggy, we would have had a few kids, I would have still lost a few friends during the war, I could have helped Peggy and Howard and everyone look for you after you disappeared, or you might not have gotten taken at all, and it would have been so different than how it is now. But I still would have lost some friends, I would still feel out of place in the city that used to be my home, and I would still be affected by the war. Who knows what else could have happened. It would be different than my life is now, but I kinda like how it’s going so no, I wouldn’t want to go back.”

When he finished he placed another soft kiss on Tony’s neck and he melted, unable to blink away the tears. Steve ran his hands gently up and down Tony’s trembling arms as he whispered soothing nonsense into his ear. Tony just wanted to shut up and let the man comfort him, he didn’t want to talk about it anymore, he didn’t want to make a decision.
“But they want me back.” Tony whispered softly, his voice barely loud enough to be heard. “They asked me to come back.”


“You know who.” Tony said. “Don’t make me say their names.”

Steve nodded and muttered about how he didn’t have to and how it will all be okay. Tony was just ashamed at the small flare of pride he felt when he refused to tell Steve who Mesman and Lotte were. He was protecting them, even though he knew by now that he really shouldn’t. If SHIELD didn’t know their names then they couldn’t track them down and for some shameful reason Tony was relieved about that.

Tony’s trembling got worse, his breathing came in desperate gasps, and his heart felt like it was about to beat out of his chest. He hated this feeling, he hated how frequently his body seemed to go into panic mode lately, and he really wanted it to stop. Steve sat up quickly and pulled him up and into his arms.

“It’s okay, baby. You’re safe. I won’t let them get to you.” Steve whispered into his ear. “You’re safe. I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

Things are going to start getting interesting really soon. We're so close.
Thank you for reading.
Comment, I am comment starved.
“Shouldn’t our first priority be keeping him safe?” Bruce asked quickly.

Peggy turned to Tony, a fierce fire burning in her eyes. “If those monsters think they can take you from me again, I’ll slaughter them all.”

Steve murmured in agreement. Tony didn’t see the point of this little meeting, gathering all of his friends into his kitchen to have coffee and discuss the threat to his wellbeing and finding his former captors. Everyone Tony had spent a decent amount of time with and at least trusted to some small amount was there to discuss what they could do to protect him.

Tony hadn’t considered that Steve would tell everyone else that the people who had him locked away for so long were back and had made contact with him, but he wasn’t surprised. He wasn’t even angry. Quite the opposite actually because with the news that he might once again be in danger everyone seemed to have come together and promised him that he was safe and loved. It was a good feeling.

“We are totally moving in now.” Peter said quickly. Rhodey nodded beside him. “Those people are out there and they are after you, we’re not taking our eyes off of you for a second.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary.” Tony said. “I’m a big boy, I can take care of myself. Besides, they aren’t really trying to grab me and disappear into the night. They simply told me that they were interested in taking me back and would be in touch.”

Everyone started speaking at once, the room filled with a loud murmuring and Tony could only make out a few sentences. They all seemed convinced that they were here to hurt him, kill him probably or at the very least take him away again. They all seemed to have grown a protective instinct when it came to him and Tony wasn’t entirely sure how that made him feel, cared for or smothered.

Coulson cleared his throat and everyone slowly fell silent. “Tony, can you tell us their names? What they look like?” He asked. Tony paused for a moment to weigh his options and then shook his head. By now he knew this weird urge to keep Mesman and Lotte out of trouble and prevent their arrests wasn’t normal and definitely not healthy. It didn’t matter though, none of it mattered. Tony didn’t care about what was considered psychologically healthy or how mistreated everyone
kept saying he had been, Tony only really cared about not going back to the way things were and keeping them from being arrested. “You do realize that by refusing to tell us you are putting yourself in danger, correct?”

“It’s not that big of a deal. I can handle this.” Tony said. Everyone gave him a weird look, raising their eyebrows and sighing as if the lie sounded more pathetic to them than it did to Tony’s own ears. “I’ve lived with these people my entire life, I know how to survive them.”

“Tony, I know you’re strong. You can survive anything.” Steve said slowly, leaning across the kitchen island to hold his hand. “But we’re worried. After what happened last time we don’t want those people to be anywhere near you again. We’re going to keep you safe, I promise.”

His voice was full of such emotion that Tony didn’t have anything to say to that. He wanted to feel safe, to feel protected and loved, and these people were trying to do just that. But this wasn’t going to work out, there couldn’t be a battle between his old family and his new one. Tony didn’t think he could handle it.

Everyone paused and stared. Tony didn’t know what was going through all of their heads, but it must not have been very pleasant. Bruce and Steve had started whispering to one another in hushed voices that Tony couldn’t quite make out. Clint, Natasha, and Thor were having a separate conversation on the other side of the kitchen about rotating shifts to guard him. Coulson and Peggy were discussing whether or not to move him to a more secure location. Peter, Rhodey, and Coulson were simply staring at him.

“Hey, let’s go for a walk. Yeah?” Peter said, putting down his coffee cup and tapping Tony’s shoulder.

Tony wasn’t sure what he wanted to do. Certainly getting away from the large group of people who had taken it upon themselves to protect him would be nice. It was suffocating, uncomfortable. A walk would do him good. He followed Peter and Rhodey out of the kitchen and once they all got their coats on they went outside into the cold. It was snowing, puffs of white were falling in fluffy flakes that disappeared when they hit the piles of snow on the ground.

Tony just picked a direction and started walking. All things considered, it probably wasn’t a good idea for him to be out and about. Mesman and Lotte were in the city, they wanted him back, and Tony was trapped between wanting to go with them and run from them as fast as he could. He wanted to go home, but he wasn’t entirely sure where he would actually feel at home.

“You’re not going back with them.” Rhodey said after they made it a few blocks away from the
Tony shrugged. “I don’t know. Isn’t it my choice to go back or not?” He said.

“No, you already promised.” Rhodey said. He turned to smile at Tony, it was forced and didn’t quite reach his eyes. He was worried. “You promised all of us you wouldn’t go back to them.”

That was true, Tony did promise. Throughout the months he’s been with these people, allowing them to take care of him and keep him alive and safe, they had asked for very little. There were a few questions about where he had been for the past thirteen years and who he was with, but mostly they just asked that he didn’t go back. They thought he would be hurt if he went back and he probably would be. Visions of dark, locked rooms and soundproof basements danced around in his head.

“Promises don’t mean anything.” Tony muttered. “They’re just words.”

“Words with intent, Tones.” Rhodey said quickly. Tony looked at Peter, who simply shrugged sympathetically.

Tony didn’t really care. Promises really did mean nothing. All those years ago Clint had promised that they were going to let him go home. His parents promised to protect him forever. Steve had promised he wouldn’t let Mesman and Lotte take him back. Everyone made promises and the way things were going there was a good chance that this one would be broken as well.

There was a coffee shop just a few blocks away from Tony’s townhouse, he didn’t go out very often but Jarvis had told him it was there and that it was good. He turned the corner, Rhodey and Peter following behind him wordlessly. No one was outside, the snow and the cold probably turned off potential pedestrians. Tony hated the cold; he could see why they didn’t want to come out today. However, the feeling of abandonment that seemed to come with the empty streets wasn’t to be desired.

Tony liked the city. He had spent his whole life behind the walls of some large house in the Netherlands, completely isolated from everyone else and learning everything he needed to know from people who only seemed to want to hurt him. Boston was different, there seemed to be people everywhere. There was a constant presence every time he walked out the front door and he was greeted by shouting couples and rude people trying to get from place to place. Tony loved all of it. Now it just seemed like there was no one.
The coffee shop was almost just as empty. It was spacious, many of its seats were empty. There was a man in the corner on his laptop and a young couple sitting by the windows, but besides them there was no one but the staff. Some guy in a trenchcoat was leaving, another young couple walked in behind Tony. They smiled as Tony, Rhodey, and Peter entered and kicked the snow off their shoes and ordered their drinks.

Jarvis was right, it was good coffee.

“Maybe you should lay low for a while.” Peter said after taking a long sip of his drink. “We probably shouldn’t even be out right now. They could pop up at any moment and whisk you off into the night.”

“I’m fine.” Tony said. He looked back at the counter and debated whether or not to get a muffin. They were large and came in a variety of flavors, they smelled so good it made his mouth water. Tony decided not to get a muffin. “Besides, they don’t seem like the active kidnapper type of people.”

Rhodey raised an eyebrow and shook his head. “You do realize you’re saying that about people who actually kidnapped you, right?” He said, his voice was just a touch condescending and Tony rolled his eyes.

“They didn’t do any of the actual kidnapping. Other people technically kidnapped me and then I was sold to them. They didn’t actually take me.” Tony said slowly, annunciating each word carefully so nothing was lost or confusing. “They never really seemed like the kind of people who does stuff, they seem like the kind of people to get other people to do stuff for them.”

“I’m not buying that. It’s bullshit and you know it.” Rhodey said quickly, he had almost shouted but was quick to quiet into an angry whisper. Tony instinctively tensed, they were angry with him. Someone was always angry with him and someone would be angry no matter what he did.

The realization that all of his new friends would be angry with him for going back hit him fast and it hit him hard. They would be furious, if not at him then at Mesman and Lotte for convincing him to go back. They would come looking for him. Peggy had already told him that if he disappeared again she would burn the world to the ground to come looking for him. Steve had promised to protect him. Everyone he had met at SHIELD, Clint, Natasha, Thor, Bruce, Coulson, and Agent Hill had all promised they wouldn’t let those people hurt him again. They promised, and although promises meant very little, there was a small chance that they had all decided to tell the truth. There was some sliver of hope that suggested that when they told Tony that they genuinely cared about him and would try to save him if he did end up in Mesman and Lotte’s custody again they were being honest.
He couldn’t have them come looking for him. It would get violent, messy. He could never have these two separate groups of people in the same room together. Everything was fine the way it is, everyone was alive and safe. If all of his new, close friends would come looking and there was no way Lotte would be alright if they all came to get him prepared for a fight.

“Alright.” Tony said. “I’ll be careful. No one is going to take me away.”

“Of course not. Because we’re moving in to keep an eye on you.” Peter said.

Tony sighed. “You know, I did offer to let you guys move in not too long ago. You both said no.” He said, smiling smugly. “And now that I’m super desirable by so many people you boys are getting jealous and just want to get closer to me.”

Rhodey rolls his eyes. “Yep, that sounds about right.” He said as he shook his head. “Absolutely no one can have you but me, buttercup.”

“And me.” Peter said quickly. “You know, your first friend. Your best friend. The sunshine of your life.”

Tony laughed, relieved to have the mood lightening and that they were no longer discussing the possibility of him disappearing again. He wasn’t going anywhere, he couldn’t. “If you guys are so jealous of people you haven’t even met then how furious you must be to know how great things are going between me and Steve. We’re in love. Planning a June wedding.”

“Nope. That’s too soon.” Rhodey said. “I want you to be dating for at least a year before there is talk about marriage.”

Tony nodded. He wasn’t getting married. In all his years he had never once considered the possibility that he would end up getting married. Then again, he had never considered seeing his father again, being surrounded by people who took care of him without every laying an unfriendly hand on him, and towards the end of his confinement, Tony even stopped believing they would ever let him out. After thirteen years Tony didn’t think he would ever be out past that wall that surrounded the backyard and today he was sitting in a coffee shop while everyone he knew was talking about ways to protect him from harm. Strange things he had never thought were possible were happening at this moment, but that didn’t change the fact that he wasn’t getting married. Tony wasn’t even sure he wanted, regardless of how much he loved Steve. Marriage was just another thing he didn’t understand.
“I’m meeting with the lawyers again tomorrow.” Tony said. “Perhaps we can discuss weddings after I win what Howard wanted me to have.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took a while, but it's finally up and it's about to get really interesting. Things are going to get really fun, everyone will be super happy... and nothing bad will happen at all.

:D
Chapter 56

For the past week Tony had gone to sleep and woken up with the comforting feel of Steve wrapped around him. Everyone had thought it best to make sure someone was with Tony at all times to keep him safe and deter people from going after him. Peter and Rhodey moved in and although they were gone most of the days for their classes they came back every evening for dinner and games until the fell asleep and had to get ready in the morning. Thor always seemed to be around, whether Tony knew it or not. Sometimes he would walk into a room and Thor was there watching tv or cooking in the kitchen. Bruce, Clint, and Natasha appeared randomly throughout the day, they always knocked and came in when invited. They talked about their lives, how the search for his former captors are going, and to reassure him that he was safe.

Steve was there the most. He held Tony when he needed him to, never did anything that made Tony uncomfortable. He asked before kissing Tony, he asked before climbing into bed with him, and Tony had never felt safer or happier than he did in those moments.

“Is this okay?” Steve whispered as he lightly brushed his lips over Tony’s exposed neck.

Tony nodded, still too tired to open his eyes and face the day, but he was content in just letting himself feel Steve’s soft lips on his neck and the warmth of his arms wrapped around his waist. “Hmm, ‘s nice.”

“It’s time to wake up, baby.” Steve whispered. His hands rubbed moving to wrest on Tony’s hips, his thumbs playing with the hem of his shirt. This had become a morning routine, waking up to Steve beautiful kisses and his gentle touches. It never went further than that though, Steve never asked for it to and Tony didn’t think he cared. “You have court today.”

Tony groaned. He did have court today. His handful of lawyers who had spent a large portion of time building his case to go up against Stane’s army of the best in the business. Tony was only slightly worried. Howard wanted things to be a certain way after his death, Tony was going to make it happen.

“I don’t want to go.” Tony muttered. “You go instead.”

“No, love. I can’t go instead, but I can go with you.” Steve whispered. He sat up and stretched, smiling down at Tony. “Come on, sleeping beauty. I’ll make you breakfast.”
“No thank you.” Tony said, rolling over to press his face into the pillow. “Not hungry. Go on without me. I’m fine.”

There was a few seconds of silence and in that time Tony had thought he won, that Steve would let him sleep until it was time to go. No such luck, just as he was about to get comfortable again he felt large arms wrap around him and lift him off of the bed. Awareness flooded Tony at the sudden change in position and the stability of the mattress fell beneath him.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Steve said smugly. “Did I startle you?”

“You’re such an asshole.” Tony said. “Put me down.”

Steve ignored him, instead carried him out of the bedroom and down the stairs. He hummed softly as they got into the kitchen and gently placed Tony down into one of the waiting breakfast bar stools. Rhodey and Peter were already there, muttering silently to Rhodey’s mother as they all got ready for the day.

Steve made pancakes and he dropped the plate down in front of Tony with a kiss to his cheek. Tony wasn’t that hungry, his eating schedule had fallen back into place and no one had said a thing. This was better, it was easier this way. Without the constant surveillance from SHIELD Tony was able do what he thought was right, he had control back.

He did end up eating some. Steve had cooked for him, like he seemed to be doing most mornings, and Tony loved him. He loved everything Steve did for him and how he smiled at him like he was the whole world. Life seemed alright at the moment.

“You ready for your big day?” Peter asked, turning towards Tony with a smile. “Your lawyers here have a pretty good case.”

“You bet they do. One of them is my mom and she’s the best in the world at what she does.” Rhodey said quickly. Mrs. Rhodes was standing by the coffee pot, a smug smile on her face.

“Your faith in me is reassuring.” She said calmly. She put her mug in the sink and walked around the kitchen island, carefully laying a kiss on all of their foreheads. “I’ll see you guy there, dress nicely. Don’t worry Tony, we’re gonna win this.”
Tony smiled at her but didn’t comment, instead he continued to mindlessly poke at his pancakes. He appreciated her enthusiasm, but sometimes he couldn’t stop the small feelings of doubt the wiggled into his mind.

He didn’t finish his breakfast, instead he slid his plate over to Peter and then rushed upstairs to get dressed. Tony had nice clothes, all of his friends seemed determined to make sure he had everything in the world he could possibly need and that included a nice outfit to wear to court. He could hear Peter and Rhodey in their room arguing over what color tie did and did not count as ‘nice’ and Steve sat in a seat by the window, already dressed and looking incredible.

“It’s still not too late for you to go in my place.” Tony said. “You’re way better with people than I am. They naturally like you.”

“They like you too, Tony.” Steve said, smiling brightly at him. “It’ll be good for you to go. For people to see you all sexy in that suit and taking control of a situation.”

“I’m also dating America’s sweetheart. Maybe the judge is a patriot and will side with me because he sees you standing there.” Tony said. He walked over to Steve, bending down to capture his mouth with his own. “Go without me?”

“Nope. The media will be there. They all already think we’re a couple, what kind of boyfriend would they make you out to be if you sent me to your own court date alone?” Steve asked, his hands found their way back to Tony’s waist. “Is this okay?”

“Yeah.” Tony said. Steve leaned forward for another kiss but Tony quickly pulled away. “Well, would you look at the time. We better get going, babe.”

Steve groaned, but got up and followed Tony out of room. When they were all ready and downstairs they gave each other a once over and nodded. They were all coming for moral support. Peter was Tony’s oldest friend, Rhodey was not only the son of Tony’s lawyer but also someone Tony trusted completely, and Steve was the man who always seemed to make everything easier, he kept things okay.

“It’s going to be fine, Tony.” Rhodey said. “Let’s get going.”

They didn’t make it very far. A car was waiting for them right outside so Steve could take them to
the courthouse, but Tony didn’t even manage to make it down the steps that lead up to the door. At first he thought it was his nerves, or the fact that he had eaten so little in the past week, but suddenly his vision was getting blurry and his legs were giving out under him. Or, it could have been because of the sharp sting he had felt in his neck because Rhodey was going down too. Tony had hit the pavement with a large crack just as Peter and Steve started to collapse too.

…

Tony woke up shivering and with an incredible headache. He knew he wasn’t at home, or back at SHIELD, or anyplace with a bed, because he had been sleeping on cold pavement. It was doing wonders for the pain in his head but he was also freezing. There was no warm Steve wrapped around him.

“Tony, my darling.” A voice said over him, feminine and gentle. “Sorry we had to fetch you like that, we really didn’t intend for you to fall and hit your head like that, but we had to get you away from those people somehow.”

He cracked an eye open, confused and curious as to who was talking and what was going on. He was lying on a cement floor in an empty room that held nothing but a single lightbulb that hung from the ceiling. Lotte stood above him, a blanket in hand.

“That’s it, open your eyes. Everything is better now.” She whispered softly. “Sit up for me, okay?”

Tony nodded. He could do that. Fresh waves of pain went shooting through his skull at the movements and he had to close his eyes to stop himself from throwing up, but once he was sitting up for her like she asked the blanket was wrapped around his shoulders and Tony immediately felt a bit warmer. Still not as warm as he would have been if Steve were there, but Steve wasn’t there. Where was Steve?

“What happened?” Tony mumbled, his words coming out slightly slurred.

Lotte crouched down and ran her hands through his hair, frowning as Tony pulled away from the sharp pain in his skull and the uncomfortable chills the touch shot through his stomach. This wasn’t good, he could feel his body clench up in panic. He wasn’t safe, he was back with them,
and where, he thought but his mind unable to find any solution, was Steve?

“You have a slight concussion so I imagine you’re very confused. No need to worry, you’re back with us where you belong. You’re safe now.” Lotte said softly.

“Why?” Tony said, his voice quiet. “How did you find me?”

“We had to bring you back. We couldn’t just have you running around, allowing those people to fill your head with stupid ideas.” She said. She stood up, appearing taller than Tony remembered as she towered over him. He felt like curling up and sinking into the floor. “We just had to wait for a moment, which was difficult because you were constantly hanging around those SHIELD agents and supersoldiers. If we were going to get to you we would probably have to find a way to get through them as well.”

“Steve?”

Lotte smiled, bending down slightly to give him a gentle kiss on the forehead. “Don’t worry, darling. He’s safe. If you behave we’ll let you see him. Alright?”

Tony tried to nod, but the movement simply sent another burst of pain through his skull and nearly caused him to white out. He needed to go back to sleep, figure everything out when he was less tired and less likely to throw up. The room was spinning, he was probably going to get sick very soon if he didn’t lie down.

She didn’t say anything as he gently lowered himself to the ground, she simply stood and walked out the door. The heavy metal door echoed in the small concrete room as it slid closed. The air felt like it was standing still, the coolness of the floor seeping into him again.

Tony couldn’t think, his mind couldn’t grab hold of his racing thoughts. Nothing made sense at the moment. Shouldn’t he be at the court house? His lawyers were probably waiting for him. They had to get Howard’s stuff away from Stane, someone needed to be there. Maybe Steve was there. He could have gone in his place. Peter and Rhodey were with him, helping his case and defending him since he was gone. They were all alright, Tony would see them again soon. Once he woke up and felt better and his head stopped swimming they would come looking for him. Everything was just fine.

Chapter End Notes
Poor Tony. Hopefully he's okay, he took a nasty hit to the head when he fell but maybe he'll be able to focus enough to plan a grand escape.
I also started another story where Steve and Bucky take in a young Tony after Howard and Maria die. It's gonna be a bit dark but feel free to check it out if you're interested. What do you guys think will happen?
“Open your eyes, Tony.” A voice said above him. It was familiar, gentle. “You don’t have to wake up and do anything yet, but you gotta open your eyes.”

Tony did as he was told. The light hit him hard as he cracked one eye open, shooting thousands of shards of pain barreling into his skull. A hand covered his forehead, blocking out most of the light and gently pushing back his hair.

“Rhodey?” Tony mumbled, his words were slurred and quiet.

Rhodey was here, slowly trying to coax Tony awake with gentle hands and a quiet voice. “Yeah, Buddy. It’s me.” He said. Tony opened his other eye to get a good look at him, he looked terrible. A deep bruise and circled around the top his nose and under his eye, there was dried blood smeared across his face as if he tried, and failed, to wipe it away.

“The hell happened to you?” Tony asked. He blinked his eyes quickly as he tried to wake up. When he was sure he wasn’t going to fall back to sleep, he tried to push himself up. His head spun and if he had had anything in his stomach there was no doubt it would have come right back up. “Y’ll look like shit.”

Rhodey chuckled and shook his head. “Yeah, well I was drugged and took a little tumble down the stairs.” He said. He took Tony’s head in his hands gently and began to turn it from side to side. Tony made no effort to pull away or ask him to stop, he was too tired and nauseated to do much of anything. “Trust me, you look a lot worse. At least your heads not bleeding anymore.”

That was news to Tony. He didn’t even know his head was bleeding, let alone that it stopped. “What happened?” He said.

“We were kidnapped on our way to court. From what I know, they got all of us. I don’t know where Peter and Steve are.” Rhodey said, his voice strained. His fingers delicately roamed over the tender skin on Tony’s head, he winced away when he accidently put too much pressure. “I’m not a medical doctor, but I think you have a concussion.”

That would explain things. A concussion wasn’t all that surprising when he considered the way
the world kept tilting and his thoughts were taking too long to catch up with Rhodey's words. “Peter?” He mumbled. “Peter and Steve.”

This wasn’t good. Steve was a supersoldier, he had military training, he could probably take care of himself. Peter was just a kid, some random college student who got himself involved with Tony and put in danger. However, they must have known how to correctly knock Steve out. He was a supersoldier, he would have burned through a normal amount of tranquilizers in no time at all. Perhaps they both were in danger. It was all Tony’s fault.

He was getting the feeling again. That feeling where his chest felt like it was constricting, that his heart was beating too fast and he wasn’t getting enough air. He hated the feeling, it always gave him the sensation that he was dying. Tony didn’t want to die, he kept telling himself that and that he was going to live and be alright. Everything was fine, he just needed to figure out how to breathe.

“Tony, hey buddy you’re okay.” Rhodey said quickly. “You’re having a panic attack, deep breaths. Okay? Don’t worry, I got you.”

Tony was confused. He didn’t know what that meant. All he knew was that he was falling apart. Maybe he was sick, maybe he had a lung disease or a heart disease or anything that could possibly be making his body turn against him like this. Rhodey’s gentle hands curled around his shoulders and pulled him close, pressing Tony’s face against his chest. He was warm, the way his arms snaked around Tony’s shoulders to hold him still made him feel safe, and the slow and steady movements of his breathing was enough to focus on. Eventually, after what seemed like far too long of a time, Tony’s breathing started to calm and mimic Rhodey’s.

“That’s it. See, you’re doing so good.” Rhodey whispered to him. “It’s just a panic attack, take your time. I got you.”

“What?” Tony asked, his voice scratchy. “It’s a what?”

“A panic attack.” Rhodey said. “It’s not surprising. If I had gone through half the shit you have I would probably have them too. But you’re good, you’re strong. You made it through it and I’m proud of you.”

Tony blinked. “You’re not making any sense.”
Rhodey chuckled and pulled back. He was still leaning in close, his eyes scanning Tony’s face. “That’s because you’re concussed. You’re disoriented.” He said fondly. “Do you know where we are? Who took us?”

“I’m concussed.” Tony mumbled. Rhodey nodded quickly. “I think it was Mesman and Lotte.”

Rhodey was silent next to him, worrying his lower lip between his teeth as he thought. “You know them?” Tony nodded. “How long have you known them? From where?”

“Long time. They took care of me.”

Rhodey’s hand shot out and wrapped around Tony’s wrist, squeezing just hard enough to demand attention but not to cause pain. “You can’t go with those people, Tony! They’re going to hurt you again, they’re going to try and use you. Don’t go with them!”

It was the anger that took him by surprise. Not the fact that Tony had realized he told someone who Mesman and Lotte were, not the insistence that he not go back, and not even how it seemed like Rhodey was about to beg. It was the pure, raw anger. The only time Tony had ever seen Rhodey angry was back when everything was still covered up, when no one knew anything, and he had gotten them both arrested by SHIELD. Rhodey had been angry then, but never like this. Rhodey was never angry like this. Even when Tony had been thrown into a wall by a giant green Hulk and he had to go to the hospital he wasn’t angry. He had been concerned, insistent, and gentle. If Mesman and Lotte were enough to make Rhodey this kind of angry then it must have been bad.

“I won’t.” Tony said. He leaned forward and rested his head on Rhodey’s shoulder. “What are you doing here?”

Rhodey sighed and wrapped his arms around him. “Well, after my drugged tumble down the stairs I think I woke up locked in a closet. I may have tried to punch my way out, but the door was sturdier than I anticipated.” He said. “After a while they opened the door, dragged me out, and tossed me in here. They told me to keep you breathing and that was that.”

“Why would I stop breathing?” Tony asked. Nothing was making that much sense to him at the moment, but he knew he was in danger and the thought that he could have died was terrifying.

Rhodey shifted so he was sitting comfortably next to Tony. “You have a concussion, idiot. Not a
bad one.” He said. “You’ll be fine in a while.”

He nodded, excepting whatever Rhodey was saying as the truth. He trusted him, if he said he would be fine soon then he believed it. He didn’t have the energy to try and argue with him. Right now all Tony wanted to do was curl up into a ball and shut off his mind and go back to sleep. He wanted this nightmare to be over. Soon, he would wake up with Steve curled around his back with gently kisses being placed on his neck.

There was the loud metal clang of the door banging open. Tony was too tired to open his eyes, but he felt Rhodey’s arms tighten around him and then he was yanked away. Large hands closed around his arms and pulled him up from the ground, dragging him towards the door. Tony glanced back quickly and saw a large man knock Rhodey to the ground as the door closed behind him.

Wherever they were, it didn’t appear to be a large space. Just a few hallways, a couple of closed doors, and all it took was a short walk until they made it to their destination. Whoever the men were, they were very gentle in getting Tony the rest of the way and simply letting him go and leaving him.

“There you are.” Tony looked over to the voice, his heart beating faster at the familiar sound. Mesman stood in front of him, somehow managing to look casual and menacing at the same time. “Do you recognize this man?”

He waved his hand over to the corner. Sitting there, his metal arm strapped down to an odd looking chair, was the man, the one who had put Tony in the hospital for several weeks and killed his father. With his long brown hair falling over his eyes, the unmistakable prosthetic that Tony had thought about extensively, there was no chance Tony couldn’t recognize him.

“He works for you?” Tony asked, his voice soft and nearly a whisper.

Mesman shook his head, a sharp, wide smile spreading across his face. “No, he doesn’t work for me.” He said casually. He walked up to the man, who had been completely still the entire time. He seemed so different than he had seemed when he was trying to kill him. Back then he seemed like a giant, all muscle and violence. Now he seemed like a marionette with all of its strings cut off, limp and motionless as it waited. Mesman walked up to him and crouched down until he was face to face with the man. “But he does work for the same man I work for.”

The only thing that made sense was the idea that Mesman was trying to kill him. Of course he was, he had left Tony alone to defend himself with an empty gun, hoping that he would swing it around and get shot without any ability to defend himself. Mesman had been trying to get rid of
him, like an annoying pest who couldn’t seem to go away.

“The original plan was for you to be like him.” Mesman said. He reached up and twisted his hand into the assassin’s hair. “It was a whole program. We had children all over the world, little psychological experiments. The purpose was to see which techniques could raise the perfect soldier, loyal, unquestioning, strategic. Our method was isolation, constant bombardment of threats and praise. Most of those children died, some of them succeeded, and then there are those like you. Broken, pathetic, disappointments.”

Tony thought his heart would break, that his world would crumble and fall apart. But it didn’t. He was standing there, his heart still beating and his blood still pumping, he was alright. He didn’t care as much as he probably would have in the beginning of all of this. Right now all he cared about was the stranger’s cold, blue eyes staring at him with not a hint of recognition, only confusion.

“What did you do to him?” Tony asked. The man didn’t seem like a threat at all, no matter the fact that seeing him made the scar on his side twinge a bit and his breaths quickening at the thought of what he had done to Howard.

“I didn’t do anything. He’s just the perfect soldier, awaiting orders, believing in whatever cause his mind is telling him he’s fighting for.” Mesman said. “But he has his purpose and so do you. Lotte thought she could sweet talk you back into following orders, but you’ve spent far too much time having your mind poisoned by those people.”

Tony shook his head quickly, the movement sending a fresh wave of pain through his skull. “I won’t do anything for you.” He muttered.

“It’s not anything serious, just that you’ve spent a large amount of time inside a SHIELD base. We want you to map it out for us.” Mesman said calmly. Tony shook his head again. “Then we’ll just have to convince you. I know you hate the dark so a few days locked away should do. If not I’m sure we can see if our friend here would be as interested in fighting your lovely Captain America as much as he was interested in killing Howard Stark.”

Tony froze. The men were back, this time grabbing him roughly as they started to drag him away. He didn’t want to get locked away, he didn’t want the dark, he didn’t want them to hurt Steve. Where was Steve? Where? Tony didn’t realize he was shouting until one of the men slammed a hand down over his mouth as the other unlocked another large, metal door and tossed him into the dark room.

Chapter End Notes
If anyone is interested in a recent story I started where Bucky and Steve end up being the foster parents of recently orphaned Tony Stark who has a lot of secrets and isn't doing well then feel free to read it [here](#).
Tony hated the dark. He hated how he couldn’t quite tell if he heard something or not, if there was something in the room with him, or if he was being touched. Not being able to see through off his perceptions of everything. He was lying down, or maybe he was leaning against the wall, and the wall, or floor, pressing into his back was cold. His face was warm, he couldn’t quite be certain if he had his hands pressing against it or if it was something else entirely. It always felt like something was crawling on his skin, but he could never find it.

He missed the little lamp he had back in his room in that house, the one he would keep on all night but turn off before the sun rose. Mesman and Lotte were always disappointed when they found out he had been keeping lights on, they would lock him away to correct him. He missed the florescent lights back at SHIELD that managed to drain the life and color from everything. He missed the lamp on the nightstand back at the townhouse, Steve had never complained about him keeping it on all night and it painted the room in a warm orange glow. Tony missed the light.

The only light he would see in here was after an eternity a small opening in the large steel door would slide open and a water bottle would be tossed into his room. Then another eternity would start again, with Tony spending a seemingly endless amount of time scrambling around in the dark. He wasn’t sure how long it has been. He tried to count the seconds, always losing count after a thousand and become distracted by unknown sounds in the darkness.

Mesman had said he would be in here for a few days, to convince him to do what he was told to do. Tony isn’t entirely sure if they’ll keep tossing him in here or if they’ll just kill him when they finally let him out to order him to do it again. One of the options is definitely preferable, he won’t tell them anything. SHIELD will come for them, they came for him last time. They’ll rescue Steve, Rhodey, and Peter. They’ll all be alright, even if Tony dies in here in the dark.

Tony doesn’t end up dying alone in the dark, at least not this time, because the door swings open and the room is flooded with light. It wasn’t the small sliver of light he would see when they gave him his water, the door was actually open now and the light from outside filled up the whole room.
It wasn’t as big as Tony originally thought it was, just a few inches wider than he was if he lied down against the wall, but in the dark it had seemed infinitely larger. He didn’t have much time to look around, his eyes needed time to adjust and before they could do that he was being lifted off the ground and dragged away. The world was a blurred mess, but it had color and vague shapes and it wasn’t dark anymore.

It didn’t take long for them to take him wherever he needed to go because eventually they just dropped him onto the cold ground. Tony didn’t have the strength to get up, his limbs were too heavy and didn’t move when he wanted them too. His head stayed pressed against the concrete regardless of his desire to pick it up and look around.

Hands were yanking him up again, off the ground and into a sitting position. His head rolled around on his neck and Tony didn’t think he had the energy to hold it up. Harsh fingers curled into his hair and pulled, forcing his face to rise and look at whoever was standing in front of him. He couldn’t quite see them, his eyes hadn’t adjusted well from going from complete darkness to swimming in light.

“Three days.” Mesman said, Tony could pick that voice out from a crowd. “76 hours. You’ve been given enough stimulation to your eyes to prevent permanent blindness, but you’re probably not seeing very well at the moment.”

Tony didn’t respond, he simply squeezed his eyes closed as all of the lights shining down on his face became too much. There were people moving around him, muttering softly about things that probably didn’t matter. All that was really important right now was that he was out of the dark and that he had to find Rhodey, Peter, and Steve. They had to be safe.

Doors were opening and closing all around him. Tony could only open his eyes for a few seconds and even then he couldn’t quite make out what he was seeing. He felt too much though, the ground underneath him felt too cold and to hard, his clothes too scratchy, the hand in his hair gripping too hard. Tony’s vision was a blurred mess, but everything he was feeling seemed so much more overwhelming. The harsh hold on his hair disappeared and Tony didn’t think he could stay up anymore and was unwilling to stop himself from falling forward. He hardly thought anything strange at all that there was a soft, warm body ready to catch him and allow themselves to be leaned on.

“Tony?” That voice was a little more difficult to recognize, it was familiar but Tony couldn’t quite put a face and name to it. “Come on, buddy. God, you look exhausted. Are you bleeding?”

He opened his eyes. He didn’t see much, just an unfocused image of messy, brown hair and the general shape of the person. Tony couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face when recognition struck him.
“Peter.” He said softly. “I thought you were dead there for a moment. A lot of worrying in the dark.”

The figure nodded and pulled him in close, hands running up and down his arms before drifting up to rest on his cheeks. They were surprisingly gentle. “Jesus, man. Were you clawing at your face, look at your arms. What happened?”

Tony hummed and glanced down. He could see it, barely visible lines of red. “Oh. I’m sorry.” Tony said, blinking quickly. Everything was a bit less blurry, the world slowly coming into focus as he spent more and more time out of the dark. “I… couldn’t see. There was something crawling on me. I had to get it off.”

“Okay. I believe you.” Peter said quickly. “But when we get out of here we’re going to have a nice long talk and get you patched up.”

That sounded nice. Tony didn’t have enough time to enjoy the idea of getting someplace safe and being cared for when the soft click of a gun brought reality rushing back. There was a large blur standing behind Peter, a blur in a familiar shape that sent shivers up his spine.

“Alright Tony, let’s see if you learned anything in time out.” Mesman said calmly. The silver thing in his hands was pointed at Peter’s head, the end of it brushing at his hair. “Are there any easily accessible entrances into the SHIELD building.”

His mind immediately went to that back entrance, where Clint had taken him outside to watch the snow when everything had been a bit too much. Peter’s hands were still cupping his cheeks, his thumbs brushing along the skin just under his eyes. It was soft, comforting. Peter was a good friend, Tony couldn’t help feeling luck that he had met so many great people.

“Don’t tell him anything Tony. You don’t have to listen to his bullshit anymore.” Peter whispered to him. “You’re a piece of shit that makes his own decisions and does what’s good for him, not anyone else. You don’t have to do live like that anymore. Don’t go back to him.”

Tony smiled and shrugged. Mesman repeated his question and Tony didn’t know if a few moments of freedom was worth a hole being blown into his Best Friend’s head. No, it wasn’t. “I don’t know. They usually kept a close eye on me.” He said softly. “I-I don’t know.”
“Well think harder.” Mesman said coldly.

Peter leaned forward and hugged him, wrapping his arms around him and squeezing and Tony practically melted. He didn’t get a chance to answer, as Peter pulled back the gun was pressed firmly against his head. Tony’s vision wasn’t focused enough, he didn’t see everything that happened, but he saw Peter’s form drop down closer to the ground, his leg kicking out, and him rolling away.

Without anyone there to lean on, Tony fell to the ground. He hadn’t slept at all the past few days, too many phantom sensations and noises or movements in the dark. Sleep is difficult in extreme stress. Peter was still alive, he was grunting and cursing as the loud banging and fighting around him almost drowned out his voice. Tony didn’t have much energy to care.

Eventually, after the sounds of a few slamming doors, the noises died down. Tony wasn’t sure if Peter won or not, if he was lying dead somewhere or if he was okay. He didn’t think he could get up to check, fear coursing through him as he waited. Peter was fine, he was okay. He had gotten away and everything will be fine.

“Come on, Tony.” Peter said, his hand resting on Tony’s shoulder. We’re gonna find Rhodey and Steve and we’re gonna get out of here.”

“Thought you were dead.” Tony muttered as he allowed the gentle hands to pull him up off of the ground.

Peter chuckled. “Yeah, you mentioned that.” He said. Once Tony was standing and no longer at risk of collapsing again, his eyes had focused enough to see the faintest details in Peter’s face, like his forehead wrinkled in worry and his deep frown. “Damn, you’re out of it.”

“I’m tired. It was dark.” Tony said. It made sense to him, but it occurred to him that Peter might not have any idea what he was talking about. Of course he wouldn’t. Tony couldn’t find any other way to explain it.

Peter gently started nudging him to the door, his hands on his shoulders for support. “Alright. We’re going to talk about this later. We just have to get you out of here.”

They had made it out the door when a loud alarm started to sound through the building, echoing down the halls. Peter’s hand gripped tighter onto his wrist and started running, Tony trying to keep
his feet under him as he was dragged along. There were people shouting somewhere, gunfire someplace far away. Tony wasn’t quite sure where they were or where they were planning on going, but he trusted Peter.

“Did you kill him?” Tony asked when they finally stopped. “Please tell me you didn’t.”

Peter sighed. His attachments to these people probably weren’t healthy, they didn’t make any sense, but they were still there and still real. He may not be as upset if Mesman had died than he would have been with Lotte, may even be a bit relieved, but he would still feel the loss.

“No. I didn’t kill him. I probably should have though.” Peter said. He grabbed Tony’s arms and wrapped them around his torso. “There’s a window up there. I’m going to climb up to it, I want you to hold on tight.”

Tony did as he was told, curling his hands into the front of Peter’s dirty shirt. “How are you supposed to climb that?” Tony whispered to him. He could see just enough now, the dark window standing out against the white walls. “What about Steve and Rhodey?”

Surprisingly enough, Peter had no problem climbing up the side of the wall. Tony didn’t know if it was because his vision couldn’t quite make out the smaller details giving him places to grab onto and climb or not, but Peter was climbing closer to the window effortlessly.

Getting through the high window wasn’t at all difficult, Tony kept his grip firm and didn’t let go. It would probably be a long drop if he did. They were outside, Tony could tell by the wind blowing across his face and how dark it was. His hand curled tighter around Peter’s shirt and didn’t move to let go of him. Peter didn’t seem to notice, he simply started carrying them away.

“What about Steve and Rhodey?” Tony asked again.

Peter sighed as he started running, as if darting away from the building with a grown man on his back wasn’t at all difficult. “I saw them yesterday. We all agreed that if one of us found you we would get you out and then send everyone else. They’ll be fine.”

“No they won’t.” Tony whispered. “They’ll be killed.”

He tried to let go, to slip off onto the ground so they could go back, but Peter kept a strong hold on
him as they made it further and further away from the building and into some random direction. They didn’t even know where they were going. Nothing was making sense in Tony’s head, his thoughts were blending together and his body was too tired to cooperate with him. He might have fallen asleep to the going seed of worry in his mind, the gentle jostling of Peter’s movements, and the soft whispers that things will be okay.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it! Tony and Peter will be back and hopefully everyone else will be okay.
Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

I start class again in about ten days and I have a lot of work to do in the next few weeks. Not going to be very much fun but oh well. I'll manage. If I can't handle it all then it'll be okay. School comes first.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony wasn’t exactly sure when he had fallen asleep and the past few hours before the escape had been a bit hazy in memory, but he was sure that Peter had somehow climbed a wall with him on his back and then darted off into the woods without putting him down. Tony also knew that judging by the faint beeps he heard distantly meant that he was alive and once again in the hospital. The last thing he could remember about what had happened was that Steve and Rhodey were still there, with dangerous people, and that Mesman was going to have them killed because of his disobedience.

He was too afraid to open his eyes, worried that if he did he still wouldn’t be able to see. The darkness from his eyes being closed, for some odd reason, was always better than the total darkness that was there with his eyes open. But he was rescued, Peter helped him escape, so the lights had to be on. The lights had to be on, there had to be windows, even if they were off and it was the middle of the night, there would still be a little light from the hallway and outside streetlamps. Tony was too afraid to open his eyes to find out.

“Hey, hey. None of that. Open your eyes, buddy. I know you’re awake.” Tony could barely make out Peter’s voice over the loud beeping that had started to become overwhelming. A gently hand was running up and down his arm, comforting and reassuring all at once.

When he finally did open his eyes, it brought the relief of actually seeing the room. The light was on, it was the middle of the day, and although his vision was still a bit blurry, he could see Peter’s relaxed face clearly, he looked just fine. Clint was in the room as well, sitting on the window sill and smiling at him.

It took a moment for Tony to realize that everything hurt, his body was aching in ways that told him the three days he spent curled up in total darkness hadn’t been a terrifying nightmare. Lack of movement and copious amounts of stress had done a number on him. Tony could hardly reach out and touch Peter to make sure he was real and not just a vivid hallucination his brain was giving him before he either died or lost hope completely.
“Where are they?” Tony asked quickly. It came out more of a pained groan than actual words, his voice raspy and his throat dry. He coughed and repeated himself.

Peter frowned. “We’re at a hospital, in New York. We’re not in Boston anymore, they probably moved us once we were all passed out. That’s why no one found us for a while.” He said slowly. “They were still looking all over Massachusetts for us by the time we got out. I had to call them, but at least now I have a chance to teach you how to be the New Yorker you were born to be.”

“To be fair, we didn’t think they would have been able to move you that far in so little time.” Clint said, shrugging his shoulders. “It takes a lot of tranquilizers to put Cap down at all, let alone long enough for a trip to another city.”

“Oh, okay.” Tony said slowly, blinking a few times as he processed the words. “But, where are they?”

“Who? Do you mean Rhodey and Steve?” Peter asked. Tony nodded as he tried to push himself up, whining as his muscles ached as they were pulled, and settled back down on the bed. “They’re going to be fine. Trust me.”

That meant they were okay, they were safe. They had gotten away, Mesman wasn’t taking anything away from him for his disobedience. Tony’s body finally relaxed, his body aching more and more as the tension dripped out of his muscles. He was exhausted, ready to fall back to sleep at any moment. But he couldn’t, not yet, not until he figured out all the questions that were still drifting through his mind. Questions Tony didn’t even realize he had until now.

“How did we get out?” Tony asked slowly. Peter froze, blinking a few times as his gaze drifted over to Clint and then back to Tony. “You climbed a wall and then ran off with me on your back. You’re a skinny kid, just like me. How did you manage that? And did you fight a bunch of people?”

“You were pretty out of it, Tony.” Peter said. “You were tired, dehydrated, starved, and I’m not surprised you weren’t all there.”

“Don’t change the subject. You kicked ass, I didn’t know you had it in you.” Tony said, trying to sound lighthearted. It didn’t make sense, he was sure everything had been real and genuine. Peter had fought off Mesman and whoever else might have been in the room and then carried Tony to safety as alarms went off around them. Something was going on and Peter was trying to cover it up, but given Tony’s tendencies to hide things, he couldn’t really fault his friends for trying to either. “Thanks for saving me.”
Peter relaxed as the topic of conversation appeared to come to a close. “No problem, buddy. Those people aren’t going to hurt you again.”

Tony settled back against his pillows and tried to stop his eyes from drooping closed. “Can you find Steve and Rhodey really quick?” Tony asked, barely suppressing a yawn. “I want to make sure they’re okay before I go back to sleep.”

Peter answered almost immediately. “Don’t worry, they’re going to be fine. Just get some rest and you’ll see them when you wake up.” He said quickly. “Just go back to sleep, okay buddy?”

That didn’t sound good, that wasn’t the answer Tony wanted. Something was wrong, Rhodey and Steve weren’t here and they should be. “Peter…”

“Let’s just go back to sleep, okay? Everything will be better in a few hours and we’ll all be just fine.” Peter said. He stood up and began pulling the blankets up over Tony’s shoulders. Clint was fidgeting uncomfortably from his seat.

“They’re not here.” Tony said, his eyes widening with realization. He pushed Peter’s hands away and struggled to sit up, ignoring the way his muscles screamed in pain. “We have to go get them.”

This time larger hands pushed him down gently. Tony frowned up at Clint, unable to understand how he had gotten across the room so quickly and silently that Tony hadn’t even noticed. “Kid, relax. Everything is under control.” Clint said, his voice soft. “You’ve been out for a few hours, long enough for Peter to call and for us to get our asses out of Boston, you’ve barely been here in the hospital at all. You’re exhausted, dehydrated, you have a concussion, and looks like you’ve had a rough few days. Stay in bed. We’ve already sent a rescue team, Rhodey and Steve will be fine.”

“No. No, no.” Tony said. He shook his head as he smacked away Clint’s hands. This was bad. Tony shouldn’t be safe while Rhodey and Steve were still with those people, who knew what was happening to them. “I- I have to get them. They’re not safe. The man is there. The one with the arm and the hair and everything. He killed Howard, they’re gonna make him kill Steve!”

Tony knew he was speaking too quickly for them to understand. He also knew that he had slipped away from English in his rushed panic. Clint’s voice had turned calming as he whispered something so softly it wasn’t able to be heard. He repeated himself, slower and in the language they both knew. Clint didn’t seem fazed, but Peter’s eyes grew wide.
“The man who tried to kill you? Who killed your dad? He’s there?” Peter asked quickly. Tony nodded. “Did he try to hurt you? I should have known that bastard was trying to kill you. Of course he sent some super robot guy to take you out. Thank God you’re okay.”

“No. That’s not the point. I’m fine.” Tony said. He kept trying to get up, but they kept pushing him down gently and telling him to stay and rest. He couldn’t do that. He had to get back there. “But they’re gonna make him kill Steve, they’re gonna hurt Rhodey. We have to stop them.”

“Relax, Tony. Everything is okay. We sent some of our best to go rescue them. They’ll get the people who had you and they’ll take down the metal armed man and you’ll be safe.” Clint said. “That man isn’t going to hurt you anymore. I promise. We sent Natasha with the rescue team and there is no way he’s going to get past her. I’ll stay here with you, you’re safe.”

“No!” Tony shouted. “That’s not- Don’t hurt the guy.”

Clint paused, a frown spreading across his face. “Tony, this is the guy who killed your dad. He put you in the hospital.”

Tony nodded. “I know. I’m not an idiot.” He said quickly. “They’re using him, they’re messing with his head. You can kill Mesman for all I care, you can arrest Lotte, but you didn’t see that man. He was just confused. Don’t hurt him.”

It didn’t make sense, not even to himself. Tony was begging for the life of a man who had put him in the hospital for weeks and killed the only family he had. But they didn’t see it. They didn’t see the man’s blank stares or hear Mesman’s cruel words. Tony knew a thing or two about being used, about being locked away and told to do bad things, and Tony was never going to go back to that. He didn’t want that man to have to live with that anymore either.

He moved to sit up again. This time at least getting his feet under him as he pushed off of the bed. Peter was there to catch him. Tony wasn’t stable enough to stand on his own, his legs shaky and wobbly under him. He refuses to go back onto the bed though, Peter may be stronger than he looks and is capable of effortlessly lifting him off the ground and into his arms. They wanted him to lay back down, but now that Tony was at least up there was no way he would allow them to put him back in the bed.

“Tony, you’re tired.” Peter whispered as he supported most of Tony’s weight. “The rescue team will be back soon, Rhodey and Steve will be fine.”
Tony shook his head. “No. Don’t let them kill Steve. Don’t let them hurt Rhodey. Just let the man go.” He whispered. “Please.”

The ‘please’ was probably what had done it, Tony didn’t know if they pitied him or worried too much or what it was, but when Tony was close to begging for something they all caved. Clint rolled his eyes and groaned loudly. “Fine.” He said. “I’ll call Natasha, she’ll help the guy. I promise. And everyone will be just fine.”

He left the room without another word. Tony could hear Clint out in the hallway, speaking quickly in hushed tones. This was good. Everything was going to be okay. Steve was going to be fine, Rhodey will be okay, and everyone who deserved punishment would get it. Tony didn’t deserve punishment today, he was safe.

“Peter?” Tony said softly. His friend hummed, moving his hand to rub soothing circles into his back. Tony was safe, he was protected. “You do a lot of weird stuff.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Peter said hesitantly. “It’s not important though.”

That was a lie. Tony could remember clearly. Peter had saved him, had carried him away from the horrible people and from the danger and now he was here. Peter had climbed a wall with Tony clinging to his back and he had run to safety as if Tony had weighed nothing at all.

“It’s kinda important.”

“If you say so.” Peter said. “Tell you what, if you just get back in bed and wait for SHIELD’s rescue team to do their jobs, then I’ll tell you a secret.”

Steve was fine, he would be okay. The fear that Mesman had succeeded in his threats were horrible and felt like they were going to tear him apart, but Steve was a super soldier. He would be okay, Rhodey would be safe with him. Everything was going to be alright. Tony just had to be patient and try to remain calm.

He nodded. “Okay.”
We're nearing the end of our story. Still a few more chapters to go, but they'll be important and meaningful and hopefully the ending will be as nice as the rest of the story has been.
Feel free to tell me what you think!
Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the wait for such a short chapter. Motivation has ~hopefully~ temporarily abandoned me. I will prevail though.

It became clear to Tony that they were drugging him around the third time he had woken up. He would open his eyes and blink at the light shining in through the window and the heavy snow that was falling, confused and fascinated all at the same time. Clint was there, he was always there, telling him about a circus and a city in Hungary and even a farm somewhere far away. Peter was usually there too and told him a story about spiders and a girl and people who turned into alligators. Tony thought the strange, senseless story telling must have been an American thing.

The doctors told stories too, theirs didn’t make a lot of sense and had lingering phrases such as ‘emotional breakdown’ and ‘psychological trauma’. Tony didn’t pay much attention to those stories. Instead he would try to understand Peter’s and what he meant when he said he could climb walls and ran around in a red and blue suit sometimes.

“I think I’m on drugs.” Tony muttered once Peter had finished talking. He was pretty sure they were drugging him, everyone’s voices sounded far away and he could hardly keep his eyes open half the time.

Peter frowned and nodded. “Yeah, sorry about that. After we got you back and you promised not to run off you went to sleep and had a... fit. You were screaming and kicking and they decided to sedate you.” He said in an apologetic tone. “The doctors are worried you’re going to hurt yourself so they’re just ‘keeping you calm’ for now. I don’t like it, but on a happier note, Clint punched your doctor in the face.”

Tony laughed. “Great. Sorry I missed it. I think I was asleep.” He said slowly.

“Yeah, you were asleep. You’ve been sleeping a lot lately.”

“I think they’re drugging me.” Tony said. Peter nodded and reached out, taking his hand. “Are they going to kill me?”
“What? No!” Peter said, his grip on Tony’s hand tightening. “You’re safe now. You’re not with those bad people. These are doctors and SHIELD and I won’t let any of them hurt you, buddy.”

It didn’t make a lot of sense. This is what they did, it was what they always did. They drugged him so he wouldn’t be a problem. It was the same old song and dance, this time with different people and supposedly different reasons. He was the enemy now though, he grew up and worked for the bad guys and now he was at their mercy.

“I think I’ll just go back to sleep. Keep the lights on.” Tony said, rolling onto his side. He supposed it was good that they weren’t restraining him. If they wanted to kill him that would have been the better plan. Maybe they just wanted to keep him quiet and manageable. That was Mesman’s every reason to keep him drugged and confused. “Tell me the story about the alligator man again.”

It took practically no time at all to fall asleep, but he was always just a little bit aware of everything going on around him. The lights would flicker every once in a while, there must have been faulty wiring in his heart monitor because it was beeping too regularly for the almost disorderly pattern of his heartbeats. He could probably fix it if they stopped messing up his head.

He was in that place stuck between sleeping and consciousness where dreams and reality all blended into one. Peter told him about Spiderman and Tony could practically see it, the gaudy red and blue costume as he was swinging around the hospital room.

The next time he opened his eyes it was to the sound of heavy footsteps in the hall that were accompanied by loud, commanding voices. Tony didn’t pay much attention to them as he closed his eyes and fell back to sleep. He was warm, under the hospital blankets, and after a while he dreamed of brightly lit fields with no walls in sight and a gentle hand running through his hair.

When he opened his eyes again, it was because the large hand that was stroking his hair had started to yank at a few of the dirty tangles. It wasn’t hard enough to hurt him, but it did demand his attention. “You’re so rude.” Tony muttered. “Sleeping beauty didn’t get treated this way.”

The hand stopped and a soft kiss was placed on his cheek. “Funny, I thought you were sleeping beauty.” Steve whispered.

Tony shot up quickly, his head spinning and his vision momentarily going white. “You’re alive! Thank fuck, I thought they killed you.” He said loudly. Steve was trying to comfort him, shushed his quiet sobs and let himself be held. Tony couldn’t stop himself from hugging Steve, holding him close and burying his face into his neck. Steve’s hand was back in his hair and everything
seemed okay again. “Where is Rhodey? Is Rhodey okay?”

“He’s okay. Everyone is just fine. Well, except those horrible people. They kinda got away but at least Natasha beat the crap out of them. I think the only reason they survived was that Bucky caught us by surprise.” Steve said slowly, he took a deep breath and almost seemed to squeeze Tony tighter. “I think we should talk about this.”

Tony was familiar with that sad, determined tone. He had finally had too much. Steve had seen the people who had raised him, had saw what his life had been like, and realized Tony was just too messed up and too much trouble. Of course, it was only a matter of time. Perhaps he could just delay the inevitable for a little while longer.

“Nope.” Tony said, pulling back and shaking his head. He laid back onto the hospital bed, rolling onto his side and facing away from Steve. “I’m drugged. Can’t talk to a drugged person. It’s not right.”

Steve’s hand never left Tony’s hair. “I know. And I’m sorry, sweetheart, but I’m kinda pressed for time.” He said. “Gotta get going soon.”

“You’re leaving?”

“Yeah. Not at this moment, but in a few days. None of us are really doing too good, you took a few pretty bad hits and you need to heal. The doctors are scared that you might hurt yourself so I want you to focus on taking care of yourself. I want you to love and protect yourself as much as I love and want to protect you.” Steve said, leaning over to brush his lips across Tony’s forehead, cautious and testing. “But Bucky is my friend, I thought he was dead. They hurt him so much and then they used him to do terrible things. I know he killed your dad and I know he attacked you and put him in the hospital, but I gotta go after him. I have to make sure he’s safe. If you don’t want me to do that, then I’m sorry. If you want to hate the two of us, then that’s okay.”

That wasn’t exactly what Tony was expecting. Steve was talking about Tony getting help and relaxing while he went off to find that man with the metal arm. He had no idea what Steve’s words meant. He talked about a man that was long dead and that Tony had heard plenty of stories about. Confusions and a drug suppressed mind didn’t mix well.

“You’re going to find the man with the metal arm?” Tony asked slowly. Steve sighed and nodded. “Okay. That’s fine. I don’t mind.”
“Really?” Steve said, his eyebrows shooting up to his hairline and cautious relief written across his face. “This man nearly killed you, took the last bit of your family away. Are you sure you’re okay with me finding him, helping him.”

“I encourage it. I saw how he looked, it was Mesman who wanted to kill me. He was just the poor guy they forced into it.” Tony said. “Do you know where he’s at?”

Steve frowned. “Still with those awful people. Don’t you worry about a thing, darling. They’re not gonna hurt you again.”

“I know.” Tony said, turning back around and sitting up to lightly kiss Steve’s forehead. “You’ve all been promising me enough.”

Things seemed to fall into place then. Steve curled around Tony in the cramped hospital bed and, for the first time in a while, he felt safe. He had nothing but questions at this point. Half of what Steve had talked about made little to no sense, but he was too tired to even think about asking for an elaboration. One thing did ring through his mind over and over, forcing all hopes of sleep out of his mind.

Steve was willing to leave him, to break whatever it was they had off. The assassin, with his metal arm and cold eyes, had captured Steve’s attention and suddenly Tony was nothing more than an anchor that was holding him in place. Things needed to be done though, he understood that leaving the man with those people for any longer was just going to leave him to have his mind poisoned. He understood how it felt, to have them whisper lies into his ear and give him nothing but misplaced optimism and false love. They had to get him away from them and once all was said and done and Steve realized that he was better off without Tony there as a distraction, then he would survive that. Surviving things seemed to be what he was good at.
Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

I'm garbage who doesn't post as often. I'm sorry

Tony didn’t mind being alone. Over the years he found it a bit relaxing sometimes. He had spent his whole life behind a wall with people who wanted to hurt him, a few days on his own with a few doctors and a handful of friends who were too busy to stop by and visit shouldn’t be a problem. He could handle it, for a few days Tony could be manage not being petty or heartbroken that Steve and Natasha were off looking for the metal armed man, Peter and Rhodey were somewhere being debriefed or counselled or whatever it was SHIELD made civilians do in these situation, and Clint and Thor were guarding the building and monitoring all the exits and entrances. Tony was flattered that they would take the time and effort to make sure the hospital was as safe as possible for him, but he would admit he was a bit disappointed.

He did have Bruce, in a sense. The man had finally gotten sick of SHIELD and checked himself out of their custody. No one wanted to put up much of a fight, Bruce hadn’t had an incident in months, he was in control, and why bother taking such an unnecessary risk. He couldn’t physically be here with Tony though because he was off moving into an apartment someplace far away without the threat of military intervention. Tony had been keeping up on the story and some general was causing trouble. He would be alright, Betty was with him, and he didn’t seem at all bothered to video call Tony and then just leave the laptop on for hours so it was like he was there.

“Do you feel abandoned?” The man said. Tony didn’t answer. It was snowing outside, giant piles of white fluff covering the ground and his window sill. “Tony?”

He was asking about Mesman and Lotte, about whether or not he felt any loss to being separated from them and if he still had any emotional connections to them. They all wanted to know if he was willing to go back to them, if he was still loyal to them. It was an understandable concern, who in their right mind would keep Tony around if they knew he would sell them out to the enemy at a moment’s notice.

“Not really. They’re gone, I’m not with them, and that’s that.” He said, sparring a quick glance away from the window to the computer screen where he should have been able to see Bruce. The microphone was turned off so Bruce wouldn’t be able to hear if Tony called out to him and catch his attention, but he could see Bruce sorting through a lopsided pile of scientific journals. He was there, a silent companion to fight off loneliness, but he couldn’t hear what was actually being said between Tony and the doctor they sent to his room.
“Do you miss them?” He asked.

“Are you an idiot? Of course I miss them. I spent most of my life with those people and no one else.” Tony said quickly. “You know, I got used to it. Became accustomed to a certain lifestyle. Now that’s all gone and I’m not sure what I’m supposed to do. I get that I’m better off now, I’m safer here, but that doesn’t change the fact that I loved them and I thought they loved me. I wouldn’t ever go back to that, but I do miss it.”

The man hummed. Tony would have given him a name in his head, but he had not told him what it was. He had been there when he woke up, a notebook in hand and a friendly, reassuring smile displayed on his face. A psychologist, to see just how broken he was inside his head. The man was here to see if the damage was reparable. “It is natural for us to miss familiarity, no matter how horrible the previous circumstances had been.” He said. He made it sound so simple that Tony wanted to reach over and smack the understanding look off of his face. It did not feel simple. “But it is necessary for us to move forward to heal.”

“I won’t go back. I told you that.” Tony said.

“And I believe you, but that does not mean you don’t cling to them in one way or another.” He said, twirling his pen in his hand. “And they are still out there somewhere. What would you do if they came back?”

“They would try to kill me.”

The man nodded at Tony’s response, not mentioning or even noticing the way it was said, as if it was a commonly known fact that held little importance. “And how would you stop them if they did?”

Tony paused, pondering the question in his head over and over. They didn’t seem the type to do it themselves, they had set him up to be murdered by SHIELD agents in their old home, had apparently sent the metal armed man after him and Howard, and why would he believe that they would just appear and take his life. Maybe another assassin would come and murder him in his hospital bed, or strike him down when he was released. Maybe it would be peaceful and he wouldn’t notice it happening. That wouldn’t be their style though. If they killed him, he would know and it would hurt.

“I don’t think I would.” He said simply.
He spent the rest of the night alone. The psychologist, the man who had yet to give his name, did not give him a verdict on whether or not he was irreparable in his mind. Every fifteen minutes, like clockwork, a nurse would peek his head in and check on him. She never said anything, never did anything, just made sure he was still in his bed and that he was still alive. He wasn’t an idiot to basic hospital policies, they would put a permanent watch on him if they could, but busy hospital staffs were always stretched thin.

He was on suicide watch.

If he unplugged himself from the heart monitor than no doubt the room would be filled in moments with doctors and nurses and whoever else was supposed to stop him from hurting himself. It was stupid, he wasn’t suicidal. He wasn’t going to hurt himself, there was no point in it. All that would do was cause more problems, if not for him than for everyone else.

“How are you feelings?” Clint’s voice said from the direction of the door. “Want me to sneak you in some pizza?”

“That would be nice.” Tony said. He didn’t both to roll over, it was still snowing outside and he couldn’t take his eyes off of the window. He wondered, briefly, if they would allow him out to see it. The only time he was allowed outside in the winter in all the years he could remember was that one time they sent him to Canada for his survival training. But then it was early spring, the snow was slowly melting and was not as thick as it was today. He wanted to be out in it, appreciate it, instead of think of it as an obstacle to his survival. “When do you think they’ll let me out?”

A pause, a quick hesitation. “I don’t know kid. It’s kinda dangerous out there for you right now.” Clint said slowly. “Just a few days until we get the guys.”

“You think it would only be a few days?” Tony asked.

“Rogers and Romanoff went after them, I’d be surprised if they weren’t dead already.” Clint said, there was amusement in his tone. He was moving further into the room from what Tony heard, making himself comfortable for a long visit. “What did the doctors say? Healing up alright? Getting enough rest?”
“They think I’m going to kill myself.” Tony said simply.

There was another pause. He could hear Clint fidget in his seat. “Are you?”

“No. I sorta gave that up after jumping off the helicarrier didn’t work out. I don’t really think I want to die.” Tony said. “No, I probably don’t. I’m a bit angry with them, I’ll probably just stay alive out of spite.”

“That’s what I like to hear. You can do anything when you do it out of spite.” Clint said. “Hell, I think that’s at least half of all my successes.”

They fell into silence after that. The snow had stopped outside and the sun was hidden behind a thick blanket of grey clouds, it looked cold and gloomy. “This is all your fault.” Tony said. It didn’t sound harsh or accusing, it felt as if he were just stating a fact.

“I know.” Clint said.

“I think I forgive you though. You were a kid when it happened, we all do stupid stuff as kids.” Tony said slowly. He turned away from the window and looked at Clint. He appeared to be exhausted, the dark circles under his eyes giving him away. “When did you last sleep?”

Clint shrugged. “Since you all disappeared. I’m good though.”

“Sleep.”

“I will if you will.” He said. “You’re pretty run down right now. This was all pretty stressful, I’m hardly keeping it together. You’ll feel better if you sleep.”

Tony didn’t want to sleep. Clint would go and do whatever it was he had to do and if he left Tony while he slept then he was alone and vulnerable. Tony might not do anything to stop them from killing him but he would prefer to see it coming. Sleep wasn’t an option at this point. Not when he had gone from being trapped in a dark room trapped in a hospital bed, everyone wanting him to do one thing or another.
“I’ll stay.” Clint said, as if hearing his turmoil. “If you get at least six hours then I’ll see if I can convince your doctors to let you out into the snow. I want to make snow angels.”

That sounded wonderful. Tony had never made a snow angel before.
It's been over a month and I'm garbage. I'm still alive, still writing, but I'm garbage.

The thing about spending his whole life behind a few walls was that Tony was constantly surprised by how big the world was. The sky had no end, once he saw passed the buildings and the trees he could see land race off into the distance. In the beginning, so much space had frightened him, but now it just fascinated him.

On the roof of the hospital it was just high enough to see over quite a few rooftops, but New York was so large that he could see absolutely nothing besides it. Rhodey stared as well, his eyes wide as they both tried to take it all in. Peter was the only one who didn’t seem completely engrossed in the beauty of it all.

“How large is it?” Tony asked.

Peter shrugged. “No idea. But I do know it has a population of over eight million people.” He said, a hint of pride in his tone. Tony stared at the city, the dozens of cars that filled the streets, and the many people who rushed along the sidewalks. Eight million people, all living in one place. “I can’t wait for you guys to see everything. New York, best city in the world. I can’t wait for you to become a part of it.”

“Relax, it’s not permanent.” Rhodey said, laughing softly. “It’s not like we’re moving in.”

“Why not?” Peter said. “Tony’s already a New Yorker, we just have to reawaken it, get him in touch with his love of disgusting pizza and crowded subways. It’ll be great.”

They fell into silence, so many things still left unsaid between them. He did not know how to thank them, Tony was a mess and they were still there helping him. Tony was falling apart and the whole world seemed ready to kill him, and they were putting their lives on hold to make sure he got through it.

“Are you eating?” Peter asked. “The doctors said they were having a hard time getting you to eat your meals and that you were trying to lie and explain them away. You gotta eat Tony.”

“I know.” He said. It was common sense, he knew he had to eat. He even understood that it was unhealthy for him not to. Everyone always felt the need to tell him what behaviors he had grown into over the years were healthy and which were not. It didn’t change anything though, the compulsive need made it hard for him to eat when he didn’t feel ready. “Doesn’t matter though.”

“If I promise to break you out of the hospital and take you out on the town, do you promise to eat at a horrible restaurant of my choosing?” Peter asked.

It was a cheap tactic, Tony would do almost anything to get out of the hospital. Their restrictions and rules almost reminded him of the time when he was locked away in that SHIELD building with the constant promises that it was for his own good. Perhaps he could run. Once they get out the
doors and into the open, Tony could just take off and go as far as his legs would carry him. He could live in the woods, he knew how to survive. The only time he had ever been let out of those wall were for his survival training, the wideness of the world not as mesmerizing as it was not when he had to focus solely on not freezing and starving to death. Although, Tony was sure if he asked for Peter’s opinion, he would say Tony wasn’t putting forth too much effort on not starving.

“Okay. I could go for some pizza.” Tony said, plans forming slowly in his head. He could ask Steve to come with him once he got back. They could find a nice quiet place where no one would hurt either of them again.

Rhodey frowned and shook his head. “Don’t make that face, Tony. I know what you’re thinking.” He said quickly. “You’re planning on running off, but you already promised that you wouldn’t. Do you know how worried we would be? Peter and I have put too much effort into this friendship.”

“If I was gone, you wouldn’t have to worry about all this craziness.” Tony said. “You guys could just go back to school. It’ll be better.”

“Bullshit.” Rhodey said, shaking his head. “My mom is making Christmas Dinner on your private island and we’re going to have a nice tropical vacation away from the freezing cold and it’ll be great. Besides, we could never leave you our little fluffy kitten that we rescued from the rain.”

Tony’s face scrunched up, his nose wrinkling when he was called a kitten. “Don’t ever refer to me as that again. I will just backflip off this building and disappear into the night.” He muttered. “And your mom can still make Christmas Dinner, it just w-“

He stopped, his mind going from one idea to another. The whole situation laid itself out in front of him and he was on his feet before he even got his head wrapped around it. He didn’t quite know where he was going, but his body had a plan on where to take him and Tony was just going to trust that. When he stopped in front of the phone, he frowned. He could call Steve, but he was busy looking for the metal armed assassin. It would be rude to distract him simply because there was a burning feeling in his chest that he couldn’t quite describe.

He picked up the phone.

Tony was good at numbers. He may have been shit at reading, but numbers came naturally. Tony had seen it, in passing as he was looking through countless forms of paperwork from Howard’s lawyers. He typed it in, tapping his foot as the call connected and Rhodey and Peter caught up with him, sliding to a stop in the hospital hallways. Tony held up a hand to pause whatever it was they were planning to say.

“Mr. Stane’s office, how may I be of service today?” The woman’s voice was bored sounding, dull and flat.

“This is Tony Stark.” He said, looking over to his friends and mouthing, That’s my name. They nodded. Of course they knew it was his name, it didn’t change the way it felt foreign on his tongue.

“Tony, my boy! I haven’t heard from you since you were knee high.” The voice said. Tony cringed at the sound of it, full of false cheer and malicious intent. “I hope you’re doing alright. I heard you were nearly killed, too bad I missed seeing you.”

“Did you kill Howard?” Tony asked. The silence on the other line was rather telling, instead of waiting for a response Tony just decided to keep talking. “It just seems weirdly convenient to me.
I disappear, you end up with everything in Howard’s will. I come back, he changes it, and then he
dies. Puts you in a perfect position to challenge his decisions and take everything.”

The silence was deafening, all encompassing as Tony could imagine Stane processing the
information Tony laid out for him. “Hilarious coming from you.” His voice was cold. “Coming
back from the dead and then demanding everything Howard offered you as if you deserved it.”

“Did you kill him?” Tony asked again. He didn’t know why, he practically knew the answer
already.

A scoff on the other end of the line. “No.” Stane said. “I was too busy running his company,
since he had always been so busy drinking his life away and spending every waking moment
looking for Captain America. How do you feel about that, Tony? Knowing that when you were
missing, Howard gave up on you. Even when he stopped looking for you he kept looking for a
dead man.”

The call disconnected, Stane had hung up.

He didn’t move for a few minutes, just stared down at the phone. He wasn’t quite sure what to
think, things were jumbled up in his mind and falling into a formation that made sense too slowly.
There was meaning somewhere, but all Tony could do was hang up the phone and turn around to
look at his friends. They looked concerned, Clint hovering just behind them.

Exhaustion settled back into his body, his shoulders sagged and his arms fell loosely to his side.
Everything was too much, it was always too much and Tony could never get it to stop.

“Want me to kill him?” Clint asked, crossing his arms.

“Yes.” Tony said, the answer automatic. Such a strange feeling, being so ready to kill another
person because he killed a man Tony had hardly no connection to at all. Hypothetically killed,
there was no real confirmation. But Tony was perfectly okay with letting Clint take care of it.

“I’m on it.” He said with a nod, turning to leave the three of them.

Peter took his hand and led him away from the phone. Tony wasn’t entirely sure where they were
going, but he needed a break. Everything that could possible go wrong had happened the past few
days and now Tony just wanted to take a nice long break. He wanted things to make sense again.
An odd thing, to miss the simplicity of life where he didn’t have to make his own decision and
didn’t know what the world was like outside of the walls surrounding the property.

“Pizza.” He muttered. Peter nodded and started heading towards the elevator.

Getting outside was easy. No one stopped them and no one seemed to care that Tony was
supposed to be under constant surveillance. Tony hated surveillance, even back when SHIELD
kept him locked in a small room with no privacy. Another weird thing, they kept encouraging
Tony to think for himself, to stop relying on Mesman and Lotte and break free from the ideas they
planted in his head about being their property and having to do what they said, but SHIELD had no
problem in locking Tony away with nothing but the constant feeling of them watching.

“You’re thinking too much.” Rhodey said. Peter led them to a small pizzeria and ordered for them
while Rhodey and Tony took a seat near a window.

“My head doesn’t make sense.” Tony said. It didn’t. He kept jumping from one idea to another
without any control of where it was going. He didn’t like it. “Did I send Clint to kill Obadiah
Stane?”
Rhodey nodded. “Yeah, but he apparently killed your dad. Which would make sense, he’s the one with everything to gain.” He said. Peter came back to join them and a waitress came to get their drink orders. Tony just wanted water. After she left, Rhodey continued and Peter listened carefully. “Do you think he was behind your kidnapping.”

“No. Clint was behind my kidnapping.” Tony said.

Peter sighed and shook his head. “Clint was ten. He had no control over what the adults in his life were doing.” He said. Tony understood, he didn’t blame Clint anymore. “But he might know something, now’s not the time to ask. You’re freaking out.”

“I’m not freaking out.” Tony said.

Peter reached out and laid a hand on Tony’s. He hadn’t notices his fingers hand curled around to grip the table cloth tightly until then. He couldn’t seem to detach himself from clutching the fabric. No one said anything further, they just stayed and made sure their presence was felt. Tony wasn’t alone, and they would wait as long as they needed to for him to get his thoughts together.

The pizza came and Tony apologized for the delay in their vacation to whatever island Howard had owned.

Chapter End Notes

**Sorry for being garbage and taking so long to update. More is coming, I promise.**

**Things will be okay. I love you guys.**
At the end of the day, everyone had to leave. Bruce stayed on the computer, their skype call growing longer and longer with each passing hour but he was fast asleep. It wouldn’t be long now, Steve and Natasha were supposed to be back soon. Things would be better then.

The lights were still on, much to the annoyance of the nurses working that night. They all insisted that he was wasting power and that he was fine and safe and the lights could be turned off for one night. But no, the lights stayed on. He could see, that was the most important thing. They were still out there, he wanted to be able to see in case they came looking for him.

“Are you alright?” Tony looked up as the door opened, Jarvis walked in. A woman came in with him, carrying a large covered dish as she struggled to suppress a smile. When he nodded, Jarvis walked forward and the woman followed. “This is my wife, Anna. You probably don’t remember her, but the two of you were close.”

“What are you doing here?” Tony asked, moving to sit up. “Visiting hours are over.”

Anna laughed and took a step closer, either not noticing how Tony tensed as she approached or she decided to not comment on it. “I made spaghetti. I baked. I remember how you always used to love baking, and since you couldn’t be there to help me this time I just thought I would bring you over your favorite. We can ignore the hospital’s rules for now.”

Tony didn’t move. His doctors said he should be resting, he didn’t think they meant staying up all night eating whatever treats this stranger snuck in for him. Still, he was hungry. The only decent food he had gotten the past week had been when Rhodey and Peter agreed to help him sneak out. It had been a lovely trip, outside in the city with the snow and the people. New York was larger than he ever imagined a city could be, Peter promised to show him everything.

“What did you bring?” Tony asked.

Anna took it as the invitation it was and finally closed the distance between them, pulling a chair up to the bed and quickly peeling off the lid of the dish. It was some kind of pastry, beautifully decorated. It smelled delicious. Anna handed him a fork and put the whole container on his lap.

He looked down at it. There was a lot, too much sugar. It wasn’t time yet, if he was going to eat so much he should wait a few days first. Anna reached out slowly and squeezed his wrist, rubbing the smooth skin with her thumb.

“I’ve missed you.” She said softly. “So, to celebrate, I made this just for you. Don’t feel like you need to eat it all at once, or at all. You won’t hurt my feelings. Things change, you might not even like this kind of cake anymore, if you don’t want it you can tell me.”
Tony took a bite. It was delicious. The cake was moist and rich and although he couldn’t quite place the assortment of flavors it was still all familiar to him. He took another bite, smiling as he ate. With his free hand, he shifted until he could hold Anna’s more easily. She seemed small, her posture wasn’t threatening. If she was going to attack he could overpower her with ease. She wasn’t a threat. Jarvis had already proven to be safe, at least safe enough to ensure he wasn’t just going to attack out of the blue. If these two wanted to hurt him they would be more patient with their attempts.

He shook his head, they wouldn’t do that. He shouldn’t let his mind wander to places like that. He couldn’t let himself fall back into that place where he was afraid of everyone. If he did that, he might convince himself that he was safer going back. Tony couldn’t let himself go back to those people.

“It’s nice to meet you, Anna.” Tony said slowly.

She looked at him, her eyebrows rising slightly. At first she didn’t react. She stared at him for a moment, her mouth opened slightly as if the statement surprised her. Then, Anna’s features twisted into a forced smile that looked almost pained and she quickly tried to blink away tears.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Tony.” She said. She sounded upset, Tony didn’t know why. “I look forward to getting to know you better.”

They sat there for a while, just sharing each other’s company. Anna never let go of his hand while she encouraged him to have more cake and then recovering it and setting it off to the side when he said he was finished. He couldn’t eat too much, not yet. She spoke sometimes, in soft, slow sentences as she described all the treats they used to bake together and how the kitchen was never quiet when he was there. She promised that, if he wanted to, he could come back and she would teach him the secret family recipes that not even Jarvis knew yet.

It was late, the heavy snow outside standing out and glowing white from the reflection of the street lamps. There wasn’t a single person wandering around outside, probably all at home staying warm, dry, and comfortable.

“You guys should probably go.” He said slowly. Tony didn’t mind them being there, he enjoyed there company, but it was time to be left alone again. He wanted the solitude. He wanted to think.

“Of course.” Jarvis said, taking Anna’s hand with a smile. “If you need anything at all you can just call us. We’ll be here as soon as we can. Get some rest.”

Once they were gone, it was quiet again. The silence was nice, only slightly smothering as he tried to focus. He didn’t remember her, it wasn’t fair. He could remember Clint, who he knew for a day or two over thirteen years ago, but he couldn’t remember this woman who could describe a dozen things that they used to do together.

Maybe he’ll remember later, once he’s rested and his mind has settled a bit. The therapist they had assigned to him was still worried he would either try to hurt himself or run off to go back to those people, maybe if he worked harder he could remember who he was before all this, some happy kid who had people who cared about him. It must have been nice.

His next appointment was tomorrow, maybe he could actually try to talk about his feelings this time around. If he was able to put everything into words, he’ll say it. Tony could do this, he didn’t want to be like this anymore. Afraid, uncomfortable, like a sad and abandoned animal waiting for their owners to come back for them. He didn’t want to be that anymore.
The door opened and closed softly. Tony didn’t bother looking up.

“Did you forget something?” He asked.

There wasn’t an answer, not even the sound of footsteps. Tony looked up. It wasn’t Anna, or Jarvis. The man in was recognizable enough, Tony was glad he left the lights on. With the lights on he could see when people were coming after him.

“Did they send you to kill me?” Tony asked, surprised at how steady his voice sounded. Of course, he was afraid, but not all that surprised. They would have sent someone eventually. The man didn’t answer and Tony let his gaze fall to the shiny metal of his exposed arm. “They’re using you.”

The man took a step forward then, his hand going to one of the knives at his belt. He should probably run, get as far away as possible to save his own life. He didn’t move.

“Steve is looking for you. He thinks you ran off somewhere.” Tony said. That might be a problem. The man with the metal arm was Steve’s friend. “Bucky, right?” The man stopped. If he killed him today, what would happen to Steve?

The blade was fairly small, it didn’t have to be large to be jammed into his throat. All Tony had to do was bleed out, if the mad decided to actually kill him. Larger knives were harder to work with, the small one shone threateningly in the light, held tightly in the man’s hand.

“They are using you too.” He said softly, his voice rough and barely louder than a whisper. Tony was surprised to hear him speak.

“Yeah. But I’m working on it.” Tony said. He sat up straighter and watched as the man lowered his arm and stepped further into the room. It was still likely that he would try to kill him. “I don’t want them to control me anymore, but it’ll take a while. Do you want some cake? Anna made it for me. It’s pretty good.”

The soldier sat down in the seat by his bed as Tony reached over to grab the closed dish. He had no way to cut it, so he just handed the whole thing and the fork over to the man. He took it, but didn’t eat it.

They sat there for a while, waiting for nothing in particular. The man didn’t make any move towards Tony, he was still and as non-threatening as he could be. Perhaps he had finally gotten away from them and came here to wait for Steve. It’s what Tony did, in one sense of it.

“They want you dead.” The man said.

Tony nodded. “Yeah, it’s because I don’t want them to control me anymore.”

“But they do.” The man said.

It was the truth. It was uncomfortable to think about but Tony still kept the lights on all night, he tried to control everything he ate, he lied, he pretended that he was okay when he really wasn’t. There was no response for him to think of, no way to convince anyone that Tony was his own person now and not some broken, used up lab rat who failed his tests. He rolled over and turned off the light. It wasn’t much, not even close to enough.

Tony couldn’t see the man now, just the barest reflection off of his metal arm from the street lights outside to indicate that he was still there. “Steve will be here soon. You’re welcome to wait.” Tony said. He rolled over, putting his back to the man. If he chose to kill him, then there was
already very little he could do to stop it.

He didn’t know if the man stayed or not, he didn’t hear any movement to indicate either. All Tony knew was that he was still alive, the lights were off, and he was alright until the sun came up.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, sorry for the wait. I got caught up with work and finals and the holidays. I'll have the last chapter ready for you guys soon.

End Notes

Thank you for reading. More to come. Feel free to comment or follow my tumblr

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