Summary

Five times the Avengers saw through Tony's masks and one time he saw through theirs.

Notes

Enjoy!

1. – Steve

“Big man in a suit of armor. Take that off, what are you?”

“Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist.”

“I know guys with none of that worth ten of you. The only thing you fight for is yourself.”

Steve had spent quite a bit of time wondering how he had ever been such an idiot. He’d also spent a
good amount of effort trying earnestly to apologize to Tony for the dreadful words, but Tony would
just smile and laugh it off, saying Steve wasn’t in his right head and he’d said some bad things to so
they’d just let bygones be bygones, yeah?

It didn’t stop Steve from noticing every single time Tony proved him wrong – which happened hundreds of times a week, in the smallest gestures.

And sure, Tony was a master at cutting the wire. Thank God for that too, because it was Tony’s quick thinking that had saved their asses – and New York’s – from countless disasters. But that didn’t mean he didn’t know how to lay down on the wire. Frankly, he was too willing when he had to. Generally didn’t wait for when he absolutely had to, just calculated the odds and if they said him getting hurt or doing something stupid meant just a few more people walked away from the fight? Tony never hesitated.

And the suit was astonishingly impressive. Especially since Tony had built it himself, in a cave. Looking back on it, implying that the suit was Tony’s best quality was something that would be very hard to actually think of as an insult.

But it wasn’t his best quality. Tony was everything he’d snarkily declared himself and ten times more.

Genius – check. No one in there right minds would doubt that, especially not Steve. Now that he considered Tony one of his closest friends, he frequently found himself hanging out down in the workshop with Tony, sketching the inventor in his element, or whatever he was building, or one of Tony’s adorable bots that Tony treated as his children. Billionaire - duh. Playboy - well, not so much anymore, but he was charming as hell. And philanthropist - Tony hid it, but even in proportion to his income, he gave away more money than anyone Steve had ever known.

And now that Bucky had been rescued, Steve’s original best friend had taken to spending time in Tony's lair as well. Tony had completely rebuilt Bucky’s arm, making it so much more than a weapon. Bucky had cried into Tony’s open arms when the inventor had first put it on and Bucky had been able to feel – actually feel, not just touch – for the first time in nearly a century.

But currently Bucky was in the gym training with Clint, so it was just Tony and Steve and the ‘bots. Steve cooed as Dummy rolled past him in hot pursuit of the tennis ball Tony was throwing for him to fetch, stilling in his drawing of Tony and the bots. He turned to Tony, amusement shining in his eyes, and felt his heart melt at the look of utter adoration and pride in Tony’s as he watched his first AI robot wave his arm around in search of the neon ball. It made Steve’s breath catch because for all he knew that Tony cared so much and so deeply for the few who were close to his heart, Tony rarely showed that love on his sleeve as he was doing now.

Tony’s eyes flicked up and he met Steve’s gaze with a happy grin, before turning back to his ‘bot.

Steve turned back to his drawing, a soft smile on his lips.

2. – Clint

Clint tossed his drink back with relish, smacking his lips delightedly as the alcohol burned his throat. If there was one good thing about these dumb publicity events, it was hands down the open bar.

Clint’s eyes scanned the ballroom as they always did whenever he went anywhere with anyone, but he paid much more attention to detail when he had his team with him. He was the eyes of the Avengers after all, and even at a hoity toity function like this, they had plenty of enemies who might take the opportunity to strike.

He saw Thor first of course, surrounded by a sea of people – mostly women – hanging off of him as
he boisterously told stories of Asgard. Next was Natasha, carefully sipping her drink in a dark corner of the room as she watched the dancers with sharp eyes. Nothing unusual there; Clint moved on to Bruce. The scientist had found a group of other doctors to converse with and seemed to be enjoying the night more than usual. Bucky and Steve were chatting at a table on the edge with a few people gathered around to hear their war stories. Bucky looked at ease, though his eyes kept darting across the room. Clint followed the looks to see his final target, Tony.

At first glance, nothing was out of the ordinary. Tony was chatting up some pretty lady – scratch that, some pretty lady was chatting Tony up, both of them drinking and flirting, her arm resting on his shoulder. Although on closer inspection the woman’s arm wasn’t so much resting on Tony’s arm, but clawing it, sharp red nails digging tightly into his arm as teeth flashed in Tony’s face.

Clint set his glass down and started to move closer when he realized how tightly Tony was holding his body. On the way over he noticed a few more things – the woman had strawberry blond hair, steel grey eyes, and pale skin. This was just getting worse by the minute.

Clint broke into a careful run when he saw the girl slip something into Tony’s drink.

“Yo, Stark!” he hollered, earning disgruntled and annoyed glares from the other occupants of the party, and a relieved look from Tony, who sagged. Clint put a deliberate swagger into his steps and came forward, ignoring the girl as he pushed forward. “I need my favorite playboy for a minute,” he waggled his eyebrows. “I find myself needing a wingman.” He scooped up the contaminated drink and swirled its contents. Looking over his shoulder he flashed a grin at the woman who was caught between furiously angry and terrified. “You don’t mind if I borrow him for a moment, do you?” he asked.

“No, not at all,” the woman said, schooling her features and backing off. “I need to head off anyway – it was a pleasure meeting you, Mr. Stark, Mr. Barton.”

“Pleasure’s all mine,” Clint said, locking eyes with Natasha across the room and nodding toward the woman. His partner nodded back curtly and flounced away. “Come on, Tony my man,” he said, taking the playboy’s arm and pulling him from the room.

“Thanks, Clint,” Tony sighed in relief when he’d been pulled out of the ballroom. He massaged his forearm with his free hand and grimaced. “That woman had claws.”

Clint shut him an incredulous look. “Did you not see her slip something in here?” he demanded, waving the drink in Tony’s face disbelievingly.

Tony raised his eyebrow and looked at the floor. “I saw,” he said vaguely. “’S why I wasn’t drinking from it. I know better by now.”

Clint stared at Tony a moment longer before sighing. He put down the drink and – after a millisecond’s hesitation – pulled the ex-playboy into a hug. Tony froze in his grip, before relaxing and slowly letting his head fall onto Clint’s shoulder. “You’re an idiot,” Clint informed him fondly, before pulling back and meeting his eyes. “And I’m sorry.”

They stared at each other for a long moment before Tony grinned. “We’re such saps,” he declared, clapping Clint on his shoulder. “Come on,” he said, starting to back out of the room. “I hope you weren’t joking about that pretty girl.”

With a final flourish he left the room – and the drink – behind, Clint on his heels.

3. – Bruce
Tony stumbles up the stairs and nearly trips three times on his way to the kitchen. When he sees Bruce watching him from his stool at the kitchen island he grins and holds out his arms like a zombie, moaning, “Coffee,” as he drags himself forward.

Bruce raises an eyebrow and stands up to start to machine for Tony so the genius can collapse into a chair with a grateful smile. Bruce studies the man. There are blisters on the tips of his fingers, so he’s been in the workshop all day. And Bruce was down there with him the day before. And Steve had sat and drawn with Tony the day before that. Which means Tony has spent three days in the workshop. And judging from the shadows under his eyes, hasn’t slept in that time either.

Bruce casually turns on the stove. “What have you been working on, Tony?” he asks easily, pulling eggs out of the fridge.

Tony waves his arm in the air and nearly falls off his stool. “Bunch of back logged SI work Pepper’s been wanting me to get done,” Tony tells him, and is cut off with a jaw-cracking yawn. “Pretty easy stuff.”

Bruce knows he’s lying. Tony’s been working on the team’s arsenal – it’s obvious by fresh scratches and burns Bruce can see on his arms – clear signs he’s been working on the new explosive arrows he’s been talking about with Clint. “I’m sure it’s only easy for you,” Bruce says soothingly, cracking the eggs over a pan and beginning to stir them. “No one can make things like you.”

He hears Tony’s light splutters before the genius can come up with a response. “Aw, you’re too sweet, Brucie-Bear,” he snarks. He sounds tired. And not the kind of tired that comes from a working binge inspired by a bolt of inspiration. This is the bone-deep tired that comes from someone who desperately wants to sleep, but can’t. He’s having nightmares again.

“Only for you,” Bruce tells him, sliding the eggs onto two plates and pushing one to Tony. “Eat,” he tells the other brunette, picking up his own fork and munching on the scrambled eggs as he leans against the counter.

Tony makes a forlorn noise and eyes the still brewing coffee machine, before picking up his own utensils and digging into the food. He probably hasn’t eaten in at least as long as he hasn’t slept. “Divine, Brucie,” Tony tells him reverently while slurping down the breakfast foods. “You are a god in the kitchen.”

“A Norse god, or a Roman god?” Bruce teases.

Tony plays along with the joke and teasingly mulls over the question. “Greek,” he finally declares happily, shoving his last forkful of eggs into his mouth, only to have Bruce replace the plate. “Greek like in Hercules, those guys are bubbly as fuck. And they’ve got temper issues,” he winks at Bruce, easily moving to the next plate.

Bruce lets himself be dragged to the couch as Tony cues up the movie. He smirks and brushes the
He settles down, content to watch the movie if it means giving Tony a few hours of peace.

4. – Thor

Thor never doubted Anthony’s abilities as a shield-brother, though he did admit that in the early days he doubted his integrity as a person. Nevertheless, he knew the Son of Stark would never turn against them so he did not feel the need to voice his opinions that Stark was a rather vain man.

His opinions changed rather quickly as well.

The Man of Iron had invited him to live in his towering abode when Thor had decided to stay on Midgard with his lady Jane, providing him with a floor done up in rich shimmering golds with strong walls that didn’t break like other flimsy houses on Midgard. It made Thor feel a little more at home. And Anthony never once complained about the number of appliances Thor destroyed when he was a little too mighty.

The Man of Iron was quite generous indeed, inviting the entirety of their team to share his home with, even the good Captain who Anthony had every reason to scorn. There was no underlying tension between them however, and Thor found their team growing impossibly closer from the proximity, even the aloof Natasha.

Rare else in the galaxy did Thor think existed such fine specimens as his companions. And when the Soldier of Winter was introduced to their clan, none was so willing as the Man of Iron, not even Thor though the god loathed to admit it.

Battles would’ve been hard lost without their Man of Iron, and Thor believed he would’ve been quite lonely in the blue expanse of the Midgardian skies without his friend. His patience never wore thin and for that, Thor was grateful. His courage never failed.

But there were times like these when Thor wished that perhaps the Man of Iron was not quite so noble.

“Tony you’ll get crushed if you go in there!” their good Captain hollered as the Son of Stark dived through the air in his suit of metal towards a shaking building. Windows snapped and beams fell.

“Widow’s in the next building over!” their companion yelled back.

“She’ll be fine without you!” the Solidier of Winter retorted, worry and fear in his voice. “Tony, you know she’ll be fine. You can’t go in there!”

“Sorry Buckaroo, but a man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do,” Tony said, steal in his voice. “Widow, you get all the civvies out?” asked Tony, the sound of the suit’s power increasing as Tony’s speed did.

“Stark, don’t you dare come in here!” Natasha barked over the line, fury in her voice.

“Sorry, babe, but the ladies gotta get out first,” Tony said, disappearing into the building just as the top floors began to fall.

This time though, Thor heard more than just the words – beneath them was a wealth of emotion, a deep caring, and fear – terror not for himself or his well being, but for that of the lady Natasha’s, and it was that that Thor heard over the Soldier of Winter and the good Captain’s fanaticized yelling into
their communicators.

Moments later when Natasha’s voice reported she and the Man of Iron were well, Thor smiled and swung his hammer, preparing to find his friends amidst the rubble, prepared to save the Man of Iron as he had saved them.

5. – Natasha

“Iron Man, Black Widow, report!” Steve barks into the calms, static crackling over the line. Natasha doesn’t mind the noise though, because she knows from experience that if they weren’t StarkTech, the lines would have collapsed ages ago.

“We’re fine, trapped in a pocket of sewer under the fallen building,” she tells Steve. “Iron Man is with me, injured.”

“It’s just a scratch,” Tony interjects in the comms. “Although an evac would certainly be welcome.”

“Widow, what’s Iron Man’s status?” asks Steve, none of them for a moment believing Tony.

“Stable, currently,” Natasha informs their captain while Tony indignantly grumbles. “I need to check on him.”

“You do that,” Captain America orders. “We’re working on clearing the rubble to get you out.”

“Roger that,” Natasha manages, before the comms fizzle out and die.

Tony grunts. “I’ll work on that,” he tells her, trying to shift even though the several hundred pound suit is weighing him down. “Help me get out of this thing, will you?”

Natasha crosses the small area and kneels down, fingers easily finding the release catches with Tony’s help. “You idiot, you shouldn’t have done that,” she says, holding him down when he tries to sit up, fingers roughly feeling over his chest and head. “Two cracked ribs and a possible minor concussion,” she tells him smoothly. “Nothing dire. You’ll survive.”

“I know that,” Tony sassed back, eyes flicking quickly around the small confines of their rocky prison. “One collapsing building couldn’t take down Tony Stark. And I did save you, so I can’t be too much of a dumbass.”

Natasha hummed non-committedly as she continued to look Tony over, pulling the billionaire from the suit completely. Tony shuddered when his back met the uneven ground and tried to hide it with more snark. “Honestly, Natasha, you wound me,” he told her, placing a hand over his heart – over the reactor, finger inconspicuously feeling around it for damage.

Natasha didn’t comment. “Consider me flattered,” she said dryly, fingers lingering on what might have been a torn muscle in Tony’s thighs.

Tony shuddered again and this time tried to hide it with a grin. “Ooh, Black Widow’s feeling me up,” he said, winking. “Don’t worry, I won’t tell Hawkeye.” He shivered again, a frown twisting his lips.

“What’s wrong?” asked Natasha, finally commenting on the shivering now that Tony seemed to be constantly shaking from it.

“I’m cold,” he snapped defensively. “Not all of us are wearing weather resistant leather body suits.”
Natasha ignored the words and moved her hand to brush through Tony’s slightly sweaty curls. “What’s actually wrong?” she asked again.

Tony paused before shuddering harshly. “I hate caves,” he murmured, folding his arms over his chest – over the reactor.

Information flicked through Natasha’s mind – primarily, Tony’s paper file. A cave in Afghanistan, un-medicated heart surgery, shrapnel in chest, car battery in chest, box of scraps, reactor, Ho Yinsen. Tony hated caves.

Carefully, Natasha wound her body around Tony until she was seated behind him with his head in her lap, her fingers gently carding through his hair. “We’re not in a cave, Tony,” she told him softly, and his wide eye flicked up to meet hers. “We’re in New York City, approximately twenty-three blocks from the Tower, and our team will be here shortly.”

Tony watched her with vulnerable eyes, before whispering, “Natasha?” questioningly into the space.

Natasha’s lips curved into a smile and she nodded. “Right here, Tony,” she told him. A rumble went through the rubble and a small beam of light shown down, piercing the blue Tony’s reactor had created.

“Cap, I found them!” she distantly heard Clint call.

Natasha smiled peacefully again, soothing out Tony’s hair. “Not going anywhere,” she promised.

Bucky wasn’t sure how he’d ended up here – wasn’t even positive where here was. He just knew it was dark and cramped and warm. Three very important things for the ex-assassin. His brain would not shut up and he briefly wondered if this was what it was like to be Stark – a thousand thoughts flying around your skull at light speed with no way to slow them down or think through every single one. If so, Bucky didn’t know how the man did it, made such incredible things while suffering through this barrage of imagery and information, how he ever picked out one solid train of thought when faced with this.

Bucky blinked and pushed back against the wooden cupboard he had crammed himself into when the door suddenly opened, preparing to fight to stay here when whoever it was inevitably wanted him to come out. He couldn’t see whom it was because of the sudden flash that had flooded through his pitch black environment, the only thing he could see was warm yellow light outlining the shape of a head like a halo.

Bucky squinted and opened his mouth to tell whomever it was to scram, when suddenly the door shut. He clicked his jaw shut. Then the other door opened and someone was knocking kitchen cleaning supplies out of their way and crawling into the dark space opposite Bucky.

“What-” Bucky started to object, but then the other door was closed. But it wasn’t pitch black anymore.

Warm blue light filled the space, the glow soft enough that Bucky’s eyes quickly adjusted and he was able to see without it ruining his need for darkness. Tony sat across from him, one eyebrow raised in a decidedly unimpressed look.

“Steve’s looking for you,” Tony told him conversationally, picking at his shirtsleeve without moving his eyes from Bucky’s gaze. “He’s convinced that you left the Tower.”
“And you used your computer to track me down?” snapped Bucky, suddenly angry with his friend, though he had no reason to be.

Now both brows were up and Tony was looking at him like he was simple. “No,” he told him smoothly. “I just knew some of the places I hide when I’m not okay.”

“I’m not hiding,” Bucky growled, glowering at Tony, who didn’t flinch under the assassin’s stony glare. “And I’m fine.”

“Yes you are and no you’re not,” Tony said easily, leaning against the cupboard wall. “And you’re allowed to and that’s okay. You don’t have to be fine, and you can hide if you need to. Lord knows we all need to hide sometimes.”

“I’m not hiding,” Bucky growled again, shifting forward menacingly. Even if it ruined his friendship with Tony, Bucky suddenly needed, had to scare his friend away.

It was harder than he’d estimated though and Tony just sighed. “Okay then, you’re fine and just playing a game of hide and seek that everyone else forgot was scheduled into the team roster,” he said dryly. “You’re not hiding because you had a nightmare that this was all a dream and you’re still with Hydra and still under their control. That’s not what’s happening at all,” Tony rolled his eyes.

Bucky’s fists clenched and his eyes dropped. “How did you know?” he asks quietly, flinching when he feels Tony’s hand on his shoulder.

“I’ve had those dreams,” Tony tells him, voice soft. “That this life is all a hallucination and I’m still being tortured in a cave in Afghanistan and my mind has finally snapped. That I died when I fell into that portal, and this is just a fake universe that my brain has built as its heaven.”

“What do you do?” asks Bucky softly, voice breaking. “When you have those dreams?

Tony shifts closer again, and the shadows move on the wall as the small space’s only light source turns. It creates a mesmerizing pattern and Bucky can’t look away. “I hide for a while,” Tony tells him. “Usually in my workshop, sometimes in the closet of my room. Sometimes right here. And I wallow for a bit, and cry for a bit, and scream and throw things for a bit. And then, when I’ve managed to work up the courage, I order some takeout and call the team into the den for a movie night, and we watch something until its dawn and eat until we’re stuffed.” Tony ducks his head so he can meet Bucky’s gaze. “That’s what I do when I have those dreams. When Steve has them, and he thinks he’s back in the ice and this is the dream, he goes down to the gym and destroys a couple punching bag, before taking his sketchbook down to my workshop and drawing while I ramble and work. When Natasha thinks this is a hallucination by the red room, she and Clint spare and then go out and kill some baddies for SHIELD, and then we all go out for shwarma. When Bruce has a dream that he looses control and hurts somebody, he calls me and we do our science-bro magic until he’s smiling.” Tony pauses again and sighs, shaking his head slightly, and his grip on Bucky’s shoulder tightens. “We all have those dreams, Buck, every one of us. So hide if you need to, but – just don’t do it forever, okay?”

Tony pulls back then, shooting Bucky a soft smile. “I’ll leave you to it,” he says, and reaches to push the door open, only to freeze when Bucky’s metal fingers wrap around his wrist.

“Don’t go,” Bucky says softly, coughs, and says again, words stronger, “I need someone to be my nightlight, don’t I?”

Tony’s grin is ten times brighter than the arc reactor. “I will gladly assist you in anyway I can,” he says, faux bowing awkwardly in the small space, and hitting his head on the wall accidently.
Bucky laughs at his misfortune and leans back comfortably, and closes his eyes. And his mind is still.

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