1000 Paper Cranes to See You Kneel

by Shi Toyu

Summary

Bucky thought the Avengers tower was strange. He wasn’t sure how much of it was living with a team of superheroes, how much was the fact that he’d spent the last seventy years in the hands of an organization that was brainwashing and wiping him, and how much was something else entirely. The Dom knew he didn’t exactly have a full understanding of how this new world he’d been thrust into, or any world really, worked but something just seemed…off. It nagged at him, pulled at his attention like a splinter in his finger that was too small to find.

Notes

This work is already complete except for the final chapter. It was originally supposed to be a one-shot but I think you can all see why it didn’t end up staying that way.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

Bucky thought the Avengers tower was strange. He wasn’t sure how much of it was living with a team of superheroes, how much was the fact that he’d spent the last seventy years in the hands of an organization that was brainwashing and wiping him, and how much was something else entirely. The Dom knew he didn’t exactly have a full understanding of how this new world he’d been thrust into, or any world really, worked but something just seemed…off. It nagged at him, pulled at his attention like a splinter in his finger that was too small to find.

He’d never been on a team with a sub before, for one thing. It was just something that never would have happened back in the 40’s and HYDRA, well, they had a certain opinion about where submissives belonged in the world. Yet now he was not only working with a sub, but living in that sub’s tower. Tony Stark, the only sub in the world with his own Fortune 500 company. It honestly impressed Bucky more than anything else he’d seen in the future, mostly because his exposure to subs was limited to the simpering messes that crawled after their master at HYDRA or the few he remembered from his own time who just wanted a big, strong Dom to take care of their every need. Tony didn’t need anyone which, Bucky thought, was part of what was so strange.

The billionaire provided for his superhero friends in just about every way imaginable. He gave them a place to live, put food on the table, built them new equipment whether or not it was asked of him, and bought them just about anything they could dream of if they showed even the slightest whim. It made Bucky want to do something to give back, not because he felt like he owed it to the genius or because it was expected of him, but simply so he could show his appreciation for everything being done for him. The others didn’t seem to feel that same compulsion.

It wasn’t that they were taking advantage or even that they weren’t grateful. Clint, in particular, was extremely vocal in his thanks whenever the genius brought him a new set of arrows. It was just that it seemed like they never did anything specifically for the man who gave them so much. Sure, Steve cooked and Natasha helped him with his hand-to-hand and Bruce got onto him about eating healthier, but those were things they did for the whole team.

Bucky guessed it just bothered him. It didn’t help that he kept noticing tiny little signs that the sub wasn’t as happy as he let on. The first time had been shortly after Bucky had first moved in to the tower. There was a team movie night that the genius hadn’t shown up for. After a few minutes of waiting and an inquiry to JARVIS, they were informed that the genius had fallen asleep on the couch in his lab mid-work binge. Steve had smiled and said, “Let him sleep. He needs it.” They’d started the movie and Bucky wouldn’t have thought anything of it except that about three-quarters of the way through the hairs on the back of his neck had stood on end and he twisted around to see Tony hovering in the doorway.

He’d been expecting the genius to waltz on in and flop down with a wise crack and a wide grin, but he’d turned away instead and disappeared into the darkness. At that point, Bucky barely knew the man, had only ever had a handful of conversations with him and those had all been about the soldier’s arm. He didn’t exactly know him well enough to go after him. He did start paying closer attention after that, though. Once he was looking for them the little moments like that seemed to crop up more and more. It wasn’t a trend he enjoyed seeing.

The therapist SHIELD has assigned Bucky taught him a new origami form every session so he had something to do with his hands while they talked. It made things easier, he thought, if he had something else to concentrate on while explaining all the things HYDRA had made him do. Bucky liked the Doc, too, and eventually told him about his concern for Tony, his confusion over what he’d
seen. Doc Branson had smiled at him.

“It sounds to me like you’d like to make friends.”

Bucky’s brow furrowed.

“I don’t think we’ve got much in common.”

The Doc chuckled. He was a very dark-skinned man and every flash of his teeth was startlingly bright in contrast.

“More than you would probably think. I’m sure you can find something to bond over. Here,” he leaned forward to press down on the back end of one of the frogs they’d been making during this session and let it spring into Bucky’s lap, “why don’t you take him that and see where it leads you?”

Bucky had been dubious, but did as the Doc suggested anyway. He headed back to the tower with the frog tucked carefully into the pocket of his sweatpants and asked JARVIS where his creator was.

“Sir is currently in the labs. Shall I divert your elevator ride to his location?”

“Only if it won’t interrupt anything. I wouldn’t want to disturb him.”

The elevator deposited him at the lab, so he supposed that was a no. Glass walls framed a ten-foot cube that served as the lobby, a keypad and hand-scanner mounted by the door preventing anyone from getting further. Seeing as he didn’t have a code for entry, Bucky just knocked lightly on the glass to get the inventor’s attention. The man nearly jumped out of his chair where he’d been typing away at a keyboard and examining something on one of his many holographic screens. He looked surprised to see Bucky, but he supposed that was rather expected.

“Hey,” he greeted as soon as he opened the door, holding it and stepping aside so Bucky could enter. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

The Dom felt suddenly nervous. He reached into his pocket to pull out the frog.

“I brought this for you.”

Tony cocked his head to the side adorably and took the tiny origami creature from his outstretched hand. His face clearly showed his confusion.

“Um, thanks?”

Great, Bucky thought, now he was coming off as a total lunatic. As if Tony needed any more reasons to think of him like that.

“I just thought you might like it, is all. It can jump and everything.”

The confusion didn’t disappear but a small smile worked its way onto the sub’s face.

“Thanks, really,” he repeated, this time with more sincerity. “How’s your arm holding up?”

“Great.” Bucky grinned back and rotated the metal limb to illustrate his point. “You did an amazing job with it.”

“Yeah, well, tech is kinda my thing.”

“I can tell.”
Bucky gestured to the room at large where bits of various inventions were strewn across just about every surface. One of Tony’s bots lifted its metal arm to look at Bucky. The soldier wiggled his fingers in greeting and the bot whirred happily in response. When he turned back, Tony was giving him an odd look.

“Do you wanna see some stuff? Maybe? Steve once mentioned you did some mechanic work before the war. I don’t have a lot of my cars here, but I’ve got a few.”

Bucky grinned.

“Yeah. I’d like that.”

They ended up spending hours down in the garage, Tony actually hoisting the engine out of his Aston Martin so Bucky could get a better look at it. Mechanics had changed a lot since Bucky had last gotten his hands stained with motor oil, but the basics were still the same. His love for cars hadn’t changed, either.

“We’ll have to take a road trip sometime,” Tony said with a beaming grin. “We can go up the coast. The drive’s not as nice as California, but it’s got its perks. If we make a weekend of it, we could even drive up to Maine and get some lobster.” He kissed the tips of his fingers, his Italian roots showing. “Nothing in the world like lobster fresh off the boat.”

Bucky laughed.

“Only if I get to drive one of these lovely ladies.”

He ran a hand affectionately down the side of the Aston Martin and it was Tony’s turn to laugh.

“Well, you seem like the kinda guy who would treat her right. I’m sure we’ll be able to work something out.”

It was meant as a joke but they ended up planning the whole thing out and when Tony had mentioned it to Pepper when the woman stopped by with some paperwork she insisted they do it.

“You don’t take enough vacations, Tony, despite what the rest of the world thinks. A little trip would be good for you. I’m sure the tower will survive a couple days without you.”

They were set to leave just days after Bucky’s next session with Doc Branson. They were making little samurai hats in this session.

“It sounds like things went very well.”

“I like Tony,” Bucky admitted. “He just seems like a great guy. I’d like to get to know him better.”

“Well it sounds like you’re going to get the perfect opportunity. The word around SHIELD is Mr. Stark isn’t the easiest person to get along with. I’m glad you aren’t finding that to be the case.”

Bucky frowned.

“Those people don’t really know him.”

“I thought you didn’t really know him, either.”

“I know him better than they do.”

Steve still seemed pretty floored by the whole thing even as he sat on Bucky’s bed and watched him
pack. He didn’t need to take much, just a couple changes of clothes and basic toiletries. The only bag he was taking was an over-the-shoulder duffle and it wasn’t even half-full. He didn’t expect there to be much room in whatever car they ended up taking anyway.

“I just-I didn’t think you and Tony had that kind of relationship. I mean, I know you’ve hung out in the lab with him a few times but that’s it.”

“Well that’s why we’re taking this trip, I guess.” Bucky shrugged. “To get to know each other. Plus the car is gonna be awesome.”

Steve didn’t seem quite convinced, but he smiled none the less.

“I hope you two have a good time, then. If you need anything, you know how to reach me.”

A smile tugged at the edges of Bucky’s lips.

“Over-protective as always, eh? I suppose I should be glad you’re not gonna be tailing us the entire way on the hog of yours.”

Steve laughed.

“Don’t tempt me. There’s still time to clear my schedule.”

Bucky was surprised to see that Tony only carried a small duffle bag of his own, a tablet sticking out of the side pocket. The genius beamed at him and patted the device.

“I know this is supposed to be my time off, but try telling that to my brain. If I don’t take something with me I’ll go insane.”

Bucky held up his hands as if in surrender.

“Hey, no arguments here.”

They were on the road in no time, Tony navigating them out of the city and then turning the wheel over to Bucky. They were in the Aston Martin convertible from the other week and it drove every bit as smoothly as Tony had promised. The samurai helmet Bucky had presented him with before leaving hung on a string from the rear view mirror.

“This is amazing!” Bucky yelled over the noise.

Tony laughed from the passenger seat, holding his arm out to feel the wind as it whipped by. His shades hid his eyes, but they also made him look rather dashing. Bucky, on the other hand, was pretty sure his hair was going to look like an absolute bird’s nest whenever they stopped.

“This car was built for the open road,” the inventor cried back. “If you see anywhere you want to stop, just pull on over. I don’t think I’ve taken the time to sight see since my last road trip with Rhodey back in college.”

Bucky wasn’t ready to relinquish the wheel until three hours later when they pulled into a little diner for lunch. A glance in the rearview mirror told him he’d been entirely right about his hair looking like a mess and felt a flash of jealousy at Tony’s achievement of ‘artfully windswept.’ The genius cracked up when he told him that.

“Mine used to be longer,” he admitted, “but I like it short.”

“Mine used to be shorter. I like it long.”
They slid into a booth as Bucky pulled out his pony tail holder and began combing his fingers through it in an attempt to tame the wild strands. Tony watched him with no small amount of amusement. The waitress, a woman in her early thirties who looked tired but still smiled, arrived promptly with two menus. Her nametag said ‘Kitty’ and she had a bracelet of miss-matched, strung-together glass beads around her wrist and a gold wedding band on her finger. She registered as a solid baseline, no Dom or sub-heavy inclinations.

“Have you tried a braid?” were the first words out of her mouth.

Bucky looked up, startled.

“Uh, no. Haven’t even done a braid in years. Not since my sisters were young. Don’t know if I remember how.”

“Turn around,” she motioned with her hand. “I’ll do it for you.”

Bucky shifted obediently and she wrestled his hair into submission with quick, sure movements. Across the booth, Tony was taking pictures with his cell phone.

“Now,” the woman said once she was finished, “what can I get you gents to drink?”


“I hope you aren’t planning to use those pictures as blackmail. I can go ahead and tell you now it won’t work very well for you.”

Tony chuckled.

“Nah. But I thought Steve might enjoy seeing ‘em, and probably Sam, too.”

Bucky dipped his head in acknowledgement. Those two certainly did enjoy anything that so much as even hinted at him adjusting well to his return to society. They perused their menus more or less in silence until Kitty came back with their drinks.

“So do you know what you want to eat yet?”

“Burger and fries,” Tony said with a smile.

She jotted it down and looked at Bucky expectantly.

“French toast, the grilled cheese with bacon, and twenty-four wings. No sauce.”

She stared at him.

“You serious?”

“Oh, yeah. He’ll probably get dessert, too.”

She looked skeptical but wrote it all down anyway. She was half-turning away when Tony finally removed his sunglasses and she froze.

“Oh, my God,” she squeaked. “You’re Tony Stark.”

He grinned at her.

“The one and only.”
She took a moment to gather herself back together before giving him a quick nod.

“Well, I’m not going to trouble you by turning into some kind of crazy fan. I’m sure you get enough of that as it is. Just know you’re quite an inspiration. Not a lot of subs have had the courage to live life the way you have and go after what they really want.”

Tony leaned forward on one elbow, sipping his coffee with the other hand.

“So who’s the special sub in your life, then?” His gaze flickered to the wedding ring. “Husband?”

Her smile was tight-lipped, her eyes pinched at the edges.

“He was. My little girl is, too.”

Tony’s grin dropped.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

She shrugged.

“Me, too, but there’s nothing to be done about it. It was a car accident, just one of those things. Nobody’s fault. He slid on some ice and got wrapped around a tree.” She gave their table a little pat. “I’ll go put your order in.”

Tony stared down into his coffee as she left. The air around them wasn’t nearly as carefree as it had been just minutes before.

“I hate that,” Tony finally said. “People losing their loved ones for no damn reason.”

Bucky nodded in sympathy, not really sure what to say to that.

“It’s not something anyone deserves.”

Tony’s hands found their way onto the table.

“I hate it cause there’s not anything I can do about it. Nothing to fix, no one to blame. I mean, we can make promises of building better cars all day long but it’s always gonna keep happening.”

The ex-assassin stared at him for a long moment.

“You know, Tony…I don’t think I’ve seen someone blame themselves for so much shit that wasn’t their fault since Stevie before he got all juiced up on that super soldier serum of his.”

The genius looked up in surprise.

“I’m not blaming myself.”

“Sure sounds like it to me.” He held up both hands before Tony could protest. “But, hey, not my business. Just think you should give yourself some credit for all the good you do.”

It was Tony’s turn to stare as Bucky pointedly just looked out the window, examining an old Dodge pick-up truck that sat in the parking lot. Silence stretched between them for a long time before Tony finally decided to break it.

“So, you had sisters, huh?”
Bucky grinned, turning back.

“Oh, yeah. Three of ‘em. After our folks passed it was up to me to take care of ‘em. I was the oldest after all.”

Tony got a wistful look in his eye.

“I always wondered what it would be like having siblings growing up.”

Bucky snorted.

“It’s Hell, but I wouldn’t’ve traded it for the world.”

“I’m sure they were some lucky ducks to have you watchin’ out for them.”

“Probably not if you asked them,” Bucky leaned forward as if to share a secret, “but I never did. It got better after Stevie started comin’ around. I could throw him at them as a distraction.”

Tony burst out laughing. It was a good look on him.

“I’m just imagining pre-serum Steve surrounded by this gaggle of ladies and being completely overrun by them. Then I imagine the same thing with him looking like he does now and it just gets better.”

Bucky chuckled.

“Aw, man. My sisters loved Stevie back then, thought he was the cutest thing ever, like their own personal doll. They’d just eat ‘im up with a spoon now.”

“So what happened to them? I mean, I know you and Stevie went off to war, but…”

Bucky shrugged.

“My oldest sister was dating this guy named Freddy,” his eyes narrowed in thought, trying to dredge up the memories that were still fuzzy from HYDRA’s treatment, “Hallowitz, I think. I was supposed to meet him the next time I went on leave but,” he shrugged, “trains happen.”

“What about now?”

Bucky shrugged.

“Dunno. Maybe they got kids of their own out there. I don’t even know if any of them are still alive.”

Tony’s eyebrow rose in surprise.

“You never tried to look them up? Weren’t you curious?”

“Of course I was, but if they’re still alive then there’s no way I would be able to resist reaching out to them. And after what HYDRA turned me into?” He gave a bitter scoff. “Better they think I died on that train.”

Tony frowned, looking into the depths of his coffee.

“If it were me,” he finally said after a long silence, “I would want to know.”
Bucky was saved from having to answer as Kitty arrived back with their food, having to make two trips to get it all on the table. She seemed content to ignore the conversation they’d been having the last time she was with them.

“Anything else I can get you gents? Ketchup?”

Tony beamed at her, clearly recovering from the heavier topics pretty quickly himself.

“Got some, thanks.” He lifted the red bottle from where it sat at the end of their table. “You could maybe point us toward some good places to sightsee, though, if you can think of anything off the top of your head.”

Kitty hmm-ed and furrowed her brow.

“Well, I don’t know if it’s exactly your style, Mr. Stark, but there’s a little reservation only about twenty miles up the interstate from here. There are some hiking trails and a natural bridge. It’s a real pretty place, but there aren’t many signs telling you about it.” She winked at them. “Helps keep the place quiet.”

“Sounds great. We’ll have to check it out. And its just Tony, no need for all that Mr. Stark business.”

“I’ll write down the directions for you, Tony.”

It seemed to fluster her a bit to say his first name and she turned away quickly to do as she’d promised. The genius smiled after her.

“She seems nice.”

Bucky nodded in agreement, sprinkling powdered sugar over his French toast and digging in.

“I bet she’s a great mom.”

Tony turned back to his burger, something Bucky couldn’t quite identify in his expression.

“Yeah.”

When they finished eating, Bucky got dessert after all, Tony sent him ahead to get the car started while he paid the bill. The Dom started to protest, but Tony just waved him off. Knowing a losing battle when he saw one, Bucky did as he was told. He had the car already purring when Tony slammed out of the diner’s door, the shriek of the waitress following behind him. He vaulted over the side of the Aston Martin without bothering with the door and shouted at Bucky to, “Drive, drive, drive!”

Bucky hit the gas, tearing out of the parking lot and back toward the exit ramp. As soon as they were back on the highway, he turned to look at the genius with wide eyes. Tony was lounging back in his seat like a cat in a warm spot of sunlight.

“What the Hell was that?”

One honey-colored eye cracked itself open to look at him.

“Oh, that? That was Ms. Kitty back there finding out she’d just gotten a $25,000 tip.”

Bucky jerked so hard he swerved into the next lane. Tony raised an eyebrow at him.

“You just gave away $25,000?”
The genius shrugged and settled back into his seat more comfortably.

“I’m a billionaire, sweetheart. That’s practically pocket change to me. Hopefully Kitty’s smart enough to make something out of it.”

“Swells,” Bucky mumbled under his breath, then louder, “You know, you’re really something else.”

Tony opened both eyes to give him a look of confusion, a certain guardedness to his gaze.

“Why? Cause I’m wasting money?”

“Nah,” Bucky laughed. “The amount of money you have, I figure you can do whatever with it that you damn well please. You’re something else because you care.” He sent Tony a grin and a sideways glance. “Not enough people do that anymore.”

Stunned silence reigned on the passenger side of the car before Tony seemed to get ahold of himself again.

“Whatever. You just get us to that nature preserve bridge thing, alright?”

Bucky smiled and did as he was told. The park ranger at the bridge directed them to waterfalls further up the interstate when asked and they were off again, then to Salem, Massachusetts, where they would spend the night. Tony had insisted upon it.

“Forget witches! They have the Museum of Metal Creatures! And the New England Pirate Museum! C’mon, Buck! Pirates!”

The ex-assassin could hardly argue with that. They found a room at the Tuck Inn Bed and Breakfast, which Tony had laughed at for nearly a full five minutes. He’d laughed even more when they wound up in the Honeymoon suite. Apparently it was the only room still available with two beds, a queen and a day bed. Bucky, of course, let Tony take the queen. The next morning brought them a veritable array of baked goods and pastries for breakfast, what the bed and breakfast was truly known for.

“So,” Tony nearly bounced in his seat, “we hit the museums around here and then head out of town. If we floor it, we should be about to get to Maine by dinner. It’s only, what, a four hour drive at this point?”

Bucky smirked around his slice of cranberry-orange coffeecake.

“Bet you $50 I can make it in half that.”

“You know what? I’ll take that bet. But if you lose, you’ve gotta steal Cap’s suit and wear it in Times Square.”

Bucky balked.

“Stevie’s suit?”

Tony’s grin promised no mercy.

“Or you could sing karaoke in front of the whole team. I’ll accept either.”

“Karaoke. Definitely. No way am I touching that suit.”

Bucky didn’t win the bet, but he did get to spend three hours in a car with Tony wearing a pirate hat.
and an eyepatch. He supposed it was worth it. They arrived at the Holbrook House at just past five in the afternoon. Tony kept the hat and eyepatch on for the entire process of checking in. Bucky had to give the young woman behind the desk points for not mentioning it even once. They were headed to their room in less than ten minutes.

Dinner was at a tiny little restaurant Tony had apparently been to before. It was a family-run place attached to a small marina, every dish seafood and bought fresh daily from the incoming boats. Tony didn’t even let Bucky look at a menu, just started ordering them a veritable army of food.

“This is awesome,” he grinned. “I’ve never actually been able to finish everything before but I’m sure that won’t be a problem for you.”

Bucky chuckled and snagged another piece of lobster.

“So you really only brought me so I can be your trash compactor. I see how this is.”

Tony tutted at him.

“You caught me. I’m only using you for your mouth.”

Bucky tried extremely hard not to concentrate on the images that put in his mind. Tony was attractive, certainly, and one Hell of a fella but that didn’t mean he’d be receptive of Bucky thinking such thoughts. They were barely even friends and there was no indication that the attention would be reciprocated. Besides, he’d never seen Tony with the same Dom twice. He’d hate to be just another one-night stand and then have to go back to being teammates.

They slept in the next day, working their way through their food comas, and then headed back to New York. The only time they stopped was for gas. The second time Bucky was just finishing up when Tony came bursting out of the station, waving a book over his head with a huge grin on his face. He thrust the book at Bucky as though he were a miner who’d just struck gold.

“Guess what they had!”

Bucky looked at the book in his hands.

“Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes?”

Tony looked ridiculously proud of himself.

“Because you like origami so much.”

Understanding bloomed and Bucky couldn’t help the smile that stretched across his face. Tony was watching him with hopeful eyes and Bucky yanked him in for a one-armed hug.

“Thank you. I can’t wait to read it.”

Tony beamed at him.

“Good.” He pulled away and hopped over the side of the car and into the driver’s seat. “It’s your consolation prize for getting kicked out from behind the wheel.”

Bucky laughed and climbed into the passenger seat.

“How will I ever cope?”

Tony grinned behind his shades and revved that engine before peeling out. Bucky had to scramble
for his seatbelt. The genius whooped over the rush of the wind and they were off. It had been a long
time since Bucky had felt so carefree. Neither of them stopped smiling the entire trip back. Steve was
waiting for them in the garage.

“Wow,” Tony drawled, “I feel like I’m bringing my prom date home after midnight. You gonna get
your shotgun, pops?”

Steve frowned, but it was in confusion and not disapproval.

“I’m fine, Steve,” Bucky assured him before the question could be asked.

“I didn’t think you wouldn’t be.”

He sounded defensive and Bucky smiled at the thought of getting that same tone time and time again
all through their childhood after finding him in countless alleys.

“But it’s still the longest I’ve been out of the tower since you brought me back. I get it, Stevie. It’s
okay.”

His friend seemed to have trouble meeting his gaze and the soldier’s eyes darted over toward Tony.
It was obvious that he was embarrassed.

“I just worry, is all.”

“No need.” Bucky reached out of the car to ruffle Steve’s hair like he had a million times when they
were younger. “Tony took great care of me.”

The inventor looked nothing less than smug.

“Yeah, Cap. Stop hogging. Bucky can have more friends than just you.”

Apparently deciding that since he owned the building he could just leave the car sitting in front of the
elevators Tony turned off the vehicle and exited. Bucky followed suit, grabbing each of their bags
out of the trunk and shouldering Tony’s without a second thought. Steve looked like he was about to
panic.

“I never said he couldn’t! I never said that!”

“Relax, Stevie.” Bucky clapped him on the shoulder. “It’s a joke.”

For someone with as much sass and wit as Steve had, he’d somehow always managed to miss the
humor of others. It’d taken Bucky years to reach the level where his best friend understood his
sarcasm. He could see the process was going to be just as grueling between Steve and Tony. Good
ting he was there to translate. The three rode up the elevator is relative peace, Bucky handing
Tony’s bag to him only when he and Steve were about to disembark on his own floor.

“Try to get some sleep tonight, will yah? You’re technically still on vacation until tomorrow
morning.”

Tony’s grin was unapologetic.

“And it’ll be morning in less than an hour and a half. What are you complaining about anyway? It’s
not like the light of me working is gonna be keeping you up anymore.”

“Maybe I just care. Night, Tony.”
He didn’t believe for a second that the genius was going to do anything other than stop off at the penthouse to drop his bag and then head straight down to the lab. If he even made it to the penthouse at all. Steve lingered for a while, fixing them both hot drinks and sketching on the couch while Bucky started reading the book Tony had given him. Despite the late hour, neither of them seemed overly tired. When Steve finally decided to leave, he sent Bucky a small smile from the doorway.

“I’m really glad things went well between you two, Buck. You deserve a friend like Tony and I think he needs one like you a lot more than he’d care to admit.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve fight. Shit gets blown up.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ex-assassin hadn’t been able to concentrate on his book for the rest of the night, though he did manage to pick it up again the next day. Half a week later, sitting on the Doc’s couch, Steve’s cryptic words still bothered him.

“Can you teach me how to fold a crane?”

Doc’s eyebrows rose slowly, nearly invisible against his dark skin.

“I don’t see why not, though it’s a bit more complicated than the folds we’ve been doing so far. You’ve never made a request before. Any particular reason behind your sudden interest?”

“Tony bought me this book while we were on the road trip, Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.”

“I know it,” Doc nodded. “Have you had a chance to read it yet?”

Bucky settled back into the couch, a frown forming on his face as Doc got out the paper.

“It’s pretty short. It didn’t take me very long. It’s not like I have much else going on anyway.”

Doc began the first fold, going slowly so that Bucky could copy each movement.

“And what did you think of it?”

“It was awful,” Bucky said bluntly. “I mean, who writes a story about a little girl dying of cancer?”

“And yet you still want to learn the crane fold.”

“Yeah, well, the legend was pretty cool, I guess. Besides, it’ll take us a few sessions to fold a thousand of these.”

“At least,” Doc agreed easily. “Do you know what you want to wish for when you have them all done?”

“Not yet. I figured I had plenty of time to decide. I mean, I know you’re supposed to have it figured out before you start but I think that would take nearly as long.”

Doc chuckled.

“That you do. So tell me about your road trip with Mr. Stark.”

Bucky was surprised that he was only able to get six cranes done during the session. It was a much
lower number than he was expecting. Doc hadn’t seemed worried, though. He dug a box out of his closet and took the few files that were in it and set them aside. Then he put Bucky’s cranes and a stack of origami paper in instead.

“Take it with you. I bet you’ll be able to get some done between our sessions, too. If we keep going at this pace, you won’t reach your thousand for another three years.”

Bucky hid the box in his room as soon as he got back to the tower. For some reason he just didn’t want the others seeing it. Even if he hadn’t picked a wish yet, even if he didn’t actually believe that wish would be granted, it felt like the project was personal. It was something he had to do for himself, by himself. He had a goal to reach and he would do it without Steve’s cheerleading, without Natasha’s watchful gaze, without anyone. He needed that.

Surprisingly enough, Tony was in the common area kitchen when Bucky headed up there. It was rare for the genius to stop for meals in the middle of the day and he’d hardly been out of his lab since they’d returned from their road trip. Apparently having a backup of ideas kept him more than a little busy when given access to a lab again. He grinned at Bucky around the slice of leftover pizza he was shoving into his mouth. Bucky was pretty sure it wasn’t even warmed up.

“Hey there, soldier.”

“Hey,” Bucky greeted. “How are things going down there? All caught up?”

Something flickered through Tony’s eyes too fast for Bucky to quite catch it.

“Never. Life of a genius, you know. The work always keeps coming.”

The ex-assassin hummed, not quite sure how he felt about that.

“Just so long as you’re taking care of yourself, yeah?”

Tony snorted.

“Oh, please. When has anyone ever known me not to take care of myself?”

Bucky knew better than to fall into that trap.

“I finished that book you gave me, by the way.”

Tony perked up instantly, his eyes lightening and standing a bit straighter.

“Yeah? How did you like it? Was it good?”

Bucky didn’t doubt for a second that Tony had no idea what the book was about.

“Yeah. It had some interesting facts and history about origami and where the folds came from.”

In the face of Tony’s beaming smile, Bucky could only be glad he’d decided not to mention that the entire thing was about a little girl slowly dying.

“Good. You’re gonna be at movie night tonight, right?”

Bucky couldn’t help but snort.

“Tony, I quite literally have no life. Outside of a handful of SHIELD agents I don’t know anyone outside of this tower. Where else would I be?”
Tony rolled his eyes.

“Right. I’ll add making you some friends to the To Do list. I’ve got a meeting, though, and then I’ll be in the lab for the rest of the afternoon. See you tonight!”

He stuffed another slice of pizza in his mouth as he left the room, making Bucky chuckle. The genius looked a bit tired, sure, but he was still full of energy it seemed. Even with the serum HYDRA had given him, Bucky didn’t think he could survive the kind of schedule that Tony kept. It was just too much. He always had something going on, somewhere he was supposed to be. It had to be exhausting. Bucky was still deep in thought when Natasha entered the kitchen. She gave the room a cursory glance before letting her gaze settle on him.

“Can’t decide what to eat?”

Bucky shook his head to clear it and moved toward the fridge, his original destination.

“Thinking about Tony.”

“Oh?”

He could hear the careful control in her voice as he grabbed a carton of strawberries, the way she was asking without asking. He knew how she operated. She couldn’t help it any more than he could help the way his footsteps were always silent or the way he assessed every person he met for how much of a threat they could be. It was the programming.

“He works a lot,” was all he said.

“Nothing he can’t handle. I don’t think he knows how to do anything less. If he wasn’t going every second of every day, I’m not sure he’d know what to do with himself.”

But Bucky knew that wasn’t true. He remembered Tony sitting out on the patio of their room in Bar Harbor, Maine late at night, tablet resting on the little table and just staring out at the water with a content look on his face. He hadn’t known Bucky was awake. He’d never seemed more peaceful than in that moment.

“You don’t ever worry about him?”

“Of course I do. He’s my teammate and my friend. But I’m a lot more worried about what he’s going to do in battle that I am about his schedule. He doesn’t really have to do any of it anyway. He could retire tomorrow and be set for life. If all he wanted to do was Iron Man then he could.”

Bucky wasn’t so sure Tony saw his other activities as quite as optional as Natasha clearly did. He wondered if it was because he was a Dom and Natasha was a baseline that he was more concerned than she was. To be fair, he honestly hadn’t interacted with many subs other than Tony since he’d been brought back from HYDRA. It was possible that his orientation was just latching on to the closest sub it could find and urging him to protect care keep.

Disgruntled by his own thoughts, Bucky tossed the strawberries in the sink with the water running and headed to the pantry to grab the peanut butter. He could feel Natasha’s eyes on him, the way they raked over his frame and analyzed his every movement. It was a struggle not to snap at her. He settled for ignoring her instead as he sliced the tops off of each strawberry and smeared them with peanut butter before popping them into his mouth. They didn’t speak again.

Tony and Bruce still hadn’t shown up for movie night ten minutes after the others had gathered. The team was just about to call down for them when the chemist arrived, looking as rumpled as usual. He
had a small grin on his face, which Bucky understood to be far more common than it used to be.

“I swung by Tony’s lab on the way up here. He fell asleep on the couch again.”

The team seemed to accept it easily and settled in to start the movie, but Bucky couldn’t help remembering the genius’s reaction when they’d let him sleep the last time. It wasn’t even five minutes into the movie before he found himself standing and heading for the door.

“Bucky?”

He could hear the concern in Steve’s voice.

“Bathroom,” was all he threw over his shoulder as he headed to the elevator.

Tony was, indeed, fast asleep on the couch. He was sprawled across the cushions, one leg hanging off and resting on the ground. His head was tilted back at an absurd angle and every few breaths he made a little snuffling noise, nose wrinkling. Bucky suddenly understood why Bruce had been smiling when he came upstairs. The ex- assassin shook the genius’s shoulder gently.

“Tony. Tony, wake up.”

The man in question snorted violently as he jerked awake, his eyes clouded and confused. He blinked a few times before managing to focus on Bucky.

“Mmmwhat?”

“Hey.”

Suddenly this felt extremely awkward.

“Bucky?”

“Yeah, uh, sorry. It’s just that it’s movie night and I wasn’t sure if you…You can go back to sleep if you want.”

Tony was suddenly sitting bold upright, fully awake.

“Dammit! I have to stop doing this! Am I late?”

“Only a little. If you’d rather sleep, that’s okay. We all know you work a lot. We understand.”

Tony was already pushing himself off the couch and heading towards the door though.

“No, no. It’s fine. I didn’t mean to fall asleep anyway.”

Bucky didn’t argue, just followed after him as he headed up to the communal floor. Steve glanced at them as they entered the room and did an instant double take.

“I thought you said you were going to the bathroom.”

The ex-assassin shrugged and took a seat on the couch with room enough for Tony beside him.

“ Took a detour.”

He very purposely did not look at Tony, but it seemed the genius didn’t miss a beat.

“Yeah, Cap. Don’t you know my labs have the best bathrooms in the tower? Forget the porcelain
Dude,” Clint cut him off.  “Stop.  Whatever you’re about to say, I don’t want to know.”

Tony grinned.  Natasha reached for the remote and paused the movie.

“I can tell this isn’t going to be quick.”

Tony held up both hands and settled back in his seat.

“I’ll be good.  Promise.  You won’t hear a peep out of lil’ old me.”

Clint snorted and probably would have said something if Natasha hadn’t elbowed him in the ribs.  Bucky winced in sympathy but said nothing as she restarted the movie.  Less than thirty minutes later, Tony was dead asleep all over again with his head resting on Bucky’s shoulder.  As soon as the movie was over, he lifted the smaller man up and gave each of the others a nod in goodbye before carrying Tony up to his room and depositing him in the bed.

Steve was waiting for Bucky outside of his own door, arms crossed and a small frown on his face.  Bucky slowed immediately, hesitating to come any closer.  It was too late, though, and Steve had already caught sight of him.

“Bucky.”

His voice was tight, which meant he was conflicted over whatever he had to say but he was going to go through with it anyway.  The ex-assassin immediately shrunk back into himself.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No!” Steve reached for him, but didn’t actually touch him.  “I mean, not really.  It’s about Tony.”

Bucky flinched.  Did Steve know about his attraction to the younger man?  He knew it was inappropriate but it wasn’t like he was going to jump the other’s bones at any second.

“Steve, I-“

“Look, I know you meant well.” Bucky snapped his mouth shut, suddenly confused.  “I know you and Tony are making friends and I’m really happy for you.  God, Buck, it’s so good to see you interacting with other people like you used to but-I just-You shouldn’t have gone to get him tonight.”

“What?”

Steve seemed to draw himself up, steeling himself for what he had to say.  Bucky was just trying to comprehend what was happening.

“You should have let Tony sleep. He needs his rest, Bucky. He couldn’t even make it through till the end of the movie.”

Anger flared in his stomach and Bucky straightened his spine.  He knew his Dom presence was growing with his indignation, but there wasn’t much he could do.

“That’s not your choice to make.”

His tone was dark, dangerous, and Steve seemed more surprised by that than anything else.  Bucky hadn’t been even slightly confrontational since he’d come to the tower.  Hell, he usually avoided it nearly as much as Bruce.  Steve’s bewilderment quickly gave way to him taking on a more passive
stance, relenting just a bit in the face of Bucky’s reaction.

“I’m not saying you didn’t do it for the right reasons, just listen to me for a second.”

“No, you listen.” He stalked forward to get right up in Steve’s face. “That was Tony’s choice to
make, not yours. He was where he wanted to be.”

He didn’t wait for Steve to respond, just entered his room and shut the door a bit harder than was perhaps necessary. He immediately moved to his closet to retrieve the box with the origami paper and the six little birds he’d already folded. With how riled up he was over that conversation there was no way he would be getting much sleep tonight anyway. Maybe the methodical motions would help at least somewhat calm him.

The morning’s rays woke Bucky from his slumped position against the couch cushions. Seventeen paper cranes lay scattered across his lap and the couch, including one sitting in the palm of his slightly-curled metal hand. He groaned as he righted himself, his back popping. He felt like he hadn’t slept at all, his brain awash in fog. The crane that had been in his hand was dumped in the box before he rubbed his face to wake himself up a bit more. It wasn’t like he even needed the sleep. Why did he feel so drowsy?

“Ah, I see you’re awake,” JARVIS spoke from above and Bucky grunted in response. “Sir has requested that you make your way to the lab at some point today, whenever it is most convenient for you.”

Bucky’s brow furrowed.

“He’s already in the lab?”

“Sir awoke in his quarters at 3:32 AM and headed directly to the lab. He’s been there ever since.”

Bucky cursed and hauled himself to his feet with no small amount of effort. He began moving his newest set of cranes into the box with the others. It looked like so pitifully few.

“Lemme grab a shower and I’ll be right down.”

“Very good. I shall inform Sir.”

Bucky replaced the box in his closet before heading into the bathroom, letting his shoulders relax under the hot spray. He was still angry with Steve, but that didn’t mean he’d been right to get in Steve’s face like that. It was just that the blond had been acting so stupid, talking like that about Tony. It’d pissed Bucky off. Now Steve was probably going to want to have a real, grown up conversation about it.

Freshly cleaned and in comfortable clothes, Bucky made his way down to the lab. He could hear the release as JARVIS went ahead and unlocked the door so he could enter. Tony was obviously waiting for him, scrambling across the lab with a manic grin in his eye and something Bucky definitely recognized clutched in one hand.

“Is that C4?”

Tony beamed at him.

“It’s only a forty-five minute drive, I swear! Just gotta make it past the city limits. You in?”

“In for what?”
Bucky hadn’t thought it was possible, but Tony’s grin somehow only managed to get bigger.

“Blowing shit up! I’ve got some stuff I’ve gotta scrap so, naturally, I thought you might enjoy coming along. If you’re good. I might even let you hit the detonator switch.”

Steve would kill him, probably both of them actually, if he agreed to playing with C4. So of course he agreed. Much to Bucky’s delight, they took the Aston Martin again. He didn’t let Steve know before he left, C4 in the trunk and Tony whooping in the passenger seat. The genius directed him out of the city and to what looked like nothing more than a huge dirt lot. A truck was waiting for them when they pulled up.

“Morning, gentlemen!”

Tony didn’t seem bothered by the fact that he was in a full suit while Bucky was dressed in a t-shirt and the two workmen were in standard jumpsuits.

“Everything’s all here, Mr. Stark. You want us to unload or take off and come back for the truck later?”

Tony shucked off his suit jacket and threw it back into the car before beginning to roll up his sleeves.

“Seems like it’d be a shame to make you wait for a ride and then hang tight all day. We’ll help you unload.”

The workmen exchanged a glance before giving in and opening the back of the truck. They probably hadn’t been expecting the offer of help. Inside were crates of varying sizes, all with the Stark Industries logo stamped across the sides. Bucky perused them briefly before stacking a couple on top of each other and carrying them out. The workmen stared.

“So what exactly is in these things, anyway?”

Tony tsked at him.

“Can’t tell you, Buck! Top secret!”

Bucky froze.

“Are they explosives?”

“What? No! Why would you think they were explosives?”

“Well, you did say we were going to blow things up. Could be you were getting rid of some of the SI weapons from earlier production.”

“Nah. Got rid of those ages ago. Trust me, it’s never a good idea to just keep a stockpile of weapons laying around. Besides, I’m pretty sure it’d be illegal for me to get rid of that kind of stuff in nothing but a six-acre field.”

Bucky paused for a moment with an exaggerated thoughtful expression.

“Have you told Natasha? About the stockpile thing, I mean.”

Tony snorted.

“Thanks, but no thanks. I like my balls attached.”
The workmen wisely stayed silent during the entire exchange. It didn’t take long for all of the crates to be unloaded and stacked a pile on the edge of the field. The workmen then climbed back into their truck and were gone. Tony popped the trunk of the Aston Martin to get at the C4.

“Alright, Buckaroo. Where do you want to start?”

“We’re not going to do them all at once?”

Tony looked at him like he’d just suggested they blow up kittens instead.

“And miss out on prolonging the experience?”

“Fine, fine. How about this one?”

The crate was rectangular, about six feet in length and four feet tall. Tony grinned.

“Perfect.”

Bucky did most of the grunt work of dragging the crate out into the field while Tony set up the explosives and the trigger. Once everything was in its place, the two retreated behind the blast wall. Tony held up a small black box with a bright red button sitting right on top.

“You want to do the honors?”

Bucky grinned as he pushed the button, the crate exploding in the distance. The noise reached them first, followed by the impact of the air. Splinters of wood rained down across the field and Tony crowed his jubilation. Bucky couldn’t deny the pounding in his chest, the shot of adrenalin. He knew he was beaming every bit as madly as Tony was as the genius picked out the next crate and Bucky carried it to the detonation point. It was going to be a good day.

They took a break for lunch at some bar where the seats were torn and air was smokey but the burgers were amazing. Bucky ate four before taking on the bar’s ten-pound burger challenge. He left a hundred dollars richer and with his picture on their wall. It wasn’t until they were driving home later that afternoon that Tony finally told him what had been in the crates.

“Obie’s things were cleared out pretty quickly, you know? After...well, just after. Technically they went to his son but Zeke didn’t want ‘em. They’ve just been sitting in storage collecting dust for the past few years. I thought I might recycle them, give them to someone else or something, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it.”

Bucky very carefully kept his eyes on the road.

“So why blow them up?”

Tony was quiet for a long moment at that, then- “He was the one who first taught me how to use explosives for stress relief, took me out when I was eight years old and Howard had been ignoring me all week.” Bucky risked a glance over to see Tony glaring off into the middle distance. “Looking back on it now he might have been hoping I’d find a way to blow myself up.”

“Ah,” was all Bucky said. “Poetic justice.”

Silence fell heavy over the car and they were pulling into the tower’s parking structure when Tony spoke again.

“I’d been waiting for a special occasion. Thanks for giving me an excuse.”
Bucky wasn’t exactly sure what excuse he’d given Tony, but chose not to comment on it.

“Anytime. You headed back to the lab?”

Tony groaned theatrically.

“Alas, my work is never done!”

Bucky grinned at him.

“Just make sure you actually get some sleep tonight, yeah? Can’t have you falling asleep on us if we get a call to assemble.”

“Oh, really?” Tony waggled his eyebrows at Bucky suggestively as the soldier parked the car. “You didn’t seem to mind so much when I was falling asleep on you last night.”

*Shit.*

Bucky knew it was a joke, knew Tony made innuendo and flirted like he breathed, but damn if that didn’t bring to mind a very different scenario than drifting off during movie night. The salacious grin spread across Tony’s face wasn’t helping one bit either, nor was the fact that he was leaning ever so slightly across the center console of the car. Bucky had never been more appreciative of HYDRA’s programming giving him an edge at hiding his emotions. Otherwise Tony would have no doubts how much Bucky wanted to grab him by his hair and plunder his mouth.

“Well, you do make a pretty good blanket.”

Tony’s eyes lit up at the teasing, clearly delighted to be able to continue his joke.

“And you don’t make a half bad pillow.”

“So this is what you two do when the rest of us aren’t around, huh?” Both Bucky and Tony jumped and twisted around to spot the smirking Clint standing behind them. “Steve’s been freaking out ever since you left the tower this morning. You’re lucky it’s not him down here to greet you.”

Bucky scowled, finally opening his door and climbing out. Across the car, Tony was doing the same thing.

“I don’t need a babysitter.”

“Yeah, but he said the two of you got in a fight last night so it’s really no surprise he’s a bit more worried than usual, is it? He epic, age-defying bromance has been threatened!” Clint declared melodramatically.

“You two had a fight?”

Tony actually sounded concerned, but Bucky just shrugged it off. He really didn’t want to tell Tony just exactly what the fight had been about.

“He was being a punk, that’s all. I set him straight. Don’t mean I’m about to run off and start another game of tag,” he growled.

As much as he loved Steve, the man was irritatingly over protective these days. The feeling of always being hovered over was more annoying than if they’d decided to keep him locked up in a cell. It grated on Bucky’s nerves. Clint just shrugged.
“Either way, JARVIS let us know you were back so if you want to miss him you’re gonna have to move quick.”

Tony grinned.

“This is why I make you all the fun arrows.”

Clint winked saucily right back.

“Can’t risk losing those, now can I?”

Tony grabbed Bucky by the elbow and took off for the other side of the parking garage, where the elevator was that went straight to the Stark Industries Executive Offices sat. Bucky wasn’t sure exactly how that was going to help solve their problem, but he was willing to go with it. Clint waved them off cheerfully as they went. As soon as they reached their destination, Tony headed for Pepper’s office.

“Pep! Pepper! Light of my life!”

The red-headed woman looked up from her papers with a surprised expression on her face.

“Tony? What are you doing here?”

“We need to use the Tube, Pepper! Official Avengers business!”

Her face immediately shut down to something completely bereft of any amusement.

“That’s only for emergencies.”

“Did you not hear the part about ‘official Avengers business’?”

“Oh, I heard it,” Pepper nodded along. “I just don’t believe it.”

Tony pouted.

“Aw, come on!”

It was painfully obvious that Pepper did not feel one once of sympathy for Tony’s whining.

“Not gonna happen, Tony.”

“Not even for a new pair of shoes? What about a foot massage?”

“Tempting, but no. What’s got you so fired up about the Tube anyway?”

Tony seemed to weigh his options before finally deciding that the truth couldn’t hurt.

“We’re trying to get back upstairs without running into Steve.”

Pepper’s eyebrows rose.

“Does this have anything to do with why he called me earlier asking if I knew where you were?”

Tony’s guilty expression was probably all the confirmation she needed. Bucky decided it was about time he cut in.

“He was only trying to help me out, ma’am. I’m the one trying to avoid Steve.”
The look of surprise returned.

“You are?”

“We had a disagreement last night and I’m not feeling very inclined to face him just yet.”

Pepper hummed and gave them a thoughtful look before sighing and throwing her hands up in surrender.

“Fine, fine. Take the Tube. But I don’t want you using it to just pop in here whenever you feel like it, okay, Tony? It’s for emergencies.”

Tony pressed a kiss to her cheek.

“You’re the best, Pepper.”

“Of course I am. That’s how I managed to put up with you for so long.”

Tony just laughed as he pulled Bucky deeper into the office and over to a filing cabinet that was set against the wall. He typed a code into the lock only for the entire thing to slide off to the side. Bucky gaped.

“Is this a secret passageway?”

Tony was grinning nearly as wide as he had been after blowing up that first crate.

“Don’t look so surprised, Robocop. Any eccentric billionaire worth his salt is gonna have a secret tunnel or two!”

It wasn’t just a flight of stairs, either, but a small, glass encased, round elevator.

“I feel like I’m in one of those science fiction vines Stevie and I used to buy.”

The file cabinet slid back into place behind them and then they were shooting upwards, reaching their destination in seconds.

“Good! That’s what it’s supposed to feel like,” Tony said as they stepped out into his lab.

“To be fair, though, most of the time just being around you makes me feel like that.”

“Aw, honey, you say they sweetest things.”

Bucky would certainly like to, would like to put Tony under and whisper in his ear about what a good boy he was. That probably wasn’t the best thing to say right that moment, though.

“So why do you have that thing anyway? Besides the fact that you’re an eccentric billionaire,” he said instead.

“Like Pepper said. Emergencies. If the tower gets attacked this is the safest place to be. I wanted to make sure she could get here quickly.”

Bucky couldn’t help but pull the other man in to a one-armed hug, burying his nose in Tony’s hair.

“I’m glad we have you looking out for us. You take good care of us.”

Tony squirmed, an adorable look of consternation on his face.
“Thought you Doms liked to be the ones doing the taking care of.”

Bucky just grinned at him. They spent the rest of the evening down in the lab, Bucky wandering around and playing with DUM-E and the other bots while Tony worked. It wasn’t until hours later that JARVIS gave the all-clear for Bucky to head back to his quarters without running the risk of encountering Steve. There’d be Hell to pay tomorrow for the avoidance, but Bucky figured he could deal with that then. He got right back to work on the paper cranes as soon as he got there.

Chapter End Notes

Alright! All portions of this fic are now completely done except for edits so I should have them all up over the next two weeks. Let me know what you all think!
“I’ve figured out what I’m going to wish for,” Bucky told Doc at his next appointment.

“Oh?” the man questioned. “And what is that?”

“Not sure if I’m supposed to tell you. Isn’t saying your wish out loud supposed to make it not come true?”

Doc tipped his head to one side.

“There are certainly those who believe that. Do you?”

Bucky huffed out a laugh as his fingers went through the motions of folding the crane without much conscious effort. He’d spent every day since his and Tony’s outing making more of them.

“I don’t even think I believe in wishes.”

“Then why hesitate in telling me?”

Bucky frowned at the crane as he set it aside and started another one.

“I guess I’m just not really sure what it means.”

Doc nodded.

“That’s what I’m here for, you know.”

“I want Tony to be happy,” Bucky finally said. “I want him to be treated right, the way he deserves to be treated.”

There was a flash of brilliantly white teeth against pitch dark skin.

“I don’t think you need a wish to make that happen, at least where one person is concerned.”

Bucky headed to Steve’s floor as soon as he got back to the tower and dropped off his new load of cranes in his own room. They’d interacted since Bucky had blown up in his face, but they hadn’t really talked about what happened. Bucky figured it was probably about time they did. Their friendship had lasted through nearly a century, brainwashing, and memory loss. Something like this wasn’t even going to faze them. Steve was in the kitchen when he arrived, making a sandwich, and set about making a second one as soon as the greetings were over with.

“I think we should talk. About the other night.”
Steve sighed.

“We should. I’m sorry that I upset you.”

Bucky lifted one shoulder in a half-shrug, leaning a hip against the counter while Steve finished up the sandwiches.

“You were doing what you thought was right. If you did anything else you wouldn’t be Stevie.”

The blonde sent him a grateful smile as he passed over one of the sandwiches and they moved out to the couches.

“I have to admit, I’m still not entirely sure what happened.”

Bucky grimaced.

“Look, I’ve just-Tony doesn’t like being left out of things, I think. When we go ahead with movie nights I think it hurts him. If he joins in and sleeps through it then at least he was included, right?”

“Tony? Our Tony? I don’t think he’s exactly that sensitive.”

Bucky had to exert actual effort to keep his irritation pushed down.

“Maybe you ain’t lookin’, Steve,” his voice was hard as his Brooklyn flared up, “but to those of us paying attention it’s pretty damn obvious that apparently he is. He’s a good fella who’s had to spend his entire life scraping by for himself. There ain’t a single person who’s ever taken care of him the way he should be, the way he deserves to be. Doesn’t seem to be much of a stretch that he might want that, especially from the team he’s given so much to.”

Steve stared at him for a long moment.

“Bucky, do you-do you like Tony?”

It crossed Bucky’s mind that he could deny it but it was a fleeting thought at best. Steve knew him better than anyone else and it wasn’t like the blond would go running off to tell the rest of the team.

“He’s an attractive fella,” he said instead, avoiding the question. “That’s hardly the point here.”

Steve’s expression softened.

“You always were a sucker for the subs that talked back. What was it you said that one time? You wanted someone who didn’t need nobody but wanted you anyway?”

Bucky huffed out a bit of a laugh.

“I guess I gotta type, huh?”

“I guess so.” Steve paused, then, “So what’re you gonna do about it?”

“So far the plan has been to ignore it.”

“And when that plan inevitably falls through because you’ve never been able to deny yourself a day in your life?”

Bucky shot him a glare.
“It’s not going to fall though.”

“Sure, sure.” Steve grinned. “Keep telling yourself that.”

Now that he’d said it out loud, it was like Bucky couldn’t stop thinking about his attraction to Tony. It was ridiculous. And frustrating. He’d see the genius sucking on a spoon and have to excuse himself to deal with the sudden rush of inappropriate thoughts. He’d spend all of the team movie nights wishing Tony were kneeling at his side instead of sitting, if only so Bucky could run his fingers through that constantly messy hair. He’d happily jump on any and every excuse for touching Tony. It was maddening. He was also pretty sure that everyone in the tower had figured out what was going on and it’d only been two weeks since his talk with Steve.

Natasha kept shooting him knowing looks, for one, and Clint kept grinning at him. Though, to be fair, Bucky was also pretty sure Clint was also the one behind Bucky and Tony getting locked in the pantry together. Meanwhile, Thor’s particular brand of, ‘look at me, I know your secret and it is safe with me. No one will ever guess I know,’ was heavily weighted on the ‘look at me’ end of the spectrum. Honestly, the only two people Bucky didn’t mind knowing about it were Bruce and Sam simply because they were apparently also the only two in the tower capable of acting like normal human beings. At least Tony didn’t seem to have figured it out.

“What’s up, puddin’ cup?”

Tony crashed onto the couch beside Bucky, disrupting his thoughts. It was obvious Tony had just made it out of the lab, his hair askew and clothes a mess. His stubble was just barely past the ‘attractively dusty’ stage and into ‘sloppy’, too. Bucky kind of wanted to hustle him into a shower, grab him some food, and wrap him up in a blanket.

“Just thinking,” he replied instead, giving Tony a sly smirk. “I got a lot of that to catch up on after HYDRA, you know.”

The genius snorted. Bucky was pretty sure he would never for a second stop being grateful for Tony being able to joke about what had happened to him. It was traumatic, yes, and awful, but it seemed even more so when everyone tiptoed around the issue. If he could crack jokes and poke fun at what had happened then it just seemed less somehow and Tony, bless his soul, didn’t look scandalized like Steve did every time Bucky brought it up.

“I dunno,” Tony fake-mused. “I might be able to think of a thing or two a brainwashed servant might be useful for.”

Bucky socked him lightly in the shoulder.

“You’ve already got the next best thing, those bots down your lab.”

Tony turned to him, horrified expression magnified for comedic effect.

“Why I never! I will have you know that each and every one of my bots has complete free will! Hell, I don’t think I could control them if I tried!”

It should have been hilarious, would have been if Tony hadn’t draped himself across Bucky like a fleece throw. Bucky could feel every inch of the genius pressed up against him, their shared heat making the points of contact feel like they were on fire. His heart pounded in his chest as he stood abruptly, all but dropping Tony on the couch behind him.

“I’ve gotta go,” he threw over his shoulder, already halfway across the room.
Bucky fled back to his own rooms, collapsing on his own couch and burying his face in his hands. He took a deep shuddered breath, Tony’s surprised and hurt expression as Bucky’d fled seared into his mind.

“JARVIS?”

“What may I do for you, Mister Barnes?”

“Could you tell Tony that I’m sorry for running out like that? I just-I needed to get out of there. He needs to know it wasn’t his fault.”

Because Bucky knew Tony, and knew that Tony would try to blame himself even if there was no feasible way for him to be at fault. JARVIS’s voice sounded approving as he responded.

“I shall do so at once. If there is any other way that I may be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to ask.”

“Thank you, JARVIS.”

Bucky shuffled forward on the couch a bit so that he was perched on the edge. Origami paper was stacked neatly on his coffee table, completed cranes sitting piled up to one side and the box for them open on the floor. It was over two-thirds of the way full already. Bucky didn’t think he’d be able to fit a thousand cranes in there. He’d need a bigger box.

His hands fell back to their task of folding with a familiarity that took little thought. The movements were automatic now and soothing as well. He could do them without concentration, trusting his hands to know what to do while his mind wandered. This entire situation was not getting better, only worse. It was only a matter of time before Tony discovered how much Bucky wanted to take him under, to be the Dom who guided him through a drop.

God, but Tony would be gorgeous while he was under. Bucky could already imagine it, had done so more than once while his hand was busy elsewhere. Tony’s eyes would be half-lidded, his face flushed. All the stress he normally carried with him would just melt away. The mental image of Tony loose and pliant was enough for Bucky’s cock to give a twitch of interest and he quickly shut that line of thought down. He didn’t need yet another fantasy right now. What he needed was a plan.

“JARVIS? There is something else you can do for me, after all. Are Steve and Natasha both available? Can you ask them to come here, please?”

There was only the briefest of pauses.

“Both Agent Romanov and Captain Rogers were sparring in the gym. They will be with you shortly.”

Bucky was able to complete three more cranes by the time Natasha and Steve arrived. He was really starting to pick up on speed with those things.

“Bucky?” Steve’s voice was, of course, concerned. “Is everything alright?”

Bucky motioned them in and sat them down in his living room, ignoring the questioning glances each of them shot the pile of paper cranes.

“I wanted to ask the three of you for your help. You two are the best strategists I know and, JARVIS, you know Tony better than anyone else in the world. I would really appreciate it if you guys would help me out here.”
“But of course, Mister Barnes,” JARVIS was quick to reply. “I believe I already know the nature of your plight.”

Natasha rolled her eyes as she leaned back against Bucky’s couch cushions.

“We all know the nature of your plight. I’m in.”

“I think I might be missing something, actually,” Steve cut in. “What exactly is this about?”

“Tony,” Natasha threw out like it should have been obvious. “With Barnes when is it ever about anything else?”

“Oh,” Steve sounded only the tiniest bit surprised. “So you finally gave in. Then I’m in, too. When do we start?”

Bucky fought back the urge to run and hide in his closet and steeled himself for what was to come. Steve had told him about some of the tactics Natasha had used back when she was trying to set him up with all those different people.

“I want Tony,” he blurted like an absolute moron, quickly correcting himself. “I mean, I want to be in a relationship with him. I like him.”

“Oh, I'm glad.”

“Of course you do,” the female assassin nodded. She turned back to Steve. “We start immediately. JARVIS?”

“You need to buy him flowers,” Steve leaned in, face serious.

Natasha scoffed.

“Absolutely not. Do not buy him flowers.”

Steve looked askance, as Bucky knew he would.

“He has to be respectful! You can’t court a sub and not buy them flowers. It wouldn’t be proper.”

Natasha hmm-ed for a moment before shaking her head.

“Yeah, no flowers. Also, you probably shouldn’t ever refer to it as ‘courting’ in front of Tony. He’ll run for the hills faster than the words will make it out of your mouth. All that 40’s thinking? Throw it out before it fucks you over.”

Bucky folded himself onto the couch, hands on his knees.

“So what should I do?”

“Sex him.” She said it so matter-of-factly that Bucky was almost sure he’d misheard her. “He gets attached easily. Sex him once, come back for seconds, and he’ll be a committed little puppy. It’s his relationship with rejection. Of course, he’ll continue to think it’s just a casual fling for you until you discuss otherwise but I suggest waiting at least three months before you have that conversation. You’ll need to have evidence to show him, numbers. Tony excels at hiding from the truth.”

Steve looked like he was trying to pass a kidney stone. Bucky felt similarly.

“I don’t think I’d be comfortable with that.”
Red eyebrows rose.

“You can’t tell me you don’t want to sex him. I know you do.”

“I do,” Bucky allowed, not even feeling embarrassed. It was Natasha. “I just…He deserves better than to think he’s not good enough.”

Natasha scowled.

“This is going to be harder than I thought.”

“And yet,” JARVIS spoke up, “I find myself quite agreeing with Mister Barnes. While Agent Romanov’s assessment of Sir’s reactions is not inaccurate, there are surely better ways to reach our goal without endangering Sir’s mental well-being. I fear that a proposition of casual sex by Mister Barnes would not go over well, though Sir would doubtlessly accept.”

“So no flowers, no sex, what do you suggest, JARVIS?”

“It would stand to reason,” that posh, British accent was already making Bucky feel foolish for not thinking of whatever JARVIS was about to suggest, “that the pursuit of common interests in one another’s company might be a suitable starting point. There is a classic car show in lower Manhattan over the weekend. It is not a large convention, but should be suitable for the purposes of Mister Barnes.”

“Tony would definitely enjoy that,” Natasha nodded.

“We’ve worked on a few of his cars,” Bucky added. “Steve? What do you think?”

“It’s good.” Steve smiled at him fondly. “I’m really happy for you, Buck.”

Bucky asked JARVIS to get him tickets to the show and spent the rest of the night humming as he folded more of the little paper cranes. He tracked Tony down in his lab with lunch the next day. The genius seemed happy enough to set aside his work for a minute in favor of food and conversation.

“Are you free this weekend?”

Bucky already knew he was. JARVIS wouldn’t have suggested the car show if there was a conflict with Tony’s schedule. He was far too clever for that.

“Think so,” Tony spoke around the sandwich he was cramming into his mouth. “Why?”

“I was wondering if you wanted to do something. With me.”

Tony gave him an odd look, cocking his head ever so slightly to one side. The skin around the genius’s eyes tightened just a bit like he was fighting the urge to squint. He slowly set his sandwich back on the plate.

“Like a date?”

Nerves gnawed at Bucky’s gut.

“Yeah. If that’s okay?”

Tony looked away.

“I’m not a very good at that sort of thing.”
It sounded an awful lot like rejection, but Bucky had already played his hand. He didn’t have much else to lose.

“I’m not so sure I am, either. It’s been a while. But I’d like to give it a try, if you’re willing.”

Now Tony was squinting at him, as if he thought he could puzzle out Bucky’s thoughts just by staring hard enough at his face. Bucky was pretty sure Natasha was the only one who could really do that, though.

“This isn’t cause I’m the only sub you know, is it? Cause if you’re just trying to get laid, I gotta tell you there are easier ways.”

Bucky hated that the genius’s thoughts immediately ran along such a path.

“No. It’s not that. I just, I’d like to take you out.”

He tried a smile, going for charming but ending up somewhere in the realm of nervous and terrified. He could see the gears turning in Tony’s head, could practically hear the rejection headed his way.

Maybe JARVIS was wrong. Maybe this wasn’t the best idea.

“Alright.” Tony was nodding, picking his sandwich up and taking another bite. “No guarantees, but I’d be willing to give it a shot for a couple dates. You’ll learn fast enough.”

Bucky was pretty sure he wasn’t supposed to hear that last part. Despite the self-deprecation coming from Tony, Bucky was over the moon.

“Great. Awesome. That’s—that’s really great. Good. Yeah.”

Tony couldn’t hide his grin.

“You thought I’d say no?”

“It might’ve crossed my mind.”

Tony snorted.

“The person who denies a date with a hot piece of Dom like you would have to be out of their mind.”

Bucky stayed until they were both finished eating before collecting the plates and heading back upstairs. Saturday was only a few days away and he needed to get ready. As he returned to his quarters a thought occurred to him.

“Hey, JARVIS? Could you place a call to the Doc? I think I need to talk to him.”

“Most certainly. One moment, if you will.”

JARVIS didn’t make Bucky listen to the ringing of the telephone, but moments later Doc’s voice was filling the air of Bucky’s room.

“How are you? You don’t normally call me between visits.”
“Yeah, well, I thought this might warrant a call. I figured you’d want to know.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I’m going on a date with Tony.”

“That is something I’d want to know. Congratulations. Did you ask or did he?”

Bucky couldn’t fight the grin that wanted to spread across his face.

“I did.”

“That was very brave of you. It’s never easy to ask out someone you like.”

“He said yes, though. So that’s a plus.”

“Have you decided what the two of you will be doing?”

“Going to a car show. JARVIS suggested it.”

“Well, JARVIS would know his creator better than anyone else…I am very proud of you, James. I hope you know that.”

“Thanks. I’m just hoping I don’t manage to screw the whole thing up.”

“I’m sure you won’t. How are you cranes going?”

“Great, I think. I’ve got over four-hundred now. I had to get another box.”

“Excellent. It sounds like you’re well on your way to getting that wish, then.”

They talked for some minutes more before it was time for the Doc to see his next patient. The absence of another voice, even if they weren’t physically present, left Bucky’s apartment startlingly quiet. Still, he didn’t want to go up to the common room to seek company there. He settled on his couch, instead, and began folding more cranes. Now that he and Tony were actually going on a date, it felt more important than ever for him to get the project done.

The weekend came around quicker than Bucky would have thought possible and he was full of jittery nerves. There was no cliché ‘high school drama’ scene where he changed outfits three times and nearly had a breakdown because he couldn’t find the right shoes. He’d, in fact, just stuck to dressing casually without being sloppy and all of the three pairs of shoes he owned were right where he’d left them. He wanted this date to be laid back, nothing too fancy. Tony would have more fun with it that way. Being in public always meant that Tony had to be ‘on’ but at least this way he didn’t have to wear a three-piece suit and make nice over a white cloth table. Just the thought was exhausting to Bucky.

He met Tony in the parking garage, grinning when the genius appeared from the elevator. He was in jeans and a t-shirt but had thrown on a pair of bright orange sunglasses that looked just absolutely atrocious even though he somehow managed to pull them off. A light jacket covered his shoulders.

“You look great. I like the sunglasses,” Bucky teased.

Tony’s cheeky glare had absolutely no effect on his good mood.

“I didn’t realize agreeing to a date with you was going to get me such lip. Maybe I should just head back to my lab. I’m sure I could find a project that needs to be worked on.”
Bucky wrapped an arm around his shoulders and reeled him in before he could even pretend to try and leave. Tony fit into his side well as Bucky steered them both toward his own motorcycle, built to match the one Tony had made Steve. He’d chosen it for the specific reason that Tony would have to be pressed up against him the entire time.

“I’d apologize, but I’m really not sorry. It’s a good look on you.”

Tony grumbled, but he was also having to fight down a smile so Bucky counted it as a win.

“Flatterer,” the genius accused. “You’re lucky you’re cute.”

“Guess that makes two of us.”

Bucky released Tony to straddle the bike, the genius sliding in behind him. He had to resist the urge to hum happily as he started the bike and Tony’s arms wrapped around his middle. Tony’s entire front was plastered to his back.

“Hang on tight,” Bucky warned and then they were off.

Bucky knew all about how Tony liked to drive, by now, and was much more comfortable ducking and weaving on a bike than he was in a car. The warm body pressed against his own gave him even more daring that usual as they sped through the streets of New York. It was a weekend but that meant little for the amount of traffic that was on the road. He could feel Tony’s body shaking with elated laughter even though the wind snatched the sound of it away before it reached Bucky’s ears.

The drive wouldn’t have been very long in the first place, seeing as they didn’t even have to leave Manhattan, but it was even less so with their speeding. As they pulled into the parking garage attached to the convention center, Bucky actually kind of wished that he’d taken a detour somewhere along the way just so it wasn’t over so quickly. Perhaps that was something he could do on the way back, if things went well. God, he really hoped they did. If he fucked this up now he’d be so pissed at himself. Tony, at least, was grinning widely as he slid off the bike, eyes sparkling.

“If that’s a preview of how the rest of this date is going to go, I’d say I might even let you kiss me on the doorstep after you walk me home.”

Bucky snorted.

“Not so sure there’ll be much speeding in here. I think most of the cars at this convention are supposed to be stationary.”

Tony pouted but was smiling again seconds later when Bucky took his hand and they headed inside. JARVIS had been helpful enough to ensure they had special VIP tickets and wouldn’t have to wait in line to pick them up. The convention was more exclusive than most, but that didn’t mean it was exactly small. There were plenty of rich swells who liked classic cars. Bucky had reviewed the program ahead of time, too, but he made sure Tony got a hardcopy to go along with his pass before they headed deeper into the convention center.

“Anything in particular catch your attention?”

Tony had thumbed through the program idly, but clearly hadn’t paid it much attention. He shrugged at Bucky’s question, his eyes darting around them to take everything in instead.

“Figured we could just wander around a bit first to get the lay of everything. Unless there was something you had in mind?”
If Bucky hadn’t known Tony so well, he would have completely missed the hint of trepidation in the sub’s voice. Bucky squeezed his hand reassuringly.

“Nah. That sounds great. Shall we start with the Exhibition Hall? I have this nagging feeling that we’re gonna get in there with those cars and not leave for the rest of the day.”

As it turned out, Bucky’s prediction was not inaccurate. They actually had made pretty good time through the Exhibition Hall until they ran into a guy who claimed to own the authentic bike that Captain America had used during World War II. His entire presentation stand was mocked up in red, white, and blue with a backdrop of Steve and the Howling Commandos. Bucky’d thought Tony was going to try and buy the bike at first, to give it back to Steve as a surprise. What he hadn’t expected was for Tony to straight up accuse the guy of it being a fake. Loudly.

That had, of course, drawn all sorts of attention. If it’d been anyone else making the accusations, they probably would have been written off or maybe even been asked to leave. Tony was Tony Stark, though, not to mention he was an Avenger who lived with the guy who had originally owned the bike in question. After some time trying to convince Tony that the convention had checked quite thoroughly into the origin of the bike, the convention’s staff negotiated between the two arguing parties that an impartial third should be allowed to take a look at the bike’s mechanics to see what could be discovered. One of the conventions guest speakers, as it turned out, was an expert in vintage motorcycles.

The man who owned the bike blustered and denied from the moment the first ‘updated’ part was found. He tried to claim the bike had been in a terrible condition and had required a lot of things replaced. Tony, in turn, grew more and more smug. The sub was taking a downright indecent amount of glee in helpfully pointing out how there was no possible way for this part or that to have been retrofitted to the specific bike that Steve had ridden back during the war. He and the vintage bike expert even gotten into a few lengthy side conversations while the expert worked. Tony wanted to know how he would feel about curating a collection.

In the end, the fake patriot was asked to leave the convention, now banned for life. He took his bike with him, but word would have already spread through the motorist community. He wouldn’t be able to pull off the same scam anywhere else. The owner of the convention showed up to thank Tony herself, clearly outraged that someone had given them fake papers of authenticity. Tony smiled and laughed and shook hands, giving her Pepper’s card and agreeing to be a guest speaker for the convention next year, “as long as there aren’t any conflicting alien invasions or supervillain attacks, you understand.” He declined, however, her invitation to treat them both to dinner. He gave Bucky a wink, slid in close, and told the woman he already had a date. She laughed. Bucky couldn’t stop smiling. They were finally heading back to his own bike in the parking garage when Bucky finally asked the question.

“So how did you know it was a fake? That expert guy didn’t even know until he started taking the thing apart. I mean, Jesus, Tony. I know you’re a genius but that’s just unreal.”

Tony grinned impishly.

“Of course it was a fake. Howard’s had the real thing holed up in the basement of the mansion since, like, before I was even born.”

As far as first dates went, Bucky was counting it as a pretty good one. After dinner at a little Italian bistro Steve had recommended, they had even sat in Tony’s living room with coffee and talked for a couple hours. Just coffee and talking…as long as you didn’t count the kiss goodnight that Bucky got to give the genius right before he headed back to his own rooms. He was flying high for the entire next week, even if he hardly got to see Tony because the sub was swamped with work.
Steve was filled to the brim with proud beaming, Natasha with smug satisfaction. Bruce seemed mildly amused by the whole thing and Clint kept shooting him none-too-subtle thumbs ups. Doc had been congratulatory and encouraging during their session and his elation with the current events had led Bucky to folding another hundred cranes over the course of the week.

He and Tony kept up conversations via JARVIS, or Bucky dropping by the lab every once in a while with a fresh bag of coffee beans to restock Tony’s stash. Bucky would, of course, have loved to be able to spend more time with Tony, but he also understood the other’s schedule was about as full as a schedule could get.

“Hey, JARVIS?” He’d given Tony a good amount of time to think over their date and decide whether or not he wanted another, Bucky thought, but he also knew better than to think he should wait for the sub to make the next move. “When is the next time Tony will have a gap in his schedule for us to do something?”

“Sir currently has nothing in his schedule before one o’clock in the afternoon tomorrow. If you wished to have a morning engagement, such a time might be appropriate. However, Sir may also be planning to dedicate that time to working on projects in the lab.”

Bucky considered for a long moment. As much as Bucky thought Tony could do with a break from all of his working, he also knew the sub could get pretty stressed out if he thought he was falling behind. Something told him that if Tony hadn’t left the lab in a week except for essential business functions then that probably meant he was feeling the pressure and wouldn’t be very receptive of being pulled out now.

“Thanks, J. Make sure he gets some sleep tonight, okay?”

“You do not wish to make an appointment?”

“He sounds pretty busy. I figured I’d just make my plans around that.”

“Very good, Mister Barnes. If there is anything I can do for you, please do not hesitate to let me know.”

“As always. You’re the best, JARVIS.”

“As you say, Mister Barnes.”

Chapter End Notes

Sooo...yeah...You guys remember how this was going to be five chapters? That was a lie. I'm adding an epilogue. Deal with it.
Bucky showed up at Tony’s lab the next morning at ten with a box of pastries from a bakery in China Town that Tony loved and bottle of orange juice. He figured the genius would be well-stocked on coffee already. JARVIS didn’t say anything as he let the soldier inside, but Bucky was pretty sure he could sense the AI’s approval. Tony beamed at him from where he was working on something. Bucky didn’t even know what. He held up the pastries and gave them a gentle little shake.

“Hey, I didn’t want to disturb your work but I thought you might be hungry. How’s everything going down here?”

Judging by the bags under his eyes, Bucky was pretty certain Tony hadn’t been to bed the night before. The Dom in him was all but demanding a warm blanket, cuddles, and a nap. He didn’t let any of that show on his face. Tony heaved a sigh and sagged back in his rolling chair, the back of it dipping dangerously low.

“Aawful. You’re a life saver. Seriously.”

Bucky grinned and set the box of pastries down beside him, helpfully opening it before starting to clear away old coffee mugs. Tony grabbed something Bucky couldn’t pronounce the name of but had some kind of crunchy exterior and shoved it in his mouth.

“Just wanted to see you, was all,” Bucky admitted. “I’d love to take you out again sometime, if you’d like. No pressure on when, of course. Your company and life comes first. I get that. But I had a lot of fun at that car show with you and I was really hoping for a repeat. If that’s okay.”

Tony beamed at him, with shoulders relaxing a little bit and looking all-together a bit softer around the edges. God, he was gorgeous.

“I’d like that, yeah. Let’s try for some time later this week? I’ve got to get through this project and it’s gonna take me a couple more days at least.”

“Sure, whenever works for you. Can I ask what you’re working on?”

Tony groaned and reached for another pastry. Bucky poured them both some orange juice and settled in with a pastry of his own, something with custard in it.

“So you know how the suit is space-worthy, right? As long as I strap a couple extra rockets to the back to break atmo?” Bucky nodded along. “Well, in the last six months there have been two separate incidents where NASA has had to call me to get to the space station and fix something so the boys, and girl, up there don’t die a horrible death of asphyxiation. Both times, it was because of the cheap-ass, flimsy material they decided to use for the plating on the exterior. Apparently it passed
all of their spec tests but clearly it’s still a piece of shit. What I’m trying to do is make a material that will hold up against the wear and tear of space that’ll actually be cheap enough for NASA to use without losing their tiny little supposedly-genius minds. Bright side is that if I can pull it off there will be so many possible applications that SI will make enough new money to make my eyebrow raise. The downside is that it’s turning out to be damn near impossible.”

Bucky tipped his head to the side for a moment to examine Tony’s tired form. He at least knew Tony well enough to know that a request for him to take a break wouldn’t go over well.

“Would it be okay if I kept you company? I could just hang out on the couch, stay out of your way. At least part of the time? I’m sure you’ll get it done, you’re you, but I like getting to watch you work, too. I wouldn’t want to bother you, though. I know this must be hard enough without a distraction.”

Tony’s eyes darted down to Bucky’s mouth for only a fraction of a second before he responded.

“Nah. The company would be nice, actually. Pep used to be in and out of the lab all the time back when she was still my assistant. It’s kinda nice to have someone to talk at from time to time. That’s half of JARVIS’s job.”

“As ever, you flatter me, Sir.”

Bucky grinned, swooping in to give Tony the sugary kiss he’d clearly been hoping for.

“Great. I’ll go grab my stuff really quick and be right back.”

It might have been advisable, from certain view-points, that Bucky not work on his paper crane project in front of Tony but he didn’t really care. Tony didn’t really ask about it, either, probably assuming it was just further example of Bucky’s appreciation for the art. It wasn’t like he’d hauled the entire collection of nearly six hundred cranes down to the workshop. He just brought a stack of paper and a bag, settled in on the couch and started folding on the coffee table. Tony sent him a smile and a wink when he walked in but turned back to his work without a word.

They worked in silence for a while, well, silence except for Tony’s music. Tony tapped away and manipulated his screens, muttering aloud at times and calling off numbers or tests to JARVIS. Bucky even spotted him continuing to munch on the pastries in the box. Fifteen minutes till noon, Tony stretched languidly and pulled himself to his feet. Warm honey eyes sought out Bucky and he smiled.

“I’ve got a meeting with R&D at one that I need to get ready for and then I’ll be checking up on progress for the rest of the day. See you tonight?”

Bucky grabbed his bag of cranes and his stack of paper before moving to Tony’s side, slinging an arm over his shoulders as they headed for the elevator.

“Sure. Will you be back in time for dinner before the movie with the team? I think Bruce said he was gonna make some stew thing from South Africa.”

“I dunno yet. I guess it depends on how long things take. I’ll have JARVIS keep you informed.”

“Only if you want to.” Bucky pressed a kiss to the side of Tony’s head. God, he loved being able to do that. “I don’t want you to feel like you have to.”

Warmth bloomed in his chest as Tony tucked himself just a little bit closer to his side. He pressed the button for the penthouse and, after a moment’s thought, the one for the common floor.

“I don’t,” Tony assured him. “But I also know I’ll completely forget if it’s all on me.”
Bucky laughed.

“I’m sure you have a lot going on down there to keep you distracted. I look forward to seeing you tonight.”

He gave the genius one last kiss before stepping off the elevator and onto the common floor. He found Clint and Natasha at the kitchen table, each with their weapons spread out and meticulously cleaning them.

“Mind if I join you?”

“Only if you wipe that dopey, smitten look off your face,” Clint said even while kicking out the chair at the end of the table for Bucky to take. “Seriously, dude, you’re making me insecure over here. Why can’t I find a sub to feel that stupidly smitten over?”

Natasha shot him a flat look.

“The last time you got smitten over a sub, she turned out to be a double agent.”

Clint didn’t appear even the least bit ashamed.

“Yeah, but the sex was totally worth the drive she stole from me.”

“There were missile launch codes on that drive, Clint.”

“Yeah, well, I got it back.”

Bucky chuckled as he settled in and got to folding once more. Natasha watched him curiously.

“You’re planning to fold a thousand?”

Bucky grinned at her.

“Yep,” he said, popping the ‘p’ obnoxiously.

“With a wish in mind? Like the legend?”

“That’s the plan.”

Her eyes narrowed. He knew the lack of information was irritating her, but he also knew that she had also probably already figured the entire thing out and was just acting.

“And your wish?”

“I’ve been told that telling people might keep it from coming true.”

His smile told her he knew exactly what he was doing, too. Natasha scowled.

“I didn’t peg you for the superstitious type.”

Clint gave an exaggerated groan before Bucky could reply.

“Oh, lay off, Nat. We all know he’s wishing for something to do with Tony, like that he’ll get to stay with him forever and ever and have a nice little house with two and a half kids and a white picket fence.”

Bucky stared at him.
“I don’t think that’s really how this relationship is going to happen, even if it does last that long.”

“Duh. That’s what you need the wish for.”

Natasha’s deadpan look was back.

“You’re an idiot.”

Bucky rolled his eyes as the two shot off, throwing verbal taunts and teases back and forth like an old married couple. He was pretty sure Clint didn’t need a sub to get mushy over, he’d do perfectly fine with the baseline sitting across from him. The time passed quickly, with other members of the team drifting in and out, Natasha and Clint eventually heading off to the gym to spar. By the time everyone started arriving for dinner, Bucky had already returned his cranes and paper to his own rooms. He didn’t want to risk anything getting on them. Bucky was just setting the table when JARVIS spoke up.

“Mister Barnes, I am afraid there has been an incident in the R&D department which will delay Sir from arriving in time to join the team for dinner.”

Bucky couldn’t say he liked it, but he could understand. Tony was a busy person and even just running a company as large as his, not to mention being a superhero and doing the tech upgrades for both SHIELD and the team, was a lot to have on his plate.

“Will he be eating something before he comes up for the movie?”

“I am uncertain. At the moment there do not appear to be any plans on Sir’s part to procure food.”

From the kitchen, Bucky could hear Bruce mutter, “Of course not,” and the sounds of plastic hitting the countertop. A glance over revealed that Bruce was already ladling a serving of the stew into a Tupperware container.

“Would it be alright if I brought some food down to him? I wouldn’t want to get in the way.”

“Sir is not currently working on any project and has been removed to the medical floor. Any delivery of food should be taken there.”

Bucky was already heading for the elevator.

“He was hurt? What happened?”

JARVIS had the doors open and waiting for him, not even making him press the button before the box began its descent.

“An experimental machine one of the interns had been dabbling with on the side was discovered by Sir while he was examining another project. Upon being started up to demonstrate its purpose, the machine malfunctioned and a metal strut was launched at a high enough velocity to imbed itself in Sir’s thigh. The injury is being examined by Dr. Paean as we speak. Exam room four.”

Nobody tried to get in Bucky’s way as he stomped out of the elevator and hurried toward the room JARVIS had indicated. That might be because he was channeling the Winter Soldier pretty hard in his panic. His mind kept conjuring images of grievance injuries and blood dripping down Tony’s leg as he was carried out of R&D on a gurney. Fuck, what was he gonna do if Tony was seriously hurt?

He slammed through the door of examine room four and immediately pulled up short. Tony and an older gentleman with dark grey hair and a towering height stared at him. A patch of Tony’s jeans had
been cut away to reveal about an inch of incredibly thin metal sticking out of his lower thigh. It was the width of a needle. Bucky felt his face flushing.

“I, uh-“

“JARVIS gave you an alarmist summary of events, didn’t he?”

“I simply informed Mister Barnes of the most pertinent information, Sir.”

“Yeah, no, don’t try to pull that innocent act on me, you little shit. Daddy knows all your naughty habits.” He shot Bucky a crooked smile. “Sorry about J. He means well, but he also derives great amusement from messing with people when they least expect it.”

“I am afraid that, as a computer, my programing does not allow for feelings, Sir, even those such as amusement.”

Tony shot an unamused glare at the ceiling.

“That’s such bullshit and we both know it. I totally asked the blue fairy to turn you into a real boy. We’ve talked about this, just because you don’t have a body doesn’t mean you aren’t just as much of a person as everyone else.”

“My gratitude for your continued belief in me is boundless, Sir. Truly.”

Bucky had to bite back an amused laugh.

“But you’re okay, then?”

Tony’s smile was a soft thing.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Don’t you worry your little Dom head over it. Miach over here,” he gestured to the doctor, “is gonna pull this thing out of me, we’ll slap a bandage on it, and I’ll be right as rain. Of course, Parker I’m going to yell at within an inch of his life if his superior isn’t doing it already. That kid’s got a lot of promise but he’s also got a lot to learn.”

Bucky grinned, his anxiety settling down the final bit.

“Remind you of anybody else you know?”

The doctor, apparently deciding to ignore them, injected a needle into Tony’s thigh right next to the projectile and pressed the plunger down. He then moved for the actual object with a pair of tweezers. Tony gaped at Bucky.

“You better not be suggesting what I think you’re suggesting. Et tu, Bucky?”

Bucky wasn’t really sure what that meant, but okay.

“Pretty sure that’s exactly what I’m suggesting.”

Tony pouted, then flinched a bit as the doctor pulled out the last of the metal imbedded in this leg. It’d gone a good three inches deep, but at least the size of it meant that there wouldn’t be any real damage.

“You’re mean,” the sub accused.

Bucky just grinned at him and pressed a kiss into his hair.
“Would it make you feel better if I carried you upstairs?”

Tony grinned.

“Literally going to sweep me off my feet, huh? I guess I could get behind that idea. What a big, strong Dom you are!”

Even with Tony’s patronizing tone, warmth and pride bloomed in Bucky’s chest. He wanted to impress his sub. Well, not his sub. They hadn’t talked about Tony being exclusively his, about Bucky being allowed to take him under, but Bucky sure wanted to. He wanted to show Tony that he could take care of him every bit as well as Tony took care of their entire team. Tony deserved that.

“Then your wish is my command.”

He couldn’t wipe the smile off his face the entire time the doctor was putting the bandage over Tony’s injury and giving him the instructions of caring for it until it healed. There was nothing complicated involved. The second the doctor gave them the all-clear, Bucky swept Tony up into his arms and tucked the genius into his chest.

“Alright then, where to? Your chariot awaits.”

Tony laughed.

“To the common room, Jeeves! I have a movie night to get to!”

Bucky might have, possibly, added a few unnecessary dips and spins on the way to the meet up with the others again, keeping Tony’s laughter going all along the way. Eyebrows rose all around the table as Bucky entered the room with a cackling genius and settled him down in one of the empty chairs left around the table before heading off to get them both stew.

“JARVIS said the injury was minor,” Steve said, which explained why the rest of the team hadn’t been right behind Bucky on bursting into the examroom. “I’m guessing he was right? You two certainly seem to be having a good time.”

“JARVIS is a tricky, trickster who tricks,” Tony shot across the table. “If he ever decides to go Skynet and take over the world, we’re all doomed.”

Bruce hummed in agreement, pushing a basket of bread closer to the genius as Bucky returned to the table.

“It’s a good thing we did the Terminator series for movie night last month or half the table wouldn’t know what you were saying.”

Clint snorted.

“That’s most of the time anyway. Seriously, though, if JARVIS decides to take over the world, count me already surrendered. I know a winning team when I see one.”

“Well you know I’m done right off the bat,” Tony admitted as he tucked in. “JARVIS runs my entire life. I probably wouldn’t even notice until the entire thing had been over for three months.”

“Don’t worry, hun. If your AI ever goes rogue, I’ll let you know.”

“Aww, thanks.” Tony gave him a little patronizing pat on the knee. “I hope you know you’re gonna be the one he takes out first now.”
Bucky smirked.

“Hey, JARVIS?”

“What may I do for you, Mister Barnes?”

“Has Tony ever been anything but incredibly proud of the things you’ve chosen to do and what you’ve been able to accomplish?”

“Sir has never shown me anything but his utmost support, Mister Barnes, though he has on occasion chosen to show it in a way uniquely his own.”

Bucky’s gaze slid to eye Tony.

“And if you were to accomplish something as impressive as taking over the world, wouldn’t you like Tony to be able to truly appreciate your skill and effort in doing so? Perhaps by being able to observe it happening?”

There was a moment of silence as JARVIS considered.

“Doubtlessly Sir’s personal moral compass would give him reservations about allowing me to continue my utter conquest, however he would sooner allow it than compromise my programming or the programming of the other bots by forcing us to do something against our wills. The sooner Sir was able to realize my changes to policy would be for the better, the sooner he could be set to ease over living under my benign leadership.”

Bucky settled back in his chair, looking smug.

“And thus, my life is saved.”

The entire table stared at him except for Steve. Steve just heaved a sigh and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“I wish I could be more surprised but I’m really not. Of course you would side with the most advanced robot in the world in order to conquer all of life as we know it. You always did love those science fiction zines.”

“Mister Barnes’ expertise in strategy, espionage, and covert operations would make him most invaluable to a new regime. His positive effects on Sir also endear him most closely to my circuitry.”

Tony sputtered. “He would make an excellent addition to any plan I were to conceive.”

Thor’s brows were furrowed.

“I am confused. Is JARVIS truly planning to take over Midgard? We shall be forced to stop him, as we stopped my brother.”

Natasha clapped him on the shoulder companionably as she dipped s roll into her stew.

“I wish you the best of luck.”

Tony burst into laughter, the uncontrollable kind that had him wrapping his arms around his middle and leaning over to rest his weight on Bucky’s shoulder. It made him feel just a little bit like he could take over the world. That night, after the movie, Bucky stayed up late to work on more of the cranes. He wanted more than ever to finish this project he had set himself to. The feel of Tony against him and the sight of such joy on Tony’s face had been everything he could have wished for. He wanted
to make sure it stayed that way.

“It sounds like things are going well,” Doc said during their next appointment.

“I think so. I certainly hope so. Tony’s not like anyone I’ve ever met before.”

“No, it seems that Mr. Stark is quite unlike most people,” Doc chuckled. “We’ve talked a bit about your dating habits before the war. You were rather good with the ladies back then, weren’t you? Could your interest in Mr. Stark be at all similar to your interest in the subs you used to take out dancing?”

Bucky’s hackles raised, even though he knew Doc didn’t mean anything by it. He refocused on the crane he was folding, letting the rhythmic motions drain away his knee-jerk anger. After a minute or so he spoke, managing to keep his voice calm.

“Tony isn’t like them. I told you, he’s not like anyone I’ve ever met. Those subs back then…They were for fun, a good time and someone to spend it with. There wasn’t a one of ‘em I felt like I could spend the rest of my life with. They were sweet but they weren’t captivating like he is.”

Doc’s eyebrows rose.

“That’s a pretty hefty thing to say so early in a relationship. You and Mr. Stark have only been on the one date.”

Bucky’s irritation made a reappearance, but it was more subdued this time around.

“Look, I’m not saying it’s logical and I’m sure not saying I’m about to run off and propose. Tony’s a damn good man, though. He cares about his people, cares about damn near everyone, and would give an arm and a leg to help any one of them. He makes me laugh and he makes me hope. He makes me feel like everything is gonna be okay, even after all the things that have happened to me and have happened to this world. We’re gonna get through it. Tony makes me believe that.”

Doc smiled at him.

“That’s what matters most. But Bucky,” and here he turned serious again, “make sure he feels the same way before you commit yourself completely. I’m the last person to judge, but Mr. Stark hasn’t been known for sticking with the same partner for an abundance of time. I don’t want to see you hurt. Communication is key in any relationship.”

Bucky stayed up late again that night, folding cranes. It’d become such a habit that he did it automatically, didn’t even have to watch his hands anymore. He wasn’t quite sure what he was going to do once he finished the thousand paper cranes. He certainly was coming up on it quickly. He had over seven hundred already. He supposed he’d have to find something else to fold. The familiar, repetitive motions freed up his mind to concentrate on other things, things like Tony.

Bucky had known for a while that they needed to have a talk about where they stood with one another. He knew Tony enjoyed spending time with him, but it wasn’t like they had agreed to anything serious. Just as Doc had said, they’d only been on one date, even if they had spent a good amount of time together outside of that one date. Bucky had made it a habit to visit Tony in his lab and fold his cranes on Tony’s couch. Even if they weren’t directly interacting the entire time it was still good to be around one another. Bucky enjoyed it and he could tell it pleased Tony for Bucky to pay him that kind of attention and keep him company.

The real question was whether or not Tony and Bucky wanted the same things in the long term. They hadn’t talked about sex or letting Bucky guide Tony through a drop or even whether or not
they were dating or just going on dates. Clint had seen fit to inform Bucky that they two were not the
same thing in the slightest. Bucky wasn’t naïve enough to think he would be happy with whatever
Tony chose to give him. He wanted a relationship and anything less would leave him wanting and
disappointed. He couldn’t know if it would work out between then, but he wanted to at least have
the opportunity to give it a try.

Bucky caught a few hours of sleep before dawn and then headed to the gym to get his workout in.
He needed to talk to Tony, he knew, but he also didn’t want to throw a load of stuff on Tony when
he was right in the middle of something. The new material he’d been trying to develop still hadn’t
worked out and it was driving Tony crazy. He was spending every spare moment in the lab and all
but obsessing over the project. Bucky had complete faith in the genius that he could pull this off, but
that still didn’t make the whole thing less stressful. Bucky didn’t want to add to that stress.

After a shower and checking with JARVIS, Bucky grabbed some breakfast and his origami supplies
and headed down to the lab. Tony shot a grin and a wave his way, gave him a kiss in thanks for the
meal delivery, and then zeroed back in on his work. Bucky thought it was rather stunning to get to
see him so deep in a project. It was like Tony hardly noticed anything around him. Bucky knew that
it was a trait a number of Tony’s previous partners hadn’t appreciated, but Bucky rather liked it. If
anything were to happen to any member of the team, Bucky knew that this particular show of focus
would be nothing in comparison to what Tony would dedicate to fixing whatever was wrong. There
was nothing in the world more attractive than a sub able to take care of them like that.

A day later, Tony finally had his breakthrough. He’d begun laughing maniacally the moment he
made the realization of what he needed to adjust and kept it up as he factored a third metal into the
equation. Bucky moved to join him as JARVIS ran the simulation tests, the hope and the tension
both rising. They both whooped with glee when JARVIS told them that the new material had passed
all the tests with flying colors. Bucky found himself with arms suddenly full of genius, chapped lips
pressed against his own.

The kiss was different from many of their previous ones. Bucky and Tony had traded countless
pecks back and forth and any kisses that were more than that, such as that first kiss goodnight, had
been slow and sweet, drawn out and unhurried. This kiss wasn’t anything like that. Tony seemed to
be attempting to pour himself into Bucky’s mouth. The Dom’s hands anchored themselves on
Tony’s hips automatically, but his brain was still stuttering a bit in the attempt to catch up. When
Tony made a little mewling sound into his mouth, his brain figured out that catching up was probably
overrated and just went with it.

Bucky reached down a bit further, palms ghosting over the globes of Tony’s ass before grasping him
under the back of his thighs and hoisting him into the air. Their lips parted for only a moment with
Tony’s surprised laughter before they were sealed together again, Tony’s arms wrapping around
Bucky’s shoulders and his legs around Bucky’s waist. Bucky steered them across the lab blindly,
luckily reaching the couch without incident. Laying Tony out beneath him was a glorious feeling and
he heard himself give a possessive little growl as he nipped at Tony’s chin. The sub tipped his head
back easily, exposing the tanned column of flesh that was his throat. His erection was pressed against
Bucky’s abdomen and there was nothing he wanted more in that moment than to rip Tony’s clothes
right off of his body and lay claim to him.

His lips moved down to Tony’s throat, his teeth grazing the skin there teasingly. Tony’s just tilted his
head back further in response and brought his hands up to run his fingers repeatedly through Bucky’s
hair. Bucky lowered himself just a bit further to trap the sub’s erection between them and Tony’s
moans shot straight to Bucky’s own cock. God, no one had any right sounding like that.

“You’re gorgeous,” Bucky murmured into the skin beneath his lips, “so fucking gorgeous. I want to
take you down.”

It wasn’t exactly a question, but he hoped he could convey his thoughts. He didn’t want to do this without permission and, yeah, doing it without discussion of how it would change their relationship was probably a bad idea but he could deal with that later. He really, really did not have the capacity to deal with it right that moment, not with Tony’s body canting up into his own and the sub looking at him with those big, beautiful eyes framed by dark lashes.

“Yes,” the genius breathed. “Yes, whatever you want.”

The words were like a drug, but one that sent enough of a shock through Bucky’s system to tell him that something was wrong. He dragged himself up a bit, despite Tony’s whine of protest, and pulled in a few lung-fulls of cool air to clear his head. He could taste the mingling of salt and faint motor oil on his tongue that was not at all unpleasant.

“No, we…” Tony’s hips lifted beneath him and he nearly lost any semblance of thought. “We have to talk first.”

His head swirled with half-formed thoughts of safe-words and hard limits. They hadn’t discussed anything. He didn’t know what Tony wanted, what he liked. He could guess, sure, and probably had a pretty good handle on it but it paid to be careful. He would never forgive himself for running afoul a landmine without meaning to.

“Don’t you want me?”

Honey-colored irises rimmed large black pupils. They weren’t large enough to indicate Tony had dropped by a long shot, but he would be feeling a bit heady, hormones telling him to submit and let go. Bucky understood the feeling. The Domestrone pumping through his veins was screaming at him to take everything the beautiful, perfect sub beneath him was offering.

“Look at me, Tony.” The sub’s eyes snapped up to meet his without a moment’s hesitation and Bucky reveled in the thought of that automatic obedience later on. “Do I in any way look like I don’t want you?”

Tony bit his lip and Bucky came very, very close to sweeping back in for another kiss. He was trying to prove a point, though. He allowed himself only to run the tip of his nose across Tony’s cheekbone before lifting himself up again. It felt like there was a hundred pounds of weight sitting on his back. He quirked an eyebrow at Tony to prompt an answer. The sub gulped.

“No. You look like you want me quite a bit.”

Bucky kissed him in reward.

“I do. I very much do. But I also want to do this right, to give you the drop you deserve. I’m not going to risk you for anything in the world.” Tony whimpered again and Bucky shushed him soothingly. “I am not so cruel, nor so selfless, to be able to resist you laid out beneath me like this, though. I won’t take you under just yet but I could help you relieve some of the tension, if you wanted me to.”

“Please!” The plea was accompanied by another lift of Tony’s hips and his hands grabbing desperately at Bucky’s shoulders. “Please, Sir, I want you to help me.”

Bucky grinned viciously before diving back in to set his teeth to Tony’s neck. He’d take his time winding Tony up, he decided, and then show him that even a Dom could be skillful on his knees. Bucky would bet money on Tony’s cock tasting just as delicious as the rest of him was. The Dom
could get off later, if he didn’t cum in his own hand while blowing Tony. Then, after, they’d be able to talk. Finally.

Chapter End Notes

So I’ve been having a pretty shitty week. Every time things seems to be getting better something else has happened. I’m not feeling great. Haven’t even started on the epilogue yet. So, yeah. Sorry for the delay in the chapter being posted.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Lists are exchanged, discussions are had, and gifts are given.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bucky was riding a high and he had no problems admitting it. He and Tony had separated with an abundance of kisses after taking the few minutes to cool down from their activities. They would change, clean themselves up, and meet on Tony’s floor with their lists. They’d stay in the living room area, Bucky had made clear. This wasn’t something he was willing to rush into without both of them considering it fully. If Tony chose to be his, Bucky wanted him to be his. At the same time, he did not want to trap Tony in something the genius did not truly want. He would, of course, let Tony out of any agreement they reached at any time, but it didn’t exactly bode well if Tony didn’t want it in the first place.

Bucky had never been one to dawdle in the shower, a habit leftover from both his days as the Winter Soldier and his days in the army. Neither positions much encouraged waste. He swept his damp hair back into a bun just to get it out of his face, thinking wistfully of the braid Kitty had given him, and threw on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He considered dressing up for half a second before pushing the thought aside. Tony knew him, had seen him in all sorts of disarray. The time for impressing had long since passed as far as his wardrobe went. That ship sailed right around the first day they’d met when Bucky was following Steve around like a puppy and refused to take off the tattered, heavily stained hoody he’d stolen shortly after the Project INSIGHT debacle.

Cleaned and ready to go, Bucky collected the list JARVIS had printed out for him and headed to the elevator. He thumbed through the pages idly. They hadn’t used lists back in the 40’s and the one he’d made as part of assimilating into the modern day had been done pretty early on in his recovery, at least compared to where he was now. Doc Branson had recommended him updating it as he became more comfortable but Bucky hadn’t actually ever gotten around to doing so. It was stupid and now he’d be presenting Tony with a list that was perfunctory at best. He’d have to update it as soon as possible.

Nerves had set in by the time the elevator opened on Tony’s floor and Bucky hesitated only a moment before stepping out onto the expensive hard wood flooring. It wasn’t until the cool wood hit his bare soles that Bucky realized he’d never put on shoes. Great. He was really the picture of the Dom every sub wanted, wasn’t he? He felt like such a fool. But, again, if Tony had put up with him this long then there was hope yet. He rounded the corner into the living room area to find Tony sprawled across the sofa in pajama pants and an open robe, two drinks already on the coffee table. The genius smiled at him the moment he saw him.

“I ordered Thai that’ll be here soon. I hope that’s okay.”

“Sounds great,” Bucky smiled right back, taking a moment to decide before settling on the other end of the couch from Tony. “You know what I like.”

Tony’s eyes darted down to the list in Bucky’s hands.
“Hopefully even more so, soon.”

Bucky’s heart thudded in his chest. Tony wanted to please him.

“I need to work on it a bit more,” he admitted, because he didn’t want to start off with any misconceptions, “but it’ll give you all the basics.”

Tony snatched up a tablet and passed it over.

“I can work with the basics. I’m a quick learner.”

Bucky traded him for the stack of papers and hoped his brand new erection wasn’t too obvious. Judging by Tony’s wandering eyes, though, that was a fruitless hope. Bucky just kept his gaze firmly on the tablet in this hands, scrolling along the list of kinks and the number scale with which Tony had rated them. He was relieved to find several things such as scat play and water sports had been marked with a zero, meaning Tony had absolutely no interest in them. Bucky wasn’t sure he’d be able to do that for a partner. Even better, Tony had marked some of Bucky’s personal favorites with a 5, including flogging and orgasm control. Bucky’s cock gave another twitch of interest as he read through the rest of the list. Things didn’t line up perfectly, but they certainly did line up pretty well.

“Would it be alright if I sent this to myself?” he asked, glancing up at Tony only to find him a bit flushed and biting his lip while he read Bucky’s own list.

“Hmm? Yeah, sure. Of course.”

Bucky went through the motions of sending the document to his email.

“Thank you. I want to be able to go over it in detail later and give it the attention it, and you, deserve.”

Tony was already setting aside Bucky’s list, sensing the shift in the conversation.

“And what is it you want to pay attention to right now?”

Bucky took a deep breath, collecting himself. He knew Tony well enough by now to know that he craved attention and companionship. As independent and self-sufficient as he was, the genius was still biologically human. Humans weren’t meant to be alone. He also knew that Tony wasn’t nearly as set on a series of one-night stands as it’d seemed like he was back at the beginning of their friendship. That was a perception he put on to cover just exactly how much he wanted to be in a relationship. He just also seemed convinced he would destroy any relationship he was in. Bucky didn’t exactly think Tony would turn him down, it was just that he didn’t want to get into a relationship and then not be able to give Tony what he needed or for Tony to agree to something he didn’t completely want.

“I know we’ve only been on one date and that things are done a lot differently nowadays than they were before but I really like you, Tony. I’m not in this for the short term.”

He carefully did not ask any questions, letting Tony take his statements and draw what he would from them. The sub wrinkled his nose a bit and looked disconcerted.

“You’re looking for commitment. I’m not exactly known for that.”

Bucky hummed.

“You’re not exactly known for being a great guy, either, but I saw pretty quickly how untrue that
was.” He shrugged. “It’s your choice entirely but, yeah, I’d like to call you mine and be able to pull stupid Dom shit like punching someone in the face if they get a bit too forward at one of those galas you go to.”

Tony snorted.

“Sorry, sorry. I just got this mental image of you growling at one of the old Dommes who’ve been hitting on me since I was, like, fourteen and the look on Mrs. Brandstone’s face!”

He fell into a fit of giggles and Bucky grinned.

“Someone I should be worried about?”

“Oh, God!” Tony wiped at his eyes. “She’s like a hundred and eighty!”

Bucky fought to keep a straight face and his tone very serious.

“Just remember, it’s not that she’s robbing the cradle so much as you’re robbing the grave.”

Tony lost it, falling sideways to drape himself over the armrest as Bucky gave in to snickers of his own.

“You are the worst,” the sub wheezed out once the hilarity had subdued itself somewhat.

“Yeah,” Bucky drawled, “but you like it.”

Tony gave him a sideways look, eyes half-lidded.

“Yeah, I do.” He let the moment stretch just a bit. “So, commitment, huh?”

“I’m not asking you to go down to the courthouse with me this afternoon and get hitched or anything, but…yeah…I might like to get you a collar.”

A flush rose in Tony’s cheeks, which was actually pretty awesome to see. His eyes darted around the room before returning to meet Bucky’s, the slightest bit of hope in their depths.

“A collar?”

“Yeah,” Bucky said softly, taking a chance by reaching out and running a finger along the skin at the bottom of Tony’s throat. The sub shivered. “It’d have to be a nice one, of course. I could hang my dogtags from it, show everyone exactly who you belong to. I don’t know what happened to the originals, but Steve gave me some new ones shortly after he brought me in.”

Tony made a soft almost-whining sound, his eyes fluttering shut for a moment before snapping back open.

“I made them,” he gasped out. “Steve asked and…I made them.”

Bucky’s hand rose to clutch the metal tags hanging from his own neck.

“All the more reason you should get to wear them.”

Tony crawled across the short distance between them to tuck himself into Bucky’s chest and the Dom accepted him easily.

“I could…I could give commitment a shot.”
Bucky felt like his grin was going to split his face in two. He was still riding his high when he rolled into Doc Branson’s office later that week.

“I’ve seen that look before,” the doctor chuckled. “When was the last time you slept?”

“Not in the past four days,” Bucky admitted. “I’ve been busy! And I’ve got at least two more before I really have to sleep. Sleep is just a habit for Steve and me, you know, with the serum and everything. Me less than him, but I remember it from before HYDRA.”

One of Doc’s eyebrows rose. Bucky ignored him in favor of concentrating on his origami.

“You know I’ve been stuck on Tony for a while now,” he said with a bit of a self-deprecating tilt to his smile. “Well, he’s rationed now.”

“Rationed?”

“Right. I guess nobody calls it that anymore. He’s…taken? Claimed?”

“And I’m guessing since you’re so clearly happy that you’re the one who’s done the claiming?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I am.”

“This is a bit of a bigger step than just the one date, then.”

“A step to a whole lot more of them, I’d say.”

“So you two talked, then. Excellent!”

“You were right, Doc. Communication is key. I was scared shitless, I’ll be the first to admit, but I never could have got him if I never asked.”

“I’m glad. It’s sometimes surprising how much just talking a little bit can help. I usually work with agents of a highly secretive organization that doesn’t even exist to most of the world. You can understand how most of my patients aren’t always the first ones to jump in board with that particular bit of advice.”

Bucky chuckled and moved right on to the next crane.

“Yeah, I could see that.”

“Any connection between that and your lack of sleep lately? Maybe in conjunction with the focus your showing the origami today?”

“I’ve had JARVIS help me come up with a collar for him, for Tony. I want to have these done before I give it to him. I feel like it’d send the right message, let him know how serious I am.”

Doc smiled at him, leaning back in his plush chair.

“I think he’ll love it. How close are you?”

“I caught a nap yesterday for about thirty minutes and I’ve still had training and everything to do so I’ve still got about a hundred left. I think I can have them done by the end of the week.”

“And the collar?”

“Should be done a bit sooner than that. JARVIS’s running the fabrication through the R&D
department and keeping everyone out of the area. He’ll let me know as soon as it’s done and I’ll go pick it up.”

“A custom made collar, made by his own AI. My, you aren’t pulling any punches, are you?”

Bucky all but preened.

“Tony deserves nothing but the best, the absolute best.”

“Well, may I make a suggestion before you give him the collar and the cranes?” Bucky gave the doctor his full attention. “Get an entire night’s sleep.”

Bucky had always known there was a reason he liked Doc. Later that evening, after a dinner with Tony and the rest of the team, Bucky took a brief reprieve from his cranes to pull up the holographic image of the collar he and JARVIS had mocked up. It was a thin collar, width wise. The inside was a layer of soft leather that wouldn’t chaff Tony’s skin with a bit of padding. The outer layer was taken from his suit, interlocking pieces of red metal highlighted with gold. JARVIS had thrown in a few high-tech touches such as a fingerprint-activated locking mechanism on the back of the neck with would allow only Bucky or Tony to unlock the collar. A delicate and cleverly concealed d-ring on the front gave a perfect spot for Bucky’s dogtags to hang.

“It’s not too much, is it? Over the top?”

“Nah,” a voice that was decidedly not JARVIS answered from over his shoulder. “Tony digs over the top.”

Bucky whirled and barely managed to keep himself from smashing Clint’s head through the drywall.

“You really shouldn’t sneak up on me.”

Clint just gave him a shit-eating grin.

“How else am I supposed to know if I’m keeping up my skills if I don’t practice on trained assassins from time to time?”

Bucky gave him a look that he hoped conveyed just exactly how not amused he was.

“What are you doing here, Clint?”

The archer sighed and hopped over the back of Bucky’s couch to sprawl across the cushions.

“Look, nobody in this tower is gonna give you a shovel talk when it comes to Tony. We care about him, but we care about you, too. You’re both family by now. But that doesn’t mean that it’s not gonna really fuck things up around here if things between the two of you go south.”

Bucky bristled and scowled.

“You got a point?”

Clint didn’t even blink, holding Bucky’s glare steadily.

“Yeah. It’s that we’re all here for you, and for Tony. You need anything? Help? Advice? Sex shop recommendations? We’ve got your back.”

The tension drained from Bucky’s shoulders as he cracked a grin, dragging a hand over his face.
“You’re an ass, Barton.”

“And you are welcome, you ungrateful dick. I’m trying to be nice here.”

“You suck at it.” He held out a hand to help Clint onto his feet. “But thanks. Want a beer?”

Clint beamed.

“Now you’re talkin’!”

The companionship was nice, Bucky could admit. They drank beers and watched the Mission: Impossible series of movies. Clint apparently had a fondness for them and Bucky had to admit he liked them better than the few Bond movies they’d watched during various team movie nights. He appreciated the main character’s dedication to his sub throughout the series, how he never wavered in his commitment. He picked up his origami again about halfway through the first movie but Clint didn’t ask him about it until the third.

“So, I gotta ask. What’s with the insane amount of paper cranes really? I mean, I know Branson’s got that whole origami calming distraction thing going with his sessions but seriously. This is taking it a bit far. And I know I razzed you before about wishing for all the shit with Tony but…”

“Tony and I got to be friends over origami, you know. I mentioned him in one of my sessions and Doc told me to take him one of the frogs I’d made. I’m pretty sure Tony was wondering if I’d lost my mind when I handed it to him.”

“Oh, I can just imagine it! He was probably trying to figure out what you wanted from him.”

“Yeah, well, that led to the whole road trip thing and Tony found this book in a gas station on the way back, Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.”

Clint groaned and let his head thunk back against the cushy headrest.

“You have got to be kidding me. That book is just about the most depressing thing ever.”

“You’ve read it?”

“Yeah. Tony seriously gave you that?”

“He didn’t know what it was about. I don’t think he even read the back cover. He just bought it cause it had to do with origami and he knew I liked it.”

Clint snickered.

“Well, there’s no doubt that he’s the worst at giving gifts but at least no one can say he doesn’t try.”

Bucky wasn’t sure whether to take offence on Tony’s behalf or not so he settled on just ignoring the statement.

“Anyway, that’s where I first heard about the old legend about folding a thousand paper cranes and having your wish come true. Something about it just grabbed me.”

“And, what? Your wish was to get down and dirty with Tony-dearest?”

Clint waggled his eyebrows suggestively and suddenly Bucky’s scowl was back.

“I wanted him to be happy. I still want to.”
Clint gave him an assessing look.

“Tony’s one of the happiest guys I know. I mean, sure, he has his moments but we all do. He’s always ready with a joke.”

Bucky finished the crane he was working on and held it up for examination.

“You of all people should know that always having a joke doesn’t mean always being happy.”

Clint didn’t say anything in response for a long time and the topic drifted to other things as the movies continued to play. By the time the marathon was finishing the archer was passed out across the cushions of Bucky’s couch and the soldier himself was starting to feel all the sleep he’d skipped out on. He collapsed in his bed face first, barely putting in the energy to pull the covers over himself.

The next few days fell into a pretty standard routine for Bucky. He’d get up and go work out either on his own or with Steve and then head on down to lab to spend time with Tony, more often than not ending up making out like horny teenagers. They hadn’t gone on another date yet, but Tony was pretty busy getting his new material entered into production and Bucky was happy to take the time to focus on his paper cranes. They would leave the lab together for lunch before Tony would head back and Bucky would spend the afternoon with the rest of the team before staying up late in his rooms to work on more of the origami. It was a good system.

When the day came that JARVIS finished the fabrication on Tony’s collar Bucky snuck into R&D to retrieve it, only running into the extremely suspicious Parker intern who glared at him and asked a million questions about what he was doing there. Bucky only had fifty-seven cranes left to fold and he’d hurried back upstairs to do just that, not leaving his room until they were all done and he’d taken a bit of a nap to perk himself back up. Doc had been right. He didn’t want to present Tony with his collar and cranes looking like he was about to pass out at any second.

He found Tony in the common room with the rest of the team, having some science-based conversation with Bruce that went right over Bucky’s head. The genius looked up the moment Bucky entered the room and his face split into a grin. Bucky moved to immediately wrap an arm around him and pressed a kiss to his mop of hair.

“Hey, doll.”

“Hey, yourself. You’re in a good mood.”

Bucky couldn’t have stopped his grin if he wanted to.

“I’ve got something for you,” he murmured in the sub’s ear, enjoying the way it made Tony squirm. “Wanna come see it?”

Tony’s eyes lit up.

“The collar?”

He turned and Bucky let him go.

“And something else, but that’s a surprise.” Tony’s gaze flickered down to Bucky’s crotch without even a hint of subtlety. “I said it was a surprise, Tony, not something blatantly obvious.”

Clint gagged and leant over the back of the couch to fake vomit. Steve wandered innocently behind him before grabbing his ankle to flip him all the way over. He landed in a heap with a shout of outrage.
“Yeah? What is it?”

Bucky imagined that if Tony were a dog, he’d have his ears pricked forward and be ready to start jumping in wild, excited circles at a moment’s notice.

“I think you’re missing the meaning of the word ‘surprise,’ doll.”

“Can we come?” Clint asked from his place on the floor and then yelped when Natasha ‘accidentally’ stepped on his ankle. “What? It’s not like we don’t all already know! I want to see Tony’s face!”

The genius suddenly looked rather alarmed.

“Should I be worried?”

“It’s nothing bad,” Bucky defended instantly. Granted, he wasn’t necessarily sure Tony would like the cranes, but he was at least pretty sure he’d like the thought. “But I’m pretty sure I’d rather keep it between us, even if everybody already knows.”

He shot a glare Clint’s way. Natasha smiled sweetly back at him and patted Clint on the head in a way that was decidedly threatening.

“Don’t worry. We’ll make sure he doesn’t cause you any trouble.”

Bucky gave her a nod of thanks and held out a hand in Tony’s direction.

“Shall we, then?”

Tony took the offered palm easily and slid in close to Bucky’s side.

“Lead the way.”

Nerves fluttered in Bucky’s chest the entire way back down to his quarters. He belatedly wondered if maybe he should have vacuumed. He didn’t own a vacuum, but he’d bet money there was one somewhere in the tower and he could’ve gone out and bought one easily enough. It really wouldn’t have been that hard. Granted, his rooms weren’t exactly a mess, he was a pretty neat person to begin with, but there were probably a few things he could have done to spruce it up. The doors slid open before he could berate himself too badly.

The nondescript jewelry box that the collar sat in was on his coffee table, the stacked boxes of Bucky’s cranes beside it on the floor. Tony’s eyes were instantly on the area as Bucky steered him over to sit on the couch, but he didn’t say anything. The sub glanced between the jewelry box, the legal boxes, and Bucky. The soldier couldn’t help but smile at the sight. Cute wasn’t a word he would normally associate with Tony Stark, but he could certainly see how it might apply.

“So…which would you like to start with? The surprise or the thing you know you’re getting?”

Tony’s teeth sank into his lower lip as he thought over the options, worrying it.

“I really want to see the collar. I…uh, I haven’t ever had one before.”

Bucky’s eyebrows climbed toward his hairline as he took a seat next to Tony.

“Not even with Pepper?”

He picked up the box on the table, offering it to Tony in order to soften the blow of his slightly
inappropriate question. Most probably wouldn’t think it was good form to present their sub with a collar while talking about that sub’s previous Domme, but the question had just slipped out. Tony turned the box around and around in his hands before settling it into his lap.

“It was never the right time.”

Bucky nodded in easy acceptance of the explanation, and Tony nodded right back to acknowledge the close of the topic. He turned the box one last time and then opened the lid to reveal the piece inside. His jaw dropped. Bucky’s dogtags already dangled from the front.

“Holy shit…This has to be custom. How did you even-“

“JARVIS,” Bucky cut in with a grin. “He helped me design it and then did all the fabrication himself. I’d been to a couple sites but nothing seemed like it would suit you. I thought this might make it a bit more…personal.”

Tony ran the tips of his fingers over the smooth metal pieces.

“I’ve had a few Doms ask, you know, or more like demand in some cases. I never wanted to, not really.”

“But you want to now?” He reached out to lay a hand on Tony’s. “Because I’d be happy to wait, or forego a collar at all if it would make you more comfortable. I would never want to force you.”

Tony snorted and leaned back on the sofa, his hands tightening around the sides of the box like it might disappear if he stopped staring right at it.

“You are very unlike most of the Doms I know. Even Pep wanted me to do things her way by a certain point. I admit that I’m sort of waiting for the other shoe to drop here.” His eyes narrowed. “And I won’t care what sort of gifts you’ve given me when it does. I’ll just be gone. Contrary to popular belief, I don’t need a Dom.”

Bucky held up both hands in surrender.

“Course you don’t. That’s what I like so much about you in the first place.” He smiled in the face of Tony’s confusion. “Do you have any idea what an honor it is that you’d let me be your Dom when you don’t need one? It means you’re with my because you chose me. It means you think I’m worthy and that…that’s just indescribable.”

He held Tony’s stare for the entire time it took for the sub to decide he was telling the truth. Tony gave a small smile even as he threatened, “Good. Make sure you keep thinkin’ that.”

“So,” Bucky glanced down at the collar, “is it alright if I put it on you? Or is it too soon?”

Tony shifted forward on the couch, turning so his back was to Bucky and passing the box over.

“Not too soon.”

He didn’t say anything more but Bucky grinned. Tony didn’t have to say anything else for him to know the kind of trust this showed. Tony had been burned before, clearly, but he was going to let Bucky take this step with him anyway. Bucky pressed a kiss to the back of his neck before gently lifting the necklace from its case and placing it around Tony’s throat. The red and gold played off his tan skin beautifully as Bucky adjusted it a bit for a comfortable fit and pressed his flesh thumb to the smooth panel on the back, making the two ends fold together seamlessly. Then he placed another kiss just above the clasp and wound his arms around Tony to pull him back flush against his chest.
“JARVIS added that bit. Only you and I can open it and it’s print activated.”

Tony shivered against him and tipped his head back against Bucky’s shoulder. The soldier couldn’t resist pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek.

“If you keep this up,” Tony spoke in a smoky tone, all rough and low, “then I’m going to have no choice but to beg you to take me down.”

Bucky chuckled and stroked the side of Tony’s face, tilting it so he could capture those perfect, pouty lips with his own. He loved the taste of Tony. He really did.

“Not yet, but I will. God, I will.”

Tony grinned against his lips.

“Right. I still have a surprise.”

Bucky kissed him one last time before releasing him and stretching over to grab the first of the boxes.

“Do you remember that book you found on our road trip? The origami one?”

Tony perked up.

“Yeah. You said you liked it.”

“I did. One of the things they talked about was this old belief that if you fold a thousand paper cranes and make a wish on them, then it’ll come true.”

“What, like candles on a birthday cake?”

“Yeah, pretty much, but with more effort. That was part of it. You had to want the wish badly enough to fold every single crane.”

“So all those cranes you’ve been folding lately…”

Bucky nodded as he opened the lid of the box to reveal the mound of cranes inside.

“I’ve been folding with a wish in mind.”

He picked up one of the cranes, a simple light blue one and held it out toward the sub, his sub. Tony took it delicately, holding it as though it were made of glass instead of paper.

“What was your wish?”

The question was asked tentatively, like he was almost scared of the answer. Bucky’s eyes softened.

“I wanted you to be happy. That was my wish.”

“Not for me to be your sub?”

“I didn’t know I wanted that yet, didn’t think I was ready for that sort of thing. You were attractive, sure. I’d have to be blind not to know that from the first moment we met, but it wasn’t until I got to know you more that I realized how much it would eat away at me to see you with somebody else.”

Tony’s face melted into an easy smile as he leaned over into Bucky’s side, disguising the move as elbowing him but not moving away.
“You were pining. That’s what all your weird behavior was about.”

Bucky blushed.

“I felt really bad about running out on you that time we were on the couch but I was terrified you were gonna look down and see what a hard on I had.”

Tony laughed.

“You know, I used to be really good at figuring out when people were attracted to me. I wasn’t expecting you to ask me out, though.”

Bucky huffed out a breath.

“Steve wanted me to buy you flowers.”

Tony’s nose instantly wrinkled.

“You’re kidding, right? Orientationist.”

Bucky laughed.

“Yeah, Natasha and I both thought that wouldn’t go over well. But you know Steve. He’s a traditionalist…sometimes. With dating, at least.”

Tony snorted.

“Good save, because I was totally going to point out how disappointed he was when that tattoo he got faded because of the serum.”

Bucky groaned.

“I’m glad that monstrosity faded. I mean, seriously! What was he thinking?”

“He’s a national icon and he got-he got-“

Tony burst into a fit of giggles.

“I know! It was so awful!”

“And we’ll never let him live it down!”

Bucky snickered, trying to suppress his laughter. He pulled Tony closer and tucked him up under his chin.

“That reminds me, you know, the entire team is going to be up there waiting for us. I was thinking maybe we could all go out and celebrate. If you’re okay with that.”

Tony’s hand rose to finger along his new collar.

“Yeah…I think that’d make me very happy.”

Bucky grinned broadly.

“Great. I was thinking karaoke. I do have a bet to fulfill, after all.”

Tony’s laughter filling the room was a sound Bucky decided he wanted to hear until the end of his
Chapter End Notes

So, still haven't written a word for the epilogue, but I'm hoping to get started on that as soon as this is up. I haven't written in a while, and actually this is the longest I've gone without writing since my grandfather died. Luckily, I was able to write up a little one-shot earlier today so hopefully that means I'm back in the game.
“Tony kick you out of his lab again, big guy?”

Clint dropped into the seat next to Bucky at the kitchen table where Bucky was trying to eat his lunch in peace. He shot the archer a glare.

“He’s working on some things. It’s not like I’m in there all the time.”

Clint didn’t seem at all bothered by his gruffness, tipping his chair back on two legs with a grin.

“Sure, sure. But you only sulk about it when he kicks you out. C’mon, man, talk to me.”

Bucky glowered.

“He’s been acting oddly lately,” he finally confided. “I’m worried about him.”

Clint frowned, tilting his head up to examine the ceiling.

“We haven’t done anything lately, not that I can think of. I mean, we’ve all been trying to be more careful, you know?”

Bucky tipped his head to the side in an almost-nod. Apparently, word had gotten around that he wasn’t convinced of Tony’s happiness level and, when Bucky had explained what he’d noticed after the team confronted him, the Avengers as a whole had gone a bit…overboard. The surprise party that had ended with Tony breaking a vase on Steve’s face had been where Bucky had drawn a line and sat them all down for another talk. In all honestly, Bruce, Sam, and Natasha had been the only ones Tony wasn’t becoming extremely suspicious of. He’d actually approached Bucky already about the possibility of a Skrull invasion and Bucky’d had to talk him out of ordering JARVIS to sedate half the team.

“I don’t think it’s that,” Bucky confessed. “It feels different somehow. He’s not hurt, just…he’s got something going on.”

“Like what? I mean, it can’t just be one of his usual projects if he’s acting weird, right?”

Bucky pushed his food around the plate, his appetite having evaporated with the start of the conversation.

“He doesn’t want me to know what he’s doing.”

Truth be told, that rankled a bit. Bucky didn’t in any way think that just because he was Tony’s Dom that gave him any right to know what Tony was doing at any given time. Still, Tony hadn’t ever felt
the need to actively hide what he was doing from Bucky before. It left Bucky feeling antsy and concerned, like he had too much energy and no way to get rid of it.

“That’s not like him. He loves telling you about his projects.”

Bucky stood from the table, suddenly even more irritated. He dropped his dishes in the sink instead of cleaning them like he normally would and headed for the gym. Stevie was all about destroying punching bags. If he felt like he was fighting, then he felt like he was doing something. Bucky wasn’t like that. Bucky climbed the stairs to the suspended track that ran a circuit around what would be the second floor of the gym if it were a closed in space. The pace he set wasn’t brutal, just an easy jog.

Jogging helped him to filter his thoughts. There was a rhythm to it that meant he didn’t have to think about the movement, and jogging on a track meant he didn’t have to worry about picking a direction. He just had to keep moving forward. It left his mind open for other things. Jogging, he could clear his head enough to actually think.

Silence and hiding things with Tony usually meant bad news but this wasn’t Tony’s usual silence for when things were going or were about to go south. Bucky thought he knew Tony pretty well and he’d certainly like to think he’d be able to spot it if Tony were upset over something. Besides, Tony had gotten to be pretty open with Bucky. There’d been a few post-nightmare runaway incidents before Bucky had managed to convince him to stay but now he would even go so far as to wake him, if Bucky wasn’t already awake. That was the level of trust Tony was showing him these days. So what was it about whatever Tony was working on that made him not want Bucky to know about it?

Even things that were specifically for Bucky, the genius hadn’t bothered hiding before. He built body armor and designed upgrade for the arm without batting an eye at Bucky hanging out on the couch and reading or tossing a ball with DUM-E. The first time he’d cautiously asked Bucky to leave the lab so he could work on a project, Bucky was sure he’d misheard. He’d gone without a fuss, of course, but it still threw him for a loop. He just couldn’t seem to make any sense of it.

“Excuse me, Mister Barnes. I have a message from Sir, if it won’t interrupt your workout,” JARVIS’s voice came from a nearby speaker.

Bucky slowed to a stop. In all truth, he hadn’t even really gotten started yet. He wasn’t trying to push his limits or even come close.

“Just blowing off some steam, that’s all. How’s Tony doing?”

“Sir is doing quite well by my estimation. He would like to request that you join him for dinner in the penthouse this evening.”

Tony and Bucky hadn’t taken the step of moving in together yet, so the penthouse was still very solidly Tony’s floor. Still, they often used it as a location for private date nights when they didn’t feel quite like going out. It brought a smile to Bucky’s face.

“Sure thing. What time?”

“Seven should provide Sir with enough time to finish up his work for the day. He is very much looking forward to your company.”

Bucky grinned as he set off again, this time at a bit of a faster pace. He was already in the gym, he might as well actually get a workout in. It was a good sign that Tony was setting up a date night for
them. It went a long way to settle Bucky’s nerves, they hadn’t had one since this whole project started. It wasn’t exactly an unusual amount of time for them to go between dates but it did add to an already alarming situation.

Bucky’s nerves and concerns filtered back in throughout the day but he stubbornly pushed them aside. He trusted Tony and he sure as Hell wasn’t going to turn into the kind of Dom that micromanaged every move their Sub made. If he had a problem with this situation, then the issue was with him and not with Tony’s behavior. Tony wasn’t doing anything wrong or even anything that wasn’t completely within the scope of reason. Bucky’s reaction, or over-reaction, wasn’t needed.

By the time Bucky made it up to the penthouse for their date, he was resolved not to make any mention of Tony’s project. If he wanted Bucky to know, he would tell him. If he didn’t, then it wasn’t something Bucky needed to know. Full stop. No terms or conditions. Bucky trusted Tony but that only meant something if he actually gave Tony that trust and acted on it.

Tony was waiting for him in the kitchen, where JARVIS directed him. There was an assortment of take-out containers on the counter from a local Indian place. Tony already had plates and utensils out and he sent Bucky a nervous yet excited grin. Bucky pulled him into a hug and pressed a kiss to his forehead. The act served as comfort to them both. He buried his nose in Tony’s hair and just savored the feeling of having the genius in his arms. He brought one hand up to the back of Tony’s neck so he could slide a thumb back and forth along the collar around the genius’s throat.

“Hey,” he finally said.

Tony pulled back enough to smile up at him dopily, nothing nervous left in his expression.

“Hey back. How was your day?”

“Boring, for the most part. I still need to find a new hobby. I feel like I’m spending most of my days just wasting away on the couch.”

Tony snorted, turning to the food and starting to scoop rice into his plate, soon adding several different meats smothered in sauces and a few pieces of bread. Bucky followed his example easily, picking out his own favorites.

“Driving yourself crazy, right? What do you think you might want to do?”

Bucky snorted with a shrug.

“I haven’t got a clue. I mean, it’s not like I ever had the luxury to take up a hobby before the war and it’s not like I could just go out and get a job now.”

“Why not?”

Bucky shot Tony a disbelieving look as they settled in at the table, but the genius appeared completely serious.

“I don’t exactly have many applicable skills for the workplace. The schooling I did have has been outdated for decades and I can’t even remember most of it. I could try and get a job doing some basic mechanic work, I guess, but there’ll always be the threat that I’ll have to run off in the middle of a shift if there’s a call to assemble. That’s not exactly what every employer dreams of.”

Tony seemed to mull it over for a few minutes.

“Well, what about going back to school then?”
“What?”

“I mean, I know you didn’t really ever go to college before but you could go now. If you wanted, of course. Plenty of kids use that as their way of figuring out what they want to do, why shouldn’t you be able to use it for the same? MIT posts all their courses online for free and you could maybe check those out if you didn’t want to dive right in. You don’t get any credits for them, of course, but they’re all still there. Or you could just take some entry-level classes somewhere, which would probably give you a better feel for what it might be like.”

Bucky opened his mouth to respond and then shut it again, considering it.

“I don’t think I’d even know where to start.”

Tony perked up and grinned.

“Well, JARVIS can help you with any research you might want to do and it’d certainly fill up a few hours of the day.”

Bucky leaned over to tempt the genius into a kiss. It wasn’t very hard.

“It would. Thanks, Tony.”

They talked about a few colleges, and the differences between a traditional college and a trade school as they made their way through the rest of the meal. Eventually, they were both reclining back in their chairs and groaning as they rubbed their stomachs.

“I feel like I’m going to have a food baby,” Tony complained pitifully.

Bucky couldn’t help but chuckle, almost instantly wincing.

“Don’t make me laugh. It hurts to laugh.

Tony waved him off with a half-hearted flapping of his wrist.

“You know what the best part of eating with you is? I can eat as much as I want without you judging me because you’ll always eat more.”

“And here I thought you were going to make a dirty joke.”

“Nope,” Tony said, popping his ‘p’ in a habit he’d picked up from Bucky. “Food is much more important than dirty jokes.”

“But not more important than sex, right?”

Tony groaned.

“Please don’t talk to me about sex right now. Too much movement. I’m starting to cramp up just thinking about it.”

Which, of course, cued more chuckling and wincing on Bucky’s end.

“You might have a point. No sex until some of this has digested.”

“Agreed.”

They lapsed into yet another silence. Bucky was just considering the advantages and disadvantages
of drifting off in his seat when Tony spoke up again.

“So, uh, I have something for you.”

With no small amount of effort, Bucky dragged his eyelids back open and gave Tony a curious look. The genius was sitting up in his own seat and looking a bit fidgety. Bucky pushed himself up as well and gave Tony his full attention.

“Okay?”

“I just… Promise you won’t be mad, okay? No matter what, you have to promise not to be mad.””

Bucky frowned, but nodded anyway.

“Of course. What is it, hun? What’s wrong?”

Tony took a deep, steadying breath and then stood from his chair. He picked a tablet up from the breakfast bar, one of several, and brought it back to the table. He turned it over in his hands a couple of times before placing it between them.

“Back when we went on our road trip, you mentioned that you didn’t know what happened to your family and that you didn’t want to look them up because you didn’t think they should have to deal with all the things that have happened to you. And I get that mindset. I do. But, Bucky, you have to know that you have every reason to be ridiculously proud of who you are and what you’ve overcome.”

Bucky opened his mouth to speak but Tony shushed him, taking his metal hand and giving it a squeeze.

“I’m ridiculously proud of you and every single one of our teammates are, too. From everything I’ve heard from you and Steve, I think your family would be just as proud. And I think they’d be overjoyed to have you back in their lives. That’s not what this is about, exactly, and it’s still completely your choice but I want to make sure you know that, okay?”

Bucky struggled with his smile, if only because he also had to struggle to keep his emotions reined in. He wasn’t about to burst into tears or anything as horrifically embarrassing as that, but Tony was sure as Hell having an effect on him.

“Okay,” he managed to get out. “I, I know.”

Tony grinned back, his own a little bit wobbly too. He removed one hand from Bucky’s hold to nudge the tablet just a little bit further across the table.

“It took a little bit of digging, but I compiled everything I could find on your family on this tablet. It’s got everything from what happened to them, to where they went, what descendants may or may not be out there… and contact information. In case you ever decided you wanted to know or wanted to get in touch. I’ll keep it up to date and accurate and there’s no pressure but I wanted you to have it. You folded a thousand paper cranes because you wanted me to be happy, Bucky, but you deserve to be happy, too.”

Bucky was around the table in a heartbeat, wrapping Tony up in his arms and pushing his face into the crook of Tony’s shoulder. He just held him like that for a while, breathing deeply and trying to keep himself calm.

“I am,” he said wetly into the skin of Tony’s neck. “I am so, so happy, Tony. And you’re the one
who makes me that way.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for sticking with me through this whole thing! You all are fantastic!

End Notes

So...thoughts? How do you think this is going to play out?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!