Stellar Forge: From the Ashes

by Bragi151

Summary

As the ashes of the Civil War settle, Tony Stark, rather than deal with the phone and olive branch sent to him by Steve Rogers, decides to focus on those left behind. After all, he won't be the only one looking for them, and they're far safer with him than they are with Thunderbolt Ross.

Or

How Laura Barton Took Over Tony Stark's Life

Notes

My foray into the aftermath of Civil War. I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes.

- Inspired by Done by ficlicious
Perhaps the only universal constant that was irrevocably indisputable was the fact that life sucked. Steve had gone and broken the rest of the Avengers out of the Raft, leaving Tony holding the bag, yet again. The actual act of getting the Avengers out of the Raft wasn’t something that Tony had begrudged Steve, but he wished Steve would have let him do it himself. They could hate and rail at him afterwards, but now, with Clint and Scott escaped from Ross’s illegal detainment, the general would be out for blood.

Steve and the rest of the former Avengers were, no doubt, living in “hiding.” Wakanda was still insular enough for that to hold water, and though T’Challa was still going through the song and dance of his inauguration from His Panthery Highness to His Pantherous Majesty, Tony figured he would have more than a little time before he had to deal with things falling apart again.

Unfortunately, this also meant that Tony was going to have to be the one to clean up Cap’s messes, yet again. Tony, manfully, resisted the urge to hand the flip phone Steve had given him to Dummy and tell his beautiful little disaster of a helper bot to make a smoothie out of it. He would tell everyone about it. Later. When his heart and his brain had time to reconcile whatever it was they needed to reconcile.

Tony rubbed a hand over his face, perfectly recalled shards of memory snapping through his mind. A lonely road in December. Falling up towards the stars, the majesty of the infinite spread out before him. More pain than his mind could process as his chest was opened and his heart exposed to the world. Jetting down towards the ground to chase after his soul encased in a suit of silver. Killing the man who ought have been his father. A vibranium shield glinting in snow light as it swung down to cleave his heart. Terrified, guilty, ice chip blue eyes sunken and covered by hobo hair. Cornered, guilty, patriotic blue eyes unimpeded by gold crew cuts. Teary green eyes framed by fiery hair as they left, taking his heart with them. A boy taking a hit and lying on the ground, motor mouth silent for a millisecond too long. A child with bright eyes and a wide smile, reaching out with too small hands. Carefully complied statistics and death counts. Mountains leveled. Children reduced to ash. Cities floating above the clouds. Nations reduced to rubble. The Earth, a mote of dust rendered barren by the wrath of beings from beyond the stars, suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth, a mote of blue and green, verdant, fragile, glistening in the light of her warm star.

Tony stood and let the weight of his choices, his sins, his memories, and his dreams slip away. He had families to save.

“Why are you here?” Laura Barton’s face was impressively impassive. Tony figured you picked up a few things when you were married to asshole super spies who couldn’t keep their priorities straight. She still had her ticks, though, and Tony had been trained from childhood to pick upon those types of things. Her eyes darted behind him, probably looking for tac squads or police vehicles. There wasn’t anything behind him, though. Nothing visible, at any rate.

Tony took off his sunglasses, pushing them up so they rested on the top of his hair and behind his ears, so Laura could take a good look into his eyes. “May I come in?”

Laura hesitated for a heartbeat before stepping back, motion for Tony to come inside.

“Beautiful place you’ve got here. I see Barton did some more work before, you know, he decided to break international law.” Tony said as he sat down on the couch, Laura sitting down opposite him, eyes warry. Tony saw the way she put herself between him and the stairs to the upper portion of the house. He saw her eyes flick furtively to the stairs before refocusing on him. Tony even managed to
hear the scramble of what was likely little tykes on the stairwell.

“Why are you here?” Laura repeated, looking calmer, now. She ignored the jibe about her husband, though Tony noticed the way her mouth firmed up, tension working its way into her shoulders.

Tony tilted his head, “I’m here to offer you a job.”

Laura blinked, “What?”

Tony nodded, “Ross doesn’t know you exist. Yet. Barton covered his tracks pretty well, but there’s no SHIELD to cover for you anymore. You need to leave. Just so happens I have a very visible, very lucrative, and mostly-kinda-sorta job opening for a PA available. Benefits include family health, family dental, protection from over enthusiastic military assholes, completely new and completely legit identities for the entire family, and a surprising amount of upwards mobility.” Tony leaned backwards, spreading his arms over the back of the couch, “My last PA got ended up as my CEO.”

Laura’s eyes darted between Tony’s. Tony let her look, wondering what she would see. Apparently, whatever it was she did see was very different from what Tony expected she would find, because she nodded her head, “When do I start?”

Tony took his sunglass off from atop his artfully disheveled hair, putting them back over his eyes, “Now, preferably. There’s an invisible Quinjet parked in your yard, so get whatever it is you want or need, get the kids, and let’s go. I’m looking forward to working with you, Ms. Laura Bowman.”

James Paxton and Maggie Lang answered the door with guns in hand. Tony arched an eyebrow, but raised his hands slowly, “I come in peace.”

Paxton’s eyes darted around the empty block before he nodded, tilting his head to indicate Tony should head inside. Tony dutifully trotted into their living room, though he heard scampering. Likely more kiddies where they shouldn’t be, listening with too big ears for too big secrets. Well, good for them.

“What do you want?” Maggie Lang asked as Tony sat down on yet another family’s couch. This time he put his sunglasses in his suit pocket, though. Might as well change things up a bit. Paxton, strangely, remained silent, considering Tony with too seeing eyes. Maggie sure knew how to pick ‘em.

“I’m here to offer both of you a job.” Tony said, keeping that part of the script the same. He would probably be switching to improve, soon enough, though.

Maggie narrowed her eyes at him, “Are you trying to get to Scott through me and Cassie?”

Tony shook his head, “Trying to keep you safe from people who will. No doubt you’ve already gotten a fair amount of flak for being associated with Mr. Lang at all. Heard about you getting laid off. Sorry to hear about that.” Tony addressed the last bit at Paxton.

The man shrugged, “It happens.”

Tony nodded and continued, “So, yes, trying to keep you away from Ross, trying to keep a roof over your heads, and trying to minimize the damage caused by, well, everyone. Sort of my shtick.”

“Pym said not to trust you?” Maggie asked more than said, though she lowered her gun.
Tony arched an eyebrow, “Was this before or after he verbally crucified your ex-husband for getting his precious suit caught in the nefarious clutches of the government? Or was it after the part where I somehow managed to brainwash his daughter into signing the accords under her mom’s name? Oh, no, wait, let me guess, it was after he accused me of being the devil incarnate, some unholy reincarnation of my father, bent on ruling the world of science with a fair but firmly cruel fist of iron?”

Paxton snorted, and had to turn around, covering his mouth with the back of his hand.

Maggie rolled her eyes, but clicked the safety of the gun on, “So, what is it we’ll be doing?”

Tony rolled his shoulders, getting up off the couch, “Just so happens I have need of someone to lead my personal body guard detail, which doesn’t actually have anyone in it anymore, and someone to work in the SI daycare at Stark Tower. Both positions come with amazing benefits, I’m sure you’ll find.”

Paxton’s eyes lit up a little, “As long as it’s honest work.” Maggie’s eyes flickered from her husband, to Tony, to the stairs where everyone was under no delusion Cassie was hiding and listening in to this whole conversation.

“What about school?” Maggie arched an eyebrow.

Tony sighed, “That’s up to you two. I can recommend some secure facilities, but-”

Maggie nodded, “You should set up something private. Not like you can’t afford it, right?”

Tony just arched an eyebrow as she marched past him and up the stairs. Tony heard her talking to Cassie about packing everything away as quickly as she could. “Why do I get the feeling I’m going to regret this?”

Paxton just laughed at him, the bastard, “Don’t worry. It ended up going pretty well for me.”

Tony snorted, but smiled as he pulled his sun glasses out of his suit pocket and put them on his face, “As long as I don’t have to marry her.”

It turned out that Maggie wasn’t kidding when she said she expected Tony to start up a school for her daughter in exchange for moving from one coast to the other. Plus, combined with the new demon ins life, AKA Laura Barton/Bowman, they bullied him into getting it done without bugging Pepper too much. In point of fact, Pepper had been so pleased that Tony now had more people to bully him into doing things that she had given both Maggie and Laura a set of Jimmy Choos.

It was some sort of unholy trinity that had descended onto his life.

But Pepper was talking to him again, like nothing had changed, and Tony would have given absolutely anything for that.

Laura, especially, though, was demonic. She actually made him go to meetings on time, forced him to leave the Avengers facility in a timely manner, and get sleep and eat when he needed it. He thought he would have been able to throw her off, but she used a set of weapons that had never been at Pepper’s disposal.

Her kids.
The first time she had marched into his workshop, since FRIDAY was a dirty traitor and aided and abetted in all crimes against humanity committed by the Unholy Trinity, with Nathaniel on her hip and Cooper trailing behind her, Tony had known he was outmaneuvered before she had even spoken.

“This is so cool!” Cooper had gushed, his eyes practically vomiting sparkles as he looked around the workshop.

Laura had done absolutely nothing, leaving Tony to lurch madly towards the young boy as he tried to get a hold of Tony’s power tools, “OK, little man, let’s not touch that. At all.” Cooper turned to him with the most betrayed little expression he had ever seen, “For now! Yeah, for now! Uh, I can show you…stuff! I can show you stuff, later. If your mom says yes!”

Laura had just smiled as Dummy, U, and Butterfingers wheeled over.

“Omigod! Robots!” Cooper had dashed towards the three robotic stooges.

“I’m never going to get him out of here, am I?” Tony had bemoaned.

Laura’s smiled had broadened, “Well. You could get something to eat? I’ll make sure he heads up after you.”

Tony had glared at her.

Laura had made to put Nathaniel onto the ground, and Tony’s brain was consumed with images of tiny babies crawling on the floor of his workshop, electrocuting themselves in piles of their own spit up, crashing into tables with precariously balanced heavy machinery, and far far worse.

“Ok. You win. We’re leaving now! Hey! Coop! Budy! The bots can play with you outside! Let’s just, uh, leave. Now.” Tony had said frantically.

“Sure, Uncle Tony!” Cooper had said, dashing out the doors, Tony following, his expression dark.

“FRIDAY,” Tony had said, rubbing his heel over his eyes, “get the bots into the service elevator and onto the common level. Also make sure that they know that squishing tiny beings is a no no.”

“But such was the way the world had come to work for Tony Stark, not even a month after the disastrous events at Siberia. Tony Stark lamented how this had come to be his life repeatedly to Rhodey and Vision, but Vision hadn’t understood and Rhodey just laughed his ass off, “They’re domesticating you! And I thought Harley had you wrapped around his little finger!”

Rhodey was, of course wrong. So very wrong, Tony reflected, as he was finishing the charter needed for the new Yinsen Academy, a non-profit charter school that would be operated out of the Tower. He’d already gotten it set up for K-12 and Pre-School, so the kids would be set for a while. May was looking to get Peter to transfer, but Tony wasn’t going to touch that particular battle. That decision was up to Peter, since Tony had already gotten the kid an “internship” to cover up his Spidery activities, to say nothing of the grant to help him out with his own work.

“Of course you set up a new school after I’m done applying for early admission to MIT,” Harley complained. Tony and the kid kept in regular contact, usually video calling at least once a week.

Tony snorted, looking up to see Harley’s smiling face in the video interface in the table in the common room of the Tower. He was tinkering with some of the newer specifications for Rhodey’s
Harley gave him a speculative look, “I dunno. I might be able to. Any openings for a waitress in the Tower?”

Tony blinked. Maybe Harley was taking this seriously. Very few people knew of his connection to the kid, so there hadn’t been a big need to keep him safe, but with the kid going to MIT soon, he might be worried about how his mom and sister got on without him.

“I’ll figure something out. There are cafeterias here, and at the Avengers facility upstate. Both could work for her and your sister. Laura and I commute between the two all the time.” Tony said, muttering around the piece of bacon he stuck in his mouth.

Harley rolled his eyes and chuckled, “Yes, because all of us have access to Quinjets.”

Tony shrugged, “Once my workshop in the Avengers compound is finished, I’ll probably be staying there more often. The Academy will be staying in the Tower, along with the, uh, special housing facilities. It’s best if we keep the civies away from the compound. Even if they do make my life hell by following me there.”

“I heard that!” Laura Barton/Bowman said with a smile as she walked into the common area, Cooper and Lila trailing behind her, riding Dummy and U respectively. “Hello, Harley! Did the application to MIT go well?”

Harley smiled at Laura, “Well, I sent it in, along with all the letters and transcripts. We’ll have to see how it goes. Hopefully the scholarships and financial aid come through, too.”

Laura’s eyes flickered to Tony for a moment. Tony hadn’t told Harley that Tony had sent a special letter of recommendation for the kid to the admissions offices telling them that they were idiots if they didn’t accept him. Also, that Tony may or may not have set him and his sister up for their college funds.

“Did your sister get the watch I sent her?” Tony said, derailing any potential revealing of potential secrets.

Laura smirked but remained silent.

Harley laughed, “Yes, the little sister is thoroughly bribed by the new Dora the Explorer watch, custom built by Iron Man.” Harley narrowed his eyes at Tony, “You didn’t tell me if there were any secrets to the watch, by the way. She won’t even let me read the note that came with it. She keeps telling me to build my own.”

Tony laughed back, but Laura was the one who spoke, “I’m sorry, Harley, but Tony’s going to have to get to a meeting in,” she glanced down at her own watch, which may or may not also have special features built in, just in case she needed some protection, “fifteen minutes.”

Harley waved her off, “Yeah, yeah. We all know how much Tony likes to use me as an excuse to skip meetings. See you later!”

Before Tony could cry treachery, the call was cut off, and Tony was left to the tender mercies of a demon in Jimmy Choos.
Unsurprisingly, it took Ross more than a little time to figure out what had gone wrong with his plan to use Scott’s and Clint’s families against them. Of course, the man had also, finally, managed to figure out that just calling Tony wasn’t going to cut it, and ended up showing up at the Tower.

“They need to be put into protective custody,” Ross growled out, storming into Tony’s office, where he was doing actual work of his own accord, thank you Unholy Trinity.

“I’m sorry?” Tony asked, not bothering to look up at Ross as he continued to skim over the paperwork for the school, which had actually been doing pretty well. All of the parents in the company had taken to enrolling their students, and Tony had made sure to recruit nothing but the best teachers in the Tri-State area for it. Of course, most of the donations to the Academy were coming from him, Pepper, and the Maria Stark foundation, so the Academy could afford a little largess where it mattered.

“Maggie Lang. Cassie Lang. Paxton. Scott Lang’s family. The convicted felon who managed to escape from the Raft. They need to be put in protective custody so Lang doesn’t come after them.” Ross said, his voice less of a growl, but still filled with low threat.

Tony signed off on the authorization for teacher assessments, his eyes skimming over some weird form asking for the kids to be able to access some of the gym floors that used to be used by the Avengers, “That’s their choice. Not mine. I hear they just got new jobs, too. Apparently they like them.”

“Don’t play these games with me, Stark,” Ross was back to growling, then.

“Excuse me, Mr. Stark,” Laura Bowman let herself in, no kids and no bots trailing behind her, causing Tony to blink, “King T’Challa would like to inform you he would like to discuss his future involvement in the Avengers Initiative. He detailed the need for an immediate response.”

Ross blinked at the woman, and Tony had to admire her balls. “Uh, tell His Panterous Majesty that I’ll get to him just as soon as I’m done with-”

Ross’s eyes widened in realization, “You!” Ross stalked towards Laura, “You’re Laura Barton! We’ve been looking for you!”

Laura arched an eyebrow, “Excuse me, but my name is Laura Bowman. I’m a single mother of four, currently working as PA for Tony Stark.”

Ross spun around and looked like he wanted to reach out and wring Tony’s neck, “Stark! When were you going to tell me you had Hawkeye’s family in custody? We need to put them in a secure facility so we can-”

“I’m sorry, the who of the what?” Tony asked, tilting his head. He kept his face blank, but Tony clapped and giggled on the inside as Ross’s face turned the shade of an eggplant, and a vein started throbbing on his temple.

“Stark! I am demanding you let me take Laura Barton into custody!” Ross was shouting now, spittle flying from his mouth.

Tony’s affable smile dropped, “Let me make something very clear to you, Ross. You do not get to make demands about my people. Will I enforce the Accords? Yes. Will I let you kidnap my employees out of my own building? Hell the fuck no. If you so much as blink in the direction of any of my staff in a way I don’t like, I will make sure President Ellis gets a call from me questioning your fitness to continue in your office.”
Ross spluttered, “How dare-”

“Don’t fuck with me, Ross. I have enough on you to have you dropped like the rotten little sack of shit you are. Unethical experimentation on humans? Black ops carried out without the knowledge or permission of the state? Unlawful imprisonment of enemy combatants without Council approval? List goes on.” Tony arched an eyebrow.

Ross’s face turned splotchy white and purple as he matched Tony’s gaze.

“I quite agree with Mr. Stark,” a smooth cultured voice interrupted. T’Challa moved into the office, looking around before nodding, then turning his attention back to Ross. “Your treatment of the rouge Avengers after their defeat was not done in accordance with the Accords. While the council may have turned a temporary blind eye, they will still be more than willing to hold you to account for your actions, should you prove to be an improper enforcer of the Accords, General.”

Ross’s gaze darted from T’Challa to Tony and back. He licked his lips, “This isn’t over, Stark.” Ross’s voice was barely a whisper, but he turned and left the room.

Tony, T’Challa, and Laura watched him go. “Make sure the door doesn’t hit you on the way out!” Tony said just as FRIDAY slammed the door onto Ross’s ass. “Good girl!” Tony muttered, a smirk teasing the corners of his mouth.

“I do my best, Boss,” FRIDAY chimed, her Irish brogue coming out heavily.

T’Challa took in the banter with a smile, “Good evening, Mr. Stark. I believe we have much to discuss.”

End Notes

Thank you all for reading, and I hope you enjoyed the fic! Feel free to pop by shoot me an ask or whatever at mithras131.tumblr.com!

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