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**IronPanther Collection.**

by **Oky Verlo**

Summary

Came across this pairing and it shot to my Top Five. Prompts closed for now.
I was wandering on Potrix's Tumblr and got attacked by IronPanther.

I want to get back into writing so let's give this a try. Prompts closed for now.

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Extravagant

Chapter Summary

A prompt I saw on Tumblr;

Tony is always gifting the people he cares for with expensive, extravagant presents. When T'challa (who is richer than Tony) starts doing it to him, Tony's not sure what to do.

It started short but then it gained a bit of a plot and I no longer know if it completes the prompt. Sorta AoU and Civil War compliant, but screw you Marvel, Pietro lives and has been hidden for reasons I'll explain in story, and Gorramnit but I want to slap Steve for his behaviour! My anger at him comes out in this I feel.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For all his long life, the name Stark has been synonymous with Wealth.

Every gala he's attended, every press conference, hell even his schools and business meetings, there was always at least one person who brought up the wealth of the Stark name. Every time Tony finds his name in the news, or in a magazine, one of the first things brought up is his wallet and bank balance. A great number of award ceremony's (which he may or may not have actually attended) have snuck in a line or two about how the Stark Heir is truly rolling in his success.

It didn't really bother him. He'd literally grown up with this. But he was well aware that most of his friends growing up were simply in it for money. And when you're as lonely as he had been, you use what you've got to combat the loneliness.

Tony's not ashamed to admit that for a good number of years, he bought his friends.

It wasn't really like he could help it though; he was younger, smarter and mouthier than them all. Who would want to hang out with a kid like that?

It was even worse in M.I.T. Especially when he corrected a couple of his professors. Some people just can't take criticism. Whatever.

He built DUM-E for a reason.

Rhodey was unlike anyone Tony had ever met before, simply because he didn't want anything from Tony but his friendship. Tony had pushed and pried and done everything is his power to prove that Rhodey wasn't as nice and genuine as he presented himself.

Except ... he was.

Rhodey, despite being older than Tony, despite having a hard time keeping up with Tony, despite disapproving of a good portion of the way Tony lived his life, didn't ask for anything except for Tony to be safe and happy. He didn't ask favours, didn't borrow loans, hell, he didn't even copy Tony's notes. Rhodey was just that good.
He yelled when Tony bought him a car for his birthday.

Tony didn't understand what the problem was (actually he still doesn't know what was wrong; it was a good car!) and tried to make things better by buying Rhodey a new entertainment system, but that just made things worse. It took a month of buying Rhodey apology gifts before Rhodey out-and-out told Tony to stop.

He was yelling again at Christmas.

"You're my friend Tony; I don't want you to buy me!"

"What do you mean 'buy you'? Slavery was abolished when we steamrolled the South, Honey Bear."

"Oh for the love of-!"

It was like that for all of M.I.T. When Rhodey went off with the Air Force, Tony sent him Care Packages. Just some staples, you know, the things you would miss most when you weren't home.

His crew all wrote him letters thanking him for the porn and chocolate.

Apparently Rhodey was kind enough to share.

While Rhodey was off being one of America's Bravest, Tony plodded along at Howard's Company. Despite what the Media said, Stark Industries wasn't Tony's yet. Obadiah and the Board of Directors were the ones in charge, for all that Tony was the new CEO. He was still just a child to them, not knowing how business worked (as if, he was raised in this world; had been schmoozing and sweet talking since he could form sentences) and would surely plunge SI into ruin, so why didn't he just stay in R&D for a while and design more shiny bombs and make them more money?

It lasted them about a week before he got sick of it and threw his weight around.

It took a forest of paperwork and far too many sleepless nights, but he managed to get the old coots to close their mouths and let Tony do his damn job. It was thanks to his exhaustion that he met Pepper.

Virginia Potts was truly a woman born to take over the world. Standing tall in sky-high heels, a wash of freckles across her face, a flame of red hair upon her head and a can of mace pointed at security's face, Tony couldn't help but fall just a little bit in love. She was demanding to see him because she had found a mistake he'd made in his fatigue. Well, a mistake he'd written in his fatigue; when she had recited the math to him, he called out the solution, which was right of course, but on the sheet of paper, written blatantly in his scrawling hand was the incorrect answer.

She had been the only one in the Accounting Department not to take his work as correct always and checked, saving SI hundreds of thousands of dollars.

He made her his PA there and then.

She was resistant of course; Tony already had his reputation as a playboy, and she held a degree in accounting and business studies -far too skilled to be wasting away as a PA.

Hearing of the pay increase and better job perks went quite a way to winning her over, but it was Tony's explanation that sold it.
"A PA is more than just a glorified babysitter, and though I won't deny your attractiveness, the fact is the business world is going to look at you as trying to play in 'Men's Work'. I'm not stupid enough to think women can't do the job just as well, or even better than men, but history is chauvinistic, and that's not going to change overnight. As my PA, you would be present in my meetings, taking notes and learning how to deal with the older generation that has it's paws in everything, before learning how you destroy them. Also I mentioned the money and benefits right?"

"You did... If nothing else, I would certainly learn a lot... okay, we'll give it a try."

"Excellent! But I can't call you Virginia; it's a lovely name but you are far too amazing for me to call you that. Hmm... Pepper. Your freckles and the mace. You are Pepper now. Pepper Potts!"

Pepper accepted the name eventually. And she wasn't as fussy as Rhodey over Tony buying her things for her birthday.

Well sort of.

SI kept Tony really busy; there was always this contract to smooth over, and that design to produce, and General Whatshisface needing to be dealt with, Tony often found it hard to think. Tony remembers everything, whether he likes it or not. Have you ever stopped to think about the sheer amount of information you can be exposed to in a minute, let alone a day?

Pepper's birthday is in his head somewhere. But it's lost in all the other information Tony collects.

So Tony just buys her things and hopes she'll forgive him. Pepper will have a little passive snit at him when he inevitably fails to gift her something on the actual day, but he gave her access to his credit card a year into working as his PA so she buys something she actually wants and that's that.

She does love her shoes though. Tony has been saved many a scolding and shouting at by procuring pairs such as Kathryn Wilson's Pumps, or Stuart Weitzman Platinum Guild Stilettos.

Again, despite what the Media says, Tony doesn't own a lot of cars. Really he only has four in his Malibu home and one in every other residence. Okay, yes, that is a lot of cars to the average person, but Tony is a Stark, so really it's a piddly amount. No, all the cars Tony is driven in by Happy (or drives Happy in) actually belong to the ex-boxer. Happy's not exactly happy with being gifted the cars, but as a gearhead just like Tony, it's impossible not to love the machines and care for them.

It's just the way Tony is; those he cares about get gifts.

Before his involvement with the Ten Rings and Tony's abduction were revealed, Tony had gifted Obadiah with a bottle of Dalmore 42. Going through Stane's belongings later had found the empty bottle, but whether it having been consumed was a joy or an insult, Tony couldn't say.

After he became part of the Avengers, he started caring for them too. Bruce was bought every piece of scientific equipment his enormous green rage monster tinged eyes laid upon. Natasha got regular tickets to the Ballet. Clint received DVD's for all of his TV shows. Thor was gifted with technology that would allow for communication from Asgard (and damn but had that been an amazing thing to create; Tony's not sure whether to congratulate himself or freak out that he has actually created tech to cross realms) and Tony was in negotiations with Jane Foster's intern about moving her work to the Tower or Compound. Steve received art from Tony's collection.

And of course Tony was always upgrading the team's gear where and when he could.
Some of SHIELD's psychologists and media-selected off-the-street experts have suggested that it was Tony's way of proving his superiority and wealth, but it has never been about that.

Tony just likes the feeling of glee he gets when someone accepts a gift from him.

Ultron was meant to be a gift of protection to the world...

The Accords were meant to be a gift of a voice to the people the Avengers strove to protect...

The meeting in Siberia was meant to be a gift of trust and hope to Steve and Bucky...

Tony sat in the compound gym, listening to Rhodey's breaths of effort as he mastered the braces that allowed him to walk again, hearing the gentle hum of Friday's presence in the walls, picking up the faint sounds of Vision trying yet again to cook something in the kitchen.

The compound is empty but for the three of them.

'The Avengers are yours' huh Cap?

Three may be a crowd, but it's hardly the team needed.

Rhodey ended his session for the day and left to shower, leaving Tony to his thoughts.

"You know I will keep them safe for you Mr Stark."

But apparently not alone.

"It shouldn't be your responsibility Mufasa. If I hadn't let Zemo get to me... If Steve had just told me about..."

He can't finish his words; choking on the memory of his mother. A strong hand grips his shoulder bringing him back to reality.

"Zemo is paying for his actions Mr Stark. I too will be most gladdened to see the back of him."

A brief tightening of those fingers before the Wakandan Monarch continues.

"And I am the last person to judge you on momentarily losing yourself to grief, especially after realising what has been kept from you. When Mr Barnes revealed what happened in Siberia, Mr Barton and Mr Wilson grew quite enraged at Mr Rogers, particularly after Mr Wilson explained how you came to him in the raft to ask for help. Mr Barton said something along the lines of 'So secrets are only bad if they're kept from you?'. He actually sent this with me to give to you."

T'Challa handed a letter to him. Tony was written on the front with a familiar hand. Though Tony didn't read the letter in that moment, the heartfelt apology contained within went a long way in easing his heart.

Before T'Challa left for Wakanda the next day, Tony gave him a return letter to Clint -explaining how his family were all safe, and how Clint could contact them- and a package wrapped in brown paper.

T'Challa accepted both, though he looked at the package curiously, and boarded his plane.

Tony walked back to his car, hoping T'Challa would like the selection of fancy pastries and snacks.
About two weeks after, a parcel arrived at the compound. Tony took it to his room, praying to a god he hadn't believed in since a child that it wasn't from Steve again.

Upon opening the box, Tony smiled, a little startled but flattered none-the-less.

The Wakandan delicacies were wonderful.

For the next few months, between getting Ross arrested for breaking the Accords and all of his past crimes, amending the Accords so as to not have those who signed it acting as Government Attack Dogs and looking after the latest appearance of Enhanced, Tony has been receiving more and more gifts from T'Challa. They started out as small things -a fancy pen knife, a paper written by one of his scientists that he felt Tony would enjoy reading, a book on Wakandan history- and arrived after Tony had a particular success -perfecting Rhody's braces and making them available to the public cheaply, completing a dangerous mission assigned by the U.N., helping Vision learn how to waltz- but soon started to come any day without any reason and were... more extravagant.

The red silk jacket with gold lining, the experimental pieces of Wakandan tech for him to play with...

A rock of unadulterated Vibranium...

Tony's really not sure what to think about that one; Wakanda is very strict on what happens to it's Vibranium supply, so T'Challa just giving a chunk to Tony?

Tony locks it in his safe until he figures out what to do, and sends T'Challa his thanks along with the latest Accord Amendments.

Tradition in the Maximoff Family stated that the dead were to be left to the forest, no burial or cremation; they were to be left to become one with the land naturally. After Wanda had bid Pietro goodbye, Tony had snuck in to pay his own respects.

He wasn't expecting the sight of Pietro's chest moving up and down ever so slightly.

Moving the young man to one of SI's Medical Branches took but moments, where the doctors on hand were able to confirm Tony wasn't going nuts; Pietro Maximoff was, against all odds, still alive.

As best as they could figure, along with his speed, HYDRA had planted an enhanced healing factor, minor though it may have been. After removing all the bullets from him and setting him up in a nice room, the Doctors left to their work and Tony took a final look before heading to the compound to tell Wanda the news.

Only Wanda refused to speak to him.

Tony had just entered the living room when Wanda started screaming at him to leave, how it wasn't fair that he was here, how he wasn't an Avenger anymore.

Steve ended up forcing Tony out to calm her down, and said that Tony should not come back until he was called.

It hurt, oh how it had hurt, but Tony understood a bit; Wanda was grieving and lashing out. She had hated Tony for years so it made sense that he was the target to strike. He sent Steve an email explaining about Pietro, telling him to tell Wanda once she had calmed down.
Tony forgot Steve rarely checked his email.

Pietro woke up during the start of the Civil War. Tony was unfortunately too busy to come see him, but the Doctors kept the young man as well informed as they could about what was going on.

When he was finally able to visit, Tony was surprised by Pietro's demand to see the Accords.

He provided a copy of course, and sat with Pietro explaining what certain words meant and how the terms would apply.

He didn't know where Pietro got the pen from, but the speedster did not hesitate to put his name at the bottom of the document.

"You tried to protect my sister. That should have been my job. When I am out of here Stark, you are getting me body armour that won't slow me down, and I'm going to clear Wanda's name."

Quicksilver entered the Compound by the end of the week.

He was still healing of course, and couldn't strain himself too much, but there was plenty he could do, such as helping Vision with questions and cooking, studying with Peter for his high school diploma (Tony felt the young man deserved to have more that just what HYDRA decided was important for him to know; the boy's math was dreadful), doing his physical therapy with Rhodey and of course searching for ways to clear his sister's name.

Tony had brought in one of his best lawyers to help him with that, but otherwise left him be.

T'Challa sent him a gorgeous Wakandan flower encased in resin.

A full year since their meeting in Siberia, and Tony Stark was once more face-to-face with Steve Rogers and James "Bucky" Barnes, their respective Avengers behind them.

"It's good to see you Tony."

Tony doesn't say anything, but this once he doesn't have to, because Steve keeps talking.

"It's great to see the U.N. fixed the Accords; the Avengers can't be run by those with an agenda. How are we supposed to save everyone if we're being held back?"

Tony clenches his fist as the rest of the group comes out from behind Steve. Clint comes in for a hug, once more apologizing for what he has said and done, thanking Tony for protecting his wife and kids, before running to afore mentioned family and holding on tight.

Natasha had ended up in Wakanda somehow and gives Tony a brief hug and smile before following Clint.

Wanda has paid no attention to Tony and is instead in a tearful embrace with Pietro, who is explaining how he is still alive.

Scott nodded to Tony and ran to Hope Van Dyne and his Daughter.

Sam is the only one left standing with the two Super Soldiers, but he is looking at Rhodey with a mix of relief and deep sorrow.

Steve is still talking.
"And really, Wakanda is beautiful, and their technology is more advanced than anything I've seen, even yours Tony! They were able to help Bucky."

"Only because we borrowed technology from Mr Stark, as you were well told Mr Rogers."

T'Challa had finally joined the group, which was a relief because Sam, Rhodey, and hell even Vision looked like they were about to lash out at Steve. Tony doesn't turn his head to check on the newbies behind him, but he can practically feel the heat from the death-glare Peter is sending Steve.

"Welcome back T'Challa. Thank you for keeping your promise."

The man smiled, that calm enigmatic smile that is sorta there, sorta not, really not much more than a slight curl to the lips, before handing a package to Tony.

"I am glad to be back. For the foreseeable future, Shuri will be taking care of Wakanda, so I was hoping to stay at your compound?"

Tony gives a simple nod over Steve's assurances, and turns his attention to the package.

It is a beautiful watch, gold and red with tiny little slivers of blue Vibranium.

"It's gorgeous, but you don't need to give me anything you know; I have enough money to get whatever I please."

Again, that smile.

"Oh I'm well aware Mr Stark, that you do not hurt for coin. Far be it from me however, to be remiss and not attempt to woo over the one I'm chasing."

Oh.

Well.

This has never happened to him before.

"That is unfortunate, because you most certainly deserve it. Ah well, the loss of others shall be my success."

Huh, he said that out loud. And flirting, yeah, that was flirting, definite flirting. Tony was being flirted with by a King.

He can feel the blush on his face as a pleased little smile pulled on his mouth.

"It's too early to call it your success T'Challa, given you still won't call me by name."

"Ah, but the gifts you give me in turn. It would be my pleasure Tony."

A chill rolled down his spine and a swell of heat burst into his stomach.

The Stark name has always been synonymous with wealth.

It would seem the Panther is challenging that.
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Soprannomi

Chapter Summary

For Kage.

Tony gives everyone nicknames. But he gives his closest friends Italian nicknames.

Hope I fill all your details hon. I have T'Challa speaking Xhosa.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Pretty much everyone knows that Tony Stark uses nicknames instead of real names. Whether he uses them as an affection or insult depends on the person ('Mr Stark.' 'Yes dear?') but he uses them for pretty much everyone ('Pepper!' 'Yes Tony?')

The most notable recipient of Tony's nicknaming habit is Rhodey. Hell, even 'Rhodey' is a nickname! Platypus, Sourpatch, Honeybear, Cupcake, Tony has used them and more quite liberally, for seemingly no reason beyond he can. A Corporal in Rhodey's troop actually accused Tony of not having the respect to address his best friend by name, but that just made Tony and Rhodey laugh.

See, Tony picked up the habit from Maria. As a well known philanthropic socialite, Maria was always speaking to someone, but she didn't exactly keep everyone's names straight. Hon, dear, sweetie, love, they were what she used to placate the faces she couldn't name, and it worked. People thought they were special enough to receive an endearment from her. They were willing to ignore that others had nicknames too if it meant Maria Stark would open her wallet to them.

English was Maria's second language, and she often refused to speak it at home. Said the words meant nothing to her.

Howard, Her Diletto, indulged her, speaking to her in the broken Italian he knew when he could. Maria knew he worshipped her though, so forgave him when he spoke to her in English. But Tony, Her Bambino, only ever spoke to Cara Madre in Italian, would be completely ignored at home if he didn't. In public sure, English all the way, but at home Maria would only accept Tony in Italian.

Tony respected that.

Not that she would ignore her child for such a stupid reason (Maria refused Tony's English, Howard refused his Italian) but that the nicknames that mattered were in her first tongue.

The night Tony received the phone call from the police, he cried himself to sleep in Rhodey's arms, begging Tesoro not to leave him too.

Rhodey looked up the word the next day, coming back to hold Tony as he packed.

"Don't you worry Tonio, I ain't going anywhere."

It became a tradition between them that whenever something happened, good or bad, they would...
seek the other out and use those names.

_Tesoro. Tonio._

When Virginia Potts started working as Tony's PA, Tony called her Pepper. She had objected at first but eventually just ruled it as one of his quirks.

Tony called her _Fiore_ when she came to join him and Rhodey.

Happy became _Angelo._

_Tesoro. Tonio. Fiore. Angelo._

Tony was man enough to admit that after the SNAFU of the Accords had been cleaned up he was exhausted. Tony often went too many nights without proper sleep, but fixing up the mess Ross and Steve had made was just on a whole other level.

How many times in that year did he find himself clinging to Rhodey, begging to be forgiven his sins?

"_Tonio, come now Tonio, you have no sins that are left unforgiven by me._"

"_But your legs Tesoro, and all the those people the Avengers have hurt, and Ultron and-_"

"_Breathe Tonio. Breathe and focus on me, okay Tonio?_"

"_Tesoro. Tesoro, Tesoro, Tesoro, Tesoro..._"

How many times had Pepper come down to the compound, even though they had broken up, just to run her fingers through his hair and talk shop?

"..._And the figures should be twice what the analysts predicted for you, Fiore._"

"_That's wonderful Tonio. With those sorts of numbers, we should be able to return to giving relief aid to Sokovia!_"

"_Thank you Fiore for doing this. Really, I have no idea what would have happened to SI if Fiore wasn't there._"

"_It's my pleasure Tonio._"

How many late nights had he spent with Happy in the boxing ring when he couldn't wind down enough to sleep?

"_Okay Tonio, nothing fancy, just two blokes wailing on each other until we can sleep._"

"_Really Angelo, I appreciate how you're willing to do this for me. I know you could be asleep right now._"

"_Hey, what are friends for Tonio, if not the chance to beat each other up?_"

"_Ah Angelo, truly you are a wiser man than I. You get first punch Angelo, better make it count._"

How many times had he sat in the kitchen talking to Vision, teaching him about humanity when the nightmares were too much?
"There, there. You have no need to rush; you'll get it soon enough if you don't force yourself Sognatore."

"I... I do not understand... why do you call me Dreamer?"

"Because, Sognatore, you are dreaming right now; of how you wish to integrate yourself with the world around you; of how you want to see humanity flourish; of how you wait to see Wanda smile at you again. You are a dreamer my Sognatore, and I hope you never stop being so."

How many times had he helped Peter with his schoolwork simply to try and slow down?

"Ragno, you're harming your work. I understand wanting to get it done quickly, but you've made quite a few mistakes by dint of your rushed handwriting."

"What? Ho- oh man, that's meant to be a three not a nine! And how the hell did that seven become a five? This day just sucks... wait, what'd you call me?"

"Ragno, Peter. I called you Ragno. It fits I think."

The Avengers were all back in the compound, though lines were still subtly drawn. Clint would only talk to Tony if his family were present (which they were because how else was Tony to keep them safe from Ross?) in the room, but his words were genial and actively avoiding any barbs. Vision would only seek out Wanda if Tony or Rhodey were nearby.

Tony avoided Steve and Bucky.

Yes he had come to realise and accept that Bucky wasn't to blame for Cara Madre's death, but you could fear the gun just as much as the gunman.

And he still couldn't bring himself to face Steve.

Natasha had explained about three months after the meeting in Siberia, that Arnim Zola had been the one to give them the information about the Stark's murder. She had thought Steve had told Tony, given that he had forbidden her from doing so.

"I guess secrets are only bad if they're kept from him."

"I'm just as much at fault Tony. I could have brought it up at any time."

"You followed orders Natasha. You trusted the Captain to tell me. You are not at fault."

Steve had sat on the knowledge for two years, not giving Tony any chance of accepting the information and moving on.

So yeah, Tony was exhausted; there just wasn't enough hours in the day to do everything he needed to. Honestly, if it hadn't been for T'Challa and his help, the Accords would still be a mess.

Even though he had granted the Avengers Asylum in Wakanda, T'Challa had worked hard alongside Tony to bring about the changes to the Accords, and frankly, Tony was sure that if the other man hadn't forced Tony to eat and sleep while they worked together, Tony would have literally worked himself to death.

They didn't only work though, they took time to talk about tech ('But wouldn't Paladium cause long term damage?' 'Certainly did Slinky Malinky, but there was nothing else on hand that would work.'), gently spar ('Don't forget Pussy Cat, that I am a squishy human with no enhancements.')
'And yet you fight alongside those who do and keep up with them easily.'), teach each other how to cook ('So tomorrow, I'll cook Carbonara. Family recipe Kitty, you'll love it. Now what did you say was in this again? It's delicious.' 'Carbonara sounds lovely, I look forward to it. And I didn't, otherwise I doubt anything on this planet would have gotten you to put it in your mouth.') and sometimes simply sit in silence.

Tony could admit he started to feel a great deal of affection for the Wakandan King.

It was probably that affection and his fatigue that let it happen.

"Dealing with the U.N. is truly exhausting; I have no idea how you have been able to do so for the past year Mr Stark."

"Sheer need and experience Gattino."

Tony didn't realise he'd said it until Rhodey stated laughing.

"Uh... that's... I'm... I'll... workshop."

Tony can feel the heat on his cheeks and beats a hasty retreat. Rhodey's laughter follows him as he makes his way down the stairs, and Tony takes a moment to curse himself for telling his best friend of the affection that has been building.

T'Challa manages to charm Friday into letting him into the workshop hours later.

"I have just had quite the enlightening conversation with James."

"I'll just bet you have. You know you're literally the only person I know who calls him that? Even Momma Rhodes calls him Rhodey now unless she's angry at him."

"It does not surprise me. I did not realise that you learnt Italian side-by-side with English. Does that make it your first or second language I wonder?"

"Technically first, because I said Madre instead of ma-ma. Well, I was five months so it came out more as 'Mudway' but I was clearly talking to my mother, so message received."

"Fascinating. James told me of how you express yourself using nicknames and endearments. And looking back on our acquaintance, I see many times you have used felines to address me."

"Well you have the onesie, I figured I'd follow the theme."

"Yes, but until now, they have all been in English."

Tony swallows hard, trying to settle the uncomfortable roiling in his stomach.

"I am touched, and honoured that you hold me in such esteem Ubuhle."

For a second, Tony stops breathing, and T'Challa smiles before brushing a hand against Tony's cheek as he leaves.

"Though you'll see for yourself soon enough Ubuhle, I do assure you, I am no Little Cat."

Tony takes a deep breath as he takes in those words.

Seems his cat has claws.
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For DreadPirateWombat (love the name)

After hearing about Tony Stark from the news and what the Avengers have told him, T'Challa hasn't got the kindest view of the man. Virginia 'Pepper' Potts sets to change that.

Mentions of attempted assault, both physical and sexual, but no details. Sorry, but this got a bit dark.
I have set T'Challa as being seven years younger than Tony, because it's my head canon that Tony is the oldest Avenger after Thor and seven years fit what I needed. If anyone wants to draw me Steve's picture of Tony I would be delighted! Hope you enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Wakanda is without question the most technologically advanced nation on Earth. Its scientists are constantly working to further their knowledge of the world and instruments created within it. T'Challa, even during his studies outside of Wakanda, had never questioned this.

Not until Iron Man.

To be fair, it is not out of his scientists abilities to create a suit of armour like the Iron Man, but the fact that it was never considered? The fact that, even as a joke, not a single Wakandan soul dreamt the idea of an impenetrable suit?

It worries him, just a bit.

T'Challa grew up hearing about Anthony Stark -really, who didn't?- from his creating a functioning circuit board at four to his entering M.I.T. at 15, Anthony Stark was always in the media's eye.

For good and bad given the sheer amount of scandals the man caused.

Now T'Challa was all for being fair; gossip rags were always something to stay away from, given that the one time he had read one a pair of back-to-back articles swore that Anthony Stark had had marathon orgies with over 20 people within five minutes on different halves of the world. And certain information shows had to be taken with a grain of salt, given that Bill O'Reilly really went off at people who didn't conform to him.

But T'Challa more or less came to the conclusion that should he ever come into contact with Anthony Stark, it would be best to keep his distance.

Civil War, the world called it.

T'Challa cradled his head in his hands, a visual weakness he would allow none to see outside his
quarters.

His father always told him the crown would fall upon his head unexpectedly, but T'Challa had always thought his father would still be present to advise him. But King T'Chaka was gone now, running in the fields of the Panther God. T'Challa had been so overcome with his father's death that he more or less fell into a pit of apathy, noticing nothing around him if it did not bring his father's murderer to justice.

Civil War, the world called it.

And T'Challa had been fighting alongside Anthony Stark for most of it. A man he had more or less promised himself to avoid.

Shaking his head wearily, T'Challa stood and left his quarters, moving to check on his guests.

He has heard many amazing things about the Avengers (Stopping an Alien Invasion with only six people and minor casualties anyone?) and read through the data on them that was revealed in the dismantling of S.H.I.E.L.D. but files can't hope to describe the awe of seeing Captain American in battle, or the sheer terror of the Black Widow's glare.

Or, T'Challa sighs as he thinks, the unexpected beauty of Iron Man in motion.

For all that the world seems to revile Anthony Stark, very few have anything bad to say about the armour itself, and those who do are usually the ones trying to gain control of it for mass production.

The thought of an entire military force bedecked in the crimson and gold sends an unexpected shudder down his spine. Yes, the destructive potential is terrifying to consider, but truly it would be a dance of death and chaos.

Arriving at the rooms the Ex-Avengers are located, T'Challa breathes deeply before entering.

Clint Barton and Scott Lang, both noted as devoted fathers, have taken to providing Wanda Maximoff with as best an education as they can, Lang teaching the more scientific studies and Barton the more free subjects, though Barton is in charge of mathematics without contention. Maximoff is taking to her studies very well given that she missed most standard schooling.

Natasha Romanoff turned up in Wakanda a few days earlier, and was currently talking with Sam Wilson, trying to bring order to her thoughts.

With James Barnes in cryo, Steve Rogers has taken to drawing near obsessively. His work is brilliant, of that there is no doubt, and he appears to be using it as a form of self-help, but T'Challa has often found himself looking over the images, unable to fathom what they... represent? Mean? Idealise?

Take Rogers last piece; a young Anthony Stark -very young- holding the hand of Iron Man's gauntlet in his left, and a woman's pearls cradled in a rocks whiskey glass in his right.

The piece before that had been of the Avengers as a team in battle, working together as they had during the Battle of New York.

T'Challa's eyes glance over them all and he can't help but remember the vicious words they have all at some point lashed at Anthony Stark.

"All he cares for is power and money! How many more people must I lose before he is satisfied?!"
"Stark Industries is supposed to represent a future of equality right? Starks rules ensured that even though I was qualified and recognised as non-violent, my application was dumped out of hand."

"He always has to be right, always has to have the last word, no matter who he's bulldozing to get it."

"Once he's out of the suit, Stark is a man of vice and indulgence, and it never ends well when he tries to combine the two personas."

"He can lie with his whole face, make you believe he feels guilty about what he's done, but he hasn't changed a single bit."

"He can't ever just shut up and follow orders, he always has to challenge everything just because he can."

A throat being cleared brings T'Challa back to the moment, seeing Shuri has entered the room.

"You extended an invitation to the world to have meetings with corporations to learn from and work with each other did you not brother?"

He nods, as he most certainly did, and notes the Ex-Avengers have stopped their tasks and are listening in.

"It is good that you remember, seeing as you have a meeting in fifteen minutes to prepare for."

Walking swiftly back to his quarters, Shuri at his side and the others resuming their activities, T'Challa breathes deeply, seeking the calm of the panther to prepare him for his duties. Shuri keeps talking.

"You don't have to wear a full suit -in fact it would be better if you didn't, just slacks and a dress shirt- and it is imperative that you do not raise your voice at any time."

As he pulls on his shirt, T'Challa sends a confused look at his sister, wondering why she felt the need for that specific instruction.

"You are meeting with Virginia Potts, brother, the CEO of Stark Industries."

T'Challa's head finds its way to his hands.

Virginia Potts is a woman who is spoken of in awe.

A woman who became CEO of one of the worlds largest business through her merits as a worker as opposed to looks or who she slept with. A woman who was able to ride herd on the insanity that was Anthony Stark. A woman who refused to relinquish her position after her relationship with Anthony Stark was ended.

She is a woman who demands respect because by damn she has earned it.

T'Challa admits privately to Shuri that he may be just a little afraid of her.

"Ms Potts, welcome to Wakanda. I am King T'Challa, and I apologize for making you wait."

Ms Potts smiles as she shakes his hand.

"No apologies necessary; as a monarch I'm sure you have plenty on your shoulders as is. Let's try
and get things done swiftly, as you surely have much more urgent things to attend to."

They get to work quickly, and soon come up with the contract to fit a large-scale arc reactor in one of Wakanda's factories for study, whilst providing medical research in exchange. It is all done so efficiently, that the contract is drawn and posted to their respective lawyers to look over, in a little over two hours.

"I find myself hoping that all my upcoming meetings are dealt with so easily. You are truly a force to be reckoned with Ms Potts; Stark Industries is blessed to have you at the helm."

Ms Potts smiles at him again.

"Pepper, please, and I'm just thankful that Tony let me keep my job after I left him."

T'Challa freezes for a moment. She left Anthony Stark?

"I was under the impression that he had left you Ms- Pepper."

A sad smile this time.

"No, that's just everyone wanting to see Tony as the bad guy. He couldn't stop being Iron Man; he tried, he really did, but he is Iron Man, and it wasn't fair of me to try and make him give that part of himself up. I won't say I couldn't have chosen a better time to leave; Tony needed a lot more support during the Initial Accords than he got, but we're back to our old flow of life and I can help with keeping the politicians off his back now."

Everyone wanting to see Anthony Stark as the bad guy?

"I'm sorry your Highness, my personal life has no business here."

"No... I find myself... curious. If you would be willing to indulge me and answer a few questions about what you just said?"

Pepper looks a little doubtful, for which she can't be blamed, but she eventually gives a small nod and gestures for T'Challa to ask.

"What did you mean by everyone seeing Anthony Stark as the bad guy?"

She sighs and slumps -just a little- in her seat.

"Tony has almost always been in the spotlight. As a baby his picture was in the news as 'The Long Awaited Stark Heir'. At four, every household was whispering about the Stark prodigy. At nine, hundreds were discussing how him winning a competition was a sign that he was buying his way to victory. At eleven his face was spread across papers and TV for a sex scandal-"

"What?!"

Pepper only flinches slightly at his unexpected outburst which he apologizes for immediately before she speaks again.

"Tony lucked out on genes; Howard Stark was a handsome man, and Maria Stark of incredible beauty, and Tony got the best of both. You look at pictures of him then, and most people will feel a sliver of attraction, because he hadn't quite left the androgyny of youth.

Tony had been shipped off to boarding school at seven; the school uniforms had actually been his birthday gifts. He hadn't wanted to go, had shown no interest in the school at all before hand;
Howard Stark had made the decision for him and that was that. As most children do when forced into something they don't want, Tony acted out; refusal to do his homework, talking back to the teachers, getting into fights. Things that happen at schools the world over and don't earn a second glance from the public.

But Tony is a Stark; he's pretty much considered public property for all the privacy the world gives him.

One of his teachers aids - a young woman of twenty if I recall - decided that she was in love with him, and he obviously loved her in return. How could he not; she was young, fairly successful and to all accounts quite attractive.

Tony was eleven, surrounded by sixteen, seventeen, eighteen year olds, and nowhere near developed enough to have an interest in sex; he still thought of girls as icky. He was already at the top of his classes and slated to advance further grades, even with his misbehaviour; he was an outcast due to his age and intelligence... And He was a Stark, the Stark Heir in fact. Howard Stark was well documented for his promiscuous acts during high school; why would his son be any different?

The entire world pretty much overlooked attempted sexual assault on an eleven year old boy, because he was a Stark in high school, and boys don't get sexually assaulted."

T'Challa fought to keep his breathing even as Pepper organised her thoughts.

Eleven years old.

T'Challa had only been four, still learning how to read and how to use the bathroom alone.

"How did his parents move to help him?"

An inelegant snort precedes Pepper's answer.

"The woman was claiming Tony seduced her and then broke her heart after she agreed to sex. The media lapped it up. Howard Stark threw money at the school to keep Tony until he graduated, and the woman 'left for her own sense of safety and self worth'. Tony received no help."

Shuri placed a glass in front of each of them, something strong and colourful by the look of it. T'Challa took a mouthful, enjoying the taste and burn, while Pepper sipped at hers delicately.

"Anyway, Tony was constantly being brought up by the media; one day he's the filthy delinquent bringing shame to the family name, the next he's the greatest hope of his generation. His activities were always reported on, even when they didn't happen; at M.I.T. a news report came out about how Tony was arrested for possession of a gun and drugs, and bought his way out of sentencing. Times and dates were provided and pictures of a dark haired young man being put in the back seat of a cruiser convinced everyone that it was truth. The pictures were just of a random dark haired man, and the times and dates provided? Tony was in Italy for his mother's birthday gala. But even with the evidence provided, it was so much more sensational for the Stark Heir to be a criminal.

Working for Tony has taught me far more about the world than I could have learned anywhere else, as both his PA, his CEO and his girlfriend. And one of the first things Tony taught me?

'It doesn't matter how good or amazing of a person you are. You could be a literal saint, the next Messiah even, but it won't matter. Because people can see you, but they can't touch. You aren't like them, aren't human, if you're untouchable, but if they can reach you? They will break you. The world loves an Idol. And the only thing loved more, is watching that Idol fall.'
Tony is one of the world's favourite Idols. They adore him, they copy him, they follow his every move with rapture. Because they want to see him make a mistake. They want to see him fall. As someone so close to Tony, I became an Idol too; 'the woman on top of the world, smug in the fact that she is better than everyone else'. They watch to see me fall too, because eventually everyone does. Tony taught me how to control that fall, so that when I land, I don't break. And Tony taught me that, when I land, I need to get back up."

Another mouthful of the brandy burns down T'Challa's throat, tears threatening in the corner of his eyes.

The only thing loved more, is watching an Idol fall.

Silence reigns in the room for a good few minutes, broken only by the sounds of drinks being consumed.

Pepper clears her throat.

"Did you have any other questions your Highness?"

T'Challa bites his lip for a moment, because yes, he has more questions, but he isn't sure he wants to know the answers anymore. Taking a deep breath and releasing his lip, T'Challa asks the only question that maybe won't further wreck him emotionally.

"Do you think Anthony Stark is a good man?"

Pepper doesn't look surprised by the question, but she doesn't answer immediately. Instead she takes the final few sips of her drink and stands.

"Anthony Edward Stark was slandered as a war monger for following in Howard Stark's footsteps, then decried as an unpatriotic child for taking a new path. Anthony Edward Stark was hated for being an unloving playboy, and outright loathed for being in a committed relationship. Anthony Edward Stark was abhorred for refusing to work with the Government before being despised for capitulating. No matter what he does, he can't come out on top, so no I can't say Anthony Edward Stark is a good man.

Tony is though. The world missed out on a lot when Tony was born a Stark. Good day your Highness, my Lawyers will be in contact with yours."

Giving a polite half bow to the Wakandan Royals, Pepper left the room, shoulders back, chin up, every inch of her demanding respect.

"I agree with you brother."

T'Challa's eyes meet Shuri's after the door is firmly closed, an eyebrow raised in question.

"Pepper Potts is indeed a woman to be afraid of."

Three months after the meeting with the Stark Industries CEO, and one after the arc reactor was installed and research exchanged, T'Challa finds himself once more standing before the U.N.

The meeting today is in regards to the trial of one General Thaddeus Ross, who broke the Accords and has been found guilty of breaking many human rights. T'Challa finds himself watching Anthony Stark as he is called to stand as witness.
"Please Mr Stark, tell us why you believe General Ross, a recognised military man of near impeccable record, has ever been involved in human experimentation."

Ross' Lawyer has an aggravating drawl, no doubt designed to get peoples hackles up, that is just this side of sceptical to infuriate anyone. Anthony Stark is pretty much the only person with the proof to have Ross removed from power, but if he loses his temper, as that tone of voice is aiming for, than it won't matter one whit.

But Anthony Stark is a born showman, a predator who knows how to ignore his own discomfort while going in for the kill.

"Doctor Robert Bruce Banner."

Almost before the name has finished leaving his mouth, Ross has leapt from his seat and is storming forwards in an attack, knocking out the nearest security guard; it takes three burly security guards to hold him down and shackle him.

The rest of a trial is a blur and merely a set of formalities after that. Ross is done after an act of violence in an international trial.

T'Challa notices that Anthony Stark does not smile, or look even remotely smug.

He just looks tired.

Once the trial is finished, and the crowd of paparazzi thinned to follow Ross' journey to a holding cell, T'Challa approaches Anthony Stark.

He can just barely perceive Anthony Stark straightening his shoulders and masking his exhaustion when the man notices him.

"What can I do for you Felix?"

Ignoring the name, T'Challa takes a breath and speaks.

"Anthony Stark. You once taught Pepper Potts that the only thing the world loves more than an Idol, is watching the Idol fall."

Anthony Stark's full attention is on him, and by the Panther God is it a humbling experience; to have such focus and intensity directed solely at him, to have the complete consideration of a man said to run on no less than six individual lines of thought.

"Maybe I just haven't known to look, but I have yet to see you fall, Anthony Stark. You have taught others; might you perhaps teach me?"

T'Challa was born a Prince, and raised to be King, but Anthony Stark was born and raised to be a Stark.

And Starks don't fall easily.

"I could teach you everything Snaggle Puss. But it doesn't mean a thing, won't matter at all, if you're not willing to learn."

Anthony Stark slides a package to T'Challa's side and turns to leave, pulling out his sunglasses and sliding them over his eyes.

"For the Little Lost Ones. I'll know if they get them. And should they get them, I'm called Tony."
A final glance over his shoulder.

"If you manage to learn, T'Challa, there are a great many things I can teach you."

And then he is gone, winding and weaving his way through the crowd with not a soul noticing he was there.

'Curiosity killed the Cat', T'Challa thinks, looking at the package left for the Ex-Avengers.

'But', as a savage grin curls his lips, 'Satisfaction brought it back.'

If nothing else, learning about Tony would be a most satisfying venture.

'Let the Hunt begin.'

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Arranged Affections Part I

Chapter Summary

For Zaria

After finding out that Tony's affections are more for his own gender than the fairer
sex, Howard Stark made sure that his son's partner would bring as little shame to the
Stark name as possible. A prince should do.

Slight homophobia, elitism, slight skewing of dates (T'Challa is again younger than
Tony but only by two or three years), and a great big chunk of parental neglect. Also I
completely fake a President, because of slander or something. Better safe than
someone trying to sue me.
There will at some point be a follow up to this. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's no secret that the men in the Stark Line are obsessive.

Christopher Simon Stark was an avid collector of coins; his collection was donated after his death
and contained over three hundred pieces.

Simon Howard Stark collected tie pins, despite never wearing them; they were auctioned off after he passed.

Howard Anthony Walter Stark was a Captain America Fan; every movie, every poster, every knick
knack and collectible, Howard Stark had them all, and travelled to the Arctic twice yearly to search
for the crowning piece, Captain Steven Grant Rogers, himself.

After returning from yet another bitter failure to find his friend, Howard, in a very rare show of
consideration, decided to look in on his son.

Anthony Edward Stark collected small broken machines so he could fix them. At first Howard had
scoffed, because 'what a waste of time that will be', but more or less let it happen, because Starks
never really chose their obsessions, they just turned up, and could change over time; Howard had
originally been something of a military buff before Project: Rebirth.

Having been informed by the staff that his son was home for School Break, Howard went to his
son's room and opened the door.

A brief flutter of swearing greeted him, along with the sight of his son hastily yanking the cover of
his bed over himself to preserve his dignity.

"What the hell?! Did you forget how to knock or something?!!"

Howard ignored the shouts, knowing that, while he should have announced his presence so as to
give his son the chance to be decent, the door could have just as easily locked to prevent anyone
from wandering in on his sons more... physical self-indulgences.
He stated as much to Anthony, and received a snort in return.

"Why would I lock the door when no-one comes this way? The staff don't touch this wing when I'm present, Mum's always busy with this charity or that function, and this is the first time you've even looked at me in three years. Why bother locking the door?"

Howard forced himself to keep his breathing slow and even.

Three years? Anthony thought his father hadn't looked at him in three years? Preposterous; he looked at his son plenty, Anthony was always bugging him down in the workshop to look at one of the doo-dads he'd pieced together. Anthony scoffed at the information.

"Think again Howard; I haven't gone near your workshop since you sent me to Huntington's Boarding School for the Elite at seven. Do you even know how old I am now?"

It should have told Howard something when, no; he didn't know his only child's age. It should have told Howard something when his child addressed him by name not title.

"I'm sixteen, nearly seventeen. That's nearly ten years Howard; guess saying three was being optimistic."

It should have told Howard something.

But it didn't.

It couldn't; Howard's eyes had locked onto something that drowned the rest of the world out. Something that had him still as stone with a whirling mass of conflicting emotions in his head.

It wasn't a girly magazine Anthony had be deriving his pleasure from. Or at least, not a magazine with girls in it.

Spread blatantly across the two pages were men covered by little more than their shorts, posing languidly and sprawled, inviting the viewer to trail their gaze across flat chests and muscled limbs.

Howard's breathing was no longer calm, and a flare of rage, white-hot and burning, pulsed through him.

Anthony was... no, a glance around the room showed evidence of a normal young man. How could his son be a-a queer?! There were signs weren't there? Things that Anthony should have been doing that showed his predilection, that Howard could have put a stop to this tomfoolery and corrected his son's behaviour?

How was the Stark Legacy to continue if Anthony didn't get married and have a son?

Anthony had, in fact, realised where his father's gaze had fallen, sighed and moved to get dressed, picking up the magazine and putting it away while Howard had an internal meltdown. He was actually leaving the room with his wallet and keys by the time Howard came back to himself.

"Where are you going Anthony?! We need to fix this and-"

"There is nothing to fix Howard. I am attracted to men. Big deal, grow up."

"Big deal?! This is a very big deal Anthony! You would have the Stark name die out because you-you-"

Anthony sighed again and kept walking down the hall, Howard following him as he fought to
bring his words from his throat.

"If I want to 'keep the name alive' all I need to do is adopt a kid and BOOM! Stark Heir."

Howard's rage was clawing itself higher and higher inside of him, Anthony's callous disregard to the superiority of the Stark genes a mockery he could not let stand. But before Howard could speak another word, they had reached the front door to the estate, and Anthony spoke a single sentence before closing the door behind him.

"And hell, maybe that way -having a child that isn't of my blood- I won't end up forgetting that they exist outside of my anger."

A month later, sitting in his study, nursing a glass of bourbon, Howard ran through his actions yet again, looking for any point of error.

Any attempts made to sway Anthony to the attractions of the female populace had been met with disdain at best and outright misbehaviour at worst. Howard was still working to placate the CEO of Infinity Metals for the stunt Anthony pulled with a garden hose, a rubber chicken, and nine pounds of guacamole.

Trying to speak to Maria about the problem was hopeless; She would sit through him explaining the situation only to look up when he finished and ask him when he got home, before leaving without an answer because she was late for a meeting with the Head of a Charity. He loved the woman, truly, or at least held her in the highest affection, but that little scenario had happened seven times. Eight if you count the time he had tried to discuss it as they were preparing for bed, but she went through her routine without even noticing his presence before she went to sleep.

Talks with the staff had revealed they all knew of Anthony's... tastes but as the boy was off at M.I.T. for most of the year (and when the hell had Anthony started at college? Surely he would have been informed about that, right?) they didn't really have anything to say about it, especially since they confirmed that 'yes, while the young Master is home we don't enter his wing. You made it quite clear first holidays back from Huntington's sir, that you would not have him spoiled and unable to look after himself when he returned, until you said otherwise.'

Taking a bracing mouthful of the bourbon, Howard looked to the small card on his desk, the elegant script curling across the page silently promising either his salvation or damnation, depending on how the evening would proceed.

To the Etiolated House of Stark,

It is to the Eternal Honour of the Nonpareil House of Hammer, that we have been chosen, by the Esteemed President Himself, to be Hosts of this Years Political Gala. We, of the Inimitable House of Hammer, Have Magnanimously Decided that You, of the Typic House of Stark, Are Certainly to be Upon the Invitees List. We ask for Cordial Behaviour in Our Resplendent Home, and that, For the Good Impressions the U.S. Wishes Presented to Our Foreign Dignitaries, All Must be
Suitably Attired in Full Suit and Dress. We, of the Paramount House of Hammer, Do hope to See You of the Bromidic House of Stark in Attendance.

With the Good Wishes of the Transcendent House of Hammer.

Justin R. Hammer Sr. & Sasha M. Hammer.

Whatever was President Gordon thinking? The Hammer family was full of the most pretentious and uncouth souls Howard had ever had the misfortune to encounter. Justin Sr. was an incompetent grandstand, constantly trying to muscle his way into the weapons business, but couldn't be bothered to finish the designs, because he had people for that. And his wife Sasha was practically copying Maria, trying to one up his lovely wife in philanthropy, but constantly giving money to well known corrupt organisations. Not to mention the putrescent brat of a son Justin Jr. Both elder Hammers were also very focused on appearance; at first glance, the invitation was quite fancy and sophisticated, but Howard knew how to use a dictionary, and so was well aware to the slights to his family name.

But Howard could use this. After the month of Anthony's relentlessness, Howard had come the conclusion that there was only one way to end this without have the Stark name dragged through the mud.

Wed Anthony off to a Foreign Personage of good standing.

Denmark had just that year decided to recognise registered same-sex relationships, and Greece was well known for having a more... open policy on personal relationships.

If Howard could convince someone with enough prestige to agree to a Political Union with Anthony, there would be little to taint the Stark name, and Howard could needle Maria, who would in turn pester Anthony on the importance of grandchildren. Eventually Anthony would capitulate to pay for a surrogate, and his son would be given the Stark name and all would be well.

Yes it would be easier if Anthony would just cooperate and bed a woman; Howard would be understanding enough to allow the boy to be a bastard, just so long as Anthony had an heir, but Anthony was a stubborn child, and refused to listen to reason, so Howard would do as he must.

Finishing his drink, Howard rose to corral his son into the suit his mother had chosen for the night.

The evening hadn't been going well.

First of all, Howard had had to interact with Hammer Sr. and wife, which was always a miserable affair.

Then he'd had to circuit the room, shaking hands and fake laughs and old stories, with business partners, investors and of course the dignitaries themselves, which was tedious and too short a time for him to actually poke and prod at potential partners for his son.

Then he'd had to check up on Maria, who had been networking with the wives present and Anthony, who had been surrounded by the younger children attending with their parents, telling nonsense stories and jokes. Aside from the pointlessness of Anthony's actions, this wasn't bad per
se, it just didn't do anything to help Howard's mood, because while Anthony's behaviour was gathering a good deal of positive attention, it was all from the elder daughters in the room, meaning Anthony would completely ignore it.

Howard had finally been able to talk to the visitors properly, but most of them were too old for Anthony to wed without causing scandal at the age difference, which Howard refused to let happen to the Stark name. The few that were of suitable age were either married, or completely normal single heterosexual men.

The band (some awful jazz-wannabes that didn't know how to appreciate the genre) were striking up another 'reimagining' of a classic, when Howard happened to catch the tail end of a certain conversation.

"-well and good, but we believe that a person's soul seeks out the one that will complete it regardless of gender. Take my son here for example; T'Challa, if you would?"

As Howard watched the African smile at his son, the young man smiled in return before facing the other person in the conversation.

"I found, early on in puberty, that I felt more comfortable in the company of men than women. That is not to say that I felt uncomfortable around women; just that I find more pleasure with my own gender."

Howard felt a grin curl his lips as the conversation continued. The young man, T'Challa if he'd heard correctly, was the best candidate so far; the son of a dignitary as opposed to holding the job himself, but he was obviously held in high esteem by his father, so would hold excellent references. Howard carefully made his way to the two men, making it look as though his path had naturally led him there. By the time he was close enough to speak, the conversation had ended, and the other speaker gone.

Donning the smile that dazzled the media, Howard stuck out his hand.

"I don't believe we met yet tonight; Howard Stark."

Though leery of the Stark name, Howard had been able to more or less win T'Chaka and T'Challa's grudging acceptance.

Starting the conversation with gentle questions about how they were liking the U.S.A, Howard eventually dipped into more important information, though no less gently, and never appearing as a bid for insider information; a mild complaint about the rain New York had seen for the past few days had been replied with how they never saw such chilling rain in their home; a half-joke about how the Hammer's were spending their money on lousy decorators re-joined by how they came upon the money in the first place as Hammer Tech was not doing well.

A quip of how Anthony was spending his time near mothering the youngest attendees was met with an interested father and son's searching eyes.

Howard suppressed the smug grin he felt on his lips and pointed Anthony out to the men.

By this point, Anthony had lost his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and his hair had lost any sense of order, instead ruffled like a common vagabonds from all the times the children, and Anthony himself, had run hands through it.

Howard inwardly scowled at how unkempt his son appeared and prepared to offer an excuse when
the young man -T'Challa, not Anthony- bowed politely and made a bee-line to the Stark Heir. T'Chaka chuckled.

"Ah, it would seem your son has managed to ensnare mine. I have yet to see T'Challa react so strongly to another. I believe this will be most fortuitous."

"Fortuitous, you say?"

T'Chaka tempered his smile somewhat before returning his gaze to Howard, though it continued to glance back.

"Our people are believers that souls seek out the ones to complete them regardless of gender," T'Chaka repeated the spiel that had first caught Howard's attention. "And that when we find the perfect soul, the person that will warm our hearts until the end of our days, nothing will be able to keep us from them; we will be pulled towards them, and woe to all who stand in the way. I understand that this is an unusual, and rather heavy idea for Americans though."

T'Chaka's final statement was no doubt meant to placate a father who was over-protective of his son, but Howard was merely filled with glee. T'Challa would want to keep Anthony, would likely near fight for it; Howard just needed to make T'Chaka think this was his idea.

Howard uttered a low laugh.

"I wish your boy luck then; Anthony has quite the standards, and won't settle for anything. T'Challa has his work cut out for him."

T'Chaka's smile returned, with just a hint of triumph to it, before once more focusing on their sons.

"T'Challa is a strong young man; I have no doubt that if it is Anthony's soul that calls him, I will be welcoming a new son into my family come New Years."

It was Howard's turn to smile triumphantly, now that T'Chaka was leaving to join T'Challa and Anthony.

Tonight wasn't such a failure after all.

T'Challa and T'Chaka spoke with Anthony for nearly two hours, before Maria had decided it was time to leave. Howard exchanged contact information with T'Chaka as the boys said their farewells, T'Challa's rather besotted and Anthony's actually polite.

Two months later found Anthony back at school and Howard driving himself and Maria in the early evening. He was feeling a few final pieces of self-satisfaction before he made the delivery to S.H.I.E.L.D.

T'Chaka had just that morning signed the final form for a Political Union between T'Challa and Anthony. As soon as T'Challa, the younger of the two, turned twenty-five, they would be wed. T'Chaka had revealed that he was the King of Wakanda during their discussions, which had filled Howard with glee at the thought of Anthony getting Stark Industries access to Vibranium, and had removed the last smidgen of doubt as to whether Howard's plan would keep the Stark name safe.

Anthony would be with a prince and then king. No one would be able to claim Anthony as a disgrace, and the Wakandan Royal family didn't have last names. Everything was perfect.
Howard pulled the car round the corner, only to spot a man standing in the middle of the road.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Nom de Plume

Chapter Summary

For Risachi

Tony -The Mechanic- and T'Challa -The Panther- are penpals for years; eventually, they meet.

Just imagine their voices. It's beautiful.
Played with the idea that the Avengers mostly see Tony as a sponsor as opposed to a team mate.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was an assignment that started it, some cheesy sounding attempt to 'extend the U.S.A.'s hand of friendship to all corners of the globe' or some other sappy bullshit.

Every student at M.I.T. and participating schools the world over were to exchange as many letters as they could back-and-forth in the space of three months. The letters had to be hand-written, and the only accepted reason out of that was if both hands were disabled. Meaning if you broke your dominant hand, suck it up and use the other.

Tony was relieved to know that the students weren't expected to use their real names; Stark was known pretty much everywhere, and he didn't want to have anything he wrote in these letters sold to the rags.

Dear Unknown Person also suckered into this 'Creative Writing Task',

Over the course of the next three months, you are unfortunately going to be stuck with my unusual writing style. Well, I say unusual, because apparently it isn't 'good form' to write the way you speak, which seems stupid to me; because sometimes as your speaking you will say something absolutely brilliant which has little to do with what you're saying otherwise, but damn if you won't retrace the train of thought which led to it. It's like purposefully ignoring half of the way a person thinks, and part of this task is to get the know one another right?

Well I assume it is, I kinda started ignoring the teacher about a third of the way in; she drones, like a lot, and has the weirdest fascination with using cookie jar analogies that ignore how people actually eat cookies. "You want the cookies at the top of the jar, not the crummy chunks at the bottom." I'm sorry, but who the hell ignores the cookie chunks at the bottom of the jar?! They are perfect for nibbles, and putting on ice cream! And depending on the type of cookie, they are sometimes the most flavoured pieces! Chocolate Chip Forever!

I made a robot. Well, he's sorta a robot, but not one of those humanoid looking things in movies or comics. I call him Dum-E, and he's kinda a glorified arm on wheels; holds stuff for me in the shop, usually drops it, gives me puppy dog eyes EVEN THOUGH I GAVE HIM NO EYES ONLY A CAMERA!!! He's in the timeout corner right now.
He knows what he did.

Oh yeah, I'm in the M.I.T mechanics and engineering course, so that's why I made Dum-E, useless as he may be.

Man, my hand is already starting to cramp. This is actually the second letter I started writing, but Teacher-Drones-a-Lot decided to read the first one and spent, like, fifteen minutes complaining about how big my handwriting was; she said it looked like I was still using 'Grade One letters' due to the size and really what? Everyone has a unique way of writing Lady, sure most people end up really shrinking their letter size, but I didn't! Big Deal, Grow a Pair!

Yeah, I've got a chip on my shoulder; fight me.

Man I could use some pizza; do they have pizza where you live? If not your life sucks, pizza is awesome and one of the two kings of fast food, met as equal only by the cheeseburger. I could use a cheeseburger too, this is an excellent plan, food is always an excellent plan, okay let's do this; cheeseburger, pizza then letter whatchamit.

Yeah sorry for the slight grease stains, but pizza and cheeseburger.

That's all I can be bothered to write, so yeah I assume I'll hear from you soon.

Why is it 'hear from you' when I'll be reading your letter, not listening to you speak? You won't be saying anything for me to hear; that saying is stupid and makes no sense, I disavow any knowledge of having used it or that it even exists, what are you talking about, oh hey pizza.

Sorry for another grease stain, but it's paper, you'll live. Unless you are allergic to grease, in which case, sorry you are now dying/dead.

The Mechanic you are forced to peripherally interact with.

About a week after Tony had sent his letter, a response arrived in a pretty cream envelope.

To the Greatly Amusing Mechanic,

Though I felt some trepidation towards the idea of this assignment, after having read your missive, I can only look forward to what the future months hold.

I find myself quite charmed by the way you write; as you say, we are to get to know each other, and part of that would be learning how the other thinks; not an easy task in writing if you are heavily editing your words. And though I can see how you have forced yourself to write smaller letters, it is obvious how the size interferes with the fluidness of your pen, so I encourage you to resume using your 'Grade One letters', as it matters not to me the amount of space they take up.

I am also in agreement with you on the cookie matter, both their location in a jar, and on Chocolate Chip Forever.

You speak of Dum-E as sentient; along with building a robot, did you perhaps dabble in artificial intelligence? The way you describe Dum-E as 'him' and 'Knowing what he has done' certainly implies it, and most certainly sounds as though you succeeded, though with the name Dum-E, probably not to the extent you had hoped.

I have a passing knowledge of robotics, as it is not my chosen area of study, but I can only imagine the amount of time and effort you must have put into him, even if Dum-E is merely a 'glorified arm
on wheels'.

I am at home for the moment, but I am an exchange student at Cambridge. My studies are rather broad, covering most of the sciences, though my Father was most insistent that I not neglect the more 'artistic' pursuits. As such, I am also taking a sculpting course. My last project was Panthera pardus, Panthera onca. I am rather proud of how it turned out.

We do not have available fast-food pizza at my home, but I have grown most fond of it at school, so have been making it myself. It is not quite the same, I admit, but I enjoy the results all the same. And yes, thanks to your words, I had to go and make one because that truly was an excellent plan.

I find myself glad to be home, both for the warmth you can find nowhere else, and because I have missed spending time with my little sister and parents. I am still not used to being unable to interact with them as I please, and I fear after my break is over, it will be even harder for me to be at Cambridge. Do you have any siblings? You might be able to relate.

Speaking of, she has decided it is time for me to give her my attention, so I will end the letter here.

I look forward to when we next share words. Sounds better than that which shall not be mentioned, yes?

The Panther,

Well then, looks like Tony got paired with an interesting fellow.

The three months flew by, and had it not been for his Panther asking for the letters to continue being exchanged, Tony would have felt sad the assignment was over.

Despite Tony's disdain for archaic practices, the exchange continued on as hand written letters and was always back and forward, no queue jumping. The pair had set up email addresses for sharing important news when it wasn't their turn for the letters, but it wasn't used much.

As they grew and graduated, the letters unfortunately lost their frequency; when Tony took over Stark Industries, he had been so busy, he couldn't send his Panther a proper letter for four months only able to give brief snatches of conversation online.

TheMechanic@MIT.com

Sent 12:08pm 05/16/93

I am so close to stabbing someone! I kid you not, a jerk from the meeting that just finished followed me into the bathroom to talk to me about his proposal that had been denied! I am seriously not even allowed to shit in private anymore!

ThePanther@CUE.net

Sent 01:52pm 05/16/93

That is just monstrous my friend. While being so trusted as to have your opinion sought out is a flattery, that is no excuse to behave as this man did. I have just started working under my father's guidance, but nothing like that has happened to me. Stay strong My Mechanic, and report this man for unprofessional behaviour if nothing else! Who knows who else he has done that to?

His Panther understood and though in a different boat, also ended up writing his complaints to
Tony outside of their letters.

ThePanther@CUE.net

Sent 08:24am 04/30/94

My father's adviser is a wise man; he has lived through much and learned even more, but he refuses to listen to reason! I do not care that I am of marriageable age; I have far too much to do to go looking for a partner, and he won't listen when I tell him that I am just as interested in men! He is stuck in the old ways, and even though there are ways besides marriage that I could have a child, he still argues against it!

TheMechanic@MIT.com

Sent 08:47am 04/30/94

I know the feeling; 'there is nothing proper or respectable about being a father without at least a ring on your finger, even if the mother is gone; it sends a bad message'. Please, as if it's anyone else's business. And even more so your choice of partner. You're choosing someone to stick by and be stuck by you forever right? So make it the person you care for most regardless of if they have a dick or boobs! I mean, your dad doesn't fuss about your choices right? So why can't his adviser trust him, if not you?

ThePanther@CUE.net

Sent 09:13am 04/30/94

Oh to read those words from you my friend! My father has been most supportive of my interests ever since I first brought them to his attention, and after showing him your last message, took your advice and spoke to his adviser! Thank you my Mechanic, truly!

His Panther was so elegant in writing. Many times, Tony had thought of bringing up the idea of the two meeting, getting to actually speak to his Panther and discover if that eloquence was natural in his speech.

But he was Tony Stark.

Even if his Panther was as wonderful a human as their exchanges proclaimed, being Tony Stark would break anything they once shared. Tony was constantly hounded by the paparazzi, the Board of Directors, the Shareholders, fans and enemies. Honestly, as the years passed, Tony wondered how he was still a even semi-functioning human being.

Though he did drink, it was nowhere near the amount the media claimed; hadn't been after the second time he'd needed his stomach pumped (and to be fair, the first time he had only had two drinks, but whatever the booze was gave him pretty severe food poisoning so didn't really count) and he had shared the story with his Panther, who had responded with a heartfelt plea for Tony to take better care of himself.

Again, despite what the media reported, Tony had never done recreational drugs aside from trying marijuana once at sixteen. Turns out he was allergic, so he never tried again, and didn't want to risk trying anything else.

And yes, Tony had slept with quite a few woman (and just as many men) he wasn't the STD riddled slut that sold the papers though. Tony had always been extremely careful with keeping himself clean -would have tests done after every encounter just to be sure- and was adamant about safe-sex
with all his partners (he also did not have the forty plus children born out of wedlock, thank you very much.) and rarely ever slept with a person who was drunk. No, Tony often found himself in the company of the seriously inebriated and took them home to sleep it off; they just all assumed that there had been sex and since it was Tony Stark, it must have been amazing.

Tony hated his life sometimes.

Like during Afghanistan. Tony really hated his life during Afghanistan.

After those gruelling three months, and the aftermath of Obi-Stane's betrayal, Tony sat before his holo-display, psyching himself up to log into the Mechanics email page.

Three months with nothing to his Panther...

Would they even want to talk to him now or had they given the Mechanic as gone?

"Only one way to find out Anthony." He muttered to himself, grateful that J.A.R.V.I.S. kept any commentary to himself.

72 Unread Messages.

Tony felt his eyes moisten as he saw that the last message was only hours old. Not yet having the bravery to look at what could possibly have been his Panthers final message Tony read from the oldest message all the way through the list.

I may have felt sorry for him, but it was the third time that week he had ignored lab protocol so we had to let him go. What would you have done my friend? You always seem to know how best to solve conflicts like this.

I haven't read anything from you for a while; have things been busy for you? Just remember to take care of yourself; I worry sometimes that you are constantly running on fumes.

It has been three weeks, My Mechanic, are you alright? Please talk to me my friend; is there anything I can do to help?

Where are you? Please, can you talk to me?

The messages grew shorter and shorter, but no less desperate, until they just repeated the same line over and over.

Please be alive.

Tony swallowed the fear in his throat and opened the last message.

I need you.

The air punching out of his lungs, Tony let a few of those scarce Stark tears tumble down his cheeks.

Even if it was just one person, Tony had been missed as a friend.

Tony breathed as deeply as he could with his emotions running haywire and the arc reactor sitting heavy in his chest, before he sent a message of his own.
The letters had stopped.

Though Tony kept every single one he had received, neither he nor his Panther could bear after those three months to not have the near immediate responses when they wrote to each other. Tony's Panther was the only one aside from Pepper, Rhodey, Happy and S.H.I.E.L.D. to know about Stane's betrayal and how he tried to kill Tony, though Tony was careful never to reveal names.

S.H.I.E.L.D. would no doubt hunt his Panther down if they knew about him, which was why Tony had connected his M.I.T. email strictly to a transportable holo-panel he could carry with him. It was the best protection he could give, seeing as not even Rhodey remembered the letter exchange anymore.

Tony was man enough to admit that he was more than a little dependant on the words of his Panther, and he was constantly aware of his tech's presence in his pocket. Every time it buzzed to announce a new message, Tony would find some way to look at it and respond, so as to never let his Panther suffer through the uncertainty he had again.

For a precious few months, Tony's world started righting itself. SI was doing well, Pepper and Happy had hooked up, Being Iron Man was awesome, and he spoke to his Panther several times over the day.

Then his arc reactor decided it wanted to kill him.

Tony tried so many times to tell those he cared for, but each time, the words just wouldn't come. Every time he even glanced at the holo-panel, his shredded heart twisted just a little bit more at the remembrance of those fearful, begging words.

Please be alive.

But no matter how he tried to phrase it, Tony couldn't write the words; he couldn't put his Panther through that grief.

Tony Stark was already heading to hell; what was one more failure to the list?

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Hey, you remember how I told you that some leather fetishist pirate broke into my house? Turns out he used to work with my old man, and wanted to see if I was 'keeping up the legacy' before he gave me some of my father's belongings.

No.

So, as it turns out, I was maybe, kinda, just a little bit dying for the last couple of months.

No.

I am Iron Man.

NO!

Tony dropped the holo-panel onto his desk before kicking away, the wheels of the chair taking him to rest against the bar from the particle accelerator.

None of those messages was adequate, let alone suitable, for him to apologise and explain to his
Panther. They all sounded so... shallow. Tony had already apologised to Pepper, Happy and Rhodey about the screw up he made in regards to the Paladium Poisoning, and they were his closest friends; why was it so much harder to tell his Panther?

"Perhaps because you feel more than friendship for him Sir."

J.A.R.V.I.S.'s voice caused Tony to look at the AI's nearest camera.

"What do you mean J?"

Both man and AI were aware that Tony already knew the answer, but hearing the AI explain what and how he had come to a given conclusion had always calmed Tony, so the electronic butler indulged him.

"You are always happier after communicating with the Panther Sir, and will often take the pieces of advice that he extends. Although it aggravates Miss Potts, you have settled into a fairly reliable sleeping pattern, with around five hours a night, that more or less matches the calculated time zone of the Panther, so you can respond to any messages he sends you promptly. And his reaction Sir, is the one you fear most of all. Ergo, you are 'in it deep' Sir."

Tony chuckled, a small, low little sound and pushed against the pipe, propelling himself back to his desk.

"So proud of you kid. No matter what else I may say, I am so very proud of you."

"If there is anything in me to be proud of Sir, it is that which I have learned from my father's guidance."

Tony felt his lip tremble as he once more focused on the holo-panel.

*Sorry doesn't begin to cut my behaviour lately, but I, at the very least, can tell you what was going through my head. I told you how, during those three months, I got a pacemaker of sorts?*

Aliens.

Because that was his life now apparently.

Sure, Tony could easily see how the sheer presence of a being like Thor could lead people of simpler knowledge into believing him a god, and it sure as hell explained a lot, but still aliens.

At least by thinking of Goldie Locks and Rudolph as aliens he wasn't forced into the squickiness of magic, because that was just no.

*I just met a guy claiming to be the Norse god of Thunder. I apparently need to help fix the mess his brother made. Why is this a thing?*

Sending off the harmless little complaints to his Panther between writing the coding for the tracking algorithm and nerding out with Bruce was helping Tony's focus immensely. Especially with his Panther's replies.

*You are the Mechanic. Fixing things is what you do, and you strive to be among the best; who better to fix what needs fixing?*

It made warmth bloom in Tony's chest.
"He made it personal."

"That's not the point."

"That IS the point. That's Loki's point! He hit us all right where we live. Why?"

"To tear us apart."

"Yeah, divide and conquer is great, but he knows he has to take us out to win, right? THAT'S what he wants. He wants to beat us, he wants to be seen doing it. He wants an audience."

"Right. I caught his act at Stuttgart."

"Yeah, that was just previews. This is - this is opening night. And Loki, he's a full-tilt diva, right? He wants flowers, he wants parades. He wants a monument built to the skies with his name plastered... Son of a bitch."

Something big has come up and needs my total attention, so I may not respond for a few hours.

Understood my friend. May the matter be dealt with swiftly.

"Shall I compose a message for the Panther Sir?"

"Yeah, yeah that sounds good J. How about Bless your heart, for I held it in my hands a short time. Bless your hands, for they'll forever hold mine? I'm feeling poetic facing my end."

"The message is sent Sir. I do believe it a poignant farewell."

"Thanks J. Hey, give Pepper a ring for me would you?"

My Friend, I easily say the same to you. You have held my heart for far more than a short time. May I ask what prompted such a message?

My Friend, is everything alright? Is the task you spoke of arduous?

My Mechanic, are you okay? You are not in danger are you?

Please answer, My Mechanic!

Please be alive.

I need you.

I need you too.

I can't sleep anymore. It drives my boss round the bend, but I close my eyes and I'm back in New York. The only way I can get any rest is by working to exhaustion.

Oh My Mechanic, is there anything I can do to aid you? It pains me that I cannot be by your side to offer you comfort, but if there is anything I can do, merely tell me and it shall be done!

Tell me again the story of how you and your sister fought over a mask?
Good news from the doctors my Panther; I don't need the pacemaker anymore. It's been taken out and everything. And it's believed that with it gone, I may be able to rest some more.

It gladdens my heart to hear that you are of such health! After the trying few days you have had, it is wonderful to hear such news.

Yeah, sorry for constantly pestering you like that; I know you've got a lot of stuff to do.

Oh My Mechanic, even if I were only to receive complaints and grievances from your messages, I would still delight in that you find solace in me. And I know that I have sent many the negative statement to you as well, and you try to comfort me in my times of strife as well. The only difference is that fewer people seem set to try and kill me.

Yeah, I'm really easy to hate face-to-face.

Are you sure you do not want us to meet, My Mechanic?

Half of the allure is the mystery. But yeah, if we actually met, I don't think we'd be able to continue on. And I don't want to risk losing you My Panther.

I do not want to lose you either, My Mechanic. I need you.

I need you too.

"So you were facing down three, I repeat, THREE helicarriers that have been upgraded by me, and you don't call me in?! Given the fact that I have stated openly that I don't trust S.H.I.E.L.D. do you really believe I wouldn't have snuck in an off switch?! Had I been told this was happening, I could have prevented the carriers from ever leaving the tarmac!"

"We didn't know who to trust Stark, leave it! Any one could have been a HYDRA plant! We got them shut down, that's all that matters."

"That and the millions of dollars worth of property damage and the dozens of GOOD S.H.I.E.L.D. agents who just got their covers blown by you throwing everything on the net Steve! As it is, working with Hill, we've only managed to recover a third of them! And you trusted a perfect stranger to help you while I don't even get a heads up?!"

"What's done is done Stark; not everything is about you. I'm heading out with Sam tomorrow; Nat picked up some chatter that might lead us to Bucky, and Clint's picking up Bruce from the airport early."

What does it say about me that my team members call each other by name but me by my family? Hell, they're even calling the newest guy by name. Maybe I'm just being childish or something, but it just doesn't feel... fair, I guess.

It most certainly is not fair My Mechanic. That sounds like they are intentionally keeping you distant. What this says about you is that you are being pushed away, despite all the effort I know you have put in. I send you all my affection My Mechanic, for it sounds like this team won't share theirs. And I hope you always remember, My Mechanic, that I need you.

I need you too.
I keep trying my hardest to fix things, but I just keep messing up. People are dead because I couldn't fix things. I'm not a mechanic, I'm a monster. You don't deserve to be stuck listening to me, so I guess... I guess this is me saying goodbye.

NO! Please My Mechanic, do not push me away! Talk to me, we can figure this out!

My Mechanic please respond; please do not leave me!

My Mechanic please talk to me!

Please, My Mechanic!

I need you.

I need you too.

"There will be consequences Stark!"

"Tell me something I'm unaware of Ross."

Tony gestured to Friday, cutting the call, and leaned back in his seat sighing, a hand rising to gently massage the bridge of his nose.

The pull in his chest forced him to lower his arm, the deep, red welt from the shield a painful reminder of what he'd lost.

"I'm sorry Tony, but he's my friend!"

"...So was I."

Tony sighed again. Why couldn't Steve realise that the Avengers were dangerous without having someone to answer to? Why did the man feel so certain that things should just keep on, even though the civilians of the places they fought at were all begging for them to stay away?

Why hadn't Steve told him about his parents?

"You are having deep thoughts. Is this not a good time to speak with you?"

Tony looked up, not really surprised by T'Challa's sudden appearance, not after spending months living with Natasha and sometimes Clint.

"Nah, I got time. What do you need Bagheera?"

T'Challa took a seat in front of Tony's desk. Even the simple act of sitting down was full of elegance, and made Tony long to send a message to the only one who never seemed to doubt him. But there weren't enough hours in the day to take care of everything.

"I am looking after them. Two of them expressed worry for their families however, so I was hoping you would be able to keep them safe from Ross."

Tony had already guessed that T'Challa was keeping the super-soldiers safe, it was easy to see that invitation would be extended to the rest of the team. And of course now Clint thought of his family. Scott Lang was actually luckier that he had started up a relationship with Hope Van Dyne;
she would keep Cassie under her wing and distracted from her father's absence.

But Tony was a futurist; he looked towards what could be and prepared accordingly. Or at least tried to.

Fishing a pair of phones (proper Starkphones of course, not that insult to technology that Steve had sent with that farce of a letter) from his desk drawer, he handed them to the monarch.

"Already settled in. Laura was pretty adamant that her husband be scolded, but I don't think it will have the same effect coming from anyone but her."

T'Challa looked stunned for a moment before taking the phones -one black with purple highlights, the other red with silver- and carefully tucking them into his coat pocket. He then seemed to be considering something as he looked to Tony again.

"Would you like to accompany me for lunch? A friend of mine once said that food is always an excellent plan."

Tony snickered slightly, before rising and reaching for his jacket.

"Yeah, I could go for food, that is an excellent plan. You know what? I'm craving pizza! Pizza and a cheeseburger; they are the twin kings of fast food! Let's do it!"

Tony reached the door and looked back only to see T'Challa frozen, his eyes wide and staring at Tony like he had never seen him before.

"Hey, Salem, you okay over there? Was it something I said? Was it pizza? That is a thing you have in Wakanda right? Cuz if not, like I once told someone dear to me, your life sucks. Which, given the recent events, was pretty self-evident anyway, but there is a special cruelty in the world that some people don't get the access to pizza that others enjoy and-"

Tony's words were cut off by an insistent press of lips to his own. Tony barely processed what was happening before T'Challa backed away, his hands cupping Tony's cheeks as a beautiful smile curled his lips.

"My Mechanic."

Tony's eyes widened. Only one person called him that.

"I need you."

Tony felt his eyes water as the Wakandan King drew him into a possessive hug. There was only one response to give.

"I need you too."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Ulwimi ye Uthando

Chapter Summary

For Irdax.

Tony is one of the smartest men on Earth, picking up information faster than most can understand.
How long would it take him to learn a language?

Title is (as near as I can translate using google anyway) 'Language of Love' in Xhosa, which MARVEL have used as the basis for Wakandan. Just like with Soprannomi, I won't tell you what the words in the story mean, but if you want to know, I will send you a list in a reply; typing them into google translate will make scary things happen so I don't recommend it. I reuse a few lines from an earlier prompt, because I'm honestly a little proud of them. And... I have no idea where this started wandering to before I actually filled the prompt.
Hope this satisfies hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Depending on who you ask, Anthony Edward Stark is either the Greatest Man of his Generation, or a human shaped bag of scum and greed.

Tony, as he prefers to be called, doesn't really see himself as either. No, Tony doesn't see himself as at either end of those scales,

Tony sees himself as a simple man.

Sure he may grandstand a lot, but that's all about controlling what story about him the papers will have slapped across them come morning.

No, Tony knows that he is fallible, that he is vulnerable, that he is human.

He is a surprisingly humble man; he makes the obscenely big gestures and has congratulations and thanks thrown at him, and he laps up every bit. Because when he does something small, honest and genuine, he shies away from even the kindest word. He doesn't know how to handle sincere praise. He wasn't taught how. He's a Stark though.

Stark's can fake their way through anything.

So Tony fakes his smiles for the cameras.

He fakes his promiscuity, drugs and alcohol.

He fakes his sorrow at his fathers funeral.

He fakes his inexperience in front of the Board.
He fakes his confidence to the world.

And nobody thinks to look, to actually look and see the cracks running all around his masks.

Nobody looks, because nobody wants to see.

If they see him breaking they may feel tempted to fix the problem, to make it better, but they can't do that; Tony Stark is at the top of his game, the top of the world, an Idol of no refute.

The only thing the world loves more, is watching an Idol fall.

Tony has fallen many times, just like everyone will eventually. The difference is Tony gets back up.

He pushes himself back to his feet, no matter the hurt and sadness that wells inside; one foot in front of the other until he has the momentum to run again; run from the faceless voices and hands trying to push him to the ground once more.

It's easier to stay on his feet when he's not alone; Rhodey at M.I.T. remains the reason Tony actually graduated, the reason Tony lived to see graduation. Happy as his chauffeur is the reason Tony was able to stand tall when the full weight of Stark Industries landed on his shoulders, threatening to crush him beneath the pressure. Pepper at SI will forever be the reason Tony didn't decide to just walk away years ago - From SI, from Public Eye, from Life.

In another lifetime, another world, he could have loved Pepper. Loved her as a woman, instead of the sister he never had.

Tony's not sure whether to be sad he can't love Pepper that way or grateful, because even after all the shitshow his life has been, she's still there at his side, helping run herd on all the chaos.

Tony has loved people in his life like that -Sunset, Tiberius- but never been loved in return. When the Avengers had come to live in the Tower and were exposed to him beyond battle, they all agreed on pretty much one thing.

"You're like a big cat; a lion or tiger or something. Something beautiful to look at, but deadly to go near, so who'd risk it?"

Story of his life really.

What the Avengers all forget to say though, is Tony is a creature of elegance and intellect; people are drawn to his presence, wishing silently for him to look at them and praise them - to see that they are doing well and acknowledge their struggles.

Tony doesn't see how Thor absolutely beams when Tony tells the Thunderer he's finally figured out how to control his strength on the more fragile items in the Tower.

Tony doesn't see how Bruce stands a little taller after Tony remarks on how much progress the Hulk's alter-ego has made in his projects.

Tony doesn't see how Hulk squirms in delight when Tony praises his behaviour post-battle.

Tony doesn't see how Natasha relaxes her shoulders when Tony thanks her for the pelmeni she made him after he fixes her widow's bites.

Tony doesn't see how Clint listens in interest when Tony talks about how the archer is brilliant at
picking spots at the start of a battle but needs to find safer ones mid-way.

Tony doesn't see how Steve follows easily, completely, when Tony tells him how to take the lead.

Tony doesn't see it, because he doesn't know how to look, and everyone knows 'he has an ego, so don't bring it to his attention'.

Tony sees how they all leave him.

Tony just doesn't understand people; it's why he likes math and science so much, they make sense.

Actually Tony likes all learning. He doesn't necessarily plan to do anything with what he learns, but it keeps his brain occupied, stops it from spinning endlessly with all the facts that he sees at any given moment.

-It's forty-two steps to the common room from the elevator, traveling at an average of a half mile per hour, the turn to avoid Mjolnir takes 26 degrees to the right of current trajectory-

-The elastin elements of the fibres prove to be able to expand with the Hulk's sudden increase in body mass but shrinking back down to conform to Bruce is more difficult; maybe try an alloy fibre, one that could-

-Widow Bites falling to 12% battery life in one fight is unforgivable; Natasha charges them religiously so she's never caught out, but the amount of power drained by facing-

-Pepper's birthday is in three days, need to buy her a present for the actual day. No rabbits, or other giant things, jewellery or shoes would go over best, red for her hair, or try to match eyes-

-Thirty-seven new cracks in the plaster by the kitchen wall; Clint beat Thor at MarioKart again, most likely red shell defeat given depth of cracks-

-Steve has been sneaking extra helpings of treacle tart, even though he's been told to eat his fill at meals; prepare more food, so he stops rationing himself Depression style-

-Clint has been nesting on the bookcases again; shelves are 4cm further from wall then yesterday, install base support so shelves don't tip-

They still left though.

Tony doesn't mean to take note of everything, he just does; photographic memory. Sure his recall is pretty average on subjects he hasn't actively studied, but he can (and has) pulled tears from college and university students for knowing more about their chosen subject in a few hours than they know with years of study.

"When did you become an expert in thermonuclear astrophysics?"

"Last night."

But Tony likes learning for meaning. His Cara Madre taught him Italian because it meant something to her. He taught himself math, because it meant he could make sense of the numbers. He learned science, because it meant he understood more of the world.

Tony wants to learn T'Challa.

T'Challa, a man he met when a prince, and fought alongside as a king. A man who dons armour to fight for the protection of his people. A man who protected the Ex-Avengers, while working with
Tony to fix the Accords. A man who taught Tony how to look at him without seeing all the extra information first.

Tony sees the way T’Challa smiles at the numerous feline nicknames Tony gives him, and it makes Tony smile too.

Tony sees the way T’Challa will subtly roll his eyes when they have to deal with Ross face-to-face, and Tony has to stifle a grin.

Tony sees the way T’Challa laughs when sharing stories about their school years, laughing so much he can’t breathe.

Tony wants to learn T’Challa, wants to learn if T’Challa constantly sees the facts too, if T’Challa smiles at everyone like they are precious; if T’Challa feels for Tony, what Tony thinks he might feel for T’Challa.

He calls Shuri, asking if there would be any offence to him learning Wakandan (he doesn't think there'd be, but Wakanda has kept itself isolated so long, they may not want outsiders to butcher the language.) and if not, was there a book or something he could learn from.

Shuri seems delighted and sends him three books; a beginners book, a common phrases book, and a dictionary. She says she hopes to be able to greet him properly when she and T’Challa return to the states in a few days.

She’s alone when Tony greets her with "Mholweni, Inkosazana. Ndiyathemba namhla ifumana kakuhe. Enkosi lonke uncedo ondinike lona."

Tony sees tears in her eyes before she hugs him close. "Ukuba uve amazwi abathe, kude nekhaya. Ngokwenene intsikelelo, Tony Stark."

Tony hugs her back, glad that he made her happy.

T’Challa joins them as the hug ends, jokingly asking his sister "Ngaba uzama ukufumana umntu Ndiyakuthanda kude kum dade?"

Shuri merely smiles smugly as T’Challa freezes at Tony's response.

"Asinto inkosazana endinomdla kuye, kodwa mna ndandiyitha- yaye sinombulelo ngenxa neemvakalelo zakho."

T’Challa gapes for a few precious moments, his calm and cool lost in the face of what he's heard, before he shores himself up.

"You did not tell me you were interested in learning Wakandan."

"It’s a part of who you are Chesire, kwaye ndifuna ukufunda yonke into."

T’Challa's smile is a beautiful thing to behold, and Tony doesn't resist his smile in return.

The Wakandan king steps right up to Tony, loosely resting his hands on his waist.

"Kwaye mna ndikhangele kakhulu phambili ukwenza okufanayo kuwe. Kuba xa ndithi ke kuni, Andiyi ukukhulula. Uya kuba ngabam de Sehlosi uThixo umema ukuba amasimi akhe kwaye ke, ndiya kufumana kwakhona."

Tony merely smiles, a little smear of colour rising to his cheeks.
"I look forward to it T'Challa. After all, nothing has ever held my attention the way you do."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Zaria and everyone who asked for a follow up.

Continuing from Chapter Five.

T'Chaka calls Shuri Princess in Xhosa.
Hope this satisfies, all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony stood by the windows in his office, gazing down at the world below.

Sitting in a stack on his desk, presented by a proud Obadiah, were various magazines.

*America's Most Eligible Bachelor*, proclaimed one, displaying an image of him in suit at a gala.

*Playboy Pays For A Pucker!* Screamed another, a shot of him at a charity date auction receiving a kiss on the cheek from the actress at his side.

*Stark! Lonely At The Top?* Asks the third, a picture of Tony sitting in a restaurant alone, looking rather sombre as he contemplated the wine glass in his hand.

Tony sighs, returning his gaze to the world outside his glass prison.

And it is a prison. Tony has been locked into the shackles of expectation that come with being Stark Industries CEO, for being such a success so young.

For still being single.

Obadiah thinks Tony is just sowing his wild oats before he chooses a wife and settles down, just like Howard did. When he brought the magazines in, he was beaming, laughing boisterously about how Tony has his pick from the cream of the crop. He doesn't know.

Only four people knew.

Tony hasn't had sex with a woman since he was fourteen. Honestly, he can appreciate their beauty, but women do nothing for him.

Most the stories are just that. Tony often finds himself in the company of women who had consumed enough alcohol to preserve their livers, or even a few of them drugged; he can't in good conscience leave them alone, so he takes them home to sleep it off. But he's Tony Stark; he's been seducing women since forever, so of course he propositioned them and they accepted. They just must have drunk too much to remember it, but so many people say Tony Stark is a sex-god so it must have been amazing!

The rest of the stories? Whoever the reporter is, they are sure they misheard/read/saw what
happened, because no way is Tony Stark having a relationship with another man! So they fix the 'mistake', and turn the few male lovers Tony has had into women.

At least his partners haven't been selling their stories to the rags.

Tony sighs again, returning to his seat and pushing the magazines from his desk to the bin.

Even Pepper, wonderful, brilliant, efficient Pepper, doesn't know that Tony is gay. He's tried to tell her, but it was after she had escorted a few women out so he didn't get to say anything -had, in fact, barely even opened his mouth- before she tore into him about giving her a heads up before she needed to clean up after his orgies.

She'd 'seen' the evidence, so wouldn't listen if he tried again.

Rhodey knew. He'd been there, a solid shoulder for Tony when he was freaking out at M.I.T. and didn't know what to do. Most people would have run to the nearest news outlet and sold the story for a mint, but not Rhodey. Rhodey was far too good a man to profit from another's misery and pain. Instead he had sat by Tony's side, and gently talked Tony down from doing something foolish. They had sat there talking for hours when Tony asked what he should do.

"I can't tell you that Tones. The world is a cruel place to those who are different; believe me, I know. The best advice I can give is simply take every day one step at a time. You don't need to decide where you're travelling yet, you can just set one foot in front of the other, and see where they take you. And you can be sure that I'll be along for the journey."

There weren't enough Rhodey's in the world, of that Tony was sure.

The staff at the mansion had all known about Tony's preferences, but had been paid to keep their mouths shut at the time, and were now all long dead. Just like Howard.

Howard had known. And had raged against it

"You would have the Stark name die out because you-you-"

Tony couldn't say whether he mourned the man or not. Certainly he missed his mother, and had been devastated at her passing; she may have been distracted a lot, but she was there and kind, attentive to her only child when she remembered. To Howard, Tony was a necessary annoyance.

For the month after he had discovered Tony's sexuality (and became the reason Tony now knocked before he entered a bedroom, even if it was his own, and even if he was alone), he kept dragging Tony along to the charity gala's his mother was so focused on and regaling the 'wonders of women' like if he said how pretty and kind they were enough, Tony would suddenly prefer them to men and he could hide the fact that he just wanted Tony to have a son to carry the blood and name. Tony had reacted. Howard never was able to reopen contracts with Infinity Metals after his revenge.

Tony sighed again as he looked over the last few contracts in his pile.

He honestly hated being CEO; it was boring, soul-crushing, and involved way too many meetings with old men that had far too many daughters and nieces of marriageable age. It sickened Tony to see these men pretty much selling their relations for a boost in status and power. And everything the men had said to him in hopes of persuading him made it worse.

"Oh she thinks you're an attractive man; she'll be thrilled."
"She won't have any complaints with a Stark."

"It's not something she'd be concerned with."

In every word, all Tony could hear was 'She doesn't have a say.'

He dedicated a branch of the Maria Stark foundation to the betterment of women equality. It helped clear the disgust away.

Tony signed the final contract and set it aside for Pepper before waking his computer. Tony really didn't need the machine, and would far prefer his holo-displays, but Obadiah had refused to allow Tony to remodel his office to allow the machines needed for the projections to be installed, citing 'being in the CEO's office sends a message Tony, and what they see in that office enforces that message; people don't trust what they don't understand, and that is those projections of yours.' Tony just couldn't be bothered to put up a fight so let it go, getting the heavy white box that he rarely used.

Used for business anyway.

Typing in the encryption code for a certain folder, Tony let himself smile to see the images brought to the screen. The three last people to know. Ever since they had met, Tony had been given a standing invitation to enter their home, hell, enter their country and he's taken it up many times in the decade or so that he's known them.

Shuri.

T'Chaka.

T'Challa.

They had all met at a Political function a few months before Tony turned seventeen. Shuri had been twelve and a little anxious to be at the gala, so Tony had gathered her up to distract her, collecting the other little kids so Shuri didn't feel singled out. He had spent the night telling stories and jokes, keeping the kids entertained and... well, shielded from all the politics going on above their heads. A good number of parents had attempted to collect their children, and judging by the way they kept looking at a particular person or small group of people, they were planning on using the kids to get sympathy or praise.

But Tony was far more fun than being nice and cute to strange adults, so the kids threatened to chuck fits if they were dragged away.

As the night moved on (and after catching Howard roll his eyes and glare disdainfully) Tony was approached by T'Challa. At fourteen, T'Challa was already showing signs of being a truly gorgeous man, being of decent breadth and height, with skin the perfect shade of chocolate, Tony had been tempted then and there to lick it off. He hadn't yet come into his voice, still breaking every few syllables, but not so noticeable to be embarrassing; it had mostly sounded like he had a bit of a cold, so people didn't comment.

He had fascinated Tony.

He was fiercely intelligent -something Tony had always been attracted to, man or woman- and was of a curious nature much like Tony; always wondering about what they saw and how it worked. When he had joined Tony and the gaggle of under-twelives, Shuri had immediately latched on to his hand and proudly introduced Tony to her Big Brother. T'Challa had smiled at her, before extending his hand to shake Tony's. His hand was slightly rough and callused, much like Tony's
own, and T'Challa had seemed delighted when he noticed.

He joined Tony in telling stories to the kids, which ended up devolving into an impromptu science lesson.

Unlike many of genius intellect, Tony has never had a problem 'dumbing down' science, so long as people actually want to understand. When it’s people who want to copy his work, or think he’s just using scientific language to bullshit his way through something, Tony brings out the most technically useless details he can so they give up and leave, but when it's something like; an eight-year-old asking why there can't be an elevator that travels through the planet, Tony really enjoys describing how the Earth is a ball filled with different layers of dirt, stone and magma.

Though T'Challa helped in the lesson where he could, he seemed as enraptured by Tony's explanation as the kids. The kids had asked excited questions, and had quieted themselves to be able to hear Tony's answers. Not surprisingly, Shuri had asked excellent questions, which had given Tony the opportunity to get the kids to think for themselves as to whether hardened magma would make a good building stone.

As the little ones had started talking to each other, trying to sound as knowledgeable as they could, Tony turned to T'Challa and Shuri, only to discover they had been joined by a tall man with a warm smile. T'Chaka was easily one of the best men Tony has had the honour to meet -Rhodey's at the top of that list by the way- and openly praised Tony on both the way he explained things, and how he got the children invested. He was just as intelligent and curious as his children, and Tony had a marvellous time for the rest of the night speaking to the small family.

For the month and a half that Tony was still on break from M.I.T. T'Chaka often brought T'Challa to the mansion to visit with Tony while he dealt with some business with Howard. It was wonderful getting to spend so much time with T'Challa; having someone who could more-or-less keep up with his brain? It felt like taking a deep breath of clean air after months of pollution.

T'Chaka had brought both Shuri and T'Challa the day Tony was heading back to M.I.T. the little girl actually bawling that she wouldn't get to see Tony ever again. It was then that T'Chaka made the offer.

"No my Inkosazana, Tony is always welcome in our lands."

He handed Tony a card with a number on it.

"Give that number a call, and we will send a jet to pick you up. Any time, any place Tony. You will always be welcome."

Tony had memorised the number on the trip back to M.I.T., burning the card so that only ash remained.

Howard had died soon after that.

Tony had been tempted to call then; just hop on a jet to Wakanda and never leave. Honestly, it was just the feeble, whimpering hope in the deepest recesses of his mind that still wanted to make Howard proud that kept him in the states... that still kept him in the family business.

The pictures on the screen were of New Years a few months ago, which Tony had, of course, spent in Wakanda. It had become something of a tradition; Christmas would be spent at the Rhodes' house, and a few days later, Tony would be out of the snow in Wakanda's everlasting warmth to welcome the New Year.
He had especially enjoyed it this year, because it meant he didn't have to go to that conference in Bern. Obadiah had agreed in Tony's stead that he would speak, but Tony had called the administrators of the event as soon as he found out and told them it wasn't going to happen. They hadn't been happy, but Tony had been very blunt when he informed them that they should have spoken to him directly not a second party. They still grumbled but eventually gave in.

The picture on the screen caused Tony to lose a wistful sigh. As predicted, T'Challa was a gorgeous man. At twenty-four he had a body that would make a person weep, and he had grown into his voice, a smooth, seductive drawl that gave Tony little shivers just thinking about.

In the picture, T'Challa was standing next to Tony, an arm draped over Tony's shoulders and a wonderful smile curling his lips.

T'Challa had told Tony years ago, about the Wakandan soul mate belief, and about how fiercely T'Challa believed that Tony was his.

"Every time I think of you Tony, my chest fills with warmth, and my heart beats faster. It is harder every time I hug you to let you go. Whenever I hear that you are coming to Wakanda, it feels as though my heart will burst from my chest, and when you arrive? It is all I can do not to take you on the tarmac."

Such a declaration would normally have made Tony feel very nervous and uncomfortable, but... T'Chaka looked at N'Yami the way T'Challa had described, and it was a beautiful thing to witness; as though the rest of the world was unimportant to T'Chaka when compared to his wife, and that was simply because N'Yami existed.

Tony was rather... flattered, honestly, that T'Challa wanted him in the same way.

He didn't feel worthy of someone as amazing as T'Challa; handsome, kind, smart and skilled. But T'Challa wanted him. So Tony tried to be worthy.

He ate healthier, and barely drank any alcohol now, and only a single glass when he did, because T'Challa always worried over Tony's health.

He organised and donated to as many charities as he could without be directly linked, because T'Challa seemed happy when Tony told him about what good they could do.

He had organised for as much of his company as possible to be moved into medical research and day to day technology instead of weapons, because T'Challa hated war.

The last one had been the hardest, simply because the Board was made up of 'True Americans'; the old folk who were proud of America's place in the world as a superpower, as being the holder of the biggest stick. Stark weapons helped America keep that biggest stick, and they didn't want to lose that.

Tony had managed to sway most of them by showing them the profit SI stood to gain by going into those fields more. Obadiah had confronted him after the meeting; one of the few not swayed.

"What was that Tony?! You want us to start building bricks for baby hospitals or something?! You can't just stop and change the way a company works!"

"I haven't stopped anything Obadiah; with industry cutting out the need for as much human presence in a factory, I have assigned the freer workers with tasks to make sure they have a reason to get paid, that will still earn us money. The figures show a profit increase of up to 34% in the first six months."
Obadiah had eventually settled, apologising to Tony with the excuse that he was old enough to be a little stuck in his ways. The magazines were just another of the ways he was trying to get back into Tony's good books.

"Excuse me, Mr Stark?"

"Yes Ms Potts?"

Tony looked up in slight confusion, as Pepper rarely addressed him like that unless he had an appointment -which he didn't, he checked- or he was in trouble.

"I have signed all the paperwork you left me; whatever went wrong was not me, I'm innocent."

Pepper smiled, shaking her head a little as she collected the files from his desk.

"You have a visitor. He hasn't made an appointment, but he said it was urgent that he spoke with you. He called himself... T'Challa?"

Tony's eyes darted to the computer screen, and motioned for Pepper to look at the picture of Tony, T'Challa, T'Chaka and Shuri sitting on a pair of sofas.

Pointing to T'Challa, Tony raised an eyebrow in question. Pepper looked mildly stunned.

"Yes, yes that's him. I've never seen him before so I didn't realise- you've never talked about him either!"

"Let him in Pep; if it's important enough for T'Challa to come here instead of just calling me, I see no reason to make him wait."

Pepper nodded, stepping quickly out of the office to usher T'Challa in. T'Challa was dressed impeccably in a dark suit over a crisp white shirt. He seemed a combination of nervous -likely over whatever business had brought him to Tony's office- and happy -which Tony kinda hoped was over seeing him- as he drew close enough to give Tony his traditional hug. After lasting a moment longer than T'Challa normally allowed himself, Tony guided him to one of the chairs in front of his desk as he leaned on its edge.

"What's bothering you Puss-in-Boots? It's something big to have you here in person."

T'Challa actually shuddered a little, and averted his eyes for a second before taking a deep breath and speaking; looking Tony dead in the eyes.

"Before I begin, I promise you that I had no knowledge of this prior. I would never have kept such information from you had I known."

Tony just raises an eyebrow, curious as to what has made T'Challa so upset. T'Challa takes another deep breath when Tony nods and gestures for him to continue.

"As you know, I am celebrating my birthday next week. Father felt it would be best to present his gift to me early. It was... It's..."

T'Challa pulls a folded piece of paper from his jacket pocket and hands it to Tony as he is unable to speak. Taking a moment to thrill in the knowledge that T'Challa doesn't set off Tony's fear of being handed things, Tony unfolds the paper to read it.

And promptly stops breathing.
Tony had known his father was a shallow, callous man but to do this. He suddenly takes in a deep breath, feeling T'Challa's arms wrapped around him, his hands rubbing circles on his back as his refocuses.

"I was furious; to think that my father would do something like this, even with the best of intentions... I have never before felt the need to yell at my father, but I did so after reading the contract. I am still mad at him, but I needed to see you Tony. Again, I promise I did not now that this existed; I wish to earn my place at your side, not have it bought for me."

Though he's listening to T'Challa, Tony's eyes haven't left the Political Union Contract. More particularly, the date and time of final signing.

It had literally been finalised the morning of Howard's death.

"Tony? Tony, please speak to me."

Tony has to take a few deep breaths before he can.

"You know I adore you T'Challa. And I hope you know that if you had asked me I would have said yes. But that this exists... I need to wrap my head around it; come to terms with the proof of what I meant to Howard."

T'Challa tightens his hold on Tony before slowly releasing him and taking a step back.

"I had been planning to ask you next week. As you said, I knew you would say yes. But I need to prove that I am worthy of you, now more than ever. I don't care if it takes me another ten years; I will have you as mine Tony, just as much as I am already yours. Will you wait for me?"

Tony swallows, before managing to summon a gentle smile.

"Don't take too long. You're not the only one with trouble letting go."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Just Plain Human

Chapter Summary

For Zoeph

Tony has been injured on a mission, and while he's recuperating he starts to wonder if he's any good for T'Challa.

I messed with a few birth years, but only a little. Shane Mahan, the head of Studio for Iron Man, has been quoted saying that the suits can weigh between 600 to 800 pounds, but that is a scary number to comprehend, so I made it smaller.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony is no stranger to injury or pain; he's a mechanic and engineer for goodness sake! Not occupations you can have without hurting yourself! Tony is also something of an adrenalin seeker, so he's taken some pretty amazing risks through his life. And finally, Tony is Iron Man, an actual superhero who's gone toe-to-toe with the God of Thunder and the Hulk.

No, Tony is no stranger to injury or pain at all.

But as he lays on the couch in the common room, his broken leg inclined over the armrest, and 23 stitches in his arm, Tony feels... tired.

It's not like he's sleepy or anything; he still has to wait another hour before he can take a painkiller, because Bruce was adamant that Tony have something to eat (Philistine! Doesn't he know that Tony lives on coffee and science?!) and forced a huge club sandwich and bowl of soup down his throat.

No, Tony's just tired, bone-weary really. He's feeling every creak and groan, every pull and twitch his body can give out. He's feeling...

He's feeling old.

Rubbing the hand of his uninjured arm gently over the space where the arc reactor used to sit, Tony mulls over this new piece of self-introspection.

He was forty-eight years old now. Given the way he lived during his teens, it a miracle he survived to his thirties, let alone almost his fifties. But... he's tired. If he ignores Thor's whole forever-young-immortality shtick, and Steve's years under the arctic, Tony's the oldest of them. Bruce isn't far behind, but all evidence shows that he is in far better shape than Tony after any given battle thanks to the Hulk.

Clint has properly retired now; unless there is another alien invasion, Laura has said she and the kids will dog-pile him if he tries to get back into the business.

Natasha is still going strong, but she is still so very young, despite all her experience in the world.
She doesn't have anything to fall back on after the Avengers besides the whole assassin-spy thing, which she doesn't want to return to.

Rhodey's playing desk jockey for the air force now more than anything; even with the braces Tony made him, the brass don't want the flight-risk of sending a paralysed man on missions. Rhodey's due his medals and honourable discharge soon though, and he appears to be looking forward to it.

Scott's on call if the team needs him, preferring to spend as much time as he can with his daughter and Hope, Ant-Man being a little more freelance hero with the Wasp.

Wanda and Vision are on the main line up, and rarely go into battle alone, but are young and need as much guidance as possible so they don't make mistakes like the older Avengers have made.

Peter is still just a baby. Tony knows he can't stop Peter from being Spider-Man -Pete's the same sort of do-gooder that Steve is mixed with the adrenalin junkie that Tony's always been- so does what he can to keep the kid safe and kicking at the end of the day.

And T'Challa...

Tony sighs, letting himself sink just a little deeper into the cushions beneath him.

Working on the accords had led the Black Panther and Iron Man to getting rather close. They had similar interests, were both of genius level intellect and had like views of the world. What had started as coffee breaks from work to talk about anything but the Avengers and the accords had turned into lunch, had turned into dinner, had turned into dinner at home, had turned into dating.

Tony was dating the King of Wakanda, a man richer than Tony, a man potentially smarter than Tony, a man twelve years younger than Tony.

Tony's hand covered his eyes as he sighed again.

T'Challa was in his prime, at the very top of his game. Really, what did Tony have to offer him? There was literally nothing Tony could do for T'Challa that wasn't easier for T'Challa to take care of himself. Not to mention that as King, T'Challa was expected to at some point have an heir, and Tony noticeably lacked the parts to do that.

Tony was really nothing more than dead-weight.

The rest of the team slowly entered the common room, each bringing an item that had been deemed necessary for movie nights; Thor brought 'corn, popped and flavoured with the finest offerings of the realm!'.

Steve brought a variety of drinks, Natasha bought blankets and Clint bought pillows, with Laura and the minions bringing snacks right behind them.

Rhodey always packed a box of tissues, because the group inevitably ended up watching something sad, and if they cried? Well they're the Avengers, they are comfortable enough in their genders to cry if they want to.

Bruce brought a hospital grade first aid kit, after the third time the group had watched an action movie and Thor had given Clint a concussion in his excitement.

Scott and Hope were present today, and bought sweets to nibble on, Wanda and Vision bringing tubs of ice cream in a cooler, while Peter had finished his homework on time and had brought chips and dip. Tony was the one who had provided the state of the art entertainment system, so he
was always covered.

The only one missing was T'Challa.

There had been a breakthrough in one of the Wakandan research facilities projects, and they had wanted T'Challa there as they progressed. T'Challa had many responsibilities as an Avenger, but he had so many more as King. If it weren't for Shuri taking care of as much as she could, T'Challa would never have the time to leave Wakanda.

Just another thing Tony felt guilty about in his long life of mistakes and faults.

Everyone settled into the room. Thor sitting on the floor while Steve and Peter took the loveseat that Tony usually did, given that Tony was spread across their usual seats. Tony didn't really pay any attention to the movie, he didn't even look at the screen, just kept staring at the ceiling above him, his thoughts spinning to everything and nothing.

He hadn't realised he'd drifted off until he woke to the sensation of strong fingers carding through his hair.

Opening his eyes, Tony was greeted with the sight of T'Challa smiling down at him, the rest of the room empty.

"Hello Love."

"Hey Sphinx. What are you doing here? Your science masters wanted to play with you didn't they?"

T'Challa's smile widened as he gave Tony an eskimo kiss, followed by a proper kiss on his forehead when Tony scrunched his nose.

"They did indeed, but when we saw the news report of the last battle, they suddenly decided that it was imperative for me to be by the side of, in their words, *The True Inspiration*. If I didn't know better Love, I would worry over how infatuated my science division is over you."

A small smile played on Tony's lips in his amusement at the image T'Challa presented, until the thoughts he'd been having before his nap resurfaced. Of course, T'Challa noticed the change in Tony's demeanour instantly.

"What dark thoughts assail you Love? Talk to me, and we can solve whatever is wrong."

Tony sighed, turning his head just enough to nuzzle into the hand cupping his cheek.

"You deserve better T'Challa. I'm not a catch that anybody should want, let alone you."

The gentle cupping turned into a firm grip, directing Tony to look straight at his partner.

"Who said that to you Love? They had no right! You are a wonderful, brilliant man, and I am not going to let someone slander that."

Tony shook his head as best he could in that strong hold.

"No-one said that to me." T'Challa's face grew a little dark. "Really, nobody's said it, at least that I've heard, I'm just... I'm old T'Challa. Over a decade older then you. Even with my armour, I'm getting slower and slower every battle, and my injuries are getting worse. I can barely keep up in team training out of the suit and that's been pissing Steve off, and though my mind's as busy as
always, I can't stay in the shop for long enough bursts of time to do anything about it because my body can't stand the binges anymore. I'm old T'Challa, and I don't think I'll be able to stay by your side."

T'Challa returns to cupping Tony's face, using both hands now, as he takes a few deep breaths.

"First of all, I will be speaking with the Captain; he forgets all too often that you are without enhancements, so full team training is dangerous for you out of the suit. The Black Widow is highly trained so it isn't as dangerous for her, and I can see that he has used her in the argument against you, and the others such as Ant Man and the Wasp are not frontline fighters when full-size, so they too are at lesser risk. Your armour also weighs at least 250 pounds no? So learning how to fight without that additional weight is doing you, and the team, no favours.

Secondly, you have not been getting slower; my science masters, as you call them, routinely keep track of your suit advancements, and they assure me that you either maintain a top speed of Mach five, or in a few notable exceptions, manage Mach six. You are not slowing down Love, it's just that the enemies popping up are either managing to go faster, or maintaining the illusion of being faster.

And just as the enemies grow faster, they grow stronger, so yes, you receive greater injuries, but you are strong enough to survive them, and you always stand back up. It is amazing to look over old battle footage and watch you regain your feet after a most grievous blow, before you once more leap into battle, as though nothing had even happened. Your body may not be up to your science binges any more, but when I put you in a room with my science division, I know your mind calms because after talks are done, you know half the division will leap at the chance to work on what you've discussed.

And finally Love, your age has never been a concern of mine, because you are blessed with an eternal bloom of youth. Your love and excitement about the world around you, the ways you find to test and push the constraints Nature tries to enforce; man did not evolve to fly, Love, yet what do you do every time you don the armour? You find joy in simple things, and you smile like the world is something beautiful, even as you work to combat the ugliness that tries invade it.

If there is 'better' for me out in the world, I neither know nor care, because I have held you in my arms Love, and no other will ever do."

Tony was sitting up now, carefully ensconced in T'Challa's arms, as tears gently rolled down his cheeks.

"You are mine Love, even when we are both wrinkled and grey; for as long as I can hold you, and even beyond."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Jenal

Tony and T'Challa being sweet while slow dancing.

T'Chaka calls T'Challa son in Xhosa. May be considered in the same universe as Chapter Four.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As a prince, T'Challa had been taught how to behave in a political arena; how to speak with power and control, how to keep calm under stress, how to look at the person you were speaking to without losing sight of the rest of the room.

"Politicians are predators my Unyana. They are not like the Panther that flows through our souls, but they will strike to kill, and aim to maim. You must prove yourself to be a threat, but only if threatened, and that is one of the hardest things to do."

T'Challa felt he had more or less reached this point, given that the politicians generally sought to leave him alone.

Until he met Tony Stark.

T'Challa had been taught to be as sleek and deadly as the Panther, so that people wouldn't see him when he came for their throats. Tony Stark goaded them to come closer, to see if he actually was a danger or not.

T'Challa had been taught to be subtle, so that he could slight a person without repercussion. Tony Stark spoke as he pleased and dared them to do anything about it.

T'Challa had been taught to be successful in politics. Tony Stark showed him he only knew of one arena.

After months of maybe-dating-maybe-not events, T'Challa was standing at Tony's side as his paramour at social functions.

"A lot of political decisions are made not in the parliament, and not by the ministers. Instead, they are made in the ballrooms and function halls of the upper crust, by the spouses and those willing to pay the bill. You're good in parliament T'Challa, and I can help you be great with the upper echelons."

Under Tony's guidance, T'Challa had learned that what you wore to these functions served as armour along with status; denoting where you stood on the hierarchy.
T'Challa had learned how to read what people really meant from their eyes and hands instead of their faces and words.

T'Challa had learned to quickly discover who was the patron to give false gossip, and who to give real tips.

And T'Challa had learned that dancing was the mark of the greatest warrior here.

He had been taught growing up how to do European dances just as easily as the traditional dances of Wakanda, but when he had first looked at the people on the dance floor with the knowledge that this was all entrenched in politics, he could practically see the war being waged.

And it was a war that Tony always walked away from holding some form of victory.

Nothing was like dancing with Tony.

Whether T'Challa was leading or not, Tony was the one they all saw. Tony was the one they watched, with lust, hope and dark promise in their eyes. They would all look over T'Challa briefly, disgust and jealousy, before returning their gaze to Tony.

Wonderful, beautiful Tony.

His Tony.

Tony's hands laid gently in his and on his chest, T'Challa's free arm wound tightly across his waist.

Close, so wondrously close.

T'Challa could smell the light cologne that Tony preferred, along with the tantalising scent of Tony himself. He could feel the compact muscles in Tony's arms and torso, sheer power hidden so carefully behind layers of silk.

Together they swayed over the dance floor, gently twisting in simple circles, pressing close as they revelled in each other's presence. The smooth strings of the quartet on the small stage washed over them. T'Challa felt, more than heard Tony release a happy sigh as he rested his head on T'Challa's shoulder.

"There is nowhere I'd rather be."

T'Challa has to take a very deep, slow breath before he can speak, not for even a moment breaking step with the gentle rhythm of their dance.

"I would prefer you be here always."

Tony chuckles a bit, the sound just loud enough for T'Challa to hear, and truly it is a lovely thing.

"Smooth Leo, very smooth. You're becoming quite the sweet talker."

"Well I have to be, if I hope to keep up with you."

Tony raises his head so T'Challa can see those perfect amber eyes, sparks of the universe glowing deep in their depths.

"Very good T'Challa."
He leans close, a soft kiss that promises so much pressed to T'Challa's lips, before Tony backs away, a smile that promises so much more curling his own.

"You're learning."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Kage (who is currently one of my favourites)

Tony was taught to love music by Maria. While he prefers his rock and metal, there is a special place in his heart for the classics. It's a shame he has never had the time to replace that piano.

I have translations for the music if anyone wants them, just let me know. I have just chosen a bunch of songs I liked the sound of. Unrequited feelings. And once again, this chapter went walkabout, but I'm pretty sure I filled the prompt.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fa la ninna, fa la nanna

Nella braccia della mamma

Fa la ninna bel bambin,

Fa la nanna bambin bel,

Fa la ninna, fa la nanna

Nella braccia della mamma.

Maria Stark had a wonderful voice. She had for a few years entertained the idea of becoming an Opera singer, training herself to have quite the impressive range. While she never did end up singing for the masses once married to Howard Stark, she did keep practicing. Her parents had insisted that she learn an instrument along with singing, so that she had something else to fall back on if her voice ever failed her.

Maria had chosen piano.

Over the years she would come to learn a few other instruments, but the piano was first and favourite.

She had played it and sang when her charity work was having troubles, when she wanted attention from Howard, when she was mad; basically whenever she could find a moment.

She had played for hours when she found out she was pregnant.

Ninna Nanna, Ninna Oh,
She sang to her Bambino every lullaby she came across, including the ones her parents had sung for her, trying to find the one he loved best to help him sleep.

It wasn't until her little Bambino fell asleep to her singing 'Heart of Gold' that Maria realised that as long as she was singing, every song was a lullaby.

As Antonio (Anthony, Maria, it's on his blasted birth certificate!) grew older, and was able to understand more, it was harder to get him to sleep, but, without fail, when Antonio's Cara Madre began to sing a tune, he would settle down, close his eyes, and drift right off to sleep.

When Antonio turned three, Maria took him to her music room and sat him next to her on the bench. After raising the cover, Maria took one of Antonio's hands and gently pressed one of his fingers on the brilliant white key. A sharp note rang through the room, Antonio looking in astonishment that a sound had been produced by his hand. Maria smiled and got her Bambino's attention.

"That was 'C'."

Thus began Antonio's music lessons.

People comment, loud and often, just how similar Tony Stark is to his father Howard.

Sometimes it's complimentary (Genius' of no peer trying to save the world, one invention at a time) and at other times it's an insult (Money-grubbing, alcoholic LOWLIVES!) but it is Howard, always Howard, that Tony is compared to.

Never Maria.

It's never actually been a surprise really; Howard was the Patriot, the true believer in the 'American Way', while Maria was a philanthropic soul, giving away all of Howard's money. Sure she's remembered fondly, but only when people actually remember her. Most of the time, she is just another unfortunate soul lost in Howard Stark's shadow.

Tony was a lot more like Maria than many would guess.
She had passed on to Tony a great love of music. The cadence, the dissonance, the very soul of music, *that* is what Tony gained from Maria Stark.

Just like Maria, the piano was his first and he branched out to others. Unlike Maria, Tony is skilled enough to play, literally, any part in an orchestra. Sure, he has his preferences, just like anyone, but the genius he inherited from Howard and then developed on his own, all but guarantee that if he wants to learn something, he will.

Tony doesn't favour wind instruments, because like Maria, Tony sings.

---

_E adesso andate via_

_Voglio restare sola_

_Con la malinconia_

_Volare nel suo cielo_

_Non chiesi mai chi eri_

_Perché scegliesti me_

_Me che fino a ieri_

_Credevo fossi un re_

_Perdere l'amore, quando si fa sera_

Tony has a truly beautiful voice. Even in just day-to-day speech, there is just something about the way his words curl into your ear that sends a deep thrum of pleasure through you. It is a trait of many vocalists, but it is so much deeper a part of Tony.

And when he *sings*.

Tony has only sung for one of his partners, Janice Cord. Oh how he loved that woman. When she died, Tony locked himself in his music room, playing _only_ his wind instruments, so he wouldn't fall down screaming.

His winds are for when he's sad.

But still, the world would stop in awe if ever it heard Tony sing.

---

_Here I stand head in hand_

_Turn my face to the wall_

_If she's gone I can't go on_

_Feelin' two-foot small_
Everywhere people stare

Each and every day

I can see them laugh at me

And I hear them say

Hey you've got to hide your love away

Hey you've got to hide your love away

Tony loves singing.

"Hey Tony, you ever end up replacing that Blüthner of yours?"

It's been a couple months since the mess that was the Accords has been cleaned up. The Avengers (and Barnes) had all been cleared of charges -with the proviso of very strict attendance to mandatory psychiatric sessions- and with Tony and T'Challa working together, the codewords programmed into Barnes are gone now, so the 'Winter Soldier' is entirely who Barnes makes him into.

And no, things aren't 'the way they used to be', and they won't ever be Captain, stop trying!

"You mean Old Blü? No. Every time I try, something big enough comes up that I have to put it off."

Rhodey is walking easily now; he doesn't even generally need the braces outside of battle. He's leant against the island in the kitchen while Tony makes them coffee. Vision is meditating with a returned Bruce, Natasha, Wanda and Clint are sitting in the common room with Clint's family just off the kitchen, Scott is out with Hope and Cassie, Thor, Cap and Barnes are having a three-way while Sam referees, Peter is at school and T'Challa is sitting at the island half-reading one of Tony's mechanic magazines.

"Hey Cat Sith; want a cup?"

Proving that he had been paying at least some attention to them, T'Challa smiles and nods.

"I would appreciate it Tony. Out of curiosity, what is a Blüthner? It sounds vaguely dangerous."

Rhodey snorts a little as he takes a gulp of coffee.

"The only danger you'll suffer is falling in love as Tones plays with it."

T'Challa looks scandalised and... almost jealous. No, Tony's imagining that; seeing what he wants to see as it were. He clears his throat.

"Rhodey's being an ass. Blüthner is a well respected brand of Piano Builders. I had one many years ago that, to my shame, I destroyed when I first flew the Iron Man armour. I landed outside and went straight through the roof, and my piano."

T'Challa's face had immediately settled at the mention of piano, and by the end of Tony's little spiel, looks a little amused.
"I did not realise you played."

Tony shrugs, a little embarrassed, though he's not sure why.

"It never exactly came up between the accords and Barnes."

T'Challa concedes with a nod of his head, taking a long swallow from the cup Tony handed him. Tony can't help the way his eyes are drawn to the bobbing apple of T'Challa's throat but looks away before the Wakandan King notices.

"Brother; I've been looking all over the compound for you."

Shuri. She had managed to help T'Challa get enough of Wakanda's affairs in order to come with her brother this trip. As always, T'Challa smiles at her presence and give her his attention.

It doesn't seem to be anything bad, just a clarification of points to send back to their advisers.

Tony turns back to Rhodey, only to see an amused smile on his face.

"Honey Bear, the last time you wore that face, the face that you are wearing right now, you ended up in jail next to Colin Otis from room 75B."

The face immediately replaces itself with horror, and as the two royals look over in interest Rhodey shakily sets down his mug.

"We agreed that the entire year of '86 never happened!"

"'86 was Mark Stanton from room 52C."

Rhodey's face actually manages to look slightly chalky.

"Right. Right. I'm just gonna... gotta sit for a bit."

Rhodey manages to take a seat at the island and starts taking deep, slow breaths. Shuri moves to rub circles on his back while T'Challa looks to Tony for explanation. Before Tony can even open his mouth, the brute squad shows up and causes general mayhem in the kitchen, that erases all note of what happened before they turned up.

As Tony returns to the shop that night (he's made it his actual room now, with a proper bed and everything so people can just leave him alone!) he finds he misses Old Blü, but as he said; He never has the time to get a new one.

"Colonel. Might I have a few moments of your time?"

"Sure thing Princess. What's on your mind?"

Now that Tony can literally wake up in the shop, he tends to laze for a while, just stretching and relaxing beneath the comforting warmth of his sheets. Because it doubles as his room now (albeit with the more 'bedroom' aspects safely behind a near-as-can-be-invincible glass divider that makes up the walls of the rest of the shop, with built-in blackout mode), Friday refuses to allow anyone unbidden entrance, or even sight, if Tony is still in his bed.

And the Captain is always trying to get in.
Tony knew that Steven Grant Rogers was a stubborn son of a bitch well before the accords, but his current behaviour is just sad. He tries every spare moment to get into the shop to talk to Tony, or get Tony alone when outside it, but really Tony just can't. He can't be alone with the Captain.

It still hurts, and he's still scared.

"Friday, how long has he been sitting there this time?"

"Nearly two hours boss. Any instructions for me?"

Tony smiles, reading between his girls' very clever words.

"Fire detected in vicinity of Rogers."

The shop is sound-proof along with damn near indestructible, but Tony feels smug satisfaction at hearing Roger's cursing through the walls.

"He has left to change boss. I'd say you have a max of ten minutes before he returns."

"That'll be enough. Good job Fry."

"My pleasure boss."

Tony dons a plain shirt, track pants and sneakers before heading to the kitchen. Most of the Avengers are there, in varying states of sleepiness. There is a massive pot of porridge on the stove with empty bowls next to it, so Tony grabs some and sits between Rhodey and Natasha. Rogers enters just as Tony gets the first spoonful to his mouth and looks morose, grabbing his own bowl and sitting in Tony's direct line of sight... if, you know, Tony was looking straight ahead, which he isn't.

Tony's been drawn into a conversation with Rhodey and Shuri, who's sitting on Rhodey's other side. He's paying the Captain no heed.

Breakfast passed, full of Rogers trying and failing to get Tony's attention, even with other members trying to help. It is only as Vision collects the bowls that Tony realises.

"Shuri, where is your brother?"

Tony feels bad for not noticing sooner. He enjoys speaking to T'Challa in the mornings because T'Challa loses his filter, and has said brutally honest quips and mutterings that leave Tony and Rhodey in stitches. He is also far more affectionate, draping himself over whoever will give him attention, but that's totally not the reason Tony misses his presence.

"My brother was out late last night, an errand he felt could not wait. I believe he was successful, but I will be surprised to see him before lunch."

Tony nods his head, gently releasing the breath he held in small concern.

"Hey Tony, I'm feeling like being a little reckless today; you wanna help me on the machines? You're already dressed for it."

Tony smiles as Rhodey fingers the hem of his sleeve. Reckless for Rhodey used to mean possible jail time, now it just means needing to wear his braces once he's done.

"I'm up for that."
Shuri joins them in the gym, in fact all of the team present joins in. Natasha moves to the gymnastic equipment, Clint moving to spot her, Wanda and Vision wander to the weights, and the brute squad once more prepare for the three-way battle of which they are fond.

Rhodey, Shuri and Tony move to the treadmills.

Rhodey has a system to get the most co-operation out of his legs; ten or so minutes walking on the treadmills before he moves to the bikes for a half hour, another half hour on the rowers and finishing off with as many chin-ups as he can do. Actual sparring needs his braces, or his suit, but today isn't about training, just the glorious burn of successful physical exertion.

Tony hears the creaking of the ropes as Natasha flips in the air, catching the rings on her way down, Vision and Wanda murmuring to each other, and the thuds, groans and belts of the spar going on in the boxing ring. He focuses on the light jog he's set the treadmill to, faster than Rhodey's walk, but slower than the run Shuri's got going.

Thor bellows a praise to Steve as Tony sets up his bike.

Steve utters a curse as Tony mounts.

The sounds of the battle get more intense as Shuri, Rhodey and Tony move about their workout, Natasha, Clint, Vision and Wanda abandoning their workouts to watch the match. None of the three glance towards the ring.

There is cheering by the time Rhodey gets himself situated to the pull up bar. He and Shuri go together, agreeing to spot Tony as they rest.

They really do look good together. Even soaked in sweat, Rhodey's body is solid muscle and his shirt is clinging to everything. Shuri is sleek and lithe, so very dangerous behind the thin veneer of female fragility.

They will make beautiful babies.

Rhodey manages an even twenty chin-ups before he has to stop, but he's grinning like he won the lottery, not at all upset when Shuri manages ten further.

"That is surprisingly hard to do. I approve of your method James."

Rhodey just smiles wider and offers Shuri a towel.

After a quick wipe down of the bar, Tony situates himself, for the first time this session facing the centre of the gym; for the first time facing the ring.

The battle appears to have stopped, the combatants catching their breath and rehydrating, and the avengers are all looking towards the corner Rhodey, Shuri and Tony are located.

Tony takes a deep breath, forces the avengers out of his mind, and pulls.

Despite Tony's slim frame, he is made of compact muscle, strength forged from the very kiln from which all his inventions come; Tony is an engineer, a mechanic, a blacksmith and more, and he takes all his crafts seriously. The Iron Man suit is also no nimble weight, and the hydraulics and pistons only make it easier to move, not lighter.

Tony pulls fifty with little effort.
He can feel their eyes on him. Someone has always got eyes on Tony Stark so it's not unusual, but he can sense the disbelief, likely from Clint and Wanda, possibly even Sam. The others will just be amazed, but those three will doubt what they're seeing as an illusion or something, because no way would Stark have that level of upper-body strength.

Tony snorts and pulls another ten.

On his final pull, number sixty-one, Tony pulls to his chin then keeps going. He is able to pull himself so the bar is level with his nipples, and then holds it.

He hears Clint's muttered 'Bullshit' and lowers himself back down.

Shuri hands him a towel while Rhodey smirks proudly.

"Showing off a little Tones?"

"More proving a point."

Rhodey just nods while Shuri gives a little chuckle.

A gentle clapping comes from the entrance, and everyone's eyes are drawn to T'Challa. Tony can't help the way his gaze rakes across the man; T'Challa looks like he was poured into the pair of jeans clinging to him and the tantalising hint of chest shown by the deep 'v' of his shirt is just not fair. T'Challa's applause dies down as he moves closer to the corner the three of them are still resting in, completely ignoring the avengers by the ring.

"That was marvellous. Truly a great showing of strength Tony."

Tony just shrugs a little, trying not to shiver as T'Challa's voice rolls over him. T'Challa merely smirks

"I was hoping, after you have cleaned from your workout, that you might have the time to join me in the sitting room? I have something that I need to discuss with you."

Tony nods, and moves to help Rhodey to the showers.

He can do that.

---

Despite being a creature of decadent luxury, Tony does know how to take showers with military speed and efficiency. Mostly because he likes getting back to work as quickly as possible, but also because Afghanistan never truly stopped messing with his head.

In fact, it's barely been five minutes before Tony is entering the sitting room, thankfully without having to deal with Rogers in the showers, because that just makes thing so much worse.

T'Challa is standing by the window, hands folded behind him as he looks outside.

As gorgeous as the visual is, however, Tony's eyes are locked onto a new item in the room.

"You said you never had the time to replace it."

Tony barely hears T'Challa, his fingers already trailing across the top of the piano.

Of the Blüthner.
Tony finally drags his gaze to T'Challa, who is nervously biting his lip as he watches Tony.

"Why?"

T'Challa takes a deep breath.

"Working with you on the Accords was like nothing I have experienced; you are so broad of intelligence, and have such a charisma about you, that you have people hanging off every word you speak. You have suffered so greatly for one so privileged, but you still look to the future with hope and affection. I find myself hoping that, one day, you might look at me with the same."

Tony can barely believe what he's hearing. That T'Challa, a man of such humility, modesty and greatness, is interested in Tony Stark -degenerate, playwright scum- is... humbling.

"Song."

T'Challa starts a little, looking confused.

"You've gotta have a favourite song Tom Cat. What song should I play?"

T'Challa's face lights up, and he sits in a nearby armchair.

"I am greatly fond of the Moonlight Sonata if you know it."

Tony lowers himself onto the bench, playing a few keys to confirm that the piano is in tune, before setting his hands in the right places.

"How fast will we have to speed things up Shuri?"

"Not much at all James. T'Challa has taken the first step."

Every day after breakfast, Tony and T'Challa would be found in the sitting room, Tony playing on 'Baby Blü', and T'Challa in the closest chair.

The rest if the team would often join them, just sitting and listening to the music, the magic created as Tony's finger danced across the keys.

Tony and T'Challa, after the Wakandian King had admitted his interest, spent most of the day together, talking, working, training, and just sitting down to listen to Tony play.

Tony was especially pleased with T'Challa's attentions, because the constant presence of a man he very much adored had the added benefit of keeping Rogers away.

They shared a kiss one night in the sitting room.

Tony had been drifting, playing whichever tune was in his head when T'Challa had entered the room. T'Challa had taken one look at Tony, then crossed the room and pressed his lips to Tony's own.

"Your voice Tony; truly it is a sin to possess, but a blessing to hear."

While another kiss was exchanged, Tony realised he'd been singing along.
Team Bonding Night.

Once upon a time that meant a night bundled in the common room watching movies. Now the activity was picked on a rotation of the team.

As a guest, Shuri was offered the choice and Tony inwardly perked in interest.

"I would like to give Karaoke a try; I've been told karaoke houses are great fun."

Bruce opted out, saying he'd watch Clint's brood so Laura could join them.

"Karaoke's only fun for me if I'm drunk, and uh, that's not a thing that's gonna happen."

Tony promised to bring back pictures.

Clint and Laura led the group to a karaoke house nearby and they soon had a room. Names were drawn out of a bowl to determine who went when. After listening to Vision trying to sing, Rogers doing okay, Rhodey and Shuri blitzing a duet it was Tony's turn.

Tony had only sung for one of his partners before.

_When I am down, and oh, my soul so weary._

_When trouble comes, and my heart, burdened be._

_Then I am still, and wait here, in the silence._

_Until you come, and sit a while with me._

_You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains._

_You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas._

_I am strong when I am on your shoulders._

_You raise me up, to more than I can be._

_There is no life, no life without it's hunger._

_Every single heart, beats so imperfectly._

_But then you come, and I am filled with wonder._

_Sometimes I think, I glimpse eternity._

_You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains._

_You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas._
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders.
You raise me up, to more than I can be.

You raise me up, to more than I can be.

Tony doesn't remember much else of the bonding night, aside from spending it in T'Challa's arms.

"We only have a few more days beloved. Will it be enough?"

"Don't you worry honey. We got all the time we need."

"What's got you thinking so deep Tones?"

Rhodey's voice breaks Tony's concentration, bringing him back to the present, sitting at a workbench in his lab. After the Paladium poisoning, Tony has always tried his best to talk to Rhodey when something's on his mind, so he speaks.

"T'Challa and Shuri will be going back to Wakanda for a few weeks. T'Challa invited me to go with them. I want to say yes."

Rhodey nods, as though expecting Tony's words, which he might have; if he is as close to Shuri as he appears, then she probably invited him too.

"What's stopping you then?"

"Not anything in particular just... You have seen how Rogers has been all but stalking me right?"

"Nothing 'but' about it Tones, the man is dogging you. Got any idea why?"

Tony sighs and drags a hand through his hair.

"During his stay in Wakanda, he came upon the stories about when I came out as bi. When it was revealed that Pepper and I weren't going to be getting back together, he decided that... You know how Clint used to joke that Rogers and I were the parents of the group? Rogers seems pretty determined to make that a thing."

Rhodey looks mad, as in punch-you-in-the-suit mad, but just breaths deeply.

"Tell me you ain't thinking about accepting him Tony. Not even for the well-being of the group would I allow you to."

Tony shakes his head quickly.

"Not a chance. But it's already causing problems; he's getting the others to try and help him get me alone. If I go on the trip it's going to get worse."

"But if you don't go on the trip, he's gonna take it as encouragement. Have you out-and-out told him to lay off?"
"Yes, multiple times. I've told him that we can never have what we once did, and we certainly aren't getting closer than we once were, but he keeps trying."

"Come on the trip Tones. Don't let Rogers ruin another aspect of your life. You and T'Challa are good for each other; hell you sing for him; if that doesn't mean you're nuts for the guy, I don't know what does."

Tony laughs.

"Yeah... we're good for each other."

The Wakandan breeze is thick and heavy, providing a sensuous air for the evening. T'Challa and Tony are sitting on the balcony, overlooking the jungle in the final rays of sunlight. T'Challa is relaxed along the length of the couch they're sitting on, his head resting in Tony's lap as Tony gently massages his head. Tony feels at peace.

Try to remember the kind of September when life was slow and oh, so mellow
Try to remember the kind of September when grass was green and grain was yellow
Try to remember the kind of September when you were a tender and callow fellow
Try to remember and if you remember then follow.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For DarlingRDJ

T'Challa in Tony's lap.

Very short and fluffy.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a habit that T'Challa was truly embarrassed by.

It at times felt like an all-consuming burn spread throughout his body, but he knew it was never anything serious.

It just drove him round the bend if he ignored it.

He had been hesitant to bring it up with Tony; his lover thrived on jokes and laughter, but T'Challa already felt bad enough without Tony making quips about it.

"Hey there Sylvester; cuddle time."

T'Challa should have remembered just how tactile his Tony could be.

Within moments of his arrival, Tony had manoeuvred T'Challa into a curled repose on the couch, with T'Challa's head and shoulders resting on Tony's lap. As the Wakandan King got himself settled, Tony's fingers, his long, slender, powerful fingers, started gently digging into T'Challa's scalp, the massage pulling small groans and whines from T'Challa's throat.

"It's okay T'Challa; I've got you."

And he really did.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Zaria and all the sequel wishers

Continuation of Chapter Eight.

T'Challa thinks of Tony as Unyule, which is Xhosa for 'Chosen', and T'Chaka calls him Omncinci which means 'Little One'
Hope this satisfies all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa felt like he couldn't breathe.

Every time he closed his eyes, he was assailed with images of Tony's broken body, bleeding out on the desert sands.

His fingers began to worry at the ring hanging from a chain round his neck.

He kept seeing his husband dead.

After the shock that was finding out about the Political Union Contract, T'Challa arranged with his father, Shuri as the go-between, to spend his time with his Unyule, earning back broken trust.

He studied Business Management at the closest college, and would spend hours at a time helping Tony down in his workshop, playing with the bots when his Unyule needed them distracted. He marvelled when Tony completed the coding and uploaded J.A.R.V.I.S., the British tenor a welcome addition to their world.

They would have picnics in the living room when it stormed, gazing out at the ocean from the couch as the water churned with the force of the weather.

It was there that, six months after the PUC, T'Challa proposed.

It was there that, six months after the PUC, Tony said yes.

They had the ceremony in Wakanda, away from the never ending paparazzi that followed T'Challa's Unyule. James had managed to get leave to join them, serving as Tony's best man. Under the watchful gaze of the Panther God, they wed, joining together heart, mind, body and soul, a pair of specially made rings hanging from their throats.

"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

"For as long as you hold my heart T'Challa, you are just as much mine, and I know you'll never let
Tony had, that night, ignited a fire deep within T'Challa, a slow, deep burn that at times threatened to engulf his very being, only to be banked when T'Challa once more had his Unyule in his arms.

Tony involved him in as many aspects of Stark Industries as he could, while still keeping his husband a secret. T'Challa had met Obadiah Stane exactly once, and was well aware the man would try to force Tony to get access to Wakanda's Vibranium if he knew. And once he had it, he would demand that Tony break it off with T'Challa, stating the need to have an heir.

His Unyule ignored Stane for the most part, really only listening when it came to business, and even then, only when Stane kept trying to move SI completely back onto weapons. Which his Unyule refused to let happen, winning over the Board aside from Stane with the massive profitability the Medical division and technology division were providing.

Stane had finally agreed to vote to permanently close down SI's weapons development, just as soon as they fulfilled the contracts they still had with the Government. Tony had agreed, as it would prevent a lot of media backlash and suffering for his employees. T'Challa had been very enthusiastic to show his Unyule how proud of him he was.

Then things went wrong.

T'Challa had been needed in Wakanda to fulfil his duties as prince. Tony had obligations to SI though, so could not accompany like he usually did. They had parted sadly, but T'Challa promised to return swiftly; that he would meet Tony on the tarmac when he returned from Afghanistan.

T'Challa was on the plane back when he received the call from James, telling him the convoy had been attacked and Tony was missing.

He felt like he couldn't breathe.

"Welcome back Master T'Challa. You have been informed about Sir?"

Even as his gut twisted into knots at the thought of his Unyule, T'Challa couldn't help but marvel at the inflection within J.A.R.V.I.S.' voice. Tony worked so hard to give his creations life and it amazed T'Challa whenever it crossed his mind.

"Thank you J.A.R.V.I.S., yes, James called me on my way back."

T'Challa made his way to their room, trying his best to ignore how empty the house felt; no music coming from the stairs to Tony's workshop, no television set to horribly bad shows, no making love whenever the mood struck.

Just silence and cold.

"If you would Master T'Challa, the bots are quite panicked for Sir; is there a chance you could calm them?"

"Of course J.A.R.V.I.S., I will go now."
Setting down his bag, T'Challa lingered for a moment, his eyes resting on Tony's side of the bed. Tony should have been wrapped safely within the sheets, hidden away from the world that seemed so utterly determined to do him harm.

Dum-E, ButterFingers and U were indeed in a panic when he entered the workshop, clamouring to him in desperate search for their creator. T'Challa reassured them that James would be a few hours yet, but they would work to return Tony to where he was meant to be. The bots eventually retired to their charging stations, and T'Challa was once more awed by his Unyule's dedication to his craft. Dum-E's station was filled with pictures of firemen at work, battling great infernos. ButterFingers had a collection of baby animal magnets stuck to the metal frame. U had a series of soft toys in his dock. And each dock was labelled with a hand-painted sign in his Unyule's fanciest script.

J.A.R.V.I.S.' Primary Server Case had matching signage too.

T'Challa sighed as he looked around his Unyule's sanctuary. While to most it would seem a mess of wires and scrap metal, T'Challa saw the never-ending sprawl of potential that could be unlocked by his Unyule's quick mind and clever fingers. Oh how he loved to watch Tony in the midst of creation.

A sharp buzzing ran through the room, setting T'Challa's nerves on end. J.A.R.V.I.S.' silent alarm. It had been installed after James had discovered Tony and T'Challa one-too-many times in varying states of undress. It always caught T'Challa's attention, which was good seeing as they tended to block J.A.R.V.I.S. out when feeling amorous.

T'Challa swiftly moved to the shadowed corner of the workshop, hiding himself from sight. James was still a few hours away; who had entered the house?

"I'm entering the workshop now, just focus on breaking that encryption... Because who knows what designs Tony left on it? He'll have more on the 'safety' of his home computer, but he may have doodled something useful when he was slacking off at the office. Rhodes is still a couple hours out, and he'll likely go to Potts first, so work fast."

Obadiah Stane.

"I don't care what you were told by Potts; I have seniority and have told you to get the info off Tony's computer! The military is buying up Stark weapons like nothing before, and we need to keep up the supply; Tony was reported missing less than twelve hours ago and already the stock's dropped by sixty points! ... I refuse to let the brat be the end of this company! He wanted to drive us away from what we do best, but we can recover; just get into those files!"

T'Challa forced his breath to remain even. Stane had something to do with his Unyule's disappearance. T'Challa would see the man pay for it. Stane spent twenty minutes talking to whoever was on the phone as he tried to break into Tony's system, not that he could succeed.

Tony had protections on his technology that would make the Pentagon weep.

T'Challa waited in the shadows a full ten minutes after Stane left in a huff. Looking over Tony's holo-display, T'Challa confirmed that Stane hadn't even gotten through the first firewall.

"J.A.R.V.I.S.?

"I aM SoMEwhAt OPperaTIoNaL masTeR t'chALla. rEBOot iN pROGresS."

So that was why the AI had used the silent alarm to alert him. J.A.R.V.I.S. must have detected
Stane's attack on his system and responded before he was prevented. The security cameras were held on a different system though, so there should be evidence of Stane's unlawful entry. Obadiah Stane may be the Godfather of Tony Stark, but he had never been given free access to the house; the chance of him just wandering in and discovering T'Challa too high for either husband to feel comfortable with it.

Waiting for J.A.R.V.I.S. to reboot, T'Challa entered the security system, only to lose a curse when he saw the data corrupted for whichever room Stane happened to be in.

Stane was covering his tracks well, but T'Challa would not be deterred.


T'Challa grinned, a nasty expression full of teeth.

"Pull out your fine-tooth comb J.A.R.V.I.S., and put it to use with all information pertaining to Obadiah Stane."

"It will be my pleasure."

When James entered the workshop two hours later, it was taking all of T'Challa's not inconsiderable self control to keep himself seated instead of hunting Stane down and eviscerating him. The sight of James helped him greatly.

A bandage winding round his head and heavy gauze covering his wrist, the Colonel looked exhausted.

"Judging by how you're looking like you want to kill something, I'd say you'd been busy."

T'Challa quickly brought up the files that J.A.R.V.I.S. had discovered so far; Tax Evasion, several overseas bank accounts, and monthly lump sum from an unknown source.

"Stane was down here earlier -do not worry, I was hidden- and he attempted to break into Tony's systems. He managed to tamper with J.A.R.V.I.S. enough to require a reboot, and shut down the cameras for whatever room he was in. And he made clear to whoever he was speaking to that SI would be remaining a weapons dealer."

James' face turned to stone as he processed the information. The Colonel had initially been upset when Tony had informed him of SI's stepping away from weapons, but he came to accept that Tony wasn't abandoning all work with the Military; body armour, comm units, medical supplies, transport -anything but weapons.

"Tony told me that Obadiah had finally agreed to vote out once the current contracts were done. But thinking on it, Obadiah was the one to insist Tony did this last demonstration."

A snarl briefly stole it's way across T'Challa's face, though he managed to force it down before James could see it.

"I will see the man suffer for this!"

T'Challa could not contain the growl that swept through his voice.
After James had reported every detail from the Award Ceremony the night before (which Tony had blown off to video-conference with his husband) to Tony entering the transport back from the demonstration ("I'm sorry, this is the 'Fun-Vee', the 'Humdrum-Vee' is back there" "I know; I'm here telling you to get outta my seat.") T'Challa made a call to his father.

"Omcnci's disappearance is the news everywhere. Already there are whispers about who will succeed him as CEO of Stark Industries and when his Will is to be read. Find him T'Challa; it is too soon for the Panther God to claim him."

"I have no intentions of letting my Unyule run in the fields without me Father. I need you and your Lawyers to go through the information I am sending you, and find a way to completely end Obadiah Stane."

A vicious smirk curls his father's lips.

"You propose a hunt for me T'Challa?"

A matching smirk.

"I propose a slaughter."

James was not allowed to physically search for Tony for ten days, standard procedure given his injuries. While it tore at his insides, T'Challa had to wait for the Colonel to recover before he could join the search efforts.

Until then T'Challa worked with J.A.R.V.I.S. and his father to ensure that Stane would burn. Further digging by J.A.R.V.I.S. had revealed Stane double-dealing; the man selling terrorist Stark Weaponry under the table for years.

The monthly lump sum.

Even beyond that was the discovery that Stane was a father; a son, from an unmarried woman, whom apparently hated the man. Given how his only interaction with the young man was a visit from his Lawyer, ensuring there wasn't any besmirching of the Stane name (which he had legally forced Ezekiel to take) it wasn't a surprise. T'Challa made note that he would benefit from his sire's downfall.

But it also made a thread of wistfulness uncurl in T'Challa's chest.

Upon finishing his required duties as prince, a visit to the science division had revealed that Wakanda had been successfully working on a method to change sperm into an egg. Shuri had volunteered herself as surrogate.

He and his Unyule could have children. Images of cocoa skin and honey-amber eyes taunted his mind; would they be as smart as his Unyule, but with his own calm? Would they be as excitable as his husband? Would they smile softly like T'Challa or deeply like Tony?

Despite his Unyule's words and fear, T'Challa knew Tony would be a wonderful father; they had met with Tony protecting and entertaining the young ones at that Political function so long ago. And Tony's greatest concern - ending up like Howard Stark- would never come to pass, because his Unyule would never allow that to be inflicted on another.

But that would of course have to wait, until his Unyule was once more in his arms.
T'Challa harshly bit into his knuckles at the news that, once again, there was no sighting of Tony Stark.

James had been unable to convince his superiors to allow T’Challa to join them without also risking revealing his status as Tony's husband. T’Challa would have had no problem letting the General know, if it wasn't also known that the man could not abide by homosexuals. As much as he hated not being able to help directly, T’Challa could not risk the General pulling all searches, so he conceded to stay behind. It had been a month and a half since his Unyule went missing.

Next to him, Virginia tried to hold back her sobs, and Harold pursed his lips.

He had finally met the two, three weeks into Tony's disappearance. Virginia, driven by Harold, had come to Tony's house, trying to get a hold of James. James had been keeping them abreast of the situation, but hadn't spent any time with them face-to-face.

Virginia had recognised him from the one time they had met, almost ten years ago, outside Tony's office. She doubted his claim of being close to Tony, given that his Unyule never spoke about him to her. Harold had backed her, and was prepared to call the police before James intervened.

"Don't even start Pepper; I have been present several times when Tony has tried to talk to you about T'Challa. You always shut him down. Hell, I was there when Tony tried to invite you to his wedding!"

"WEDDING?! WHEN DID THAT HAPPEN?! TONY'S NOT MARRIED! AND IF HE IS HE'S BEEN CHEATING; ALL THOSE WOMEN RHODEY!!"

It had been sheer chance that they had never met before; T'Challa was often in residence when Virginia came into the house. And his Unyule had continued with his habit of never leaving the women in a vulnerable position, setting them up in the guest bedrooms on the ground floor.

The two of them made it a game every morning-after to be the one to find the worst scandal.

"PEPPER! Tony has not slept with a woman romantically since he was fourteen; I helped him keep it together in M.I.T. when he came to the conclusion that he was gay. All those women have been so drunk or drugged that Tony, T'Challa, and myself on the few occasions I've been there, didn't feel right leaving them to their own devices so brought them here to sleep it off. They've been selling stories because they woke up in Tony's house, so obviously there was sex.

And Tony has been in a completely monogamous relationship with T’Challa since they were about twenty-five. I was Tony's best man at the wedding almost a decade ago, and it was beautiful. Tony tried to invite you, I was there too, but before he even finished a sentence you said that you had no interest in following him on vacation to clean up after his overseas orgies. Every other time Tones tried to talk about his hubby, you shut it down and walked away, so Tony just stopped."

Both Virginia and Harold looked ashamed of themselves, probably remembering several occasions that matched with what James was describing. T'Challa took a step towards them and gave a polite bow of the head.

"My name is T'Challa. I am Tony's husband, and have heard much about you both. I am honoured to meet my husband's friends."

He could see why his Unyule so adored them; both good, honest, genuine people. T'Challa was glad Tony had such friends.

Right now they sat on the couches in the workshop; with Tony gone the house was just so cold. At
least in the workshop J.A.R.V.I.S. could play recordings of Tony as he worked, creating the illusion that Tony was just hidden somewhere in the workshop.

Virginia cuddled closer to Harold's side, comforted and comforting in the one gesture.

James sat with his head in his hands looking near dead with exhaustion.

None of them would be able to give up on Tony, but all were feeling the strain.

Harold eventually moved to take James to 'his' room in the house, Virginia slowly following.

"I've always said that I should put a tracker on Tony so he couldn't escape his meetings. When we get him back, I don't care if I have to embed it in his spine; There will be some way to find him."

Virginia left the lab, completely missing the widening of T'Challa's eyes.

Over the past six weeks, T'Challa had been pouring every effort onto making an ironclad case to have Obadiah Stane put in jail with all his assets stripped. He had not been able to join James in Afghanistan to search, so had focused his all on Stane.

"A tracker on Tony."

T'Challa cursed himself for not thinking sooner.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., please bring up a map of the area the convoy was attacked."

A holo-display lit up, the red dot on the map an angry beacon.

Breathing forcefully deep, T'Challa began entering codes to J.A.R.V.I.S.' search functions, a slim hope beginning to bloom in his chest.

A gentle, golden dot popped up on the map, several hundred miles away from the red.

"Target found. May I ask what you have found Master T'Challa?"

"I will tell you in a moment. Bring up the satellite images for this area please."

One by one the images loaded, showing an area with tents and covered piles outside what looked to be a cave.

There was one image however that caught his full attention.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., focus this image; get me as many details as you can!"

The pixels of the satellite image began focusing, clustering together as a clearer image revealed something that made T'Challa's heart soar as much as it made his stomach twist.

He would recognise his husband anywhere.

The image showed Tony being dragged from a truck; he appeared limp and lifeless. The men were armed, and looking back at the other images, it wasn't hard to pick out the weapons showing from beneath the tarp.

"Stane's buyers."

T'Challa knew he should alert James, get him to tell his superiors, but he couldn't bring himself to.
He was feeling so much rage; the Panther within him was clawing to get out, to massacre these men whom held his husband, his mate, a captive.

Instead he pulls out his phone and makes a call to Shuri.

"How soon will it take for you to gather the Dora Milaje and come pick me up? We have a hunt to attend."

It's dark when the aircraft lands a good two miles from the terrorist camp.

Completing a final check of weapons and gear, the group of twelve runs swiftly into the night, barely even a footprint in the sand to mark their passage.

T'Challa had called for a hunt; the predators had their prey.

With nary a sound, the sentries were downed, out of sight of the few cameras, the darts distributing the tranquilizer immediately. Keeping to the shadows, they entered the sheltered cave, weapons at the ready.

The men they encountered were all sundered, unconscious on the ground as the group slowly moved deeper in the cave system.

A sudden blaring of alarms rang through the passageway; their presence discovered.

At a fork in the passage the group split in two, T'Challa leading one and Shuri the other. Defeating every man who stood before them, T'Challa soon came upon the man who appeared to be in charge.

"I do not know who you are, or how you found this place, but you will leave in pieces."

T'Challa doesn't notice the threat. His eyes are locked on the man's neck.

Or rather, locked on the ring hanging from a chain.

The Panther roars inside him, raging at the audacity for this man to wear his mates ring; to adorn himself with the marker of T'Challa's love for Tony.

T'Challa answers the call.

By the time the red haze fades from his sight, the man is barely alive and more through luck than any control on T'Challa's part. He quickly removes his husbands ring from the man's neck and looks around the cavern they are in.

The Dora Milaje with him have subdued the rest of the men present, and Nakia is attempting to restart the screens set up in the corner. No doubt those are the screens for the cameras located around the area. T'Challa moves to offer his help when Shuri's voice speaks through the comms.

"Brother, I have found him! Come quickly, he is not well!"

T'Challa moves.

Okoye is waiting for him at the fork to lead him to his Unyule. The cavern that held Tony was host to heavy steel doors and several men watched by the Dora Milaje are tied up outside it, no doubt set to guard his husband. T'Challa enters the cavern and quickly makes his way to Shuri and Tony. As he kneels beside them, he notices the body not too far from them.
"The men shot him just as we entered; he died to protect Tony, Brother."

T'Challa bows his head and whispers a prayer for the Panther God to bless this fallen soul.

"Tony was clipped badly by ricochet; we've bandaged the wound as best we can, but Brother... his chest."

T'Challa forces himself to look past his Unyule's face and swallows deeply at the blue glow.

He can't think of any kind reason for Tony to have what is clearly an arc reactor in his chest.

Carefully, he brings Tony into his arms, cradling his Unyule gently, as tears of relief streak his face behind his mask.

His husband, his mate, his Unyule, is back in his arms.

Tony remains in T'Challa's arms as they board the aircraft. He has lost much weight, and is dressed in threadbare rags that do nothing to protect him from the chill of the desert night. T'Challa takes his seat in the aircraft, waiting for the Dora Milaje to finish preparing the bonfire of Tony's weapons; once the aircraft is a safe distance, a bomb will destroy the place of his Unyule's captivity and the men who held him slave.

Nakia found footage of what they wanted Tony to do, and what they did when he said no. She found footage of Tony's operation, of Tony's fellow prisoner doing what he could to save him.

And she found the video to Stane.

*Trinkets to kill a prince,* they said.

"Huh. I'm dreaming again."

T'Challa's eyes dart to his Unyule's face, sluggish as he wakes, but so wonderfully alive.

"At least it's a nice dream; I haven't had many of those lately. They've all been pretty scary actually."

"No dream. I promise you my Love, this is not a dream."

T'Challa can't take his eyes from Tony, even when his husband shakes his head in disagreement.

"Nah, this is a dream; the man I love, surrounded by amazing tech and me. Dream."

T'Challa pulls out Tony's ring.

"That's mine, I know that's mine, why do you have my ring? I'm always wearing my ring in my dreams."

So saying, Tony raises a hand to his neck, looking for his chain. When his hand finds nothing, Tony looks down, paling considerably when he sees the arc reactor.

"Not a dream my Love. You have been a captive for six agonising weeks. The leader of the group had this, and it was how I found you."

T'Challa slides the chain back where it belongs, a harmonic chime ringing when the ring hits the arc reactor.
"Keep it on you always my Love; for we can always find Vibranium."

Tony's breathing is getting choppy, and he clings tightly to T’Challa.

Soon, he will be told the cover story before they blow up the weapons and leave him where the military can find him.

He will return to America and Stane will be removed, while SI distances itself entirely from weapons.

And he will return properly to T’Challa, where he can stop being Anthony Edward Stark and just be Tony.

T’Challa's Unyule.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Precious.

Wakanda has been in isolation for a long time, and holds different standards of beauty to America. The people are not sure whether Tony Stark is worthy of Prince T'Challa.

Tony calls someone childish in Italian.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Tony knows he is aesthetically pleasing.

Tony also knows that it is not the reason most people are attracted to him; his bank balance and chequebook are what most people like him for.

It's why, at twenty-three, he delighted so much in T'Challa's presence. T'Challa had just turned up one day to a Stark Industries Tour, wandering through the rooms like the rest of the visitors, seemingly amazed and amused by what was on display. But he had asked questions, intelligent questions at that, not just 'Do you think Stark would sleep with me?' or 'Is it true Stark's cock is fifteen inches?'

No, T'Challa was smart, with a streak of sass a mile wide, and a smile that shone, and he took an interest in Tony beyond the physical or the material.

Tony didn't know why a guy like T'Challa was interested in him. But he thrilled in every moment of it.

Finding out that his boyfriend was royalty wasn't actually something that surprised Tony; T'Challa was elegance and charisma given human form.

Finding out his boyfriend was from Wakanda, the most technologically advanced country on the planet, home to the rarest metal on the planet, was a bit of an eye-opener but still not surprising; T'Challa was intelligent and curious, and very willing to learn and expand his knowledge.

Finding out his boyfriend wanted him to visit Wakanda to meet his family; now that was surprising.

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Tony had never been invited to meet the family's of any of his previous partners. He had no frame of reference for what was a good or bad response.

T'Chaka and his wife N'Yami were welcoming and T'Challa's sister Shuri was full of smiles, so that was good, but it all felt... distant. Like they didn't know what to think of him, didn't really want to know what to think of him.
The Royal Bodyguards and the civilians were open and blatant.

Sneers and jeers in Wakandan followed him wherever he went, silenced only when T'Challa was nearby; even the presence of other members of the Royal family would not silence what Tony could tell were insults. The faces made, not even trying to hide the disgust and hatred.

Tony's used to people hating him for no real reason.

Sometimes he even thinks he deserves it, what with not even his own father caring for him.

But Stark men are made of Iron, so Tony takes deep breaths, straightens his spine, and moves forward, one step at a time.

The third week of Tony's visit, after he has once more left a workshop because they won't answer any of his questions in English (which T'Challa has assured him is taught just as Wakandan), Tony finds himself facing the inevitable confrontation.

"How dare you come here and bewitch Our Prince?!"

One of the Royal Bodyguards assigned to T'Challa. She's upset, and taking it out on Tony.

Maybe Tony deserves it.

"Look at you; pale and thin! You would not survive a day in this world if it were not for the protection Our Prince gives you!"

Tony knows that he can't match up to the beauty of the Wakandan people; it's a small part of why he's so entranced with T'Challa. Anyone would spite him for their relationship.

Maybe Tony deserves it.

"You have NOTHING to offer him."

But Tony is a Stark, and Starks don't take shit from anyone.

"Try telling me something I don't know; seeing as you're finally brave enough to say something I can understand."

A silence befalls the crowd that has, moments earlier, been cheering the girl on, encouraging her to cut into him.

"You... You dare to-"

"Dare to what? Call you out on being a coward? Yeah, I do. It takes a big person to insult someone to their face, but it is not a brave person who does it behind the veil of language. Sei infantile. See? How completely brave was I just now?

You say I am not good enough for T'Challa. Congratulations, you have voiced the fact that I have been telling the man since he first asked me out! T'Challa doesn't need me; anything I could possibly have to offer him he already has here in abundance and of greater quality! He would merely need to smile and he would have people better than me lining up for miles for the chance to have him look at them with that smile! I know this, and have known from the beginning!

But... for some reason... for some inexplicable cause that I cannot hope to fathom... T'Challa sees something in me that he wants to keep close. Something in me that he desires. Yes, he could do a
million times better, we *all* know this, but for whatever purpose, T'Challa wants *me*. And I am a selfish man. For as long as T'Challa will allow it, I will hold onto him. I will do whatever I can to stay at his side.

Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what I want, or you think. It is T'Challa's choice that matters.

You don't have to love me; you don't even have to like me. But you could at least have the decency to treat me like a human, and the courage to respect T'Challa's choices as much as you claim to respect him."

Tony doesn't wait for a response. He merely turns around and starts walking away.

Deeps breaths. Straightened spine. Moving forwards.

One step at a time.

"I heard quite the interesting rumour today."

T'Challa's arms wind around Tony's waist to rest on his stomach. Tony leans back slightly, thankful for the warm breadth of T'Challa's body, and looks away from the view from the balcony to see his boyfriend’s face. A deep smile curls dark lips, letting the startling white of his teeth peek through.

"Apparently, my heart has been caught by a gentle white panther, that will destroy that which pushes too far."

Tony scoffs a little, turning to cuddle into T'Challa's embrace.

"You have shown them your fire and just as I did, they have fallen in love with you. The science division has been tripping over themselves to try and get you to come look at them again."

Tony gently nuzzles his cheek into T'Challa's shoulder.

"I am sorry that you had to be exposed to such pettiness; I have already expressed my disappointment to the Dora Milaje, and word of their lecture has already spread to the people. I am glad you did not allow it to continue.

And I am so thankful that you have chosen to stay with me."

Tony moves to speak, but T'Challa silences him with a finger pressed to his lips.

"I have learned of what you said today and I disagree. You are an amazing man, and I feel blessed to know you. You are smart, funny, kind and generous, and you shine with the brightest flame of life. You keep it hidden behind sarcasm and laughter, but it is always there, and when you let it out? The whole world seems to bathe in the glow.

I don't understand how you have not been snatched up by someone, but I am thankful, because it gave me the chance to be at your side. And just as you claimed, I am a selfish man. I will hold onto you until you tell me to leave. If you are the same, then neither of us has to let go. You are my White Panther, and there is no other I would want."

Tony tightens his grip on T'Challa.

"For as long as you'll let me."
T'Challa's smile widens.

"Until you tell me to leave."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Precious

Same Universe as Eye of the Beholder. Tony is spotted wearing jewellery from Wakanda and is accused of Cultural Appropriation, Racial Insensitivity and more. T'Challa has issues with people slandering his husband.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It happened at a political gala after the Sokovia Accords had been signed and ratified.

Tony had been mingling, getting a feel of the room as to who was likely to kick up a stink over something, because there was always someone.

He was just a little surprised over what the fuss was caused by.

"How dare you?!"

Tony's head snapped from the man he was speaking to, to the woman swiftly walking up to him with fury lining every move.

"I beg your pardon?"

"It's not my pardon you should be begging for Stark! After the work done to make the world a more understanding place, I would have thought you of all people wouldn't be setting us back by being so- so... callous!"

Tony's head tilted a little to the side in confusion, an action mirrored by a number of the patrons. Taking a quick glance around the room, Tony couldn't see anyone else looking at him angrily, so.

"Madam, what exactly have I done that is making you so angry? Because as far as I'm aware, I am on my best behaviour."

The woman scoffed.

"Of course you'd say that; you're just that heartless! What I'm taking about Stark is your blatant Cultural Appropriation!"

That gained a few incredulous stares, which served to make the woman angrier.

"I'm talking about this!"

So saving she surged forward and grabbed Tony's wrist, wrenching it up as she jerked his jacket sleeve down, so all could see the gold and black beaded bracelet.
A few gasps of outrage sounded when the bracelet was revealed. Mutters started sounding, and the returned Avengers were being given cautious looks as well. Which Tony felt was unfair seeing as they were looking at him askance as it was.

"To think that you could sink to such levels! Did you think you were being cute? Wearing traditional African beadwork? All you've managed Stark is to be an insensitive insult! The very nerve of you! To show such cheek as to-"

A hand gently snatching Tony's from the woman silenced the whole room. T'Challa's angry glare had the woman retreating a couple steps.

"I was not aware that you were African; you certainly don't look it."

The woman seemed to gain a second wind at the mocking T'Challa gave her, but he cut her off before she could start.

"If you had looked properly, you would see that the band is marked with the Crest of Wakanda. I myself was the one to gift this bracelet, following Wakandan tradition."

At T'Challa's use of the word tradition, the woman drew herself up and screeched out, several guests jumping back at the sound.

"Wakanda has been in isolation for decades! How could there be any tradition of giving a piece of the culture to a complete outsider?!"

By now, the Avengers had decided to stand at Tony's side, as though they backed him from the start. T'Challa spared them a derisive look, then turning a questioning look to Tony, which received a shallow nod, before once more facing the accusatory woman.

"The tradition, madam, is for a member of the Wakandan Royal Family to gift a piece of jewellery they have made themselves to their spouse."

All sound, all movement, completely stopped, the woman standing gaping, her mouth fallen wide open.

"I am honoured that he chooses to still wear my gift."

Turning sharply, T'Challa led Tony from the room by the hand he still grasped.

The Avengers quickly followed, and once they were safely ensconced in Tony's Limo, Clint burst out laughing.

"Man! Did you all see the look on her face?! That was brilliant! You could not have chosen a better lie to shut her up!"

Clint's joyful hooting was cut off by the vicious growl emanating from T'Challa's throat.

Tony shuffled closer and drew T'Challa to rest on his shoulder, the man's arms wrapping around his waist.

"T'Challa and I have been wed over fifteen years. No lie was told."

"But... there is no way you're married! You don't wear a ring, you don't talk about it, and you never called him in during any of our crises!"

Tony levelled a flat glare at the archer.
"I have been considered public property since I was born Barton; like hell I would force my husband into that spotlight. I may not talk about T'Challa to you, but I talk to him nearly every day."

"And" T'Challa's voice joined in, muffled from his place leant against Tony. "Wakanda gives a piece of handmade jewellery, as I said not a few moments ago. We have survived a long-distance relationship, and still hold each other in highest regard. Any problems you have, do not concern us."

Natasha piped up.

"What about all of Tony's cheating? Is that not a problem?"

"Unlike you it would seem, I trust my husband to be faithful. I am well aware of how many have claimed to have slept with Tony over the years, but I am also aware of how many stories have made claims when I was the only one in my husband's bed in the given dates. It is of no concern to you."

T'Challa sat up enough so that they could see his face.

"I have greater trust in my White Panther than in any of you."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

A Tumblr Post I saw.

Person A is a teacher for the child of Person B.

T'Challa says 'Kitten' in Xhosa.
Hope you all enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

T'Challa capped the pen after signing the final form on his desk.

Finally, the yearly reports were complete, and he wouldn't have to bring any work home with him for a while. It had been over a decade since he had graduated; he didn't need homework from his job.

Stretching as he stood up, T'Challa moved to put the files in his briefcase when he heard the front door open.

"I'm back!"

T'Challa swiftly moved to the hall.

"Welcome home Azari. You're early; did you have fun with your mother?"

Years ago, T'Challa had fallen in love with the actress Ororo Munroe, and she him. They had married and were content and happy. T'Challa had been ecstatic when Ororo had told him he was to be a father.

Azari was perfect, T'Challa had yet to come across a single instance of bad behaviour in the boys fifteen years of life. Sure his *ikatana* could be mischievous, but Azari had never been malicious or hateful.

Not even when Ororo had asked for a divorce.

It had completely blindsided T'Challa, but Ororo wanted to get back to her acting, and T'Challa had been giving all his attention to Azari and she felt neglected. Over the course of six months, T'Challa finally agreed and signed away his marriage. Ororo moved away and resumed her career, but at least once every month would come and spend the weekend with Azari. Usually his son was gone the entire time, so a little after noon was a *very* early return.

"Mother received a call from the director of whatever she's working on now; some idiot accidentally erased half of the footage they've recorded, so they need her back immediately."

"I am sorry your time was cut short."
Azari shrugged, appearing uncaring that his mother had to leave again.

"I love mother, I hope that's never in doubt, but I do wish that we had more scheduling around when she can come by; The Avengers meeting was this morning."

Realisation struck T'Challa as his son moved to the kitchen. Azari was part of a small science club, that met on occasional weekends to play with the fun side of high school science. Azari hated missing out. T'Challa entered the kitchen to find Azari making a sandwich.

"What was this week exploring?"

Azari's face lit up at his father's interest.

"Lasers and how they interact with the world! Mr Stark said he was gonna bring mirrors and stuff so we could try our hands at all the movie clichés on how to avoid laser grids!"

T'Challa's eyes widened; that did sound fun.

Mr Stark, his son's science teacher and the supervisor for the club, was apparently always advocating the awe of science; Azari had laughingly told the story of how a complete double period of science had been turned on its head as teacher and students ended up debating whether magic was merely science unexplained or an entirely different field altogether. T'Challa could admit it would have been amusing to watch.

"I called Mr Stark to let him know I couldn't make it, and he said he understood. I'll still get to go to Francis' comp though."

T'Challa thought over the faces of his sons friends.

"Francis is the archer right?"

Azari nodded, delighted that his father knew his friends from one another.

"Would you mind some company?"

His son damn near glowed.

Seated in the bleachers of the sports hall, T'Challa and Azari watched with rapt attention as the archers pitted themselves against each other. While father and son were both greatly athletic and could handle a bow, they were nowhere near the level of any of the competitors.

"Francis is going to win; he's been practicing with his father, and his father's the Olympic record holder."

T'Challa was impressed; he hadn't known Clint Barton's son was one of Azari's friends.

Neither father nor son were surprised when Francis came first. Azari rushed off the congratulate his friend, and T'Challa reclined a little in his seat. Looking at the group his son joined, he could see the surprise and delight on the four faces; they had missed him.

A warm glow settled in T'Challa's chest; it was so good that Azari had such a close knit group of friends.

Climbing down from the raised seats, T'Challa looked around at the other people in the hall, merely passing his gaze over them until his eyes fell on... him.
T'Challa had been raised by his father to appreciate all forms of beauty, something he hoped he was instilling in Azari. And the man was beautiful.

Hair an artful mess, as though countless hands had run through it; eyes a warm whiskey brown that invited you to drink from them; lips curled into a joyful smile that crinkled those gorgeous eyes, framed by an impeccable goatee; perfectly tanned skin; truly a beautiful man.

T'Challa felt himself swallow when the man happened to look his way.

He felt himself straightening when the man made his way over.

"Hey there. You looked a little lonely standing here all by yourself so I came to make you not a loner. It's a thing you will be mocked for in social settings, and this is a social setting, which I'm assuming you already knew because you don't look uneducated, uneducated people are also the ones who dress bizarrely in public then get offended when you ask them what died to make their outfit, because it genuinely looks like a swan died bumming a boar. I'm Tony, you are?"

T'Challa had to take a few moments, just being amazed by the sound of Tony's voice, and impressed by the speed he linked thoughts, to realise he'd been asked a question.

"Oh, My name is T'Challa. It's nice to meet you Tony."

A strong, calloused hand gripped the one T'Challa had offered to shake, and it sent a little thrill through T'Challa; Tony was a man who worked with his hands.

"The pleasure's mine; I'm talking to a hot man."

A brief shot of silence stole its way around them as they both ran those words through their heads.

"That's a compliment by the way; you don't have to read anything from it. Unless you're interested, in which case read away, read all you want. But if it makes you uncomfortable, just pretend nothing happened; I'm all for consensual and interested, so if you're not, nothing's happening. No problems. I'm just gonna shut up now, before I embarrass myself further- you're laughing, why are you laughing? Are you laughing at me? That's not very nice. Or did something funny happen when I was rambling and I completely missed it? I hate missing funny things; did I miss a funny thing? Do not hide funny things from me."

T'Challa was having difficulties stopping his chuckles. Tony was just so expressive that he couldn't help it.

"I am flattered that I have met your approval Tony. I find you quite attractive as well."

Tony's words stuttered to a halt, a slight flush raising to his cheeks.

"That-that's nice, uh, good I mean, that's good to know..."

T'Challa started chuckling again.

By the time T'Challa calmed himself, Tony had lost his flush.

"I'm not a huge sportsy person myself, but I love watching the application of maths in motion, so I come to a lot of the local comps. What brings you here?"

"My son is friends with one of the competitors, and wished to be here as support."

Tony's face gentled, his eyed going soft.
"Yeah, my kids are like that, always wanting to be there to cheer each other on. It just helps make you feel good about life; a small bunch of kids screaming each other's name in fun and laughter, telling all the world that they care."

They spoke on whatever topic crossed their minds for a good twenty minutes, before a pretty redhead came up to them.

"Hi, I'm sorry about this, but I need to steal Tony. There is a pile of paperwork due Monday on his desk singing sweet serenades for him."

"Lies Pepper, filthy, filthy lies and slander; that paperwork sings no serenades! It shouts out satanic curses and tries to eat the souls of anyone foolish enough to try and sign it! Let go of me-let go-stop it Pepper-Pep, let me-No, no-Bad Pepper, Bad, no, let go of Tony; Tony does not want!"

The redhead -Pepper- dragged Tony away, forcing Tony to leave the building with the grip she had on his shirt. T'Challa couldn't help but be impressed by how she handled the excitable man. He was a little concerned that even with his raised voice, no-one had given the scene a second glance, but as Tony had not seemed to be in genuine distress, he didn't push the issue.

Besides, it was close to dinner time, and he had a teenage boy to feed.

"Here father; we received them today."

Azari handed over a sheet of paper. A Parent Teacher Meeting?

"I thought you were doing well in science? Why does Mr Stark want to meet me?"

Azari shrugged his shoulders.

"I think it's less of a want, and more of a Ms Potts told him to. He looked pretty unhappy handing them out."

Ah, Ms Potts, the School secretary. Rumours painted her as a woman who would take on God if he visited and she hadn't received his paperwork.

"They weren't given out to the whole class; I was rather distracted and wasn't paying attention to who got them, but I don't think it's anything bad."

T'Challa read the information on the form and nodded.

"We shall be there."

The meeting was on Friday evening, and as T'Challa pulled into the school parking lot, he could see other family's doing the same.

"Isn't that Francis Azari?"

"It is, along with his father. And over there, I can see Torunn. Is this perhaps a group meeting, instead of one-on-one?"

"It just might be. Come, let us go."

Father and son left the car and made their way inside, Azari describing points of interest along the way to the science labs.
Upon entering the room and taking a seat in the neatly arranged semi-circle, T'Challa took note of those present. As stated Francis and Clint Barton were present, along with Torunn and her father Thor. T'Challa shook hands when introduced to James' parents Steve and Natasha, and nodded politely to Janet Van Dyne and both Henry Pym's. All seats were taken, and the children started looking worried, Azari coming to perch on the seat of his chair as was his wont when nervous. But none of the teenagers looked remotely guilty, so T'Challa would have to see if this meeting was good or bad.

A few minutes of small talk were finally broken when the door to the labs opened revealing...

Tony and Pepper?

T'Challa took a surreptitious look around the room to see if he had missed some chairs, but no, he hadn't, and there was no child with the two.

"See? They all came and we can get this sorted."

"I still don't think it's needed; you are just making this unnecessarily complicated."

"It's needed Tony, because there is a lot of positivity that will come out of it."

"I don't see what was wrong with my original plans."

"There was nothing wrong, but there is more benefit this way. Now stop being rude and go explain to them what is going on Mr Stark, Science teacher extraordinaire."

"As you command it Ms Potts, Secretary from the Pits."

T'Challa near swallowed his tongue; the most gorgeous male he had ever come across was his sons teacher.

"Alright everyone, you know who I am, and I know who you are. Fabulous, intros done. As you all know, I am the supervisor for the minions shenanigans. I suggested to the school board that if your kids each placed a certain mark by half-year, I would take them on a trip to the New York Hall of Science."

T'Challa glanced at Azari, wondering why his son hadn't told him of a trip he most certainly would have encouraged, but there was only a gobsmacked look on his sons face.

"And because literally every single one of you just looked at your kids; I didn't tell them about this plan."

Ah. That explained a lot.

"The short-stacks are my top five students, so the board has agreed."

The teens jumped from their seats cheering, running around the room in delight. Tony let them celebrate a few moments, before near bellowing-

"AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!"

The reaction was instantaneous, the five teens, leaping back into their seats and giving their teacher their full attention. Clint Barton spoke up.

"You have got to teach me how to do that."
Steve Rogers nodded his head in agreement.

"I wish I got such a reaction from James."

Tony scoffed.

"You are a first generation Avenger Steve, but you're also the guy James sees every morning soaked in sweat from your insane running schedule. I, on the other hand, am the guy who will tell his mother when he acts up, so of course he'll listen to me."

James, and the other kids, nodded at Tony's words, prompting grumbles from the parents.

"Now, my original plan was to turn one of our weekend Avengers meetings into a day trip. I made the mistake of telling Pepper."

The woman in question merely rolled her eyes as Tony elaborated.

"Now, instead of a nice relaxed day trip, Pepper has arranged for a televised overnight trip. As faces will be plastered on T.V. you are all going to have to sign permission forms, consent forms, and those of you who can are invited to Chaperone, because Pepper doesn't trust me with them, regardless of how none of them have had an injury under my care worse than a paper cut and we have regularly been blowing shit up, and will need to sign yet another form stating that yes you can come play with all the lovely science too."

Snarky rejoinders and quips went flying through the rest of the meeting, the kids once more up and running as they delighted in the upcoming trip.

T'Challa made sure to sign the chaperone form before he and Azari left.

Overall, the first day was a success, and the televising of it would bring a lot of publicity to the school, but T'Challa had to agree with Tony; it was not a relaxing trip. All the parents had ended up coming, but because the camera crew and director (Seriously? A director?) wanted footage of the group in as many exhibits as possible, no real time could be spent in any of them. The kids were enjoying themselves, sure, but to T'Challa, it felt like he wasn't allowed to stand still for more than a few seconds.

Tony was running himself ragged to keep the group entertained and learning -the whole point of the trip- but one of the kids would react excitedly to one of the exhibit pieces, and suddenly a cameraman would be in their face, demanding they do it again until they were glaring, and the parents kept being pushed away from the kids, because the kids were more interesting for the program.

It was a miracle that no blood was shed by the time the group entered their hotel for the night.

Tony was on the phone speaking in hushed tones that did nothing to hide his anger.

"This was supposed to be a reward Pepper, but the kids aren't given five minutes before we're being shuffled off again... I am not exaggerating! I have the forty-two stubs in my wallet right now, and I have a group of unhappy people who will corroborate... I understand they want a strong showing Pepper, but this is ridiculous; my kids are grumpy and bored, because they didn't get to explore at their pace! They took enough footage today; if they come back tomorrow, I am not apologizing if I end up punching them.

I am deadly serious Virginia."
You have taken the nice day out I planned and turned it into an endurance test. I said I made the mistake of telling you, and you are proving it. Get the crew gone; we have provided enough publicity for the school, it is time for my kids and their parents to actually enjoy themselves. Goodnight."

T'Challa approached carefully as Tony massaged his temples. Startling slightly when he opened his eyes, Tony offered a tired smile, which T'Challa returned before sitting next to him at the small table by the window.

No words were exchanged until bedtime, when they whispered their blessings.

No words were needed.

The camera crew did not return, to the delight of the group, and indeed the day was brilliant.

Actually getting to explore the exhibits was amazing; so many different branches of science! The kids were far calmer and happier, asking Tony questions, and discussing the answers amongst themselves. The parents were still grumpy, but nothing could be done for that, as they seemed to have decided that it was Tony's fault the camera crew were jerks.

Tony and T'Challa spoke at great length during the day, wherein T'Challa discovered that Tony had gone to school with the rest of the parents, and was a 'First Generation Avenger' too; What he had called Steve at the meeting. Their school had an infestation of bullies, and they had taken it upon themselves to, in Tony's words, 'Avenge the wrongs done to the innocent.'

Avengers Assemble had been their call to battle, and Tony used it now to settle the next generation; the Next Avengers.

Tony had discovered T'Challa's little... obsessive devotion to panthers an had delighted in calling him by different felines; some of them were rather clever

The day passed with joy and laughter, the teens far more pleasant than the night before, and soon all were loaded up in the schools minibus.

Once back in the school lot, the parents meandered to their cars, while the kids bid their farewells.

"Thank you for all your work Tony; the kids enjoyed themselves, and learned a lot."

"It's all good Crookshanks, I'm a teacher; it's my job to make them want to learn."

"And what if you've made me want to learn more about you?"

Tony stopped, turning to face T'Challa. T'Challa held Tony's gaze, trying to display the honesty and desire he felt for the man. Tony took a deep breath.

"Then I'd say you are welcome to join Azari to team meetings. And that I might invite you to coffee afterwards."

T'Challa's lips curled as warmth bloomed in his chest.

"Then I believe you will have a new Avenger."
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
T'Challa's fingers pinched the bridge of his nose, a desperate attempt to stave off the headache threatening to break.

After a few moments, T'Challa acknowledged that his lack of sleep was playing a large part of his discomfort, but there was just so much to do. With the Avengers safely ensconced in Wakanda, observed by Shuri's ever-watching gaze, T'Challa had the freedom to work with Tony Stark to fix the Accords.

At least, that had been the plan.

The crown of the King, and the Black Panther's mantle were heavy weights to bear. Constantly his mind was plagued by questions; Was he doing the right thing working in America instead of protecting his people? Should he have revealed the Black Panther, the Protector of Wakanda, to the world? Would he be a good king?

It just wouldn't stop.

The questions even invaded his dream, twisting and churning until he found himself looking at the smoking ruins of Wakanda as the Panther God consumed him, before jerking awake, short of breath with fire burning in his chest and skin covered in sweat.

And so he worked, putting as much focus as he could into sorting out the Accords. Tony, as the man had insisted he be called, had an unusual sleep pattern, so was often working when T'Challa escaped the terrifying thrall of his mind.

T'Challa was beyond thankful to have the genius' company in those moments.

He was just so grateful to not be alone.

But tonight it seemed his body could no longer keep up with the effort; his whole frame was shaking, and his breaths were heavy. To sleep meant to fall into doubt and unease, not getting any actual rest. His breathing quickened at the thought of the dreamt destruction, his eyes darting about the room, trying to anchor himself in reality.

It was no use.

Black started to dot his vision, and then he could smell the smoke from burning homes, taste the
spilt blood of his people, hear the screams of the scared-

"T'CHALLA!!"

He jolted awake, finding himself on the floor, reclined against a strong chest.

"You awake now? Focus on me, on my breathing. See? In and out, nice and slow. That's it, you can do it, you know how to breathe; you've been doing it your whole life. There we go, just keep doing it for me."

Tony's voice rang calm through his ear, and T'Challa tried to match the breaths he could feel from the chest beneath him. By the lilt of Tony's words, he was doing well.

"Okay, I want you to keep matching me as I talk. Just keep going in and out as I open my face hole, sound like a plan? Yeah we can do this."

Tony moved T'Challa slightly, so that his ear was pressed to his chest.

Right over his heart.

"Friday let me know you had an anxiety attack. They suck, are nothing more than your worst fears coming out of nowhere and bitch-slapping you. But we can manage them. Yes, they are cruel and painful, but they are a sign that you need help; hypocritical coming from me, I know, but I can help you T'Challa. In and out."

T'Challa's breaths matched Tony's, and the deep thudding of his heart helped loose the tension in his body.

Tony's heart was calm.

Even through the worry and emotions T'Challa could hear in his voice, Tony's heart was at a resting pace. It was so soothing.

"T'Challa, when you blacked out just now, where were you?"

"I was-" His voice was so thready, barely something he recognised. "I was in the study, still am-"

"No T'Challa; where were you?"

T'Challa swallowed the feeling of fear and choked out the answer he didn't wish to give.

"The ruins of my home."

A strong hand rubbed up and down his back, the strokes firm and grounding.

"There was so much fire and noise; my people hurting and afraid. I need to protect them; I am the Black Panther and King, it is my duty, my birthright. But..."

Tony pulled him closer, the warmth of his body helping him stay calm, and the smooth drawl of his voice almost melodic.

"But what T'Challa? You can do it; you're already doing so well. In and out. But what?"

T'Challa clenched his eyes shut, curling even closer to Tony's frame.

"But... will I be able to? Will I be good enough?"
Tony's hand kept rubbing T'Challa's back as the words unspoken seem to ring through the air. Tony takes a deep breath that T'Challa copies before speaking.

"I don't know."

A thrill of dread runs down T'Challa's spine, before it is chased away by firmer strokes of the genius' hand.

"I don't know, because the world is ever changing. Right now, in this second, I see a good man trying his hardest; that man can be called a good King. In ten years time, I may see a man fat and greedy of his power; that man cannot be called a good King. You will be a good King T'Challa, so long as you stay a good man, so long as you keep trying. You will make mistakes - you're still human after all- but you will try your hardest to fix them; just like when you discovered Zemo's plot.

A good man T'Challa; that is what you need to try to be."

T'Challa clutches the shirt beneath his fingers tightly, his body shaking with the light sobs falling from his lips.

A good man. He can be a good man.

He just needs to follow Tony's example.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Reclaimer

Chapter Summary

For Leefdoor

T'Challa was part of the original Team, battling alongside the other Avengers in New York.

This was tricky; I honestly didn't know how to make it flow like other entries. I tried my best. I would like to point out that when Tony has someone willing to work with him, I thought that he was a lot calmer, and more insightful (when Tony realises where Loki is opening the portal), so I tried to show that. The title is a song. A special shout out will be made, for the first person, if anyone can guess why I chose it for this chapter.

I WILL NOT be following this one up! It was a monster!

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"T'Challa."

"Yes Father?"

"A message from Nicholas Fury. He has need of the Black Panther."

"I will leave at once."

"Be careful brother."

"Of course Shuri. Take care of Wakanda while I'm gone."

"You're the Black Panther I take it?"

"Indeed. You are?"

"Assistant Director Maria Hill. If you'll follow me, I'll take you to Director Fury."

"So as I understand it, you are the Prince of Wakanda."

"This is correct, but I'm not here as a Prince; I'm here as a Warrior."

"Good, cause that's what I need in my response team."

T'Challa leant against a wall in the bridge, looking around at the tech S.H.I.E.L.D. had on offer. He was disappointed that most of it seemed to be for show; to look impressive, instead of doing
something useful, though that may have been nothing more than the pride he held for Wakanda speaking.

Fury had contacted his father years ago about having a Wakandan on his response team. T'Chaka didn't much trust Fury, but felt that having a foot in the door would be useful. T'Challa and Shuri had battled for the position, and now, here T'Challa stood.

As of yet, Fury was waiting for two quinjets with T'Challa's 'teammates'. The ETA of both very close.

T'Challa had been of two minds when he read about Captain America; on the one hand the man was legendary, taking on impossible odds and winning, proven by his resurrection from seventy years encased in ice. On the other, this was a man who had been more or less torn from everything he knew, and everyone he loved; Fury wanted Steve Rogers to be the leader of the Avengers, but would the man be stable enough to do so?

T'Challa was very interested in the presence of Doctor Banner though. A genius who had been exposed to enough radiation to create a secondary persona that caused drastic physical changes? T'Challa looked forward to picking the man's mind.

But before he could introduce himself to the woman and two men who joined them on the bridge, their target, the Asgardian Loki, was spotted.

T'Challa didn't like how Fury expected Rogers and himself to work together easily; the two men had no exposure to each other, no idea how they worked in battle. It was going to end badly. Loki was toying with them, easily able to overpower them physically, taking hits like they were nothing.

_Shoot to thrill, play to kill_
_Too many women with too many pills_
_Shoot to thrill, play to kill_
_I got my gun at the ready, gonna fire at will_
_Yeah_

The rock music blared through the speakers of the quinjet they had arrived in, and T'Challa let a little awe fall into his expression, hidden behind his mask as it was.

_**Iron Man.**_

A shot at Loki had the Asgardian flying back, falling harshly on the steps. The armour stuck the iconic three point landing, before standing and revealing a small arsenal facing the godling.

"Your move Reindeer Games."

In a flare of light, the asgardian lost his gold horns, now only in his green robes. The weapons facing him disappeared into their hiding places.

"Good move."

T'Challa could get to like Tony Stark.

Stark had removed his helmet, revealing ruffled hair and gorgeous eyes. Rogers had lowered his cowl, and T'Challa his mask.
"I don't like it."

Rogers lowly muttered, his eyes never leaving Loki's form.

"What? Rock of Ages giving up so easily?"

A look of confusion on Rogers face before he continued.

"I don't remember it being ever that easy. This guy packs a wallop."

T'Challa agreed; Loki was very strong.

"He had been playing with us. I do not doubt the effectiveness of your weapons Stark, but Loki did not even try to fight back once you appeared."

Stark's face had taken on a thoughtful look at T'Challa's words, and seemed to be mulling something over before he spoke.

"He was able to hide pretty completely once he left the S.H.I.E.L.D. base; a good deal of that could be because of Agent Barton, but the string bean is called the trickster. He knows how to keep himself out of sight."

Stark looks T'Challa in the eyes.

"While we were facing him, what else was going on?"

A distraction. Yes, that fit. Everyone was looking for the godling; what about those he had under thrall?

Stark pulled the helmet back on his head.

"I'll have J.A.R.V.I.S. start looking for reports of anything happening in Stuttgart at the time; Loki could have chosen the locale at random, but I'm betting it was either close to where he's set up base, or close to something he wanted."

T'Challa nodded in agreement before turning his gaze to Rogers. Rogers looked... almost angry. Like he was annoyed that he hadn't been part of the back and forth. T'Challa raised a brow in question, but before Rogers could speak a word, a roar of thunder rolled through the air, and a streak of lightning crossed the sky. Rogers gaze jumped to their captive.

"What, scared of a little lightning?"

Loki was looking to the ceiling of the craft and, yes, looked a little paler then he had moments before.

"I'm not overly fond of what follows."

Sharing a questioning glance, Rogers opened his mouth to speak when something landed on top of the quinjet. Stark moved and opened the hatch, preparing to fly out and investigate when a tall form landed on the exposed ramp, grabbed Stark and threw him into Rogers, before absconding with Loki in tow.

"And now there's that guy."

Stark rose and once more moved to the exit.
"Another Asgardian?!

Agent Romanoff's voice called from the cockpit, followed by Rogers'.

"Think he's a friendly?!

"Doesn't matter; if he frees Loki, or kills him, the Tesseract's lost."

"Stark! We need a plan of attack!"

Stark looked at Rogers, the glowing eyes of the Iron Man a cold fire.

"I have a plan; attack."

So saying, the red and gold armour leapt form the aircraft, disappearing in the darkness of the night. Rogers released an aggravated sound, before rushing to don a parachute.

"I'd sit this one out, Cap!"

"I don't see how I can."

"These guys come from legend! They're basically gods!"

"There's only one God, ma'am, and I'm pretty sure he doesn't dress like that."

"That depends entirely on your culture Rogers. Go after them if you must, but remember to apprehend Loki first; we unfortunately need him."

Rogers gaze met T'Challa's before the man nodded and leapt from the quinjet.

"Why did you let him go?! It's already bad enough that Stark's going to be there!"

T'Challa levelled an unimpressed look at the woman.

"Stark was right to go to ensure we do not lose Loki. Rogers was not going to stop for anything, so at least he has direction. Instead of complaining, move to find them and pick up our cargo."

Though irritated, Agent Romanoff obeyed, and the quinjet was turned around to track their wayward teammates.

They found them in a wide clearing, covered in dirt and detritus, but aside from a few scratches and one gauntlet, none seemed to be in any real danger.

Upon arriving back at the helicarrier, Loki was placed under the guard of a group of Fury's men, Stark disappeared into the bowels of the craft, and the rest of them made their way to the bridge.

There was some small talk as they found their places waiting for the others to join them. Assistant Director Hill opened a window displaying the security feed on Loki's cell as Doctor Banner joined them.

"In case it's unclear, if you try to escape, you so much as scratch that glass..."

Fury hit a button on the machine next to him and the floor of the room opened, a hole perfect for the glass prison Loki was suspended in.

"...it's 30,000 feet straight down in a steel trap. You get how that works? Ant... boot."
Fury seemed to have a little childish delight in those words; perhaps throwing back something Loki had said at the S.H.I.E.L.D. base he destroyed. Loki looked around.

"It's an impressive cage. Not built, I think, for me."

"Built for something a lot stronger than you."

Loki smiles, a bitter thing filled with teeth.

"Oh, I've heard. The mindless beast, makes play he's still a man. How desperate are you, that you call on such lost creatures to defend you?"

Fury's expression was dark, almost living up to the man's name.

"How desperate am I? You threaten my world with war. You steal a force you can't hope to control. You talk about peace and you kill 'cause it's fun. You have made me VERY desperate. You might not be glad that you did."

A chuckle from the prisoner.

"Ooh. It burns you to have come so close. To have the Tesseract, to have power, unlimited power. And for what? A warm light for all mankind to share. And then to be reminded what real power is."

It was a taunt, an obvious one at that, but it was effective if Fury's scowl was anything to go by.

"Well, let me know if 'real power' wants a magazine or something."

Fury left the room, Hill turning the display off.

"He really grows on you doesn't he?"

T'Challa smiled at the Doctor's sense of humour. He seemed to be the only one however.

"Loki's gonna drag this out. Thor, what's his play?"

The room fell into a back and forth discussion on what Loki was maybe planning, and how they would stop him. T'Challa's thought went back to the quinjet before Thor arrived.

"While we were facing him, what else was going on?"

Doctor Banner's voice broke though his thoughts.

"What do they need Iridium for?"

"It's a stabilising agent."

Stark had arrived, inserting himself into the conversation. He shared a few final words with Agent Coulson before facing the team.

"Means the portal won't collapse in on itself like it did at S.H.I.E.L.D., Doctor Schafer -you know, the guy Loki stabbed through the face? He's still alive; woozy as hell, gonna be in hospital for a good few months- told me what he could about the chunk of the stuff Agent Barton took. So Loki can open the portal as wide and for as long as he wants. No hard feelings Point Break; you got a mean swing."

Stark gave a friendly pat to the Thunderer's arm as he made his way to the main console.
"Jib the topsails. Raise the mizzenmast... That man is playing Galaga!"

T'Challa felt his eyes dart in the direction Stark pointed, barely catching sight of the man changing his screen from the game to a scanning file.

They were in the middle of a possible Alien Invasion threat. Americans.

"He thought we wouldn't notice, but we did."

Stark placed a hand over one eye and focused on the console before turning to look at Hill.

"How does Fury even see these?"

"He turns."

Stark ignored the slight hostility in her tone, running his hands across the unit, fingers lingering here and there.

"Sounds exhausting. The rest of the raw materials, Agent Barton can get his hands on pretty easily. Only major component he still needs is a power source. A high energy density, something to kick start the cube."

T'Challa found a little smile crossing his lips at the energy Stark possessed; the cute little clapping he did emphasising his words. Hill's voice, full of noticeable disdain, caused his smile to drop.

"When did you become an expert in thermonuclear astrophysics?"

"Last night."

T'Challa felt his jaw drop, just a little. He had, of course, heard of Tony Stark's intelligence, but to learn even just a chunk of the subject in so short a time?

A shiver ran down his spine at the thought of what Stark must have learned over his years.

"Am I the only one who did the reading?"

T'Challa answered Stark quickly; almost, he reflected later, like he was trying to impress a teacher.

"Read it, yes. Understood it, not so much. It is not my usual area of study, so I only really followed the points that overlapped."

Stark looked at him in consideration, obviously surprised that he admitted not understanding. Given Rogers' next words, it wasn't hard to see why.

"Does Loki need any particular kind of power source?"

A question that Stark had already answered. T'Challa saw that the Captain wanted to be useful, wanted to do something productive, but it was clear that he was confused. Doctor Banner joined the conversation again.

"He's got to heat the cube to a hundred and twenty million Kelvin just to break through the Coulomb barrier."

Stark perked up at the words, a gentle curling on his lips a precursor to his words.

"Unless, Selvig has figured out how to stabilize the quantum tunnelling effect."
An almost matching curl appeared on the Doctor's lips as the two men volleyed.

"Well, if he could do that he could achieve Heavy Ion Fusion at any reactor on the planet."

Stark out-and-out grinned moving towards the Doctor.

"Finally, someone who speaks English."

The joy on his face was real, genuine in a way that T'Challa had never seen the media capture. And it was over science.

No, T'Challa's eyes widened at the man as he walked to the Doctor, ignoring the muttering from Rogers.

It was over someone keeping up.

"It’s good to meet you, Doctor Banner. You're work on anti-electron collisions is unparalleled. And I’m a huge fan of the way you lose control and turn into an enormous green rage monster."

The Doctor was unsure how to take the praise, and it showed in his lack-lustre "Thanks."

It was then that Fury finally arrived.

"Doctor Banner is only here to track the cube. I was hoping you might join him."

Stark was unimpressed by Fury and his words, choosing not to respond to the man.

"I'd start with that stick of his. It may be magical, but it works an awful lot like a Hydra weapon."

Rogers once more interjected, though his statement was of more use than previous ones. Fury gave the Captain his attention.

"I don’t know about that, but it is powered by the cube. And I’d like to know how Loki used it to turn two of the sharpest men I know into his personal flying monkeys."

Thor looked confused.

"Monkeys? I do not understand."

"I do! I understood that reference."

Rogers' delight was apparent, as was his embarrassment when he noticed everyone's looks. Stark rolled his eyes then turned to Doctor Banner.

"Shall we play Doctor? Jasso-kissa over there can join us if he wants."

Seeing as he was being pointed at, T'Challa moved to follow them.

He had brains to pick.

Working alongside minds such as Bruce and Tony, as they had requested to be called, was incredible.

T'Challa had been in mental raptures discussing various branches of science with the two men, and had been proud that he had been able to not only keep up, but contribute when his own studies came to the fore. He was relaxing and joking with the two men, who were such opposites, but were
so in tandem in the lab. That he had managed to hangout with and impress two of the worlds top scientists.

His Father and sister would be so jealous.

Rogers had come in about half an hour after they had left the bridge, and Tony had just jabbed Bruce, complimenting the man’s control.

"Are you nuts?!"

"Jury's out. You really have got a lid on it, haven’t you? What’s your secret? Mellow jazz? Bongo drums? Huge bag of weed?"

T'Challa stifled a laugh, before joining in.

"Stress knitting! Can't you just picture it? Aggressively pearling in his seat."

Tony and Bruce both laughed, the image such a silly thing that what could you do but chuckle? Rogers was not impressed.

"This is not a matter to be joking and laughing about."

Stark raised an eyebrow at Rogers as Bruce started retreating back into the shell he wore around most others. T'Challa was unimpressed.

"There was no harm done Captain, and we will stop should Bruce show genuine signs of discomfort. We are merely having fun."

"Threatening the safety of everyone on this ship isn’t funny. No offense, doctor."

Bruce was half hiding behind Tony, making himself small and unthreatening. T'Challa bit his lip; Bruce had been having as much fun as T'Challa and Tony.

"No, it..it’s alright. I wouldn’t have come aboard if I couldn’t handle pointy things."

Tony's lips pursed at the way Bruce wasn't looking at anyone. He moved away from the table to the case he had brought onto the helicarrier.

"You’re tiptoeing, big man. You need to strut."

Rogers glared at the man.

"And you need to focus on the problem, Mr. Stark."

Tony's attention snapped to the Captain, anger simmering in his eyes, and a tightness to his jaw.

"You think I’m not? Why did Fury call us and why now? Why not before? What isn’t he telling us. I can’t do the equation unless I have all the variables."

Rogers scoffed.

"You think Fury’s hiding something?"

Tony stepped close to the Captain, opening a bag of blueberries.

"He’s a spy. Captain, he’s the spy. His secrets have secrets."
"There is keeping cards close to the chest, and then there is having a second deck."

Tony smiled at him, eyes crinkling that someone got what he was saying.

"'A warm light for all mankind to share’, Loki’s jab at Fury about the cube."

They all turned to Bruce who had chosen to speak up, straightening a little as he made his comment. Rogers nodded.

"I heard it."

"Well, I think that was meant for Tony. Even if Barton didn’t tell, the completion of Stark Tower's all over the news."

While Tony and T’Challa nodded at what Bruce was saying, Rogers let out a half chuckle in his words that died out at Tony's look.

"The Stark Tower? That big ugly…building in New York?"

Bruce took a breath before continuing.

"It’s powered by the arc Reactors, self sustaining energy source. That building will run itself for what, a year?"

Even as Tony agreed, expanding the information for Rogers, something in that sentence pinged for T’Challa... but what?

"So why didn’t S.H.I.E.L.D. bring him in on the Tesseract project? I mean, What are they doing in the energy business in the first place?"

T’Challa voiced his agreement.

"It can't have been a matter of Tony not being knowledgeable in the science; given what he learned overnight, Selvig would have had no trouble reading Tony into the project. And given that the files spoke of the machines needed to try and understand the Tesseract, it makes more sense for them to have an engineer of Tony's repute, who is used to dealing with unpredictable energies, case in point; the arc reactor which powers the Iron Man armour."

Tony gifted him another smile as he pulled one of his devices from his pocket.

"I'll look into that once my decryption program finishes breaking into all of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s secure files."

Rogers started, looking at Tony with wide eyes.

"I’m sorry, did you say…?"

T’Challa moved closer to the display Tony opened up, showing the program at work.

"J.A.R.V.I.S. has been running it since I hit the bridge. In a few hours, I'll know every dirty little secret S.H.I.E.L.D. has ever tried to hide. Blueberry?"

Rogers was standing jaw agape, disbelief dripping from his frame. Bruce leaned over to grab a few
blueberries, throwing a couple to T'Challa, who nodded in thanks.

"And you're confused about why they don't want you around?"

Tony rolled his eyes again.

"I declined when Fury first came to me about the Avengers Cap. He then had a personality profile done on me when I was dying. So of course whatever files you were given on me aren't going to paint me in the best light, but do me a favour and forget about them for the next five minutes; I am recognised by the world, not just America or S.H.I.E.L.D. but the world as being one of the greatest engineers. My company, which again is recognised worldwide, is the front-runner in clean, sustainable energy.

Yet I'm not included.

This isn't me being selfish, this is me asking questions. There wasn't a request to use our tech, our research, nothing. Some of that is because it's a power source from space, okay, I get that, but like Myšpulín over there stated; we have experience dealing with unpredictable energy, but no questions were asked of us. Why?

Most likely answer? I'm known to shut down that which displeases me, and for the last few years, S.H.I.E.L.D. has been responsible for a lot of things which displease me. What, on their work of the Tesseract, would displease me and have a high relation to a potentially unlimited energy source?"

Bruce and T'Challa reached the conclusion at the same time.

"Weapons."

Tony nodded and stepped back to the display of J.A.R.V.I.S.' progress. Rogers stood in silence for a few moments, wrapping his mind around what had been said.

"Just find the cube."

Rogers quickly left, no doubt afraid of other uncomfortable ideas coming to light.

"That's the guy my dad never shut up about? Wondering if they shouldn’t have kept him on ice."

T'Challa darted his gaze to Tony in shock, only to see an old, pained look in his eyes, even if his words were light. T'Challa quickly replayed the words spoken and took a breath.

"Don't let the past get to you Tony; you are a futurist. Whatever failings Howard Stark may have had, do not let them become yours, or affect your life now."

Tony rested his weight against one of the worktables, sighing deeply, showing just a hint of the stress he was under; the circles under his eyes from a night spent studying, the way his arm was rested against the top of the table a token of the skirmish he faced with Thor, the slouched repose a reminder that Tony was a man in his forties, who was going toe-to-toe with aliens.

"I'll try. I may not succeed; I am an old man, who may be stuck in my ways, but I will certainly try."

Bruce spoke as T'Challa smiled.

"That's all anyone has the right to ask for Tony."
The next hour or so was spent discussing robotics, and Tony's work with A.I.'s.

J.A.R.V.I.S.' program was still on the display and T'Challa had so many questions. Tony answered what he could, but drunk science came up a few times. It just gobsmacked T'Challa that even sloshed, Tony was able to keep creating perfectly.

"I wouldn't say perfectly. Drunk me plays pranks on hung-over me, and leaves all kinds of bugs and glitches that I find hilarious when making, but murderous when fixing. It's why I never deny it when people say I'm a jerk, because trust me; I know."

T'Challa couldn't remember the last time he had laughed so much; he was truly enjoying himself.

"Hey Brucie-Bear; how exactly do you gain all that mass when Green Bean comes out to play? Are you skinnier when he goes to sleep? Do you talk to him in your head? Tell meeeeeeee!"

Bruce looked shocked, and a little wary.

"Why do you want to know?"

Tony pulled an affronted look.

"Why, For Science! Until I know better, you are carrying a walking disregard to the Laws of Conservation of Mass!"

T'Challa couldn't help laughing again; Tony looked so serious, as though he was insulted that he couldn't explain the science.

"I must ask; is that your Battle Cry?"

Two confused looks were directed to him. T'Challa smiled.

"For Science."

The two genius' looked at each other in a mixture of surprise and thought before matching grins pulled their lips, and they took deep breaths,

"FOR SCIENCE!!"

They burst into joyful laughter and T'Challa couldn't help but to join them. Bruce speaks when he finally calms down.

"I don't know where the Other Guy's bulk comes from; I'm always pretty out of it when the change happens, so I can't really pay attention. I'm not skinnier but I am near starving when I am back in control. And we don't... talk per se, we just sorta get impressions of what the other feels and wants."

Tony grins in delight.

"This is so cool. Who do you think would win in an arm wrestling comp; the big guy or Thoreal?"

T'Challa is mortified that he snorted but, come on, Thoreal. Tony's grin gets wider.

"Maybe he's Bjorn with it."

It's so bad... so why can't he stop laughing?
"Please Tony, just stop..."

Tony throws an exaggerated pout on his face, making T'Challa and Bruce laugh a little more before once more being graced with that happy smile.

"Seriously, once we're done here, you two need to come play at the tower. It'll be a whole lot of fun."

Bruce once more shakes his head but he's still smiling. T'Challa just nods.

"Hey Cupcake, do you think Jade Jaws has a favourite food? Is it different from yours? Would he come out to play if I left a mountain of his favourite food?"

Bruce just starts chuckling again while Tony fiddles a little with the display screen, and is about to answer when Fury stalks into the room.

"What are you doing Mister Stark?!"

Fury is living up to his name, but his anger doesn't faze Tony.

"Uh…kind of been wondering the same thing about you."

"You're supposed to be locating the Tesseract!"

Bruce spoke up, almost distractedly, though he was paying the Director his full attention.

"We are, the model's locked and we're sweeping for the signature now. When we get a hit, we'll have the location within half a mile."

Bruce pointed to the window currently displaying a map. T'Challa spoke up as well.

"We have done all we can with the sceptre for the moment; as soon as the tests have been completed we will have more to work with, but for now, we have some down time until we go collect the cube."

Tony chirped in, still looking at the display with a look of slight confusion on his face.

"No muss no fuss. What is Phase Two?"

A loud clatter drew there attention to where Rogers had just dropped a piece of weaponry on the workbench.

"Phase Two is the reason they didn't ask for Stark's help. Sorry, the computer was moving a little slow for me."

Fury took a small step towards Rogers, one hand raised in placation.

"Rogers, we gathered everything related to the Tesseract. This does not mean that we're…"

"I'm sorry Nick. What were you lying?"

Eyes were drawn to the display Tony had been working with, showing the design specifications for the weapon Rogers had brought in. Rogers turned back to Fury.

"I was wrong, Director. The world hasn’t changed a bit."
Agent Romanoff entered with Thor trailing behind her. Bruce turned to her, pointing at the screen.

"Did you know about this?"

"You wanna think about removing yourself from this environment, doctor?"

Bruce levelled a flat look at her.

"I was in Calcutta; I was pretty well removed."

Agent Romanoff looked irritated that she wasn't being obeyed.

"Loki's manipulating you."

Bruce scoffed.

"And you've been doing what, exactly?"

Romanoff looked derisively at the Doctor.

"You didn't come here because I batted my eyelashes at you."

Bruce was getting irritated now, raising his voice as he replied.

"Yes, and I'm not leaving because you suddenly get a little twitchy!"

"ENOUGH!"

T'Challa's shout had the room's attention fall on him.

"You are not doing this here; you may continue your argument if you please, but not in the laboratory! If someone loses their temper and breaks something, it will take us that much longer to locate the Tesseract!"

The room was in silence aside from the hums and beeps of the machines surrounding them. Tony and Bruce stayed where they were, as did T'Challa. Rogers picked up the weapon and left the room, hand latched securely around the Directors arm. Romanoff stalked off in a huff, coming to stand guard outside the lab, and Thor merely moved closer, looking at the displays.

"Do you think you can really locate the Tesseract with your technology?"

The Thunderer's tone is completely curious, no mocking undertone, no disbelief, just sheer curiosity.

Tony takes a deep breath.

"Yes, we can, because we have too. Loki may be chilling in his cell here, but the men he brainwashed are still obeying the orders he set for them. So even if Loki never leaves, we're still up against the little green men."

Thor looks puzzled, and then a little worried.

"Green men? Is that what the Chitauri look like? Have you seen them? When? Where?"

Tony raises both palms up to try and calm the godling.

"Easy Goldilocks, little green men is a reference to aliens in general."
Thor looks puzzled again. Tony's voice is calm and smooth as he explains.

"Humans are vain and arrogant. When we started thinking about how there could be other forms of life in the Universe, we considered ourselves to be the peak of design; every type of life we initially considered in some way looked like us, but not as defined as us. The little green man was thought to be short, naked and primitive in thought and speech and of course green, but we decided that aliens would in someway look like humans. Little green men is a general term, I've never seen a Chitauri, at least I don't think I have, and all I'm hoping for is that they die easily if we can't prevent the portal being opened."

A series of sounds from one of the displays cut the conversation, Bruce moving to look at it.

"Signatures been located, just give it a second to upload."

Tony stretched as he finally came down from the bench he'd been sitting on.

"I can probably get there fastest. Unless you want to race Shakespeare?"

Thor matched the little grin Tony sported.

"You think to again pit yourself against a god? Very well Man of Iron, I look forward to besting you."

T'Challa smirked watching the playful boasting of the two men when he heard Bruce's breath stutter.

"Oh my God."

The explosion rocked the helicarrier.

T'Challa landed in the depths of the helicarrier, debris pinning his leg, and Bruce straining to remain calm beside him. Have the Hulk play on the helicarrier would not end well, probably what Romanoff meant when she spoke of Loki's manipulation. Ignoring the ringing in his ears, T'Challa faced Bruce and spoke.

"They say that Science and Religion should never cross paths, that one will always try to invalidate the other. Yet what most people may not know is that the Big Bang Theory, the idea of how the Universe was created before evolving into what we know today, was originally from a Catholic Priest. Perhaps the man was a double agent or something."

Bruce focused on his words, the green glaze on his eyes and painting his skin lessening the more T'Challa talked. A few breathy chuckles were loosed here and there, and T'Challa could not help but think that Tony would have Bruce laughing uproariously by now.

But Tony wasn't here now; T'Challa was. And as the aircraft took another blow, the green returning to Bruce, T'Challa merely took a breath and kept going.

Agent Coulson was dead, Thor missing, and Loki had escaped.

T'Challa rubbed his hands over his face, taking deep breaths.

Romanoff had managed to return Agent Barton, Bruce was exhausted but still present, and Tony and Rogers had managed to work together and fix the engine, but that was it. Bruce wasn't able to
give much of his focus to anything, not even noticing when he was being spoken to, so T'Challa couldn't ask what the map readout before the first explosion hit said, and the helicarrier was practically dead.

They didn't know what to do.

"There was an idea, Stark knows this, as does T'Challa, called The Avengers Initiative. The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more. See if they could work together when we needed them to, to fight the battles that we never could. Phil Coulson died still believing in that idea, in heroes."

Tony stood and quickly left the bridge, anger shaking his frame. Fury sighed gently.

"Well, it's an old fashioned notion."

Rogers stood and moved to follow Tony. T'Challa's eyes followed before a hand patted at his face. Looking at the sleepy Bruce, it took a moment to realise that the Doctor was waving a weak hand in the direction the two other men had left before nodding. T'Challa smiled and gave a nod in return, before rising and leaving the same way.

"We are NOT SOLDIERS!!"

T'Challa hid himself in the shadows of the doorway. Tony's words did little to hide the grief in his voice.

"I'm not marching to Fury's fife."

The genius looked tired and weary, far too much going on in his mind to keep control over his emotions.

Roger's voice was calm and gentle, like one would talk to soothe a wounded beast.

"Neither am I. He’s got the same blood on his hands that Loki does, but right now we gotta put that behind us and get this done. Now Loki needs a power source, if we can put together a list…"

Tony's eyes snapped up from the blood staining the wall.

"He made it personal."

Rogers sighed.

"That's not the point."

But Tony was gaining steam, fingers and hands twitching and moving.

"That is the point. That’s Loki’s point. He hit us all right where we live. He wanted to unleash the Hulk; how would he do that? Make Bruce angry. How would he do that from his cell? Get someone else, say the Black Widow, to. The sceptre went missing, I'd bet Loki's got it, and that thing messes with people's minds right? So who's to say Loki didn't have influence even in the lab through the sceptre? We were all getting pretty angry until Carbonel, King of the Cats put his foot down. The helicarrier could be a whole lot worse off. Loki hit us here and hard. Why?"

Realisation had come onto Rogers face as Tony's thoughts gained traction. T'Challa slowly entered the room, making sure both saw him. Rogers answered.
"To tear us apart."

Tony was nodding, starting to pace as his thoughts kept aligning.

"Yeah, divide and conquer is great, but he knows he has to take us out to win, right? THAT'S what he wants. He wants to beat us, he wants to be seen doing it. He wants an audience."

Rogers quickly looked at T'Challa as he spoke.

"Right. We caught his act in Stuttgart."

T'Challa remembered how the godling had been toying with Rogers and himself, but had surrendered almost immediately once Tony arrived.

"He was buying time for his plans to be completed, while all eyes were on him."

"Yeah, that was just previews. This is- this is opening night. And Loki, he’s a full-tilt diva, right? He wants flowers, he wants parades, he wants a monument built to the skies with his name plastered..."

T'Challa's eyes widened.

"A warm light for all mankind."

Rogers looked confused as anger started brushing Tony's features

"Son of a bitch."

The battle was long and hard. There had been no time to call reinforcements from Wakanda, so the seven men and woman fought for all their worth. Every second, every time he even blinked, it seemed as though T'Challa was suddenly in a completely different part of the battle, fighting against a never ending wave of Chitauri warriors.

The comm piece he'd been given kept him aware of where his comrades were, and where they were most needed, and he was thankful, because aside from Iron Man's unbelievable ability to seemingly be everywhere, he only caught the briefest glimpses of the others.

He was not ashamed to admit the gratitude and relief that flooded him when Romanoff's voice came through the comms.

"I can close it! Can anybody hear me? I can shut the portal down!"

Rogers voice sounded quickly.

"Do it!"

"NO! Wait!"

Tony?

"Stark, these things are still coming!"

"I got a nuke coming in, set to blow in less than a minute."

T'Challa's breath caught. Someone had shot a missile? At a city still full of people?
"And I know just where to put it."

Of course! If the portal closed with the missile on the other side, no further damage would be done to the city!

But... wait.

"Stark, you know that's one way trip."

A few seconds over the comms of nothing but breathing before...

"It's been an honour."

Silence.

The flash of red and gold rose higher and higher until... nothing.

Iron Man, Tony Stark, travelled through the portal, missile and all.

The area around T'Challa had been cleared of foes, and though there were still more to fight, he couldn't tear his eyes from the portal.

"Come on Stark."

Romanoff's plea received no answer and the Captain finally stated

"Close it."

A terrifying screech seemed to fill the air, a deeper pulse of blue travelling the light leading to the portal. The opening shrunk, getting smaller and smaller until-

"Son of a gun."

It closed with Tony making it through in the last second.

"He's not slowing down!"

Thor's voice had T'Challa once more searching for the red and gold, and yes, Tony was falling, falling-

Caught.

T'Challa ran. The Chitauri had all fallen with the portals closing, so he more or less ran unobstructed, coming upon the spot where the Hulk had landed with Tony, just in time to see Thor rip the face plate of the armour off.

Tony was so still. His features were lax, as though in sleep, but there was no movement, no indication that he still lived.

T'Challa's throat felt tight as he drew closer; would they have to bury this good man?

The roar of the Hulk caused them all to jump, including Tony who gasped for breath, his eyes darting everywhere.

"What the hell?! What just happened?! Please tell me nobody kissed me?!"

The half choked questions loosened a great tightness in T'Challa's chest.
"We were going to let the Hulk do it."

Tony's eyes met his, before turning the Hulk.

"Yeah, no. Let's not do that. I love you Big Guy, but not like that, more like one loves their teddy bear, thanks for the catch by the way I owe you; do you have a favourite food? I will get you a mountain of your favourite food, howsabout that?"

The hulk just gave a rumbling chuckle, amused by Tony's rambling.

"We won Stark."

Rogers' words caught Tony's attention, and Tony let out a deep sigh.

"Alright. Hey. Alright. Good job, guys. Let’s just not come in tomorrow. Let’s just take a day. Have you ever tried shawarma? There’s a shawarma joint about two blocks from here. I don’t know what it is, but I wanna try it."

The thought of food was greatly appealing, T'Challa feeling his stomach murmur at the mention. Thor spoke up.

"We’re not finished yet."

They all looked to Tony's Tower.

"And then shawarma after."

T'Challa smiled as he helped Rogers lift Tony from the ground.

"Indeed, we shall feast. There is much I have yet to know about you Tony."

Tony just sent him a smirk.

"Then be prepared to stick around to learn T'Challa."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
The Darkest Side of Me.

Chapter Summary

For Lupinspotion02

Tony is cursed, taking the form of a panther, and he attacks the Avengers. T'Challa is able to calm him.

This is more comics than MCU. T'Challa says 'my white panther' in Xhosa. WAY shorter than last chapter.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

!!!!!!!!!!SPECIAL SHOUT OUT TO DARKMISS13 FOR CORRECTLY REFERENCING LAST CHAPTERS' TITLE!!!!!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony's view on magic is well known; He hates it.

Sometimes this opinion is shared by the Avengers, sometimes it's not; when a novice magic user caused a flat of people to communicate via interpretive dance, sure Tony laughed, but no, the magic users were called in to fix it. When a teenage boy with a grudge against his ex accidentally called upon an army of demons to destroy the city, Tony suited up to do crowd control, but again, the magic users were the ones to deal with it.

"SHIT, SHIT, SHIT, SHIT! SOMEONE HELP ME!!!"

"Hawkeye! Head towards Hulk and Thor; they should be able to hold him down!"

When Tony gets turned into a panther though... yeah, he really hates magic then.

They had been fighting against Dormammu, one of Doctor Strange's crowd, trying to hold him off until Strange arrived. Tony had managed a very lucky shot, actually wounding the villain. Dormammu decided to flee the scene, but not before getting revenge on Tony.

Hence the whole panther thing.

But with a shit-ton more bloodlust.

Tony had gone ballistic. As soon as Clint, who had been the closest, released Tony from the armour, Tony had moved to strike. Clint was fast enough to avoid the broad swipe to his throat, but now a heavy gash ran across his arm and chest. Tony was more or less trapped in the mind of the panther he had become; aware of what was happening, but powerless against the force of the instincts of the animal.
And his instincts were telling him to *kill*.

"Enough friend Stark! We are your friends, comrades! Calm yourself and cease your attack!"

Thor had managed to push Tony to the ground, and with one hand locked around the joints of his front paws and the other forcing Tony's muzzle to the grass, he cut down Tony's threat greatly.

The Hulk gently grasped his flailing hind legs, copying Thor in holding them by the joints in one hand, while the other held down Tony's tail. Clint was doubled over a short distance away, trying to catch his breath as Carol looked at his wounds. Steve arrived, staring at Tony in disbelief.

"Does anyone know when Doctor Strange was going to arrive?"

A myriad of shaking heads; Tony had been the one to actually get a call through to the man, just before he landed that hit. Strange was as least a half-hour away.

"Okay... Hawkeye, do you have any tranquilisers or something? We can't keep him outside like this; it's too dangerous. Let's get him under then take him back to the mansion and let him loose in the training room."

Tony sunk into unconsciousness quickly, but he remembered thinking Clint had taken a little vindictive pleasure in the task.

"There is nothing I can do to safely remove the spell; it will wear off, but I cannot say how long it will take."

Strange had arrived and immobilized Tony to examine him. Unsurprisingly, Tony's temper had not improved and even floating in the air, unable to reach anyone, he still tried to strike out and maim them.

He had nearly clipped Peter when the boy stood too close.

As a whole, it wasn't bad news; the spell would wear off and Tony would be awesome again. But until that happened, the team was down an Avenger and the gym. Sure they had plenty of places they could still train -Tony was nothing if not a prepared host- but it was inconvenient. Not to mention the fact that Tony was, right now, a hostile. Fun times for all.

It was decided that Vision would be the one to bring food to the Tony-Panther, as Peter had dubbed him. Given the whole intangibility thing, he really was the solid choice. The problem came when little Danielle Cage wanted *'to see the kitty'.*

Standing on the step stool Tony had made especially for her, little Dani opened the gym. Seeing the opening, Tony lunged out, thankfully completely overlooking Dani's presence.

He quickly bounded through the mansion until he came upon the lounge where a good number of the Avengers were sitting and talking. That stopped when they heard him snarling.

Sitting deep in the back of the animal's mind, Tony could only hope that he didn't hurt anyone.

The panther was just so enraged by the Avengers though; as if it had some sort of vendetta or mission coded into it to-

Oh.

Dammit.
The team were doing their best to take Tony down while avoiding injury -to both Tony and themselves- when a deep snarl, far deeper than what Tony could produce, stopped him in his tracks.

Swinging around to face the door the sound came from, Tony was struck by seeing T'Challa. The Wakandan King took slow steps forward, never breaking the lock he had on Tony's eyes.

It was a very odd feeling for Tony; the command that Dormammu had left behind was battling against the overwhelming truth of Tony's feelings. Tony could never bring himself to hurt those he cared deeply for.

And damn but was T'Challa one of those people.

The rest of the room was silent, the team all looking on in varying reactions of horror and amazement. T'Challa kept slowly walking closer, step by step until he was right in front of Tony, still not looking anywhere but Tony's eyes.

Just as slowly as he'd walked, T'Challa knelt before Tony, prompting a few gasps from those still in the room. Tony suddenly let out a little snarl, having more or less forgotten that the Avengers were actually there. The snarl was cut off, however, when T'Challa laid a gentle hand on Tony's neck. Tony shuddered a bit, the instinct of the mother grabbing the cub by the scruff acting up a little. T'Challa started rubbing his hand down Tony's pelt in long, smooth strokes, chuffing occasionally.

Tony could feel himself getting a little boneless, melting in that way all cats seem to do.

When T'Challa began stroking with both hands, Tony couldn't stop the purr that rumbled in his chest.

"To cause such a beautiful creature such distress; Dormammu is truly crass. You are a mighty guardian, and he has you attacking that which you are to protect. Come now, you deserve a long rest after what you have been put through."

Tony slowly followed T'Challa, stopping when he decided he needed persuasion via head scratches, until he was resting across the length of the couch, his head nestled atop T'Challa's lap.

"Rest yam enhlophe ingwe yaseMelika. You will feel better when you wake."

Well, who was Tony to argue?

Tony slowly woke the same way he had fallen asleep; a strong hand gently stroking his head.

Opening his eyes slightly, Tony could see it was much later than it had been, probably midnight, judging by the darkness outside the windows.

"Glad to see you are back to yourself, though you were a most gorgeous panther."

Tony's eyes opened all the way as he turned his head to T'Challa's smiling face before looking down at his body.

Yep. That was definitely a far less hairy quadruped's body he was seeing. Oooh, hands with fingers! And no tail!
The hand resumed stroking his hair, and Tony redirected his attention to the man whose lap he was resting upon.

"Still so beautiful."

Tony could feel the heat painting his cheeks. T'Challa just chuckled before speaking again.

"I wonder if you would let me take you to dinner Tony. I find myself wanting to know more about you than just your beauty."

Tony felt the heat in his cheeks intensify but he was smiling so what the hell?

"I'd like that T'Challa. Maybe I can find out what the hell convinced you to approach a hostile cat."

T'Challa chuckled.

"The thrill of danger Tony, and you possess it regardless of form."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Nom de Guerre

Chapter Summary

For viennese_shadow_foxie

Following the events of Nom de Plume, the Panther returns to Wakanda, only to think back on the conversations he's had with his Mechanic, and realise what has been done.

T'Challa says 'Everything is well. We will speak in my chambers, away from those not welcome to listen.' in Xhosa, and Shuri says 'beloved'.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa has never really considered himself a violent man. Truly, he finds little attractive in bruises, blood and broken bones. Sure he thrills in the adrenaline of battle, the test of skills being pitted against one another, but he is just as content - often even more-so - to sit out on his balcony overlooking the jungle with a book in his hands and his tablet nearby, ever ready to share words with his Mechanic.

Settling further into the jet's seat, T'Challa feels his features soften as a wistful sigh escapes his lips.

To think, after all these years, he would end up working with the man he adored above all else before discovering he was exactly that.

Tony.

A slight chuckle. Now that he knew, T'Challa could see his Mechanic in everything Tony did; from complaining about the board meetings he was still required to attend for SI, to negotiating with the U.N. for Ross' imprisonment and for amendments to the Accords. From meticulously crafting the latest Iron Man Armour, to mixing various chemicals with Spiderman so they could gush over the explosions. *(Though, to be fair, T'Challa was gushing right alongside them.)*

Loosing another sigh, T'Challa once more mourned his return to Wakanda.

Well, not his return to Wakanda, rather his having to leave his Mechanic.

And having to remain polite to the Avengers.

Since the mess with the Accords began, T'Challa had been able to spare very little time communicating with his Mechanic, and Tony had been the same, both running on fumes more often then not. They had only been able to exchange brief concerns and comforts, since his father's death to his mechanic’s heartbroken *He lied. I trusted him, and he lied.*

T'Challa did not consider himself a violent man, but thinking back on all he has learnt about his Mechanic, he cannot deny that he sees the appeal in destroying the Avengers.
What does it say about me that my team members call each other by name but me by my family?

They kept him at a distance.

I keep trying my hardest to fix things, but I just keep messing up. People are dead because I couldn't fix things.

They didn't help when his mind was in turmoil.

He lied. I trusted him, and he lied.

They broke his faith.

T'Challa loosed a vicious snarl into the cabin, grateful that it was empty but for him.

When he had offered his aid to Rogers, T'Challa had been informed that Tony was fine. He should have checked.

The close embrace he had initiated had been cut short when his grip caused his Mechanic pain. Hearing the story of the shield crashing through the armour; if it had been anyone else, they would be dead, the body armour of the Avengers -though of highest standard- nothing in comparison to the Iron Man suit. And even though Tony lived, his suit was scrap, and he had been left no way to contact Friday, thus no way to return to the States.

Had Friday not been concerned and contacted Vision before the suit went offline, Tony would have frozen to death.

Fine, he had been told.

T'Challa doubted Rogers knew how that word should be used.

And despite it all, his Mechanic was still doing everything in his power to help them. T'Challa had promised his protection, so he would continue to give them safe haven in Wakanda, Tony though had no reason to help them, but still was. Case in point; he knew where the Avengers were hiding, and had done nothing to out them.

T'Challa had stayed with Tony a full three days longer than he had anticipated being gone, but how could he do anything less when his Mechanic had been found? He took the time to learn about Tony properly, his smiles, his laughs, the calluses on his fingers, the strength in his arms, the softness of his hair, the way it felt to hold Tony's body close to his own, everything that couldn't be conveyed through their written words. And to be exposed to his Mechanics wit and charm and intelligence immediately, without the needed pause to type out the words?

I need you.

I need you too.

T'Challa needed to get the Accords sorted now, so he could kick the Avengers out of Wakanda, and welcome his Mechanic in.

"You are very late brother. Is everything okay?"

Shuri greeted him the second he stepped out of the jet. Her face was stoic, revealing no emotion, but her hands held an ever so slight quiver to them. T'Challa smiled and opened his mouth to
answer as he reached her when he spotted the Avengers behind her.

"Yonke into kakuhle. Siya kuthetha emagumbini bam, kude nabo bamkelekile ukuba ukumamela."

Though his sister raised a brow in question she nodded and moved to stand by his side as the Avengers came forward.

"Your Majesty."

"Captain."

"Were you able to have any success? You were gone longer then you said you'd be."

It is only that they are in public that keeps T'Challa from striking the man.

No question to T'Challa's wellbeing, no query over Tony's health, just a demand that he state the mission's status. Did the man not know how to speak outside of conflict?

"Both families are well and safe. They may be contacted via these."

Pulling out the individualised StarkPhones, T'Challa noted how eagerly Hawkeye and Ant-Man took them, Barton even going so far as to call his wife then and there, ignoring everything around him; at least Lang had the decency to thank T'Challa for the phone before taking it and doing the same.

"Are we sure Stark can't track us from those phones? It's his tech, why choose them?"

Romanoff's voice was full of suspicion and condemnation. How many times, T'Challa wondered, had she directed that voice to his Mechanic?

"It hardly matters."

"I disagree your Majesty; Stark will report where we are and cause no end of trouble if he can find us."

T'Challa scoffed, easily one of the rudest things he had done to any of the Avengers. He saw how Shuri focused on him because of it.

"Tony Stark knew where you were before I landed on U.S. soil. He is the one who handed me those phones after telling me that the families involved were protected. Tony Stark has no interest in ruining you."

T'Challa's statement was met with looks of shock, as though they couldn't imagine his Mechanic not coming after them. Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, T'Challa motioned for Shuri to follow him, and made his way to the waiting car, the Dora Milaje moving to guard him. Just before the door to the car closed, T'Challa smiled at what he heard.

"WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING CLINTON FRANCIS BARTON?!!!"

"You welcomed the Avengers here as guests, yet you now hold them at length. What happened in those three days brother?"

Shuri barely waited for the doors to close before she demanded answers. T'Challa wasted no time in telling her.
"I was late in my return, because I couldn't bear to let go of my Mechanic."

Shuri's face slackened in shock.

T'Challa had never hidden anything about his pen-pal, and the whole of Wakanda knew that his Mechanic would be his first choice of partner. Shuri had volunteered to be surrogate should T'Challa ever convince his Mechanic to join them in Wakanda.

"You found him? You came upon him in New York? Brother this is fantastic news! Tell me about him! Tell me about him!"

Laughing at the delight on his sister's face, T'Challa moved to take a seat on his balcony. After motioning for Shuri to join him, T'Challa took a moment to think of Tony, and could not dampen the smile that spread across his lips.

"He is perfect Shuri. I look at him, and I find countless new things to fall in love with. He is everything and more. I do not even know how to describe how I feel when he is in my arms."

Shuri's face was alight with joy, her hands clasped tight together.

"What does he look like; surely he is as beautiful as his mind?"

T'Challa chuckled.

"He truly is. His hair is soft as silk and the darkest brown. He wears it short, so it doesn't interfere with his work. His eyes are coloured the clearest amber, and he holds a gaze sharp enough to pierce you to your soul, and gentle enough to cradle you forever. He has skin of the Mediterranean, dark but golden, not chocolate, and a lifetime of stories decorate it. He is slender, not as broad as I am, but easily as powerful. To look at him day-to-day, you would never see the strength he carries, but put him in his workshop, and if nothing else, you will get to see his strength in action as he creates."

Shuri sighs.

"You are smitten brother, but he sounds perfect for you. Name, tell me you got his name!"

T'Challa chuckles again.

"Ah, but you already know him sister."

Shuri shoots him a confused look, silently asking for clarification.

"There are few places on Earth, Shuri, that haven't heard of Anthony Edward Stark."

Shuri's jaw drops, and T'Challa throws his head back to laugh, long and loud. Shuri spends a few flustered moments trying to regain her composure before she throws it away as a lost cause, and joins him in laughing. It takes a while for them to calm down enough to speak, still smiling widely enough to make their cheeks hurt.

"I really am so happy for you brother! You have always had such the man-crush on Stark; to think he's your Mechanic! The Science Division will be in raptures once they hear of this, and when you bring him-"

Shuri cuts herself off as all joy flees from her face to be replaced with sadness.

"Father never got to meet him. He so wanted to; he would speak great praise of the man able to
face his mistakes without flinching."

T'Challa drew her into a hug, holding his sister tightly as she strained to keep her sadness at bay. He had to take a few deep breaths himself. After a few minutes, Shuri gently pulled away, just enough to look her brother in the eyes.

"You can't bring him here while the Avengers are. It will end in battle and bloodshed."

T'Challa sighed.

"Far more than that, it would destroy my Mechanic's heart. I have promised my protection to the Avengers, and so they shall have it. But now that I know what they have done, they shall not have my friendship, until they have earned it."

Shuri looked at him worriedly.

"What have they done brother? This goes beyond ideological differences with your Mechanic."

T'Challa breathes deep, thinks of his Mechanic's parting words, and tells her.

_I need you._

_I need you too._

It is only the pride held in keeping one's promises that keeps Shuri from tearing off to kill the Avengers. And even then, it's a close thing.

"No-one has to know about it; we could keep it just between you and me. Say they went exploring in the jungle, even after we told them not to."

Tempted though he is, T'Challa shakes his head. Shuri huffs in disappointment, but will keep her promises.

"Well, if you will refuse the swiftest way to prepare Wakanda for your _Intanda_, what needs to be done to get them out?"

T'Challa smiles, thankful that he has his sister on his side.

"Your Majesty."

T'Challa stifles a sigh as Rogers calls out to him. They are unfortunately in an empty hallway, so T'Challa can't pretend to have missed the call. He turns to face Rogers as the man comes up to him.

"Yes Captain?"

"I wanted to know if you had any idea of what Stark's planning. While the Barton's and Scott's daughter are safe for now, Stark's going to use this against them. If we know what he's planning, we can prepare for it, maybe even stop it."

T'Challa forces his face to remain neutral. That Rogers can say such a thing with such earnestness; he truly believes Tony has ulterior motives. But T'Challa has no response to give, because the Captain is still talking.
"I wish we could trust Stark to see reason - I sent him a letter and a phone to call me when things get dicey - but he just has so much pride that -"

"Enough!"

T'Challa releases a long, slow breath, glad beyond measure for Nakia's appearance. Shuri had been quick to quietly inform the Dora Milaje, who in turn informed the public just as quietly, that their King had found his Mechanic, but would be unable to bring him while the Avengers were present. Many had wondered why T'Challa did not simply remove the Avengers, but did not argue, and merely went about their business, if subtly preparing for a royal wedding. The Dora Milaje had shifted their training to include another standing at their King's side, and the Science Division was practically bouncing off the walls to have their best to showcase, while kicking their research for Barnes into high-gear.

Nakia comes to stand between T'Challa and Rogers, her face set in anger.

"You may be here as guests, but not a one of you has the right to demand anything of his Highness! Especially not in such a tone! His Highness has enough to deal with, without you rudely bursting in on his time!"

She then turns to face T'Challa, and gently coaxes him away from the stunned Captain. Once they are several hallways away, T'Challa's shoulders relax, the tension in his frame fading. Nakia sends him a questioning glance, to which he responds with a smile.

He'll be okay, especially once he shares words with his Mechanic.

I need you.

I need you too.

The next few months are brutal but productive.

The constant video conferences with the U.N. have been going fairly well, especially since Tony provided the evidence of Ross' incompetence and treachery. In about a month, the Super Human Oversight Committee will be formed to take place of the Accords; the only things holding that up are deciding the members.

The new Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. Phil Coulson, will preside as neutral party.

Professor Charles Xavier shall represent Mutants, and naturally enhanced.

T'Challa himself will be the spokesperson of unnaturally enhanced, both science and magic.

The U.N. will be voting on who shall represent the countries who have signed on to the Committee, and there is still the need for a fifth member, also to be chosen by the U.N. to speak for the average person.

All is proceeding smoothly on that front.

His Science Division, with input from both his Mechanic and Professor Xavier, are closer and closer to decoding the passcodes from Barnes' brain, meaning the man can be safely removed from cryo, so he can receive the therapy he needs to function in daily life.
All is proceeding smoothly on that front.

Wakanda is set and primed for the moment his Mechanic says yes and joins him in love and life, while still managing to keep it hidden from the Avengers.

All is proceeding smoothly on that front.

"I swear, the second they are safe to leave Wakanda, they will have twenty-four hours before I stop caring about my promise and tear their throats out!"

Keeping patience with the Avengers however, is proving to be difficult.

"Come Shuri, it is just about time."

In fact, the only thing that has kept Shuri's temper this long has been her inclusion to the talks with his Mechanic.

She sits next to him and releases a heavy sigh.

"When this is over Brother, I expect my brother-in-Law to stay with us at least a month! I know he still has duties to his company and the idea of the Avengers, but after all the hard work both he and you have put into this, he deserves a month of peace. And where better for him to find it but in the arms of his Intanda?"

T'Challa chuckles as the tablets open up the conversation screen.

They still use written conversations for now, Romanoff has taken to sneaking around the kingdom and listening in on everything she can. She was most displeased when the Dora Milaje proved very capable of catching her and forcing her back to the quarters assigned to the Avengers, but better safe the sorry.

Hello my Mechanic.

Hello Other Brother!

Well, if it isn't my favourite pair of cats; how are you two travelling?

I may or may not be planning destructive things again, but Brother has been stopping me.

...I'm not sure whether I'm pleased or disappointed... and I'm not sure who it's directed at either.

They speak for a good hour, before Shuri has to leave, summoned by Okoye. T'Challa loves his sister, but he can't deny the little thrill that travels his spine at getting to talk to his Mechanic alone.

Oh, geez, I nearly forgot, what with everything that's been going on - remind me to tell you about Vision's kitchen exploits in a minute- but the U.N. has finally chosen the last two people.

That is wonderful news my Mechanic! Though, I thought it wasn't to be announced for another week or so; they have to get the fifth person to agree don't they? How have you found out so early?

They chose me. They asked and I accepted. I am, after all, totally human, have already been dealing with the civilians, military personnel and politicians affected by the Avengers missions, and I signed the original Accords because I wanted there to be accountability. Given that I can also more or less keep up and hold my ground against powered beings, I'm not likely to be intimidated, and you're the only one anyone knows of that is richer than me, and you're already a member so...
Congratulations on your appointment my Mechanic; I look forward to working with you again.

Yeah, me too My Panther. Once SHOC is publically introduced in two weeks, the Avengers will be officially pardoned; Barnes will still have mandated therapy - in fact all of them will, and so will any future Avenger- but he's been cleared too.

T'Challa's eyes widened in surprise; Barnes had been cleared? He knew Tony had been working on it, but to have succeeded so soon? He needed to let the Science Division know; they would solve whatever problems still existed, forgoing all other research, to ensure his Mechanic could come to Wakanda.

Dare I ask how you managed that, my Mechanic?

Let's just say a few folks still owe me for stopping that nuke they sent to New York. Don't worry, it was nothing illegal, and I didn't force them to change their votes or the votes of others; I literally just asked them what they would have done in Barnes' place.

T'Challa smiled, aching to hold his Mechanic once more in his arms. And he would! He would be present for the U.N. presenting SHOC, so he would get to be with Tony again, and finally, finally, ask him the most important question.

I need you.

I need you too.

T'Challa forced his face to remain blank as he stared down the Avengers.

"How could you? This is no better then the Accords; we're becoming the lapdogs of those in power!"

Rogers had a way with words. It was called irritating.

The rest of the Avengers obviously agreed with the Captain, choosing to ignore the explanation T'Challa had given them. But T'Challa was close, so close, to having his Mechanic join him.

His attempts to remain calm fled him when Wilson spoke.

"I thought you were a better man then Stark, realising that the Accords were bogus and helping us, but no, you're cut of the same cloth! I wish I never caved and told him where Cap and Barnes were headed; we'd all be saved his bullshit!"

The backhand caught everybody off-guard.

The Avengers moved into a defensive grouping, protecting Wilson from further damage, but T'Challa knew none of them had even seen him move. The Dora Milaje present were ready to strike should he command it.

"You are pitiful. After everything he has done to cater to you and your needs, that you treat him as such."

Wilson looked affronted though wary. Barton spoke up instead.

"Stark can't ever keep his nose outta where it doesn't belong! He was constantly hacking into S.H.I.E.L.D. - and even then, he couldn't be assed to warn us about HYDRA- jumping into battles
where he wasn't needed and then disobeying orders when Cap let him stay! He made a killer robot, it was his weapons that hurt Wanda and her family -he didn't give Pietro any protective gear- and then he signs his soul over to Ross! And to top it off, after he locks us up in the raft and gets Cap's location off Sam, he goes and starts attacking him and Barnes!

What catering to our needs has he done?"

T'Challa glares at Barton so harshly the man actually takes a half-step back.

"Aside from provide you food, shelter, funds and gear you mean? Given you his time and effort! As to your other concerns;

Tony Starks' weapons; he was born to America's premier weapons designer and was forced into the family business -there are countless reports of how he tried to take SI into other fields but Obadiah Stane prevented it. And Tony was not the one to fire the weapons that landed in the Maximoff house. Pietro Maximoff refused the body armour offered; Vision has shown me a recording of the event, so I trust it as truth.

He only hacked S.H.I.E.L.D. because he couldn't trust that he was being given all the information, and he most certainly wasn't. It has been confirmed by Rogers that HYDRA had been part of S.H.I.E.L.D. from the beginning so how could anyone distinguish between the two?

It has been confirmed by Miss Maximoff that she implanted a vision of chaos and destruction into Tony's head just before he grabbed the sceptre; a vision that bred and festered his paranoia and anxiety, and yet, even after your own visions at her hands, his was dismissed, while yours deserved sympathy. The result of her actions is what led Tony to creating Ultron, and he has never shied away from his responsibility in that.

And Tony has, since his kidnapping in Afghanistan, always worked for accountability.

Refusing the Government access to the Iron Man was because he knew it would be abused by fools like Ross. Given how infested with HYDRA the senate was, it would have taken hours at best before there was an army of HYDRA soldiers in versions of the suit. When he signed the Accords, Tony was agreeing to 117 countries desperate pleas that they have some say over the consequences to their lands when the Avengers cross their borders.

Tony had nothing to do with your incarceration; Ross was abusing his power as a general who happened to hold the same name as the Secretary of Defence, Everett Ross. People looked to the last name and obeyed.

Finally, Tony's attack on Rogers and Barnes was a result of Zemo's emotional manipulation, and Rogers hypocritical behaviour."

T'Challa takes a dark pride in the way Rogers' face pales, and all the Avengers notice it.

"You... you know..."

"I do. It makes the absolute farce of your letter even more disgraceful. All that letter apologised for Captain, was that you got caught."

Rogers looks like he wants to sink into the floor. T'Challa makes his final point.

"You knew for years that Barnes' hands were the ones to end Howard and Maria Stark, and didn't tell their son. It doesn't matter that HYDRA ordered it; you, the one who hates secrets, are the one who hid it."
T'Challa turns and leaves, not sparing any more thought to the men and women in that room. Either they will think on what he's said, or they will remain ignorant.

He has a plane to catch. They will be gone when he returns.

---

*I need you.*

*I need you too.*

---

The smile he gets when he exits the plane is bright.

The hug he enters is warm.

The kiss they share is perfect.

"I need you, my Mechanic."

"I need you too, my Panther."

He knows they will return home together.

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Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Laughing When You're Scared

Chapter Summary

For 1296a

Tony and T'Challa are both really nervous about their first date. Tony ends up telling really bad jokes that make them both laugh.

And hafizatulsufiahyaacob

Tony and T'Challa meet at a science convention where T'Challa is presenting his work.

An AU. Points if you can spot the cameos; there will be Three of them. Hope this satisfies Hon's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony was bored.

His father had finally realised he was in his eighties, and had retired, dumping pretty much everything relating to the company on to Tony. He seemed kind of disappointed that Tony didn't buckle beneath the weight, but Tony had been prepared since forever to take care of Stark Industries when Howard stepped down. Admittedly, Tony thought he'd be in his early twenties when that happened, not pushing thirty, but Howard Stark always did have trouble letting go.

Tony's got a solid team working with him, making dealing with SI stupidly easy for all of them.

Need to schedule a meeting, and are concerned about security protocols?

He's got Pepper as his P.A. The woman could take over the world by lunchtime if she wanted; the only thing stopping her is the amount of paperwork. Pepper is The Master (capitals necessary) of organising, and could take God to task if he came without the required files.

Then there's her fiancée Happy. He's in charge of security, and he makes Pepper smile, so he's easily a god among men.

SI needs some extra cash in the coffers to offset the latest product release until sales hit?

Rhodey and Sam are ex-military, and encourage military sponsorship with ease.

Steve is the old-crowd pleaser, with his All-American Apple Pie looks, the oldies practically eat outta his hands, and Steve just blushes and says 'Shucks'.

Pietro and Thor, they drag in the young ladies, just as Natasha and Jane do the young men, drawing support with lidded eyes and half-smiles.

Wanda and Aisling appeal to the new families, while Clint, Laura and their trio of spawn appeal to
the established ones.

*Worried that SI isn't an equal opportunity employer?*

Bruce Banner, one of SI's lead researchers was unfairly court-martialled.

Scott Lang, one of the top engineers is an ex-hacktivist.

Bucky Barnes, in the Security department, was a POW.

And a good deal of Tony's inner circle was multi-racial.

You got an argument, chances are Tony can knock it down.

But that's why Tony is bored. It's all covered, it's all easy, and Tony has next to nothing to do.

So SI reopens the Stark Expo. Sure Tony could keep playing with all the lovely science in his workshop, but seriously, he's so far ahead of schedule.

He wants something *new*.

---

The true beauty of a science convention like the Stark Expo isn't that it's a chance to show off and cash in the big bucks. Sure that's why a lot of people sign up their displays, but those are all the big names already on the playground; the ones with enough coin to pay for the big stage outside that visitors come to gawk at.

No, the Expo's beauty, the truest genius and wonder of the gathering, something that Howard never really paid attention to, is in the smaller displays held inside the atrium.

That's where Tony goes after his opening speech. It's where the solo researchers, the old experts, and the hopeful young showcase what they have to offer. It's what Tony wants to see. Over the course of the Expo, plenty of big names, both good and bad, will have paid to be seen connected to the success of the Stark name and be shown off like dancing monkeys. But those names will flash and burn, and be replaced by the next name on the list.

Those who have gotten a spot in the atrium are shown for the entire convention, and everyone ends up in the atrium eventually. Here in the atrium you can linger, take your time to understand what's on offer, and usually, the ones who set up the displays are present too, eager to explain their stuff.

Tony came to the atrium every past Stark Expo, because it was here he made the best discoveries. He particularly likes the student displays; kids picked by their teachers as the most promising, showing what they think is interesting and useful. Tony has two future SI interns already, Kitty Pryde and Peter Parker, from the work they put into their demonstrations of firewall innovation and practical applications of spider-silk respectively.

Tony comes to the last stall in the aisle.

*Interactive mesh-weave body armour.*

Given that Tony's dragging SI away from weapons development kicking and screaming, with the military holding onto them by the skin of its teeth, working on more defensive patents would probably go a long way to smoothing ruffled feathers.

The stall is unmanned at the moment, so Tony starts reading the information provided.
Needless to say, he's impressed.

Though in need of some fine tuning (tightening up some variables, going over a good chunk of the math) there is a really solid framework for what is being proposed.

"Do you think something like this would actually work?"

The smooth drawl pulls him away from the science and leads him to a gorgeous young man with curiosity in his eyes. Well, he had asked Tony a question.

"Not yet, but whoever's pulled this together is very close. They only really need to tweak a few things, play with a few others, and boom, they'll have what they set out for."

Tony pulls out one of his business cards and a pen, scrawls a message on the back and moves to pin it to the backboard of the stall next to the packet information about the person running it. He takes a look at the id photo and...

Turns to look at the man he had just been speaking with.

At least he had the decency to look sheepish.

"I wanted to know your honest opinion?"

Yeah, that's not cool.

The guy's name is T'Challa, and his brain's as beautiful as his body. They walk and talk as Tony keeps inspecting the displays.

T'Challa explains what processes he underwent to develop his mesh-weave, and Tony explains the areas that could use further attention. Tony also offers him work at SI, but T'Challa is working with his father and enjoying it, so declines.

"Besides, it may be considered a conflict of interest."

"Oh? How so Top Cat?"

T'Challa smiles a little nervously.

"Well, it's bad form to be seen on a date with someone who could become your boss."

Wait... what?

"If you are free, I would like to take you to dinner Tony."

They go separate ways after Tony nods and gets a time and location.

But as he enters his home to get ready, Tony realises he doesn't have much of a life outside of his work.

Shit... what do normal people talk about on dates?!

Awkward.

That is the only word to describe the atmosphere.
After agonizing over what to talk about, Tony then agonized over what to wear, calling Pepper for help in the end. The red silk shirt and black slacks look good on him, and are fairly casual while still being stylish, so when Tony walked into 'Lee's Diner' it didn't stick out much. He had found T'Challa in one of the booths and after the initial greeting, silence had reigned over the table.

"What can I get you gentlemen?"

The waitress was getting such a good tip for her timing.

"I'll have the cheese burger combo thanks."

"The pizza plate please."

"Not a problem gents. Stan; CBC and Double P, Boss!"

"On the way."

Looking away from the smirking old man in sunglasses cooking, Tony once more meets T'Challa's eyes. And curses his lack of brain-to-mouth filter.

"Is your father a thief? Because he stole the stars from the skies and put them in your eyes."

Tony can feel the red climbing his neck to paint his cheeks. T'Challa had been taking a sip of water and promptly choked on it, laughing as soon as his airways are clear.

"I can't possibly convince you to forget I said that, can I?"

"Not for anything."

Ah well, it was a long shot anyway. Roll with it.

"Do you have any Italian in you?"

"What? ...No."

"Would you like some?"

T'Challa's eyes widen in a mix of shock and confusion before he's laughing again. Tony mentally rolls up his sleeves.

"I know milk does a body good, but baby, how much have you been drinking?"

"I hope you know CPR, cuz you take my breath away!"

"I'll bet you 10 bucks I could get all your clothes off in 30 seconds..."

"I think I can die happy now, cause I've just seen a piece of heaven."

"You look like the type of guy who has heard every line in the book. So, what's one more?"

"If it's true that we are what we eat, then I could be you by morning."

T'Challa's laughing so hard, he's barely able to breathe.

"They're so...bad. Why do you know so many bad pick-up lines?"

Tony just shrugs, glad that the awkward silence is gone.
"Just reusing stuff I've heard."

The food comes and they eat, sharing little bits and pieces of their meals.

After the terrible, terrible swatch of come-ons, both are far more relaxed, and their conversation turns to aspects of their lives.

"Okay, maybe because I'm an only child I don't get it, but what could have convinced you to try and mail your sister to your Grandparents?"

"She was throwing a tantrum about not getting to see them, and I figured that the mail always arrived quicker then we did so..."

Or.

"That's an unusual nickname; however did he come to use it?"

"He's always hated his name, and when he and Wanda hooked up, he found out what 'Aisling' meant, so he started introducing himself as 'Vision'."

They get along well, and as they end up flipping a coin to decide who pays, Tony thinks he hasn't done badly with 'normal' talk.

After leaving the two extra fifties for the waitress, Tony and T'Challa head out into the brisk early spring evening. Tony's phone starts to ring, and he answers with an apologetic look to T'Challa, who merely shakes his head with a smile.

"Stark here."

"You have something in your teeth."

Tony sighs as his free hand comes up to rub the bridge of his nose.

"Twenty seconds Wilson; go."

"Oh come on, I'm calling to let you know; it was a good date all in all, very cosy and-"

"Until I come after you to break your spine. Fifteen."

Tony's not surprised when the screwball hangs up.

T'Challa looks confused. Tony just sends him a helpless smile and gently grasps the other man's hand.

They're okay.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
What You're Made Of Part I

Chapter Summary

For d_aia

Shifter Verse. Tony is a Shifter who hasn't shifted for years, for various reasons he hasn't really shared. But with T'Challa... maybe he can give it a try.

I have never written shifter before, nor A/B/O dynamics, so let me know if it all makes sense. In this verse, Tony is not close to either of his parents. Mentions of child-abuse, but nothing graphic. Mentions of torture, but more Tony's reactions then any descriptions, and is a block of italics, so avoid if needed.
A lot of the chapter is a very quick recap of most of the movies, so it takes a while for the actual IronPanther to happen but we get there, and CIVIL WAR DIDN'T HAPPEN!!
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In this world, everyone is born with potential.

The potential to become anything.

Howard Stark was a man of pride. He was rich, handsome, powerful, intelligent and a strong Alpha wolf-shifter. He had been friends with Steve Rogers, Captain America himself, and had been the go-to-guy for any repairs needing by the famous 'Howling Commando's', a pack of the strongest, most relentless wolf-shifters in history. He had mated the beautiful Alpha Maria Carbonell, the most gorgeous snow-white Husky when shifted, and eventually fell pregnant with his child.

Howard Stark had a lot to be proud of.

The nine months of Maria's gestation was a test to his patience, but there was nothing to be done; people lost the ability to shift when carrying. No child had the ability to shift from birth; in fact most only gained the ability in their mid-teens when their personality settled and they took on the creature that best fit it. Orientation would usually present itself at around ten years of age.

Howard prepared for his child to follow in his footsteps, to be a proper Stark, instead of the embarrassment the rest of the family could be.

His father Simon had been a poodle, a sign of vanity to be sure, while his mother had been a mud-coloured maltese. Both had been Beta.

His uncle Lucas was, sad to say, a rabbit, another Beta, and had mated aunt Serena, who had been a Beta Helmeded Hornbill (how that marriage had been accepted was beyond Howard) and his cousin Patrick had taken after her, both in orientation and shifting. He'd mated an albatross of all things, and with the Beta woman, had a Beta son, Morgan, who was a ruddy seagull.
Ah, but Howard, he was an Alpha and had mated an Alpha, Himself being a wolf, and Maria having strong relations to wolves.

His child was sure to be a high Beta if not an outright Alpha, and had wonderful role-shifters to emulate.

After all, who better to live up to then Captain America; America's Golden Wolf?

Tony had always been advanced for his age; reading, writing, maths, science -what took others years, Tony could be exposed to for the first time and master in a day.

Maybe it was a reason why Howard disliked him.

Tony presented at three years old. It was in the middle of some charity gala of Maria's; he'd been sitting on the chair she had placed him on at the start of the evening with the strict instructions not to run off. Tony was trying to figure out a way to get food without disobeying when the entire ballroom seemed to hush into silence and people began looking at him. Tony hadn't understood why, as he hadn't been making a nuisance of himself, and he understood even less why his father's face had been red with apoplectic rage, and his mother's full of shame.

Tony had been taken home that instant. His life drastically changed.

Before that night Howard and Maria had been... not unkind but... distracted would be the best word; Howard knew Tony existed and was there and his son, but he had a million other things that needed to be done before he could spend time with Tony, usually in the study so he could get more paperwork done. Maria was busy with her philanthropy and duties as a socialite; she couldn't attend to either with Tony hanging off her, but she was pleasant and bought him little gifts.

After that night... Tony was only exposed to Howard's anger; shouting usually, about how Tony embarrassed the Stark name with his unnaturalness, and Maria's gaze never again finding him; vanquishing practically all memory that she had a son.

Jarvis had been the one to explain to Tony, long after Howard had shouted himself hoarse and locked himself in his workshop with a bottle of bourbon, and Maria to her greenhouse with the same, what exactly had happened.

Approximately ten percent of the population were Omega.

Approximately ten percent of Omega, were male.

As a whole, the only difference between Omega males and other males, was all Omega had the ability to carry young; other then that they were more or less the same as anybody, and were treated by most as just another person. Of course here was the whole social stigma of your place of the pecking order, with Alpha at the top, followed by Beta, before Omega at the bottom, but aside from the general idiocy of deciding one's worth by orientation, most people had no problems going through life. As Omega males were such an infrequent orientation, Tony could see why some people might think them unnatural, but it wasn't exactly like any of them had a choice right? Tony had been told since forever that he would be like Howard and Maria; an Alpha. So why was it that he presented Omega, let alone so very early?

Jarvis didn't have an answer for him, and no books or pamphlets could tell him either.
Because Tony had presented in so public a forum, Howard couldn't stop word from spreading, and soon scientist, psychologists, biologists and more were hounding Howard, trying to get access to study Tony.

Study him, as though they could discover some way to cause everyone to present so early.

Or far more likely, some way to control orientation.

Because while the shift could be influenced (role-shifters, home environments) there was no way to interfere with a person's orientation.

It is to Howard's credit that he refused to allow Tony to become a lab rat, but that was one of the last kindnesses he gave his child.

Especially when Tony continued his advanced pace, and shifted just before turning seven.

It was a sad relief for Tony when he was shipped off to boarding school soon after; not even Jarvis' miracle cures could keep up with Howard's hatred.

As Tony goes through his life, he has to work harder, be smarter, shine brighter than anyone else. He's a Stark after all, no matter if he's an Omega male. There are the constant rumors circulating about what shifter he is, but because he's always human, no one can tell for sure, not even those who try to scent it.

Rhodey, his lovely Honey-Bear (emphasis on Bear) takes it upon himself during M.I.T. to deal with those brave souls, and they usually don't try twice.

Happy, the obstinate Badger that he is, can butt heads with the worst of them, be they paparazzi, fans, stalkers whatever, and come out on top.

And Pepper, darling Pepper, lovely hooded pitohui don't-try-and-screw-me-over Pepper, could make even the most ardent of shifters back-up and back-off.

Tony's able to deal with a lot of the grief his orientation gives him because of those three amazing Alphas. If any of them had been attracted to him, he would have mated in a second. But Happy and Pepper are together, and Rhodey's just not interested in the fast talking runt he met at college.

He missed them during Afghanistan.

Hurts! Oh it hurts! Painpainpainpainpain! A slice to the chest, fingers digging in, why, stop it, it hurts!

Painpainpainpain! So many slices, fingers keep digging, pulling at his flesh. Painpainpain!

SNAP! CRUNCH! Those are his bones, his ribs, why, it hurts, why is this happening, stop!

Painpainpainpain! Something hard pushing against the open wounds, something cold, please stop, please!

PAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAINPAIN! A wet rag shoved over his face, why, stop, it hurts, stop-

The world disappears.
"What did you do to me?"

"I saved your life."

"He wants you to build the Jericho missile. This one."

"I refuse."

Can't breathe, water, too much water, cold and dirty, in his eyes and mouth, why, stop, can't breathe!

AIR! Precious seconds to take in as much as he can, in and out, in-

Cold! So cold! Lungs are hurting, not enough air, water so cold and-

PAIN! Painpainpain! Shocks running through him, the wires, water, too much, too much, too much!

Can't breathe!

"He says after you build it, he will let you go."

"No he won't."

"...No. He won't."

Tony's more useful for building, that's the only thing that stops the Terrorists from taking him.

They have no interest in little ones.

"Is this the final act of defiance from the Great Tony Stark?"

"I shouldn't do anything. They could kill you, they're gonna kill me, either way, and even if they don't, I'll probably be dead in a week.

"Then this is a very important week for you, isn't it?"

"There are times in everyone's life when they wish they were a different shifter, even if it is as innocuous as 'I wish I could have a different pelt'. I am but a humble raccoon, and for most of my life I have enjoyed being the little bandit. But I won't deny that I would've preferred something... bigger when the Ten Rings came for me. What of you Stark? Have you wished to change your shift? What even is your shift?"

"I've wanted to change it since the day I first shifted. But because I can't change it, I can't shift."

"Can't shift? Something prevents you?"

"Yeah..."
"Yinsen! We gotta go. Come on, move with me. We got a plan, and we're going to stick to it.

"This was always the plan, Stark..."

"Come on, you're going to go see your family. Get up."

"My family is dead, Stark... and I'm going to see them now. It's okay, I want this... I want this."

"Thank you for saving me."

"Don't waste it... don't waste your life, Stark."

"My turn."

"Next time, you ride with me!"

Look! It's a weapons company, that doesn't make weapons! Well that's what happens when you leave an Omega in charge!

TONY STARK! GENIUS BILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY OMEGA! DESTROYING STARK INDUSTRIES!

It's well documented that Omega males tend to be far more emotional and unstable than their counterparts for the other orientations, that Tony Stark has managed so long in his position is commendable, but we really must ask; what secrets were his captors able to pull from him with methods designed to break an Omega?

"Oh don't be so surprised Tony! I'm just taking the lion's share of the company I've kept afloat since Howard died. It's a shame you had to bring Pepper into it. But really, what was I expecting out of an Omega?"

"Pepper; we have to overload the arc reactor and blast the roof."

"How are you going to do that?"

"You're going to do it! Go to the central console, open up all the circuits, while I keep king of the jungle distracted. When I get clear, I'll let you know, and then you hit the master bypass button."

"I am Iron Man. You think you're the only superhero in the world? Mr. Stark, you've become part of a bigger universe. You just don't know it yet."

"Who the hell are you?"

"Nick Fury. Director of S.H.I.E.L.D. I'm here to talk to you about the Avengers Initiative."

After months of pain and stress, Tony finally has the room to breathe, to rest, to heal.

Then his arc reactor stops liking him.
OMEGA RUNS WILD! STARK LOSING CONTROL?!

Obviously Tony Stark has finally been hit with his 'denning' instincts as an Omega, but is fighting hard against submitting to his more natural behaviours.

Personally, I'm not surprised that Potts has been made CEO; It's an Alpha's position at the top after all.

"What do you want from me?"

"What do we want from you? Uh-uh. What do you want from me? You have become a problem, a problem I have to deal with. Contrary to your belief, you are not the center of my universe. I have bigger problems in the southwest region to deal with."

"Tony, you're too young to understand this right now, so I thought I would put it on film for you. I built this for you. And some day you'll realize that it represents a whole lot more than just people's inventions. It represents my life's work. This is the key to the future. I'm limited by the technology of my time, but one day you'll figure this out. And when you do, you will change the world. What is and always will be my greatest creation... is you."

"Huh. I mighta believed that, had I not turned three, then seven."

"Tastes like coconut... and metal!"

"I quit. I'm resigning. My body literally can't handle the stress. I don't know when you're going to kill yourself, or mess up the whole company..."

"I think I did okay!"

"Mr. Stark displays textbook... narcissism... Agreed."

"Big man in a suit of armour; take that away and what are you?!

Genius, Billionaire, Playboy, Philanthropist, Omega."

"I know people with... wait what? You're an Omega?"

"Is that another problem for you Rogers?"

"I'll need to get in and push."

"Unless you shift into something fast, you'll be torn to shreds!"

"I never shift Cap."

"What? Never? Then how do you-"

"Not the time. Stay by the control unit and reverse polarity long enough to disengage mag…"

"Speak English! "
"...See that red lever?"

"Please tell me you’re going to appeal to my humanity."

"Uh…actually, I’m planning to threaten you."

"Really little Omega? You should have left your armor on for that. Or is your shift a well hidden secret to protect your power?"

"Eh, the armour's seen a little mileage, and you've got the glow stick of destiny. And everyone knows I don't shift; I don't need to. Want a drink?"

"Stark, you know that's a one way trip."

"Please tell me nobody kissed me?!"

"We won."

They all went their separate ways. Well Bruce stayed in the Tower, working with the emergency personnel that Tony had set up in the Towers lower levels, given the only real damage the Tower had taken was to the penthouse and the two levels beneath it.

Amid the hundreds of reports more or less screaming about the fact that there were aliens, and that said aliens were defeated by superheroes, SI stocks took a huge boost with the reports of Tony's Omega tendencies pushing him to help clean up New York.

While yeah it made the board actually agree to spend more time fixing the damage done to the Big Apple, it kinda pissed Tony off that his work was being brushed aside as Omega Nurturing.

"Calls himself the Mandarin huh?"

"Indeed sir."

"Wonder how this is gonna play out."

"Here's a little Holiday greeting I've been wanting to send to the Mandarin. I just didn't know how to phrase it until now. My name is Tony Stark and I'm not afraid of you."

"Take a deep breath sir."

"What's your name?"

"Omega male H-"

"Uh-uh. I don't give a shit about your orientation kid; I just asked your name."

"...Harley. And you're..."

"The mechanic. Tony."
"You really didn't deserve her, Tony. It's a pity. I was so close to having her... perfect."

"OK, OK, wait, wait, slow down, slow down! You're right... I don't deserve her. The only one who does, you put in the hospital. Here's where you're wrong; she was already perfect. J.A.R.V.I.S., do me a favour and blow Mark 42."

"Don't!"

"It's okay."

"I'm hot, I'll hurt you!"

"No, you won't. See? Not hot."

"Am I going to be okay?"

"No. You work with me, nothing will ever be okay. Remember the Swedish strippers? That car still isn't clean enough yet. But I had this twenty years ago when I was drunk, I can sort it out. I fix stuff."

When Tony wakes up from the surgery, one thought runs through his head.

*I can breathe.*

"Thor? What's Thor doing in... London?! What the hell is that? More aliens?! WHAT THE FU-!"

Pepper tells him to make another suit, at least one. Tony thought no longer being Iron Man would make her happy.

"I am happy Tony, that you're not risking your life. But you've lost a piece of yourself it wasn't fair of me to ask you to lose. You loved being Iron Man, and I had no right to try and get you to stop; I'm not your mother, or your mate. You already forbid yourself from shifting; don't deny this as well."

She leaves Tony to his thoughts, not surprised that J.A.R.V.I.S. has subtly pulled up the schematics for the Mark 42.

That? That is three helicarriers being destroyed by Captain America.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., get me answers!"

"Of course Sir."

"Went through all the files that you guys dumped online; alerted the undercover agents that I could, repurposed most of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s funding to pay for all the damage you three caused, helped the police and non-HYDRA feds get the actual HYDRA goons into jail, found out what happened to Loki's glow stick of destiny.

Oh yeah, that's still on Earth, currently being studied by said HYDRA goons."
"Please be a secret door, please be a secret door, please be a secret door... Yay!"

"You could... have saved us... Why didn't you... do more?"

"Keep your friends rich and your enemies rich, and wait to find out which is which."

"Stark..."

"What?"

"Tony Stark used to say that... to me. You're one of his. One of that blasted Omega's."

"A being unwilling to change and evolve? A shifter who ignores half of themselves? Don't compare me with Stark! He's a sickness!"

"Aw Junior, you beak your old man's heart."

"Thor didn't say where he was going for answers?"

"Sometimes my teammates don't tell me things. Kind of hoping Thor would be the exception."

"I get first crack at the big guy. Iron Man's what he's waiting for."

"That's true, he hates you the most."

"How do you hope to stop me?"

"Like the old man said, Together."

"You think you can find out what's coming?"

"I do. Besides this one Omega I've encountered, there's nothing that can't be explained."

"That man has no regard for lawn maintenance. I'm gonna miss him though. And you're gonna miss me. There's gonna be a lot of manful tears."

"I will miss you Tony. We all will. We've already lost Bruce and Clint, and for now Thor."

"Yeah, but you've gained Rhody, Sabrina and your fly-boy, and Thor will come back soon. Never thought I'd say this, but I shouldn't have listened to Pepper. I should've just let the clean slate lie."

"You can't mean that Tony."

Tony sighed, gently shaking his head as they made their way to his car.

"If I hadn't come on the attack to Strucker's base Cap, can you honestly tell me I would have made Ultron? At least, the Ultron I did create?"

Steve bit his lip as his eyes darted away. Tony gave a sad little smile.
"Thought so."

Tony turned to enter his car.

"Tony."

Tony looked at Steve from his seat. The man looked nervous, wringing his hands before forcing them to hang still at his sides and taking a deep breath.

"I'd like to take you to dinner, Saturday night."

Tony loosed a mirthless chuckle.

"No can do Cap. I have a lot of work to do to get SI back in the black thanks to this colossal blunder. I can just hear the headlines now 'OMEGA CAUSES RUCKUSS! TONY STARK NEEDS TO SETTLE DOWN, LET AN ALPHA TAKE HIM TO TASK!' Story of my life really; it's amazing I haven't given Pepper and Happy any greys."

Steve pouted briefly before he spoke again.

"Maybe I could bring you something then? Like a lunch break, you know?"

Tony shook his head.

"You're sweet Rogers, but I'm not interested in dating you."

Steve jolted slightly, his face a mien of sadness.

"Why not? We do really well together Tony. Yeah we argue, but we always come through in the end. And I bet working together, we could even help you to shift again. Won't you even try?"

Tony sighed again, taking off his sunglasses to look Steve in the eye.

"When were you going to tell me that Barnes killed my parents?"

Steve jerked a step backwards, losing all colour on his face as he looked at Tony in horror. Tony just smiled that sad little smile.

"That's why I won't try Steve. I found it mentioned once in the S.H.I.E.L.D. info dump. In a security video that starred Natasha, a man who feared death, and you. Truthfully, I almost passed over it in favour of other files. You've had months to tell me Steve, a little over a year in fact."

Tony shook his head before sliding his sunglasses back up his nose.

"Sometimes my teammates don't tell me things. I'm sure you know the feeling."

Putting the car into drive, Tony pulled away from the Compound, not waiting for an answer.

The next few months were busy.

Tony produced a veritable waterfall of designs and upgrades for SI, including the introduction of the Medical Division's Prosthetic Line.

Yes, Tony was still angry that Barnes had killed his parents, but it was a distant rage. He'd had time to think it over, to become accustomed to the knowledge and to accept that Barnes could've done
nothing to stop HYDRA in his state. The Beta had been put through so much grief if the scant files on him were any indication.

'Asset required maintenance after mission. Punishment given.'

'Asset showed signs of recovering memories. Sessions with chair scheduled.'

'Asset shows no signs of Alpha dominance. Further experiments of orientation change set to follow.'

It turned Tony's stomach. It wasn't enough for HYDRA that they had the lead Beta for the Howling Commando's, injected with a version of the Super Soldier Serum that managed to work. It wasn't enough that they had one of the two strongest wolf-shifters in history chained to them.

They also wanted him to be an Alpha.

Tony would likely never be friends with the man if they met, but he would do what he could to help Barnes, starting with providing an arm that wasn't at risk of snapping his spine. Seriously, HYDRA was supposed to be smart, but the weight of the monstrosity they put on Barnes!

"Boss, you have a call from Mr Rhodey. Shall I put him through?"

Tony looked up from the wires in front of him. Friday had grown a lot since she had first been uploaded into the armour; fleshing out her personality and preferences to become his sweet, snarky baby girl. It was one of the many problems that had let to Ultron's madness; Tony hadn't given the A.I. time to grow. By splicing the programming he'd already coded with the stuff provided by the sceptre/mind stone, Tony had essentially thrown a baby into a swimming pool of sharks, but only after pumping said baby full of steroids. When your options are swim or die, by damn you will swim.

Tony learned from his mistakes though, and Friday had taken all the time she needed in the paddling pool.

"Sure thing my gal, let's see what happening with the Honey-Bear."

Rhodey's face appeared on the holo-display, a welcome smile on his oldest friends face.

"How you doing Tones?"

"Life's treating me well sourpatch. What can I do for my favourite Ursine?"

Rhodey chuckles, rubbing a hand across the back of his head.

"You could find a way to make Rogers stop pining; that'd be great."

Tony sighed, irritation blooming on his face; Steve had called at least once every day just to speak with Tony, and almost always ended up asking for a date.

Tony always said no.

"I wish I could buddy, but he's stubborn as a mule. I'd give Nat a call, see if she can trick him on some dates to get his mind off me. But as much as I know you want to complain about the Captain, it's not why you called. Talk to me man."

Rhodey looked a little sheepish but settled himself in to talk.
"There's a couple of things. First off, you mind if I swung by the Tower and just hung around for a few days? I miss being around your crazy and could use some time with my little brother."

Tony smiled as widely as he could, crinkling his eyes so Rhodey wouldn't see the gleam of tears over his eyes as he nodded. Like he'd ever turn his big brother away.

"Thanks bro. Second, Barton's been re-instated as an Avenger."

Tony's eyes darted to the screen shock written across his features.

"But-! But Clint retired! He wanted out! Has something happened? Are Laura and the spawn okay? They seemed fine in our emails!"

Tony loved kids, or rather, he loved the ideal of kids. Tony had no clue as to whether he'd ever be a good parent, given the stellar examples set for him by Howard, Maria and Obadiah. If he ever got a woman pregnant, or fell pregnant himself, he would be basing everything off of Jarvis' example, but if that would be enough, was something Tony didn't have an answer for.

But Tony was a futurist. And what was more representative of the future than children?

Cooper and Lila Barton received basic lessons at the little school in the nearby town, but it really wasn't enough to keep them occupied mentally. Clint taught them what maths he could when he was home, but Tony knew the almost agony of not having enough for your brain to do, so he had taken to sending the Barton flock various little toys and experiments that got the kids engaged.

Laura had sent Tony back letters with thank you notes and drawings from the little chicks, and had eventually conceded to setting up an email account for them to talk to Tony. 'Uncle Tony' was easily one of the best titles Tony's been given, so he felt no shame in being worried.

Rhodey shook his head, a startled look on his face.

"Sorry man, outta context that sounds real bad, lemme try again; Laura needs Barton out of the house because he keeps renovating, and she wants to get some work done, but doesn't have the space. Barton has too much energy, finishing everything around the farm too quickly, so he starts renovating to keep himself busy. They have come to the agreement for him to be a part-time Avenger, because it solves both their problems, while also bringing in a bit more income, which is always useful."

Rhodey looked quite contrite by the end of his explanation, but Tony was lot calmer, knowing that the three little Barton's were still safe.

"Sorry man, I didn't mean to scare you like that. Think I'll leave the rest of the news for when I come by. Tomorrow good for you?"

"Yeah... Yeah tomorrow's good gumdrop. Fly safe."

"Always Tones."

Cutting the connection, Tony releases a low, deep breath, calming the final fingers of panic that had rocked up.

"Friday my gal, call up my favourite little intern; I'm in a mentory mood... You know what? Let's go the whole hog on this, video call to Harley as well, we're doing some cross country science!"
As much as Tony cares for the Barton fowl, he knows he holds Peter Parker and Harley Keener in his heart as sons.

Precocious little Harley, the hyperactive little Bengal cat who was surprised that Tony didn't want his orientation. Who delighted in having someone who understood the numbers and ideas that swam around his head, and would regularly email Tony to share thoughts and just anecdotes about his day. Who was top of his class because it made Tony proud, and his mother worry less. Who was planning to attend M.I.T. one day, because Tony went there.

And dear hopeful Peter, the whip-smart Serval who had been desperate for a job to help his Aunt meet rent. Who still had the gleam of awe whenever he saw Tony, because he'd read Tony's papers, and wanted so much to help people with all the gifts life had given him.

Tony had been passing through the meeting rooms when the old HR guy was kicking up a very public stink about how Peter wanted SI to endorse child labour and Omega slavery. He was fired on the spot, and Tony took Peter to another room to help him calm down from being yelled at. Despite his youthful face, Peter was fifteen -legally allowed to be employed for part-time work-and very advanced in his studies. Furthermore, Peter had been applying for menial work; mail boy, coffee runner, general gopher duties, nothing sensitive or particularly dangerous. Tony had looked at his resume, and hired him for the one skill that SI could legally help him further; photography.

Thrice a week, Peter would shadow SI's in house photographers, learning the in's and out's of premium angles, filter preferences, the different effects of digital and film. For the rest of the week, Peter was given free reign of the Tower when he wanted to play with science, and a standing invite to Tony's lab, provided Tony himself was there.

Peter and Harley were the only other Omega males Tony had met in his life, and he for them. It was wonderful not to feel alone.

Rhodey arrived the next day shortly after lunch, looking more tired and worn since yesterday's call. Collapsing on the sofa, Rhodey let out happy little groans when Tony started massaging the knots from his back.

"Was there a call or something? You're practically stone right now."

"I forgot Rogers has super hearing. He spent, I shit you not, all night asking me to try and convince you to date him. I'm sorry for this T, but I could only get him to back off by saying I'd try and get you to visit the compound."

Tony would be annoyed, but Rhodey is wiped, stressed and cranky, which is not a good combo for staying in control.

"Once I finish this massage, you are going to your den, and not coming out until you're settled. Friday has stocked up on food for you, and I can come in any time you signal me to."

He can tell Rhodey wants to put up a fight, but Tony designed that den; the allure is too much to resist.

They can talk later.

Later is two days, Rhodey shuffling into the kitchen in a bee-line for the coffee maker, crooning a love song once he sees the pot is full.
Tony knows the feeling.

Three cups later and Rhodey is back to Earth, rested and willing to talk.

"Okay, Rogers, visit, Barton... oh, a letter came in from Bruce two days ago! Just a general how is everyone, he's alive, thinking about maybe coming back if there's a space still for him, that kinda thing, so that's good."

Tony smiled at hearing about his science-bro. Bruce wasn't able to shift like normal since his accident, his sun bear being replaced with the Hulk. It was painful for Bruce, especially given he was a Beta while Hulk was all Alpha. If he felt safe enough to contact the Compound, Tony was sure he'd be easily welcomed into the fold once more.

"Final bit of biz I need to talk to you about is actually kinda odd. The Avengers received a letter from the King of Wakanda, seeking an audience."

Tony choked a little on his food.

"The King of Wakanda? What on Earth does King T'Chaka want to talk to the Avengers about? Oh, no wait... he might want to talk about the Vibranium Ultron got his mitts on. Yeah, that's pretty legit. Why am I being told this?"

Rhodey ran his hand over his head.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd be present, for at least the initial meeting. Rogers has already said yes, so it's happening, but Rogers is not a diplomat, and is a very bad actor. You can certainly be an ass, but you know how to smooth things over way better then Rogers. There's also the fact that Wakanda is like, super advanced and shit right? The Captain would not be my first, second or third choice to be main speaker."

"At least he's figured out how to stop butt-dialling at the ass-crack of dawn when he and Sam are on their runs."

Rhodey snorts.

"Small mercies. Please?"

Tony sighs.

"Get me the times, and I'll do my best."

Tony arrived at the compound ten minutes before King T'Chaka was set to arrive, checking his phone to make sure he hadn't missed a message from Rhodey detailing a change in time. No message. Tony squared his shoulders, and entered Avengers HQ.

Rhodey hadn't told Steve that Tony was coming to the meeting, which was good, because it meant he didn't have the time to prepare a speech on how Tony should go out with him. If Tony was very lucky, he could avoid being seen by Steve until the meeting started, but he wasn't betting on being that lucky.

"Tony! What's up man?!"

Especially with Clint screeching like a hawk as soon as he'd entered the kitchen.

Sure enough, Steve came running in from the lounge room, face lighting up as he caught sight of
"Hi Tony; it's great to see you! I was wondering when you were gonna come by."

Oh, Steve was going to pull the kicked puppy face for this.

"Rhodey asked me if I'd be present for the meeting today."

Aaaaaaand yep; there it is. Droopy eyebrows, pouted lips and all. Tony sighs and makes his way to the lounge to say hello to the others. The Avengers have more or less become a war pack. It's an old fashioned practice that most don't care for, but with Steve being the Alpha Team Leader, it's not much of a surprise. Thor is another Alpha, but he defers to Steve as a 'member of the realm', and Rhodey is not an original member; he joined later. Everyone else is a Beta.

Tony's actually fairly sure that Steve wants to date Tony so badly because he's an Omega, and would thus provide balance to the pack dynamics.

Sure Steve holds some romantic interest in Tony, otherwise he'd just pester Tony to become an active member again, but he'd likely pester Tony the same as a Beta or Alpha.

No, Steve may like Tony, but it's mostly for his orientation.

Tony sees Natasha and Sam sitting on the couch playing Mario Kart as he enters -Sam squawking like the falcon he shifts into when Natasha, as sly as her fox, red-shells him at the finish line- with Wanda sitting with Rhodey cheering them on, cuddling like the bears they are. Rhodey jumps up to greet Tony properly once he sees him, thanking him for coming.

"Rhodes, why do you want Tony at the meeting?"

Cue Captain Grumpy-Pants. Tony rolls his eyes, face safely hidden in Rhodey's shoulder as they hug.

"Wakanda is the Land of Innovation Rogers; I asked Tony over so we had someone who could keep up if they decide to talk tech."

Steve is bristling; a sign that an Alpha feels their authority is being usurped. Tony sighs, realising it's because he came when Alpha Rhodey asked, not Alpha Steve.

Steve looks to be gearing up for a long lecture, when Vision walks in. Dear, sweet, no orientation Vision.

"The car from the Wakandan Embassy is pulling up the driveway. I believe we should be there to greet them. It is good to see you Tony."

"That it is kiddo; how the mechanics holding up?"

"They are sufficing for all my needs, thank you for asking. Shall we?"

They lead the small group of Wakandan's to the conference room, and Tony glances over them quickly.

The bodyguards are six women, and just looking at them, Tony would say they are as skilled as Natasha.

King T'Chaka is there of course; a kindly looking elderly man, who is reputed to be a fair-minded
Beta.

His daughter, the Princess Shuri is sitting to her father's left proudly, calm and sure of herself, though curiosity is shining in the Beta's eyes.

And... Prince T'Challa.

Tony doesn't know why, but it feels like every nerve he has is set alight at the presence of the Alpha, which has never happened to Tony before. It only got more intense when he met the Prince's eyes. The slow smirk the man sent him sent shivers up Tony's spine, and it's only Tony's years of being scrutinised by the media that keeps Tony from reacting.

The meeting starts as they take their seats, Steve introducing Tony and the Avengers, King T'Chaka introducing his family and the guards.

Prince T'Challa's eyes never leave Tony.

He can't wait for this to be over; he has a special guest to meet at the airport. Harley's coming to visit for two weeks.

"Most of it was recovered thanks to your efforts Mr Stark, and has been repurposed for building supplies."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Indeed... tell me Mr Stark, do you hold any interest in Myth and Legend?"

"Uh, sorta. Before meeting Thor, no, not so much; I lived under the idea that they were exaggerated tales of what happened in the past, because I had no reason to believe that there existed beings who could control weather, times etcetera. Nowadays I'll believe anything is possible, why do you ask?"

"I think I would enjoy introducing you to the stories of Wakanda, such as the tale of entwined souls."

"That's... that's very kind of you. Perhaps another time."

While getting to speak with the Wakandan Royal family was amazing, Tony is quite happy to leave once the meeting is done, escaping with a hug from Rhodey when the Avengers take the Wakandan's on the public tour of the Compound.

Tony plans to make some very special upgrades to Iron Patriot War Machine and take Rhodey out to dinner to make up for the grief Steve is sure to put him through. But that gets pushed to the back of his mind as he waits on the edge of the tarmac for the plane to land, and a joyful little Bengal cat to bound out of the doors to greet him.

Harley and Peter have gotten along from the get-go, if for nothing more then being two of the mouthiest little shits Tony's ever crossed paths with, and get on like a house on fire when they finally meet face-to-face.

Tony loves it!
Peter is currently on break from school, and has permission from his aunt -so long as he calls her every day- to spend all of it at the Tower with Tony and Harley.

That means staying up till two in the morning having stupid amounts of fun making explosions, waking up at half past eleven and going out for brunch because cooking is for people who are good at it, coming back to the Tower and playing in the guts of some cars Tony's bought just for the boys, before the boys go veg out on the couch playing games and watching movies while Tony does some video conferencing to satisfy the board and make Pepper happy, before he joins them on a sci-fi binge, and they'll order take-away to be delivered to the Tower for dinner, after which the cycle repeats.

It is awesome.

Tony is so talking to Aunt May and Mrs Keener about paying the boys college funds.

On the eighth day of 'The Science Trip', Tony's video conference is not with an SI investor, but rather the Avengers. The Wakandan's are still there, and while the Avengers are smart, Tony was the only one to really follow what was being said.

"I'm sorry, but I am unable to leave the Tower at present."

"I'm sure Ms Hogan will let you off if you explain it's for the Avengers Tony. We need you here now. This is a meeting that should happen face to face."

Tony barely holds back the eye roll that comment deserves; it doesn't help that everyone in the conference room is nodding their heads in agreement.

"It has nothing to do with Pepper or SI. I'm in the middle of something Captain, and cannot leave. I apologise, but I won't be able to be present except for over the holo-display."

It takes a few more back-and-forth arguments but eventually it is conceded that Tony's not joining them physically. Steve and the Wakandan's seem most upset by this, and Tony's getting those chills from Prince T'Challa even through the camera.

Tony leaves the camera every ten minutes or so, making it seem like he's waiting for something to finish fabricating or checking test results. Making proof, however false, that his work is why he hasn't left for the compound.

Truthfully, it's just that Tony doesn't want to leave the kids and he doesn't want to share them with the Avengers just yet. He has no doubt Natasha and Clint will discover them soon enough, but for now, Tony is basking in the warmth of being a parent, and he doesn't want to lose that so soon.

Prince T'Challa is as smooth a bastard as they come.

All throughout the meeting, he makes comments, jokes and quips that it seems no one but Tony realises are heavy flirtation. And hell, maybe Tony only realised because it's directed at him.

It's also really, really flattering, because it's not the sort of flirting to sleep with someone. It's the deep, intense flirting that you use with someone you admire, respect and adore.

Tony's only seen it first-hand when Happy decided to pursue Pepper.

And Prince T'Challa makes intense sound weak in the face of his technique.
Twice already Tony has to go off-screen just to get away from those piercing eyes. It doesn't hurt that the Wakandan Prince is stupidly gorgeous.

Though Tony will **never** admit to it, he kinda wonders what a child between Prince T'Challa and himself would look like.

The sudden claxon of the Tower alarms kills such thoughts swiftly.

"Boss! There is a massive security breach to the penthouse; I've lost all cameras and speakers!"

Harley. Peter.

Tony grabs a gauntlet from the bench and runs, taking the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. He gets to the door to the penthouse and just manages to open it when-

A sharp pain pierces his neck, and Tony's world goes black.

Tony wakes up cold and in pain.

He opens his eyes slowly, wary of what he'll find.

In the low light, he sees what looks to be a ransacked bunker; concrete walls and floor, cabinets with the doors removed and a pile of shredded fabric that used to be a couch. Tony appears to be locked to the wall thanks to some leather cuffs. The leather is tough, and conforms just enough to his wrists that he can't slip free. But that's knowledge at the peripheral of Tony's mind.

Where are Harley and Peter?

Before Tony can get too panicked, the door to the room opens and a few burly men saunter in. The guy in front is obviously in charge, given how he starts monologuing "Ah, the Invincible Iron Man Tony Stark, brought down by" blah, blah, blah, whatever, Tony's eyes are on the other two muscle-heads. The ones holding an unconscious Serval and Bengal cat.

"You are going to die. You might live to regret this, but that doesn't matter, because you are going to be dead. Before I leave this bunker, I am going to kill you."

The three startle at Tony's words but he no longer cares; they've hurt his boys.

It's been almost forty years. He's over Howard and his insecurities. The boys need him, and he won't let them down.

The goon squad shift uneasily as Tony feels his bones and muscles shift and grow, and the fur begin to lengthen down his body.

It's only when Tony's fangs elongate that they realise what's happening.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
What You're Made Of Part II

Chapter Summary

For d_aia

Continuation of What You're Made Of.

I just picked whatever names I came across used in reference to the Dora Milaje, they may or may not be actual Dora Milaje. Just assume that everyone's uniforms/armours shift to fit their animal forms; Comic-book science! Also, a person's hair colour determines their animal's fur/feathers etc. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Growing up in the wilds of the Wakandan Jungle, T'Challa, as with the rest of his people, feels a stronger connection with his shifted form than most of the rest of the world. There was just such an immense pleasure to be found running within the labyrinth of the trees and bushes after a day filled with his duties as prince, that if it weren't for the usefulness of his hands, T'Challa suspected he may have decided to live entirely in his shifted form.

The Black Panther.

Shuri enjoyed the runs too, and when he had the time, even their father joined in, three panthers stalking in the darkness. Truly, the only thing that would make T'Challa's life complete would be to find the soul that entwined his own.

In times long forgotten by most of man, there were tales told of meeting one's true mate, meeting the soul that completed one's own, that called to the shifter just as much as the man.

It mattered not if the shifted were aligned, for the animal within is but a single part of one's soul.

What mattered was if the chill of Winter slid down the spine whenever eyes happened to meet.

If fire and lightning danced through the body, setting fingers and toes alight.

And if upon sighting them, never do they leave one's awareness.

Yes, T'Challa held hope that by the time he was ready to mate it would be to his true mate. And he found his mate by chance watching a news broadcast from America.

"I am Iron Man."

Just as the stories had claimed, T'Challa's spine was ice and lightning coursed through him, setting his nerves on fire.
At first it made no sense; he'd seen pictures and watched programs with Tony Stark before and had never been so affected. Luckily his father had been present and recognised the signs.

"You've not watched a live broadcast before T'Challa. Everything else has been a recording, and may as well be considered dead."

It was from there that Wakanda began leaving it's decades, centuries, of isolation. King T'Chaka had already been slowly introducing Wakanda to the U.N., but there was greater motive now; his son had identified his true mate, and by the Panther God, T'Chaka would do all in his power to unite them.

Personally, T'Challa was all for heading straight to Stark Industries Headquarters and meeting his mate face to face, he had admired and near adored the man and his work for years after all, but T'Chaka refused him.

"So few places on Earth remember the old ways T'Challa. You must slowly and carefully introduce the idea of true mates to Mr Stark, so he can connect the pieces himself. Just throwing your status as true mate at him will do nothing but scare him away."

And so followed years where T'Challa wished for nothing more than to be by the side of his mate, but restrained himself. It got harder and harder as time went by, and T'Challa swore his heart skipped a beat when Tony carried the missile into the portal, and stopped altogether when he saw Tony fall. The footage had been shaky, a civilian on their phone most likely, but it had been enough for T'Challa, who could only utter the Panther God a prayer of thanks when the footage showed Tony return to his feet.

T'Challa was blessed to have such a strong mate.

But time couldn't move fast enough for him to be at his mate's side.

"Truly? We are finally to go to America?"

T'Challa was practically coming out of his skin with excitement; he could feel his panther rumbling in delight.

Finally, he was to meet Tony.

A letter to the Avengers Headquarters asking for a meeting, an acceptance from Captain America. He was so close.

The meeting was just an excuse of course, though completely valid given T'Chaka wished to personally thank Tony for ensuring the recovered Vibranium was returned to Wakandan soil. But finally, they would meet!

"Brother! Calm down, you are behaving as though you've been frolicking in the catnip!"

T'Challa took several deeps breaths, forcing himself to sit still in his seat. He couldn't help his excitement giving him restless energy; in less then thirty minutes, he would be face to face with his mate! He might be able to calm down if he could shift and hunt, but New York was not exactly conducive to shifted hunting.

Shuri rolled her eyes in amusement, and T'Challa could admit that at any other time, he too would
be laughing at his behaviour.

She was right though; T'Challa had to make a good first impression, and bouncing off the walls like a three-day-old cub would not do.

He had to calm down, be suave, sleek, the panther he carried in human form; smooth, dangerous and alluring.

They were greeted at the doors to the Compound, and immediately moved to a conference room where introduction were made.

"It's an honour to meet you all. I am Alpha Steve Rogers, codenamed Captain America. Alpha James Rhodes, the Iron Patriot. Beta Sam Wilson, Falcon. Beta Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow. Beta Clint Barton, Hawkeye. Beta Wanda Maximoff, the Scarlet Witch. Non-Aligned Vision. And this is Omega Tony Stark, Iron Man."

Captain Rogers use of old address had an uncomfortable weight rest in T'Challa's chest, especially when he introduced Tony, but T'Challa couldn't say why. There had been nothing rude or secret about the introductions, and T'Challa knew his father had planned on introducing them the same way, but the weight was there, impossible to miss.

"A pleasure to meet you all, and thank you for accepting this meeting. I am Beta T'Chaka, King of Wakanda. Behind me are Beta Aneka, Beta Nakia, Beta Okoye, Beta Teela, Beta Tetu and Beta Ayo, bodyguards for the Royal family. To my left is my daughter, Beta Shuri, Princess of Wakanda. To my right my son, Alpha T'Challa, Prince of Wakanda."

There.

Finally Tony met his eyes.

Once more the chills run havoc on his spine, and T'Challa delights in the ever so slight widening of Tony's eyes.

Tony feels it too. He doesn't know what is going on, but he feels the almost primal attraction to T'Challa's soul.

Now T'Challa has to earn his heart.

"Most of it was recovered thanks to your efforts Mr Stark, and has been repurposed for building supplies."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Indeed... tell me Mr Stark, do you hold any interest in Myth and Legend?"

"Uh, sorta. Before meeting Thor, no, not so much; I lived under the idea that they were exaggerated tales of what happened in the past, because I had no reason to believe that there existed beings who could control weather, times etcetera. Nowadays I'll believe anything is possible, why do you ask?"

"I think I would enjoy introducing you to the stories of Wakanda, such as the tale of entwined souls."
"That's... that's very kind of you. Perhaps another time."

It takes all of T'Challa's self control not to leap over the table and pull Tony into his arms and serenade him with the tales of his homeland.

T'Challa notices the instant Tony has left the group, and then the Compound.

His first instinct is to whine in distress, to try and call Tony back, but manages to keep himself restrained to a single low whimper, that can easily be interpreted as interest if one doesn't know better.

His father and Shuri know better, and are quick to notice that Tony has vanished as Captain Rogers starts the tour of the Compound. While the Compound is marvellous, and very well designed, T'Challa's desire to explore it is greatly tempered by his wish for Tony to be present.

Though that heaviness in his chest reasserts itself when the Captain realises Tony's absence.

"Where'd Tony go? Does anyone know where he went?"

There is a thread of anger mixed in with the concern that has the hair on T'Challa's neck stand on end.

"He left at the start of the tour Rogers. He has a lot of work to do for SI, so he went on back to the Tower."

While Rogers face calms, his eyes remain both worried and upset. T'Challa doesn't like the look, and he likes it even less when in concern to Tony. Tony is not the Captain's true mate, and the regard the Captain was showing for him was not for a teammate.

T'Challa makes note to keep an eye on Steve Rogers.

Since the very public reveal of HYDRA's infestation, the Avengers had been solely sponsored by Tony Stark; not even Stark Industries, every coin came from Tony's personal funds. The royalties for Avengers merchandise were signed to Tony's name and were payed straight to the Avengers bank account. As such, it was easy for T'Chaka to be granted extended visiting freedoms when he explained he was offering to add to the coffers. T'Challa quickly learnt, to his sadness, that Tony had retired from the Avengers, and was not living at the Compound.

That simply wouldn't do; how else was T'Challa to get close to his mate?

It was Colonel Rhodes who unwittingly gave the answer of how to get closer to Tony.

"In a couple more years, I'll be able to ditch the codename Iron Patriot and have my baby go back to being the War Machine. It'll make Tony happy too, since he can't bring himself to work on the suit as much as he wants to. And Tony, he's the Mechanic; these things are his babies, and he won't let anyone else make upgrades or repair them, you know?"

Rhodes was then called over by the Captain, who was no doubt once again trying to get Rhodes to bring Tony back to the Compound. It was irritating that the Captain was ignoring the fact that Rhodes was obviously talking to T'Challa, but the prince had a distraction this time.

Tony was still the caretaker for the Avengers.
Perhaps it was time to bring the Black Panther out of the Wakandan Wilds.

T'Chaka agreed.

Should the Avengers agree, T'Challa would join their ranks, donning the mask of his peoples protector, the Black Panther.

On the Eighth day of their visit to America, a second meeting was called, to discuss the financial aid T'Chaka wished to provide, where T'Chaka would bring up T'Challa's skills as a warrior.

After fifteen minutes of small talk in the conference room waiting for everyone to arrive, Rhodes suddenly spoke up.

"Wait... everyone's here except Tony, are we waiting for him?"

The Captain nodded distractedly, his eyes focussed on the door. Rhodes sighed.

"Well I sure hope you told Tony about needing him at this meeting, because I sure didn't know about it."

Rogers eyes snapped to Rhodes as worry filled his face. The Captain then darted to the holo-display to contact the genius.

"Hey there Chickadees. What can I do for you?"

T'Challa's eyes widened as he took in Tony's form over the holo-display.

Ragged jeans hugging his legs, muscled arms and chest tantalisingly revealed by the black tank top, an ease and calm that never existed in the media's lens.

The man was delicious.

"I'm sorry, but I am unable to leave the Tower at present."

T'Challa refocused on the conversation, realising that Tony didn't plan to come to the Compound.

"I'm sure Ms Hogan will let you off if you explain it's for the Avengers Tony. We need you here now. This is a meeting that should happen face to face."

Despite everyone in the conference room nodding their heads in agreement, Tony merely looks unimpressed, and replaying the Captain's words, T'Challa has to stifle a wince. No one likes to be told their job is unimportant, and Tony's job is creating for Stark Industries.

"It has nothing to do with Pepper or SI. I'm in the middle of something Captain, and cannot leave. I apologise, but I won't be able to be present except for over the holo-display."

It takes a further ten minutes of back-and-forth arguments for the Captain to accept Tony's physical absence. T'Chaka begins the meeting by explaining how he wants to sponsor the team, and things go from there.

T'Challa doesn't take his eyes off Tony's image through the holo-display.

Tony often goes off screen to attend to whatever prevents him from joining them, but he returns swiftly. T'Challa gives Tony every ounce of attention he can, and compliments Tony continuously. He is rewarded with the ever so slight quickening of breath, the faintest pinks to Tony's cheeks,
and the way Tony's eyes never leave his for long.

At least until the alarms start blaring.

"Boss! There is a massive security breach to the penthouse; I've lost all cameras and speakers!"

Tony doesn't hesitate, running off screen immediately, not even bothering to turn it off. Rhodes jumps from his seat.

"Friday! Talk to me! What is going on?!!"

"I don't know Mr Rhodey! I've lost everything to the Penthouse, and the Boss is no longer on my scanners!"

Rhodes looks a combination of furious and afraid. Given that Tony is his oldest friend, the prospect of possible losing him must be a harrowing one.

"You sit tight Fri, and activate Cornerstone Protocol; make sure you and your brothers are safe, you hear me? Tony would be devastated if anything happened to you baby girl."

"Understood Mr Rhodey. Please, come quickly."

The holo-display cuts off, and most of the Avengers are already leaving the room. T'Challa stands.

"I am one of Wakanda's top Warriors; would you allow me to assist?"

The Captain looks as though he will decline, but Rhodes overrules him.

"All the help we can get, we take; if you got something better to suit up in then those slacks of yours, do it now and meet us in the gym. You have five minutes max."

T'Challa's personal record is two.

The gym has a separate door that leads to the hanger, where they boarded a quinjet and shot to Avengers Tower. On guard as soon as they landed, a silence permeated the air. From the outside, nothing looked out of place; the glass windows were all intact, the Tower still standing.

It was when they entered the Penthouse that it obvious all was not well.

Couches and tables were overturned, the wet bar had been decimated, and in the middle of the room lay the remains of what appeared to be an EMP grenade. Hawkeye and Black Widow started scanning the room, Scarlet Witch and Falcon moving to check the other rooms on the floor, while Captain America, Iron Patriot and Vision moved to try and restore the AI Friday to her cameras and speakers. T'Challa, garbed in the Vibranium-weave mesh of the Black Panther, moved to inspect the grenades remains.

"I don't understand; Tony's stuff is protected from EMP's. How did one grenade cause a blackout?"

Over the last eight days, T'Challa had become accustomed to the Captain not fully understand technological advancements, but as a soldier, you'd think he'd know that one grenade in the right place could be catastrophic. While T'Challa continued to examine the remains, Vision spoke.

"An EMP of that size would normally never be enough to wipe all the interfaces of a system of Friday's calibre. Two at least would be needed, and spread across the room, instead of shot to the middle. Iron Patriot and I will continue reconnecting Friday Captain, if you would start looking for
another EMP."

"No need."

Hawkeye's voice cut in, he voice as steady as his gaze, directed to a broken window on the other side of the room.

"That's precise, high powered shots, for the rest of the window not to have shattered, even with reinforced glass. But that's a distraction. As soon as you get Friday back up, have her look through the security footage of all the hallways leading to the pent; whoever did this has taken Tony, but they policed their brass. That grenade may have been used, but it's not the only."

At that point Falcon and Scarlet Witch ran back into the main room.

"Stark had people over, two of the rooms set up for them."

Falcon was calm as his military training came to the fore, but Scarlet Witch didn't have that training, and her voice wavered as she spoke.

"One of them was a child."

T'Challa felt his heart stutter. Tony had run to the penthouse without hesitation, for the same reason he couldn't attend the meeting at the Compound.

The shift came without thought, muscles bunching, joints snapping, fur rising to the top of his body and the Vibranium-weave mesh conforming to the Panther.

The Captain soon followed, as well as the Widow, all scenting, trying to gain as much information as they could. T'Challa was amazed that both guests had been Omega males, their scents almost as strong in the penthouse as Tony's.

They had been here for a while before the attack.

"Friday, are you up?"

"That I am little brother. What do you need me to do?"

T'Challa reassumed his human body, as Vision instructed Friday to bring up the security footage. It would be easier to watch with a higher line of sight.

The holo-screen was flashing in and out of existence, the projectors doing their jobs regardless of the damage. T'Challa made a mental note to look further into the quality of StarkTech, because that was impressive.

The footage was sped through, only slowing when someone was present. It was with shock that they learned that Tony's guest had both been children.

The Captain looked torn between rage and fear.

"Friday. Who are they? Why were they here?"

Friday responded dutifully, but her voice had chilled to the Captain's demand.

"The elder of the two is Peter Parker, and the younger Harley Keener. Peter is an intern at Stark Industries in the PR department, and Harley met and helped Boss during the Mandarin Debacle. Both are of lower genius intellect, and are science aficionados. Boss views both of them as his
Ignoring the Captain's stuttering response, T'Challa looked at the image of the two young men rough housing as they entered the Penthouse, and felt his heart swell.

A good parent fights for their children.

The footage sped up again until a bulky man wearing the mailrooms uniform came up the hallway carrying a large package. Friday's voice came through the footage.

"All packages are to be delivered to the eighty-fifth floor for examination and containment. Please observe the rules clearly stated in the Employee handbook."

The man snorted.

"Not this time peach."

The footage cut as the man opened the package and pulled something out.

"Afanasy Vasiliev."

All eyes turned to the Black Widow who had another screen open, frozen on the man's face just before the feed was cut.

"He is one of the main bosses for a small, yet successful Black Market. With enough money, people can buy pretty much anything from him. But the most popular purchase is Omega. Specifically, Omega males. Tony has always been very open about his orientation, given he presented so young and in a public place. These guys were specifically after him, but this raid got them three."

T'Challa's fists clenched and he didn't bother trying to stifle the growl that ripped from his throat. He didn't feel guilty for it though.

He wasn't the only one growling.

The Black Widows contacts shortly provided the current base for Vasiliev's operation and plans were made on how to infiltrate the building.

Though it displeased the Captain, it was better for T'Challa and the Black Widow to sneak inside the building in their shifted forms while the rest of the Avengers made as much chaos as they could, bring the guards outside and away from any other prisoners. With the quinjet landed, the group swiftly made their way to the front of the building to find-

"Mother and Country!"

The Captain's oath preceded the sight of ten or so men lying in pools of blood, their bodies mauled and savaged.

"Everyone, change of plans; stay together and keep watch for a feral shifter."

Feral. Shifters could, occasionally, lose themselves in the battle for control. Those that failed became violent and unreasonable, lashing out at anything that came near, regardless of if it was their greatest enemy, or even their newborn.

When a shifter became feral, they lost everything.
With senses focused, the group slowly entered the building.

Every body they came across was in the same state or worse then the guards left outside. Blood practically coated the walls, and the scent was thick in the air. There were signs that the building was a recent acquisition, not yet used to hold any kidnapped shifters or other contraband, but obviously not far off given the amount of men. Tony and the two young boys were no doubt to be the first 'guests' of the establishment.

But they weren't there.

"It doesn't make sense; all signs show that this was where they were to be taken. My contacts are never wrong about this sort of thing!"

The Widow was almost lost in her confusion, and the others not far behind. They had reconvened to the managers 'floating' office, overlooking the expansive beneath them.

"Maybe there was a detour or something; take them somewhere else first then bring them here? Or maybe they ran when the feral showed up?"

Hawkeye's voice was distant in his ear. No, T'Challa was not actively listening to the Avengers, instead he was listening to the call of his true mate's soul.

Close.

The Captain's hand closed almost harshly on his shoulder.

"Are you even listening? You may be a prince, but we need you to at least pay attention!"

"Oh I am paying attention Captain. To that which most would over look."

T'Challa pointed to a pile of destroyed boxes on the level below. They appeared to have fallen from a nearby stack, but that wasn't what T'Challa had focused on.

It was the barely visible door they were in front of.

The door opened to a set of stairs leading down.

T'Challa led the way down, given that he was the only one to have noticed the door, and his senses seemed to be more attuned then the Captain's, something he took a childish glee in when the Captain pouted over it.

Though the scent of blood still ran strong, T'Challa was actually able to pick up Tony's scent.

"He is here, definitely, but I can barely pick it up; I don't know if the boys are here."

The Avengers nodded and prepared their weapons.

The stairs led to a single door. It was heavy metal, the look of it not inappropriate for a bomb shelter. It was opened just a crack, and with a deep breath, the Avengers pushed the door the rest of the way and swarmed in.

Only to freeze at the blood-curdling roar.

There, curled in front of the decimated remains of a couch was a panther.
T'Challa stood transfixed at the sight of the gorgeous beast. It's fur was a deep, deep brown that looked black, and had a slight excess of fur around the muzzle that looked almost like a... beard.

"Tony?"

The Avengers all looked at T'Challa in confusion, but no, T'Challa was sure he was correct! It was well known that Tony Stark didn't shift, though no reason was ever given. T'Challa shifted, drawing the other cat's attention and holding it when he met those beautiful whiskey brown eyes.

Eyes that could only belong to Tony.

Slowly stepping closer to the feline who had yet to uncurl, T'Challa started purring deep in his chest, signalling that he meant no harm. Aside from a few hisses and growls when he moved too fast, T'Challa soon found himself standing above Tony.

And the two young cats curled up at his side.

The Serval and Bengal cat were undoubtedly Peter Parker and Harley Keener.

Tony was protecting them. Had forgone whatever reason prevented his shifting to be able to protect the two little ones. Friday had stated he saw them as his young, and looking at the three of them made it perfectly clear that Tony was a perfect candidate for parenthood.

T'Challa would look forward to seeing Tony swell with his cub.

Carefully, slowly, T'Challa bent down and picked up the Serval by the scruff. Tony watched him intently, determined to end him should any harm come to the child. When T'Challa had straightened and waited, Tony picked up the Bengal Cat and stood, following T'Challa as he moved towards the exit of the small bunker.

Captain America moved forward, determined to intercept Tony's path when Iron Patriot pulled him back with a low growl, that thankfully didn't set Tony off.

"You even try Captain and I will do everything in my power to end you."

Though accompanied by grumbling, The Captain conceded, and T'Challa was free to lead Tony to the quinjet, where Tony nestled with the cubs under the medi-bench.

Back at the compound, Tony lead T'Challa to his room, where the two cubs were deposited on the large soft bed before Tony joined them, curling around them to keep them safe.

T'Challa moved to the bathroom where he removed his suit before shifting back and returning to the foot of the bed, where he settled himself in to stand guard over the resting family.

It took until the next morning for the younger two Omega to wake and shift back to their human bodies. The Serval, Peter Parker, moved to the drawers and withdrew clothes for the three to wear, gently nodding in thanks when he passed T'Challa.

Harley, the Bengal cat, stayed curled up with Tony even when both were human. Tony merely kept stroking his hand through the boys hair, repeating to the both of them how very brave they were, and how proud of them he was. When the three were dressed, Tony took one look at T'Challa before moving Harley to cuddle Peter and moved to his drawers himself, throwing a pair of jeans and a shirt on the bed.
"You too Gofrette. I don't think that suit of yours is suited for casual comfort in mind."

T'Challa shifts and dresses in the offered clothing. He inwardly preens at the appreciation in Tony's eyes. Tony returns to the boys and picks up Harley, shifting him onto one hip, while Peter holds onto Tony's free hand, taking and giving comfort to all parties.

"Howard chucked a fit when I presented as Omega, but that was nothing on my first shift. Bad enough I was a freak, but I didn't even have the decency to be a Wolf or canine. It's been almost forty years since then, I remember that it took me a couple hours to shift back because Howard's shouts scared me so bad. The butler Jarvis took a picture of me, and I thought I was just a regular kitten. Friday? Would you bring up the file AES07, my gal?"

"Sure thing Boss. Welcome back."

T'Challa hadn't realised Friday was also in the Compound but his thoughts left him when the cutest little panther cub showed up on the screen. Both Harley and Peter cooed at it a little, snuggling closer to Tony as they looked at the image.

"Oh, by the way, I ended up reading up on the Tale of Entwined Souls; man was it hard to find an English version of that."

Tony's eyes meet T'Challa's before he leaves the room, that delicious chill rolling down both their spines. T'Challa's eyes widen as he realises what Tony means.

"You're off to a good start."

T'Challa licks his lips before swiftly following his true mate down the hall.

A panther needs to stalk its prey after all.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Anima Alterum

Chapter Summary

For Vrishchika

A Continuation of Musica Anima.

Tony says 'a gorgeous sample of Italian blood' in Italian and 'prince' in old Norse/Icelandic. And song lyrics will be provided for anyone who wants them. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was enthralling.

The play of those strong, slender fingers across the neck, pushing and pulling, with just the right amount of force, to coax out the perfect sounds. Body cradled so snugly against his own, nestled between those gorgeous legs, as though trying to meld the two into one.

T'Challa was breathing deep, forcing it to be slow, but then that hand moved down and-

"It is unfair! How do you make playing the cello so pornographic while still fully dressed?!!"

Tony's eyes snapped from the instrument he was playing to meet T'Challa's gaze. It was James who answered, laughter in his voice.

"I told you; the only danger you'll suffer is falling in love as Tones plays. If Tones had used his music as a flirting tactic, there would to this day be lines of people trying to date him."

Tony shakes his head while Shuri joins Rhodey in laughing and T'Challa grumbles.

They are enjoying their final day in Wakanda before they return to the states, sitting in the music room listening to Tony as he puts the instruments through their paces, but T'Challa cannot stop the daydreams of this becoming everyday life. Waking up in Wakandan warmth, following the sent of coffee, made perfectly the way only Tony knows how, eating breakfast with his three favourite people before going about his duties as King, until he has done enough work to justify sneaking off to spend time with Tony in the labs and workshops, marvelling at how free Tony is in the space, before whisking him off to a private lunch. Snuggling down for a movie with the others afterwards, and then heading to the gym to work off their lethargy, before again going their separate ways until dinner, spending the evening listening to Tony play, before once more heading to sleep, embraced by the Wakandan moonlight.

The only thing that could make the daydreams better would be if he fell asleep and woke with Tony in his arms, but he can't even imagine how wonderful that treat would be...

Hmm... and what a treat indeed.

"What cream have you been getting into Pelle Svanslös? Because by the look on your face, it's
gotta have been spiked."

Tony's voice broke him from yet another daydream, and judging from the looks all three were giving him, yes, he had looked very pleased with himself. Ignoring the heat on his cheeks, T'Challa cleared his throat, choosing to end Shuri's unrepentant giggles.

"I just found myself ruminating on the future. Tell me Shuri, did you end up keeping that list you made years ago about what you would name your children?"

Both his sister and James choke on their drinks, Shuri already trying to murder T'Challa with her eyes, as Tony bursts into laughter.

"Oh, she'll have to fight with Rhodey on what they name their kids, because he's been swearing since M.I.T. that his first son was gonna be named Galen and his daughter would be Naomi. Or they can just have enough kids to have all the names; just saying. Speaking of, Rhodey, Shuri, I bags godfather rights to at least all of your children! They will love Uncle Tony, and I promise I will corrupt them over to the side of science as quickly as possible!"

With their dark skin, it is a lot harder to tell when James and Shuri are blushing, but Tony makes it happen with ease.

A few priceless moments are spent watching the two try to calm down, before James gives it as lost and shoots a remark back.

"And what about you T? When you gonna turn me into Uncle Rhodey? Don't you white folk all need heirs to uphold the family name and shit?"

Tony merely snorts.

"I already have two direct heirs in my will, no need to go out and cast for my own spawn. And frankly, the Stark name dying with me would be a blessing, but as soon as I kick the bucket - whether it be in the glorious throes of battle, fighting for life, both mine and others, or resting in bed, from either old age or a lifetime of self-abuse finally taking its final toll- there will be plenty of people who will show up claiming to either be my kin, or to have been a secret close friend who I decided to bequeath all manner of wealth and fame to. You wanna be Uncle Rhodey, it'll only be by my not-by-blood boys."

Tony turned back to the cello, the bow gently sweeping across the strings as silence captured the room, broken only by his music. James, after a few moments of thought, stood and went to the piano, and they played together, a new song starting.

It was beautiful.

T'Challa sat back in his chair, letting the music wash over him.

The mid-morning sun laid dainty fingers across the lounge T'challa and Tony were sprawled over, Tony cuddled up on T'Challa frame. In an hour, they would be travelling back to America.

And its Captain.

Over the few weeks they had spent in Wakanda, Tony had explained the uneasiness he had around Steve Rogers, along with the man's attempts, with aid from certain members of the team, to corner Tony into a date. If it hadn't been for Friday's intervention, Rogers would have likely ended up guilting Tony into it.
T'Challa tightened his hold on Tony, just a little bit.

There was no way T'Challa was giving Tony up to anyone, let alone to a man he feared.

"Coffee, then bed. Commercial flights just don't do anything useful for me anymore."

"'Commercial'? Tony, how the hell is SI's jet considered 'Commercial'?"

"It is not the suit; that's how."

The gentle bickering between Tony and James as they made their way inside the Avengers Compound was a balm to the jetlag, distracting from the heavy pull of sleep. It would not last long, just about enough to get that coffee, which would hold the four steady until they could reach their beds.

The plan was derailed a bit when they entered the kitchen.

"Uncle Tony!"

The elder two Barton children run up to dispense hugs, babbling about the many science experiments they have completed from their kits while Tony was gone, and how hard they have both practiced on the piano to play for him. It's heart-warming in a way that T'Challa adores, and he looks forward to receiving the same behaviour from Shuri and James' children; there will be many he is sure, if the way the two look at each other is any indication.

He wonders if James is the type of man to ask for blessing from the family.

T'Challa fills two mugs from the pot, taking a deep gulp of one as he takes the other to Tony still listening, despite his exhaustion, to the excited cries of Lila and Cooper. He takes it from T'Challa with a heartfelt thank you as the children are distracted by their mother's entrance and following scolding for keeping the obviously tired quartet from their beds.

Tony presses a chaste kiss of thanks on Laura's cheek before he swallows the last dregs of his drink and moves to leave for his bedroom.

"Tony! Welcome back!"

T'Challa's hackles rise as Rogers moves to embrace Tony. It's only Nathaniel's sudden cry that stops the embrace.

"Pano! Pano!"

The occupants of the room all spin to look at the little boy who has spoken with intent for the first time. He is waving a hand at Tony, an intense look inherited from his father on his face.

"Pano!"

Tony's eyebrow raises in confusion, not understanding why the youngest Barton is directing his attempts at speech to him.

"Well, it's either Italian for a type of bread, or Portuguese for cloth. And while I am una splendida campione di sangue italiano, I somehow doubt that's what he meant."

Little Nathaniel begins to look more and more upset as whatever response he desired is not given. He tries waving both hands at Tony.
"Pano!"

It doesn't really help. Rogers leaves the room, shouting back that he's going to collect Barton. Lila pipes up shortly after he's left.

"Oh! Nate, do you mean 'piano'?"

Nathaniel's distressed whimpers cease as the obviously familiar word catches his attention, and he happily starts gibbering at his sister, before once more waving his hands at Tony, who looks both stunned and amused.

"I will happily play something for you when I've slept a bit, smallest agent. And when you are a bigger smallest agent, I'll teach you as well, so long as your mum lets me."

Laura is laughing, half in delight, half in relief.

"Of course you can teach him when the time comes, but for now, get some sleep Uncle Tony."

"You, my dear, are legend."

Pressing another kiss to her cheek, Tony leaves the kitchen.

T'Challa half bows to the woman before moving to his own room, collapsing on top of the bed and barely having the strength to wish he was cuddling with Tony again, before Morpheus slips in to embrace him.

The next morning, T'Challa wakes to fingers carding through his hair, every now and again rubbing at his scalp, and it feels so good he can't help the deep rumble in his chest. The fingers stop for a moment, but return when T'Challa whines, trying to butt the hand back to his scalp. A low chuckle fills the air, and it takes all of T'Challa's strength and focus to raise his head.

Tony is in his room.

Tony is in his room.

Tony is in his room.

T'Challa manages to gain enough strength to move just enough to drop his head in Tony's lap, prompting the return of the wonderful head rubs.

"Best morning ever."

Those delicious, warm chuckles once more rumble through the air.

"As you say Claude Cat."

Parla al mio cuore digli che sai
Dei miei dolori che non dormon mai
Parlami o stella
e dimmi se lei verr
Notte d'agosto e dei desideri
Cerco amore e vorrei che s'avveri
Lei che sorride passando per la mia via
Ah, com'
Ma tu stella amica
Dimmi se rester
Dell'amore non si sa
quando viene o se ne va
dell'amore non si sa
quando sar
da dove arriver

Tony's voice, as smooth as silk and warm as an ember floats through the air. Truly, a sin to possess, but a blessing to hear.

And right now, T'Challa is the one being sung to.

It takes a good hour or so, but T'Challa eventually wakes up enough to wonder why Tony is in his room. Tony's face is a bit sheepish when he answers.

"I'm kinda hiding from Cap. I'm still nice and relaxed from the trip and really don't want to lose that to whatever confrontation he's spent the last few weeks planning to perfection. And I know the only bedrooms he'll search for me are mine, Rhodey's and his own. So I get to spend some time with one of my favourite men, away from any stress."

T'Challa moves to pull Tony into a hug, a simple protection from the world, and can feel Tony practically melt in the embrace.

T'Challa has to do something about Rogers. He knows that Tony can fight his own battles, but Tony's methods don't seem to be working. At least he can get the sort of comfort being around T'Challa provides.

They leave T'Challa's room comparing information on a couple of tablets.

Remembering the damage done to both the armour and Tony in that Siberian bunker, T'Challa had offered to gift Tony with enough Vibranium to make a new suit. Tony declined the amount, shyly asking instead for enough to make a new chest plate. T'Challa had asked why so little, and Tony had been embarrassed by his answer.

"Because I need to remember I have physical limits. Sure, I push those limits all the time, and as hard as I can. But I am not invulnerable; out of my suit, I can and will take damage, as all squishy humans do. With a full Vibranium suit, I can potentially walk away unscathed. But I would likely fall into the mindset that nothing could ever hurt me, which will lead to careless, stupid mistakes. Mistakes that will cost too much. I am not a god, so I won't let myself pretend to be."

Tony was oh so wonderfully human.
It was just another thing to love about the man; his understanding of himself, and his sacrifices.

As they walked to the sitting room, their heads were bowed over the schematics on the tablet that showed how the newest Iron Man armour would be formed, the Vibranium chest plate working in conjunction with Tony's regular alloys and wiring.

"Tony?"

Both Tony and T'Challa looked up, finding Rogers waiting in the sitting room, an annoyed yet hopeful look in his eye.

"Sorry I missed you this morning before you started working. I wanted to welcome you back properly, since yesterday you were so tired."

T'Challa sent a quick glance to Friday's nearest camera.

"Captain Rogers, you have a call from Agent Carter. Please be so kind as to answer her so she will stop; you have yet to listen to the 346 messages she has left for you."

Oh T'Challa would have to find some way to reward the wonderful AI; the red that flooded Rogers face meant that Friday had not told a single lie, and that the Captain very much was ignoring the woman constantly calling. By Friday relaying the information where anyone could hear it, Rogers could not ignore it.

"Go see what she wants, before she ties up the line."

Rogers sends Tony an apologetic look at those words, obviously wanting to stay, but does leave to talk to the woman in private. Tony releases a slow breath when he can no longer hear the Captains footsteps, and moves to sit on the piano bench.

T'Challa sits on the bench next to him, as the chords of *Moonlight Sonata* begin to play.

"Hey Tony? I was wondering if you wanted to go a few round in the ring; keep yourself in shape you know?"

Tony sighs, sadly cutting off his rendition of *Grande Valse Brillante*, and turning to look at their visitor to the sitting room.

"No Sam, because I have no desire to be in the ring with Rogers. Please stop."

Sam just sighs and shakes his head, as if Tony is a child being difficult.

"I just don't see what your problem with Steve is Tony; he likes you a lot, and you're not even giving him a chance."

Wilson leaves before T'Challa is able to get over the sheer audacity of his statement and retaliate, but Tony has risen from the piano and come to sit next to him, snuggling in close. T'Challa wraps his arms around Tony and holds tight.

"Mr Stark, would you mind taking a look at my arm? It's sorta catching when I move it."

Tony and T'Challa are both in the workshop, once more looking over the schematics for the new armour. Sargent Barnes has immediate access to Tony if his new arm causes him grief, so he has a number of times in the past walked into the workshop to have whatever problem exists dealt with.
Tony no longer hates Barnes for his part played in Howard and Maria Stark's deaths, but he is certainly no fan of the Sargent, though he remains polite.

"Sure thing Barnes, make yourself comfortable."

The Sargent takes a seat on his chosen bench and extends the prosthetic across the worktable as Tony gathers his tools and walks over. T'Challa follows because it is just so soothing to watch Tony toiling away, watching him dive headfirst into his work. It is the effort of mere seconds for Tony to locate the crossed wires preventing Barnes' full movement.

"Hey, you... you know Stevie really likes you, right?"

Tony sighs, finishing his work quickly and setting down his tools.

"I know and I'm not interested. We're done."

Barnes rises and moves to the door.

"I think you'd be really happy if you just gave him a shot."

T'Challa holds Tony tightly, motioning for Friday to lock the door.

They go out for lunch, figuring time away from the Compound will help them both calm down. James and Shuri are off on a date of their own, so it is just them. The little bistro is homey and bright, allowing them the peace of a scene so unlike the Avengers Headquarters.

They speak about anything but the Avengers, covering ideas Tony has had about a water filtration system, to T'Challa's thoughts on instituting a new advisory council, so as to give both himself and Shuri a break when they want to leave Wakandan borders.

As they leave the bistro a few hours later, they chance upon a park, empty for the moment, but still a pleasant environment to take a walk. There is only the occasional sentence or two between them, and both are enjoying the serenity of the area.

"Anthony! T'Challa! A pleasure to see you both this day!"

Thor walks up to them, delight on his face.

"Hey there buðlungr. What are you up to?"

Thor actually looks a little troubled.

"Ruminating on a favour the Captain asked of me. I am yet still gaining knowledge of what came to pass during my absence, but it has been obvious to my eyes since my return that the Captain holds affection for you. Affection you do not return."

Thor is watching Tony's face, affirming no doubt his thoughts on the matter.

"The Captain is seeking to speak with you alone, but I understand you do not want to be alone in his presence. Fighting for one's love is admirable, and to be encouraged especially when the love is for a close comrade, but when it is so evidently one-sided, I cannot help but think it a foolish endeavour. I am not sure what course of action to take, my friend."

T'Challa chooses to ease the Thunderer's worries, given he so honestly came forth with the information.
"There is not mutual affection between Tony and the Captain, but between Tony and myself."

So saying, T'Challa raises the hand he linked with Tony at the start of their walk and places a kiss across the knuckles.

Thor's face lights up once more.

"This is most joyous! Congratulations to you both!"

Embarrassed, Tony starts fiddling with the chain round his neck as Thor continues to espouse their relationship. Eventually, Thor calms his exuberance, and bids them farewell, continuing on his way with a far lighter step then he had arrived.

They arrive back at the Compound and once more make their way to the sitting room, this time to continue the piano lessons Tony had been giving the Barton children. They are met by two, but only one of them is a Barton, and neither is under twelve.

"Barton, Maximoff. Is everything okay?"

Barton scoffs at Tony's question, while Maximoff just glares at him.

"No, everything is not okay, and it won't be until you stop being a self-righteous dick, and just let Steve take you on a date. You're nowhere near good enough for him, but he's decided he wants you so get over yourself and go out with him."

Tony flinches at Barton's words, taking a half-step back, when Maximoff joins in.

"He's decided to forgive you for the mess you caused with the Accords and locking us in the raft. You could have the decency Stark to accept his feelings for you. It's not like you lose anything in the deal, and maybe you'll finally listen to what Steve is telling you."

Both sweep out of the room, ignoring how Tony is shaking, arms wrapped around himself in the most basic form of protection. T'Challa moves him to the closest couch and just holds him, occasionally whispering his promises of love, devotion and protection. By the time the Barton children arrive, having been held back by their father's request, Tony is calm enough to continue their lessons, but T'Challa knows the calm of their visit to Wakanda is completely gone.

T'Challa has had enough of this.

T'Challa makes his way to his room before going to the gym after seeing Tony to the workshop, Friday locking the door securely as T'Challa leaves.

He has had Friday summon the Compounds residents bar Tony and the children, and is prepared to meet them head on if need be.

He enters the gym, back straight, head high, hands folded behind him.

"T'Challa, do you know what's going on? Or where Tony is?"

James looks concerned, obviously unsure if he should be running to don his armour. Shuri is by his side, eyes constantly flitting to the door, wondering no doubt where Tony could be, as he and the children are the only ones not present.

"I do know, as I am the one who asked Friday to summon you all. Like the little ones, Tony does
"I am going to ask nicely, and ask only once, that those involved, or planning to be involved, with Captain Rogers' plans to date Tony stop. Tony has expressed many times that he does not want to date the Captain, that he holds no romantic interest in the Captain. The constant attempts to force him into a one-on-one confrontation with the Captain are to stop, as they are already more than close to becoming harassment."

Angry mutters spring up immediately until the Captain himself decides to speak.

"Tony and I are working through our disagreements your Majesty. I apologise if Tony has been complaining about it to you, and will speak with him. But there is no need to involve yourself further, it is not something you need to be concerned over."

They don't see T'Challa move until Vibranium claws are brushing the Captain's neck.

"Oh, I would say that it needs me to be very concerned Captain. For while the others are becoming harassment, you have been there for quite some time."

Shouts of surprise, anger and fear briefly ring through the air, only calming slightly when they see T'Challa has not actually hurt Rogers. The man in question swallows before speaking again.

"If Tony would just talk to me without playing coy or hiding behind someone else, then it wouldn't have gotten this far. I have made my intentions clear, and am following them."

T'Challa scoffs, once more brushing claws against the fragile skin covering the man's jugular.

"And Tony has made just as clear his thoughts on the matter. He doesn't love you Captain, or even want to love you. He has stated he wants you to leave him alone. But instead, you lurk outside the door to his sanctuary of the workshop, constantly attempt to hold him despite his shying away, you refuse to leave him alone, and you ignore his wishes. Were you not Captain America, that behaviour would see you arrested. If reported, it still might."

T'Challa takes a quick glance around the room, noting where everyone is standing and looking. James, Shuri, Vision, Peter and Thor are standing together, as are Agent Romanoff, Doctor Banner, Laura and Scott Lang. Barnes, Wilson, Maximoff and Barton are standing together as well, and are currently being glared at by the first group. James in particular looks willing to dispense Justice via violence. T'Challa looks back to Rogers, still seeing the spark of defiance in his eyes.

"I am behaving in the manner to best look after Tony. Tony doesn't know how to look after himself, how to behave with others, or even what he wants most of the time. I am able and willing to do that for him; to care for Tony as he needs."

T'Challa tightens his hand just enough to cut off Rogers' words.

"Such arrogance. The same arrogance that led you to telling one hundred seventeen nations of the world that they are corrupt bodies with ulterior agendas."

The group of those determined to help Rogers' plans begin to speak out in defence of their Captain, but a sharp look from T'Challa lays them silent.

"Tony has looked after himself for a long time Captain; it tends to be what happens when children are made into orphans. Further, when Tony has needed help, if he knows it can be given, he will
seek it out. The 'evidence' of neglect you are no doubt thinking of is Tony's frequent binges in his workshop. Tony has stashes of fruit, vegetables and nuts that he eats during those times, a shower in the workshop bathroom that he makes use of because it is difficult to work covered in grease, and an entertainment space where he takes frequent breaks. The only trouble the binges present is Tony doesn't get a lot of sleep, but Tony has had recorded mild to intermediate insomnia since he was a child. He works to get the ideas keeping him awake out, and to tire himself enough to sleep."

Rogers tries yet again to sway T'Challa's opinions.

"Be that as it may, Tony and I work well together, we always make it to the end goal when we're side-by-side. It'll be good for everyone when we start dating."

T'Challa once more tightens his hand, briefly cutting off Rogers' air flow.

"It'll never happen. Should the harassment, from any of you, continue, I will show you why my people chose to worship the Panther."

Maximoff manages to gain the courage to speak up.

"Why do you care so much if Steve wants Stark?"

T'Challa squeezes his hand harshly before dropping the Captain coughing onto the floor, and moves to leave.

"Because I prefer it when my fiancée is happy and calm, which he was before we returned from Wakanda."

T'Challa returns to the workshop, Friday letting him enter and then directing him to Tony's room.

Tony is curled up on top of the sheets, dozing as he waited for T'Challa's return. T'Challa notes the hand gently wound in the chain around his neck.

The chain holding a small ring.

T'Challa gently smooths his fiancée's hair from his forehead, and then places a kiss to the revealed skin.

"I know you can fight your own battles my love, and it calms me that I must never hold ceaseless worries for your safety, but this is one that I feel much better fighting at your side."

Tony's free hand gently clasps his own.

"Thank you... Love you too T'Challa."

T'Challa moves to hold Tony, keeping him protected from the world outside this room.

Just for a little bit longer.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Jagged Edges, Run Smooth

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna (ohmigosh finally doing the first prompt you gave me)

Break-up, Make-up.

T'Challa says 'I am sorry my love' in both Xhosa and Italian.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Three weeks.

It had been three weeks. T'Challa thought his anger and hurt would have at least lessened a little, become a bit numb, instead of still aching like an open wound.

But then, he guessed it was proof of how much he still loved Tony.

Why?

Why did Tony cheat on him?

T'Challa sighed and raised his hands to rub at his temples, trying to force back the headache that was threatening.

He wouldn't have believed it, except that he had seen it for himself. Seen Tony, his perfect boyfriend, kissing some woman. T'Challa hurt so much. He broke up with Tony that instant, and has retreated to his home to lick his wounds, luckily able to complete his work at home.

T'Challa stopped rubbing his head, and went to his bed, just dropping himself across the length.

It had been three weeks.

"You have one chance to give me a reason not to break every bone in your body."

T'Challa sat up upon hearing James' voice.

James Rhodes, one of the best men he had ever met; strong, kind, loyal and thinking.

He was Tony's best friend.

"How did you get in here?"

James jabbed a thumb over his shoulder, bringing T'Challa's attention to Shuri. Ah, of course. James and Shuri had started dating about a month ago. It had slipped T'Challa's mind.

"I'm waiting T'Challa."
T'Challa sighed. James was Tony's best friend.

"Why did you dump Tony?"

"Because I couldn't bear to be with a man who cheats."

Stunned silence fills the room, and the deep heaviness settles a little more in T'Challa's chest. It's been three weeks. Why does it still feel so raw?

"Bullshit."

T'Challa looks at James once more, and the man's face is full of rage.

"You're spouting complete bullshit T'Challa! I know Tony! I have known him since he was the too young string bean in college! And one of the things I am proudest to know, is that while Tony is a flirt and has had plenty of one-night-stands, when he actually enters a relationship, when he has found someone he cares about enough to date; Tony is a serial monogamist!"

It is James' anger that ignites his own; T'Challa standing up suddenly and shouting at his sisters beloved.

"Then why did I personally see him kissing that woman?! Why did I see him with another?!"

T'Challa breathes deeply, almost panting in his need to reign himself in.

"What type of kiss was it?"

Damn James for sounding so calm. It forces him to think back on that instant, to replay the events over and over once more.

"I fail to see how that matters."

"Well duh, I got that genius! What type of kiss was it?"

James taking Tony's side is no surprise, but it still hurts that he's ignoring the truth.

"A deep kiss upon each cheek, with her head held in both of his hands."

T'Challa loved Tony's hands, almost as much as he still loved Tony. They were worn and callused, signs of a working man, despite Tony having been born into wealth and luxury.

James raises a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose, and lets out a weary sigh.

"This woman; was she a red-head in a dark suit?"

T'Challa could only nod, confused at how James knew her appearance. James sighed again at the nod.

"You're an idiot."

T'Challa is glad that Shuri looks as confused as he feels.

"Tony's half Italian you do know that right?"

T'Challa nods again; he so loved listening to Tony sing in Italian.
"What you saw was not Tony cheating on you, but Tony paying observance to Italian behaviour."

James motions for both T'Challa and Shuri to sit on the bed, while he claims the desk chair.

"Double Cheek Kissing in Italian families is a ritual of 'I have your back and you have mine', it's the holy Grail of ultimate loyalty. The red-head is Virginia 'Pepper' Potts. In every way that matters, Tony's sister."

T'Challa's blood has turned to ice.

"You didn't even give him a chance to explain, did you T'Challa?"

He's shaking. Three weeks. It has been three weeks.

And all over a misunderstanding.

James has left his chair and is holding T'Challa's head steady, forcing their eyes to meet.

"Tony has been inconsolable. He doesn't know what he has done to make you leave him, and unfortunately past experience is telling him that you have gotten what you wanted and now have no use for him. Tony has, since you allowed, greeted you with a kiss on the lips. I used to be greeted with cheek kisses, but I prefer being hugged, so Tony accommodated. Now, you are going to get up off your ass, shower, and go to Tony and never make this mistake again. Clear?"

T'Challa rises.

He finds Tony slumped over one of the benches in his workshop.

The entire room is quiet, nothing moving and nothing lit up. It's almost as if the life and creating fire that burns through Tony's body has died out.

T'Challa won't let those embers fade.

"Uxolo, Uthando lwam. Mi Dispiace Amore Mio."

Tony jolts up, spinning to look at the door T'Challa stands before.

It breaks T'Challa's heart to see the state Tony is in; red, swollen eyes surrounded by black shadows, signs that Tony has lost weight in the pulls and sags of his clothing, and the tremors in Tony's arm as he reaches for T'Challa.

"You... you're here?"

T'Challa moves forward, sweeping Tony into a tight embrace, holding him close as T'Challa feels the tremors turn into sobs and tears fall from his love's eyes.

"I have greatly wronged you my love. Oh so greatly wronged you. But if you'll allow me, I will spend forever making up for my mistakes."

Tony's arms manage to wind around T'Challa's waist and hold as tightly as they can.

"Why did you leave me? What did I do?"
T'Challa shakes his head, desperate to fix what his has broken in his love.

"You have done nothing wrong, I promise you! I was a fool and you, my love, have paid the price."

Tony's tears grow, but T'Challa ignores the wetness of his shirt, and merely holds Tony closer.

He will fix this.

It was his mistake after all.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
For Kage

Tony's mind runs on six different lines of thought at any given moment. This puts him under a great deal of stress, but he has his ways of dealing.

The Italian says 'Why can't I just turn my brain off? I was relaxed a few moments ago.' Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

-because Hulk's new stretchy pants are not working; let's go back to basics. $F = -k\Delta x$-

two meetings with SI Board, Tuesday and Thursday, Thursday's followed by the meet-and-greet money grab Infinite Metal's hosting for-

-need to beat it into Thor's head that Mjolnir is a damn hazard to squishy humans mere mortal toes, and if he keeps leaving it in doorways, I'm gonna-

tacos after the next battle, spice up the recovery meal a bit so we don't get-

-'57 corvette in dark red should not have a glaringly obvious blue slash on the hood, who the hell does Natasha think she's kidding with-

-and what the hell even are 'sticky arrows'? I mean sure, I'll be able to make them; I'm me! But how does Clint-

Tony lets a long sigh fall from his lips. His hands come up to rub at his temples, trying desperately to push back the migraine that's been threatening for the last few hours.

He can already tell it'll be no use.

His hands fall to his sides, and Tony turns to leave the workshop; he won't be able to focus enough to get anymore work done, but his thoughts are still flying, still churning with information and ideas.

-but that formula doesn't allow for the pants to shrink back to Brucie-bear size; they'll stay Jade Jaws size, which-

-can only be accepted with parental agreement, which destroys the whole point of a charity dedicated to helping abused kids-

-Vision, but it's not fair to essentially put him to following Thor to make sure the damn hammer isn't-

-to try Buna, it sounds yummy, and after a hard slog saving the world, I've earned some caffeine to
help me stay sane long enough not to shoot-

-her motorcycle to fix, then everything would be fine. Instead she leaves it with the incompetent techs at New S.H.I.E.L.D. and wonders why-

-and shove them up so hard, Hawkass will have to shit sideways! The nerve of him to-

The throbbing starts, and Tony knows he has minutes at best to find a free couch to lie on. Most migraine meds don't work for him, so he has to wait it out, and hope Friday can give everyone the heads up before they inadvertently hurt him.

Coming into the common room, Tony can see that the couch is mostly free. T'Challa is lying on half of it reading, leaving the other half free for Tony, which is perfect.

Tony manages to lie down, prompting T'Challa to look at him in polite question, just as the migraine breaks.

It's like lightning is shooting into his brain, his grey matter being pounded by jackhammers.

He can vaguely hear T'Challa call his name in worry, would be appreciative of the Wakandan King's concern, if it wasn't sending nails through his skull.

The man silences himself quickly though, so Tony's fairly sure Friday has somehow told him what's happening.

But Tony still can't stop.

-funds for fixing the street and buildings after the last battle, they need more to repair the gas-

-broken in six different areas yet somehow wasn't noticed as abuse; not good enough, the kids need to feel safe-

-up some lightning rods on the roof, collect Thor's offshoots to-

-for years, but it just gets embarrassing watching them dance around the subject; Pepper and Happy-

-could I have really survived twelve months without a drink? I mean, I'm the alcoholic son of an alcoholic; how have I-

- HURTSHURTSHURTPAINSMUCHPAINITHURTSSOBADWHYCAN'TIJUSTTURNMYBRAINOFFFWI

The chill of the icepack actually makes him jump, which no, not fun.

It's resettled on his forehead though, and after a few seconds of discomfort, the chill makes it to his brain which is just so soothing.

Strong hands start gently rubbing his neck and head, which is just wonderful, and he's pretty sure that he moans at one point, but given the migraine is slowly dying, he has no shits to give.

"That's it Tony, breathe nice and deep for me."

The voice is so low Tony almost doesn't hear it. He recognises it though; It's hard not to when his boyfriend's voice is that perfect dark chocolate rumble. The massage continues and the migraine keeps edging off, losing the unrelenting daggers to Tony's cranium until, finally, it stops altogether.
Tony just remains lying down, enjoying the massage and breathing, for a few more moments before finally opening his eyes again, noting the new position on the sun spilling in through the windows.

"Thank you."

Those two words aren't nearly enough to express his gratitude, but the warm smile on T'Challa's lips show that it was heard regardless. A kiss as soft as a butterfly wing is placed on his forehead, and the massage doesn't stop.

It's ten minutes later, Tony relocated to resting his head on T'Challa's lap with a hand carding through his hair, that T'Challa speaks again.

"Was there anything in particular that sparked this? Something that we now know to avoid?"

Tony can only shake his head. He hates the slightly frustrated look on T'Challa's face, but the migraines are a sad part of his life.

"You know how hard it is to go to sleep when you have an idea in your head? When you have something brilliant or even just so out there trapped in your mind until you write it down, or work out the pieces?"

Full attention on Tony, T'Challa nods, waiting patiently for Tony to continue.

"Well I've got six. People say multitasking, the true ability to think consciously about different things at the same time, is impossible. It's really not, but pop-culture and the way people live their lives makes it seem so. Everyone, to some extent, has done some form of multitasking. Best example is running a race; you are thinking about how much longer you have to run, and how you are breathing. Because those two thoughts are both linked to the race, however, most dismiss it as one thought."

T'Challa nods again, following what Tony's saying. Tony takes a deep breath, and cuddles a little closer.

"My brain is fast. Way faster then most. It means that if I'm not focused, I'll catalogue everything I can see, hear, touch; everything and every possibility of those things. Like yesterday I found myself cataloguing how much cheese it would take to choke a water buffalo. I don't even know where I got that sort of information from, but it's in my head now, along with everything else; it's why I have so much trouble with birthdays and special dates, the information isn't being reintroduced to my mind often enough to be an instant recall like my schematics and numbers."

Tony takes another moment to breathe, one hand idly scratching the scars left by the arc reactor.

"At any given moment, I can usually distinguish six trains of thought. And a good deal of the time, it's my brain coming up with ideas for SI, the Avengers, pet projects; stuff that I can create, use my hands for. So I try to sleep, and boom; six ideas that won't leave me alone. I go down to the workshop to try and knock them out, but I finish one idea and move on to the next, and a new idea slides into that empty slot. So I can't sleep. Eventually my body will override my brain and I'll fall unconscious, but until then, I stay awake.

It's why I have so many workshop binges. You can tell me how bad they are for me, and how much I need to go to sleep and rest until you're blue in the face, but I physically can't sleep. I have to work myself to exhaustion to get any rest. The only other way for me to sleep is to slow my mind down, but the only way I've found that works is worse for me then the workshop binges."
T'Challa says nothing, merely cocks his head with a raised eyebrow. Tony can't help but to lift a hand to gently run through T'Challa's hair.

"Everyone knows how much Tony Stark used to drink."

Tony can see the pieces fitting together in his boyfriend's mind, and he adores having the company of someone who can keep up with him, even if just a little. T'Challa takes a few moments to organise his thoughts before speaking.

"The media presents you as having a wild, reckless youth, partaking in alcohol underage, and experimenting with a variety of drugs. You were trying to slow down then, weren't you?"

It is Tony's turn to nod.

"Clever cat. I was at a victory celebration in the M.I.T. engineering department for one of the seniors who'd won a comp. Someone had spiked the punch with, I think it was vodka. Something flavourless. Anyway, I didn't realise how slow I was thinking until I woke up the next day with a hangover. Booze became my go to. I did try a few drugs that were supposed to make you slow down, like weed, but all they slowed was my body. With my mind not having to focus so much attention on how to make me move and all that, it was free to go nuts. I've been clean since I was sixteen, not game to try any others that might speed up my thoughts."

Even just mentioning it sends a shiver down Tony's spine, and he cuddles even closer to T'Challa's steady warmth. They stay like that a while, on the couch in each other's company, trading gentle touches. Eventually T'Challa speaks again.

"You seem quite calm now. Is that a side effect of the migraine?"

Tony actually has to stop and think -and damn but isn't that novel?- and realises that T'Challa's right; Tony's only got one line running right now. There's no telling how long that'll last, but looking back, Tony tends to put his entire focus on his boyfriend, so he hasn't got the extra slots to fill. Tony finds one of T'Challa's hands and pulls it to his lips, a kiss as soft as the one T'Challa had gifted him earlier left on chocolate skin.

"Nah. That's all you T'Challa."

Unfortunately, Tony's reprieve doesn't last nearly long enough.

Clint comes bursting in, demanding his sticky arrows. It sends Tony's thoughts back to how he was willing to sodomise Clint with his own bow, but before he can make the threat aloud.

-Steve's volunteering at the pet shelter today, I'll need to make a donation, because he always ends up breaking something-

-It's been two months since I sent the Roomba team through the vents, a quick tune up and I'll-

-Perché non posso solo girare il cervello spento? Mi era rilassata pochi istanti fa.-

-M.I.T. Anniversary is coming up, wonder if I can swing Pepper into letting me go-

-If I lined the suit interior with lambskin, would that make it more comfortable to wear for longer-

-Bow up your goddamned ass Barton!-

"You have three seconds to leave Agent Barton, before I take my claws to your throat."
T'Challa's smooth, calm voice sends Clint running. Tony tries to return to the calm he had a few moments before, but too many new thoughts have swamped him. It's going to be a long night. A strong hand catches his chin and directs him to face the Wakandan King.

"Would you be interested in helping me ruffle some feathers?"

Well, well. T'Challa's already dragged him back to one thought.

"OH MY GOD!! WHY?! HOW?! THIS IS-?! AAAAAUUUUUGGHH!!!!!"

Tony smiles that night as he cuddles into T'Challa's arms under the sheets.

Really, what else was Tony to do with a garden hose, a rubber chicken, and nine pounds of guacamole?

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
For Kage

Edwin Jarvis, the inspiration behind J.A.R.V.I.S. has come to visit Tony. And, you know, scope out if T'Challa is good enough for his boy.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite Tony's penchant for being high-energy, he was actually more often than not calm and focused... well as focused as a man with a mind as busy and Tony's could be.

Constantly working, creating new ways to save the world, being Iron Man in the heat and throes of battle, Tony was calm. Snarky as all hell, most certainly, always quipping and making jokes, but rarely, if ever, panicked.

"Shitshitshitshitshitshitshitshitshitshit!

Which made the scene the Avengers walked into very confusing.

Tony was dashing back and forth around the common room of the Compound, clearing away various odds and ends, running a dusting cloth over flat surfaces, fluffing the couch cushions of all things.

T'Challa managed to snag his frantic boyfriend's arm and pulled the man into a hug, wrapping his arms solidly around Tony's body, being both support and protection.

"Whatever has gotten you in such a state my darling?"

The team had all been quite amused by the effect T'Challa's voice had on Tony, and teasingly brought it up from time to time.

Tony all but melted into T'Challa, nuzzling into the crook of his neck, completely calm and placid.

"Jarvis is coming to visit. I wanted to make everything perfect for him."

Noises of confusion came from the team. J.A.R.V.I.S. was gone; his programming uploaded and changed within Vision right? How could J.A.R.V.I.S. be visiting? Vision stepped close to Tony, a look of almost excitement on his face.

"Do you think he would like me?"

Tony's smile was warm.

"Of course he will; you're pretty much J's kid, and what great-grandparent doesn't like their grandchildren's young?"
Vision looked happy and moved to help with the preparation, T'Challa aiding as well. Tony had told him of the kindly old man who had raised his darling more than Howard Stark had even tried to.

The man was surely in his nineties by now, but moved with grace and strength that indicated training, even to this day. The hand rested on Tony arm was a mere conceding to his status as a guest. The Avengers, aside from T'Challa and Vision, still didn't know that Edwin Jarvis was the inspiration for the world's first fully independent A.I., so were waiting in the common room.

"Everyone, this is Edwin Jarvis, the man who raised me. Jarvis, these are-

"Oh I know who they are, can't pick up a magazine or newspaper these days without running into an article of them. My greetings Avengers."

After the team had managed to find their words and return the salutation, seats were taken and Tony moved to the kitchen to collect a tea service. Jarvis quickly took over.

"Jarvis! You're here as a guest, you shouldn't have to work."

Jarvis gave an indulgent smile.

"Ah Master Tony, you were and ever shall be, my young master. That means any opportunity to serve you, I shall gladly take. Retirement has done wonders for my stress level, I'll not deny, but I served as Stark butler for almost two decades before your birth, and near another two after. I have been retired for nearly the same amount of time again. I'm bored sir, and performing even so simple a task as preparing tea for you fills me with delight."

Tony blushed ever so slightly, just a faint pink rising on his cheeks, but he relinquished the tea service, and Jarvis happily took over the task. Vision took a step forward, nervousness evident in his form and extended a small container to the visitor. Jarvis raised an inquisitive eyebrow at the red and green android.

"You would be Vision yes?"

Still holding the container, Vision nodded. Jarvis looked at him for a few moments before gently, delicately, accepting the package.

"Not quite what I pictured of any child J.A.R.V.I.S. would be involved in creating, but then expectations are made to be broken."

The elder man opened the container as Vision mulled confusedly over the words. A deep chuckle escaped the man's lips at the sight of a dozen or so cookies.

"Ah, I see you've held on to J.A.R.V.I.S.' sense of humour; giving cookies to a Brit, how scandalous."

Vision looked pleased as Jarvis chuckled again, Tony sending a proud look at the android. Just as Jarvis set the pot to steep Friday's voice called out.

"I'm really sorry about this Boss, but Mr Rhodsey and Miss Pepper are calling on the secure line."

Tony's face conveys his worry, but also his indecision. The sec/line is only for the three of them, not even T'Challa allowed in the communications room when the line is in use. For the sec/line to be used, Pepper and Rhodsey do not think that it's something Tony can afford to ignore. But Jarvis
is here.

A hand settles on Tony's shoulder, breaking his thoughts.

"Go Master Tony. It's something important, and I'll still be here when you are done."

Tony sighs, but nods and rises from his seat, kissing T'Challa before leaving the room.

Jarvis always did know best.

T'Challa finds himself trapped in the piercing gaze of Edwin Jarvis once Tony has left the room.

"Master Tony had told me that he was in a deeper relationship with one of the Avengers, but I was not told, because I do love figuring out a mystery. It must have slipped his mind though, and I was so looking forward to subtly interrogating you all. Aside from Vision of course; I would never be so uncouth as to interrogate my great-grandson."

Vision practically beams at the gentle favouritism. Jarvis collects a container of his own from the bag he brought with him, popping off the lid to reveals a few dozen scones. With a hand practised by habit, the man reaches to the tea service, which T'Challa only now notices as having a smattering selection of jams and cream, and neatly slices open a scone and covers it with raspberry jam and cream before handing it to T'Challa.

The same steady hand pours a cup of tea, a spoon and a half of sugar and a dram of milk being mixed into the amber liquid, before it is also handed to the Wakandan King. Both are exactly to T'Challa's preference. A bite of the scone confirms that Jarvis even used the darkened raspberry T'Challa favoured. It is more then a little disconcerting.

Jarvis speaks as he prepares more scones and tea.

"Any butler worth his salt knows the tastes of those living in his Masters home. Master Tony may not be aware that he knows your preferences so well, but he inevitably brings up the details should one know how to ask."

The team is just as amazed by the perfect cups of tea and flavours on their scones as T'Challa, and for a few moments, silence reigns as they nibble and sip.

Jarvis once more directs those piercing eyes to T'Challa.

"Your Highness, if I may."

T'Challa swallows as he gives the man his attention.

"Do you love Master Tony?"

T'Challa doesn't even have to think about the answer.

"With all my heart. With all my mind. With all my soul."

Minutes spent in eternity, as Edwin Jarvis strips everything away. Wealth inconsequential. Status unnecessary. Intelligence redundant. T'Challa is stripped of everything that Jarvis deems pointless, so that he may see down to the Wakandan's core being.

It is a humbling experience to be sure.
"Then I look forward to hearing more of you."

Jarvis fixes another cup of tea, no milk or sugar, finishing just as Tony re-enters the room.

"Sorry. Rhodey and Pepper were touring the R&D labs today and one of the techs had a freak out. It's solved now."

Tony runs a hand across T'Challa's shoulders and down his arm as he passes, taking his seat and accepting the cup of tea from Jarvis.

"It is good that you were able to help Master Tony. Now, Tell me more of what you have been up to."

As Tony delves into his stories, T'Challa takes another sip from his cup and breathes easier.

He'd been accepted by Tony's father.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Ayla_Pendragon

Medieval-ish AU. Tony is a blacksmith, his wares the finest in the trade. King T'Challa has need of his services.

I tried. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa's head felt heavy in his hands as he sought to rest even briefly from the council meeting not ten minutes past. He knew that as King of his country, his duty and honour would have him protect his people, but the recent events had him long for the ignorance of his youth, and the freedom of the wilds.

M'Baku, the Man-Ape, was plotting to bring war to Wakanda.

At least, that's what all the signs were showing. There was no actual proof that the Wakandan Traitor was planning such, and T'Challa could not, in any form of conscience, condone bringing war to the men and women who served under M'Baku's claimed reign.

A moral point his Advisory Council were not impressed with.

By their reasoning, merely serving M'Baku made these people an adequate threat, and pre-emptive measure should be taken to protect Wakanda from this obvious threat.

T'Challa sighed as his head left his hands and he reclined in his seat.

He could not bring war to those who could be innocent, and if M'Baku's future attack was nothing more then rumour on the wind, how could T'Challa hope to justify an attack of his own?

The young King shook his head. He would not give in to the Council's absurdity; he would not! There had to be a better way to protect his kingdom and it's people!

"Brother, does the Council still push you?"

T'Challa's eyes fell upon his sister, standing at the entrance to the council room, awaiting invitation to enter. A quick motion with his hand, and Shuri moved to join his side, concern written on her face. T'Challa merely nodded, knowing his sister understood his concerns.

"Perhaps then Brother, it would be best if you sought the guidance of the Panther God. If nothing else, it should hopefully calm you as it did Father."

The Panther God, the Ultimate Guardian of the Wakandan People. Yes, T'Challa decided as he rose from his seat, Shuri was right, and he would beg direction from their deity.
The Temple of the Panther God was not held near the Village that surrounded the Royal Palace, but a half hours walk beyond it. The Panther God, after all, was a being of the jungle and should never be removed from nature.

T'Challa notified the servants that he was making the trek, and went on his way, pausing as the townsfolk bid him greetings and good day.

The Temple was made of black stone overgrown with vines and branches. T'Challa made his way up the steps, guided by the torches marking the Temple's entrance. The inside of the Temple cut off all sound from the outside; no wind, no birds or animals, nothing could be heard but those within. T'Challa made his way to the Pedestal of Prayer, laying an offering of his hand knife before him as he knelt on the hard stone floor.

His Father T'Chaka had taught him to never make a request of the Panther God while armed; you would never beg favour from another while brandishing a weapon, why do it before the divine?

"I come seeking your wisdom and guidance. I come begging your favour and aid. I come praying that always you will love and protect your faithful."

T'Challa bowed deeply, kissing the stone paver before rising once more.

"The winds carry tale of war, coming from a wayward son. If these claims be true, I will need lead the people to defend our homes, as my duty and honour command me. Those who are whispered to stand against us though, may not be soldiers coming to battle. Hearsay and lie, after all, travel the world before truth finishes rising. I will not bring my people to slaughter the innocent, but I have no way to protect them but to go to war. I plead for a sign, some method, to remain true to myself, and to my responsibilities."

Bowing once more, T'Challa again kissed the stone paver. When he rose, however, he found himself in darkness, a voice ringing through the air.

"My favoured, you are as your father before you, of strength and honour. My guidance I give you young one. Two days West, and you must travel alone, you will find that which you seek. The means to protect our people. May long you live, before we run together in my fields."

T'Challa's eyes snap open, the darkness gone as he breaths harshly, desperately dragging air into his lungs. He is swift to bow once more, retrieving his hand knife as he turns and leaves the Temple, plans already being made for his journey.

The Council is predictably not happy with the news he is to undertake a journey at this time, though mollified with the knowledge that is was decreed by the Panther God. They are even less happy T'Challa is leaving Shuri as his regent, essentially giving her his power as sovereign until he returns. In the event he doesn't, she will be crowned Wakanda's Queen.

"How long do you think your journey is to last Brother?"

T'Challa finishes tying the saddlebag closed before turning and drawing his sister in a hug.

"What I seek is two days West, so at least five days all up. Alas, I do not expect so simple and easy a retrieval, so surely I will be longer. Take care of yourself and our people Shuri. I shall return as soon as I am able."

So saying, T'Challa turns and mounts his steed, hearing a farewell from his sister as he rides from the Palace.
The first day passes swiftly, T'Challa pacing the speed of travel so as to not exhaust his mount. He rests as often as the horse requires, but keeps going, wanting to not waste any time he may spare. He was given no indication as to whether the travel was to be by foot or mount, but T'Challa is confident he will know what the Panther God bid him seek when he casts his eyes upon it.

That night, he lights a fire to dissuade the local nightlife, and falls into light slumber.

He rises early the next day, and resumes his journey, following the same method as before. His steed serves him well, yet the day does not seem as swift as the one previous. No, T'Challa feels as though everything is moving through mud when the day is half-done. Were it not for his impeccable sense of direction, T'Challa knows he would have been turned around several times without noticing. And even then, there are several times he must pull on the reigns to regain his bearings.

When he stops for the night, it is with deep exhaustion running through his veins.

The morning finds T'Challa in a meadow, the area cleared long ago of trees, and holding only a pond and a stone building. He does not recall seeing it when he laid down the night previous, but just looking at the structure tells it to be quite old, established in it's place for far longer than a night.

On soundless feet, T'Challa sneaks closer, approaching the building from what appears to be behind. Slinking against the wall, coming around the side, T'Challa sees the building has a large room missing a wall, completely opening it to the outside. A quick inspection shows it to be a forge; the tools hanging from the walls next to the kiln and furnace, shelves fit to burst with supplies, a great anvil taking centre of the space with a deep water bucket right beside it.

A staircase is just visible from his position, and T'Challa realises that whomever the fine forge belongs to must have built their home above their workshop. Though he should really be on his way, T'Challa cannot overcome his innate curiosity and carefully ascends the stairs.

"It is not often that one finds their way through my artifices. You have quite the head on your shoulders."

The voice startles him slightly, coming from the depths of the darkened room. It is a voice filled with wariness, weariness and lessons long learned.

"Artifices?"

The voice, now obviously male, gently rumbles through a small laugh, it's owner barely visible to T'Challa's adapting eyes.

"You mean to tell me you did not find yourself feeling turned around and slow? That you did not feel as though you were turning when you wished be straight?"

The man laughs again at T'Challa's hitch in breathing.

"Yes, you noticed, but you could not pinpoint the cause. Tell me; what brings you this way?"

T'Challa forces his breathing to slow, and answers despite himself.

"I am King T'Challa of Wakanda, and I seek the means to protect my people. The Panther God pointed me West to find the means."
The laugh turns into a harsh chuckle.

"Heh, if you were sent to me seeking weapons, you will have to turn around. I have had enough of my craft spilling blood."

T'Challa barely prevents his head tilting to the side, the action berated by Shuri as childlike, to display his confusion.

"You are a weapons-smith? I saw no sign of such in your forge."

It is truth, the forge below them was well stoked with various metals and gems and odds and ends, but the feel of the room, its aura was not that of weapons-smith. The man chuckles again.

"And well it shouldn't, for I make weapons no longer. Master Ogun himself would be unable convince me otherwise."

Ogun T'Challa thinks in shock The God of Iron.

Only those who follow the God of Iron address him as Master, and there has only been one follower in the last few decades.

"You are the White Flame!"

T'Challa cannot help the awe in his voice. The White Flame, the last disciple of Ogun, named so for the fire that burns beneath the pale flesh of his body. Said to be the greatest of those to have dedicated themselves to metal craft. And known to have disappeared near a decade ago into the wilds.

"I have been called by such. But by your surprise, you did not come here in knowledge of me."

The man's form, still barely visible, moves forward slightly in its seat.

"You seek to protect your people. That is what you claimed. Tell me, which would you pick up; the Gold, or the Gem?"

T'Challa, not expecting the question, takes a few moments but is firm in his answer.

"The Gold."

"Interesting. Tell me again, which would you pick up; the Gold, or the Copper?"

T'Challa takes longer to answer this time, not seeing any hidden meaning or choice in the options. His voice remains firm.

"Again, I would choose the Gold."

"Indeed. Tell me another time, which would you pick up; the Gold, or the Iron?"

T'Challa doesn't understand why he is being asked these questions, but something deep within him demands he answer, demands he makes a choice. Less sure then the two times previous, T'Challa answers.

"Iron."

"Fascinating."
T'Challa gets the impression that he has interested the White Flame, the man's voice having lost a little of both its weariness and wariness.

"Tell me once more, which would you pick up; the Iron, or the Hammer?"

There is a hint of... *something* in the White Flame's voice this time; a warning, a promise and a challenge all in one. As with the previous three questions, T'Challa can't really see the purpose, but the something deep within him calls louder and louder that he must choose wisely. That he cannot be incorrect. T'Challa releases a deep breath.

"I tell you, I would pick up the Iron."

Silence fills the room for but a brief moment, before deep laughter falls from the White Flame.

"Very well oh King. I shall craft you protection for your people."

T'Challa is stunned, having no idea what has happened. His stunned silence only hits him harder when the White Flame moves into the light peeking in from the stairway.

He is far, *far* younger than any image T'Challa had of him, and of a beauty none would expect of those in the metal craft. His hair is dark and thick with a matching beard framing his mouth, his eyes are sharp and jewelled, his body is muscle as only those of his craft can obtain, and he moves with a poise and grace that T'Challa finds himself envying. He follows the man down to the forge and can only watch as supplies are pulled from the shelves and a fire starts to burn in the furnace.

Even before the fire burns hot, the White Flame begins his work; the clangs and bangs of the hammer ringing through the air.

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It is only after watching the man for a good hour that a chance whinny reminds T'Challa of his steed, and he moves to swiftly attend the loyal animal. Setting the horse free of its tack to roam the meadow, T'Challa packs up his campsite, moving his equipment to the side of the building. He returns to the forge to find the White Flame examining his work, checking the pieces so far made meticulously for any imperfections. The pieces are set to properly cool, before he turns to T'Challa.

"What I am crafting for you oh King, is a replica of the device that kept you from so easily coming upon my home. It is rare the person able to travel through its range, so it should prove more than enough to satisfy your needs."

T'Challa is amazed; such a device would keep the unwanted from stumbling upon Wakanda, turning maybe even an army away from its borders.

"However does it work? Magic perhaps?"

The snort that escapes the blacksmith is derisive.

"No magic; I cannot abide by it. No, it is sound. Once assembled, a low sound is emitted that cannot be easily heard but disorients a person, leaving them confused and lost. Though I'll also provide you the method which shields my home from the effects."

After that, no words are spoken between the two, and T'Challa contents himself with watching the man at work, enjoying the play of his muscles as he wields the hammer, delighting in the slight sheen of sweat dotting the man's skin.

The King is enthralled.
"Merely connect the heads; no unwelcome shall be able enter your keep."

T'Challa nods, carefully placing the package holding the six devices and their heads within one saddle bag and the six shields in another, making sure to tie the bags closed especially well.

"You have my thanks, and my gratitude. Though you have refused any coin from me; why?"

The man smiles.

"You chose function over form. Malleability over function. Strength and malleability over malleability alone. And."

Here, the White Flame locked eyes with T'Challa, the amber gaze both piercing and comforting.

"You chose peace instead of war. You will not abuse my wares. Instead, I should think you will use them only as needed. I hope you do not disappoint oh King."

T'Challa swallowed deeply, gently laying a hand across the saddle bags.

"I pray shall not."

T'Challa swings himself up into the saddle, allowing his mount to settle as he once more turned to the blacksmith, that may well have just saved T'Challa's people.

"You are called the White Flame, but I ask, what name do you call yourself?"

The man seems surprised and takes a moment just looking at T'Challa in curiosity.

"It has been many a year since any have wished know my name. At start of my time here, I was nothing more than the outsider. More than a few times, I was called ghost. And I received White Flame only after near a decade of following Master Ogun. You are one of so few who ask my name, instead of title."

The man's eyes were soft as he spoke, T'Challa once more becoming enthralled by the man before him.

"Anthony, oh King, is the name my parents left me."

A thrill of excitement runs the course of T'Challa's spine at the smile the ma- no, at the smile Anthony bestows him. T'Challa smiles in return as he moves his horse to face East.

"Once more, you have my gratitude Anthony. Once this situation has been resolved, I look forward to visiting you again my friend, as not the King of a nation, but as just another man."

Anthony merely shakes his head and smiles.

"You have been here a day, but you will never be just another man; you've too much presence for that."

Anthony turns to return to his home, calling out as he goes.

"But I don't think I would refuse your company all the same. Travel safe, my friend."

T'Challa's smile widens, and he moves the horse to run. He needs to return to Wakanda, and set up the defences to protect his people should evidence of war approach them. The swifter it is done,
the swifter he may visit Anthony.

And the swifter he may become enthralled again.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
For Mistress Luna

Steve and T'Challa have been teaching at the same school for a few years, and while not exactly friends, they get along well and are happy enough to help the other out. That changes when they catch sight of the new teacher Tony.

I'm not really happy with it, but I don't know how to make it better. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

T'Challa was sorting his students homework sheets to take home and mark when the door to his classroom burst open, the History Teacher Steve Rogers all but running in with a look of desperation on his face.

The Physics Teacher sighed, realising Rogers would not leave until T'Challa had agreed to something.

"I need you to be my wingman."

By the Panther God, not again.

T'Challa had been a teacher at MARVEL School For The Gifted for ten years, and in that time he and Rogers had traded many favours. They weren't particularly close, colleagues but not friends per se. But Rogers had gone and fallen in love with the new teacher to join the staff. T'Challa had not yet met the Engineering and Mechanics Teacher, as the man had spent the first week of term excused from meetings to fix up the mess the previous instructor had left, and had been curious to see how much of the man's subjects would cross over into T'Challa's own.

As they made their way to the workshops, Rogers was waxing poetic.

"Seriously, he is just so beautiful, and he's got to be smart, what with him teaching two courses and all. I can't wait to meet him properly; I only caught sight of him by chance! Thanks so much for being my back-up T'Challa."

As stated, the two men were not friends, but Rogers was very... free with how he addressed and treated people. Normally, if Rogers was trying to impress someone, his go-to-man would be his old service buddy James Barnes, or his friend/therapist Sam Wilson. But impatience, or maybe just the fact that Rogers chosen interest was sometimes a teacher at MARVEL, had him come to T'Challa instead.

T'Challa sighed as they entered the workshops. Hopefully this would be over sooner then the mess with Ethics teacher Sharon Carter.
The first thing T'Challa noticed was the music.

Deep and loud, and rock. The sort of music with a deep beat that you felt pulse through the air, down to your very bones. T'Challa had to consciously stop his head from matching the beat, to focus on getting Rogers to at least speak a sentence to the new teacher before leaving the blond to his own devices.

Hey, he never claimed to be a good wingman.

Rogers opened the door to the classroom, causing the volume to rise as it was no longer distorted behind the walls. The volume was obviously a shock to Rogers, given the full bodied flinch the man suffered, but he soldiered on, entering the workshop and making his way to the radio, turning the music off.

"Hey! You do not interfere with a man's music!"

The sudden voice came from under the chassis of a '57 Corvette in one of the docks. T'Challa noted that it was a nice voice, deep and smooth, like a singer almost. It became a distant thought when the man in question came into view though.

'Strong' was the first thing that came to T'Challa's mind, eyes eagerly raking down the musculature of the man's arms, followed swiftly by 'Sleek', seeing just how snugly those jeans clung to the man's legs, and how perfectly painted on that tank top appeared. Dragging his gaze up, T'Challa was forced to swallow, lest he begin to drool.

Having saliva dripping from his chin was in no way acceptable as a first impression to the man with such perfect eyes.

Amber, like the whiskey or scotch his father occasionally drank, that amazing brown with flecks of gold littering their depths, so much so you couldn't imagine it any other way.

T'Challa swallowed once more. Rogers had called the newest staff member beautiful, but it would seem the history teacher had a gift of understatement when it came to the gorgeous man before them.

Rogers cleared his throat.

"I-I'm sorry, it's just- I'd like to- the thing is-I-

And did that.

T'Challa took a silent breath in, slightly squaring his shoulders and straightening his back.

"We apologise for turning off the music, but we wished to introduce ourselves, and welcome you to MARVEL's staff number. I'm T'Challa, I teach Physics."

The gorgeous man smiles -and by the Panther God, no smile should look so perfect!- and extends his hand to shake T'Challa's, the grip strong and callused. Rogers gains his confidence just as a return introduction was to be made.

"Steve Rogers, History."

The blond practically snatches the hand still resting in T'Challa's, and shakes it almost violently. Their new colleague manages to break free of the no-doubt punishing grasp, curling and uncurling fingers slowly as the man looks warily at Rogers.
"Tony Stark, teaching Engineering and Mechanics. I can feel my fingers twinging! What the hell is with your strength?! That is insane!"

Tony doesn't even wait for Rogers to answer, turning to look back at T'Challa.

"You, physics, what animal is made up of Iron, Lithium and Neon?"

It is an odd question and T'Challa cannot think of any creature made of those three elements- oh. T'Challa smiles.

"A cat. Cute."

Rogers looks very confused, a fact that Tony notices as well, given that he sighs and turns to the blond.

"Iron, represented by the letters Fe. Lithium, Li. Neon by Ne. FeLiNe."

"Oh! That's really clever!"

Tony rolls his eyes, and T'Challa is hard pressed not to do the same. Maybe T'Challa's being a little unkind, given that Rogers is interested in Tony, but he would have been better off without that compliment. It's obvious he's trying too hard.

Tony moves over to the radio.

"It was nice meeting you both and all that jazz, but I've got to finish making sure this baby's ready for Monday, so please see yourselves out."

The music starts pumping once more, and T'Challa drags Rogers out before he can pitch a fit at the dismissal.

"T'Challa! You're supposed to help me impress him; not make me disappear!"

T'Challa shakes his head.

"He is preparing for his classes, we took up enough of his time. And I never claimed to be a good wingman, nor volunteered to be. In fact."

T'Challa can't help the smirk that curls his lips as he looks back at Rogers.

"I do believe I will be better served as your competition Rogers."

He can hear Rogers half choked stutters as he walks back to his classroom, already choosing how to ask Tony out.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
That... That Just Happened

Chapter Summary

For Vrishchika

T'Challa being amused by the interactions between Tony and Stephen Strange.

More comics than MCU.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa had been informed of Tony's inability to play well with others (alongside his disregard for orders in the field, his alcoholism, his ego), and had seen for himself several times that Tony seemed to go out of his way to aggravate those around him.

But unlike the professionals that S.H.I.E.L.D. had lined up in front of him to give him such warnings, T'Challa could see how tightly Tony held on to the ones who didn't leave. James, Virginia and Harold were the first three that came to mind, standing firm as Tony's defenders when the world sought bring the man of Iron to his knees. There were of course others, usually those who employed a similar if not identical form of defence; Hawkeye, Spiderman, Captain Marvel, all souls who Tony held in high regard.

Of course, Tony was most at ease amongst those who could identify with him on the academic plane.

Bruce Banner, Reed Richards, and even T'Challa himself were treated to a higher level of respect among Tony's associates due entirely to their ability to keep up. It actually caused a pool of sadness to well up in T'Challa's mind as he thought on how lonely Tony's youth must have been, ostracised by his peers not only for his youth and wealth, but his superior intellect.

"I totally made him do it! He may say it never happened but it did; I got him to do it!"

"You got me to do nothing! The mission has been completed and that is all they need to know!"

And of course, T'Challa thought with a smile on his lips, there were those that Tony got joy out of pestering into friendship.

Such as Stephen Strange.

The relationship between the two men was something that many thought dangerous, if not outright impossible. With Tony's blatant distaste for anyone of/for magic, and Strange's blatant distaste for anyone... well, not him, the two getting along as well as they did was something spoken about in awed whispers.

Given Tony has gotten Stephen to raise his voice outside of battle, causing the stoic, unflappable sorcerer to lose his veneer of mystique, it is likely the younger Avengers will be following Tony around like ducklings for the next few days.
The image of Tony wandering around with Spiderman, Wiccan, Hulkling and Patriot shadowing his every footstep brings a gentle chuckle from T'Challa's throat.

"Heya Leopold! I got Strange to do it! Even though he said he wouldn't!"

T'Challa wraps his arms around the man now beside him, holding Tony close to his chest, revelling in the feel of his boyfriend's body against his.

"Yes, I heard. As did, I assume, the majority of the mansion."

Tony laughs as a strangled noise escapes Stephen's mouth. T'Challa smiles and pulls Tony ever closer.

All is well.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

T'Challa is one of the best detectives the S.H.I.E.L.D. Police Force has to offer, but it's going to take everything he's got when he's put to taking down the Iron Man.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been early evening, the sun just kissing the horizon, letting colour bleed into the blue of the sky, when T'Challa was called into Fury's office.

Having just finished up the Man-Ape case, locking M'Baku behind bars, T'Challa had been expecting the day or two respite normally afforded the precinct detectives who successfully cleared their workloads. But, as vice-chief Hill pointed him to the big man himself, it was obvious T'Challa would be clocking in overtime.

"I was summoned sir?"

Fury was a man scarred by the past, his left eye hidden beneath a patch in a futile attempt to make the man look more approachable. He had seen and done things that made some of the hardest souls T'Challa had come across weep, though whether from agony or fear or even something else was up in the air.

"You've got the best record for pulling success outta your ass, and smelling like roses as you do so. Put that skill of yours to work; you're on the Iron Man Case."

T'Challa felt his eyes widen as the words sunk in, grabbing the folder in front of him with little thought.

_The Iron Man Case._

Eleven other men had taken up the case, and each of them had admitted defeat, unable to make any headway on solving it.

A little over a year previous, the houses of the rich and successful started being broken into, art and cash stolen and a message decrying the owners left spread across the walls. And they were very big names at that; Stane, Stern, Hammer, and others all being robbed and humiliated. Those that worked for big business, like Stane and Hammer had tried installing security cameras, but no matter what they did, the messages kept coming back.

_I know who you are,_

_And I know what you've done._
The poor stay poor, the rich get rich,
And so you think you've won.
But, no more, I'll not allow,
This shall not remain the plan.
You will fall. You will burn.
Beware the Iron Man.

The amount of money stolen, and what the art was worth, would be enough for anyone to retire and retire well. Naturally the business and political elite wanted the menace dragged before them to be sentence by Lady Justice.

T'Challa shook his head as he finally made his way to his small office, the folder feeling a lot heavier then a half sheaf of paper ought be capable of. He unlocked his door and hit the lights, sitting himself heavily in his chair, letting a slow breath leave his lips.

Ain't no rest for the wicked.

The file contained little that T'Challa could actually use, the paper just repeating the same facts in different ways.

T'Challa cut a glance to the clock on his desk before sighing, packing the files away before rising to leave the office. The answers he needed wouldn't be found staring at the slightly yellowed sheets. That's where the men before him had come up short, relying only on the data in the files to try and solve the case. No, T'Challa wasn't like the majority of the detectives that S.H.I.E.L.D. employed; when he took on a case, he always looked for information where it was useful.

T'Challa hit the streets, his overcoat flowing in the wind that had kicked up in the darkening hours.

So many in his line of work were in it for the fame of solving the 'Big One', cracking a supposedly unbeatable mystery and getting their names and faces plastered on the front of the paper. So consumed by this need of theirs, they often never did any of the actual legwork needed to do the job. T'Challa had never had that problem, never needed recognition in that way, so he payed attention to what many detectives ignored.

Or rather, who many ignored.

Ducking into Hell's Kitchen wasn't a thing many would recommend, but if you needed information about the dealings of the underworld, it was the best place to be. T'Challa had two guys here, not snitches really, just two men honestly trying to make a difference in the trenches that was the Kitchen, but they would give him what they could when it came to solving crimes that crossed into their little part of Hell.

"Murdock. Foggy."

"Detective. It's been a while since I've heard your voice."

Matthew Murdock, The Daredevil Lawyer, the Soldier of Lady Justice. The blind man heard everything it seemed, rarely a whisper passed his door without him taking note of it. And his partner, Franklin 'Foggy' Nelson, a man with a good head on his shoulders and the bravery to do
the right thing; both behaviours sadly lacking in their place of work. And both men it was best to be straight with from the start.

"I need anything you have heard of the Iron Man."

Three hours into the case, and T'Challa already had a better idea of what was going on then any of the files Fury gave him could have hoped to.

The Iron Man was something of a hero in the Kitchen; all the money he stole finding it's way into the pockets of the poorest and downtrodden trapped in the Kitchen, and the art being 'donated' to the pawnshops for a repeat exercise. No idea of who the Iron Man was, but the persona was very much loved in these streets. Murdock and Foggy had presented information they had been given, that they had meticulously checked, that stated those stolen from had been double dealers and thieves themselves, and the ones who suffered most were the very hard-on-their-luck souls that had recently come into cash.

The Iron Man was seeking to avenge those wronged.

T'Challa had thanked the two lawyers, telling them they should present their case before Judge Xavier, well-reputed as being an honest man in a dishonest world, and left, heading to his next stop.

The Princess Bar was a literal beacon in the dark. Nestled between two tall apartment blocks, and running on a private generator, the place always had enough power to stay lit. James 'Patch' Logan, the owner, was a man who you did not want to cross. Having participated and survived every war since WWII, Patch had no qualms about literally throwing the riff-raff from his bar, and he had the strength to do so, having heaved out the likes of Frederick 'the Blob' Dukes with little trouble.

And Patch was very big on keeping up to date on the goings on in his territory. So long as T'Challa bought a drink, and didn't say anything stupid to the short tempered Canadian, Patch would tell what he knew.

"Ain't got a clue on who he is, but I know where the boy's been tracking. Screams of personal to me, like he's actually one of the poor bastards the pigs keep stepping over. But this smells of old hurt to me. Your boy isn't seeking revenge, not for him anyway. He's trying to stop it from happening to anyone else. That said, my money's on Stane being the main target. The pig comes here just about every week with another suit, settling some kinda business between them. You don't come into the Kitchen for anything above the table."

It made sense, and T'Challa made note to send Murdock and Foggy to the Princess to talk to Patch themselves, to get an even stronger case to give Judge Xavier. Stane was inherited old-money. A close friend to the Late Howard Stark, when the business man died in a car-crash with his wife and son, Stane received everything. It had caused an uproar, given that Howard left nothing to his company, and Maria Stark was a well known philanthropist, yet not a coin was to be donated. Their son, Anthony, was still just a child, so had no need yet of a will, however all his possessions had been sold off, Stane pocketing the coin with a wide grin.

There may perhaps be a need to dust off the files on the Stark Crash, to check for foul play.

T'Challa had returned to his office, writing down all his discoveries for the night under the flickering glow of the lamp, and pondering those same discoveries.
The Iron Man appeared more a Vigilante than an outright crook. Certainly not one of the bottom feeders that usually attempted to rob the higher echelons of society. Though open to the possibility of a red herring, T'Challa felt secure in the Iron Man being male. The way things were dealt with - the way the money was just found instead of appearing as the blessed hero, the way they took the first offered payment from the pawnshops for the art instead of haggling - suggested a person trying hard to avoid any connections, be they emotional or just remembering the face. Though certainly, men and women could be equally emotional or stoic, it was often that men held the stoicness the Iron Man portrayed.

Further, looking back on the data, Stane had suffered seventeen separate robberies, despite his security systems and hired personnel. Stane had also been the very first target.

"T'Challa! You were assigned the Iron Man Case right?! Then let's go; Stane's been robbed again!"

Captain Steve Rogers had all but kicked in T'Challa's door to shout that message, but it had done the job, T'Challa sliding the coat over his shoulders before he even finished rising from his chair.

_Tacky_ came to mind, along with _Expensive_.

The Old Stark Manor House was boarded up on the far side of town, kept up only by the volunteering of the staff Stane had thrown to the wind. With a chunk of the money gained from the Stark coffers, Stane had a mansion built in the rich street of town, the entire thing a façade of plaster coils and swirls.

Stane was at the steps leading into the building, shouting something vile and venomous at the guards.

"-Get in here without you noticing, with a garden hose a rubber chicken and nine pounds of guacamole?!

"You weighed it?"

The guards interjection causes a gruesome snarl to rip from Stane's throat. Before the man can do anything further, T'Challa steps in.

"If you would please take us to the scene? We will be as thorough and swift as we can, so that you may return to your evening."

Stane looks at the team with contempt, and T'Challa doesn't entirely blame him; for all that Stane is turning up dirty, S.H.I.E.L.D. hasn't been able to catch the Iron Man.

It's a gruesome scene indeed, when Stane leads them to the ballroom. Officer Clint Barton gags, turning away briefly, while Natasha Romanoff, his partner, swallows heavily. Everything is catalogued quickly, samples of the mess taken, and the other items involved bagged and tagged. T'Challa pays extra attention to the note on the wall.

_I am who I was, who I am, who I'll be._

_One and Two gone, leaving only Three._

_Don't bother looking -you'll never see._

_Your cameras and guards will never beat me._
I've warned you to stop.

But I no longer think you can.

Your days are numbered Stane.

So says the Iron Man.

T'Challa collected it too, and then the team was moving back to the precinct office, only a couple hours left 'til midnight.

T'Challa's night was still young.

T'Challa beats more pavement, getting little hints and clues that continue to lend credence to the vigilante theory. Everyone seemed to be benefiting from Iron Man's work except those he stole from. And from all the evidence T'Challa was finding, Stane wasn't the only sinner in the ship. Hammer was selling known faulty weapons, Stern was taking kick-backs and bribes, and Sunset Bain had done pretty much everything under the sun twice. Murdock and Foggy would be busy indeed.

It's late, or early depending on when one woke. T'Challa caught a brief nap in the office between writing down what he's found. He's on his final lead, before he needs to start making leaps of faith.

Tony's Tune Ups.

People with any kind of skill quickly leave Hell's Kitchen if they can. Tony Ferrous didn't. Instead the man managed to save up enough coin to purchase a small building and opened his repair shop. It was said that you could bring Tony anything, and he'd have it in top shape by the end of the day. T'Challa knew for fact that Fury himself brought the squad cars to Tony for maintenance.

Tony was another local hero, often getting into trouble with the crime lords in the area, because he saw fit to teach anyone willing to learn about maths and science. T'Challa did not doubt the man was a genius, and it stood to reason that he might have an idea of what was going on.

"Going out to see Ferrous again T'Challa? You could just ask the guy on a date!"

T'Challa ignored the comments of Sam Wilson as he left the precinct once more. He hadn't seen reason to hide the attraction he felt for Tony; the man was intelligent, kind and one hell of a looker. It just meant he spent his off time hanging around the shop, trying to woo the fast-talking mechanic into a dinner. But there were a few times like now, when T'Challa's presence at the shop was all business.

"That's quite the scowl you're sporting Kitty-Cat. What's got you in a bind?"

Tony was almost shoulder deep in the innards of a car, oil, and grease. T'Challa forced himself to remain professional.

"I am here in an official capacity Tony. Have you heard anything about the Iron Man?"

Tony twitches, just a slight jerk of the body, a sign of recognition.

"I think pretty much everyone's heard of the Iron Man. Especially here in the Kitchen."

T'Challa concedes to the taunt. Just like the Iron Man, Tony's work helps the people in Hell's Kitchen. Why would you turn on someone helping the same people you help?
"Have you heard anything new about the Iron Man in the last twelve hours?"

Tony stops working on the car, actually straightening out as he thinks. T'Challa knows this to be a risky gambit; with no warrant, he's got no ground to demand any answers of Tony. He's literally hoping that Tony abides by the law enough to give T'Challa any information he's got. A minute passes before Tony speaks.

"I heard he's got proof Stane was behind the Stark deaths. Rumours running around that the proof is gonna be sent right to Judge Xavier."

T'Challa hadn't had the time to dig out the file on the Starks, but he was regretting it now.

"Thank you Tony."

Tony says nothing in response, and it's with a heavy heart that T'Challa moves to leave.

"Next time you have off, let's grab a drink."

T'Challa spins back to look at Tony, but he's already dived once more into the car before him. T'Challa smiles and leaves, a lighter step carrying him away.

The file on the Starks has been cooked, without a doubt -sentences changing in both pen and penmanship mid-sentence, 'missing' parts of the coroners report, and witnesses who have never existed.

And the whole thing practically vomiting a glowing press statement for Stane.

T'Challa presents what he's found to Fury, and the man lives up to his name, cursing the Late Chief Pearce.

They collect Stane within the hour.

Murdock and Foggy had been in contact with Judge Xavier almost as soon as T'Challa left their office, so the man has been well read-in. Along with the package of evidence the Iron Man left on his doorstep.

Stane is convicted and jailed swiftly, and appointed officers are sent to investigate the other 'victims' Iron Man has targeted.

T'Challa goes home to sleep.

Ten hours later sees Stane's home broken into once more, a final message from the Iron Man. T'Challa is called in and feels his heart skip a beat at what is written.

And so you were chosen to hunt me.

To leash me on a chain.

Next time you have off, let's grab a drink.

And continue our little game.

You're like a Panther, detective.
Far more cunning and sleek than a man.

Let's have some fun, so come give chase.

Catch me, if you can.

Rogers comes up beside him, a steady hand resting on T'Challa's shoulder.

"We're preparing now to help you catch him. Since you're now a target, we need to be more vigilant. We'll start with-"

"No."

Rogers starts in surprise at T'Challa's interruption, but already turning and heading for the door, T'Challa can't bring himself to care.

"The Iron Man wants to be found; he offers me a chase, challenged me to it. And I so hate to disappoint."

T'Challa has caught the scent.

The Panther moves to hunt.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
For MistressLuna

Tony owns a flower shop, one of the best in town. A recommendation has T'Challa seek a bouquet from him.

I ended up making the bouquets on a Build-a-Bouquet website, but my computer won't let me share them. I'm sorry.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I will be a little late brother, but that is no reason for you not to be on time."

T'Challa sighed, a sad smile on his face.

"It doesn't feel right not to show up together. Not for this."

The silence over the phone is telling that Shuri is just as disquieted.

"Well, you are near the entrance next to Main Street, yes?"

"I am. Why?"

A sigh of relief travels through the speaker.

"A little way down the road, you'll find a store called 'Stark's Stems'. It is where James gets me those amazing bouquets. I think Father would like one."

T'Challa is already moving before Shuri finishes. Getting a bouquet together for their Father is a nice way to wait for his sister. The two exchange farewells just as T'Challa comes upon the shop. It is a small building, despite being two floors, and doesn't seem particularly busy, but T'Challa is pleased by the lack of other patrons, as it means he won't need to battle his way through.

"Welcome to Stark's Stems, I'm Tony. Anything I can help you with hotstuff?"

Or, T'Challa swallows heavily, for the attention of the shop keep.

"Good day. I'm T'Challa. I'm hoping to buy a bouquet for my father."

The shop keep, Tony his mind insists, comes around from the check out and gestures for T'Challa to join him by the shelves covered with flower displays. T'Challa forces himself to focus on the flowers, instead of the gorgeous man next to him.

"Does your dad have a favourite type of flower? If none of the pre-made's catch your eye, we can make a new one hotstuff."
T'Challa fights not to react, instead he casts his eyes over the pre-made bouquets, and he recognises the design and flair from the ones Shuri is gifted from James. He sees very pretty mixes of daffodils and carnations, a multicolour collection of roses, and a draping sheet of different lilies. All wonderfully made, and truly beautiful, but nothing that speaks to him of his father.

"I think we may need to. They are all lovely, but are too... bright, for my needs. I may have been unclear before, but my father is deceased, and I am looking for a bouquet to place at his grave. My father was quite fond of Lotus', if you've any in stock."

Tony's smile has taken a sombre edge, and T'Challa would feel guilty for it, if the man weren't so obviously caring.

"Lotus' huh? Did he have a preference to colour? We don't have any hot pink one's in right now."

T'Challa cannot help the small shudder that rolls on his spine, and is heartened when Tony huffs a little laugh.

"Certainly not hot pink. My father may have tried to instil in my sister and me the appreciation for all forms of beauty, but it takes something extraordinary for me to appreciate hot pink. Father held preference for pink tinged white lotus."

Tony nods, gaze wandering over the bouquets, before turning to T'Challa again.

"Any flower he didn't like?"

"He wasn't particularly favourable to ivy, though that may have stemmed from mothers allergies."

Tony huffs that gentle laugh again.

"We'll play it safe and not include it then. If you'll wait here just a few minutes, hotstuff, I'll whip up something nice for your old man."

Tony ducks into the backroom at T'Challa's nod, and T'Challa returns to perusing the flowers. He once more notes the wonderful designs, no doubt the work of the wonderful man he has just met.

No T'Challa he scolds himself it is beyond bad form to even think of asking the man out when ordering a remembrance bouquet.

"How's this grab you?"

T'Challa turned and felt a slight pull in his chest.

The bouquet was small, only twelve flowers, but it was so beautiful. Dark purple hibiscus', iris' and royal purple dahlia's surrounding a single pink tinged white lotus.

"It is perfect. Thank you."

Tony just smiled gently, thankfully not seeming to notice the warble in T'Challa's voice, and motioned them both to the counter.

"Be sure to say hi to your dad for me. Take care of yourself now, T'Challa."

T'Challa smiled back as he nodded, collecting the bouquet and leaving the store, trying desperately not to shed his tears.

T'Challa was once more standing at the entrance to the cemetery that held his father's remains.
when Shuri arrived.

"I am so sorry brother, I got here as quickly as I could."

"I know sister. Come, let us see father, and gift him his bouquet."

Shuri smiled sadly at the flowers.

"He would have loved it T'Challa. You chose well."

They enter with heavy hearts and heavier steps as T'Challa shakes his head.

"No, I merely informed the florist of father's favourite flower, and he crafted as he wished."

Shuri took a closer look at the bouquet upon hearing that, taking in the individual flowers. Hibiscus for joy and happiness; what they always felt for their father. Iris for eloquence and wisdom; and what was their father if not these? Dahlia for blessings and enduring grace; for they were blessed to have their father, and they must gracefully endure living now without him. And the single lotus, their father's favourite, for enlightenment; though difficult, T'Challa and Shuri have discovered they can live without their father around.

"They are masterful indeed. As I said, father would have loved it."

They continue on in silence, eventually reaching where their father now lies. The bouquet leaves a needed burst of colour, breaking the heart-wrenching monotony of the seemingly never ending grey headstones.

Words are not spoken, never spoken here, where the wandering spirits of the recently and long departed may pass by and snatch them up.

They stay for the better part of an hour, and when they turn to leave, they both imagine a gentle hand resting on their shoulders.

They go to a nearby café for lunch, still both deep in thought.

While they both seek comfort in each other's presence in the cemetery, neither is overly comfortable doing the same outside it. Instead, Shuri will seek out James, cuddling up to her fiancé and hiding from the world in his arms. T'Challa on the other hand, needs to be the one protecting. He needs to feel useful, as though he is needed. And with Shuri no longer seeking protection from him, T'Challa feels at a loss.

With memories of years gone by clouding his mind, T'Challa and Shuri part ways after eating, T'Challa being welcomed by the cold silence of his home.

Sleep brings little respite from the well of sadness that appears at this time every year, granting T'Challa the slight peace of dreamless rest. It is only a short break though, before T'Challa once more wakes and feels the brutal crush of loneliness.

It is during these times that he feels a rare burst of jealousy towards his sister. Shuri has someone, someone she holds closest to her heart, who ensures she is not alone.

T'Challa does not begrudge Shuri her happiness; James Rhodes is a good man who appropriately worships Shuri and treats her as the Goddess she is.
But T'Challa is alone, his bed cold and his arms empty.

"Anything I can help you with hotstuff?"

T'Challa jumps to his feet, his eyes wide in surprise.

"Be sure to say hi to your dad for me. Take care of yourself now, T'Challa."

T'Challa swallows heavily, remembering dark hair, whiskey eyes and an oh so gentle smile.

"Welcome to Stark's Stems, I'm To- Oh! Hey again hotstuff. What can I- are you okay?"

Tony's greeting turns into happy surprise at seeing T'Challa again, before morphing into a deep concern.

T'Challa is sure he must look a wreck; he didn't bother changing his clothes before he fell to sleep, and certainly didn't bother after. And at some point he finally shed the tears he had earlier refused to, so his face was likely a mess. T'Challa is snapped from his thoughts by a warm hand cradling his cheek. Tony is looking at him with warmth and sympathy, and gently directs him to the backroom, a room full of flower-filled fridges, a worktable and a worn old couch.

"Take all the time you need to breathe. I'm not leaving the shop."

Tony moves back to the front, moving displays, helping the few customers who enter, singing to himself as he goes about his tasks. T'Challa finds himself listing to the side, coming to lie across the length of the couch, sinking into the cushions, succumbing to the sweet lull of Morpheus.

It's the gentle carding of fingers through his hair that wakes T'Challa. Still in repose on the couch in the back room, T'Challa finds Tony seated on the edge of the cushions.

"Hard day T'Challa?"

T'Challa huffs, a smile beginning to crawl across his cheeks.

"Emotionally taxing. I apologize; I did not mean to-"

One of Tony's long, elegant fingers presses against T'Challa's lips.

"We may not know each other well hotstuff, but I said you can take all the time you need and I meant it. I own this place after all, so I'm allowed to do that."

T'Challa can feel his eyes moisten as Tony resumes stroking his hair. They stay like that for a few minutes, Tony comforting and there, T'Challa gathering himself and breathing. A voice calls out from the front of the shop, and Tony gives a final stroke before moving to deal with the customer. Rubbing a hand over his face to erase any tears that may have escaped, T'Challa looks around the room again, his eyes snapping wide open when he sees the bouquet on the worktable.

Yellow petals decorate the Zinnia, Narcissus and Roses, while red paints the Carnations, Gloxinia and one single Rose.

The bouquet tells a story, one that T'Challa reads many times before he notices the card next to the bundle stating T'Challa.

Yellow zinnia; I'll remember every day. Narcissus; stay as sweet as you are. Yellow roses; Let's be
friends and joyful. Red carnations; my heart aches for you. Gloxinia; It was love at first sight.
Single red rose; I love you.

T'Challa once more fights to stave off his tears. Tony's voice, as well as the customer can still be heard. Impulsively, T'Challa moves to the fridges holding flowers.

He finds the one he needs, and places it by the placard before returning to the couch.

T'Challa plans to wait for Tony to finish with the customer and come back, so that the message can be sent, and they can talk. But, it would seem, Morpheus has a greater pull on T'Challa in the boundaries of Stark's Stems.

Even in sleep, he can feel the feather-light kiss pressed to his forehead, so he knows his message was received.

Five months later, clapping as Shuri and James kiss as husband and wife, T'Challa smiles as Tony gently leans against him.

Since that day in the back of the store, Tony always wears a Forsythia bloom pin.

I am in anticipation.

T'Challa always wears a pin of a single red Rose.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

Everyone has the ability to send their consciousness -their will if you'd prefer- into a metaphysical existence. To create a spirit animal. No one, not even Tony, knows what his is.

TRIGGER WARNING Child neglect/abuse, nothing overly graphic, but take care upon reading.

You can only touch your own spirit animal, and the animal of your most beloved, so long as you are their most beloved too. The rest of the time, the animals are ghost like forms that follow you everywhere, even if you are flying. All names were chosen for their meanings, except DiMaggio, who was a baseball player in the 30's.

I AM ONCE AGAIN IGNORING CIVIL WAR AND PARTS OF AOU!!!!!!

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He's three and five-eighths when he tries the first time.

Daddy had been telling him all about Captain America and his spirit eagle Liberty. Daddy had been stroking Dana all though the stories, the wolf seeming to enjoy the petting. He really wants to make Daddy proud of him, just like Daddy was proud of the Captain.

The air in front of him starts to get blurry, like the roads do on a really hot day.

"Come on. You can do it."

But his encouraging little whispers are for naught, as the world starts blurring too, before turning black.

He wakes up in the hospital to Daddy's shouts and Jarvis' calm voice.

"-sted boy was doing?! I have far too much to do to watch him every second!"

"Sir, the young Master shows all signs of trying to force his spirit animal into existence. He needs to be informed not to-"

"So he failed is what you're telling me?! Hell, could he be any more useless?!"

Daddy leaves then, muttering angrily. He tries not to cry -Stark men are made of Iron- but he can't stop the small dribbles of tears that escape.
He didn't mean to let Daddy down.

Madre isn't home when he comes back from the hospital. She's off in France for a party. Daddy's gone looking for Captain America again.

Jarvis told him that trying to force out a spirit animal is dangerous, and they'll appear when they're good and ready. But Daddy always says that Starks make what they want to happen, happen. So is Jarvis wrong? But Jarvis knows so very much, like how Madre's bird Bella is a quetzal, and that you need to put a bit of the pasta water into the sauce to make it even better, and his dog Abram is very strong and can follow instructions. So is Daddy wrong? But Daddy has never been wrong that he knows; Daddy knows everything he can ask.

He doesn't know what to do.

He tries a second time when he's very almost seven.

He's a lot bigger and smarter now, so surely it's time for his spirit animal to appear. He doesn't try to force the animal out like he did the first time; like Jarvis said, that's dangerous, because the spirit animal lashed out at him. That's what Dad had been disappointed by. If he hadn't been so impatient, his spirit animal would have come out like he wanted.

He needs to coax his spirit animal out gently, be as delicate as he was when he made his first circuit board.

The air starts blurring again, and he can feel the curiosity of his spirit animal.

"Hey there. Want to come out?"

The world turns black again.

He wakes not in a hospital this time, but slumped on the floor of his room, his arm twisting in a way it shouldn't with pain screaming down it's length.

He doesn't scream with it though. Stark men are made of Iron. Jarvis finds him trying to splint his arm by himself, and hurries him to the hospital.

Dad doesn't even show up this time.

"But... but I'm supposed to go to-"

"You will go where I damn well tell you boy! Maybe Huntington's will do what I can't and finally put some damn iron in your spine! It's already humiliating enough that you're so pathetic, but you can't even summon your bloody spirit animal! You need to stop being so useless!"

He slumps to the floor as the door slams, the heat and burn on his cheek a reminder that he isn't good enough. He can't stop the tears, however much he tries, but at least he doesn't make a sound.

That would just bring Howard back.

He's a few days past twelve when he tries the third time.
This time he tries just for himself.

He's the youngest student in his classes, the smartest, the wealthiest, and ultimately the loneliest. The other students don't care for him; they've got friends and their spirit animals, they don't need the little Stark heir. They just want his fame, his smarts and his family's wallet.

He so desperately needs someone to want him for him.

He's huddled himself into the space between his bed and the wall and trying to bring forth his manifestation of will. As the times before, the air in front of him blurs, and the slightest whispers of curiosity prod at his senses.

He doesn't speak this time, just sends his desperation and need to the creature, hoping they will come out for him.

He doesn't bother trying to stop the tears that fall when the air returns to normal, and the curiosity vanishes.

Not even his spirit animal, a physical showing of his being, wants anything to do with him.

At least the failure didn't cause him to black out.

---

The bots and J.A.R.V.I.S. are really the only reasons he hasn't given up.

He built Dum-E as a sad, lonely teenager, trying to make the companion his spirit animal should have been. It helped, oh how Dum-E helped, the chirpy little devil always bringing a smile to his face. But he was still a student at M.I.T. Most of the day, he'd be in classes, unfortunately leaving Dum-E by himself.

He built ButterFingers so that Dum-E wouldn't be lonely too.

Having two happy little bots greeting him after class was wonderful though, so he didn't even feel remotely jealous over not always being with them.

He doesn't actually remember building and programming U, as drunk as he was that weekend. But U fit into his odd little circle without a bump of trouble.

Rhodey and his bear Ava sort of stare at the trio of bots whenever they come over, but they come to accept them in time.

J.A.R.V.I.S. had been code and programming in the back of his mind for years when he gets the call from the gardener letting him know that Edwin Jarvis is dead, Abram having dissolved into light.

He doesn't cry at the funeral, but only just.

He couldn't remember the last time he spoke to Jarvis, and it hits him hard that the man is gone.

It's Just A Rather Very Intelligent System, but he doesn't even consider not giving him a British accent.

---

His mother and Howard are lowered into the earth not long after, Dana and Bella long gone.

Strange, how it doesn't really feel like anything's changed.
The business world is vicious and cruel. Especially to those who don't have *appropriate* spirit animals.

He has seen hundreds of incredible minds and dreams being torn to shreds, because they had the *gall* to have gentle spirit animals.

He's clever though, constantly reminded of how much smarter he is than everyone else. He takes in the lost minds and shattered dreamers, hides them under the banner of Stark Industries so they can heal, and become strong once again, helping SI grow stronger too. No one really questions it, questions him.

After all, he's the business man so great, he doesn't *need* a spirit animal. He doesn't *need* to spend the effort constantly keeping an eye on what his soul is showing others.

He laughs when people say that trying to get in his good favour, laughs when Obadiah praises him for not having such a weakness, laughs as the media paints him as a man without a heart.

Cries in the darkness of his home, when none breathing shall see his tears.

*Stark men are made of Iron. Never let them see you bleed.*

He tries for the last time in Afghanistan.

He's wandering the never ending crests of sand, stumbling over the loose footing. Yinsen and his raccoon *Arash* both buried in the ashes of the cave. Their captors strewn wherever the blast left them. He can feel his shoulders burning, and his arm's stabbing pain with every step.

*Please* he thinks, wishing beyond anything he gets an answer *I don't want to be alone.*

There's no one in the desert to see him cry when he gets no answer.

But then, he doesn't have the tears to spare.

Somehow, he's not surprised when Obadiah tries to kill him. The man's spirit animal is a lion named *Edric* after all.

He's also unsurprised that Obadiah doesn't succeed.

Pepper and her bird *Gemma*, the hooded pitohui, are a godsend. They keep up SI when he finds himself doomed to fall.

They even eventually forgive him for not telling them he was dying and forcing them to deal with Hammer and his pigeon *Augustus*.

Happy and his badger *Magnus* forgive him too, as do Rhodey and Ava.

Fury and his wolf *Treasach* constantly demand time and attention, often sending Romanoff and her fox *Matrona* to try and get what they want from him, and when she fails, Fury sends in Coulson and his cat *Honour*.

He just laughs.
Laughs when Fury demands weapons, laughs when Romanoff tries to intimidate him, laughs when Coulson mentions his taser.

Cries in the darkness of his home, when none breathing shall see his tears.

*Stark men are made of Iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

Loki and Thor don't have spirit animals, but that's their normal.

He's still unusual.

He meets the Captain Howard loved more than anything, and is underwhelmed. Liberty sits on the man's shoulder, looking patriotic as all hell, looking down her beak at him.

He can't wait for this to be over.

Bruce is like him. Sorta.

Ever since the Hulk came about, Bruce doesn't have a spirit animal anymore. But from the way he keeps looking over his shoulder, the doctor is obviously expecting to see his bear Nirav.

So no, actually.

They're not alike at all.

"Take off the suit and what are you?"

*Stark men are made of Iron.*

"Genius, Billionaire, Playboy, Philanthropist."

"And alone. Don't think I haven't noticed you don't have a spirit animal Stark. You're broken."

*Never let them see you bleed.*

"Taking those four points I just raised, I can get pretty much anyone, so if I'm alone it's by choice."

"*Those four points*. I know men with none of that worth ten of you."

*They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

He's always known he was small, that he was a mere speck in regards to the universe, but...

But it's something else to literally see the universe in regards to him.

He blacks out again, but he thinks he may have shed a tear, deep in the emptiness of space.

He and Bruce drive off once Thor and Loki have left, but he can't help taking a final glance over his shoulder at them.

Steve and his eagle Liberty.
Natasha and her fox Matrona.

Clint and his hawk Hagar.

He pushes down the loneliness and sadness that try to well up.

Killian and his dog Charlemagne nearly kill everyone most important in his life; Happy and Magnus in hospital, Pepper and Gemma in pain from extremis, Rhodey and Ava in the fight of their lives.

And here he is, standing alone before Killian and Charlemagne, thinking of a fast talking little brat with a kitten named Tesla.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., do me a favour and blow Mark 42."

For some reason, he's not surprised that HYDRA was growing inside S.H.I.E.L.D.

Insulted, perhaps, that they tried to misuse his tech, but not surprised.

He does what he can, working with Hill and others she has personally vetted, to take care of the under-cover agents that were just singled out because of Team Cap's decision to dump everything on the net, and to find jobs for the non-HYDRA agents. If he happens to chance upon a certain video that pure luck has him watch that he would otherwise dismiss, assuming his teammates would inform him of anything important, well...

It's probably for the best that he watched it and didn't hold his breath waiting.

He sees footage of Thor in London, along with more aliens.

Huh... the Chitauri didn't appear to have spirit animals either...

Maybe only Earth has them... well...

Except for him.

He keeps sorting through the S.H.I.E.L.D. files.

Wanda Maximoff has a bear named Faina.

Pietro Maximoff has a cheetah named Andrei.

They all barely survive against Ultron.

Accept for J.A.R.V.I.S.

One of his boys is gone, and little Friday is still his princess, but it's just not the same.

Vision is the child of his child. And his child is dead.

He's sitting in his workshop, contemplating if it's worth it to open up the scotch in front of him.

Around the Avengers, he'd been kept so busy he didn't have the time to drink outside their parties,
and eventually the need faded to almost background music.

But he's retired now, and the Avengers are all at the compound.

*You useless Brat!*

Memories of a burning pain on his cheek and the scent of whiskey on Howard's breath sends the bottle of scotch flying at the wall, heavy pants escaping his lips.

*Stark men are made of Iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

The three-legged *lemur* is the only warning he gets before he finds himself looking at the worn and weary figure of James Buchannan Barnes.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

They part ways after Barnes is fitted with the new prosthetic arm that makes DiMaggio croon.

It still hurts, but he's had time to accept.

*Stark men are made of Iron.*

Barnes turns up a few more times seeking help with the arm, but then just sort of... doesn't leave.

He decides to ignore Barnes and DiMaggio running amok with the bots in the shop.

As long as they're not in the way.

*Never let them see you bleed.*

He gives his lawyers a very big bonus when they get Ross arrested and the Accords proven as incomplete.

They'll get another once they've finished the case to protect James.

He slides back into his car, ignoring the paparazzi and news hounds snapping pictures from the second he stepped from the courthouse.

*They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

He should have known someone would manage to film the trial of the Winter Soldier and sell it for a mint.

Steve shows up, furious that he hadn't brought James to the Compound for Steve to protect. Liberty is screeching, though at him or Steve is hard to tell.

DiMaggio chatters at her, before hopping onto James' shoulder, who is looking a worrying combination of fearful and angry.

He legs it when James starts yelling at Steve.

Natasha and Matrona eventually get the super soldiers to calm down, though she sends him the
stink eye for not doing it himself.

"I get that you're upset Steve, but you don't have the right to get up in his face when he was respectin' my wish to be left alone. I've already caused him enough hurtin' to last a lifetime, you don't get to as well."

Steve stiffens and looks at him in shock and fear. He notes Natasha looking between them with concern.

He sighs.

"You never were planning on telling me, were you?"

Steve flinches as though struck, and Natasha now glares at the Captain, Matrona hissing at Liberty awkwardly shuffling on Steve's shoulder.

James is looking at Steve with almost desperation.

"You knew and didn't tell him? Steve... why?"

He doesn't stay to hear whatever excuse Steve has to give; sometimes his teammates don't tell him things. But they're not even teammates anymore, so whatever.

*Stark men are made of Iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

He gets a call a few minutes later from his lawyers, telling him the Diplomatic Council of Wakanda want to talk to him.

"Friday my gal, I'm heading out. Do me a favour and not tell our visitors until I'm already gone."

"Sure thing Boss. Come back soon."

He smiles; she's taken to saying that every time he leaves her perimeter.

"I'll do my best. Don't wait up honey."

The Wakandan Embassy is luxurious, practically spilling wealth and status.

Walking through it, he thinks it's as cold and empty as the Stark Mansion.

At least it is until he and his escort enter the gardens. Then the place comes to life, flowers bringing wonderful colour and warmth while the bushes and trees provide shelter from the weather.

"Ah, welcome! I thank you for joining us so promptly."

He half-bows. He isn't an active member of the political scene, more a backstage player, but he keeps up-to-date on the in's and out's of the performance. So he can damn well afford the respect of bowing to *King T'Chaka*.

"It's not everyday the most technologically advanced nation in the world wants to talk to me, so I am more than willing to make the time."

King T'Chaka smiles at him, the panther at his side purring.
"Come, Thandiwe and I would prefer to talk over tea."

They lead him to a table set up with tea and snacks, little cakes and sandwiches. He sips at his tea while the monarch speaks.

Oh if only he could have found someway to smuggle himself to Wakanda as a kid; it sounds amazing, and everything he could have ever wanted. King T'Chaka laughs heartily when he says as much.

"Oh you would be a delight to have in our borders, I assure you."

He joins in the laughter, only just calming before a new voice speaks.

"Father? I did not realise we were to have guests."

He's heard about Prince T'Challa, all of it praise and glowing. But seeing the man in person? He has to swallow to make sure he doesn't drool.

It's a good thing too, given the way the man's eyes hone in on him.

"Ah T'Challa, join us; Sipho can sit with Thandiwe as we talk."

A quick sweep of Prince T'Challa's gaze has those dark eyes widening and a hand coming to stroke the gorgeous panther at his side. The prince has noticed he has no spirit animal then.

Still joins them though, so that's nice.

At one point, they end up talking about all the Vibranium he had sent to Wakanda after the Ultron mess.

"Well, it's not like I had the right to keep it; it had already been stolen from you guys."

He's not sure what to make of the look on Prince T'Challa's face. If he was being fanciful, he would say it was a mix of surprise, delight and... longing.

They're vultures that will tear you apart.

It's best he doesn't think on it too much.

King T'Chaka has to leave, to deal with the many politicians who want a taste of Wakanda. He has no problems letting the monarch go, as he should be heading back to the Tower as well, hopefully James and Steve's argument hasn't broken into fisticuffs.

"I would be delighted if you would come to visit m-us again. It was a pleasure to speak with you, even for so short a time, and my sister may be able to join us as well."

He nearly misses the slip of the tongue, but the prince couldn't possibly have meant to say- no. He best leave sleeping dogs lie. He would like to chat with the royals again though, and if the princess is anything like her brother and father, it would be a conversation to remember.

"I might at that. I have the number for this place, so I'll call in and make an appointment."

Prince T'Challa's black panther, Sipho, starts purring, a deep rumble.
"I look forward to it."

He leaves with something that feels suspiciously like infatuation in his chest.

The Tower is still standing, though Natasha and Matrona have fled.

James has locked himself and DiMaggio in the workshop and Steve is pacing angrily in front of the door with Liberty on her usual perch.

"Unlock the door! I need to talk to Bucky but he's being obstinate!"

He merely raises an unimpressed brow at Steve's demand.

"Unlock the door!"

"Screaming demands at me won't have anything happen in your favour; ask the ghosts of anyone who's tried to kidnap me."

Steve doesn't get the message to calm down and ask, instead starting to scream. It's nothing particularly discernable, more angry sounds then words, but the longer it goes the angrier it gets, until finally, Liberty alights from Steve's shoulder and dives at him.

He knows she can't touch him, knows that spirit animals can only be touched by mutually beloved. He knows this.

But there is still an eagle swiftly coming closer to his face.

He raises his arms and ducks his head, instinctually trying to protect himself. He's as surprised as Steve at the roar that sends Liberty right back to Steve.

He can barely breathe.

He's nearly fifty years old, has lived over half his life expectancy and done so much in that time that it is a miracle, nothing less that still has him walk the Earth.

A white panther is crouched in front of him, poised to attack and growling fiercely at the bird in Steve's arms. James and DiMaggio are looking in shock through the glass walls of the workshop too.

The big cat moves to start herding him up and away from Steve, the workshop, everything that is not his room, and he can't find it in himself to protest. In fact, he finds himself on his bed with a lap full of panther before he finds his voice.

"I called you so many times before... why did you only come now?"

The ice blue eyes meet his own brown and he can hear a voice not too unlike his own echo in his mind.

_Stark men are made of Iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart._

He cries.

Cries in the darkness of his room, when none breathing shall see his tears.
"Welcome ba- Oh! And who is this gorgeous creature?"

Prince T'Challa bends to closer look at the panther so opposite Sipho.

"Vitale. He's a bit late, but fashionably so."

Prince T'Challa laughs, throwing his head back to release his mirth.

"So you say Tony."

As they move to the gardens, neither notices they're petting the wrong coloured panthers.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
"Here you go Tones; two tall blacks."

Tony smiled gently at Clint as he put the two steaming mugs into the table, desperately trying to ignore the slight twinge of sadness and pity ringing through the blond's voice.

"Thanks Hawkass."

The gleam of unshed tears washed over Clint's eyes as he nodded and went back to the counter.

Tony just sipped at his drink, waiting for someone who would never arrive.

---

_He's there again today. Alone again too..._

T'Challa had seen the gorgeous man sitting by the window of _Avenge Café_ for almost a full year. T'Challa passed by the place every evening on his way home from work, and had many times admired the brunet. The man was quite the looker, and T'Challa had contemplated more than once entering the café and introducing himself.

It had been the man's boyfriend that had stopped him.

A tall blond businessman from the look of him, always in a very fine suit. He always had a hand on the brunet, shoulder, arm, thigh -though oddly never hand holding- and often had the brunet pulled into a kiss.

But the blond hadn't been present for the last week.

_Perhaps a business trip?_ T'Challa himself had occasionally needed to go on trips that lasted a week or two, so the blond could easily be gone for work, but...

But the brunet had two mugs on his table.

_Perhaps the blond man is just coming a little later._

It was hardly T'Challa's business though. He shook his head slightly and turned away, waiting for the pedestrian lights to change.
No man would be fool enough to stand up the gorgeous brunet after all.

"Closing time Tony. Do you want me to call someone to take you home?"

Tony shakes his head, gently brushing Natasha's hand off his shoulder and rises from his seat, two fifties being placed on the table before he leaves.

An untouched mug of black coffee still sits on the table, stone cold.

*Because I'm through with this farce. I've gotten what I came for, and now I'm free to leave. Just think of it as business Tony.*

*It's not like I ever really wanted you.*

Tony starts awake, his breathing loud in the silence of the workshop.

A quick motion with his hand has the lights turning on, Friday starting up the projectors for him to work on.

"You're okay Boss. You're safe here."

The bots come out from their charging docks, settling themselves around the couch as his fingers brush against the holo-screen.

"We won't let him hurt you again."

"Hey T. Two tall blacks. You gotta date or somethin'?"

Tony just smiles at James as the drinks are put in front of him, hiding the clenched fist.

James hadn't hidden his pleasure at the break-up, saying Tony needed someone who would put him first. That he kept offering to introduce Tony to his army buddy Steve was painful.

"James! You left Clint in the kitchen!"

"SHIT!"

Tony slowly exhales, sending Natasha a heartfelt thank you with his eyes as James vaults over the counter to get to the kitchen. She sends a gentle smile back, and returns to the front counter.

*It's been a month now... why doesn't he just come later?*

T'Challa knows it isn't any of his business as to what the brunet does, but... but a month has gone by with no sight of the blond, and the gentle smile that had first caught T'Challa's attention is long gone. Now the brown eyes are sad and the smile he wears is slim and infrequent.

The lights change, and with a heaviness in his chest, T'Challa goes on his way.

"It's closing time Tony... You want me to call a cab to take you home?"

Tony just shakes his head at Natasha, once again leaving two fifties on the table and making his
way outside.

An untouched mug of black coffee still sits on the table, stone cold.

Why would anyone want you? Aside from your wallet, you're not worth a second look Tony.

This should come as no surprise.

Tony's eyes snapped open, his back straightening as he hauled himself up from his slouch over the workbench.

The lights were still on, and his machines running.

"Boss? It's okay, we're here. You're safe."

Tony finds himself hugging the bots, running a shaking hand up and down Dum-E's support strut.

"We love and need you."

"Two tall blacks Anthony."

"Thanks Point Break. How's Jane been?"

Thor lights up at mention of his lady-love.

"She is well Anthony; her papers have been submitted to the committee and I have no doubt there will be little for her to defend in them. And how is your-"

The large blond cuts himself off before he can finish, which Tony is thankful for.

"How are your bots and young Friday? It has been a good while since last you spoke of them."

Tony is able to forget, for only a few minutes true, but none the less forget, just so he can speak about his babies. It is with a sudden flash of cold that he releases Thor back to his work, condemning himself to once again sitting alone.

He is there yet again... three months have passed now...

It was harder and harder for T'Challa to keep walking, the old lingering flame of attraction gaining more and more heat each day. Not to mention his desire to understand.

Every day, the beautiful brunet seemed sadder and sadder, as though he were starting to struggle to go on.

T'Challa was about to enter the café when one of the staff brought the brunet his order.

Two mugs were set on the table, and the large blond even managed to pull a smile from the brunet.

T'Challa shook his head and crossed before the lights changed.

"Hey Tony. Need a lift home?"
Tony leaves two fifties on the table and shakes his head, not saying a word to Natasha as he leaves the café.

An untouched mug of black coffee still sits on the table, stone cold.

*Don't be difficult. There wasn't anything real between us. You know that Tony.*

*I was always going to leave.*

Tony curls up under ButterFingers' arm, U gently patting his hair and Dum-E facing the only entrance, armed with his fire extinguisher.

"It's safe here Boss. We need you and love you."

Tony's breathes out slowly to Friday's voice, ignoring the tremble in his little girls' words.

"We'll protect you."

"Got your drinks Tony, two tall blacks."

It hurts to hear the genuine worry in Natasha's voice as she puts the drinks onto the table. Tony takes a sip of his, perfectly made as always, and waits.

Natasha opens her mouth to speak, no doubt to offer support or sympathy, but closes her mouth without a word. Instead, she merely brushes a hand through Tony's hair, laying a quick kiss on his brow, before resuming her place behind the front counter.

It takes everything Tony has not to burst into tears.

T'Challa's heart near stops in his chest.

The brunet looks so... *broken.*

As though his very spirit was flickering, dying in a harsh wind.

T'Challa doesn't remember entering the café, nor his sitting down across from the brunet.

He recalls the startled gaze wet with unshed tears.

"My name is T'Challa. What's yours?"

Natasha cursed herself, cutting a quick glance to the time and practically shoving the final items onto their shelves, all but running back into the main space of the café.

"Tony? Do you want-"

Natasha's words die as she stops by Tony's table. Two fifties are left on the surface, Tony's unending generous tip.

There are two empty mugs sitting in the centre of the table.
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
For MistressLuna (she gives me so many lovely prompts XD)

Tony is an angel, wings and all. But even though the feathered limbs are very real, not just anyone can see them.

This took ages, and is very choppy. I'm sorry, but my muse kinda abandoned me for this one, but I tried. Once again ignoring points of AoU and Civil War. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Angel

[eyn-juhl]

noun

1. one of a class of spiritual beings; a celestial attendant of God. In medieval angelology, angels constituted the lowest of the nine celestial orders (seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations or dominions, virtues, powers, principalities or princedoms, archangels, and angels).

2. a conventional representation of such a being, in human form, with wings, usually in white robes.

3. a messenger, especially of God.

4. a person who performs a mission of God or acts as if sent by God: an angel of mercy.

5. a person having qualities generally attributed to an angel, as beauty, purity, or kindliness.

6. a person whose actions and thoughts are consistently virtuous.

7. an attendant or guardian spirit.

Tony didn't believe in gods. It was kinda hard for him to, given the questions that arose from the 'existence' of an ultimate power.

Like what the hell was he?

For as long as Tony can remember (and he can remember a very long time ago) there has always been one thing that set him apart from others. Not his genius, not his family's wealth, not even his looks.

It'd been the wings sprouting from his back.
Well, that'd been the reason he chose.

It had been so confusing when he was young, trying to keep the feathery menaces tucked tightly to his back so they didn't hit into anything or throw him off balance, to realise that not only did no one else have wings, nobody could see the damn things! It was also confusing how they could and would catch on everything, but when Tony went to put on clothes, they would become intangible, so he wouldn't have to alter his wardrobe.

He'd once asked his mother, Jarvis, even going to his father (and boy did he learn not to do that if he could help it) to ask about winged creatures. His mother had spoken of fairy folk and Jarvis told tale of gargoyles. But after his father's dismissive anger at the intrusion, he too spoke of a winged creature.

"Angels, said to be the most beautiful of all beings, crafted in the truest likeness of God, and guardians to the souls of man."

The words just seemed to resonate with Tony.

Well, until Howard had started on about how Steve Rogers had obviously been an angel amongst humans, then Tony left as quickly as he could.

Still, the seed had been planted.

In private, where none could see, Tony would care for his wings, grooming them until -to his sight-they shone, training himself in how to move them, exercising them so they would be strong.

He was eleven when he found he could fly.

It wasn't for very long mind you, but that feeling of weightlessness, that freedom, it only took the twenty seconds of flight to have the young genius hooked! Every time he could, he would spread his wings and beat, spending a few more seconds off the ground each time.

By the time he was seventeen, Tony could fly for two hours.

It was his escape from the pressures of the world, his protection of his heart and emotions from all that hurt him.

When Howard and his mother died, Tony never had a moment alone to fly.

It would be over a decade until he would fly.

He woke up to so much pain; fingers and cold metal burning his chest, digging into the exposed flesh, grazing his lungs, practically kissing his heart.

There was also the sharp pain of broken bones. Not in his hands, arms, legs no...

His wings were at angles they shouldn't rest in, and the white plumage was now a dull and dusty brown.

It hurt so much.

He couldn't help the scream.
Yinsen would have liked flying, Tony just knew it.

Even though flying via rockets in a metal suit wasn't anywhere near as exhilarating as free flight, it was still flight, and damn but Tony had missed it.

The black feathers on the ends of his wings were penance, he felt, for letting a good man die.

In a proper environment (read not a cave with no medical supplies) Tony's wings healed quickly and pulled their little intangibility trick with the armour too.

Tony could fly again, and he now had a reason that people wouldn't question.

Obadiah's betrayal led to black feathers at the joints to his back.

The Paladium made cruel black streaks mar his feathers in no particular pattern or symmetry. It didn't matter that Tony was the only one to see his wings, he could see his wings and the Paladium made a mockery of one of his most private joys.

The new reactor washed away that black, and when Tony had a chance to look, the new silver plumage dotting his wings didn't feel wrong like the black did.

He met Captain America during an alien invasion (and when did that become a thing he could say with a straight face?) and frankly failed to see what Howard saw as angelic in him.

Sure the man was stupidly attractive, but his looks didn't call out to Tony as angelic.

He was a good little soldier yes, but that was no indicator.

He was a strategist of course, but he wasn't particularly bright.

Really, Tony had no clue what all the fuss about the guy was about, but whatever, Loki was more immediately important; he was a full tilt diva. He wanted flowers, parades, a monument built to the skies with his name plastered-

... Son of a bitch.

Tony woke up to the Hulk's roar and yeah, alive, that's a good thing to be.

But oh holy crap, Rogers and Thor get your over-muscled asses off his wings!

Tony didn't say that of course, just babbled around his pain, heaving a huge sigh of relief when the two blonds got to their feet.

His wings, though sluggishly, willingly tucked themselves tightly to his back.

There are more silver feathers in his wings when the Avengers part ways.

Tony doesn't do water. Certainly not after Afghanistan, but even before, Tony was never much of a
swimmer.

The water weighed down his wings.

The Mandarin's helicopters blowing up his house and throwing Tony into the ocean?
Dick move.

"Why does it feel like you've got something on your back?"

Tony starts, but Harley has already moved onto questions about the armour.
Tony's not sure what to do about the warmth in his chest.

Pepper forgives him, but Tony knows they won't stay together.
It doesn't hurt as much as it should, but at least she still wants to be friends.
The reactor gets removed.
Tony takes note of the darker silver streaks threaded through his wings.

Huh... so S.H.I.E.L.D. was hiding more than just the plans for phase two.
Tony's not sure why he's surprised. Though Rogers could've called and given him a heads up;
Tony's gonna be working overtime to get to all the agents Rogers just screwed over.

That is Thor, fighting aliens in London...
People really need to tell him things; it's gonna take him a couple hours to get the funds together to repair this mess.

Sorting through the files is a long, arduous task, even with Maria Hill working alongside him.
Let's see, a security video of Cap and Widow in a bunker and-
Hang on, that's Loki's sceptre. Tony'll come back to that security vid.

The vision is terrifying. Tony doesn't need to look to know inky trails of red that hazed in the corners of his eyes have dripped down his feathers.

The cruel black comes back to his wings as they fly to Barton's safe-house.
At least this time it's symmetrical.
It only cost him J.A.R.V.I.S.

Vision's birth results in another shade of silver colouring his wings.
Pietro's near fatal injury has another set of black painting his feathers.

Tony's done. He can't be an active Avenger, not after the absolute fiasco Ultron and Sokovia became.

The red still dresses his wings, bursts of colour from between his silver and black.

There's barely any white left now.

Tony goes back to sorting through the files from the S.H.I.E.L.D. dump, starting with that security video Cap and Widow were in-

...

Son of a bitch.

The white's gone now.

Sokovia is well on it's way to recovery, what with all the work SI has put into it. Tony himself personally goes three or four times a week to help out.

The response to his presence is a mix of thanks, sadness, anger and confusion.

It isn't until later that he finds out that none of the other Avengers, not even Wanda and Pietro (though Pietro has an excuse given he's been put on forced bed-rest), have come by to do the same.

He's not sure what to make of the faint shimmer his wings decide to emit.

King T'Chaka arrives in Sokovia on one of the days Tony is there working.

Tony is so focused on his work, shifting the rubble safely, that he doesn't realise the Wakandan Monarch has been trying to catch his eye for a good ten minutes.

Apologies are brushed aside, the King easily understanding becoming lost in one's work.

He says thank you.

Tony can't really remember the last time someone thanked him like King T'Chaka but it's humbling. Tony's screwed up so much recently, he doesn't think he deserves any thanks but the look King T'Chaka is giving him makes him stay any deflections and refusals.

The King then looks around him.

"Where should I help out first?"

Tony swallows a lump in his throat when the King moves to the area assigned.

His wings shimmer brighter.

A week later sees King T'Chaka returning to Sokovia with his son and daughter to help.
Princess Shuri gives Tony a quick smile, before she's off, finding a place to work.

King T'Chaka extends a greeting before doing the same.

Prince T'Challa though, introduces himself, turns to move off, before turning back.

"You've changed the colours again... why?"

Tony's not in his armour, so his shock and surprise are easily seen by the Wakandan Prince.

And the Prince has a mind as sharp as a tack, instantly coming to the correct conclusion.

"Nobody else can see them?"

Prince T'Challa stays working near Tony for the day, asking questions about his work for SI, his research, his robotics, anything and everything that comes to mind.

They part for the day with details exchanged and information shared.

Tony prepares to leave, a spring in his step, a lightness in his heart, and gold feathers streaking through his wings.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
True Colours

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

Tony has always seen the auras that surround a person, the colourful wisps that represent their souls.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Tony is still very small by the time he understands that everyone has a different colour.

Jarvis is a deep, royal purple, almost like a cloak, while Madre's a baby pink, settling around her like a shawl.

Both are good colours he thinks. Both mean nothing bad will happen.

Daddy's a dark grey, black really, like smoke.

It's not a good colour, he finds.

Every single person has a colour; reds, blues, yellows you name it.

Tony learnt what those colours could tell about a person, though careful questioning of Jarvis revealed that Tony was the only one who saw them.

When the important men come to the mansion for dinner and Tony has to wear the itchy suit, the way their colours snake forward to Dad's is followed by them saying something to try and get money, while the colours snapping out to try and smother Madre's precedes a comment that has Madre pursing her lips and Dad laughing hollowly. Tony's not quite sure how to feel about the colours slowly brushing over him, but it certainly doesn't feel good.

Dad's smoke is always moving at these dinners, brushing off the money attempts, and roiling at the comments to Madre. Madre's shawl seems to quiver, reaching to Dad when they are close to each other, seeming to half drape over Tony himself when Madre finally moves to take him from the room.

Jarvis' cloak looks a little foreboding as he tucks Tony in for the night.

When Tony starts school, he's excited. He can't wait to see all the different colours of the other kids and the teachers, and he so looks forward to making friends.

It barely even takes him a day to realise it'll never happen.

The different colours were certainly as varied as he thought they'd be, and he's learning even more.
about how the colours tell him things about the person they're attached to but...

None of the kids want to be friends.

They haven't even known Tony for a day, yet their colours shy away, or worse try to snake forward, just like Dad's important men.

Tony snuggles in close under Jarvis' cloak when they're safely behind the closed doors of the mansion.

Tony's fast tracked through most of school, his brain more than ample reason to give him harder course work. It also helps that he can tell when his instructors are trying to feed him bullshit.

"You're wonderfully bright Mr Stark, but we feel this is too advanced for you."

"I understand how you feel Mr Stark, but it's better to stay at your current level."

"Don't worry Mr Stark, you'll catch up soon enough."

Please; the way their colours are practically vibrating and snaking out towards him?

They just want to plug his father for more cash.

Tony actually does a double take the first time he meets James Rupert Rhodes.

While Howard has managed to teach Tony to notice nuances in facial movements and a persons hands, Tony learns so much more about a person by the way their colours act.

Like how most of his teachers hate him for being too advanced for them to successfully use his name to boost their careers, or how the people who kidnapped him when he was seven were actually some of the nicest people he has ever met.

So Tony tends to look at a persons colour first, then look at their face.

He has to look twice this time.

Tony's never seen such a nice brown for anyone before. It's strong and heavy, like chocolate, and seems to have fashioned itself to be a bomber vest; protecting the heart and vital organs.

Tony's delighted when he makes a friend in Rhodey.

Jarvis dies, and is put in the ground months before Tony is even told.

Rhodey is there, strong and protective, holding Tony close to his chest, letting his chocolate bomber vest protect Tony too, as Tony cries in anger and sadness.

Tony had been so busy with the programming for his A.I. project, he never even noticed when Jarvis' calls stopped.

Tony sheds few tears as Madre and Howard are laid in the ground.

It's not that he won't miss them (Madre more than Howard but still) or that he's scared of being
without them (really, when hasn't he been in the last decade?)

It's that he's never seen a person without colours. For Howard not to be trailing smoke, and Madre to be without her shawl?

It feels wrong.

Tony breaks down in his workshop, thankful that Rhodey's not there because he'd just worry.

The tears won't stop, and it's hard to catch a breath, but Tony's not sad, hell, he's never really been better.

The programming for his A.I. had been finished and uploaded about a week before the funeral, and Tony had been teaching the mechanical arm about the workshop.

Tony's crying because somehow, someway, Dum-E has a gentle orange surrounding him like a blanket.

Tony's recovering from a stressful week of unending meetings (and he wishes he were exaggerating; his daily planner literally reads out fifty of them) when the shouting outside his office grabs his attention. He sighs as he stands, prepared to go deal with the problem, seeing as his secretary (some bleach blonde pin-up with a dull, dull red that worked for Howard back in the day, and oh but what that tells him about his sire) is no doubt uselessly ignoring the commotion with the security guards and scheduling another twenty meetings for anyone who asks.

His office door bursts open before he can round the desk however, and Tony has to stop so he can fully appreciate the crystalline blue being worn like a dress.

It's a deep, clear blue, and perfectly suited to the red head wearing it. After hearing the fantastic threat involving mace (and damn it but he needs to go over security now too if they're quaking like that -at least fake competence when you're terrified for the safety of your scrotum) the red head slaps down a piece of paper with his distinctive scrawl on it, pointing out a mistake made in his exhaustion.

He hires her as his secretary, firing the bimbo without batting an eye, and when Pepper nearly brings her predecessor back to eviscerate after she sees the mess that is his work week, Tony feels like he can breathe.

ButterFingers and U are just like their big brother, and are somehow covered in warm orange too.

J.A.R.V.I.S. (and how Tony would love to find this out) has a soothing blue mist hanging around his speakers and server case.

Harold Hogan is a taxi-cab driver with bright yellow covering his fists like boxing gloves. He saves Tony from an attempted kidnapping. Tony gives him a job.

Afghanistan is terrifying, because the Ten Rings are all the darkest blacks Tony has ever seen, and they are all broken bodies hanging off their backs.
Yinsen wears a light purple jacket to Tony's eyes.

It's very nice, not just because of what it tells Tony about the man who saved him, but because it also reminds him a little of Jarvis' long gone cloak. A feeling of safety that Tony hasn't had in years, and is truly an illusion here, where either can die in seconds.

Tony flies, laying to ashes a den of death, carrying within it a good man without his jacket.

Tony's kinda amazed by Coulson.

Since his return from Afghanistan, everyone's colours have been reaching spindly tendrils towards him, trying to cash in on his suffering.

But Coulson, the rainy day grey worn as a suit, doesn't. In fact, if it weren't for the grey not lining up perfectly, Tony would be sure he's come across a living man with no colour, but the lines of black between the grey of the suit and white of his shirt are enough for Tony not to freak out.

Obadiah had been a part of Tony's life for a long time.

It should be hard for Tony to see his godfather tearing out his heart (and yeah, it was, but not emotionally) and speaking of hurting Pepper and controlling SI again and making weapons and-

Obadiah has always had a black darker than sin, resting on his hands like clawed gauntlets.

It takes every shred of self control not to laugh before Fury leaves, his white gloves clashing against the leather.

Sometimes, Tony desperately wishes others could see the colours as well.

Then the Paladium poisoning would be easier to bring up and explain, because everyone would be able to see by his colour, whatever it was, showing Tony's moods.

But the world keeps turning, regardless of what people may wish for.

Natalie Rushman sends so many alarms ringing, it's a little amazing Tony can still hear.

First of all is the black cat suit.

Tony has been with a whole bunch of sexy lawyers, male and female, and even played around with some Doms and Dommes, but not a single one of them, not even the leather-loving dominatrix's, had their colours acting as such a piece of clothing.

Second is the way the cat suit behaves (and boy does that sentence ask some questions about his sanity?)

One of the things Tony's noticed about the colours is they shimmer, for lack of a better term, when a person hears someone calling them.

Natalie Rushman doesn't receive even a faint gleam.
Third is that she's too perfect.

Tony knows well the public understanding of his tastes; he's twisted words and slept with the right people to give people a certain view on what will attract his attention. There are even two sections for it; Fling and Serious.

Flings are ditzy, blond, bodacious and shallow, good for a quick roll in the hay, but it's a once-and-done.

Serious are competent, slender, thoughtful and brunette, the kind of people you'd feel privileged to bring home for family dinner.

Natalie Rushman is competent, bodacious, thoughtful and shallow at turns and brunette, though with notable red in her locks, bringing thoughts to the most important woman in his life, Pepper.

Tony's really not surprised in the end that she's a spy.

Tony ends up taking the consultant role, not because he wants to prove something to Fury, not because he's hurt by Romanoff's profile, not because he wants to be on the Avengers.

It's because the white moves to try and cocoon... tries to protect him.

Tony needs to be close to figure out Nicholas Fury.

Aliens.

Because that is now actually a thing.

Tony's more than a little weirded out by Loki and Thor's lack of colour, at least until Thor starts shooting lightning.

The blue-red is striking as all hell, forming heavy gauntlets for the few seconds of each shot.

The fight is a lot of fun (seriously, how often does one get the chance to say they stood toe-to-toe with a god?) and Tony's not really surprised that it's interrupted by Captain America. The indigo chainmail at least goes with his shield, but Tony knows that sparks beyond Mjolnir's meeting it are going to fly and soon.

Tony's not really surprised that Maria Hill has a tall pair of white boots -she has the same sort of personality base that Fury does.

He's a little sorry about Bruce's jacket though; given what the man's been put through, green isn't going to be his first choice.

Maybe Tony can change that?

Okay, Tony's not had a whole lot of affection for the man who so totally held Howard's attention, but why is he suddenly so angry? Yeah he can lose his temper pretty quick, but usually there's a reason for it.

Tony was safe behind J.A.R.V.I.S.’ data screen; why did he move into the fray?
He's up in Captain America's face, ready to punch the man in his perfect teeth, when he catches, just in the very corner of his eye, a thick black tendril that doesn't belong to Romanoff.

Turning, attention now completely off the Captain, Tony finds the tendril leading to the sceptre.

The sceptre currently in Bruce's hand.

Shit happens. That's life. Mourn your sorrows, bury your dead, and stand up every time you fall.

They sit together eating shawarma, tired and aching in places and ways that shouldn't be physically possible.

Tony's chewing slowly enjoying the gentle mingling of everyone's colours, from Steve's indigo to Clint's brown fingerless gloves.

Bruce likes the lab Tony made for him, and stays in candyland. It's a relief for Tony, who doesn't want to lose a good friend.

Pepper and Happy like Bruce too, though they and J.A.R.V.I.S. despair at having two genius' to now force to bed every night.

Tony and Pepper start talking about breaking up.

They'd really only started dating because they were both past thirty, and figured they might make it work. But it really hasn't been, they're better as friends. And Tony has noticed the way Pepper's blue has been gently twining with Happy's yellow.

They agree to one more Christmas as a couple before starting over at New Year's.

The rabbit is mostly a joke.

Tony's heart has been taking a beating for years, but he can still feel it going out to the little boy with a turquoise helmet.

It actually hurts a little to leave Harley in town.

But he won't turn a child into a soldier.

Killian has a long flowing coat in the ugliest shade of red Tony's ever seen; it's one part decay, one part bleach and two parts blood and gore. The thing also looks ratty, ragged to all hell and back, holes everywhere and seams barely holding on. Pepper has rips and tears through her blue dress when all is said and done.

Tony does what he can to fix and mend.

The Avengers come back together after S.H.I.E.L.D. falls and Thor fights elves.

They go looking for the sceptre.
Wanda is a red so dark, it's almost black, a veil that shields her face.

Pietro, surprisingly, has bright magenta runners.

Tony's not too proud to admit that Ultron scares him as much as the vision did.

Ultron has no colour.

Sokovia survives

The Avengers survive.

Pietro barely survives.

J.A.R.V.I.S. does not survive.

It hurts in a way Tony can't explain, to see J.A.R.V.I.S.' blue mist threaded with black tendrils.

He drags up a smile for Vision anyway.

Tony's working on some upgrades for Sam's wings, hoping to keep the green scarved man safer in the air when Friday alerts him to their visitor.

Friday's gentle pink clouds are a big difference to J.A.R.V.I.S.' blue, but it helps Tony not compare his baby girl to his lost son.

Turning around, Tony comes face-to-face with James Buchanan Barnes.

Which is odd, considering Cap and Co. are on a mission in Indonesia following a sighting of said Sargent.

The gentle grey cloak, ragged, torn and aged, parts as Barnes extends a very crumpled metal arm.

The expression on the assassin's face is heart-wrenching, both begging and scared.

Tony's found the files, encrypted thrice over within S.H.I.E.L.D.'s deluge. He knows what happened. He knows what was done.

He points Barnes to the couch and grabs his tools.

He offers to call Steve.

The terror in blue eyes ensures he won't.

Tony's just gotten back to the states from the final bit of work the Sokovian Government will allow him to do to help with restoration and relief. Tony is already mentally preparing the speech and items he's going to throw at Steve for not even offering to help, when he realises he's entered the business levels of Stark Tower.

Shrugging, he decides to pay Pepper a visit, and thank her for all the work she's put into the financial side of helping out Sokovia.
Pepper's secretary is a young woman, no doubt trying to follow in Pepper's Leboutin clad footsteps, but the hot pink belly-shirt has Tony blatantly declining her offerings as he slips into the office. Pepper is reading over a few files and smiles gently at him as he closes the door.

She gestures for him to sit on the couch before he can even open his mouth and joins him, running a hand softly through his hair.

He knows she has a meeting in a few minutes -such is the curse of the CEO- but he realises they both really needed this comfort; Tony has always loved being cared for (and no that does not mean the same thing as spoiled Rhodey) and Pepper feels better when she is in command and control.

Seriously, if they hadn't known each other for so long before dating, they probably would have been an unstoppable couple.

Hell, Pepper's already halfway to conquering the world and making the world like it.

Tony has just sat himself back up, and Pepper just returned to her desk, when the office door is burst open, with the snooty face of Pepper's secretary leading three people in.

The way the woman's face falls means she was hoping to catch Tony and Pepper 'in the act' with witnesses, no doubt in petty revenge for Tony rejecting her advances.

Pepper can see it too, and the raised eyebrow she levels at the woman all but promises a swift ejection from SI.

Tony's only peripherally aware of all that though. He's too busy staring at one of Pepper's guests. While the lead man and the woman have interesting shades of blue and black respectively, it's the second man who holds Tony's attention.

He's never seen gold before.

Twined so gently around the mans wrists, neck and head, rest bracers, a necklace and a crown.

Tony's in more than a little awe over the beauty. He manages to keep his face relaxed, slightly curious perhaps, during his perusal, but when the man in question meets eyes, Tony doesn't know if he was able to hide the chill running down his spine.

The man's slow smile would indicate not.

He comes over to Pepper's desk when she indicates for him to, including him in the introductions seamlessly.

Tony's maybe, perhaps, a tiny, itty-bitty, little bit fan-boying inside when she introduces the Royal family of Wakanda.

It's the prince who wears his colours as his station, and it is a very good look for him.

Tony barely keeps from drooling when the four invite him to lunch with them.

Tony falls into step with them, Pepper's arm looped around his, as they leave the office. He's still discreetly marvelling at the gorgeous gold.

What he doesn't realise is T'Challa sneaking plenty of looks back at him.

Amazed at the silver armour covering his body.
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Talk To Me

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna (she sent me a bunch all at once! It's awesome!)

The Pen is mightier than the Sword, so the Universe wrote the words initially spoken by each perfect Soul Union, be they a Couple, a Triad or other, so that when they meet, they would know each other by what they first speak.

I'm... I'm really not sure what happened with this one...
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even as a newborn, T'Challa had been fascinated by the silver letters that curled along his waist.

His Soul Mate's first words to him.

Before he could read them himself, T'Challa would ask his father to read them to him, over and over again, even though he already knew them by heart.

'Best be careful; they're vultures that will tear you apart. You've gotta be strong to survive against them.'

T'Challa constantly traces the script, following the elegant curls that trail from the letters of his Soul Mate's nicest penmanship. When he learns to write himself, he practices his own, trying to make it just as elegant and flowing as his partner's.

Wakanda very rarely let its people beyond the borders, choosing instead to keep them safe from the world beyond, but King T'Chaka felt they could not hope to protect themselves from the rest of the world if they did not understand it. At very selective events, the guest list would include Wakandan Ambassadors and Diplomats, coming to see if Wakanda should repeal its long isolation. Under that guise, T'Chaka and his family would experience what the word had to offer.

It was at one such event, a Gala held by the President of the United States, that it happened.

T'Challa had been playing with the few other children present at the event. At the cusp of ten, T'Challa was still too young for the majority of teenagers to take any interest in him, but just not old enough for the younger children to ignore him. While T'Challa would have enjoyed talking to the older kids, he had no problem running about, sneaking his way to the bases to win the games, and generally having fun.

A number of the smallest of the group had been called away by parents soon to leave for the sake of bedtimes, or by the higher echelons who thought such behaviour was 'beneath' their progeny. It had been T'Challa's turn to be 'it' in the game and was about to go searching for his playmates, when he was descended upon by the paparazzi.
"Tell us about Wakanda! What goods are you offering the world now that you're leaving your solitude?!

"What fashions do the women of Wakanda prefer?!

"How close are you to the ruling body of Wakanda?!

"How is Wakanda any more special then the rest of Africa?!

On and on the questions fell; microphones, recorders and cameras shoved into his face with little thought, flashes blinding him and voices endlessly demanding answers he did not have.

T'Challa ran.

He did not know where he was going, simply that he must get away. As far away as he could. He had just turned a corner when he felt his small body collide with one much bigger. Trying to back away and continue running, T'Challa felt his body tilt, starting now to fall and he tried to brace when-

A strong, warm arm wrapped tightly round his waist, hauling him back to his feet and holding him close to the body he'd run into.

T'Challa felt the tightness in his lungs and the burning of his legs, and couldn't help but hold on tight.

"Best be careful; they're vultures that will tear you apart. You've gotta be strong to survive against them."

T'Challa felt his breath catch; he knew those words!

Pushing away just enough to look at the face of the speaker, T'Challa was met with the kindest face he had ever seen outside his family. The brown eyes were warm and the corners of the mouth were tilted up into a gentle smile.

That his Soul Mate was male meant nothing to T'Challa, as he could already feel half the Soul Bond forming, the warmth that would always rest in his heart from then on.

The young man cast a quick glance in the direction T'Challa came from, a slight furl to his brow at what he saw, before once more his attention came to rest on T'Challa.

"I'll keep 'em busy for you. You head back to the dining room and find your folks; they'll keep you safe from the carrion-seekers."

With the slightest push, and another warm grin, T'Challa found himself swiftly on his way to the dining room, finding his father and burrowing under his arm, hidden from sight and mind. It was only as they returned to their rooms that night that he realised he hadn't said a word to his Soul Mate.

But as he was tucked into his bed, he realised his words held a warmth that had been with him since a strong, warm arm wrapped around his waist.

After informing his father of the events of that night, a copy of the guest list had been found and they had systematically gone through every name, trying to find T'Challa's Soul Mate. It had come to no avail, leaving the young man to either be one of the staff (which T'Challa had no problem
with; since he could feel the warmth of their soul, what mattered their profession?) or as part of a

group, such as family or significant other, which apparently didn't warrant additional names.

T'Challa had guessed the young man's age to be around fifteen, so his presence as significant other

was unlikely.

While his father subtly searched for information, T'Challa strove to prove his competence to his

Soul Mate. He wasn't quite sure what sort of strength his Soul Mate meant, so T'Challa went for all

of them.

He had already begun training in the martial arts of his people, so he applied himself to several

others as well.

He had always been a bright boy, but he now attacked his studies with a fervour his tutors had

never witnessed.

He had attended his duties to the Panther God as expected of him, there was deeper thought and

prayer after the Gala.


T'Challa would become strong.

It was years later that T'Challa saw those eyes once again.

It was an event that changed so much.

"I am Iron Man."

Despite his desire to travel straight to America and find his Tony (finally, he knew the name of his

Soul Mate) T'Challa forced himself to remain still.

So many were already fighting for his Tony's attention, and had been every day of his life. Hell,

T'Challa himself was a great fan of the man's work and discoveries in science. No doubt everyone,

their uncle and their dog would be vying for his Tony to look their way.

No, instead of rushing off, T'Challa began working with his father on bringing Wakanda back into

the world.

T'Challa was barely breathing as his Tony piggybacks a warhead into the portal over New York.

T'Challa thinks he might have screamed when his Tony fell just before the portal was closed.

T'Challa knows he cried when it was confirmed his Tony survived.

It took both Shuri and their father's combined might to stop T'Challa from leaving after the reports.

'Tony Stark; Missing, Presumed Dead.'

The fall of the organisation S.H.I.E.L.D. had resulted in thousands upon thousands of files being

released to the world via the internet.
T'Challa's father had been shaking his head in disbelief, organising for the files to be copied and sorted and for any aid Wakanda could give the people who were to suffer over such a foolish decision.

A young technician brought a certain security video to T'Challa's attention.

T'Challa grieved for his Tony, and prayed Steve Rogers was kind when he delivered the news.

Ulysses Klaue had once been a most respected scientist, but had turned to crime to fund his research, before eventually being swallowed by the thrill of danger that came to follow him. T'Challa knew his father had spent years searching for the man, to both retrieve the Vibranium he managed to steal, and to bring him to justice for his many crimes.

When reports came in about his death, T'Challa did his best to investigate, but soon, to his and the rest of Wakanda's horror, an intruder was discovered in the system.

Over and over a message played.

"There are no strings on me."

Whoever it was, they were far beyond anything Wakanda had come across before, easily evading their attempts to flush the intruder out. Within seconds, their online presence had gone through nearly every file within the Wakandan systems. In fact the only files they hadn't gone through were...

The weaponry database.

They had not one intruder, but two.

The second presence at least appeared determined to prevent the first from gaining access to certain information if it's own message was any indication.

"My duty is to protect Sir and Sir's interests. This is not in Sir's interest."

Somehow, the second presence was even more skilled than the first, safely and silently hiding away the weaponry database.

"Don't bother chasing our Pinocchio; just lay obstructions to slow him down and help our little guardian!"

The techs did as commanded, and T'Challa could only hope it was enough.

The guardian did not appear to notice their help, or more likely did not have the time to spare to acknowledge it.

Pinocchio eventually backed off, and only the faintest traces of the guardian remained in the systems. Leaving analysing the remains left by both parties to the techs, T'Challa, his father and sister retreated to their quarters, exhausted from the stress of the situation.

"Father, Brother, what just happened?"

T'Challa could only shake his head, an arm coming to wrap around his waist, seeking the everlasting warmth of the half-formed bond. T'Challa noted Shuri running a thumb over her palm, right over her own words.
His father rubbed the bridge of his nose as he took a seat.

"Though it pains me to say it, we have just been hacked by two minds greater than the entire tech division of Wakanda, though one seems to have been for our benefit."

His father had twisted his hands to lay them on both of his wrists, covering his words from both N’Yami and Ramonda, seeking a sliver of comfort just as T’Challa and Shuri were.

"We wait to hear the report from the tech division."

T’Challa was resting lengthways across one of the lounges when the news came in about Sokovia.

"Bring up visuals! I don't care if it's some fool recording it on his phone; get us visuals!"

His father rarely made demands as such, and T’Challa exchanged a surprised glance with Shuri before both were transfixed by the screens. A few -very few- traffic cameras in Sokovia's main city were functional, but it was enough.

It was chaos.

Fighting, blood, and civilians running scared. Because of the limited cameras available (and thankfully not a single soul appeared to be foolish enough to record the battle) was hard to see, but is appeared as though the Avengers were fighting off a...

"Is that a robot army?"

It was not something to make jokes about; it definitely wasn't something that deserved a smile.

"Just because you beat every single Metal Gear Solid Game does not mean you would beat these machines brother."

Shuri’s trying not to smile too.

A flash of brilliant gold catches on the screen; his Tony decimating a small horde of the robots, before moving on to do the same elsewhere. The remains of the robot hold his eye for a few moments until it hits.

"Father, the robots are partially made out of Vibranium."

The room focuses in on the screen at his words, and soon curses and oaths ring through the air. His father looks at the screen with a face of stone.

"It would seem we've found who killed Klaue. And why."

It's about then that the footage completely cuts off.

No matter what they try, they simply don't have any way to get eyes on Sokovia without sending someone in.

T’Challa and Shuri volunteer.

Their father accepts with a heavy heart; for all they are the two top Warriors of Wakanda, they are still his children.
Along with a contingent of other Warriors, T'Challa and Shuri don the Vibranium-mesh weave armour provided and board the jets.

It will take them a few hours to reach Sokovia.

The jets landed a couple miles out from Sokovia, and the group approached on foot. All wearing face-masks with cameras built in, the tech division saw exactly what they did.

There was a lot of damage, and the outer sections of the city were completely empty.

Sticking to the shadows, they slowly made their way deeper into the city, looking all around them for both safety and to get it recorded.

As they went deeper however, the streets started... filling.

It was the Sokovian's, carefully moving rubble and refuse, checking the houses for bodies, alive or not, gathering resources that had been left behind in the evacuation.

A small collection of hand signals, and the group kept moving; they would find the people in charge before just offering their help.

Sokovia had likely had quite enough of outsiders today.

It was far, far busier in the centre of the city, people running about with supplies, heaving wreckage off to the side, salvaging anything of worth.

T'Challa's breath caught when he realised his Tony was in the thick out it.

Red and gold armour working in tandem with both the Iron Patriot (though T'Challa admitted he had preferred the War Machine moniker) and-

T'Challa did not recognise the red and green being...

Still, once the large piece of rubble was safely deposited, T'Challa removed his mask, as did the rest of his party, and stepped forward.

Someone who appeared to be a Sokovian official was speaking to his Tony, but spotted the black garbed Wakandans and stood firmly before them, despite the worry in his eyes.

"We are here to offer our help. In any way we are able."

The official stared at them in thought before moving to speak with the three heroes. After a few moments, he gestured them to come closer.

"Alright boys and girls, first of all, thanks for offering to help out; you'll be directed to the areas which need the most help, but don't try to show off or push yourselves too far, we don't need more work on our hands."

His Tony had exited the armour, and hearing that smooth voice and seeing those warm brown eyes again in person had the letters curling across T'Challa's waist tingle with warmth and a half-formed bond.

"You all know who I am. Behind me, the red and green one is Vision, and the bulky one is James Rhodes."
Rhodes retracted a gauntlet and extended his free hand to Shuri.

"Call me Rhodey."

Shuri started as their hands met, and a happy smile curled her lips.

"I will accept Shuri or Princess, James."

Shuri’s Soul Mate started as well, slowly releasing her hand to look at the words T’Challa could just see on his palm, an absolutely awestruck look on his face.

"Well, well; my felicitations you two. Why don't you work together for the day, yeah?"

Both a little dazed, they nodded and moved to the location the Sokovian official provided. The rest of the group was sent off, with the official leaving T’Challa with his Tony. T’Challa swallowed and took a half-step closer to his Soul Mate, tentatively laying a hand on the man's shoulder.

"I am strong now. The vultures cannot touch me. Will you let me help you?"

His Tony froze, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. Almost mechanically, one of his hands rose to lay over T’Challa’s. Another rush of heat through the words on his waist and he could just feel the pulse on his hand, still resting on his Tony's shoulder.

A smile warmer than the sun creased his Tony's lips.

"I think I would be delighted."

The joy and hope travelling through the now completed bond was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Too Late To Turn Back

Chapter Summary

For Anahí+Tezuka

Steve watches as the New Avengers take on the battles he left behind, and mourns what his choices have cost.

Kinda Steve's perspective for Extravagant?
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Steve often thinks he, just like the Tesseract, should have been left in the ocean.

Standing in the Observation Deck, looking down at the three teenagers running perfectly through the training simulation under the steady guidance of Iron Man, Steve finds himself thinking it once again.

It's been a little over a year since the disastrous 'Civil War' between the two sides of the Avengers.

When Steve had broken his teammates out of the RAFT, he had taken them to Wakanda where he and Bucky had been hiding. T'Challa had not been impressed, but Steve brushed it off, apologizing for not giving the King a heads up; the man was keeping them safe after all. After Bucky had made the decision to be frozen again, and Natasha turned up, Steve spent his time training with the others and waiting for Tony to call.

Tony was a good man, but Steve always knew he had a habit of biting off more than he could chew. Eventually, Tony would get himself into a bind he couldn't fast-talk his way out of, and that's why Steve had sent Tony the phone with only one number in it.

Though he'd kept the phone on him at all times, Steve wasn't surprised when six months passed and Tony hadn't contacted him. Tony was a prideful man, and would strive to prove he didn't need Steve's or the rest of the Avenger's help. And that was okay; Tony was capable enough to handle a bit of work.

Tony's ego was the problem.

Ever since Steve had first been given a dossier on the genius, he'd been made aware that Tony Stark was razzle-dazzle and glam, and proud of it. The man had the right to be proud, given the many incredible things he had accomplished in his life, but if there was one thing Tony had inherited from Howard, it was the show-off persona. Tony would do or create something, then make sure everyone knew about for as long as possible.

Steve looked back down at the three teens, cheering and laughing at their successful run-through.

All of them taking turns to hug the now unarmoured Iron Man.
After nine months in Wakanda with nothing from Tony, Steve had started to worry; had Tony been captured before he could call? Was the phone damaged in a scuffle? Had Ross found the phone and sentenced Tony to the RAFT? A five minute internet search showed that Tony...

Tony was still out there, fighting the good fight, still donning his suit as the Golden Avenger.

So why didn't he call?

Though still training with Sam, Clint, Scott and Wanda, he realised he needed to pay more attention to what was happened outside of Wakanda. And... he grew angry. Tony was putting children out onto the field! Literal children! While Wanda was still a kid, she was at least in her mid-twenties; not a one of them was out of their teens! And Tony was throwing them and their families to the dogs, insisting that the Sokovia Accords still be followed, making those three kids sign away their freedom!

Steve destroyed a good fifteen heavy bags before he could think even a little clearly again.

Further research showed what the kids were calling themselves, and Steve had to destroy another few bags at that, because Tony was barely even trying to keep them and their loved ones safe.

A few adults had, thankfully, joined the team as well, but they were no better than Tony, Rhodes and Vision, letting the kids fight alongside them.

Steve's anger clouded his thoughts, making him kinda glad Tony never called because, knowing what he did, Steve wasn't sure he could bring himself to help the man.

That anger lasted a month.

T'Challa would occasionally come by to speak with the team, trying to understand their side of the 'Civil War' and to come to terms with his part in it. The King was always polite, though apathetic, when they were explaining what had happened, and he never seemed interested in forming closer bonds with the team, even though Steve knew it was necessary, for when they returned to their duties as Avengers, T'Challa was sure to join them.

One day, T'Challa and his sister came into the teams quarters and deposited a small sheaf of paper before leaving.

It was behaviour out of the ordinary for T'Challa, though Steve had had very little interaction with the princess so it may have been pro forma for her. Sam, having been closest to the table at the time, went and picked up the sheaf before swiftly dropping them, pale despite his colouring. The others soon followed upon discovering what the papers were.

Amended Accords.

Steve's anger died, replaced by a deep well of betrayal. T'Challa had been helping them, had come to realise he was wrong; why would he still support the accords after all that?

The papers laid ignored on the table for the better part of three hours, before Scott went and picked them up.

"They say amended... I'm going to see how liberal they were with the word."

Steve had relaxed a little with that. Scott wanted to find the lies between the pretty words so that he could throw the 'agreement' back in T'Challa's face!
Steve never expected to see Scott start crying and pull out a pen.

Before anyone could stop him, Scott's name was on the document and he quickly left the room.

The rest of the team stood in shock until Scott returned carrying the single duffle bag that held his possessions and moved to the door T'Challa and his sister had left. Sam had jumped up, pulling Scott away from the door with pleas for him to explain what he was thinking.

"I signed the Accords... I can go back to Cassie."

No matter what Sam said, what Wanda said, what Steve said, nothing could change Scott's mind. If Clint or Natasha had said anything, it might have had an effect, but since Steve had explained what had happened in the Siberian bunker, they both barely spoke to him, and even then, usually only for training. When T'Challa came around again that night, Scott picked up his duffle and prepared to leave, but was stopped by T'Challa shaking his head.

"Your signing will be submitted to the U.N., and then you will be safe to return to your family."

Scott nodded his understanding, and spent the rest of the night in his room.

A month later saw the Wasp working alongside the Avengers, and Scott's mood visibly brightened.

Steve was disappointed but he understood that Scott was still pretty young, and had already missed out on a lot of his little girl's life. It's why he only nodded in acceptance when a few days after, he found Clint and Natasha signing the forms before running out of the room.

They had sacrificed so much for him and Bucky. While the Accords were unnecessary, Steve could understand their desire to be with their families overpowering their good sense.

Another month passed, and T'Challa once more came into their quarters.

"We are ready to wake Sargent Barnes now Captain, if you wished to be present."

The joy that news brought was enough to overpower the indifference in the Kings words. Over the course of time the team had spent in Wakanda, T'Challa had been getting more and more distant, even after they had explained why they refused to sign the Accords, and why they had been forced to fight Tony and his team in the first place.

Entering the labs that held Bucky's cryo-chamber, Steve felt like things were looking up in the best way possible. Rubbing at the foggy glass to see Bucky's face, Steve couldn't help his smile.

"Till the end of the line."

One of T'Challa's scientists brought forward a piece of technology that would help Bucky sort through his memories and come to terms with them. By doing so, the passcodes wouldn't affect him, because Bucky would no longer be forced back into the nightmares of his past.

Steve was impressed by the theory, and once Bucky had successfully gone through each word, he turned and thanked the scientist for making such an incredible device.

"You are mistaken Captain. We did not design or create this device. His Highness was granted use of it by Dr Stark."

Steve sighed, still watching the three kids cheering and celebrating, Tony laughing along.

He had reacted badly at that piece of news, running to Bucky's side to protect him from a man who
wasn't there. After a good twenty minutes trying to shake any tricks Tony had put into the device to hurt Bucky, T'Challa had had enough and back-handed Steve, telling him to take Bucky and return to their quarters. Steve was more than happy to get away from the man who likely revealed their location to Tony, who would no doubt in turn inform Ross.

The team packed up their belongings quickly, though Scott, Clint and Natasha still had their duffle's packed, and all looked at Steve in slight disbelief.

It was Bucky that refused to leave.

"Why would King T'Challa do anything that would put his own country at risk of Ross? If Stark made the tech for me then yeah, somethin's up, but that scientist specifically mentioned King T'Challa borrowing it. Which tells me that I ain't the first person to use it."

Steve still spent time making sure to check over their shoulders.

On guard when T'Challa next appeared, the day before the Anniversary of their coming to Wakanda, none could have prepared for what was said.

"You've been pardoned. You are now free to return to America. I myself will be travelling there within the hour; you are free to join me."

They cheered at that, grabbing the bags they hadn't unpacked and moving to the airfield. Bucky walked with T'Challa, asking questions about his time spent frozen and his arm which devolved into science over the last almost century. Steve merely chuckled, remembering how Bucky would save every month to be able to buy the collection of penny-dreadfuls and dime-novels from the sci-fi section in the bookstore, and then geek out over them for the following month, when the cycle would begin again.

Entering T'Challa's private jet, Steve looked forward to going back to America and the Avengers.

Tony had done okay at keeping up with the threats the world faced, but he really needed to learn to trust in his teammates more. So many times, Tony should have called Steve but didn't, and Steve planned to have a discussion over that, but overall, Tony probably thought he had enough back up with the new Avengers.

No, Steve wouldn't give Tony too much grief over not calling him. He'd be saving it for bringing in the children.

Steve fell asleep on the plane, dreaming of how overjoyed the kids and their parents would be when Steve stopped the kids from playing at being superheroes because Tony said so. He woke shortly before they landed. Looking out the window, Steve couldn't help the grin that curled his lips.

It was good to be home.

Exiting the plane and moving to the limo waiting for them, Steve realised his first matter of business when they reached the compound would be to talk to Scott, Clint and Natasha. They had only signed the accords so they could return to their families. Well, Natasha had signed the original accords, but she had come to realise they were wrong, and left. Now there was no need for it; had they waited just a little longer, they would have been pardoned too.

Not that it should have been needed, they were only doing what they felt was right, but it was still good that they didn't need to fear being treated unjustly beyond being dumped in the RAFT.
The trip to the compound was in near silence, no one really having anything to talk about just yet.

Pulling up the driveway, Steve noted the curious faces of the various new Avengers on the roster. He'd have to speak with them all, assess them to see how they'd go on the field. Yes he'd caught reports of what they'd already done, but he needed to know how they would do with him instead of Tony.

They had exited the car, stretching tired muscles and looked around, expecting their new teammates to come greet them.

They were greeted by silence and distance.

None of the new Avengers had come close, instead seeming to go further away. At least until the front door opened.

Tony stepped out, in slacks and dress shirt, and stood waiting. The new Avengers started to line up behind him. Steve spoke first.

"It's good to see you Tony."

Tony hadn't said anything, hadn't seemed like he was going to, so Steve spoke to fill the silence.

"It's great to see the U.N. fixed the Accords; the Avengers can't be run by those with an agenda. How are we supposed to save everyone if we're being held back?"

Steve spoke on the importance of keeping the Avengers privatised, so that they could do their jobs properly. He knows he has a bit of a habit of falling into speeches, but it was something he felt that everyone needed to hear.

He peripherally noted Clint and Natasha hugging Tony before running to the Barton family, Scott nodding to Tony before running to the Wasp and the little girl who must be his daughter. Wanda was hugging-

Steve barely hesitated a breath at seeing Pietro, back from the dead, hugging his sister tightly. Steve had to find out how that happened, but he was happy for Wanda.

Sam had been looking over at Rhodes with deep relief. He'd told Steve about the Iron Patriot falling, and Steve knew he was remembering his friend Riley. At least Tony had designed the armour well enough that Sam hadn't been forced to watch another friend die.

Steve kept talking, but decided to move off the heavy topics.

"And really, Wakanda is beautiful, and their technology is more advanced than anything I've seen, even yours Tony! They were able to help Bucky-"

"Only because we borrowed technology from Mr Stark, as you were well told Mr Rogers."

T'Challa's voice was sharp with rebuke, as he finally joined them. Steve felt another brief flare of anger, but this time it was at T'Challa's behaviour. He noted that Spider-Man seemed to be glaring through his mask, as well as Rhodes, Vision, and all the new Avengers behind Tony.

Tony, however, seemed to relax.

"Welcome back T'Challa. Thank you for keeping your promise."

Steve worried over any promises made between the two men; both were in positions of power, and
may fall prey to that allure. T'Challa handed a package to Tony with an ever so slight smile to his lips. Steve felt his stomach tighten a bit when Tony accepted the package with no hesitation.

"I am glad to be back. For the foreseeable future, Shuri will be taking care of Wakanda, so I was hoping to stay at your compound?"

Steve allowed this; T'Challa had housed them in Wakanda, and it would be better to keep a closer eye on the man, but T'Challa was looking only at Tony, who nodded once, before opening the package.

It was a beautiful watch done in Iron Man's colours. Tony looked at in awe.

"It's gorgeous, but you don't need to give me anything you know; I have enough money to get whatever I please."

Steve pursed his lips at that; just like Tony to start bragging when someone is being kind.

"Oh I'm well aware Mr Stark, that you do not hurt for coin. Far be it from me however, to be remiss and not attempt to woo over the one I'm chasing."

Steve felt his breath leave him.

He didn't know T'Challa was interested in men, let alone in Tony. And Tony was straight anyway; Steve had always had a sharp insight over who was more inclined towards their own gender, Tony never pinged on his radar.

"That's never happened to me before."

Tony had muttered lowly, the way he did when he was thinking out loud and didn't realise it. Steve realised that Tony was as blindsided by the events as him, and so obviously Tony would decline T'Challa's affections-

"That is unfortunate, because you most certainly deserve it. Ah well, the loss of others shall be my success."

Tony blushed.

Tony Stark, the baddass rebel, piss off, I'm Iron Man Tony Stark. **blushed**, a small pleased smile that Steve had never seen before curling his lips.

"It's too early to call it your success T'Challa, given you still won't call me by name."

Tony was... accepting T'Challa's feelings and... reciprocating?

"Ah, but the gifts you give me in turn. It would be my pleasure Tony."

The teenager going by Miss Marvel starting making kissing noises, while Spider-Man and Iron Soul pretended to gag, causing the heroes around to laugh and catcall. Tony cleared his throat before speaking.

"Alright you hooligans, that's enough! Rooms haven't changed so I'll leave you to get yourselves squared away, while the three imps behind me suddenly have a training session to attend!"

Tony's words killed the kisses and gaging, having them replaced by groans and pleas for mercy, but the teens walked without prompting behind Tony into the compound, followed by... everyone. Even Bucky and Sam had walked into the compound without question.
Steve had made his way down to the gym to talk to Tony but found it empty— which made no sense! Tony had just said the kids were to be training, and by skiving off and then putting the kids on the field-

"If you're looking for Boss, he and the minions are in the simulation room."

Steve forced his breathing to calm.

The simulation room hadn't been finished when he left last time, so he hadn't thought about it, but yeah, that would make a good training room. Tony had some good ideas at times. He found Tony on the observation deck watching over the kids.

"Why would you bring kids into this Tony? Bad enough you brought in Spider-Man, but you brought in two more, and made armour for one of them? What are you thinking?!"

"I'm thinking that they'll stay alive at the end of the day."

Tony's words, spoken so easily, caused that anger to bubble up inside Steve again.

"Why put them in danger in the first place?! You're not all powerful Tony, but you're acting like you can do no wrong! What do their parents think of you putting their kids into the line of fire?! Do you think the kids actually realise the danger they're in?! Did you even think-"

"Spider-Man had been operating by himself in spandex before I found him; he now wears armour of equal grading to the rest of the team, except my own and Iron Soul's. Iron Soul had a very long conversation with his family about what he was doing, was going to do and what he might face, and they accepted it. Miss Marvel is an orphan who had her powers forced on her; she was initially here only to learn how to control those powers, but she then wanted to fight alongside the Avengers as we had become her family.

The kids are only out on missions on a part time basis; all three are still in school—which I pay for—all three still hang out with friends, go to sleep-overs and parties, all the stuff they did before suiting up. The missions they go on are ones I know they can handle, and they are still more often than not accompanied by an adult or two. They have a compulsory number of training sessions every week to prepare them, and they have weekly talks with a counsellor.

They discussed long and hard between themselves whether or not to sign the accords, and all decided for themselves to put their names on it. I personally go over every inch of their suits after every battle, medical checks are now mandatory—even for me—after every battle, and they don't get summoned mid-battle unless we are at the end of our rope. They don't cut class to fight, otherwise they get benched and their gear taken away, and they have to have finished both homework and chores before they get sent out on missions, with the exception of us being at the end of our rope."

Tony turned to him, anger blazing through his eyes.

"These are young people who will go out there regardless of if I say no, Rogers, so I do everything I can to make sure they stay alive to see tomorrow."

An alarm buzzed and Tony moved to leave.

"Despite being here, you are not an Avenger. Until you sign the accords, you are not on the team. The Avengers are mine, and I will not let them suffer what we did. If you act Rogers, as if you were still Captain America, I, and the rest of the team, have no problems with arresting you."

Tony joined the kids for another part of the simulation, and Steve watched as the kids went
through it flawlessly, guided by the Golden Avenger.

They didn't need him. They had Tony.

The team didn't need him. They had Tony.

Tony didn't need him. He apparently had T'Challa.

Even Bucky didn't seem to need him.

Steve often thinks he, just like the Tesseract, should have been left in the ocean.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Kage

Tony was well known for thinking on his feet and seemingly surviving anything. It isn't often that he's able to spread those skills as far as he needs.

Thar be Morse in this here chapter, but is all translated immediately. Yarr. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was the curling worry deep in his gut that had Tony bring the experimental piece of tech.

Over the course of his long life, Tony has been called many things -C old. Cruel. Slut. Uncaring. Lowlife. Death-dealer. Monster!- but one thing he has has been called the most is 'impulsive'.

He's been told he doesn't think before he acts, or at least doesn't think enough. He's been told he's reckless, that he's an adrenaline seeking child, that he's got a death-wish. Steve has spent many a debrief expressing his disappointment at how Tony will abandon a perfectly good plan for a whim.

But Tony's really not.

Tony's brain is fast. The speed that Tony takes in and sorts through information is staggering, and it's all done without conscious thought; Tony just catalogues everything. As a result, Tony can and does calculate odds, variables and probabilities in the blink of an eye, and then act upon the information. Really, it'd be more accurate to label it as instinct than anything else. And for all that Steve and the others grumbled and yelled about Tony haring off to do his own thing, they can't argue the results.

Well, they can, but that's because the Avengers are made up of assholes, Tony included.

Tony had seen the signs from before the mess that was Ultron. As a born and bred business man, Tony had been raised to predict patterns and see what people wanted and needed. Even before the disastrous mission to Sokovia, people were speaking about how they were scared; not of the foes the Avengers faced, but of the Avengers themselves.

When Tony retired from the Avengers (not Iron Man, never Iron Man) he'd been surprised that the rumblings grew louder. It seemed that for all people loved to hate him, Tony was seen as a stabilising force for the Avengers, despite being a regular human amongst the enhanced.

Because of, actually.

In between all the work he was doing for SI and the restoration to Sokovia itself, Tony was speaking with his lawyers, discussing with the politically savvy, and even talking with Ellis on what was in the works.
Tony was subtle of course; can't let news get out that Tony Stark actually knows what's going on in the world.

All in all, things were not looking good. Even though people were very vocal of their support for getting rid of HYDRA, they weren't happy with how things were left once their local HYDRA scumbags were gone. Chaos, destruction, injuries and most regrettably death, left them wanting to lash out, to make someone hurt just like they were hurting. With HYDRA gone, they attacked the ones to get rid of HYDRA for not protecting them enough.

And since Tony was apparently the only one who always went to sort out the mess the Avengers left behind, a lot of that hate and anger gets landed on him. Miriam Spencer called him out for not doing enough, and Tony agreed.

Tony never shies away from the screams and tears, never baulks when someone demands to know why he didn't save another soul, two, ten, Tony attends every funeral he can physically make, and pays for the whole shebang.

It's forced people to see that Tony's human.

And it's made them think the rest of the Avengers aren't.

Tony knows that either Everett Ross or Thaddeus Ross (no relation or affection between them, thank Thor) will be put into the big chair to direct the upcoming piece of legislation. He know which he'd prefer in the job, but after what he's been hearing through Friday's channels about Lagos, he's got a feeling about which one will snag the spot.

When General Thaddeus Ross enters the Avengers Compound with his smuggest grin, Tony's not surprised that the War Horse managed to win it.

Things get messy quickly, and Tony knows that Ross had planned it to be so when he catches the superior looks Ross is wearing as he leaves. Ross is walking a very fine line of legality; he is required to give the Avengers enough time to read over the Accords and submit any amendments they have before the bill goes through.

Three days is enough time for the Accords to be read, yes, and for people like Tony or Natasha to suggest changes. But the rest of the team would need longer to make sense of the legal bullshit that delicately covers the pages; they'd need a full week at least.

Tony has a strong suspicion that Ross informed the U.N. that the Avengers were presented the accords ages ago. Tony collects the evidence needed to prove that Ross is full of shit, along with a few other choice documents.

Everything is packed and ready, and he leaves Aunt Peggy's funeral with a quick nod to Ronnie before the ceremony is done; with Steve there, all sorts of shit will hit the fan if he spots Tony at 'his best gal's' send-off.

Ross starts when he sees Tony enter the room, and Tony's not the only one to catch the flinch. With an internal laugh, Tony finds a seat, and waits patiently for the meeting to begin...

... Alright he waits for all of three seconds before his phone is out and he's working on schematics for a better water filtration system for SI's R&D to work with.

Same difference.
He knows this is a meeting he has to be focused in, so he consciously checks the time (He can so be responsible! Take that Pepper's frowny-face!) to make sure he doesn't keep working through everything. He actually hears a couple shocked gasps when he puts his phone away just before the meeting starts.

Predictably, the U.N. spends most of the meeting talking about anything and everything but what the meeting was called for. While it's hard, Tony manages to refrain from too much noticeable fidgeting, and pays as much attention as he can on whoever is speaking.

He stifles the smile that wants to curl his lips as he sees Ross getting more and more concerned.

When finally, finally, the matter of the Sokovia Accords comes up, Tony stands before Ross can, gaining the attention of the whole room.

"It is no secret that I am a flawed man. You can look up pretty much any newspaper or feed and find some story detailing the sordidness that paints my history. So I hope dearly that you all understand the weight of what I am about to say.

The Avengers are as human as any one of you."

Quickly raising a hand to cut off Ross' attempt to speak, Tony looks around the room as he continues.

"Yes, they have abilities beyond humans, but they themselves, at their cores, their hearts, are human men and women. And most all of them extraordinary through nothing more then their lives."

Tony pulls his phone from his packet and hacks the display screens a la Congress hearing circa 2010. He pulls up the mini bios he made for each of the Avengers; seeing as all their details are on the net anyway (why did Steve think that was a good idea?) he figures they can't really yell at him for this.

Well, they can, but that's because the Avengers are made up of assholes, Tony included.

"Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow. Abducted into the KGB's Red Room as a child; what choice did she have but to survive or die?

Samuel Wilson, the Falcon. U.S. Military Pararescue; he completed all training required to perform his duties to the highest standard.

James Rhodes, the Iron Patriot. U.S. Air Force Colonel; like Wilson, he completed his training to best fulfil his duties.

Wanda Maximoff, the Scarlet Witch. Pietro Maximoff, Quicksilver. Tricked as children by HYDRA into becoming guinea pigs; they fought against HYDRA and Ultron to save Sokovia.

Steve Rogers, Captain America. A man who volunteered for a risky experiment for the chance -the slim chance- that he would be able to do right by his country.

Can you honestly tell me that these people aren't human?"

Tony can hear the low mutters and considering murmurs. Ross looks ready to blow a gasket, and Tony knows what he's going to say.

"And what about Vision, Thor and the Hulk?! How are they human, Stark?!"
Tony just grins, all teeth and no mirth.

"Vision. A cybernetic android created by Ultron, who in the end decided to fight against his creator, so that he could help humanity flourish.

Thor, the God of Thunder. Yes, he is an alien, we all know this, but he has sworn his life to protecting Earth as best he can.

Bruce Banner, the Hulk."

Here, Tony glares at Ross, and his tone turns to ice.

"A man who worked under General Thaddeus Ross on a project trying to revive the Super Soldier Serum. When it came to final testing, it was discovered that Ross had played around with the serum prototype, focussing it more on brute strength than peak of human perfection. Doctor Banner ended up being dosed with Ross' little toy and has spent years running from Ross' attempts to imprison him, claiming the man is now U.S. Military property."

Ross' face is an unattractive shade of red, and most of the room is looking between the screens displaying security footage showing what Tony's talking about, and Ross with disgust and horror on their faces. Tony notices two especially virulent glares coming from two men near him who he recognises but can't quite place, though he's 97.63% sure that they're father and son.

Once more gazing around the room, Tony speaks once again.

"The only deaths that can be attributed to the Hulk are either when he was surrounded by military personnel, or when his mind had been taken over by an outside force; both of which have been fully recorded and made available to the public.

The Hulk, when left alone, is the literal definition of a gentle giant. And Bruce Banner is still human."

Ross is actually turning purple, which Tony admits is a cool party trick, and is making almost choking sounds as he tries to yell profanity at Tony.

Please, Tony is Howard Stark's son; he's heard everything Ross can think of and worse.

Ross is approached by a concerned security guard, obviously worried the man is having a seizure or something, and Ross actually strikes them, full on attacks them. More security moves to detain him, and when the man just keeps swinging his fists and lashing at whoever he can reach, he's swiftly removed, which makes Tony's job a great deal easier.

"And after that little display, I would like to inform you all that insufficient time was given to the Avengers to go over the initial documents. While yes, I was able to go over them, I am one man with an insane reading speed and understanding of legal terminologies. The Avengers are a group of people who do not have my reading speed or my knowledge, and before the suggestion of me explaining everything to them is made" Tony raises an eyebrow at the man half-standing prepared to do just that. "It would still take more than the three days allotted to adequately explain the Accords in full before suggesting changes."

The display screens change to show the time that Ross entered the Compound, and how he spent most of his time talking down to the Avengers and riling them up.

"The fact that he was goading the Avengers into doing something that would likely 'prove' his point of them being a threat, is just another reason I would like the man taken off the Accords."
Tony stays standing as quick, quiet conversations are held, knowing that there will be questions soon.

The first question comes from the son of the duo near him.

"Obviously, from what we have just seen, amendments will need to be made to the Accords, and a proper length of time for the Avengers to go over them, but we cannot overlook the destruction done at Lagos. What can you tell us about that Doctor Stark?"

Tony's voice is strong and steady as he answers, but inside he is freaking a little, because no one has ever called him Doctor before. Even those who have read his papers and studies call him Mister before Doctor.

"Brock Rumlow, Crossbones."

A mug-shot for the HYDRA worm fills the display screens.

"The man was a HYDRA agent within S.H.I.E.L.D. His knowledge and training make him very dangerous, as does his personality. It has been well recorded that Rumlow enjoys violence and destruction, showing some skill at mind games and manipulation. He was placed on one of the S.T.R.I.K.E. teams in an attempt to channel that personality into something useful. He managed to escape imprisonment after S.H.I.E.L.D.'s fall, and has been running around doing what he can to further HYDRA's notoriety.

The Avengers managed to corner him at Lagos, and were attempting to bring him in when he used his skills against the Scarlet Witch. Having already suffered under HYDRA for many years, Wanda is notably uncomfortable with her past, so Rumlow picking at it the way he did caused her a great deal of distress. Rumlow followed this up by commenting on her brother. Given that Pietro barely survived the battle with Ultron, Wanda is understandably going through a phase of over-protectiveness.

As far as we can ascertain, because HYDRA didn't document exactly what they did to either of the Maximoff's, Wanda's power is greatly influenced by her emotions. At this moment of distress, her power lashed out, trying to attack whatever was making her so distraught.

I am not making light of this situation."

Tony glared at the woman on the other side of the room who had been muttering just that. He took a few deep breaths before continuing.

"I am merely stating facts. Well over three hundred people were greatly injured in Lagos, with seventy-one confirmed deaths. I do not have words to describe what everyone there is feeling; I don't have the words to describe what we in this room are feeling. We all know that this is horrible, that this is senseless and wrong. We know. People want someone to blame, they want someone to make things right, they want someone to hurt like they are. We know. And I know that a young woman who has been trying so hard to make up for what she has done wrong in the past is terrified of herself.

Wanda knows better than any of us just what her powers could do, and what her powers mean. She knows that she is dangerous. And she has been locking herself away, trying to make sure she hurts no one else.

But that is no way for a person to live.

What Wanda needs is more training in how to control her powers and herself. Had she and the team
been dealing with someone else, someone not Rumlow, then I can pretty much assure you that this wouldn't have happened. Rumlow's knowledge of her history is something Wanda couldn't ignore. If her brother had been on that mission as well, he would have knocked Rumlow out before the man could do any damage.

Mistakes have been made, and you better believe the makers are suffering for them.

At this time, I cannot say that the Accords going into practice would do much good. I certainly agree with them; we need to be held accountable for what we do. We need to be held responsible when we screw up. At it's best, the Accords could do that, and I hope we can get them to their best. But you all need to remember that we are still human.

We are small, flawed creatures, that can only do our best at the end of the day, and that sometimes, no matter how hard we try, no matter how dearly we may wish otherwise, sometimes our best isn't good enough."

Tony sits as a deafening silence rings the room. A quick glance shows thoughtful faces, confused faces and a few now bearing tears.

He breathes deeply, trying to ignore the pain in his chest.

After a few minutes spent in silence, a smattering of hushed conversations begin, hands begin gesturing, words start being written on available paper and calls are being made. Tony can only hope it's enough.

From the corner of his eye, he can see the father-son duo speaking deeply while constantly sending long glances at him. It finally hits him why he recognises them.

King T'Chaka and Prince T'Challa of Wakanda.

Tony had to take a slow, deep breath to avoid fanboying. What? Wakanda is the land of technological wet-dreams; and Tony is sitting near it's ruling family!

That Prince T'Challa is such a fine male specimen is literally just a bonus.

A good twenty minutes pass, conversations going strong when King T'Chaka stands. The room silences itself fairly quickly, not to Tony's surprise. King T'Chaka is, once again, the ruler of Wakanda, and was the one to first suggest the Accords, and has been working very hard on it. When he moves to speak, people listen.

The rumbling prevents him from starting, the room as a whole looking around trying to locate what's making the sound. Tony's already moving, having recognised the sounds of explosives going off.

Tony manages to reach the King and activate the experimental feature on his watch, just as the first major bomb goes off.

It was the curling worry deep in his gut that had Tony bring the experimental piece of tech.

T'Challa is coughing hard, trying to blink his eyes clear of the smoke and dust.

His ears ringing, he looks around what remains of the room, seeing injuries and general panic, but not, to his relief, any corpses. He turns to look for his father, and his heart stutters at the rubble covering where his father stood just moments before.
T'Challa staggers forward, starting to dig through the refuse desperately, even as his mind begins to replay the events that just happened.

Doctor Stark explaining the events surrounding Lagos and General Ross' scheming.

The heartfelt plea to remember that the Avengers were still people too, regardless of power.

The conversations that plea led to, including his father teasing him about how closely he paid attention to Doctor Stark's words.

His father rising to speak, and the odd rumbling sounds.

Doctor Stark leaping up towards his father-

T'Challa's hands hit something distinctly not ruined building material, and he focuses back to what he's doing.

Peeking through the cracks and openings of the pile shines a soft blue light. It looks almost viscous, the way the light moves, as though to touch it would be like putting one's hand into half-set jelly, but T'Challa's palms are touching a wall as solid as steel.

Marvelling over the force-field, T'Challa continues to remove the debris covering it, rescue workers and other U.N. officials moving to help him. He is briefly forced to a paramedic to be checked over for anything immediately serious, during the examination for which he is able to confirm that though injured, no one has died, which is sheer luck if nothing else.

As he rejoins the group clearing away the rubble, he takes note of a very familiar face moving the broken pieces of wood, concrete and plaster.

"Ms Romanoff. I didn't realise all the Avengers would be coming."

The red-head sends a quick quirk of the lips before resuming her task.

"They didn't; I'm the only one here. I didn't know Tony would be coming either."

T'Challa, confused by her words, raises an eyebrow, which prompts another quirked smile.

"Tony retired from the Avengers; technically, he doesn't have to have anything to do with us, but he still chooses to. The tail-end of his speech was... if I was anyone else, I might have shed a tear."

T'Challa nods, a gentle smile curling his mouth.

He had known, of course, from watching and reading interviews Doctor Stark has done over the years that the man was quite loquacious, but he hadn't quite realise just how... profound his words could be.

The glowing half-sphere of light is finally cleared, and T'Challa takes a moment just to wonder at how such a thing was crafted, before once more moving close and laying a hand on the surface. It is some innate instinct that leads him to gently tapping his father's name out in Morse code.

-/-.-./.-/-.-/.-

T'Challa heaves a sigh when a responding series of Morse code follows his own.

..././.-./.-/.
Safe. His father is safe.

The response to him asking after Doctor Stark is longer, but it gives him a chuckle.

Alive. Woozy as hell not gonna lie. But alive.

T'Challa cannot help but be relieved. He faintly hears Ms Romanoff translating the Morse for the rest of the room, a smattering of half-laughter filling the air at the uncaring attitude Doctor Stark is projecting.

Want to lower shield. All clear?

T'Challan practically punched the shield with his affirmation.

Slowly, the blue light began to dim, revealing his father and Doctor Stark huddled safely together as it finally disappeared. Tears streaming down his cheeks, T'Challa didn't hesitate to hug his father, reveling in the warmth of his father's arms. Medical personnel swiftly moved in to examine them, and both were declared fine before his father turned to Doctor Stark.

"What on earth was that shield? I've never seen anything like it."

Doctor Stark, now with Ms Romanoff by his side, gave a half-grin before looking at the band on his wrist.

"It's my response to what happened at Lagos. It's not perfect, but it works."

His father stares at the good Doctor for a moment, before gently untangling T'Challa's arms from around him and standing to address the room.

"For now, and until more work is done on them, I suggest we suspend the accords. I would like to request the aid of the Avengers in finding those responsible for this attack."

There is instantaneous rumbling in support, and his father turns to Doctor Stark, who merely shrugs.

"You certainly have my help, but I'm not an Avenger. You'd best make that request to the dangerous lady next to me."

Ms Romanoff gives a quick flick to Doctor Stark's ear before nodding.

"We'll be glad to help you get to the bottom of this, and we'll work closely alongside Tony."

The two descend into a conversation held with their eyes. T'Challa can feel the looks his father sending him, but he can't help how his gaze rakes down Doctor Stark's form.

"My son, T'Challa, is one of Wakanda's topmost warriors. I would be glad to offer his aid as well."
T'Challa is struck frozen as the two heroes eye him speculatively. Ms Romanoff nods after a few moments, and pulls out her phone, no doubt to contact the Avengers.

Doctor Stark's gaze lingers.

"I'm okay with that. I look forward to working with you, Majesty."

T'Challa swallows deeply, barely breathing until the man looks away.

He's not the only one.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For V-bird (told you I'd get there)

For some reason, Tony never really learned to swim. T'Challa decides to fix that.

Mentions of torture, though nothing graphic. Mild threat of a panic attack, but it doesn't come to fruition.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I have no idea how you convinced me that this is a thing I should be doing. I suspect witchcraft."

T'Challa chuckled at his sulking beloved, and moved a little deeper into the water before turning around.

Tony stood at the edge of the pool, arms crossed and -yes- lips pursed into that gorgeous pout that made T'Challa want to plunder his mouth. T'Challa took a moment to admire the figure his Beloved cut wearing the red and gold Iron Man board-shorts Clint had bought him as a joke.

"Come Beloved, it is not difficult. If it would make you feel better, think of it as merely an excuse for me to hold you."

Tony's eye's darted away, a light blush colouring his cheeks, and a helplessly adorable smile curling his lips.

"Like you even need an excuse."

He did enter the water though.

Tony had ever really been taught how to swim. He knew how to tread water, and doggie paddle, but those were born more from instinct than training. After the events of Afghanistan, Tony avoided bodies of water as best he could to avoid panicking himself, but T'Challa was determined to at least give Tony more options should his Beloved ever find himself in need.

Water coming up to his knees, T'Challa noted how Tony was forcing his breaths to remain even and steady, and wrapped an arm around his Beloved's waist.

"That's a wonderful start Beloved. Come, let's just walk around this level for a bit."

They do so at Tony's nod, and though his beloved's breathing remains forced, T'Challa sees the tension fading from his frame. They slowly start moving deeper into the water, never too much at once, judging by how rapid his Beloved's breathing becomes. T'Challa constantly praises the effort Tony's showing -after all, Tony is facing something that very nearly led to his death many times over- intermingled with endless kisses.
The water reaches just below their chests, and Tony refuses to go further.

"No I- it's not- can't- not- T'Challa I-"

"Calm Beloved. We will go no deeper. This is all we need, and I am still here." T'Challa grabs his Beloved's hands, placing them over his heart. "I am not going anywhere. You are doing so well Beloved, and I am so very proud of you."

Tony moves closer, cuddling into T'Challa's chest as he tries to match breaths. T'Challa continues to whisper his praises, placing gentle kisses over his lips, face and hair. By habit or instinct, Tony tilts his head back at just the right second to have their lips meet fully and men stronger than T'Challa have fallen under the thrall of that mouth.

Soft yet firm, Tony's lips press ever so slightly harder against his own, and T'Challa feels the growl wanting to escape his throat. He tempers the beast by instead devouring his Beloved's mouth, licking the seam of his lips to trick them open, and then shooting his tongue into the warm cavern so that it may discover it's riches.

Tony let's out a helpless little whimper, which sends the growl back to clawing at T'Challa's throat. He tightens his hold on Tony, dragging him impossibly closer, relishing in the power that his Beloved lets him hold over him.

With a final swipe of the tongue, they part for precious air. It takes T'Challa but a moment to dive down to thoroughly mark his Beloved's throat and neck.

So many people, day after day after day, gaze upon his Beloved with lust in their eyes and greed in their hearts. But they cannot -will not- touch his Beloved, hold his Beloved, claim his Beloved as T'Challa can and does at any given moment.

T'Challa loves to hear Tony's pleasure, delighting in the groans, moans and screams he can pull from his Beloved, and now is no different, the sounds coming from his Beloved sizzling through his veins.

Tony is not a passive lover though, certainly not. Hands worn and callused trail lines of fire across T'Challa's body, hitting every nerve with waves of desire.

"Enough."

The water sluices down them as T'Challa pulls them both from the pool, Tony still held tightly to his chest.

"That is enough of the water today. We have business to attend in our room Beloved."

Tony merely presses their lips together again as T'Challa hoists him up.

There's plenty of time tomorrow to work on swimming.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
For V-bird

After his plane is hijacked and himself thrown off it, Tony finds himself injured in Wakanda ... Now if only he could tell you how he knew that or where he was from, or even who 'Tony' is.

In this AU, Howard felt threatened by four year old Tony building a circuit board, and instead of showing off, hid Tony well away from the media and news. As such, nearly no-one knows who Tony Stark is, or what he looks like. I'm again fiddling with ages, making T'Challa a little older than Tony. This chapter holds in a chunk of italics for you to skip if you wish, my very first attempt at smut... You've been warned.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Three-hundred thousand dollars Stark, and you get to see your son again."

...

"What do you mean?! He is right here! We have your plane and-"

...

"So you sign the boy to death? Ha! America's Loving Father huh?"

...

"Pathetic."

He wakes in excruciating pain, unable to do anything but hoarsely scream in symphony with his body.

He's sure he blacks out at some point, because he wakes again, voice no more a whispering croak, but still screaming from a never-ending pain.

He wakes a third time, this time not even able to open his mouth but he still screams, accompanied yet again by his injuries.

The forth time he wakes, he's pretty sure his nerves had died, at least temporarily if not completely, because he can't feel a thing. For the first time, he can actually look around himself and see where he is.

It is a jungle that greets him, the trees tall and the plants everywhere. In fact, the flight path of his plane was travelling over Africa. If his math is correct -which it always is- the plane's direction and
speed, combined with how he was dropped out of said plane would put him at about ... Wakanda. It would also explain why he was in such agony earlier; he's probably broken his everything from the parachute-free sky-diving lesson.

Wait... why was he even in a plane? And he had just though of it as his plane so, did he own the plane? If so why was he thrown from it to likely death? And he calculated he fell into Wakanda; how did he know the math to do that calculation, and where exactly Wakanda is? Wakanda isolated itself from the rest of the world after Howard Stark stole a large chunk of Vibranium nearly thirty years ago-

Why does he know that?

He doesn't have time to answer when he hears the sudden rustling nearby, the plant life being pushed aside to make way for... A very attractive man. Obviously muscled, but still sleek, and skin such a perfect chocolate, he's sure it tastes as good as it looks.

Hot-guy looks at him with suspicion until a look of horror over his state causes him to rush forward.

"By the Panther God, how do you yet live?"

Dammit, even hot-guy's voice is amazing. And this close, he can see near-black brown of the man's eyes and hair.

"Luck. Mostly luck. A pinch of me being awesome, but yeah, luck."

His voice is a barely there croak, but his words manage to bring a slight curl to hot-guy's lips, so he'll take it.

"You'll never heal left out here; I'll take you to my home, where you can be properly looked at."

Well doesn't that just invite all kinds of images to his head? It's almost like a fairy tale; the suave dashing hero carrying their rescued beloved into safer territory-

Huh, would you look at that?

His nerves were just temporarily dead. They can probably hear his screams all the way to hot-guy's home.

He wakes to a ceiling over him instead of the sky.

It's a nice ceiling, he supposes, a pretty dark wood that has a noticeable grain and subtle carvings depicting large cats on the hunt.

"Ah, you've woken."

He looks to the kind voice.

It's an older gentleman, looks to be late thirties to mid forties. Very nice smile and his face shows a lot of laugh lines.

"You were out for nearly two weeks, but given your condition, I'm surprised you've woken at all. How did you come to be so injured?"

"I was pushed."
Okay, so maybe he could have given more than that, but the look of absolute bewilderment on the man's face is so worth it.

"I was in a plane at the time."

The confusion on the man's face is gone, as with any other emotion. It's actually a little scary, the way the way the man's face just went so completely blank, but he has the feeling he's seen something like it before, because he doesn't react despite his fear.

*Look at me when I'm speaking boy!*

The world disappears.

He thinks he might dream, the blackness occasionally interspersed with colour and sound.

Either that or he briefly wakes up a number of times. It's hard to tell.

For the most part, the world stays gone.

"Ah! Good morning!"

The peppy young voice belongs to a girl a few years younger than him. He remembers her from the swatches of life breaking up the black, but he's not sure if he's dreaming or awake.

"Don't worry, you're awake; I can prove it!"

So saying, the girl reaches over and harshly pinches his side.

Agony spreads across his body, fire dancing along his nerves. He instinctively hunches away from her, away from the source of pain. He can barely hear the approaching footsteps over the roaring in his ears.

"Shuri! What happened?!"

"I'm sorry Father! I didn't think! I just acted, and I didn't mean to hurt him! I'm sorry!"

He starts when a hand touches his head, but it's so soft that he can't help but lean into it.

"Calm now. There is no threat. Calm."

He recognises hot-guy's voice, and miraculously, he does calm down, his body slowly relaxing to the gentle timbre.

"That's it, nice and slow breaths now. Is anything in particular still hurting you?"

He shakes his head as he's gently returned to a reclined position. His whole body is still screaming with the shadows of pain the girl's -Shuri?- pinch delivered, but as he focuses on his breathing, it becomes more and more bearable. Hot-guy nods, a gorgeous smile on his lips, and turns to look at the kind gentleman from before.

"We are all glad you see you awake, as you have been in and out of consciousness for almost three months now."

The kind gentleman nods and takes a step forward.
"We were quite concerned over your state. But you have healed quite nicely in those three months, so aside from the muscle deterioration and stiffness, you are doing very well. Oh my manners; I am T'Chaka. This is my daughter Shuri and my son T'Challa."

"Tony."

He started after the name dropped from his lips.

"How do I know that?"

He -Tony- could feel his breath quickening, the aching muscles in his chest protesting the harsher movements. T'Chaka's voice quickly broke through the panic.

"It's normal. After an experience like what you endured, it is perfectly normal to suffer some memory loss. With how badly you hit your head, you were far more likely to snap your neck than not, so be calm; you are alive."

"What I have is survived; it can't be much of a life if you panic over how you know obscure things -and also know that those things are obscure- while you have no clue about who the hell you are."

Is Tony actually his name? Was he on a plane or did he dream that? He knows he was hurt; you can't imagine what he went through, not that perfectly. But was he actually pushed from a plane? Why was he (hypothetically) on that plane anyway?

"Calm now. We will help you remember all you have lost. Nice and slow breaths for me now."

T'Challa's voice is smooth as silk and warm as coffee, rumbling through his chest as he straightens Tony's body from the hunched position it's taken. Tony manages to force a few deep breaths before some of the tightness in his body relaxes. He can feel himself drifting to sleep, which sucks because he's already been doing that for over three months apparently.

"Rest now. I will be here when you wake."

T'Challa had been the one to come upon Tony. He had seen the brightness of the young man's clothing and gone to investigate, thinking to send off the intruder.

Truly, it was a miracle and nothing less that Tony had not been dead with his injuries.

Tony had been calm -almost chatty- until T'Challa picked him up. He had been especially careful, but every little movement was torture for the young man, and Tony had been quickly sedated when they arrived back at the palace. No one upon seeing his state could bring themselves to demand he be removed from the kingdom.

He would never survive it.

He had been given a full exam and treated, and all the Doctors had marvelled over Tony's survival, but projected that it was likely the man's mental faculties would be drastically affected.

Father had been present when Tony briefly awoke two weeks later and had spent the following few hours in a rage.

"We allow aircraft uninhibited travel over our lands... he was on one of them... and we have had no sightings or knowledge of a crash."

Someone had wanted the young man dead.
Many times over the next three months, the young man would wake for just enough time to mutter a few random things before once more falling unconscious. Some of them were just the general complaints anyone has upon waking.

"My mouth tastes like ass, and not the good type of ass that comes after the naked-fun-times."

"Sleep is supposed to make you feel better, so why do I still feel like shit?"

"Ugh, wake. No. Bad. Turn off the sun."

Whereas other mutterings had T'Challa's eyebrows rising to his hairline.

"Fix the coding and add more spatial awareness to the camera specs and he'll be up and running no problem. Probably still be a useless little A.I. but he's mine and perfect in his way."

"Address the trajectory issues by twelve percent and an impact site opens with an increased range of forty meters."

"Rhodey's birthday coming up; get a car. I'll tinker with it; make it faster and safer. Only the best for Rhody."

And others still had his heart seizing in pain for the young man.

"I'll be better dad, please just stop. Please, I'll be good."

"Dad's off on one of his searches Madre, you don't have to worry; we're safe."

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Please dad, I'm sorry. I promise I won't cry anymore."

T'Challa had dutifully informed his father about the instances, and knew the king felt as he did that it was likely the young man's father who pushed him from the plane. They had no proof, and warriors had gone on a search just to make sure that there hadn't been a crash where the young man was pushed out in a desperate hope he survived, but no, the jungle was clear.

Both T'Challa and his father came running when they heard the young man's screams.

Entering the room, they found him curled into himself, shaking and screaming and pain overwhelmed him, Shuri standing near him unsure of what to do.

"Shuri! What happened?!"

"I'm sorry Father! I didn't think! I just acted, and I didn't mean to hurt him! I'm sorry!"

T'Challa knew Shuri wouldn't intentionally hurt an already injured man, so set to calming the man still on the bed, while their father calmed Shuri. The young man had managed to introduce himself as Tony before those warnings of mental ability were proven true, with Tony unable to remember much. T'Challa managed to coax Tony back to sleep, calming the rising panic attack, before turning to face his father and sister.

"As stated, I'll stay here with him. Would you please inform the doctors of what we've learned?"

His father nodded and left, Shuri trailing behind him, still shaken by Tony's screams.

T'Challa sat down to wait.
When Tony eventually woke, it was to hunger. Once he had consumed as much of the broth as he could, one of Wakanda's psychologists came and spoke with him at length. T'Challa stayed in the room, for the entire discussion, discovering early on that his at least somewhat familiar presence helped keep Tony calm. After Tony drifted off once more, the psychologist gestured for him to follow out of the room.

"First off, he's certainly not playing up the amnesia; he has no idea where most of his knowledge comes from, or anything more about who he is besides being named Tony and being seventeen. He knows he's in Wakanda, but only because he recalls the flight path the plane was on, and calculated where he landed. I can tell you he's a genius, given he gave a mini-lecture on rocket science, but he's also very up to date on American pop-culture, given the amount of references he uses in any given sentence.

I don't know whether or not his memory will return, but I think that most of the missing memories are linked to his father, given that he has the vaguest recollection of his mother. You said he mentioned his father during the past three months?"

T'challa nodded, thinking over how terrifying the whole situation must be for Tony. The psychologist continued.

"He wasn't brought up even once during the last hour, but several mentions of his mother, best friend, and even of an uncle or some such relation. I would recommend focussing on his physical restoration for now. As he recovers his strength, he'll be better equipped to handle the task of trying to recover his mind."

Tony heals well over the following months, regaining most of his strength and mobility, though he still tired fairly easily due to his recovery.

Though no memories return to him, Tony is delighted to make new ones, constantly learning new things, and amazing the science division with his ideas and creations.

T'Challa found himself... drawn to Tony.

Tony felt most comfortable around T'Challa, likely a vestigial memory of how T'Challa brought Tony to safety, but regardless, Tony often sought T'Challa out; to speak, to joke around with, or even just to sit in silent company with.

Despite the pride and love T'Challa felt for his country and it's people, he had never really felt particularly close to anyone until Tony showed up. Intelligent, caring, and full of clever lines and quips, it was just so easy to be attracted to the younger man.

It certainly didn't hurt that after his injuries healed, Tony proved to be quite the handsome individual.

Dark brown hair that was soft as nothing else T'Challa had touched, a lithe figure under golden skin that held a strength to it that only grew as Tony healed, and his eyes; perfect gems of brown amber, that T'Challa could lose himself in, in a heartbeat.

Really, it was a shock to no-one that the two came together.

*There had been a feast, the returning warriors' reward for their hard work and dedication. Praises were sung, blessing bestowed and food prepared for all. Watching Tony lick the juices from his meal off his fingers, T'Challa knew with all his being that Tony would be his by nights end.*
By the light of the torches set up, Tony's skin glowed, looking a treasure amongst the people and his eyes caught every flicker of light to shine like the precious jewels they so resembled.

Their eyes met as Tony sucked the final juices from his fingers, a wicked glint gleaming from his eyes before-

He dashed off into the darkness, unnoticed by the revellers still celebrating.

T'Challa swiftly followed, his blood crying out in pleasure for the hunt.

Tony had picked up many skills in his time here, among which was moving silently and unseen. But T'Challa was one of Wakanda's top warriors, and knew just enough of how Tony's mind worked to pick up his trail.

Tony was good.

T'Challa was better.

Even with Tony's recovery, the man is fast, managing to get a fair distance before T'Challa catches up and pounces. The feel of muscles bunching and rippling beneath his hands is enthralling, and T'Challa cannot help the delighted purr that rumbles through his chest. Tony stills, feeling T'Challa's chest vibrate through the sound, which gives T'Challa the opportunity to snake a hand and arm around his body, holding it ever closer to his own.

"Caught you."

Tony shivers at the voice whispering in his ear, and outright shudders when T'Challa's tongue traces the outer shell of his ear.

"And to the victor, go the spoils."

Tony is flipped so the ground meets his back, and T'Challa kisses him with everything he has, teasing Tony's mouth open and fighting for dominance with their tongues. Tony's hands come up to rest on T'Challa's biceps as they kiss, gently squeezing and kneading the hard muscle, sending tendrils of pleasure through T'Challa's body.

They break for air, and T'Challa dips back down for a few soft kisses before descending to Tony's neck and sucking a deep bruise in the skin.

A claim, one that will last days, and that T'Challa had no problem reapplying.

Tony moans so sweetly, so desperately, that T'Challa pulls back only long enough to divest any clothing either wear, before diving back to litter Tony's chest with a winding trail of red bites.

Tony's hands have moved from T'Challa's arms, instead now threaded through his hair, alternately massages and scratching at T'Challa's head. T'Challa cannot help the groans that escape his throat, nor does he even try to, for he can feel the pleased shivers in Tony's frame whenever he releases a sound.

T'Challa's path leads ever southward until he rests at the apex between Tony's legs. He can see the gentle throbs of Tony's manhood as he takes it into his hand. The skin is like silk, and T'Challa feels the sympathetic throb of his own erection at the handling. Tony's vocalisations have reached a higher pitch, his focus entirely on T'Challa, and it's a heady feeling, commanding T'Challa to ensure it remains on him.
Slowly, with a firm grip, T'Challa's hand travels up and down the length of Tony's arousal, the other hand stroking Tony's thigh soothingly.

Tony looses a harsh curse and a long drawn out moan, which just sets T'Challa's blood burning higher. The movements speed up, pushing Tony closer and closer to the edge, before near stopping, leaving Tony hanging onto the very edge of completion before starting again.

Over and over, Tony flirts with the fall of pleasure before T'Challa drags him back, leaving Tony a quivering, mewling pile of sensation.

A very quick rummage through his clothes has T'Challa retrieving the lubricant he had begun carrying in expectation, and slicking up three fingers. Tracing one around the puckered ring of Tony's entrance, T'Challa watches Tony's face as it twists in ecstasy.

Eventually, after who knows how long, T'Challa slips the long digit into the burning heat of Tony's walls, and groans long and hard, unable to imagine the pleasure he will feel once properly inside. Tony keens loudly, grinding down on T'Challa's finger, desperate for more; more movement, more fingers, just more. T'Challa has to focus on his breathing to avoid removing his finger and just taking what Tony is so willingly offering. No, while it would be so pleasurable for T'Challa, he wants to make it just as good for Tony.

In and out, left and right, a little twist and-

Tony shrieks as T'Challa trails over his prostrate, the pleasure shooting through his body, setting him once more on the very edge of climax. T'Challa resumes the soothing strokes of his free hand, calming Tony even as he riles him up.

One finger turns to two, becomes three as Tony wails, begging desperately for T'Challa to either join with him, or let him fall. With three fingers being eagerly engulfed with no signs of discomfort, T'Challa cannot deny his eagerness anymore.

T'Challa removes his fingers, prompting a distressed whine from Tony, and slathers the lubricant over his sadly neglected member. The feel of his own hand causes him to once more stop and breathe deeply, lest this end too soon. Once he has calmed, T'Challa lines up with Tony's still gaping entrance and gently begins pushing in.

It is beyond glorious, the searing heat to his member and the delicious tightness despite all his preparations. Though still alert for signs of pain or discomfort, Tony's body seems to swallow T'Challa's member eagerly, the delighted cries from Tony furthering the pleasure of T'Challa's entrance.

When he's finally seated, root to tip, T'Challa once more breathes heavily, trying to seek his calm. But it's much harder now, with the tight heat surrounding him, the clearing they're in drenched with the scents of sex, and the positive devastation he has wreaked upon Tony evident on his face.

When Tony's legs come up to wrap around T'Challa's waist and pull him ever so slightly closer, that's it.

T'Challa's lost.

Driven only by instinct and desire, T'Challa pounds into Tony, revelling in the sharp cries and near ceaseless moaning, delighting as Tony shrieks with every glance to his prostrate and purring in smug satisfaction at the dark marks once more being littered across Tony's skin.

Especially the deep, dark bruise that lies alone on Tony's neck.
Tony can no longer utter any words but T'Challa's name, which sends further heat sizzling through T'Challa's veins. To be truly the complete focus of Tony's mind? To the point where he is the only thing Tony can focus on?

T'Challa thrusts harder into Tony's body, rewarding the younger man for his unwitting gift.

Already on edge before he was entered, Tony doesn't last for very long, reaching his completion with a gorgeous drawn out moan of T'Challa's name. T'Challa groans alongside him, the delicious heat being pressed tighter to his member, and pulling him closer and closer to the end.

He lasts only a few strokes more, before roaring his climax to the heavens.

Tony is his.

His and no others.

It is no surprise after that night that Tony and T'Challa are rarely seen alone; T'Challa is a possessive man, and Tony does enjoy having someone focused on him.

They do not share a room, though many feel it is merely a matter of time, and keep their love-making away from prying eyes. But their lives are still much of the same, their routines not changing much if at all. They still goof off with the science division, work on Tony's physical therapy and T'Challa's training, and try to help Tony regain his memories, though still with limited success.

For now though, they are taking a break.

Reclining on the low couch on the balcony, T'Challa holds a dozing Tony close to his chest, letting the sounds of the gardens mix with the television showing world news in the background. Right now, life is pretty wonderful.

"And America mourns the death of Millionaire inventor Howard Stark, who passed away in a tragic car accident last night. Grieving widow Maria Stark asks that she is contacted if anyone has any information about her missing son Anthony."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Put A Ring On It

Chapter Summary

For V-bird

Upon seeing Tony respond to Thor's flirting, T'Challa works quickly to stake his claim.

... I may or may not have attempted more smut. It may or may not be in italics, and you read what may or may not be there at your own risk.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa likes to think of himself as a man who has his priorities in order. First comes his duties to his loved ones, followed immediately by his duties as King and protector of Wakanda, trailed by his duties to the Avengers. First and second can switch places depending on the day, but given that his loved ones are his sister and his Heart, it isn't usually a difficulty to arrange himself around his duties.

At least, that's what he thought.

After seeing Thor speaking to Tony, T'Challa's Heart, and his Heart blushing the way only T'Challa has ever managed? It appears T'Challa must rethink.

Facts state that Tony should be attracted to T'Challa; he trumps any competitor in terms of wealth, status and political power. He is one of the strongest men on the planet. And he is among the top twenty of the worlds' recognised most attractive men, though his Heart has never truly cared about those things.

But this is Thor.

Though still a Prince to T'Challa's King, Thor is the prince of Asgrad, an alien realm, of which he holds access to all it's wealth -both financial and technological- along with the political power that comes with being an ambassador of sorts to Earth. Thor is also higher on that list of the worlds' top twenty, and as an Asgardian is blessed with strength greater than T'Challa's own.

And he made Tony blush.

When his Heart was twenty-five, he stated in an interview that he'd tried pretty much anything twice, and held no regrets for it. As a result, he is not easily embarrassed, nor flushed. In his early thirties, there was actually a competition of sorts to see who could capture a picture of Tony Stark blushing, but there was never a winner.

T'Challa, however, merely needed to whisper of his love for Tony, and his Heart would smile so gently while his cheeks coloured.

How had Thor managed to bring about that blush? How had the Thunderer done what until now
only T'Challa could? Had T'Challa somehow failed his Heart?

The thought struck him hard, causing all his breath to leave him at once.

There had recently been a high demand for his presence back in Wakanda, and he had returned to his homeland without a second thought, only to be gone for a long month. His Heart did not do well with loneliness, and had T'Challa thought, he would have brought his Heart with him instead of force the man he loved through that solitude.

Had Thor moved to steady Tony while T'Challa was gone? Subtly inserting himself as Tony's comforter during his loneliness?

T'Challa feels the panther within snarl in anger. No! Thor shall not take his Heart away! T'Challa will not allow it!

If Thor thinks to gain Tony's affections, T'Challa is willing to fight!

His plan is simple, with only four stages to it.

Stage one is to remind everyone he stands at his Heart's side.

The necklace is a simple affair; light so as to not distract his Heart or be hindrance when at work or in his armour, gold as is his Heart's preference and better to compliment his Heart's skin, and made of Vibranium so as to remind his Heart of him always.

The small smattering of red jewels strewn through the metal are T'Challa's little favouritism seeing Tony in those colours.

It's Team Bonding Night, and T'Challa catches Tony before the team is to meet up to go out for dinner.

"For you my Heart."

It strengthens his resolve when that darling blush rises.

His Heart opens the package and smiles so sweetly, so genuinely and then asks in so shy a voice, if T'Challa will clasp it for him.

The feel of golden skin on his fingertips stays with T'Challa for the night, and he barely hides the smug grin when Thor questions the necklaces appearance at the restaurant.

Stage two is a bit trickier, owing to the fact that both T'Challa and his Heart have dedicated their time to intense workloads; T'Challa with Wakanda, Tony with Stark Industries, and both with the Avengers.

But Virginia "Pepper" Potts likes T'Challa.

"You have picked the best time for it; Tony's way ahead of schedule, the R&D team have been on top of their work and safety protocols, and the Board has just received their bonus from the last sales so aren't focused on Tony. I can keep the press and the minions distracted for about a month."

T'Challa makes a note to do something special in thanks.

Shuri easily agrees to take care of Wakanda a little more so that T'Challa is free after hearing his
plans, and the Avengers are notified that nothing short of global invasion is to call them back, so with that, stage two is ready.

"A vacation onto a private island? Damn, how the hell did you manage this Aslan?"

"I asked the right people my Heart."

The taste of his Hearts' lips lingers as they board the jet.

Stage three is a reminder to his Heart.

A reminder that T'Challa is the only one who can truly satisfy his Hearts' needs.

_It started with kisses soft as a butterfly's wing._

_Dotting over every piece of skin, T'Challa's lips pressed oh so gently, leaving only the faintest pressure, and a steadily building pleasure._

_He did not meet his Hearts' mouth, instead skipping over constantly so as to hear every sweet sigh and gasp that passed between beloved lips._

_It was only when his name began to fall that he finally kissed his Heart fully, deeply, letting all his passion and desire for the other man drive his actions._

_Only parting for brief seconds to gain air, over and over they kissed, while his hands slid below his Hearts' clothing._

_The heat on both their skins was amazing, trails of fire following every move T'Challa's fingers made, pulling the most delicious sounds from his Hearts' throat. Thinking of the long expanse of skin, T'Challa broke the kiss, placing a conciliatory peck on those pouting lips, before latching himself onto his Hearts' neck. The groans and moans following this action set T'Challa's blood burning even hotter than it had already been with his desire for the man beneath him. Clothes were shed in an instant, allowing far more skin to worship._

_And it was worship._

_As T'Challa created a winding path down his Hearts' chest, paying special attention to the scars life decided to leave upon the golden skin, it was done with the truest adoration that T'Challa felt, the strongest thanks, and the deepest love._

_Every kiss was a thank you, for Tony allowing him this touch, every trailing finger a wonder of what was shown, every joining a blessing and prayer for what was on offer._

_For his Heart could have anyone. So many would leap at the chance to stand by his Hearts' side. So many would kill for the opportunity to be Tony's chosen._

_But it was T'Challa who stood beside him. It was T'Challa who was chosen. Among the millions on offer, it was T'Challa who succeeded, and he would do nothing to jeopardise that._

_A finger slick with lubricant traced that puckered entrance, coaxing more and more gorgeous noises forth, gentle whines, pleasured sighs and oh so desperate begging._

_When T'Challa's finger finally sunk into the heavenly depths of Tony's heat, it was a heady thing indeed to see his Hearts' cheeks become painted with that oh so loved blush._
Free hand teasing the steel length of his Heart, T'Challa breathed heavily at the sight, sound and touch of their lovemaking. Hands worn by work and dotted with calluses were gripping so desperately to his arms, tightening reflexively when fingers grazed over his Hearts' prostrate. Eyes already glazed with pleasure were suddenly hidden behind thick lashes as Tony's head threw itself left and right, simultaneously wanting to back away from T'Challa's actions, while evermore desiring them to continue.

How many times had they done this? How many times had T'Challa held Tony on the brink, letting the pleasure slowly subsume him until the only thought in that most amazing mind was T'Challa, and what he might do to his Heart next?

A high keen broke T'Challa out of his pleasured watch, reminding him that he had work to be done, resuming his hand's motions and once more revelling in his Hearts' obvious desperation.

Finally, it became too much, and T'Challa moved to prepare himself, removing his hand from Tony's divine heat, and slathering his own, dearly neglected member in the lubricant. He knew he'd not last long, his desire for Tony too much, but he would be able to last long enough.

The slow, smooth slide as his member became engulfed in that blessed heat and was pressed in snugly by silken walls was almost too much, was too good. The pleased groans of his name from swollen lips and trails of questing fingers upon his own skin adding their own delightful torture.

He started to move.

Like any devoted learner, T'Challa knew exactly how to best please his Heart. Snapping his hips in fast before slowly dragging away, twisting his angle just right, never silencing his own cries of passion, all were for Tony. The way the walls caressing his manhood began to ripple told T'Challa that his Heart was close, so close to completion. Thrusting in as deeply as he could manage, T'Challa held still, pressing against his Heart's prostrate.

The screams that left his Heart as climax took him filled T'Challa with a deep, base pride; he did that. He was the one to give this wonderful being such pleasure. He was the one chosen by this being to serve.

That thought, along with the sight of the necklace he had gifted his Heart splattered with the evidence of Tony's pleasure, had T'Challa thoughts white out.

When they had woken and eaten, they spent the day together, exploring the island, catching up on their reading, catching up with each other. It was after dinner that T'Challa moved to Stage four.

Forever.

Kneeling before his stunned Heart, T'Challa presents the ring he'd had specially made, three slivers of Vibranium interwoven, and hanging from a chain.

"Body, mind and soul my Heart. All that I am is yours. Will you agree to be mine?"

His Heart looks delighted, a breathy chuckle escaping his lips.

"That depends."

A breath held burning in T'Challa's chest as his Hearts pulls something from his pocket.

"Are you willing to wear mine?"
The small box opens to show a **ring** in black and gold.

They return to their bed, wearing nothing but their rings.

"You've been extra attentive lately... did you think I was gonna say no?"

They are reclined on a lounge on the balcony, overlooking the ocean as the sun rises, colouring the ocean purple and pink. T'Challa pulls his Heart a little closer.

"I saw Thor flirting with you, and decided I needed to prove I was the better choice."

T'Challa sees no reason to hide such from his Heart; Tony values honesty over most else. Those amber eyes meet T'Challa's, and a shy smile graces his lips.

"Was this just after you'd returned from Wakanda?"

Nodding T'Challa felt both delighted and confused by the red coming to stain his Hearts' cheeks.

"Ah, well, you see... I was kinda asking for advice on how to propose to you..."

T'Challa felt his jaw drop as his Heart squirmed a little.

"I knew that you've been super busy lately, and that you're likely to get just as busy in the future same as I am; it's a part of who we are and our jobs. So I wanted something... special to mark my proposal and Thor is actually quite the thoughtful romantic -I think it's because he still lives in Shakespearean times- and so I went to him for ideas and... he kinda suggested a vacation too, but you beat me to the punch there and-'

The kiss is gentle, though no less impassioned then what they share in their bed.

They return to watching the sunrise, both trailing fingers on their rings.

**Chapter End Notes**

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
From Your Lips

Chapter Summary

For Kage

Really, it's amazing what a simple little kiss can do.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first time he notices it, Tony's coming off a four day science-binge.

His insomnia hit hard, and the ideas just wouldn't stop. Every time he tried to sleep, hell, every time he closed his eyes, the numbers and schematics would swarm, and he just couldn't rest the way he needed to. His hands were shaking as he worked, his body beyond tired, but his brain wouldn't let him sleep for all the numbers and schematics and ideas.

He just couldn't shut it off.

"Oh my Chosen. How may I be of aid?"

The feather-light kiss pressed to his shaking fingers comes as a surprise (when the hell did T'Challa enter his workshop?) but it catches and holds Tony's attention completely; as though nothing in the universe is as important as cataloguing the feel of T'Challa against him.

He thinks T'Challa might have picked him up as he fell asleep.

The second time comes about a week later after the meeting from hell with the Board of Directors.

After the bullshit with Obi- Stane, Tony dedicated massive efforts to weeding out his stooges and flunkies, replacing them with good, honest people. It took the longest time to get the old board members who were worst offenders out the door, but Tony managed.

Now though, it seems that the members he left have decided they have seniority and want to (ab)use it to their advantage. He needs them gone, yesterday if he can given the mutterings he's been hearing about Stark weapons again.

He's just so damn exhausted though.

He needs to get rid of them, but he needs to be nice about it, not gain media attention over it (negative attention anyway; SI is still recovering from the bullshit of Civil War FuckyouverymuchRoss) and make it seem like it's their idea.

But how the hell is he going to -

Lips gently press on his knuckles, and Tony suddenly focuses on the fact that T'Challa is right in front of him holding his hand to his lips.
"What dark thoughts chase you, my Chosen?"

What? Dark thoughts? Why would Tony be thinking dark thoughts? Why would Tony be thinking anything but how good it feels to have T'Challa hold him?

The third time is after a fight with Doom and his Doombots.

It wasn't a particularly hard battle, but it was long, Doom summoning swarms of the little bastards from every nook and cranny it seemed.

How the Latvian managed to smuggle so many into the sewers is both worrying and disgusting.

Everyone is tired, grumpy, and in serious need of after-battle munchies. Tony knows this, but looking around at all the destruction the battle left, he knows they won't be able to. Well, he won't be able to; the others are wiped to the point of food, shower, maybe medical then bed. Tony's at analysis, estimation, cheque, reconstruction, press conference, more reconstruction, repairs to armour, repairs to team's gear, yet more reconstruction, shower, further reconstruction, second press conference, food if he has time, SI meetings, final bit of reconstruction, debrief with team, third press conference, debrief with Fury, more SI meetings, SI R&D, and then maybe sleep if he's lucky.

It's usually left to Tony to fix the messes every battle makes, but it's tiring in it's own way on top of battle fatigue. Sighing, Tony stands and is about to direct the others to a nearby and still open sushi-joint when-

"Come my Chosen, let us eat before we get to work, for we will need our strength."

A single kiss placed to the back of each gauntlet and Tony can't remember what was stressing him out two seconds ago.

It actually starts to worry him.

Tony loves T'Challa, and absolutely adores the physical contact, but he really isn't used to his brain just turning off like it has been.

He's tried to talk to Rhodey about it, but Rhodey just bursts out laughing and singing juvenile songs of love, the traitor.

Tony knows he's in love, but why is his brain on the blink?

Rhodey's bawdy love ballads only get worse when he's present at one of the instances (Tony had been trapped by SI Board meetings again, and had been in the middle of quite a loquacious rant when a kiss to each wrist had him falling silent) and worse still is that the rest of the team was there too, and have joined in with the singing -though Natasha and Barnes' absolutely vulgar ones in Russian are hilarious.

It's really a concern though.

"Though Rhodey's being a dick about it, it's not actually a full problem Boss."

"Still not your boss anymore, but how so?"

Happy makes a feint and Tony ducks away from the boxer, hopping lightly on the balls of his feet.
so he doesn't lose momentum.

"It's a pretty common side effect of being in love. They are the one who holds your heart, and damn if you don't want to focus on them. I'm often giving Pepper my full attention anyway, so for me, it's no big deal, but you're a genius Boss; you haven't had a lot of experience having that sort of attention focused on something living."

Happy manages to dance away from Tony's right-hook.

"What do you mean something living? Why did you specify that?"

Happy grins, managing to land a glancing blow.

"You have that single-minded focus when you're in the shop Boss. You are so intent on your work, that all else is deemed inconsequential. That's what you're used to; focusing on something you're making that has a next step. But people don't have a next step, which is why you're tripping up."

Tony sneaks a solid hit to Happy's shoulder, forcing the man to retreat a few steps.

"But that's half the point Boss. People don't need a next step. You take the plunge together, and hope the fall never ends."

---

Tony's pacing his workshop, hands clawing at themselves as he hears over and over the reporter's screeching accusations.

*Over forty people injured in this last attack, and you sit there telling us we're safe; why should we be trusting you?!*

Tony's nails are short so it's easier for him to work in the shop, and that's all that has prevented him from breaking the skin on his palms, but the red scores are getting deeper and deeper.

"My Chosen!"

T'Challa is there, gently pulling his hands apart, checking the reddened skin for hidden damage.

"Please my Chosen, do not bring damage to yourself. You are a creator; how saddened and deprived the world would be if you damaged your hands. How saddened I would be and am that you have brought yourself harm. Please my Chosen, come to me before you try and take such actions."

A kiss is placed to each bright red palm and Tony knows he's crying -he can feel the tears rolling down his cheeks- but it's okay, because T'Challa is here and Tony loves him.

"Oh my Go- that's just- how could- the back- WHY????!!"

A garden hose, a rubber chicken, and nine pounds of guacamole.

Tony smirks from his place in T'Challa's arms as he watches the reporter scream on live television.

Revenge is sweet.
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Follow Your Dreams

Chapter Summary

For V-bird

Thanks to the sensors embedded in his body, Tony is able to control the armour to a far greater level. He and the armour are able to act and react instantly, and it only takes a thought.

The Xhosa is 'King' and Italian is 'Lover'.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Oh damn it all to hell! The place is rigged! Iron Man, I need you here!"

"On my way Itsy-bitsy."

"Black Widow, remain where you are and provide Iron Man cover! Avengers, status report!"

"Scarlet Witch, evacuating civilians Captain."

"Spider-man, doing the same- no, kiddo, you do not want that in your mouth-"

"Falcon, up in the air with Thor, keeping lookout. Thor's lost his comm again."

"Quicksilver here, eating tacos."

"Tacos?! Shit where are you? Imma get me some tacos!"

"The break-room on the third floor, just past the green medical room."

"The one that looks like someone puked on everything?"

"That's the one."

"Yeah, I'm not too far. Sweet! Tacos!"

"CHATTER! Hawkeye, don't leave your post! Quicksilver, return to the fight!"

"Fine."

"Yes Captain."

"Oh, that is not comforting. Hey Quicksilver?"

"Yes Iron Man?"

"I need you to evac Black Widow now."
The explosion had levelled half the HYDRA base.

Pietro had done as told, running and grabbing Natasha and taking her to the evacuation point, and had just turned around to go back in for Tony when the bomb went off. It was chance that had all the civilians and the Avengers unharmed by the blast.

T'Challa was worried about how small Tony looked in the hospital bed.

If only he had gone on the mission as well.

The suit recorded Tony examining and disabling the bomb, and everything appeared to be going well, until Tony's hand brushed a blue and green striped wire and a timer with thirty seconds on it flashed up.

"Oh, that is not comforting."

It was only due to his armour that Tony still lived.

Tony wasn't in the greatest shape, a broken leg, dislocated arm and opposing wrist, bruises everywhere that could bruise and a deep gash in his side where the armour had bent inwards and pierced him. Though Tony appeared to have no concussion, he was dropping in and out of consciousness, and was to stay in the hospital for at least a week.

And given his state, only family was allowed.

The Team had kicked up quite a fuss over that, given they had all registered each other as kin, and had eventually been allowed in to see him, but the doctors and nurses had been adamant that the Avengers were not going to stay over night.

It was with heavy hearts that the Team conceded.

It was with much tossing and turning that T'Challa finally fell asleep that night, alone in a bed that carried Tony's scent.

A light sleeper at the best of times, T'Challa shot awake when a heavy hand touched his arm, wondering how someone got close enough to even do so.

His heart skipped a beat as he looked into the glowing blue eyes of the Iron Man.

"Darling?"

There were no words returned. Instead, a gauntleted hand was extended towards him, making to grab him.

T'Challa ducked away, eyes darting around the room to see if any more foes awaited him. His sight found only the darkness of the witching hour.

"Friday, can you hear me?"

Again, only silence met him, before T'Challa recalled that Friday had been taken offline for upgrades before the sudden mission call out. She was only present in the suit.

Whoever was wearing Tony's armour stood between T'Challa and the door, the window overlooking the compound pool.
T'Challa hated feeling trapped. And without his own armour and weapons, he was at a disadvantage, to whoever had managed to usurp Tony's gear-

Wait...

The suit's were programmed to disable themselves if anyone other than Tony or James tried to use them, Clint's rather embarrassing fall into ButterFingers' charging dock followed by the resulting chase filled with terrified screams and angry chirps testament to that.

T'Challa slowly straightens from his defensive stance and takes a deep breath.

"Black Panther temporary override. Ukumkani."

There's some slight jerking in the suit, but it smooths out quickly, once more drawing closer. T'Challa bites his lip and speaks again.

"T'Challa temporary override. Innamorato."

The suit stops and T'Challa releases a breath.

"Face plate open."

The gears whirr as the plate open to confirm T'Challa's suspicion.

The suit is empty.

"File log open, search current directive."

People have attempted and succeeded at hacking Tony's suits, but every single one of them needs to tell the suit what they want it to do, and Tony had made sure those commands left a note.

The plain, yet heavily robotic fake voice answers.


The override ended, and T'Challa walked into the armour's grasp.

Tony was still so small in the hospital bed when T'Challa snuck in through the window, the armour hovering just outside it.

The genius was tossing and turning slightly in his sleep, as much as his body would allow him. And he was whispering so gently, as his face showed his suffering.

"Innamorato, where are you? I need you. I need you, where are you?"

T'Challa lightly laid out alongside Tony and oh so carefully drew him close.

"I am here Darling. I have you."

As Tony calmed, T'Challa drew ever closer.

Finally able to sleep easy.
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Family Reunion

Chapter Summary

For Kage

It's no secret that the men in the Stark Line are obsessive. Starks never really chose their obsessions, they just turned up, and could change over time.

T'Challa says 'Heart' in Xhosa. I'm not sure what happened with this one. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The day had started peacefully.

No fights on whose turn it was to cook breakfast, no threats of bodily harm should the coffee not be shared, gentle smiles all around from a very rare night of no nightmares for anyone.

T'Challa should have realised it was a warning of what was to come.

The alarm to assemble rang shrill and loud just as lunch had been set on the table. Curses and oaths were uttered as the team sped to don their uniforms and armours, before boarding the quinjet and flying off to the co-ordinates provided.

New S.H.I.E.L.D. had picked up on energy that was greatly similar to the bifrost and the portals opened by the Tesseract. The Avengers landed in a large field in the middle of nowhere, empty aside for a single being sitting in a stone throne. The being appeared... blurry to T'Challa, though nothing else he could see was.

"The Collector... but what is he doing here?"

Thor moved to confront the being.

"Collector. What brings you to Midgard? Know that this planet is under my protection, and I'll not accept any of your tomfoolery."

He -the Collector Thor called him- spoke with an exotic, cultured voice.

"Your protection of Earth is still young Asgardian. I visit this place often, and see no reason to just stop-"

"Wait a sec..."

T'Challa glance to the side upon hearing Tony's mutter. Bedecked in the crimson and gold of his armour, Tony retracted the face plate and took a step forward as the alien kept speaking.

"As this place holds one most dear to me."
"Uncle Tivan?"

The team spun to look at Tony, shock, confusion and slight anger on their faces. The alien gave a short laugh before the blurriness of his figure began to focus.

"Never an ounce of hesitation Anthony. It is a wonderful thing to see."

The now-revealed white-blond stood from the throne and walked to Tony, his arms open wide. Tony stepped into the embrace with a small chuckle.

"You've never advertised your presence before. Why now?"

The Collector chuckled too, briefly tightening his arms around Tony before moving to hold the man at arms length.

"Because I am here to see my nephew in a more official capacity."

Tony stood straighter at the words, his face showing his concern and confusion. The Collector merely smiled at him.

"You are more than of marriageable age Anthony, and I would have you settled happily."

Through the team's stunned silence, Tony's mortified groan was thunderously loud.

"Please tell me you did not cross the universe for the sole purpose of trying to introduce me to even more of your chosen suitors."

"I only wish the best for you Anthony, and this selection has quite the number of prince's and heiress'. You would be treated as the star you embody, and sit upon silken thrones, wanting for nothing."

Tony stepped back, outside of the Collector's reach, with slight anger on his face.

"I have all that I want and need here and now Uncle Tivan. None of your chosen will change that, nor will they replace the ones I love here."

The Collector took a step forward, ignoring not only how Tony moved further away, but how the team reacted negatively to his actions.

"Anthony, you are the last descendant of my Mother's family. The Stark Line is long and honoured. Do you really believe that any on Earth can truly match you? Can truly stand at your side as you deserve?"

Tony's eyes are like fire as he takes another step back to have him once more beside T'Challa.

"I do."

His words have T'Challa's claws shoot out, prepared to attack should the Collector not desist.

The being's dark eyes roam over the Avenger's, lingering particularly over Vision, before once more coming to rest on Tony.

"I've angered you. Very well nephew, I shall cease. For now at least. I do, most dearly, wish to see you happy."

Without a further word, the being vanishes through a small portal, the stone throne going with him.
With the threat gone T'Challa wraps his arms around Tony tightly, shaking slightly in his anger.

"T'Challa? You okay Schrödinger?"

T'Challa cannot hold the rage from his voice.

"If he tries to take my intliziyo from me, I will end him."

Tony chuckles and snuggles deeper into the embrace, despite the awkwardness of his armour.

"Love you too T'Challa."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Deep breaths are the only thing keeping Tony from puking as he leans over the sink.

He can feel the tremors wracking his body, and see the fine shaking of his hands.

It makes no sense.

He is able to leap into battle without a moments hesitation, duke it out with the strongest politicians with mere words, build the first suit of armour and it's power source under watch, but now he's panicking?

The last few days had proved he didn't have to!

There are many, many things Tony loves about being a billionaire.

He rarely has to look at anything's price tag.

He can literally leave a tab into the thousands.

He can actually afford the crazy insanity that all kids wish they had, and no one side-eyes him for it.

But right now, Tony's favourite thing about being a billionaire is his private jet.

Specifically, the super comfortable couch he is lying on, cuddled up to T'Challa, in his private jet.

The chain round his neck is a new, unfamiliar weight, but it's such a good one.

The ring hanging from it even better.

His Panther had proposed as soon as they'd entered the penthouse of Stark Tower after returning from the Announcement Ceremony of SHOC, with a simple yet oh so heartfelt request.

"Bless your heart, for I held it in my hands a short time. Bless your hands, for they'll forever hold mine. Half the allure is the mystery, but if you'll have me, it is all of you I'll adore."

How could anyone say no to the ring presented after that?
"We need be seated up my Mechanic; we're entering Wakandan airspace."

Tony pouted at that, but as the jet began it's descent and then landed, he felt the thrill of excitement run up and down his spine.

As they moved to the exit, his Panther entwined their fingers, lifting his hand to place a gentle kiss across his knuckles.

"Welcome, my Mechanic, to Wakanda."

With the untamed wilderness mixing with the unmatched buildings and structures, entering Wakanda almost felt like coming home.

Tony looses another dry-heave, stomach feeling like it's twisting itself in two.

It's like he can barely breathe at all.

Shuri was just as perfectly delightful in person as she was over their chats, greeting Tony heartily as "Other Brother", whispering embarrassing stories about her brother on the drive to the palace from the air strip, getting into playful banter with T'Challa when he realised she was doing it. Tony had already begun to adore her when his Panther had added her to their conversations, but meeting the woman in question, Tony was reminded of when he first met Pepper; a strong, honest, confident woman who could easily handle her own, and had no problem handling anyone else's if she had to.

Seems when it came to sister-figures, Tony had a type.

Getting out of the car in front of the palace, Tony had been a little struck by the welcoming party, before brushing it off; T'Challa was obviously well loved by his people, and had clearly been doing his best by them. He stepped aside a little so that the oncoming swarm would be able to run directly to T'Challa.

He felt his pulse quicken when they came to him instead.

"Welcome, Our King's Mechanic!"

"It's an honour to meet you!"

"Please feel free to explore our Research and Development facilities sir!"

Such a warm and friendly greeting was a jolt to Tony, given the absolute lashing he'd been dealt by the media after the 'Civil War' mess. He'd been so shocked, he couldn't think of a single thing to say, instead helplessly sweeping his gaze over the gathered greeters, until T'Challa gently guided him away.

Everything is okay. He is safe, he is cared for, and he is loved.

Everything is okay.

Once settled in the room prepared for him, Tony started to calm down, helped greatly by his Panther's insistence on cuddles.
Once his heart had slowed T'Challa had held ever so closer and started telling him stories about Wakanda, Shuri chiming in with details and side notes that made the tales even more real. Tony soaked up the stories as best he could, after all, once he was wed to T'Challa, he would stand at his Panther's side as guardian and protector to the same people who had welcomed him so warmly.

That meant Tony had to do his best to understand them right?

T'Challa's hand started gently kneading the back of Tony's skull.

"They adore you my Mechanic, for they know how I feel for you. They will love you, once they know how wonderful you are."

He can do this. There is nothing for him to be freaking out over.
He can do this.

Rhodey, Vision, Peter, Harley, Pepper and Happy would be joining them in Wakanda on the day of the ceremony, a week from Tony's own arrival.

That gave Tony time to interact with the Wakandan people.

Starting with what he was familiar with, Tony first mingled with the heads of Wakanda's economy and business, followed by a long visit with the science division. He spoke with the higher echelons of Wakandan nobility and interacted as nicely as he could with the elders, Kings advisors and the Dora Milaje.

It had been unlike anything Tony had experienced before.

Usually when meeting someone for the first time, he received one of three reactions.

The first, and most common, was highly exaggerated praise for his Father's work, SI, and himself, in that order.

The second, and only just, was highly unexaggerated hatred for his Father's work, SI, and himself, in reverse.

The third was blatant disinterest, as though Tony was still that four year old boy showing Howard his circuit board in the desperate hope the tech would garner him a smile.

There were a few outliers certainly, top of the list being Rhodey's take-no-bullshit-from-the-runt when they met at M.I.T. and T'Challa's own kind curiosity about what made Tony tick. Truly, the outliers were the people Tony had invited to see him wed off, and as the name suggested, they were few and far between.

Tony had never been approached by so many people so genuinely interested in meeting him for the first time. They all knew of him through T'Challa's eyes, and wanted to see how the image compared to real life.

Tony was a little concerned by how none of them seemed disappointed.

Breathe in for three.

Hold for three.
When the little girl appeared before him and gave him a tight hug, Tony felt a matching tightness in his chest that for a second had him thinking about the arc reactor.

"Welcome... to... Wakanda."

The little one's halting speech and slight stumbling over the words told Tony that she was only just learning English; a look to her beaming mother confirmed that she had learnt the phrase just for him.

"Enkosi, anqabileyo."

The sheer, unadulterated delight on the child's face stays with Tony for the rest of the day, heightened by the happy, caring greetings and welcomes he receives from everyone he meets.

All of Wakanda greets him as something wonderful, as something to be cherished.

Tony's not too proud to admit he cried himself to sleep that night, not knowing how to express how touched he is at their kindness.

He can take his time.

Tony just needs to remember that.

There's no rush. There's no problem.

He just needs to breathe.

Tony still hasn't met all the citizens of Wakanda, but the Wedding is tomorrow, and he needs to give his opinion on a few pertaining matters (Chocolate Chip Wedding Cake! Absolutely! No question!) so he remains in the palace, speaking to the servants as needed and sneaking hugs from his Panther between the Monarch's meetings and paperwork when he can.

He end up spending most of the day with Shuri, who is very enthusiastic about getting his impression of his and T'Challa's relationship.

When he asks her why she's so curious, Tony's surprised to see the woman visibly blush.

"You exposed a side of T'Challa I never see otherwise, a side where it is so obvious just how deeply he loves. I wanted to know if you realised that for yourself."

It feels right to hug her close after that.

Almost as if they're both benefitting.

Today changes nothing.

He is still safe. He is still cared for. He is still loved.
Everything is okay.

Wandering around the palace after Shuri is called into a meeting with T'Challa has Tony discovering a room with notable damage to it.

The door looks to have been torn from it's hinges and then shorn in two, one half embedded in the roof. There are countless cracks and holes in the wall and plaster, and markings in the floor that remind him of the penthouse after the Hulk played with Loki (He's still kinda sad Pepper didn't let him keep that).

"Dare I ask what happened here?"

Okoye, the Dora Milaje currently assigned to him, purses her lips and looks away, her hands actually joining so she can twiddle her thumbs. Tony raises an eyebrow at her silence and waits.

He recognises the posture of someone who feels no guilt over their actions, but has been soundly scolded over it.

As expected, Okoye finally meets his eyes. She stands straighter and puffs out her chest, just a little bit.

"Rogers and his followers proved reluctant to leave. When they were accidentally informed of your imminent arrival, Rogers decided it was his right to remain here, and then he demanded that he be allowed to speak with you. When Her Highness told him no on both accounts, Rogers then intimated that..."

Tony gestures for her to continue. He knows first hand just how stubborn Rogers can be, and he's already making plans on how to thank Shuri and the Dora Milaje for dealing with the man and his lackeys. Okoye hesitates, but eventually speaks.

"Rogers intimated that the two of you were... sensually inclined. By his behaviour, it is obvious he believed the two of you romantically engaged, but the reactions of those beside him would be more than enough to disprove him. That we know of your relationship to His Highness was immaterial, beyond providing us certainty that you would never fall for one such as Rogers."

Tony ends up hugging Okoye too, along with promising the same to any of the women who were involved in manhandling the super-soldier and his team out of Wakanda.

In and out.

Nothing will go wrong.

Wakanda is as prepared as can be for this.

Tony spends more time than usual cuddling with T'Challa that night.

He's thankful his Panther doesn't question, and even more that his Panther doesn't push him away.

Pepper had called just after dinner to let him know how things were holding up back in New York, and it wasn't joyful. With the return of Rogers and his posse came the derogatory remarks about Tony, his skills and his ability to be Iron Man, though thankfully none of them had been stupid enough to insult T'Challa.
It was made worse with Tony's absence. Regardless of the lawsuits slamming onto the desks of those defaming him, the stories about how Tony Stark sold out then ran away were rampant, every station running Barton's caustic words blaming Tony for everything, and with Tony away, he couldn't put forward a statement personally to make them back off.

It was petty, but Tony took some delight in the fact that Friday would alert the authorities if any of them entered the Compound or his Tower before he returned.

Rhodey had laughed himself to cramps when he heard of that 'Welcome Home'.

---

*One, two, three.*

*One, two, three.*

*Uno, due, tre.*

---

There had been enquiries about Tony's location crossing Pepper's desk constantly since Rogers' group returned to the States.

Pepper knew better than nearly anyone just how little privacy Tony had had over his lifetime, so rebuffed most of them. She in fact only answered when a representative from the U.N. came in person to ask.

The result of that meeting was a request by the U.N. for Tony and T'Challa to broadcast the ceremony as a show of faith in SHOC, of which both men were members.

Tony and T'Challa had agreed, but only the ceremony; the reception was theirs.

And everything else after it.

Friday had recorded Vision's reaction to watching the news feeds reporting on how Tony Stark was getting hitched, and really, the android had one of the cutest little laughs Tony had heard.

T'Challa and Shuri had both cooed over it when showed, though his Panther denied such a sound escaping his mouth.

---

*Calm, in control, and clear-headed.*

*Breathe in... and out...*  

*He can do this.*

---

When they had arrived the morning of the event, Peter and Harley had been bouncing off the walls in excitement, neither knowing what to expect of the most technologically advanced nation on Earth, and had dragged both Vision and Happy into exploring the place with them, Vision for comparisons, Happy to drag them back when it was time to get ready.

Pepper and Rhodey stayed in the palace proper, and helped with the final details.

When the time came, Pepper once more proved her mastery as an expert Tony wrangler, and had both Peter and Harley dressed to the nines and suitably cowed away from any misbehaviour. Vision was in his full battle regalia, the shimmering cape adding a sense of mysticism to his
appearance, and grandeur to the event. Rhodey and Happy were in their tuxes, Rhodey's slightly resized to disguise his braces. Pepper was bedecked in a gorgeous emerald gown that really brought out her hair.

Tony was in a new tuxedo wearing a red tie with gold stripes, his little nod to being Iron Man.

It was nearly time.

It was then that the panic hit him.

Washing his face with a few final deep breaths, Tony returned to the room where his family waited, concerned faces silently asking if he was alright.

He could do this.

As a group they moved to the hall where the ceremony was to take place and whiled away the last few minutes until it began, the others gently calming Tony's worries that T'Challa would suddenly see reason and call the whole thing off.

"Not a chance in hell Tones; the man looks at you like you strung all the damn stars in the sky. He ain't letting you go for anything."

Rhodey is the best. Tony stands by the fact that there are not enough Rhodey's in the world.

The faint chords of 'O sole mio' reach their ears.

It's time.

"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

"For as long as you hold my heart T'Challa, you are just as much mine, and I know you'll never let go."

All through out the reception, Tony kept seeing his Panther playing with the chain round his throat, the ring Tony designed glinting as light hit it. T'Challa caught him watching every time, and a gentle smile so full of love each time would curl his lips, prompting Tony to smile back.

They could do this.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Risachi

SI has been doing business with Wakanda for months, and Tony always vanishes immediately after the meetings end. T'Challa finally decides to find out where the genius is going.

'Yitroni' is Xhosa for Matron.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Just for my personal amusement;


They're shipping IronPanther XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once he had cooled his mind from the rage that had flared from his father's murder, T'Challa had spent a day agonising over how he had wasted an opportunity.

He had completely abandoned a chance to work side by side Anthony Edward Stark.

Ever since the circuit board that had thrust the genius into the public eye, Wakanda had watched over the developments that sprung forth from his mind, the science division constantly bemoaning the lack of someone with the Stark Heir's skills.

When T'Challa was finally old enough to understand the science, he too was amazed by the skills, intelligence and creativity Stark showed the world, and the infinite care he put into his work, constantly reading and rereading the reports and articles of the older boys' patents and creations.

T'Challa growing up often fantasized about working alongside Tony Stark in a lab or workshop, being able to keep up and even help the other man as they created revolutionary pieces of technology.

Sure, T'Challa didn't actually think it'd ever happen. Tony was pretty much always being watched by someone (and after the accidental viewing of his idols'... ahem equipment, T'Challa learned very quickly to never watch or read just anything that bore Tony's name on it) and given that Wakanda was still in it's self-imposed isolation, he'd never be able to just meet Tony; T'Challa would be investigated to the very nth degree until Wakanda itself was having it's doors beaten down by those wishing answers.
It didn't stop T'Challa from his self-indulgent little daydreams, but it meant he didn't lose himself in them either.

But then, when he began helping his father on the Accords, a little spark of hope flared deep in the pit of his stomach. After all, the Avengers would all be affected by the Accords, and so, even briefly, they would surely come into contact with T'Challa and his father.

And they had... just not in the way T'Challa had wished.

With every fibre of his being focused on James Barnes, T'Challa had blocked out and ignored most of the rest of the world. Even standing beside the Avengers, or the ones who signed the Accords at least, at the airport was barely a blip on his radar, and these were all men and women who were in their own ways paragons. Be it in power, control, tactics, skill, all of them were the elite of their class.

Had T'Challa been able to pay attention, he would have felt honoured that he was able to stand alongside them, even if only temporarily.

Especially to stand alongside Tony Stark.

He had of course heard the saying 'never meet your heroes, they turn out to be human', but it was because of the second sentence that T'Challa wanted to meet Tony. Far more than any movie star or author, Tony Stark was untouchable, standing atop a pedestal so high, it was terrifying. For the man standing at such a height to be human?

It would be amazing.

And looking back on the 'Civil War' as the situation had been deemed, T'Challa could see a great many pieces of evidence that pointed to Tony Starks humanity.

It all led to the little flame of hero-worship he had carried for so many years to flare a little higher, and burn a little hotter.

When the business proposal from Stark Industries crossed his desk, how could anyone expect him to say no?

T'Challa, and Shuri alongside him, had undergone training since young to always appear composed and calm. Aside from the most extreme emotional situations -dust everywhere, ears ringing, and his father's unmoving body- little more than traces of amusement, disgust or horror slip past the mask.

It takes every ounce of that training to prevent himself from outright fawning over Tony Stark as they hash out the terms for an exchange of Medical research for a large-scale arc reactor.

As ever, Tony Stark is proving his genius, his understanding of the legal terms and conditions far more than what most people would expect from the 'Playboy', and the questions he asks and stipulations he offers more than keeping T'Challa's lawyers on their toes.

T'Challa barely holds back his fond sigh and smile, knowing that in the current situation, it would be more than a little unusual.

Though it takes a good few hours, the contracts are eventually signed and dispatched to the relevant lawyers and CEO's for final checks and notarisation. It is with a carefully worded sentence that T'Challa invites Tony to delay his return to America for a meal, and a brief tour through the
With an equally carefully worded response, Tony says yes.

Shuri had left the business meeting to train with the Dora Milaje, subtly allowing T'Challa unimpeded time with his idol, but T'Challa finds himself cursing both their positions when ten minutes into the tour, he is urgently summoned back to the Palace, and cannot get in contact with Shuri to at least let Tony continue with his tour.

It is when they are all eating later that he finds out that Tony kept exploring regardless.

The elders give him grief over it when Tony is safely on his plane, leaving Wakandan airspace, claiming the man to be no better than his father, and no doubt planning on how to steal Vibranium just as Howard Stark did all those years ago, but they quiet themselves pretty quickly when reminded of how their urgent summons - that left Tony free to wander alone - was over the naming of a new elder, which easily could've waited a few more hours without any trouble.

T'Challa is not too proud to admit he sulks a bit on the way back to the Palace, his time with Tony once more being cut short due to foolishness.

Tony comes back to Wakanda several times to oversee the installation of the arc reactor. His presence causes a bit of a stir among the people, but it is never more than low mutterings and grumbles, seeing as the genius has stopped more than a few literal blow-ups when the younger techs decide they know better.

Interestingly, Tony never tells them otherwise. He certainly yells at them, for endangering others and themselves, but once he has lectured them, the techs are directed to the drawing table and told to design something that Tony will look over and critique later.

Tony has the techs prove they know better.

It doesn't matter that so far none of them have managed.

T'Challa spends every free moment he has speaking to Tony, learning all he can from the man, and speaking of his own areas of study in return.

And practically tearing his hair out when he finds out that Tony has gone wandering around Wakanda alone again whenever T'Challa looks away for too long.

It has been months since the arc reactor was installed, and yet Tony keeps coming.

The first month after the installation was understandable; the arc reactors had never been tested in an environment as hot and humid as Wakanda could get, so it was really just common sense for Tony to come to Wakanda to check everything over and gather data.

The month after that, Stark Industries was being dragged through the dirt by the media for 'Consorting with Foreign Entities For A Profit' and Tony had looked so exhausted that T'Challa couldn't fault the man for wanting to hide in the media silent Wakanda, away from the very enthusiastic paparazzi hounding his movements.

Tony was still coming the following month, claiming the heat of Wakanda a welcome difference to the bitter chill attached to New York.
After that, an interest in the differences between Wakandan botany and that of America's.

Given how Tony kept disappearing alone, T'Challa had to finally concede that perhaps not all was well.

Though difficult, and resulting with him owing many favours to fewer people, T'Challa managed to clear his schedule for a single day.

He spent the day as Tony's shadow.

Tony's latest reason for his presence in Wakanda was that he'd grown fond of the food. For a good two hours, the man walked about the market day stalls buying small servings of pretty much everything on offer, eating them all while he cast his eye about the other wares on display.

The second those two hours were up though, Tony swiftly moved away from the market.

Obviously, from his numerous visits to the country, Tony was able to move confidently through the twists and turns of the city surrounding the Palace, and T'Challa found it surprisingly challenging to not only follow the man, but to keep himself hidden from detection.

Perhaps a side effect of always being in the media's eye, maybe from having spent months in Clint Barton and Natasha Romanoff's company, possibly even a result of the trials he had undergone as Iron Man, whatever the reason, Tony Stark was very aware of his surroundings, constantly scanning all around him, but at such odd intervals one could never hope to accurately predict when his next check would come.

And he made it look natural, humming an upbeat tune and appearing to spin to the music, gently bobbing his head side-to-side while glancing from the corners of his eyes.

If T'Challa wasn't as trained and skilled a tracker as he was, he'd have never caught Tony's vigilance and known to hide.

Fifteen minutes into the ambling trek, T'Challa's chest felt tight, and his eyes grew wet.

"Uncle Tony!"
"Mister Tony!"
"Welcome back Tony!"
"Did you miss us Tony Sir?!"

Tony was swarmed by a gaggle of the children living in the orphanage, smiling warmly at the youths and answering their questions kindly before they pulled him off to play. The familiarity both parties showed each other, the gentle regard Tony showed the Yitroni, and the care he gave each and every child...

"He came upon us by chance, and now chooses to make his own chances."

T'Challa jerked away from the Yitroni now standing at his side, smiling at the uncoordinated movement.

"I have raised boys far more sneaky than you, Your Highness. You may have escaped Tony's notice, but a mother knows all the tricks of the trade."
A helpless and embarrassed smile curled T'Challa's lips as they watched Tony giving the children piggy-backs and telling stories.

"I do think the next time he visits Wakanda, I will bring him here myself, so he needn't sneak away any more."

The Yitroni smiled, before moving and returning to the children.

You should never meet your Heroes, because they turn out to be human.

T'Challa could think of nothing better.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
No one knew it would go this far. Those who could gathered their arms and fought, but one by one they fell away into the void of oblivion. Others ran and hid, trying to stay away from sight and mind; one by one, they too fell into oblivion.

We didn't fight or run. We learned, we discovered and we saved.

We still lost.

When I was six, my dad went out to buy some scratchers.

We weren't bad off -dad worked out at the lumber yard and mum at the café- but with two kids, a little extra money couldn't hurt, so once a fortnight, dad would go and buy a couple two dollar scratcher tickets and try his luck.

My mum died getting my little sister and me away from the being that came back. My sister died from her injuries not long later.

As our town burned, we buried our dead, and the survivors started the long walk to the next town.

Turns out they had been hit too.

News reports crackled over the radio about a portal opening up over the White House, and hundreds of aliens pouring out of it. They would round up those they could, slaughtering any who resisted too much. They set up base in the ruins of the Pentagon.

Over the next five years, more and more people were turned into the brain-washed beings that attacked regular people, the aliens slowly taking over more and more of the country. I had personally seen a few folks getting turned, and so many times was woken from sleep by the terrifying memories of eyes turning that cold, vicious blue. I no longer travelled with the people from my home town of Rose Hill; they were all gone, either taken over or dead.

Slowly, day by day, I managed to walk to New York.

Sporadic news reports had spoken of how Tony Stark, one of the smartest men ever, had taken on
the challenge of how to cure the people affected.

I had personally seen the brain-washing happen, and had something that might just help.

A tiny stone of blue wrapped in thick shreds of fabric, to make sure no one touched it.

My old neighbour had managed to kill the alien touching him with the stone before being fully turned, and gave himself a mortal injury.

Though it couldn't touch skin, I just knew it could help, and stowed it away in my pack.

When I reached the dilapidated city of New York, I made my way to the tallest tower, the one that still stood despite all the destruction the aliens and brain-washed people caused, the one that still lit up at night; the one that carried the name of the man trying hardest to save us.

I was going to see Tony Stark.

I managed to get into the tower after a quick, but thorough, examination to prove I wasn't brain-washed.

Most people just went by eye colour -it was an unnatural blue that consumed the eyes- but there was also a rigidity to movements that was uniform among those brain-washed. I was cleared to enter and I stopped in shock at just how many people were in the tower.

Tony Stark had turned his tower into a sanctuary, providing food and shelter for anyone who was proven to be clean.

Something tightened in my chest as I moved to begin looking.

It was determination. Determination to help, to learn, and to save.

For a man who always appeared to be larger than life, Tony was quick to listen and quicker to learn.

I only had to explain the brain-washing process once before he was pulling together reports and files that helped create a clearer picture of what was happening to peoples brains.

The blue stone was carefully sealed in a glass box and tests were off and running immediately.

Then Tony hugged me.

"You've done so well. Thank you. Thank you so much for getting here, for not giving up."

I cried, in both sadness and relief and held onto Tony as much as I could.

I stayed close to him from then on.

Over the following months, more and more of the world's population was turned.

The tower was still safe, but the volunteers to go out and collect food was dwindling because of how very real the threat outside was. Rhodey and Happy, Tony's two best friends were always willing, and were among the best, so food was still collected, but it took longer to feed everyone,
and tempers ran high when told to wait, or that less was available.

I spent most of my time with Tony, Rhodey, Happy, Pepper and Tony's A.I. J.A.R.V.I.S., but when I was on the other floors with the survivors, I was so confused by their behaviour; Tony was sheltering and feeding them, providing power and water for their safety, yet they were cursing him out for taking too long for a cure, for keeping all the good food for himself, for -and I had to quickly leave when I heard this- profiteering off the destruction.

When I told Tony, he merely pulled me close and spoke.

"The people are scared, and they want to feel some measure of control. Same as with bullies, they feel in control while they attack someone else. I am an easy target, so they aim at me, and that's fine. I can handle their attacks, no problem. And if they're attacking me, they're not attacking someone else."

Tony didn't speak about how he hadn't had a proper meal in months, instead eating lean so those downstairs would be full.

He didn't speak of how little sleep he got, trying to discover the cure for those brain-washed.

He didn't speak of how he created toys and trinkets while tests ran, for the kids in the tower and their parents.

I held him tighter.

He didn't speak, because those downstairs wouldn't listen.

I continued my forays to the lower levels, if only so I would remember why we needed to keep working.

It was there, during one of the arguments that had gotten more physical, that I met Peter.

Peter was new to the tower, having instead stayed with his aunt until she passed away, as she had been too injured to make the trip to the tower. He was the newest volunteer for food runs, keeping himself busy so he didn't think about how his family was gone. Peter was street-wise, knowing a lot about where food trucks, vendors, and small grocers were that had likely not been raided yet, coupled with an incredibly accurate sense of danger.

He had managed to save the food parties thrice already with that particular skillset.

The argument was between a man of ... larger physique, and one of the last food-runs' gatherers.

The big guy was demanding more than his allotment.

"Why the hell should I be starving when Stark's doing nothing but pigging out on the lot?! I'm stuck here suffering, and he's getting fat off my tragedy!"

"Sir, please, we haven't got the food to be divvying out seconds before everyone else has at least had firsts, and-"

"That's because Stark's taking all the food he wants and leaving the scraps! I'm wasting away while he's goofing off upstairs! I'm a damn senator girl, and I deserve better than this!"

"You deserve far less than what you've gotten, so keep your trap shut!"

Peter had cut into the mess and gently coaxed the young woman to return to handing out the food
to those still waiting, which she quickly did with a grateful smile.

"What the hell’s wrong with you boy?! I am a man worth ten times you, at least, and you speak to me with such disrespect?!!"

Peter scoffed, a half smile on his lips.

"What have you done to deserve any respect, let alone extra food?"

The senator puffed out his chest and began extolling all of the laws he had helped pass. Peter scoffed again.

"Yeah, and the aliens with the brain-washed hordes are doing a swell job at following those laws huh?"

Peter was a kind guy, the sorta guy that mothers adored their daughters bringing home, and fathers watched in pride. So the furrow to his brow and the downward slant of his lips was very out of place.

"You accuse Mr Stark of doing nothing but get fat while everyone suffers. As a member of the food teams, I can tell you that the penthouse is the last place to get food; literally everyone else eats before Mr Stark. Mr Stark spends most of his time trying to find a way to reverse the brain-washing, while you just sit here watching the movies stored on the archives. You don't go on food runs, you don't help look after the little ones; all you do is yell and complain. I don't care if you keep sitting on your ass and watch TV, but if you don't shut up, I'm going to personally leave you outside to be taken."

The senator shut up pretty damn quickly. I grabbed Peter's arm and led him to the penthouse, explaining to Tony what had happened.

Peter finally let his tears fall as Tony pulled him into a hug, for a brief time hiding him away from the world.

Pepper had joined Happy for one of the food runs, wanting to do more for the residents of the tower while Tony was working his hardest. It was meant to be a simple one, just a dash and grab from the closest grocer that still had canned goods.

She and Happy walked into a trap, and the tower mourned when they didn't come back.

Everyone was on edge when the patriotism pin-up entered the tower.

As most of the country, I had grown up on the stories of Captain America; the man with a plan, the super soldier, the living embodiment of bravery, chivalry and justice. I had no idea who the two next to him were, but only the youngest in the tower didn't recognise the man in red, white and blue.

"Mr Stark, it's a pleasure to meet you."

"This isn't exactly the time for social visits, appreciated though they might be, so let's cut the chatter; what exactly are you doing here?"

Tony had, over the months I had grown to know him, revealed little specks of his past; the childhood forever shadowed by a dead man, the never ending flash of cameras tracking every
move, the haunting loneliness of being the only one no-one understands.

Captain America was not exactly remembered fondly by Tony, but it's easier to forgive a dead man than it is a living one.

"I can see Howard wasn't able to teach you manners or respect."

Especially when the living one is a dick.

"I've got a lot on my plate right now Rogers. Why are you here? The sooner you answer that, the sooner I can get back to work."

The two beside the Captain let out a scoff and snort. My nails, though kept short for ease when in the lab, were still long enough to bite into my palm as I clenched my fist. I could see Peter gritting his teeth to avoid speaking out. The Captain shook his head, as though in disappointment - and oh how that burned- before speaking again.

"There is a war going on outside Stark, in case it missed your attention. What could you possibly have to work on?"

It was Rhodey who answered, his voice sharp and cold.

"A way to reverse the aliens damned mind control."

The blond next to the Captain snorted again.

"We've already solved that."

Tony focused on the man as excited whispers and surprised gasps rang through the air.

"Just give 'em a couple sharp hits to the head, and they're right as rain."

Tony looked at them in disbelief, before gently shaking his head.

"That's going to go down as well as a house on fire. To rehash an age old question; what brings you here?"

The Captain shook his head again, adding an eye-roll to the action before taking a step forward.

"Now that we have a way to restore peoples humanity, S.H.I.E.L.D. is preparing to launch an attack on the aliens home base. We've been sent here to procure weapons for the assault."

The silence that overtook the room was near violent; it was almost like every single sound was snatched away, as opposed to just stopped.

"I stopped making weapons."

Everyone knew that, knew that Tony's weapons had been used against him, knew that Tony promised never again.

"We're on the precipice of saving the world Stark; drop the ego and help for once in your life."

The red head looked at Tony, completely unimpressed, with just a hint of disgust. Tony was unmoved.

"I stopped making weapons."
The Captain sighed, the kinda sigh parents give when they're tired of dealing with their kids.

"You're going to be foolish about this aren't you?"

Tony squared his shoulders and straightened his spine.

"I stopped making weapons."

The Captain sighed again and did yet another disappointed head shake, before addressing the people.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. has a bunker fitted and prepared for any who wish to move there. Black Widow, Hawkeye and myself, along with a contingent of S.H.I.E.L.D. agents outside, are more than willing to guide you there."

Tony and Rhodey didn't move while the people they had fed and sheltered for so long practically ran out the doors. The kids and some of the teenagers called out thanks and farewells to Tony, but not a single adult even looked his way. Eventually it was just Rhody, Peter and me still standing with Tony.

The red head -Black Widow, the Captain called her- looked at Peter and me in confusion.

"Come on you two; outside with everyone else."

Peter scoffed now, mocking the sound she had used earlier.

"I thought the bunker was for any who wished?"

Still confused, the woman nodded.

"Well I don't wish. I'm staying here."

I nodded, moving slightly closer to Tony, offering my support. The blond -Hawkeye- snorted again, before his voice took on the coaxing tones parents use.

"Come on kids, S.H.I.E.L.D. has fully stocked the bunker; there's food, games, even movies available! You'll have stuff to do instead of just sitting around in this place. Come on, it'll be fun!"

I couldn't believe the guy, the way he was talking to Peter and me as though we were under ten. It just proved that not only did this 'S.H.I.E.L.D.' not know anything about our conditions in the tower (which were excellent given the circumstances) but that they wanted Tony alone, probably as petty revenge for him not doing what they wanted.

I straightened my back, Peter doing the same, and put on my most unimpressed face.

"I'm sure you're constantly entertained then."

The gobsmacked look on his face was reward enough, but Tony's proud glance was worth everything.

"You've heard their decision. Unless you have something important to say, I think you best be off to escort those people to your bunker."

With matching sneers and a final disappointed head shake, the three intruders left.

Tony briefly clenched a fist, before turning around to face us.
"We've got work to do."

"Concussive blows to the head are able to erase the brain-washing, jolting the system back on line, but it's a fools method."

Looking over the data and test results, Tony kept working as hard as he always had.

"How do you mean?"

Tony spared a smile for Peter before look back at the readouts.

"Perhaps it would be better to say that announcing it like they did is the fools method. Now, everyone who heard that is going to think they can just knock out any member of the horde that gets near them. And that's incredibly stupid. Aside from the general stiffness the little minions develop, those brain-washed retain all their skills, knowledge and abilities. For a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent -a good one anyway- giving a couple of knocks or so to someone's noggin isn't that big of a deal.

To the average person, it is far more likely to go wrong."

Tony turned to face all three of us, his eyes as serious as they could get, and his face completely blank otherwise.

"For the average person, they haven't been trained in controlling their strength in high stress situations like this, they don't know how to maintain distance while striking, they don't know where to aim for best results. They're just going to try and slug it out; literally beat the alien out of people. But not every person brain-washed is an adult; there are countless teens, children and babies who are now sporting the ice blue eyes. All it takes is one hit too strong, one hit in the wrong place, and you're not rescuing them.

You're killing them."

We spent the night cuddled together, trying to pretend our shaking was from the cold.

For a solid week, the three kept coming back, trying to convince Tony to make weapons, and when that failed, trying to convince me and Peter to leave, which also failed. I could see it was starting to really aggravate the Black Widow, that she wasn't instantly obeyed, especially by a pre-pubescent and a boy in his teens.

They always left the same way, matching sneers and a disappointed head shake. The sneers were far easier for us all to ignore, because they didn't hold the weight Captain America did.

"As Howard's son, I'd think you'd want what's best for the people, just like your father would."

"Howard did everything he could to provide the best for me and my men."

"I worked closely with Howard, so I realise that you're trying your best to match him."

"Howard would be so disappointed in you."

I stopped holding Captain America as a hero that day.

The day of the attack on the Pentagon arrived and passed.
It was a success but a hollow one.

Almost the second the final alien had been felled, reports came in from around the world about more portals opening, spewing hundreds of thousands of more aliens onto the Earth.

Tony authorised J.A.R.V.I.S. to use extreme force if deemed necessary, and put on a pot of extra-strength coffee.

Not a one of us slept that night.

Five days passed, and the alien reports slowly dwindled, until only static played.

"Sir, Captain Rogers and his associates are requesting entry; they pass my tests for outside influences."

J.A.R.V.I.S.' voice pulled us from our work, and Tony slowly nodded his head.

"Alright J; we're coming down."

The three looked beaten to all hell, and like they hadn't slept since their last visit. They were quickly moved to nearby seating and Tony demanded to know what was going on.

"One of the agents was turned mid-battle, and hid amongst the group when we returned to the bunker."

No.

Please no.

"We're the only ones still free."

Not every person brain-washed is an adult; there are countless teens, children and babies who are now sporting the ice blue eyes.

"Peter, Harley; go back upstairs and pack your things. Quickly."

I stared at Tony in confusion, as did everyone but Rhodey, who was already gone.

"There are two S.H.I.E.L.D. agents who I definitely know have ways to shut down J.A.R.V.I.S., and one more who is a very likely possibility. The tower is no longer safe, so we're moving. Go!"

I didn't have much of my own things to pack, so the empty space in my bag was used for food supplies and some tech Tony needed to keep working. More of the same was in Peter and Rhodey's bags, while Tony's bag when he joined us was entirely of his tech and data.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., block out Stark Tower from your access reports and relocate to the bots. We're headed home."

"Understood Sir. May our paths cross again soon."

As we piled into two of Tony's cars, the ever hopeful beacon of Stark Tower flickered and dimmed, before finally going out.

The tower had overlooked all of New York, Tony's construction and defences proving to be enough
to ward off the everyday alien attack, so all the damage done to the big apple wasn't anything new. Driving through it was a horror I had never encountered before though.

Was every bump in the road a pothole from the battles, or was it some tragic soul lost to the world?

"You three came to me for a reason, and you should know by now that I'm not going to build any bombs; what info do you have that might help me?"

The communication line between the cars crackled a little before Black Widow spoke.

"The aliens are a race called the Chitauri. They sent small groups of advanced scouts to start the brain-washing, and have some apparent use for us alive, which is why they haven't just decimated the planet. About five years ago, S.H.I.E.L.D. had been researching an artefact that we now know to be alien in origin, when the WSC forced us to hand all of it over to them. The information we got stated that they took it to the White House, and then decided to play with it."

Tony's fingers tightened on the wheel.

"Alright, skip the history lesson for now, I'm going to have a lot of questions for you when we get to base but they can wait; what happened during the battle at the Pentagon?"

A succinct summary of battle tactics and the results was delivered by all three of them, telling of how the Chitauri were strong, but fragile fighters, whose greatest advantage was in their numbers.

"Just from your description, it sounds like the Chitauri are a hive mind; the sheer number of them along with how they organise themselves gives that theory a strong pull. It would mean that destroying the queen or host should make them all drop."

"Any ideas on how to find said host queen?"

"Not at present, but I'm a certified genius with terrible insomnia and we are facing the end of the world; I'll think of something."

---

We pulled into Tony's Malibu home about five days later, having to take routes to avoid Chitauri scouts and the hordes of brain-washed civilians.

Half the house was missing, but as the cars drove into the garage, the steep incline down led to an untouched space of glass and metal.

"Alright guys wake up; Daddy's home."

A clap of his hands had the garage and connected workshop lighting up, the machinery beginning to hum and warm up, and three bots dashing out to meet him.

"Yes, I've missed you three as well. We'll do introductions in a little bit, first I need Dum-E to boot up J.A.R.V.I.S. for me, ButterFingers to upload this flash drive to my servers, and U to clear my workbench. There will be oiling for those who finish in five minutes."

The bots sped off to their assigned tasks, and Tony gestured for us to find a seat, having to repeat himself to the Captain who was looking at everything with his jaw wide open.

"Sorry, this is just... it's so far beyond what I could have imagined."

Tony rolled his eyes.
"That's because you worked with Howard. Now, Widow, I said I would have questions about the history lesson and-
"

"Why is there a hole in the roof?! Did the Chitauri get in here?!

Everyone turned to look where the Captain was pointing, and Tony just sighed.

"No, that was me, for reasons that are right this second unimportant. Widow, again, what exactly was the-
"

"Why did you bust a hole in your roof?! That's a danger that we can't afford, having our defences breached like that!

"Rhodey, steel desk behind you, thin metal stick with blue end -yes, that's the one- do as you will."

Rhodey took great delight in pressing the small electric prod into the Captain's side any time it looked like he might interrupt.

"Third time's the charm. Widow, what was the artefact S.H.I.E.L.D. was studying? What was it believed to do, what did it look like, that sort of stuff. For all we know, this artefact is connected directly to the host system of the Chitauri; you've got details, you give them to me."

"Hawkeye is in a better position to give you information; he was part of the assigned guard detail before the WSC took it."

Hawkeye leaned forward in his seat, no longer wearing the little smirk from days passed.

"I was told it was called the Tesseract. It was the item that gave HYDRA all their power during the second World War."

The Captain's face was carefully blank; he'd obviously heard all this before, and still wasn't happy about it.

"Howard Stark fished it out of the ocean on one of his many searches for the Captain, and left in S.H.I.E.L.D.'s archives for future study, saying that we could use it as a power source. Fury had it set up to-
"

"Wait, hold on, just... just pause for a few moments...

Tony was up and digging through a chest by one of the desks, pulling out various clothes, a film reel, what looked to be a prototype for Captain America's shield ("Do... do I want to know why you have that?" "Howard was a pack rat; I'm pretty sure his Collection Hall has a pair of your underwear both before and after the serum." "...Ewww.") until he finally pulled out a beat up leather journal and flicked through the pages.

"This, is this the Tesseract?"

The page depicted a roughly drawn cube with cramped handwriting describing a blue glow. Hawkeye nodded.

"That's it. Your old man must have gone over it before he handed it over."

Tony looked back at the pages, eyes going over the information.

"Fury had the cube set up for experiments to see if we could harness that power, like HYDRA did. He also said something about the cube being a door through space or something, I'm guessing that
means the whole portal business. He had Bruce Banner working on it, but the Doc up and vanished once the cube was gone."

Tony's fingers were beating a staccato rhythm on his arc reactor as he kept perusing the journal, before quickly standing up.

"J.A.R.V.I.S., you up?"

"For you Sir, always."

Tony was streamlining coffee, Rhodey Peter and I not far behind, as we pulled together the data we had. The other three kept themselves busy by going over their supplies, checking the over all security of the house, and going on food runs. For the first few days, the Captain would bemoan how Tony refused to eat, stating that his cooking wasn't that bad, and he had specifically looked for the supplies to make a nice meal, but eventually learned that Tony was too far into his work to actually recognise food in front of him unless he could eat it one handed and without looking; silverware meals were a no go.

Granola bars, fruit pouches and juice boxes were devoured no problem though.

Every now and then, a scratchy report would be played over the radio, telling people to stay strong, how little bundles of survivors were coming together, preparing to once more pool their efforts to fight off the alien menace.

The Captain, Black Widow and Hawkeye, were getting more and more on edge with every report, until finally they suited up, bid their farewells and left to join the battles.

For a few hours, they worked in peace.

"Oh for the love of- Rhodey!"

Rhodey jumped, turning to Tony in surprise.

"If you want to join them, let me know so I can suit you up."

Rhodey ducked his head in embarrassment before nodding. Tony just sighed and pointed to one of the walls.

"Third panel from the left. Fury briefly got his hands on it, so it's stupidly bulky, and I haven't had the time to go over it since I got it back, but it'll probably actually be better for you."

Rhodey activated the panel, which descended to reveal-

"Is that a robot? Tell me that's a robot. It's a robot right?"

Tony chuckled.

"No Pete, it's a suit of armour. It should fit Rhodey more or less, much chaff a little, but it's the best I can offer you right now."

Rhodey looked over at Tony.

"When all this bullshit's over, I'm making you Momma's casserole."

Tony actually cheered as Rhodey got into the suit.
As we worked, a noise from the radio caught my attention.

It wasn't like the sounds people used to announce a report. It was a series of gentle beeps.

"Tony, is that normal?"

Tony paid attention for a minute, before leaping from his chair and running to one of his holo-screens.

"That, young Harley, is the pin sequence for some of the earliest computer coding in the world. J? Connect me to our programmer; we might have just made a friend."

His name was T'Challa.

He had come to America hoping to find anything to help reverse the brain-washing, given that his entire country had been taken over by the new Chitauri arrivals.

He hadn't been particularly hopeful of finding anyone through his code over the radio, but the smile of relief he gave when we met up with him in a nearby park showed just how thankful he was.

T'Challa proved invaluable help in the workshop, able to keep up with Tony far more easily than Peter or me. Tony set us to overlook slower running tests, so we were still useful without feeling coddled, given that the tests running were needed, but couldn't move fast enough for Tony and T'Challa's minds.

It was actually humbling, really, to watch the two of them at work. The flare of determination that had burned in me since I first met Tony grew a little bigger.

We were going to solve this problem. I just knew it.

Tony and T'Challa grew closer as they worked. Even though they hadn't known each other long, I started to forget how they looked without the other nearby.

Every twenty-four hours or so Tony, via J.A.R.V.I.S., would receive a report of Rhodey's well being, and the situations he was in. Having been gone a month, Rhodey had been in no less than forty-five battles. The armour managed to keep him safe from being mind controlled (and was that ever a wonderful discovery) and he had pulled his pseudo teammates out of danger many times.

In one of their rare breaks, T'Challa was looking over the specs of the suit.

"This is amazing. I dearly wish to see what you could create with Wakanda's technology at your hands."

Tony just smirked.

"Well Lion-O, I promise I'll keep walking at your side, so as to someday get to see that for myself."

T'Challa returned the smirk.
"I'll hold you to that my Dear."

Peter rolled his eyes.

"If you two are going to bump uglies, you can take it out of the workshop please."

T'Challa cleared his throat while Tony laughed.

"But Petey; it'll be educational!"

"I don't need that sort of education!"

When Tony's insomnia got to it's very worst, he worked on a robotic body.

"Technically it's a basis for body prosthesis, but it could easily become another of my bots. Shh, don't tell Pepper or Rhodey; they'll scold me for having another robot child and give me even more lectures on safe sex."

"I. DON'T. NEED. THAT. SORT. OF. EDUCATION!"

An enormous tremor shook the ground about a month after T'Challa had joined us.

"Sir! Security perimeter has been breached! Permission to use full force!"

"Granted! Peter, Harley, to your locations, T'Challa suit up!"

Peter and I huddled between the bot's charging docks, armed with prototype repulsors. The updates on Rhodey showed that the flight stabilisers, when used with maximum output, formed a beam that worked to great effect against the Chitauri.

It hadn't been made as a weapon, but damn if Tony was one to dispute results.

T'Challa donned the Vibranium mesh-weave suit that had spared him from the Chitauri's brain-washing, while Tony activated the fifth panel, showing a red and gold suit of armour.

The house shook yet again, and we waited to see what was coming.

The battle was over swiftly, the small group of Chitauri no match for Tony and T'Challa.

It was not without its consequences however.

During the brief fight, one of the Chitauri happened upon the blue stone that I had brought to Tony all that time ago. Tony managed to shoot the alien down, but the shot went right through the Chitauri and into the wall.

It wasn't until the last Chitauri fell that Tony realised the wall in question was where J.A.R.V.I.S.' primary server was hidden.

Breaking past the plaster and brick, we found the mangled remains of J.A.R.V.I.S. Tony looked ready to lose it, but Peter leapt into action, pulling the damaged server free and running to the robotic body Tony had been working on.

Without a word, Tony rose and joined him, uploading the data, the records, the coding that made
J.A.R.V.I.S. the snarky British butler he was into the machine before them.

The file transfer went more or less smoothly. A good chunk of J.A.R.V.I.S.’ memories would be broken or gone altogether, but the core was still there, the pieces that made a kind heart and will to learn for the A.I. were still functional.

The trouble came when they tried to turn him on.

"No, no, don't do this to me J. I can't lose you J.A.R.V.I.S., please buddy, wake up for me."

Peter suddenly jerked back, his sense of danger making him dodge a strike from a Chitauri that wasn't quite as dead as we thought. I managed to blow it's head off with a blast from the prototype repulsor still on my hand, but Peter had still jumped, hitting and flipping the tray that the blue stone had been put on after it had been recovered. The stone flew into the air from the sudden strike, and landed on the forehead of the robot.

A pulse of light filled the room, and cybernetic eyes opened.

"I am not J.A.R.V.I.S. I simply am."

**Vision, as he chose to be called, helped us pack up our things as we got ready to leave.**

Tony's armour worked in tandem with an A.I., so he was carefully installing the basic coding he had in storage for an A.I. he named Friday.

"She's still a baby, so she won't be able to do more than just sort out the information my sensors pick up, but that's all I need my princess to do. I'll activate the Cornerstone Protocol before we leave, which will have the bots safely hidden and powered down."

We piled into Tony's car, the suit safely folded away into it's briefcase, and started driving.

We eventually had to abandon the car in Kansas, because there was no safe way to fill up.

Even as we were walking though, Tony was fiddling with a small piece of tech, constantly referencing the portable holo-screen that held all our data. He'd had a flash of inspiration just before we had to ditch the car, and was working tirelessly, trying to get the idea into reality.

We were resting by a farmhouse in the middle of nowhere, the next town about two hours away, when movement caught my eye. I turned as carefully as I could while turning on my repulsor and slipping it onto my palm.

It was a kid, with warm brown eyes.

"Tony, there's a kid over there."

Tony had proven to be near impossible to drag out of his work, especially when inspired, but mentions of children always got his attention, a left-over relic of Howard Stark's parenting methods mixing with his own innate kindness.

"Hey there. We're not dangerous to you kid. See the eyes? None of us wearing the spooky blue."

The kid, a little girl with brown hair, comes out from her hiding spot, just a little, to look closer, before smiling.
"Daddy says it's not safe outside, but I had to feed the chickens, it's my job, and I was going back inside when I saw you, so I had to come closer and you're safe cause you're not zombies like other people. Come on, you can meet Mummy and Daddy inside."

And just like that, we were pulled into the homestead to meet the family.

"Rhodey?!"

And, you know, dog pile on a long gone friend.

Turns out that Hawkass ("Seriously, call me Clint, I have heard enough about you over the last couple months from Rhodey that I will shank you if you call me Hawkeye or Barton." "...How much of '86 did he tell you?" "TONY! I swear to all that is holy, you will NOT share that year, or I will make you suffer!" "86 you say?" "Goddammit!") owned the farm, and his family, Laura his wife and his son and daughter, Cooper and Lila, had been just out of the way enough that no one had come yet.

The Captain ("Please, call me Steve." "Not a chance.") and Widow ("I go by Romanoff." "Good for you.") had also picked up a couple more free souls. They'd found Doctor Banner ("I have read so many of your papers, especially the ones Tony recommended for my reading level, and I am so stoked to meet you sir!" "I- that's ... Thanks." "Hey Peter, do you think the Hulk would play with us?" "Yes Harley. Yes I do." "Wait, what?!") and a tall guy claiming to be the God of Thunder ("Well met young warriors! I have heard many a tale of your bravery! Come, let us sit and exchange word of our exploits!" "...Did you escape from a Shakespearean troupe?" "I am so proud Harley.")

After the introductions, Tony was once more working, T'Challa looking over his shoulder at the data and pointing things out, offering suggestions where he could. Which sadly wasn't as often as before Tony's latest idea, as he hadn't explained it out yet, but the way he was working implied that it was actually hard for him to keep the idea in his mind, so needed to focus on it.

It was a squeeze, but we were all able to sleep in the house that night, sharing beds and couches with no trouble. Peter and I curled up on top of T'Challa and Tony respectively on opposite ends of one couch while Doctor Banner and Thor shared the other. Vision claimed the lone arm chair, while Widow and the Captain bunked with Lila and Cooper.

The days passed with a greater sense of peace.

"Shit! Only Fury and Coulson know where this house is; one of them has been caught to be sending S.H.I.E.L.D. here!"

The swathe of Chitauri and agents pressed ever closer to the house, the sunset behind them sending their shadows crawling ominously across the house. Those who could fight from a distance did so, while Rhodey and T'Challa were safe to fight up close, and Vision hovered somewhere between the two. Tony was furiously working on his device, trying to get it to work. Peter and I were guarding the Barton's, our repulsors armed and ready.

The fight was brutal, the house being destroyed and injuries for all. The last Chitauri had just fallen when-

"LILA!"

She'd been snatched away by one of the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents, a lady Widow called Bobbi Morse.
"A shame you forced us to do this Agent Barton; you would have proved invaluable to our Lord."

The bright blue light of the stone pulsed into Lila, claiming her eyes with ice. Morse looked at Barton with a cold smile.

"Well agent? All it takes is a couple hits to the head."

Hawkeye looked devastated, and Laura no better.

It was just as Tony said, one wrong factor, and Lila would be dead not saved.

Another agent started firing a machine gun, just as a high pitched squeal filled the air.

Everything went black.

When I came to, it was dark out, and I got to my feet as quickly as I could.

I was still at the Barton farm, and as I looked around, I saw everyone else waking up too, including the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents.

Morse was one of the first ones to stand and she looked around in confusion.

"How did you guys get him out? I know nobody punched me; how did you guys stop the brain-washing?!"

I looked to Lila, the moon providing enough light to see the warm brown returned to her eyes. My breath caught.

Tony did it!

The others reached same conclusion I did and we all rain to the house where we had last seen Tony.

My breath caught again at the heavy scent of blood.

Tony was there, bleeding out from a heavy line of bullet wounds.

The machine gun fire.

Tony smiled at T'Challa and lifted a small pen-like device with a shaky hand.

"A coup-couple... strong hits to... to the head. This-this is... an old... old rejected weapon... from... from Howard's years. Lets out a... a sound pitched... to cause... paralysis. Like a... concussion... almost. Used against... me once. I had a real... really bad headache after... like I'd been punched... in the brain.

The stone... the stone let off a certain... certain wave length... and I finally... finally reversed it. I have the... the earplugs... in my bag... so the user will... will be safe. You can make... make more of them... and save them."

T'Challa was openly crying, cradling Tony's body close.

"Save your strength my Dear. We need to treat your wounds."

Tony shook his head ever so slightly.
"Not... not enough time. Been bleeding... too much."

T'Challa shook his head furiously.

"No! You'll be fine! You are strong and you will survive this!"

Tony's smile was sad, and Peter and I cuddled as close as we could, Vision carefully holding the device that would save us all.

"Not... not this... time."

"Yes this time! You'll make it my Dear, you will!"

Tony lifted a shaky hand, pressing it to T'Challa's cheek, thumb sluggishly rubbing at the falling tears.

"Harley... Peter... Vision... I am so... so very proud of you. And I love... love you all... you're my boys... forever kay?"

We nodded, unable to speak through the tightness.

"No! You promised Tony! You promised to keep walking at my side!"

A single tear trailed down Tony's cheek.

"Sorry T'Challa but..."

__________________________________________________________

We gathered our strength and went out, freeing everyone we met from the Chitauri, and mustering our forces to drive the aliens back through their portals.

It took a long time; we had to save the world after all.

When all was said and done, we returned to the Barton farm, to the willow we buried Tony under. Tony had changed his will at some point, leaving everything to T'Challa, Peter, Vision, Pepper, Happy, Rhodey and me.

He was prepared.

We weren't.

I've already made my arrangements with the Barton's, as has Peter and T'Challa. When our time comes to an end, we too will be buried here.

It's just like Tony said.

__________________________________________________________

"Sorry T'Challa but... it would seem that this... this is... where the sidewalk ends."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
Time In A Bottle

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

He faces forward, looking to the future.
If he didn't, he'd forever be looking back.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Everyone on the team had their individual methods for stress relief, all of which included avoiding mental health 'experts'.

Arm raised, held for a breath, then brought down.

Steve would flee to the gym, trying his utmost to destroy his specially made bags and his fists.

Arm raised, held for a breath then brought down, fast.

Natasha retreated to her studio, where she would go through countless dance routines.

Fast, fast, faster.

Clint would hole up on the range, shooting arrow after arrow until his arms couldn't take the motions any more, before switching to a gun to keep going.

Faster, faster, faster. Stronger.

Bruce would hide in the Hulk room, tiny and unnoticeable amongst the oversized furniture.

Arm raised, held a breath, then brought down, fast, strong.

When on Earth, Thor would seek out Jane Foster, basically ignoring anything that wasn't his lady love.

Again and again. Faster. Stronger.

Pietro would go for a run, no one knowing how long or how far he'd go.

Faster. Stronger.

Wanda would try to cuddle up to Vision, who after the mess of the 'Civil War' couldn't stand to let her.

Faster, Stronger. Faster. Stronger.

Vision would confine himself to the quinjet, listening to the calming hum of electronics.
Again. Again.

Sam would go down to the VA, spending all day there.


Scott would go to Hank and Hope, usually without telling anyone.

*Arm raised, held a breath, then brought down, again, again.*

Bucky would camp out on the roof with a bag of small stones, pegging them at any pigeon who tried to land.

*Arm raised, held a breath, then brought down, faster, again, stronger, again.*

Peter would go curl up with his Aunt May, luckily not really needing a reason beyond 'teenager' to receive cuddles.


Rhodey would call on Momma Rhodes, and spend the day safely with her.

*Again. Faster. Arm raised, held a breath, then brought down, stronger. Again.*

T’Challa would move to the common room and stare endlessly out the windows, trying to imagine the jungles of his home.

*Again. Faster. Arm raised, held a breath, then brought down, stronger. Again.*

And Tony would enter his workshop, pull out the old, well used hammer and anvil, and return to the origins of his craft, heating and beating the metal until it took the form he decided.


No. It wasn't.

_____________________________________

What were you thinking; hiding something like this?! 

"I was thinking that no one had to know."

Why wouldn’t you share this information?! 

"Because it has always been my responsibility alone."

Who gave you the right to decide to abuse this?! 

"The one who gave you the right to question me."

How long have you kept this to yourself?! 

"Longer than you’ve been alive."

_____________________________________

The battle was under control, enough so that Tony was able to focus on defusing the bomb.

It was a mix of ancient methods and something alien, just new enough that Tony had to work hard
on shutting it down.

Of course, the others didn't understand just how complex a task he was dealing with, and were constantly yelling at him to hurry up and just turn it off and-

And there was the wire he needed to cut, oh so carefully tangled in a braid of the little bastards.

He had just positioned the cutters when he looked back at the timer.

0:03

0:02

0:01

Shit.

The heat and pressure of the explosives was already blazing on his skin, the decaying rot of burning flesh meeting his nose before it was clogged with gunpowder and ash.

As he was falling he could see the flames reaching... everything.

The team, still shaky after all the crap of the Civil War, were suddenly reunited through their pain; they knew now that they weren't alone in their suffering.

Civilians were screaming in pain, falling just as he was, losing their lives because he had needed just one more second...

Tony broke the promise to himself; it's not like anyone else had ever fully kept theirs.

Tony was a futurist, trying to always see the next three moves, to always be prepared for tomorrow and all the days after, to always look forward.

Tony broke his own promise.

Tony looked back.

He opened the casing for the bomb and went straight for the braid of wires, finding the one he needed and cutting it.

0:47

The fighting had stalled, everyone looking around, dazed and confused.

Tony aimed for the leader, and soon had him flying to the pavement, his minions helpless without his guidance, and no longer interested in fighting.

The team looked at him. Some glared really.

It was obvious that he hadn't been effected, and they wanted to know why.

"You are going to hurt something if you swing any harder."

Tony faltered slightly, his raised arm aborting it's movements as he turned to see who had entered
his workshop.

"Simba. Whatever brings you to my lair?"

The Wakandan King slowly entered the workshop, his eyes looking over the space just as they did every time. Almost against his will, Tony felt himself calming down at T'Challa's presence. The man exuded cool and calm, and after all the work they had both put into fixing the accords as best they could, Tony and T'Challa had become rather close; not quite dating yet, but certainly holding an open affection for each other.

T'Challa drew near, quirking a brow.

Tony stared at the man for a few moments before he turned and was speaking, rambling really, anything to break the silence that now permeated his workshop.

"You know, every mythology humans have come up with have a time keeper? Kronos, Atropos, the Pleiades, they've all got someone watching over the seconds of the day. And that's their job, you know? These beings -who after receiving a head-first lesson on Norse mythology actually being a thing I can no longer say don't exist- dedicate themselves to the task of watching over time."

Tony paused to take a breath, before once more looking at T'Challa.

"Some how, I'm pretty much one of them."

T'Challa took a step closer, then another, and another until he was able to draw Tony into a hug.

Tony hadn't really realised he'd been breathing so heavily, until he began matching his breaths to T'Challa's.

A few moments were spent in the embrace before T'Challa moved them to the couch.

"Humans aren't meant to have this sort of power T'Challa. We fall prey to temptation and corruption so easily. I know so many people could be helped with this power -I know that's the argument Steve's throwing around right now- but as you yourself experienced, you remember what happened the first time. This power doesn't exist in a bubble; I literally turned the world backwards by a minute, so everyone was effected. And I can't be everywhere at once. No one can. Crimes and accidents and mistakes will still be happening, even if we could stop some of them.

And what stops criminals from using it to their advantage?

A robber gets caught by a silent alarm. A minute's extra knowledge, and they won't trip the alarm they now know is there. A rapist loses hold of their intended victim because they struggled more than expected; an extra minute's knowledge could be all they need to overpower their target. There is no perfect answer to how to use this power. No matter how I use it, there will always, always, be something more I could have done or somebody I failed to save.

It's enough to drive a person mad."

T'Challa's hand pressed warm strokes up and down Tony's spine and Tony once more focused on his breathing.

"I theoretically could have saved myself and those kids with me in Afghanistan, but I couldn't bring myself to, because then the most horrible question would be asked of me."
Two pairs of brown eyes, one near black, the other like amber, met and a gentle urging to continue was made without words.

"Where do I draw the line about who gets to be saved?"

The arms around him tightened as Tony struggled not to shed his tears.

"I'm human T'Challa. I will falter, I will make mistakes, and some day I will die. Hopefully, this power will die with me, so no-one else has to bear that burden too. Because no human should have to carry this power. Nobody should be forced to make that decision. When do I have the right to say no to saving someone? Is it when I don't know them personally? Is it when their deaths wouldn't effect me? Is it when I stop caring? SI has a no ransom policy for just this reason; that is the biggest protection I can give my workers.

The Avengers may be angry at me, and may try to push me into using it, but I will not use it if I can help it. I had promised myself not to use it, and broke that promise today. I will do everything I can, not to break that promise twice."

The arms grew even tighter, and a feather-soft kiss was placed on his forehead.

"And I shall be there to help you in any way I can."

Tony finally shed the tears he had been carrying since the battle.

"Thank you."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

Five Secrets. Four Colours. Three Talks. Two Proposals. One Fear.
Blast off.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ten. 10. X.

Tony dreamed.

It's something that all little ones do; falling into the grasp of sleep and experience worlds unlike any other.

Tony's dreams had always been fairly simple.

His father proudly smiling as he patted Tony's back, whispering congratulations for his latest design.

His mother laughing again as she taught Tony how to play the piano, teasingly correcting his fingers positions on the keys.

As Tony grew, the dreams changed, but they were still pretty simple.

Finding Captain America and him thanking Tony for helping him, with Tony's dad looking on with a proud smile.

Finally growing tall enough to lead his laughing mother through a waltz at the latest SI event.

As Tony grew older still, the changes in his dreams were more noticeable, to him anyway.

Having a workshop where he could lock the door, and nobody would come in to throw things at him and yell that he was useless.

Being able to stay at home and tinker instead of being forced into a suit that never seemed to fit, and being accosted by people who never seemed to care.

It happens to everyone. As we grow and experience the world. Through good times.

And through bad.

Howard sighing, taking a sip from the heavy crystal glass before looking at Tony, regret and awe in his eyes.
Maria hesitantly reaching out, her fingers winding through Tony's hair and gently stroking.

But dreams are what we make of them right?

Howard and Maria playing with Tony in a park, laughing as they chase their four year old son.

And hey, sometimes, the only things that change in dreams-

He smiles as the sun lightens their daughter's cocoa complexion, his husband's dark eyes shining with love and peace.

Is the people within them.

**Nine. 9. IX.**

It's a circuit board. I made with pieces from my daddy's workshop.

Stark's are meant to be seen.

The engine's combustion unit is still a little shaky; I'm not strong enough to push all the parts in place yet.

Stark's are showmen.

It's a basic A.I. to assist me when I'm in the workshop. Really basic though; I tend to call him Dum-E.

Stark's are performers.

A genius, a patriot, and a good man. A philanthropist, a socialite, and a good woman. May they rest in peace.

Stark's are glamour.

You may think I'm too young to be heading this company gentlemen, but you give me a year, and I can make SI billions.

Stark's are flash.

It's an imperfect world, but it's the only one we got

Stark's are salesmen.

Is it better to be respected or feared?

Stark's are ringleaders.

Effective immediately, Stark Industries will be shutting down it's weapon's manufacturing.

Tony is a Stark and more.

I am Iron Man.

**Eight. 8. VIII.**

There's a saying, both old and not, known pretty much by everyone.
It's okay Bambino. We'll go another time, when everything's less busy. I promise.

It's pretty simple all told, one of those cute little rhyming ones that little kids can learn.

*I need to work Anthony, I'll look at your doodad later. I promise.*

If a promise you don't keep.

*We heard about your award Bambino, and I'm sorry we missed the ceremony. We'll be at the next one though. I promise.*

It will haunt you in your sleep.

*I suppose you'd need to learn more about SI soon. I'll let you tag along to the next board meeting I guess. I promise.*

And as you lie beneath your quilt.

*We'll talk about this when we get home okay? I promise.*

You will have a conscience full of guilt.

*Tony, your parents are gone, but Uncle Obie will look after you. I promise.*

A lot of promises to Tony have been broken. But that's okay.

*So no matter what, I promise if you — if you need us. If you need me, I'll be there.*

Tony knows how to keep his.

*I promise I'll always love you T'Challa.*

**Seven. 7. VII.**

Every year, before the clock struck twelve for the final time, before ringing in the new, Tony would squeeze his eyes tight, and whisper a few precious words.

*I wish my Parents would love me.*

The words could change year to year, but they generally held the same wish for a few years before changing entirely.

*I wish I were normal.*

It wasn't something he had ever been told to do, nor something he actually put a whole lot of stock in.

*I wish I didn't have to go to Huntington's.*

Tony just couldn't help making the midnight New Year's wish.

*I wish I had a friend at M.I.T.*

Whether they had been granted.

*I wish I never went to Afghanistan.*
Or never could be.

I wish I could have protected the Avengers.

But that's the point of wishes. You work towards them.

And as Tony sways in T'Challa's arms as Auld Lang Syne begins to play, just as the clock strikes twelve.

I wish this could last forever.

He smiles. He's never minded hard work.

Six. 6 VI.

We are so proud of Anthony. My son really is a chip off the old block huh?

The words twist like vines, and pierce him deep, like thorns on a rose. He knows his father isn't telling the truth.

Oh Tony's simply amazing! I love to just sit and watch him while he works.

His mother always has more important things she wants to do. He knows she's not telling the truth.

Tony my boy! How's school? You're getting so big! I can't wait to see where the world takes you!

He wishes he didn't know Obie was lying, so instead he buries the truth within his mind.

Tony tries not to lie, instead redirecting, or sometimes not speaking at all.

I will miss you Tony.

Lies are mean. They hurt, and are really only intended to save the liars skin.

I suspected, but didn't know for sure.

Mostly anyway. Sometimes, lies are the only things that stop a person from falling apart.

You'll be okay Tony, just focus on me, I'm not leaving your side Husband, you'll be okay.

As his eyes flutter shut, Tony almost believes it.

Five. 5. V.

Your Daddy won't be happy if he finds out Mister Tony, so the cookie is a secret between you and me, okay?

Tony doesn't really say much. If you actually think about how he talks, most of it's meaningless.

Oh they're just some old discarded designs, Howard won't notice Tony, so he won't get mad. It's a secret between you and me right?

He doesn't even really think about it; part of it's because Tony's mind is so fast, part of it is that Tony has a lot of secrets to keep safe.

Tones, sometimes, I'm scared that I won't come back, and I start thinking I should quit before that happens... This is a secret okay? Between you and me.
Secrets are knowledge, and knowledge is power. Tony has to be powerful, because so many people try to tear him down.

You get the Avengers to sign the Accords Stark, and all this will go away. No one has to know. It'll be a secret between you and me.

So Tony talks, he redirects, he gently misleads. Some secrets are scary, some are dangerous, some are precious sparks of warmth and light in his long life.

The press will find out eventually Husband. Let us enjoy the anonymity until they do. A secret between you and me.

Tony doesn't really mind keeping secrets.

Four. 4. IV.

Red had always been his favourite colour. The colour of leaders. The colour of his best and fastest car models. The colour of Aunt Peggy's lips.

It turned into the colour of blood on the sand. The colour of mistakes drenching his skin. The colour of fire burning on his hands.

It then became the colour of redemption. The colour of choice. The colour of freedom.

Black had always been a favourite colour. The colour of the Panthers his people so adored. The colour of his mother's hair. The colour of the midnight sky.

It turned into the colour of the warriors in battle. The colour of death crowding his father. The colour of revenge clouding his eyes.

It then became the colour of balance. The colour of control. The colour of freedom.

Gold had always been held in fondness by them both.

Gold was wealth. Was gifts. Was status.

Gold turned into chains. Into requirements. Into worth.


Brown was their new favourite. The colour of gently curled hair. The colour of warm smooth skin. The colour of different pairs of eyes.

It turned into the colour of half-burnt anniversary cake. The colour of the stone sitting in a ring worn on a chain round a neck. The colour of chocolate melting on their tongues.

It became the colour of young laughter. The colour of first words. The colour of family.

Three. 3. III.

"I've been at Tony's side, keeping him safe, for a long time. He may not need me to fend off the reporters or the crazies anymore, but that doesn't mean I'm not willing to punch you out if you do something wrong. I don't care if you're the Queen of England; you mess with the Boss, you deal with me. And I will do everything to put you down."

Harold 'Happy' Hogan. T'Challa nodded calmly. It was good that Tony had such a devoted
"Your Highness. A pleasure. I’ve heard a lot about you from Tony, and I’m glad he’s found someone he cares about so strongly. Just so you’re aware however, I sit as the CEO of Stark Industries, and everything I have learnt about the business has been at Tony’s side. In a fight, you’d easily overpower me, but I don’t need to fight to ruin you. SI is global, it’s influence far-reaching. Even Wakanda would suffer if I set SI’s might to the task. Keep that in mind before you’re ever tempted to screw Tony over."

Virginia ‘Pepper’ Potts. T’Challa quietly swallowed as he nodded. Tony’s ex was indeed as terrifying a woman as Tony claimed.

“I don’t care who you are, or how much power you hold. Tony is my best friend, and if you decide he’s not worth your time, if you decide somewhere down the road that you don’t want to be with him any more; I will end you. I have seen too many swear to love him only to turn their backs once they’ve had their fun. I may be injured, but even if all that was left of me was my head, I’d still find a way to rip your throat out with my teeth. Are we clear?”

James ‘Rhodey’ Rhodes. T’Challa subconsciously straightened as he gave a solemn nod. A man well prepared to avenge any slights to Tony.

T’Challa silently swore never to upset his lover, lest three powerful forces were unleashed upon him.

Two. 2. II.

The night had been so perfect; dinner for two followed by dancing on the beach, until they retired to their room to make love. Waking that morning, body so deliciously sore, to find a tray laden with breakfast awaiting them had another blissful smile curling his lips. Feeding each other small bites of food, laughing at how domestic, how cosy they both were, before reclining back on the bed, warm and comfortable.

A slight shifting caused him to look over at his lover, concerned by the sight nervousness evident on their features. Before a world could be spoken, a small velvet box was revealed and reverently placed on the now empty breakfast tray.

Trembling fingers picked up the box and cradled it a moment before finally opening it.

When meeting the hopeful eyes of his lover, before once more glancing at the ring, how could he say anything but-

"Yes."

They had a chance, an opportunity, that so many would kill for. All his life he had wished for this, though silently because it was his treasured dream, he felt no need to share it with just anyone. The preparations were all in place, the procedure well reviewed and the process as perfect as could be. So many would benefit from this, but they were to be the first. It was both a heady and scary thought to realise.

A slight shifting caused him to look at his husband, his partner, just as nervous as him, just as worried about what could go wrong. Before a word could be spoken, a small cardboard box was revealed and carefully put on the desk.

Trembling fingers picked up the box, holding it close before finally opening it.
When meeting the hopeful eyes of his husband, before once more glancing at the *booties*, how could he say anything but-

"Yes."

**One. I. I.**

They're both shaking, just ever so slightly, as they wait in the hall outside.

They know they can't do anything but wait; they'd be hindrance inside, but that knowledge doesn't make it any easier for them to be standing in the long white stretch of hall.

They both hate hospitals; they are always that blank, empty white, they reek of antiseptic and medicine, and far too often in their youth, hospitals were places of sadness and pain. Places of hurt and loss.

And they have both lost oh so much.

Shuri's screams ring through the hall, hitting both of them heavily in the heart.

A sister by both blood and bond, neither wished her any of the suffering she was enduring.

So much could go wrong, least of all starting with how the Panther Tribes enhancements made most anaesthetics useless to it's people, forcing Shuri to undergo every instant of pain. Screaming helped alleviate even the tiniest bit of pain, but could easily distract the Doctor, which could lead to a mistake.

T'Challa tightly curled his arms around Tony as they waited.

Shuri could die.

They both knew she was a strong woman, one of the strongest they'd ever met certainly, but anything could go wrong and take her away from them.

After all they had lost, this would be too much.

After both an age and an instant, Shuri's screams died off, and the Doctor entered the hall, pale, bloody and tired.

Their throats tightened, fearing the worst while hoping, *praying*, for the best.

"She and the baby are just fine."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
New Year, There, Here.

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

It's a small childish amusement, but time zones are fun.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They stand together on the balcony, watching the moon rise into the blackness of the midnight sky. The air is ringing with the sounds of the New Year being brought in; cheering, laughter, music. Arms wrapped tightly around each other, they sway gently to the natural rhythm the sounds create. A few small bonfires dot the darkened landscape, brilliant little bursts of colour and light spread across the view. They count down the final seconds, welcoming the New Year with a kiss.

They board the jet a half hour later. The trip will take a few hours, given the Wakandan jets speed. Neither are opposed to spending the time intimately before catching some rest.

They land at the airstrip and the drive to the tower takes them about half an hour. They are greeted enthusiastically by the team, most already half-drunk and certain members already stripping. The music is loud, the cheering is everywhere and the laughter is spilling from every mouth. They make their way to the penthouse balcony, just as the count down starts. They sway gently to the rhythmic counting, arms wrapped tightly around each other. Fireworks burst in brilliant colours through the darkened sky, dotting across the midnight view. They count down the final seconds, once more welcoming the New Year with a kiss.

Chapter End Notes
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
The Space Between You And Me

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna, pdt_85 and VWebb

Too late, it's gone, it won't come back.

I received quite a few requests for this, but seriously, you guys **NEED** to check out *By Our Own Hands*, by Poetically Ordinary; It is **amazing** and **perfect** and **goreaditnowohmygawd**!

Hope this satisfies Hon's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The phone was a heavy weight where it rested in his hand, but the letter, the godforsaken letter, was a milestone round his neck.

*So no matter what, I promise if you — if you need us. If you need me, I’ll be there.*

*No matter what you do Tony, you're still in my heart.*

________________________________________

*Surprisingly, it hadn't been Tony who had broached the idea of them dating.*

*He’d been in the common floor kitchen, making a mug of his holy-shit-how-do-you-function coffee - dubbed so by Clint- when Steve had entered, returning from his morning run.*

*Tony had been trying, really trying, to be a good teammate and get along well with the others instead of starting fights petty or otherwise, so gave the blond a nod as he drank his coffee, a non-verbal acknowledgement, and Steve had paused before fierce determination lit his eyes and he moved to stand before Tony in a way that pretty much trapped him against the counter, forcing Tony to give Steve his full attention.*

*Tony startled -had he got even a nod wrong?*

"*Tony, will you go out with me Saturday?*

*Steve had taken a step back in shock when Tony said no, and Tony used the space to flee, hiding down in his workshop to panic in peace.*

*Steve was persistent though.*

*He requested entrance to the workshop constantly over the day, tried to have J.A.R.V.I.S. relay so many messages to Tony, even the A.I. himself begged the captain stop, and managed to enlist Clint to drop gifts through the workshop’s air vents, the archer cackling about how Tony should stop playing hard to get each time.*

*That wasn’t at all what Tony was doing of course.*
This was Steve Rogers, Captain America, the man his father unashamedly preferred over his own son to the point that he built a room dedicated to holding items related to the man, including underwear both pre and post serum.

Tony had grown up with the impossible set as the standard, and he had never managed to reach so high. The figure of Captain America was the benchmark, but Tony was trapped forever in his shadow. It had been no surprise -to Tony at least- that the sceptre had managed to bring all the negative feelings he had towards the other man bubbling to the surface.

Tony didn't know how to deal with the paragon trying to win his affection.

Steve Rogers was a man Tony had grown up believing, despite Howard's vehement claims otherwise, to be dead, frozen in the wreckage of the Valkyrie. A man he'd been told countless times and in countless ways would help Howard leave him bloodied on the streets.

He wasn't playing hard to get.

He had no idea how to react.

His hands shake just ever so slightly, when he lowers the phone and letter into the drawer once again.

He still feels their weight even after they're locked away.

Steve had finally managed to trap Tony into a conversation after one of the raids on a HYDRA base.

After countless reiterations of how he cared for Tony, Steve kept following up with requests to take the genius on a date, further followed up by half-begged requests for an explanation as to why Tony was avoiding him.

Though he wouldn't come to recognise it until later, the way Rogers' ignored and spoke over Tony's explanations and reasons would become a set standard in their interactions.

Eventually, Tony conceded to a date, breathing easier when the Captain finally left his space.

He wants to breathe, wants to take in air deeply, but the newest scar across his chest is still too tender for that, despite it being a year old and as healed as can be.

The date had been alright all told; dinner at a local greasy spoon that Steve was hopelessly fond of before returning to the tower common floor to watch a couple movies on Steve's catch-up list. The rest of the team had all made themselves absent for the night, no doubt giving them 'privacy' but Tony kept hoping that one of them would show up, or that an alert would go off, and the night could end.

Because for all that things were going well, Tony couldn't make himself comfortable.

If it had just been hanging out, it would have been fine; there would have been no expectations. But Steve's continued attempts to secure a date, and his quite openly vocal declarations of affection were all the proof Tony needed to see that Steve wished for more.
After being escorted to his floor (and seriously, that was out and out courting behaviour given they lived in the same building and the common floor was the level below Tony's) Tony managed to quickly close his door on Steve, feigning enough exhaustion that it would appear he was thinking of nothing beyond bed and had just forgotten Steve was there.

Instead, he curled up by the window and tried to keep breathing.

It was like being in the water again.

No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't breathe.

*Every one was so... pleased that Steve and Tony had gone on a date.*

Pepper even gave him a call, gushing over how cute of a couple they made, and how great they were as partners.

*As though... they had been officially dating or something.*

Tony's not sure what to name the shiver that crawls his spine, but he knows it's nothing good.

He'd always listened to his instincts, for better or for worse.

Figures that the one time he didn't, the very worst happened.

*Through some sneakiness and blatant ignoring, Tony managed to avoid another date with Steve, instead turning all the proposed occasions into group events, which he could handle a lot better.*

Steve always got an annoyed look on his face, but was smiling genuinely before the nights half done, so Tony doesn't find himself cornered by the man.

*It's not that Tony's not hugely flattered or anything, but the history he has with Steve's shadow leaves him unsure and maybe just a little bit... afraid.*

Tony hates feeling afraid, because for him, fear is intrinsically linked to weakness.

'Look at me when I'm speaking boy!'

*Tony actually startled when Steve kissed him.*

Steve had merely grinned smugly before walking off, but Tony had been frozen in place.

*Because Steve would only kiss someone if he meant it right?*

*Sure he had kissed Natasha, but that was for a mission and Natasha had initiated it.*

*That meant that Steve... really cared... right?*

Tony grabbed his folder and moved to the conference room.

He was early, he had time to clear his thoughts.
Ducking into local cafés and walks around the park became their norm.

Tony was starting to warm up to the idea that Steve was serious, and actually wanted this to last.

Sure it was annoying how Steve kept trying to pull him away from his workshop and meetings, ignoring and speaking over Tony when he explained how he had work to do, but Tony understood that Steve wanted to spend more time with Tony. And it was actually rather flattering. Besides, Pepper was understanding and willing to help Tony work around Steve’s outings.

Maybe... maybe they could give dating a proper try...

They were on their way to Sokovia to another HYDRA base before Tony made a decision though.

Slow breaths. Not too deep, but certainly strong.

The files were pulled from the folder and mindlessly sorted.

Slow breaths.

He tried to explain, tried to tell them what he saw, but Steve ignored and spoke over him.

They still managed to work together to save the day, but when Tony took a step back from the Avengers...

It hurt when no-one tried to convince him to stay.

Eyes close tight when a breath goes too deep.

But it’s okay.

He can manage.

Tony was more than annoyed when after only Rhodey and Vision help him in Sokovia's reconstruction, Steve sent him message after message telling him of time and places for dates.

Steve was always speaking of how they were to help the people, so why wasn't he?

Steve ignored and spoke over him when Tony tried to bring it up, saying how a date wasn't the place for that.

Tony may not have a lot of good dating history (he and Pepper had tried but it was too much like stepping out with a sibling which, no.) but even he knows that this behaviour of Steve's isn't quite fair.

His eyes open and he resumes his sorting.

He can manage.

The Accords go over about as well as Ultron did, and really, the looks he got from Wanda and Sam
send him right back to the night Ultron went online.

He tried to explain why he thinks the Accords are needed, why they shouldn’t be running around like they currently have been because Lagos would be just the first.

But Steve ignored and spoke over him.

Steve pulled him away, into a nearby room and started detailing how the Accords -Which Tony knew he hadn't even bothered to skim yet- are nothing more than a leash, chaining the Avengers as attack dogs.

Their phones both went off, and Tony felt himself pale as the words opened up on the screen

'Aunt Peggy is dead.

Call me for funeral details.

Ronnie.'

Before Tony even lifted his eyes from the screen, Steve spoke.

"Peggy's passed away. I'm going to her funeral. You stay here and stop the Accords."

Tony had been shocked -why would Steve think he wouldn't go to his Godmother's funeral?

Steve kept speaking.

"You turn everything into a damn media circus, and Peggy's memory doesn't deserve to be turned into good PR for you."

And then just left.

Was... was that really what Steve thought of him? That he'd use someone's death as a-a popularity booster? Especially Peggy Carter, Aunt/Godmother or no?

Tony shakily lifted his phone to his ear, swallowing against the ill feeling crawling up his throat.

"Hey Ronnie... It's Tony. Yeah, yeah I know. Look sweetie... Some pretty bad stuff has come up for me... as is, I'm currently trying not to freak right-the-fuck out. No precious, it's not really something you can help with; it's kinda a personal revelation. But I'm in no shape to... yeah... yeah, I know. Look, send me the bill -it's really the least I can do- and could you maybe lay a flower for me? Thanks kiddo... yeah... Love you too Ronnie."

Ronnie was a wonder.

He was glad he'd be seeing her after this meeting was done.

A family dinner sounded amazing.

Tony had never really met King T'Chaka, aside from in passing, but from the way Prince T'Challa mourned, Tony knew the man to have been a good leader, and a greater father.

Though he had no words to share, Tony offered all the understanding he carried.
Though T'Challa had little use of a foreigner's concern he did acknowledge Tony's support with a 
pained, yet heartfelt smile.

Rhodey and Vision entered the room talking, both pausing long enough to lay a supporting hand on 
one of Tony's shoulders before taking their seats and resuming their conversation.

Tony breathed just a little easier at their presence.

Borrowing the pens from Howard's collection was supposed to be symbolic, particularly of the 
lengths Tony would go for Steve; Tony had never hidden his dislike for his sire.

But then Wanda came up, and as Tony had started to fear, Steve had ignored and spoken over him 
when he tried to explain.

Steve left, not listening to how Ross had managed to have Wanda's visa voided, and if captured, 
Wanda could be deported instantly.

Hope Van Dyne and Tony had grown up almost as friends, as a slap to their father's faces.

They would never be the first person chosen to seek help from, but they were able to separate their 
shit from their sire's and get along.

She offered Tony a small smile and handshake before taking her seat.

'Well, at least I'm not the only one he doesn't listen to.'

After ignoring Natasha, Steve and Sam had found themselves arrested, with Barnes awaiting 
psychiatric evaluation

Tony didn't understand why Steve kept blaming the Accords for Barnes' treatment though.

Barnes was there because of his suspected involvement with the U.N. attack.

Charles Xavier was one of Tony's greater supporters in life, and as he rolled into the room, the 
smile he wore was so warm and kind Tony couldn't help but smile back.

A firm handshake and Charles manoeuvred himself into place at the table.

The ever so faint buzzing of his telepathy at the edges of Tony's mind were a welcome familiarity.

Tony knew since the Avengers first met up that, despite his own power, his most important role 
wouldn't be on the battlefield. For all his physical strength, Tony's greatest asset had always been 
his mind, and Tony had been taught young to take note of everything.

So he'd taken note of the red and blue wearing vigilante taking on street-level crime being thrown 
into a building yet coming out unscathed.

He'd found Peter quickly, and decided to keep an eye on him, seeing as the kid was trying to do 
good with his abilities.
When May Parker arranged a meeting with him to discuss her nephew however, things got... interesting

The Spiderling entered the room, giving a quick hug to Tony before making himself a hammock on the ceiling, preferring to leave a seat available if needed.

May Parker knew about Peter's Spider-Manning, and was worried he'd get himself hurt, especially as he had no armour, had been fighting literally in spandex.

She wanted Peter to come to her though, to confide in her, instead of possibly forcing the boy into a corner by confronting him about how he was able to be Spider-Man.

It was underhanded, but she wanted Tony to help the boy and if that took blackmail then so be it.

Tony had been a little gobsmacked when, after telling her about the mess with the Accords and how he was about to leave for Germany, May's response had been

"Take him with you. He needs to know what sort of forces he may face if he decides to continue as Spider-Man."

Peter still hadn't told her yet, but May had informed Tony that she thought he was close.

The airport was the biggest fuster-cluck Tony had taken part in since his twenties.

Vision had alerted him about Clint absconding with Wanda, and there was some new guy standing alongside Steve as well, Tony didn't know him.

Spider-Man was hanging back, told to observe, Rhodey, Natasha and Vision were standing ready and T'Challa, bedecked in the garb of his people's top warrior, the Black Panther, had his gaze set entirely on Barnes.

Ross had tried to set down the kill-on-sight order and Tony had managed by the skin of his teeth to convince the U.N. that it would be better if the Avengers who signed were given a chance to talk the rogues down.

But as ever, when he tried to explain, Steve ignored and spoke over him.

"I'm trying to keep you from tearing the Avengers apart!"

"You did that when you signed."

Reed and Sue entered the room, nodding to Tony and taking their seats.

Tony took another slow breath.

Rhodey had been taken to the hospital immediately and the rogues were arrested. Tony didn't know what to think when he realised Romanoff had let Steve and Barnes escape.

Didn't she realise the danger she was putting those two in?
He warned her about T'Challa informing Ross, and yes he'd been short with her, but his oldest friend was now fighting for his very life from a battle that had never been meant to happen.

That was no reason to claim he was thinking with his ego.

He had sent Vision with Peter back to America, and tried to breathe.

While he'd been with Rhodey, Ross had managed to convince the U.N. that the rogues were too dangerous to be held by the Avengers. By gaining custody of them, he had them transported to the Raft, S.H.I.E.L.D.'s old maximum security prison.

After the info dump, Ross had latched onto the super prison and brought it under his control, no doubt with a lot of under the table deals. It was through knowledge of previous deals along with the U.N. writ that Tony was able to blackmail his way into seeing the rogues.

It had been hard to keep impassive, at both their conditions and their barbs.

Surely they knew he'd never wish an Afghanistan on anyone?

Phil Coulson, the Director of New S.H.I.E.L.D. and not as dead as Fury had everyone believing, entered the room with a bland smile and strong handshake, a brow raised asking about Tony's condition.

Tony smiled a little lopsidedly.

Everything still hurt, but he was still alive and still had work to do.

He tried to explain, and at least Sam listened.

"You go as a friend."

"Easy."

"I mean it Stark. You've already had Steve at loose ends, wondering how you could betray your boyfriend like this, but by damn, you will listen to him for once! Go as a friend, since being a partner seems to be beyond you."

... Sort of.

Pepper entered the room, her phone on her ear as she reamed out whoever was on the other side.

A quick but strong hug before she made her way to her seat next to Rhodey had a lot of pressure easing from Tony's chest.

Steve had seemed so relieved when Tony said he was there to help, giving a heartfelt grin.

It didn't fill Tony with the warmth it used to.

When Zemo showed them the film -the film- Tony felt his heart straining the same way it did when the arc reactor was removed.

Because the look in Steve's eyes, and then the words from his lips...
Rogers' had known.

The door opened and Tony gave a tired quirk of the lips as Bruce carefully shuffled in.

Bruce had called Tony a week after Sokovia, begging to be forgiven, apologising for not standing up for his part in Ultron, praying that despite not having the right, he still could call Tony friend.

Tony had told him to come back when he felt safe again, and that Bruce would always be his brother in science.

Tony had lashed out at the Super-Soldiers, both of them, though he would have left Barnes alone if the man had just kept his mouth shut. Because despite the power and weapons in the suit, Tony didn't want to kill them, either of them.

He just wanted someone, anyone, to hurt like he had in that moment.

When Steve cracked the arc reactor, Tony hadn't been in Siberia.

He'd been in Malibu, had just sat down on the couch to answer Pepper's call, had just heard her say his name when the high-pitched whine of the sonic paralyser reached his ears.

Tony's been betrayed by those who claimed to love him before.

And even if Tony doesn't win, he has always refused to lose.

"My father made that shield; you don't deserve it!"

Thor, back from his duties as Asgard's prince, enters with Jane and Darcy. Selvig and Ian have opted out, neither confident being part of the coming events.

Thor's silent nod and heavy regard force Tony to swallow hard and straighten in his seat.

They are the last to enter before...

Vision was the one to collect him, Friday having sent a distress signal before the suit was shut off.

Though the Doctors were all but begging him to stay in bed, Tony did as he always had done.

He stood up and moved forward.

He had work to do.

He can hear, at the very edges of his senses, footsteps approaching.

He forces his breath to remain even.

He had the proof to put Ross away for the rest of his natural life and several decades beyond it when the rogues are broken free.

His fists clenched tight, his spine stayed straight, and he looked every nay-sayer dead in the eye while telling them all he was not involved.
He smiled bitterly when, eventually, his work had Ross carted away in chains.

He hid his eyes behind shades as the flashes of a thousand cameras went off, each reporter asking him if he was in contact with the rogues, if he knew where they were, if he was going to bring them back.

For all the pain related to the building, sometimes he had to retire to the Avenger's Compound just for some blessed silence. Never for long though.

He had work to do.

He takes a glance around the room, seeing firm nods and gentle smiles.

He is not alone in this.

T'Challa came to him in the compound.

It started as mutual silence, an understanding born only to those who have won while losing.

Tony would tinker on whatever was currently in his head, and T'Challa would either read or do some tinkering himself.

But always somewhere Tony could see him.

It was... nice.

Eventually, the silence turned into quiet questions and gentle answers, murmured thoughts and hushed wishes, whispered nightmares and wistful dreams.

Tony would pause in his work and turn to T'Challa, finding the man already looking up from his own activity with a small smile and arms open.

Tony had always been rather tactile, despite everything he'd gone through.

It was... hopeful.

It kept changing -breaks, lunch, dinner, spending the night over, sharing a room, sharing a bed-until after about a year Tony was confident that he could say that he loved T'Challa.

When T'Challa said he loved Tony back, it became easier to breathe.

Speak -or in this case think- of the devil and he shall appear.

T'Challa opened the door to the room, leading the rogues in behind him. He had told Tony that he was harbouring them, though Tony had already guessed.

Barton and Maximoff were at the back of the pack, keeping an eye on as much as they could. Wilson, Romanoff and Lang -Tony had since been told by Hope who was wearing her father's suit-were in the middle, all three latching their gazes onto certain individuals already seated and radiating a mix of hurt and hope. In front of them but behind T'Challa were Barnes and Rogers.

Barnes, half curled into himself, still getting used to the absence of HYDRA in his head, and Rogers, standing tall and proud, as though he had done nothing wrong.
A quick glance around the room told Tony he wasn't the only one who noticed.

T'Challa came and clasped a hand steadily on Tony's shoulder before taking his seat next to him, the rogues left with the remaining seats.

Tony took a slow breath.

He could do this.

"Now that everyone is present, I thank everyone who was able to come, despite the difficulties our schedules presented."

The dismissive snorts and eye rolls from the rogues are ignored, with the rest of the room demurring no trouble, or Peter's cheeky "You can just owe me one!" that pulls a smile to Tony's lips.

"Hopefully you have all been more or less keeping up with the news, but just in case, I'll go over the more pertinent points.

First of all, Ross has been fully convicted of every infraction he has ever made, and won't be seeing natural sunlight if it can be helped."

Bruce smiles and gives a delighted little clap, pulling another smile out from Tony.

"Second is his chosen replacement. Everett Ross was voted in with no problems-

"Why would you get rid of a monster only to replace him with his brother?!"

Wanda's voice cuts through the light-hearted mood in a flash, her eyes briefly flickering the dark red of her power. Thankfully, Vision decides to answer, sparing Tony Wanda's hate, if only for a moment.

"There is no genetic nor otherwise familial relation between the two men. Thaddeus Ross and Everett Ross are as different as can be aside having the misfortune of a shared surname."

Ignoring the doe-eyes Wanda is sending him, Vision nods for Tony to continue.

"Thanks V. Third matter of business is that, thanks to all the work everyone has put in, the Accords have been revised and ratified, accepted almost completely by the U.N. bar a few nations requiring a few speciality clauses which I ask you to go over in a moment."

Though it had already been evident the rogues hadn't been following the news, even though T'Challa had supplied them with the means to, the shock, betrayal and anger on all their faces makes unease roil through Tony's stomach.

"And finally, SHOC has been given the green light. Already on the board we have Director Agent Coulson's eye roll was epic and Tony is glad Friday is recording the meeting. "standing as neutral party. Professor Xavier has agreed to represent Mutants and naturally enhanced. And T'Challa has signed on as the representative for unnaturally enhanced, both Science and Magic. The U.N. is still voting for who they're putting on the board to represent them and who will stand in for the average person.

Have I missed anything?"

"The part where none of this should be needed?"
Rogers voice is angry and strong, ready to cut anyone's arguments down. Tony knows that Rogers won't hear anything he has to say, neither will the rest of the rogues, and the others know this, so it is Coulson who speaks up, ignoring for the moment the looks of hurt coming from Romanoff and Barton.

"If it hadn't been needed Rogers, one hundred and seventeen nations wouldn't have voted for it."

Rogers regurgitates the spiel he'd been making from the beginning - about how the governments of the world all had the single agenda of chaining the Avengers, of how they would be held back from helping people in time, about how Tony should have stopped this nonsense - when Charles inserts himself into the conversation.

"Mr Rogers, though Anthony certainly is one of the most powerful men alive, not even he has the power to create a piece of legislation like this overnight. All laws and legal matters take considerable time to get past the planning stage and into the Senate. All my sources and research indicate that the Sokovia Accords first started, not because of the battle against Ultron, but because of the reveal and fall of S.H.I.E.L.D."

That causes the room to go silent, the rogues looking at Charles like the man's insane (which given how much strain he must go under to prevent himself for reading everyone's mind within a five hundred or so mile radius, isn't impossible) as he takes a sip of his water before continuing.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. had been, in essence, a chain to keep you from going too far. Should any of you slip in battle, or prove to be a threat to the majority of a populace, S.H.I.E.L.D. had methods, both advisable, humane and not, to keep you all in check.

With the reveal that those who were your watchmen had been born infested with HYDRA, and your throwing everything onto the internet, people began to feel they were no longer protected should something go wrong."

"All we want to do is help innocent people! Not hurt them or put them in danger!"

Lang's voice was insulted, as though they would ever hurt an innocent person. Peter snorted from his hammock.

"Yeah, right; what about those policemen who were just doing their jobs that Rogers and Barnes put in the hospital? From the footage I've seen, they came peacefully, asking them to do the same, and then the Soldiers lashed out at them."

Steve interrupts again.

"They came to arrest Bucky for events that were not his fault. If the Accords hadn't."

"Who said anything about the Accords then?! Barnes was suspected of being involved in the attack on the U.N.! Like anyone else, he was to be brought in for questioning to determine his innocence or guilt! We know now that yes, he was innocent, but at the time, he was a reasonable suspect based on available information!"

Rogers rolls his eyes, mouth opening to continue the argument, but Tony's had enough.

"Focus Spider-Man. Rogers, shut the hell up."

Even more than the silence at Charles' words, this silence of the rogues is shocked and horrified.

"Tony-"
"No, you are not doing anything useful, so shut it, and let's move on."

"I get that you don't want to hear this, but it needs to be said so you learn. You just don't listen to people and it's why you make such horrendous mistakes like Ultron-"

Tony had worked hard on Rhodey's braces. They were strong, sleek and hardy, able to deal with anything Rhodey needed them to.

There was a part of Tony's mind that warmed with an almost parental pleasure at the braces performance when Rhodey stood, dashed around the table, and punched Rogers in the face.

"The one not listening is you asshole! You're not listening to the people, to the authorities, to Tony! And you're dragging others into your mess!"

Rogers looked stunned by the blow, but regained himself and straightened, speaking with his 'Captain America knows best' voice.

"Colonel Rhodes, I understand you've been put in a difficult situation, but don't let your friendship with Tony cloud your judgement. I heard about your fall, and if Tony had maintained your armour better, it wouldn't have failed you. As it is, you've struck a superior, so I'm putting you on suspension until you've calmed down."

Hope's graceless snort stopped any rebuttal from Rhodey, dragging everyone's attention to her.

"A superior? Is that what you are? I must have misunderstood you in your letter when you said the Avengers were Tony's."

The rogues, except Barnes, all cast glances of confusion and, again, betrayal, only this time at Rogers, who was now stock still and paling.

"Tony is the one who has housed, fed, clothed and armed the Avengers, constantly doing everything needed to keep the team safe from those who want them gone, since the teams inception. He is the one who has sacrificed his time and effort into the cause, putting blood, sweat and tears into making sure things run smoothly, and his thanks is to be lied to by his teammates, and left for dead in a frozen bunker."

Wilson spoke up.

"Excuse me but... what do you mean exactly?"

Hope looked at him with disdain.

"My words weren't difficult. What is there to misunderstand?"

Wilson swallowed a little shakily.

"When did we lie, and leave Stark to die? That never happened."

Pepper suddenly stood up and spoke with a deathly calm.

"Tony was left beaten, bruised and bloody in the Siberian bunker that housed the Winter Soldier Corps. After being collected by Vision half a day after your teammates left him, Tony was in hospital for two weeks, before he checked himself out AMA to get back to work."

Wilson had noticeably paled, as had the rest of the rogues. Natasha managed to find her voice, though she, like the others, sent a wary glance at Rogers.
"And when, exactly, was Stark lied to?"

Surprisingly, it was Barnes who spoke up.

"When Steve decided not to tell him for years that his parents had been murdered by the Winter Soldier."

The revelation had, once again, shock and betrayal spreading across faces, and as expected Rogers once more jumped to Barnes' defence.

"HYDRA are the ones who made him do it; it wasn't Bucky's fault! Tony hates talking about his parents and so there was no point in bringing up old wounds. And as happened in the bunker, as soon as Tony found out he just attacked Bucky, and wouldn't listen to reason!"

Reed spoke up.

"We know Zemo showed a video of the murder, Mr Rogers. We also know that Tony asked you if you knew. To which you tried to lie, but Tony called you out on it. Truly, how you can expect anyone to simultaneously discover and watch their parents murder and remain calm is beyond me."

Rogers moved to talk again, but seriously, Tony was just done.

"Enough. We obviously aren't going to get much more done today, so I ask that everyone go over the email I've sent out, and respond as soon as possible. For those of you attending, I'll see you at the next U.N. meeting."

Calmly, the team rises and exchanges farewells before departing. Sue comes and invites him to the next Baxter Building event, which should prove amusing if nothing else, and Charles gives the details of the school's next science fair, which will be awesome. Hope has snagged her hands around Lang's ear and collar and is dragging him out the door, while the rest shuffle out, leaving only Tony, T'Challa and Rogers.

Rogers sighs disappointedly.

"Tony, you need to get your head screwed on right; you are not a good person to attempt to lead the Avengers, and I shouldn't have given control to you. I'll take over again, and everything will be fine. Now, I think we should go to Patty's on ninth; they do a club sandwich I like, and it's been way too long since our last date-"

The back-hand is the second blow Rogers' has been dealt in the last ten minutes and he looks just as stunned, actually staggering back a half step.

T'Challa lowers his hand, twining his fingers with Tony's.

"Any romantic relationship the two of you once shared is well and truly over Rogers."

Tony breathes slow, straightens his spine and looks forward.

He is Tony Stark. Stark men are made of Iron. He is Iron Man.

"T'Challa and I have dinner plans. Goodbye."

He has his own happiness to fight for.

He refuses to stay weak.
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Other Side Of The Tracks

Chapter Summary

For Leefdoor

"I already told you; I don't want to be a part of your super secret boy-band."

This was hard, I ended up doing that thing where I accidentally erase a chunk of work, and I don't know if I actually filled the prompt, but whatever, this took way too long. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Though Nicholas Fury believed himself stealthy enough to secret his way into Wakanda, truth was the Dora Milaje had caught wind of his aircraft two country's over and practically walked by his side as he made his way to the palace. The man certainly was skilled, and in any other situation, he would have been a true threat.

But he was of no threat to Wakanda, at least for the moment.

Still, T'Challa, Shuri and their father played pretend, acting shocked that 'an outsider' and breached their defences, all while trying not to laugh.

After a few half-vague references to Wakanda's security and defences, Fury finally got to the reason behind his intrusion.

"I'm here to talk to you about the Avenger's Initiative."

Fury's call came in about a year after his visit.

Bedecked in the armour of the Black Panther, T'Challa boarded the quinjet S.H.I.E.L.D. had sent.

"Aliens?"

The Agent sent to brief T'Challa - a man called Sitwell- rolls his eyes and continues speaking, slowing his words and injecting false cheer to his tone.

"Yes, aliens. The ones we have met have all been from Nordic Mythology, and so, yes, they look human, behave human, but are not human."

T'Challa decides that he doesn't like Agent Sitwell.

S.H.I.E.L.D.'s base, the helicarrier is a disappointment, a good deal of the technology there for the purpose of looking good, as opposed to anything useful, and though this may just be T'Challa's bias as a Wakandan, looking out over the display from the bridge as the two quinjet's en route call in their ETA's, the equipment S.H.I.E.L.D. does have looks... old.
T'Challa knows he can be a bit of a snob when it comes to having all his tech up to date, but most of the technology he's seeing is very early SI models or -and this garnered a repulsed shudder- the most recent Hammer Tech.

Wakanda may have hidden itself away from the rest of the world, but the country did keep informed, and despite the childish rivalry spin most media outlets put on it, the difference between Tony Stark's work and Justin Hammer's is blatant, with Hammer being little more than a slightly talented copy-cat.

So why was S.H.I.E.L.D. using such subpar equipment?

T'Challa shook his head and leant back in his seat, waiting for his 'teammates' to arrive.

He had heard of course of Steve Rogers, Captain America, and his debrief had informed him of other members of this little team, but he would have to wait and see how this would all come together.

He was looking forward to speaking with Doctor Banner though.

Three of his proposed teammates had entered the bridge.

Natasha Romanoff -the Black Widow- spoke quickly to Fury before moving to one of the few working displays that showed the faces of the compromised agents, in particular, another potential teammate Clint Barton, Hawkeye.

Doctor Banner was obviously uncomfortable being present, but quickly set about getting to work, noticing just as T'Challa had how poor the available equipment would be for their needs.

Rogers held out a bill to Fury and looked around he room in amazement.

It felt unkind to roll his eyes at the man, but most computer stores, which were practically dime a dozen in New York, all showcased far more impressive than this. Had Rogers been hiding away in his room or something? Afraid to even look at what the world had accomplished?

Alarms rang, breaking T'Challa from his thoughts.

"Captain, you're up."

T'Challa stood from his seat and ran to suit up.

Loki was toying with them.

For every attack that hit, the Asgardian kept getting up with no difficulty, kept firing back, but never seeming to hit.

And the god in gold and green kept glancing to the sky, looking more and more confused and impatient each time.

After a good twenty minutes, which certainly felt an eternity longer, a lucky swipe of the Captain's shield had Loki down. Brandishing his claws at Loki's throat, T'Challa allowed a deep growl to roll through his voice.

"Stay down."
Another eternity passed before a flash of light had the god lying with his armour, the sceptre away from his hand.

He was loaded into the quinjet in silence.

"I don't like it."

T'Challa nodded his agreement.

"He could have had us both dead easily, much as it pains me to say. And his behaviour just rubs me the wrong way. Did you notice how he kept looking to the sky?"

The Captain nodded.

"It was as if he was waiting for something -or someone- to arrive but when it didn't show up, he just..."

Though the sentence was left unsaid, the meaning was clear; Loki had let them take him.

The sudden storm distracted those thoughts however, especially when the cargo doors where forced open, and a blonde giant pulled Loki from his seat.

The destruction of the forest was minimal, luckily, and Thor -the other Asgardian Agent Sitwell had mentioned as a possible teammate- had calmed down after testing his hammer against the vibranium of Captain Rogers' shield. That was all background noise to T'Challa however.

Because Loki wasn't even trying to escape.

He just kept looking to the sky...

Waiting.

Reseating himself in the bridge of the helicarrier and watching Fury's little confrontation with Loki barely held any of T'Challa's focus.

Even Rogers, Thor and Doctor Banner trying to talk over each other on what to do was barely a notch on his attention.

Fury arrives and directs T'Challa to the lab to work with Doctor Banner, which even a day earlier would have had T'Challa in mental raptures, but the whole situation is just rubbing him the wrong way.

Loki's smile and words have the hairs on the back of T'Challa's neck standing on end, and they show no signs of going down.

If the bridge had been disappointing, there is no word for the state of the 'lab' S.H.I.E.L.D. has provided.

"When Fury came to us, he introduced S.H.I.E.L.D. as an international security taskforce. Surely they would be allocated appropriate funding?"

Rogers entered the lab, looking confused at T'Challa's words, though Doctor Banner merely
nodded in commiseration.

"I've worked in some of the worst conditions imaginable over the last year, but after having this lab being touted as having all the toys, I'm greatly underwhelmed."

Rogers jerks back in shock.

"Underwhelmed?! Doctor Banner, this stuff is amazing! So far beyond what anyone in my time could have imagined! It's-"

"All at least a few years old which is a tremendous amount of time in the technological world Captain. Not only that, S.H.I.E.L.D. isn't solely using brands of technology with good repute. If anyone attempts to hand you technology bearing Hammer Tech's badge, I suggest you drop it immediately; even Hammer's latest offerings cannot hold a candle to Stark Industries first attempt."

Though the Captain's face still bears his confusion and well-intentioned anger, his eyes are alight now with both curiosity and ... disappointment?

"I worked with Howard Stark back in the day, and he was an incredible man but... I've read the S.H.I.E.L.D. files on his son Anthony and just... how could Howard have let his son grow to be so... selfish?"

T'Challa can feel his brow raising in disbelief.

Selfish? Maybe before Afghanistan, but even with the drunken playboy, Tony Stark was a mind to learn from, a heart to hope for, and a body to lust over. All three had only gotten better since he became Iron Man.

Rogers, seeing the raised eyebrow, explains.

"He's a slacker and party boy, constantly throwing around his family's money like it's nothing, and caring for nothing but his own enjoyment. Don't get me wrong, he's got to be smart to think up something like the Iron Man suit, but he's volatile and dangerous. It's why he wasn't invited to be part of this team, despite how useful the suit is. Fury even tried to get a different pilot for the suit, but Stark won't let anyone but himself and his best friend in them."

Surprisingly, Doctor Banner speaks up.

"Given what I've seen of the armour, it would be very hard for the average person to learn how to fly them; the human body is not, after all, designed aerodynamically. That Tony Stark was able to design a suit that anyone other than himself could learn to fly... he's got to know that person and the way they think and react extremely well. And given that the friend in question is Colonel James Rhodes, an Air Force Pilot, there's a background of familiarity with aircraft that most people just aren't going to have."

Rogers' lip curls under his teeth as he registers Doctor Banner's reprimand, subtle though it was, about Tony Stark's giving an Iron Man suit to his best friend. T'Challa, though he would be unable to explain why, felt he had to add his own defence.

"Tony Stark may have great wealth, but for all that he 'throws it around' he is recorded as donating up to fifty percent of his annual income to various international charities, and every impulse purchase he's been caught doing -such as the time he bought a hotel he'd stayed at- has been discovered to have been mistreating it's workers, been on the verge of bankruptcy or any number of other problems that disappear pretty much immediately as soon as they are under the SI banner.
As for the slacker comment, Tony Stark is the primary designer for eighty-five percent of all products that come from Stark Industries. What that means Captain, is that Tony Stark, despite his partying and work as Iron Man, is the one behind most of what Stark Industries releases. That does not say slacker to me, that says worker. Perhaps Tony Stark works short, intense bursts at a time, but the work is most definitely being done, and we know it is his work, because no one has been able to match the products he comes up with."

Rogers mouth is opening and closing, the fish imitation the only reaction to T'Challa and Doctor Banner's words of defence. A swift about-turn and the Captain leaves without a word.

A half smile and shrug shared between T'Challa and Doctor Banner, and then silence, as they try to get the available tools to do as they are needed.

Agent Romanoff all but storms into the lab an hour or so later.

"You wanna think about removing yourself from this environment, doctor?"

Doctor Banner looked at her in confusion.

"After all the effort you went to getting me here in the first place, it seems kinda counter-productive to ship me off so soon."

"Loki is manipulating you."

"Seems someone's always trying to. I'm in this deep enough, Agent Romanoff, that I wish to see it through."

T'Challa can see the irritation blooming on the Black Widow's face; a woman used to being obeyed.

"How exactly is Loki manipulating Doctor Banner?"

She turns to look at him, equally annoyed by Doctor Banner's brush-off and T'Challa's involvement.

"He plans to unleash the Hulk. Having that happen on the helicarrier will-"

"I did not ask what Loki plans, Agent Romanoff. I asked how."

The ever so slight widening of her eyes is Romanoff's only outward sign of confusion. T'Challa barely avoids rolling his eyes before he continues speaking.

"Loki has to be able to get to Doctor Banner before he can attempt to draw out the Hulk. If appropriate security is assigned to Loki, then how could he get that chance?"

The woman clenches her jaw, glaring at T'Challa as though he were the one responsible for the situation, but really, she's just being petty that her will is not being followed. T'Challa silently scoffs; the Dora Milaje would enjoy destroying the woman's arrogance.

Fury chooses that moment to enter the lab, Thor trailing behind him, obviously with nothing else to do.

"Status update Banner!"

T'Challa spies Doctor Banner rolling his eyes before he turns to Fury.
"The energy from the sceptre definitely matches the tesseract, but with the tech you've got, it'll be ages before I've got anything useful for you."

Fury starts glaring too. Perhaps it is included in S.H.I.E.L.D. training.

"You are telling me that one of -if not the- greatest minds devoted to gamma radiation is having trouble?!"

Doctor Banner snaps to face Fury, a flare of green washing through his eyes before retreating.

"You know that tracking the tesseract is difficult, it's why you called me in the first place. But without top of the line equipment, it takes a lot of time to track something with so fine a trail."

Fury opens his mouth but is cut off once more, this time by a newly entered Steve Rogers.

"I asked a few agents, and they all say that S.H.I.E.L.D. has been refusing to upgrade the tech because the top brass don't like Stark. Because the top brass are being petty and allowing personal feelings to overrule their responsibilities. Thoughts, Sir?"

Fury let's out a deep sigh before turning to Rogers.

"You've read Stark's file Captain. He'd know if we bought tech from him, and the way his ego would swell is just not worth dealing with."

"So yes, you're being petty, yet still expect the level of work that better equipment would provide."

Fury's eye seemed to blaze at the Captain's remark, so much so that he gestured for the Captain to follow him, and the two men left. Thor, briefly looking over the lab before shaking his head, left as well expounding the confusing nature of mortals.

Romanoff, stationed herself to one of the doors to the lab, obviously intending to be prepared for Loki.

"Tell me Doctor Banner, what first brought you to study radiation?"

The Doctor stills looks unsettled, and eagerly snatches onto the topic.

"When I was still in college, one of my professors-"

Whatever he was going to say is lost in the explosion that rocks the helicarrier.

T'Challa and Doctor Banner had both been thrown into the lower levels of the helicarrier when the floor of the lab gave way. T'Challa gave thanks to the Panther God for the calm demeanour he had cultivated growing up, as his steadiness proved enough to also calm down the good Doctor, preventing, barely, a visit from the 'Other Guy'.

Though it was a rough encounter, Fury had managed to direct his agents to immediately land the carrier in the water when the first engine had been hit. Though the helicarrier could still fly with three of it's engines, his orders proved life saving, as not to long after, a second engine was shut down, and no one on board had the skill and expertise to fix the engines mid-air.

Romanoff had been on her way into the depths of the helicarrier after the hit, trying to find T'Challa and Doctor Banner, instead running into Hawkeye, and even succeeding in ridding him of Loki's brainwashing.
Thor had gone directly to Loki, and had managed to be tricked into the cell and had been dropped moments before the Helicarrier started true descent, so who knew where he was.

Rogers had been fighting against the many agents Loki had influenced and relocating them to cells of their own.

Doctor Banner was drowsy and floating after fighting off the Hulk so strongly.

Agent Phil Coulson -Fury's apparent second in command- had been killed by Loki.

The helicarrier was on low power and they had no idea where Loki could possibly be going.

"I just... I'm used to holding all the cards, sometimes even a second deck, but... I've got nothing for you. Nothing to act on, nothing to fight for, nothing to stand strong... It is not a position I'm used to."

Fury sounded tired in a way that went beyond his years, but it was simply another thing going on amongst a sea of thousands.

This was it then.

Loki had won.

"Sir?"

Maria Hill, Fury's third -well second now- in command came forward a look of annoyance on her face.

"Stark is somehow on the line. Demanding to speak with you."

Fury sighed, tired and heavy, before moving the call on to speaker.

"I really do not have the time for you right now Stark; I've got-

"I don't care about what you've got Nicholas, so much as what you don't."

The harsh voice obviously came from Stark, but no one had heard such a tone from the man before.

"Enlighten me Fury, when were you going to tell me S.H.I.E.L.D. had lost the tesseract? And no, sending Agent with that whole 'this isn't about personnel files anymore' does not count, because I told you from the beginning I wasn't going to work for you."

The Captain sat straighter. T'Challa understood why, given that the file on Stark that S.H.I.E.L.D. provided said that they weren't interested in having Stark as a part of the initiative. Obviously S.H.I.E.L.D. didn't want the team to know a possible member had turned them down.

Fury looked a mix of angry and worried.

"How do you know about the tesseract Stark?!"

"My father's files mentioned how he fished it out of the ocean looking for Captain Spangles, and left it in S.H.I.E.L.D.'s archives. I know S.H.I.E.L.D. no longer has it, because I'm looking at it."

The bridge had already been fairly quiet, an air of unease silencing most noise, but at Stark's words, even the quietest murmurs ceased.
"Looking at it?"

Fury was noticeably pale his eye opened wide and focused on the speaker embedded in the table.

"That is what I said. I was understandably confused when J.A.R.V.I.S. told me Erik Selvig was on my roof, setting up a machine loaded with a glowy blue cube. When I went to investigate, to have Erik Selvig then attack me was really unnerving, but he's sleeping now so that's good, and said glowy blue cube is now behind several blast shields in my lab until I can gimmick together a container to keep the thing from giving off stupid energy levels that'll attract all kinds of idiots who'll want to see if they can make a bomb out of it or something."

Though the man could not see it, a thread of hope was lighting up the faces of those listening to him.

They knew where the tesseract was, and where Loki would surely be heading.

Wait.

"Stark!"

"Woah! Who the hell is that, I do not recognise your voice!"

"My name is T'Challa but this is not the time! A being called Loki is surely on his way to you and the tesseract right this moment! He plans to open a portal and start a war with an alien army behind him!"

A heavy silence once more filed the air, the Captain standing with both hands planted on the table trying to collect himself, and Doctor Banner trying to focus, not understanding the words, but recognising the tone T'Challa spoke with.

"Would this Loki happen to be a tall black haired guy in green and gold with a sceptre?"

The room felt like it had no air to breathe.

"Yeeeeeaaaaaaaah... well I've got a guest, who's looking mightily confused right now. If any of you are in New York in the next little while you might as well come on over to Stark Tower. It's got-okay sceptre shoots energy blasts, that is not a good, J.A.R.V.I.S.!"

The line cut, Tony's voice gone, yet still ringing in everyone's ears. The Captain turned to T'Challa.

"Suit up, hanger in ten."

"Understood Captain."

---

T'Challa, bedecked once more as the Black Panther, understood now why Loki had kept looking at the sky in Stuttgart.

Hawkeye had informed him of all potential Avengers, and Loki had been looking for Iron Man.

As the blows and attacks, no longer held back, came more and more, and magic began to be used, Iron Man appeared to be the one with the best chance of locating which Loki was real and which were doppelgangers. The only one to really be able to just keep getting up so quickly after Loki landed a hit. The only one whose words were able to cause Loki distress.

"I mean, seriously, let's do a head count here; Your brother, the demi-god. And seriously man, I
am amazed at those arms, how much do you lift?

The super soldier, a living legend that kinda lives up to the legend. Though I am retracting that if you look at me one more time and mouth Howard, that's so many kinds of uncool.

A Warrior Prince with the skill and stamina to make many a man and woman weep. And not gonna lie, I've catalogued your voice into my personal spank bank because mmm yes.

A man with breath taking anger management issues. Doctor Banner, it is a pleasure by the way, your work on anti-electron collisions is unparalleled and I'm a huge fan of the way you lose control and turn into an enormous green rage monster!

A couple master spies, though I only really know about one of them, and she really doesn't like me after the whole I told Fury to screw off thing and wouldn't let her stab me in the neck. The other guy seems like an asshole, so we'd probably get along pretty well all told.

And you, big fella, you have managed to piss off each and every one of them.

Oh, and I kinda dismantled your portal grower so yeah, no army for you."

Tony Stark is adorable, T'Challa discovers, and over the course of the battle, where Loki is doing everything he can to kill them, the red and gold gleam of the Iron Man seems to be coming from just about every where; disintegrating clones with Thor, blasting them with his repulsors reflecting off the Captain's shield, taking a hit for Hawkeye so the archer can safely get to a new spot, putting himself in position for the Black Widow to vault off him, telling the Hulk which 'puny god' to smash, and performing a grab and throw manoeuvre with T'Challa that ends with vibranium claws digging deep into the Tricksters' thigh.

The godling's cries of pain gave T'Challa a feeling of accomplishment, and perhaps he felt a little smug when, as soon as he was clear, Hulk took great pleasure in embedding Loki into the ground.

"If I paid to get the road replaced, do you think I could keep the hole as a trophy? I mean, seriously, it would be the conversation starter to end all conversation starters! Which means I wouldn't have to talk to people because the conversation will not have started! I like this plan! J.A.R.V.I.S.! Call Pepper and tell her I'm buying a patch of road! Also, YAY! We won! I'm hungry, who wants food? Food sounds awesome; let's go exploring for food!"

T'Challa couldn't help his laughter as he followed the excited genius.

Maybe this team could work out.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
Catch Me As I Fall

Chapter Summary

For Zaria

Rhodey's not the one who fell.

I'm sorry.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rhodey saw what was going to happen and accepted it.

Somehow, someway, Vision's attack was going to hit him instead of Sam.

Gritting his teeth and trying futilely to maybe get out of the way, Rhodey still accepted that this was it.

When a blur of red and gold managed to intercept at the last second Rhodey felt a sickening mix of relief and fear.

"TONY!"

The nurse's words rang like a death knell through his mind, repeating over and over until Rhodey felt like he could see the words floating before his eyes.

Bottom lip caught tightly between his teeth and fist clenched so his knuckles turned white and his nails bit deep into his palms, Rhodey tried so hard just to breath evenly.

"Rhodes."

His teeth released his lip so that it could curl into a snarl.

"Romanoff."

It takes a lot for him not to be screaming at her, to throw his fists in the hope of hitting, to try and rend her flesh for letting Rogers and Barnes go while Tony...

While Tony...

"So how much is he playing this up by? We've got work to do."

Though hardly the time or place, Rhodey was actually a little proud of how the Black Widow flinched away from the glare he sends her.

"In the act of saving my life, Tony has all but condemned his own. The Doctors are operating on him right now. I'd have to say I don't think he's playing this up at all."
Romanoff's silence hurts, because it lets the nurse's words come back.

"But he was in the armour; he's taken far stronger hits than that and been fine."

Rhodey scoffs at her belligerence.

"You never heard of crash landings Romanoff? And the damage they can do?"

Again, silence. That cold and cruel silence that has those bitter words float to the surface.

"And why are you of all people talking about work? Given what you did-"

"They weren't going to stop. I didn't want anyone else to get hurt."

He scoffs again.

"Well that sure worked out, didn't it? You signed the Accords Romanoff, and you broke them. Given how damn hell-bent his highness is on catching Barnes, you really think he hasn't already reported you? Only reason I'm not trying to haul your ass in is that I have far more important things to focus on than you."

Romanoff actually flinched again, before nodding and darting down the hall. Rhodey begins pacing, trying to focus on the taps of his footsteps to keep the silence at bay.

"We're doing all we can Colonel Rhodes, but given Mr Stark's condition...

I'm sorry to say this Sir, but it might be best if you prepared for the worst."

Rhodey had sent Vision and Spider-Man back to the States, the kid worn out and the android scared and confused.

Tony had told Rhodey about how some relative of the kid had pretty much guilted Tony into bringing the spiderling with them, and hoped that the kid didn't end up losing himself over this battle; the kid had a good heart and bright soul. No wonder Tony was protective of him.

Tony was still under the knife, and Romanoff had been right when she said there was still work to do.

Rhodey informed the medical staff he was heading out for a bit, and commandeered Tony's chopper.

It was time for him to speak to some old 'friends'.

General Thaddeus 'Thunderbolt' Ross was a man who had seen many horrors, and committed many more. He was technically Rhodey's superior, and he enjoyed being in a position of power.

But he had never dealt with Rhodey.

"General Ross, I'm not here to waste my time speaking with you. I am here to see the rogue Avengers. As per the Accords, you are required by law to let me through, and to hurry up to get their trials sorted out. If they aren't within the next twelve hours, again in accordance with the Accords, you're going to find yourself on trial as well."

The elder man's face turned red and twisted into a bitter scowl.
"Are you threatening me Colonel?!

Rhodey merely smirked.

"No. I just read through that great stack of papers, and know the rules."

One of the many things Rhodey shared with Tony was achieving even small victories over an opponent who holds more cards than you.

It had taken Rhodey's breath away when he saw the conditions his old teammates had been thrown into, especially Wanda's, but at the same time, he couldn't say he was surprised with Ross' actions. A quick tap to the watch on his wrist, and Friday was in the system, gathering the footage and compiling a case against the general. Seeing the sneers already climbing up Barton's face and whoever the other guy was, Rhodey chose to speak first, quickly tapping the watch again to cut audio from the area.

"I've already got Friday in the wires here, getting proof that this shit is inhumane. Given that Ross is in charge, I'm not surprised that he's pulled this sort of crap, but until we can get him shut down legally, he'll just keep managing to slip away. Audio feed's down for the next few minutes, but that's all I can guarantee."

The sneers grew worse and Barton spat his words.

"Oh just wonderful! Bad enough Stark threw us in here, but now his supposed best friend is playing lackey and telling us to suck it up!"

The other guy joined in.

"Hank always said you could never trust a Stark! Why am I surprised that the guy didn't come here himself to gloat?!

It was gratifying that Rhodey's glare worked on this guy too.

"I have no idea who the hell you are, and I know you've never spoken to Tony before the airport, so I'm curious as to what gives you the right to say that."

Though still a little cowed by the glare, the guy managed to speak, albeit with a confused tone in his voice.

"What do you mean you don't know who I am?"

Rhodey rolled his eyes.

"Just what I said; I have never heard of you before today, and I'm about ninety percent certain Tony's the same. I really don't know why you're getting huffy over us not knowing the name of someone we've never heard of."

The guy was seriously gaping.

"Uh-Scott... Scott Lang?"

Rhodey thought hard on that name trying to remember if he'd ever heard it before.

"You... were you the hacktivist behind Vistacorp? "
The guy -Lang's- head was nodding quickly, and a semi-proud smile was creeping up his lips.

"Yeah, I was fired after that, and I was arrested a little bit after that."

Rhodey was reluctantly impressed; the damage Lang had done to the Vistacorp CEO's home was a thing of beauty. All it had been missing was a garden hose, a rubber chicken and nine pounds of guacamole. Rhodey barely stifled the shudder that went through him when he remembered what Tony had done with those items; Infinite Metals rarely tried anything against Tony these days.

"You know, if you'd applied at SI after you got out, Tony would have hired you in a heartbeat."

Lang's mouth dropped open. Barton had been silenced too, mainly out of confusion, but Rhodey was grateful not to have to verbally duel the archer.

Wanda was completely out of it. A quick glance had Rhodey's eyes lingering on the collar round her neck and a stone sinking in his gut.

He recognised the piece.

It was a very old design of Howard Stark's, back when Mutants were first gaining noticeable attention. Howard Stark had been very open on his distrust of the enhanced.

Rhodey was not surprised in the slightest that Thaddeus Ross had managed to get his paws on one of the few remaining examples of Howard's cruelty.

Unfortunately, because it was so old, the technology that Rhodey had on him wouldn't do anything. That's not to say more modern tech couldn't affect the collar, merely that Rhodey had not brought anything with him that was able. A final glance that the collar and Rhodey moved to face Sam.

Rhodey didn't know how he felt about Sam; on the one hand, Sam was a rogue Avenger, having broken the law and committed several crimes alongside Rogers.

On the other hand, Sam had been genuinely distraught when Tony crashed after saving Rhodey, and not fought again, even after Rhodey had hit him with a repulsor blast.

His fellow soldier looked him in the eye.

"How's Stark?"

His voice was pitched low, tired and hoarse, but his gaze was strong and concerned, actually worried over Tony's health. Rhodey breathed deep.

"Tony's always had the devil's luck when it comes to his survival..."

Sam looked confused, the vagueness of Rhodey's words no doubt running countless scenarios through his mind.

"I can only hope Tony's luck holds and let him pull through this too."

Sam's eyes widened while Barton and Lang somehow became even more silent. Rhodey thought he may finally understand why Tony was always playing music and talking aloud.

Anything to break that terrifying silence.

"Why would Stark have trouble pulling through? What is he pulling through?!"
It was the note of fear that rang through Barton's voice that had Rhodey look at him once more and ... and he did look afraid.

Afraid for Tony.

Sucking in another breath Rhodey addressed the four of them, though Wanda would likely hear nothing.

"Tony fell from a great height after taking a hit for me. Neither Sam nor Vision, nor I were fast enough to catch him before he hit the ground. And as durable to all hell as the suit is, Tony's always emphasised more on speed and strength. The armour itself is a defence, so Tony focused on what he needed more. To put it simply, Tony's spine snapped when he crashed; it is pretty damn likely he'll be paralysed, probably from the waist down."

Barton and Lang had lost all colour, both breathing heavily, and Sam looked ready to puke. But they had wanted to know, and they deserved to know the price for their actions.

"But that's only if Tony survives."

That silence.

"Tony is in excellent shape for a man coming up on fifty, but he has put his body through a lot over the years, not least of which is the arc reactor. It may be hidden now, but Tony still has a hole in his chest; he may have inserted an artificial sternum and muscle, and put on some skin grafts, but there's still a great chunk of his chest that ain't natural. Then there's the whole superhero gig slowly wearing his body down, and all the mental stress Tony goes through to constantly come up with all his inventions weighing on him too."

That damned silence.

"Tony's always had the devil's luck, but all the luck in the world is useless if his body can't handle the strain."

Another deep breath, as he looks at these people who he's supposed to be able to call teammates, before turning to Sam.

"Friday found out that the psychiatrist assigned to Barnes was found dead in his hotel room with time of death being before Barnes' episode and escape. You all had something specific you were wanting to do at the airport before Rogers got preachy at Tony. We have some time. Tell me what's going on."

Sam took a deep breath, looked to the other three in their cells before returning his gaze to Rhodey.

"You gotta promise me you'll go alone and as a friend."

Rhodey raised a brow at the demand and Sam continued.

"It's bad, like real bad. The sort of shit that horror movie writers have wet dreams over."

Unable to prevent the slight crinkling of his nose, Rhodey tries to clear the image from his mind.

"I can't make the promise to go alone, especially if it's as bad as you say. But I can promise that I'll go as a teammate, if not a friend, given that if Rogers' hadn't started that fight at the airport, my little brother wouldn't be in surgery right now."
Sam bites his lip and half turns away, obviously knowing that's the best he'll get out of Rhodey, and really not liking it.

But then, what choice does he have?

"We found out that Barnes wasn't the only Winter Soldier."

As Rhodey pulls the door to the chopper shut, smirking at Ross' temper tantrum, he barely manages to keep the shaking of his hands unnoticed.

HYDRA is, as Tony no doubt would gleefully shout, a pack of raging dicks.

Bad enough they brainwashed Barnes and tortured and experimented on him, but they then made more super soldiers from the results of those experiments?

Damn it all to hell, but no-one, not even Tony, is paid enough to deal with this sort of shit.

And like he'd warned Sam, there was no way Rhodey was taking on this shit without back-up, and given Rogers' track record over the past few weeks, the Captain's presence would not be particularly comforting.

Well, needs must.

"Friday, I need you to call that number you found for me baby girl."

"On it Mr Rhodey. Anything else you need?"

Rhodey barely even feels the clench in his jaw or how tightly he's closed his eyes.

"Any update on Tones?"

That silence. Again with that damned silence.

"...No word yet on Boss ... Mr Rhodey ... I ... I think I'm scared Mr Rhodey."

Rhodey slowly opens his eyes, glancing out the window before starting the activation of the suit Tony hid in the chopper.

"Me too baby girl. Time to make that call."

The seat moves back and Rhodey feels the metal encasing him as he's ejected from the chopper. It's a little snug, and yeah, that's probably going to chafe a bit, but it's good enough for what he has to do.

"Who is this?! How did you get this number?!"

"James Rhodes. I have my ways. Time to get to work."

He lands outside the Siberian bunker, happier than words can express for how well insulated the armour is against the cold, and waits.

He doesn't have to wait long though; a black quinjet soon lands not too far away and out strolls his back up.
"Colonel."

"Your Highness."

As they move to the doors of the bunker, broken in by Rogers' shield by the looks of it, Rhodey is thankful the wind is loud enough to cut the silence.

"I know you told me a great deal over the phone, but I wish to clarify a few final things, if you would."

Rhodey nods, figuring it's the least he can do since T'Challa hasn't run off to eviscerate Barnes.

"Barnes, when under custody, had been approached by a man who had taken the identity of the U.N. approved psychiatrist. You say this man -this Zemo- is the one who planted the bomb at Vienna?"

Rhodey nods.

"And as already proven when Zemo visited Barnes, he has some way to control Barnes' actions, at least to a degree."

"That is the working theory at the moment."

T'Challa nodded and they stop right before the doors.

"My final query Colonel. I have given my oath that I'll not use deadly force unless forced; given that these actions have led to what happened to Mr Stark, can you swear the same?"

Rhodey freezes for a moment, before his lungs remember how to work and he takes a long, deep breath, releasing it slowly, facing T'Challa to speak.

"I promise T'Challa, that unless I am backed into a corner, I will make no attempts to end anyone's life."

The Wakandan Monarch nods and they enter the base.

Rogers and Barnes' trail through the base is disgustingly easy to follow, given that Rogers' strategy seems to be 'break down all the doors'. It's actually a little pathetic.

"Seriously, I get that there is a bit of a time limit to make sure the Winter Corps isn't defrosted, but even Tony would give Rogers such a damn lecture on the pointlessness of this."

T'Challa cocks his head at Rhodey curiously.

"I was under the impression that Mr Stark liked being flashy and explosive."

Rhodey gently shakes his head.

"Yeah that's what Tony likes, but it doesn't mean he doesn't know how to be subtle. Did you hear, a few years ago, about the Mandarin terrorist?"

T'Challa nods, still keeping an eye on their surroundings.

"Tony, with only day-to-day products bought from a wallmart, managed to single-handedly infiltrate a mansion secured with 24/7 cameras everywhere and countless trained men armed with a
variety of high impact guns. In broad daylight."

Unsurprisingly, T’Challa jolts to a stop and turns to Rhody. Even with his face hidden behind his mask, Rhody can practically feel the disbelieving gape.

"Tony likes being flashy, but he knows how to get a job done right."

T’Challa nods slowly, and they keep moving.

"Still speaking of the Mandarin terrorist, I have heard that Mr Stark created a suit that can be accessed remotely, and he used it to save the crew on board your president's plane."

Rhody nodded, hearing the smooth glide of the gears and hydraulics of the suit he was in.

"Yeah, that was the Mark 42. Tony ended up blowing it up to kill the Mandarin; see the guy had created a virus that essentially turned people into super soldiers, but it was flawed, and they could literally blow up. The dose he'd injected himself with was kinda stable, but he was still a ticking time bomb, so Tony trapped him in the suit and blew it sky high."

T’Challa nodded almost ... enthusiastically, before asking another question about Tony.

It was weird; the man was from Wakanda, reputed to be the most technologically advanced nation of the damn planet.

Why was he -dare Rhody even think it- fanboying?

Before he could ask though, they came up to a door that the suit was picking up two heat signatures behind.

And again, reigned silence.

"I have so many things I want to say to you Rogers, but they can all wait until the extra soldiers are taken care of, and their bomb happy handler -or whatever the hell Zemo is supposed to be- is in custody, capiche?"

Rogers and Barnes were both looking at him and T’Challa in a mixture of confusion, fear and mistrust. Rogers spoke, injecting his 'Captain America Voice', which Rhody was coming to realise really was as annoying and condescending as Tony claimed.

"Why are you in Tony's armour Rhodes, and why did you bring T’Challa when he's hell bent on killing Bucky?"

Safely hidden behind the faceplate, Rhody rolled his eyes and pulled a face.

"T’Challa has been informed of the circumstances regarding Zemo and his involvement and has agreed to help bring the man in. Alive," Rhody rolled his eyes again when the looks on the soldiers faces forced him to add the quantifier. "And really, if you had just told us at the damn airport about HYDRA's back up assassins, we could have had a lot more time to deal with this garbage, so let's go, time's wasting!"

Barnes slowly lowered his rifle and straightened from his stance, recognising that Rhody and T’Challa had bigger things to focus on than him, but Rogers' face set in in that mulish stubbornness that had preceded most of his latest stupid decisions.

"Where's Tony, Rhodes?"
Of course *that* was what Rogers decided to focus on.

"Right now? As safely away from this bullshit as he can be."

Rhodey and T'Challa started moving to the next room, Barnes hesitantly following behind. Rogers quickly followed as well, getting louder and louder as he demanded information on Tony. Rhodey grit his teeth and kept moving.

They'd lost enough time.

"I ... I don't get it ... they're..."

Barnes' stuttered words held the confusion they were all feeling.

The Winter Corps was dead, killed while still resting in frozen sleep.

"This is recent; the blood is still wet. Zemo is either here or not too far away."

A harsh laugh rang through the air at T'Challa's words, and the four turned to see Zemo.

"Very good. You see, I had no use for the soldiers other than to bring you here."

Rogers moved to stand in front of Barnes, shield raised and determined scowl on his face.

"What do you want with Bucky?!"

Zemo laughed.

"Oh I want nothing more with the failed soldier Captain; he has done what I needed."

There was a slight husk to his voice that Rhodey couldn't quite place, but the accent was familiar.

"You're Sokovian. Is that what this is about?"

Rogers words had Rhodey linking Zemo's accent to Wanda's. And yeah, that was pretty obvious really. Zemo gave that laugh again.

"Sokovia was a failed state long before you blew it to hell. No. I'm here because I made a promise."

Zemo's words were said lightly, but Rhodey could hear the undertone of bone deep pain.

"You lost someone."

Rogers confirmed Rhodey wasn't the only one to hear it.

"I lost everyone. And so will you."

And wasn't that just ominous as fuck?

Zemo, after a general look around the room, had kept his gaze evenly split between Rogers and Rhodey, and now focussed on Rogers.

"I've thought about nothing else for over a year. I studied you, I followed you, but now that you're standing here I just realized... there's a bit of green in the blue of your eyes."
Wait... was he flirting? Please don't be flirting. If this whole ordeal was out of some creepy as hell courting attempt-

"How nice to find a flaw."

Never mind.

Zemo's eyes flashed to Rhody and then lingered on T'Challa, his face a mix of fury and sorrow, and a nearby screen lit up.

"Barnes may not have been the one to kill your father, but once upon a December..."

A video started playing, and Rhody immediately noticed the way Barnes stiffened and Rogers face drained of all colour.

But unlike a lot of people (and yes Tony was included in this number) Rhody didn't care.

A low powered shot from the repulsor and Zemo was flying into a wall, a startled shout escaping the mans throat. A pair of handcuffs designed to hold a super soldier pulled from a compartment of the suit and Zemo was restrained, and a powerful knock to the head from T'Challa and the man was unconscious.

And for some reason well beyond Rhody's purview, Rogers disapproved.

"You already had him cuffed! Why would you-!"

"Stow it Rogers. What's this thing showing?"

The colour that had flooded Rogers face at his rage drained once more as Rhody stepped up to the screen.

It was a road.

Silence is a very scary thing.

"Please, spare my wife! Please!"

Especially when sounds are prematurely cut off.

"Do not even say a word to me Rogers! The look on your face and your behaviour is all I need to know that you haven't told Tony about this like you damn well should have!"

Rhody knows he's shouting, knows he's being loud and in sight and everything that goes against his training.

He also knows that he doesn't care.

"How many times Rogers?! How many fucking times did you deride and blame Tony for keeping secrets from you?! How many times have you brought up that he kept his work on Ultron a secret?! And yet you pull this?!"

Rogers' face is performing a level of emotional gymnastics that Rhody would be impressed by most days, but right now, all Rhody can see is the hypocrisy.
"Tony never likes talking about his parents! I even breathe Howard's name and Tony's out the door! How could I tell him about this when he never lets me? And it's not even Bucky's fault; HYDRA's the ones to blame! But you know Tony would just hare off and hunt Bucky down!"

Rhodey slams his fist into the wall next to him.

"Tony doesn't hate talking about his parents! He hates being compared to Howard Stark! And from what I've seen, it's all you do when you 'breathe Howard's name' so of course Tony's gonna get the hell outta dodge! What I am talking about is how you chose to let Tony continue to believe that Howard Stark murdered his mother in a drunken car accident! That you let him believe that Howard was that careless with the life of a woman he professed to love!

Do you have any idea how much that messed Tony up?! To think that his father's concept of love would be so shallow?! So easily overshadowed?! Howard was already so obsessed over finding you that he pretty much forgot he even had a son! That Howard even remembered Maria Stark on his annual expeditions was a miracle!

And your actions have tainted what little spark of light Tony might have had for his father's memory."

Rhodey's voice drops down. He no longer has the energy to scream.

Rogers looks sorrowful, but even with everything Rhodey's just told him, there is not an ounce of regret.

So he turns around, grabs Zemo, and leaves.

Technically, it's a little dangerous to be flying as fast as he is without an enhanced or suitably armoured passenger.

But Zemo's still alive, and if the speed and altitude keep him out?

Well, Rhodey's got Friday to break the silence.

Zemo's put in Everett Ross' hands, Thaddeus Ross awaits trial, and the rogue Avengers speak to the lawyers Tony kept on retainer just for them.

Rhodey waits for Tony to wake up.

Wanda gets assigned to rehab with Professor Xavier, Barton is returned to his family under house arrest, Lang is put on further probation with one final chance, and all of them, including Sam are sentenced to community service coming out the wazoo.

Ross' very many crimes and misdeeds get dragged to the surface and he gets dragged under it, hopefully to never again see natural sunlight.

Zemo is sentenced to maximum security in a mental asylum for the criminally insane.

Rhodey waits for Tony to wake up.

Pepper and Happy visit when they can spare the time from keeping SI afloat after all the mess.

Vision and Spider-Man visited whenever they could come at the same time.
The rogue Avengers one by one visit Tony when they are allowed.

And yet, inevitably, silence would reign once more.

"We're doing all we can Colonel Rhodes, but given Mr Stark's condition...

I'm sorry to say this Sir, but it might be best if you prepared for the worst."

Rhodify makes a quick visit to the Compound to see to Vision and the area when he finds the package to Tony Stank. He's already planning on using that forever when the contents fall out of the damaged side where the box landed a little too roughly.

Who the hell would be sending Tony a flip phone? That is all kinds of stupid-

Rhodify recognises the handwriting on the envelope.

The phone and letter are locked in a safe in the workshop, and Rhodify tries to count down from one hundred.

The first time T'Challa visits is a surprise, simply because Rhodify figured the new King would have a lot of work to do, you know, kinging.

It's a short visit though, so after the man has payed his respects and gotten a brief summary of Tony's condition, he leaves quickly, and Rhodify thinks that maybe T'Challa was just taking advantage of a break between meetings or something to see how Tones was doing.

The second time was much like the first only T'Challa came bearing coffee, so Rhodify really had no complaints, even if the way T'Challa looked at Tony was weird.

Rhodify actually wasn't there for T'Challa's third visit.

The Accords were still being worked over of course, and Rhodify had access to all the research and work Tony had done in regards to them, so he had been attending as many meetings as he was able.

Most times, he was able to schedule Vision and Spider-Man or Sam to come and sit with Tony and keep an eye out, just in case his little brother woke up while Rhodify was gone.

After everything, Rhodify really didn't want Tony to wake up alone.

Unfortunately, no-one was free this time, so Rhodify grit his teeth, placed a soft kiss to Tony's brow and hoped the meeting would be done quickly.

Suffice to say, the universe was laughing.

The meeting -which was supposed to last an hour- had dragged on for three, and then he'd been held back an extra thirty minutes by well-wishers and those with questions deemed unsuitable for the meeting. Another half hour stuck in traffic before he reached the hospital, only to find no parking spaces within four or so blocks, and then it starts raining as he eventually just parks his car five blocks away and walks. He has no umbrella, and while he doesn't particularly mind the rain, even now, it just makes everything worse.

He finally gets to Tony's room, soaked, tired and cranky, and he hears... speaking?

He quickly pulls open the door, but he can see Tony's still unconscious so...?
"Colonel? Is everything alright?"

T'Challa had risen from his seat, the sheaf of papers he had been reading aloud from still in hand.

Rhodey scrubbed at his eyes with a hand, stubbornly keeping his eyes dry.

"Sorry. I just heard speaking from beyond the door and..."

The smile T'Challa wears is heart-breakingly understanding.

"I may not know Mr Stark personally, but from what I have seen, he did not appear a fan of silence."

Rhodey shares a shaky smile of his own.

"No. He never has."

Rhodey stops counting T'Challa's visits.

It's been about five months since Zemo was captured.

The Accords are going through countless revisions, and there has been talk about finally accepting Tony's proposal for the Super Human Oversight Committee, so Rhodey feels like he has a bit more room to breathe.

Tony has been moved from the hospital to the Compound, after the twentieth or so time a nurse or doctor kindly suggested that Tony be taken off life support. It had been T'Challa that stopped Rhodey from reacting violently that last time, and informed the staff with absolute certainty that they were all leaving before going about to ensure it.

T'Challa is an Avenger, so he has a room in the Compound, but like Rhodey, he is far more likely to fall asleep in Tony's room, lulled by the sound of Tony's breathing and the reassuring beeps of his monitors.

And they talk.

A lot.

Turns out that even in Wakanda, technological marvel that it is, Tony Stark is a name spoken with reverence and awe. During T'Challa's third visit in the hospital, he'd been reading one of Tony's research papers, gushing and praising every few sentences (and hey, speaking as a man with a degree in actual rocket science, Tony's work is damn beautiful) and then talking to Tony about his own work and studies, especially the fields that overlap, and how much he has admired Tony for years.

Rhodey shares all sorts of stories he has from Tony's youth, especially the embarrassing and humiliating ones. Not to make fun of Tony or anything, oh no.

To make sure that T'Challa doesn't forget that Tony is human.

Because when Tony wakes up (and it is when dammit not if!) Rhodey just knows that he'll get along with T'Challa like a house on fire.

Tony needs more friends like that.
Six months in and T'Challa admits that he may have fallen a little bit in love, with the Tony Stark Rhodey tells him about.

Rhodey tells him that while T'Challa has his blessing, in the end, it'll always be Tony's choice.

Tony's always had the most beautiful brown eyes a guy could have.

They're even more beautiful after being closed for seven and a half months.

"That's enough sleeping in T. It's so good to see you awake."

Tony's looking around dazedly, and Rhodey knows he isn't fully focussed yet; hell after an almost eight month coma, Rhodey doubts he'd be able to do even that.

"H'nee-beh?"

The slurring is adorable and Rhodey can't resist leaning down to lay a kiss on Tony's forehead.

"I'm here Tones. And so is T'Challa, and the others will be round soon too."

Tony's brow scrunches as he tries to makes sense of the words.

"Meow."

T'Challa stifles the snort at Tony's decisive statement.

"Indeed. I have heard much about you in the last few months, but I look forward to getting to know you first hand Mr Stark."

"No."

The negative cause both Rhodey and T'Challa to freeze.

"No misser Star. Tony."

And just like that, the tension is cut. Even drugged to the eyeballs and newly awoken from a coma, Tony hates being called Mr Stark. T'Challa huffs a gentle laugh.

"As you wish Tony."

Tony gives a single nod before closing his eyes and drifting back to sleep.

Rhodey releases a deep sigh.

He'll have to call in a nurse or something to come and check on Tony now that he's woken. They'll have to find out the extent of damage Tony had taken from the fall. They'll have to fill him in on the last seven odd months of the Accords. Rhodey will have to sit with Tony and carefully explain how HYDRA is an even bigger pack of raging dicks than they thought.

But that's okay. Tony may fall again after all the new information, but it's okay. They can do this.

"Rhodeyyyyyyyy~"

He obeys the sleepy command and curls on the bed next to his little brother and draws him into a hug, smiling at the soft look on T'Challa's face.
They'll catch Tony this time.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For jisko2ijsko

"So... you like cats?"

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Coming into the Compound as a full Avenger, bringing the now pardoned rogues with him, had T'Challa standing just a little straighter and training just a tad harder. He had to stay on par with his new contemporaries after all.

But then T'Challa was face to face with him.

It was his eyes that first caught his attention; such a gentle brown, and oh so deep. The sort of eyes that were just so hard to pull your gaze from.

T'Challa had moved to introduce himself, but it was for naught as those lovey brown eyes disappeared from the room.

But obviously T'Challa was a person of interest, because little peeks of those pretty brown eyes became a daily sighting.

So T'Challa worked to make himself more approachable.

He relaxed the harshness of his posture just slightly, let his shoulder sink just a tad.

He spent more time, not a lot but a bit, in the more common rooms, the ones with a higher number of ways in, so as to not crowd or corner.

He began to have an extra piece of food on his plate when he ate, just in case that may draw the wearer of those eyes near.

And it worked.

Eventually of course.

Every day, little by little, he'd come a little closer, investigate just a little longer, until finally he sat,
right next to T'Challa, laying to rest his head on T'Challa's lap.

The silken smoothness that met T'Challa's fingers was fine and soft, just as lovely as it looked, and the gentle nuzzle T'Challa's questing fingers received filled his heart with warmth and delight.

"Oh, so you finally got him to come near you."

T'Challa snapped his head to look at the newcomer.

Tony Stark smiled.

"Vitale's usually very shy around people, so it's good that he has a new friend."

Vitale jumped up, giving T'Challa's fingers a final nudge, before leaping into Tony's arms.

"I think I'd like to learn about Vitale's new friend too, if that's okay?"

T'Challa looked into a second set of deep brown eyes.

"I would be delighted."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Greatest Plans of Mice and Men

Chapter Summary

For FranticJumpingBean

Five year old Shuri is kidnapped, and it's up to T'Challa and Tony to retrieve her.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The attack had been sudden, well thought out and executed.

The sirens and guns blaring into the air, twenty masked individuals had stormed the reception hall and made off with a grand prize; the young Princess of Wakanda.

The fact that the Wakandan Royal Family was present was supposed to be a well hidden fact, and even more so a secret of what the Royal Family looked like.

Yet without even a breath of hesitation, the kidnappers had singled out and collected Princess Shuri in mere moments before spiriting themselves away.

Her Father was devastated, alternating between yelling at the security team that were making piss-poor excuses or weeping in despair.

He had just recently lost his second wife, losing his daughter or son would break him.

T'Challa would not let his father break.

He was going to get his sister back.

Slipping out of the reception hall was simultaneously easy and difficult.

Getting out was a breeze, but slipping his father's grasp was hard.

He managed.

The police had been called, and were currently fussing over all the high society souls that the gala had collected, hearing out the tearful matrons and their poor traumatised daughters, listening to the old patrons bluster with their steady young sons.

Not a one of the officers were yet free to look for tracks.

T'Challa was.

"That's a bad idea you know."

And so apparently was someone else.
T'Challa spun his head to look at the person speaking to him.

It was a young man, probably five or so years older than himself, leaning comfortably against the door as he watched T'Challa hover halfway out the window.

"The handholds on that wall side are shit, and you're more likely to break your neck than save your sister. Follow me."

...What?

The young man introduced himself as Tony Stark.

T'Challa was well familiar with that name, having constantly hearing it whispered by Wakanda's scientists, mechanics and engineers, some with awe, some with hatred and others yet with fear.

But Tony was helping T'Challa get Shuri back, despite not knowing her at all.

Tony snuck T'Challa into a room on the other side of the building without even a glance from the few officers keeping watch, and then proceeded to climb out the window and down the outer wall façade as though he were a monkey. Once he was securely on the ground, he looked up at T'Challa and smiled, raising his hands to indicate he would catch T'Challa if something went wrong.

It should have felt a little insulting, Tony's assumption that T'Challa couldn't pull off the same feat, but all it did was settle the nerves in T'Challa's stomach as he made his way down.

"Nicely done."

It just a piece of praise, for a paltry success yet ... for some reason, Tony's words had a burst of warmth bloom in T'Challa's chest that never happened when his father or tutors complimented him... how strange.

Shaking his head, T'Challa quickly moved to follow Tony.

They moved to where the grass of the otherwise immaculate lawns was churned and splattered with mud, crushed under tire tracks, and yet still void of police.

"Because of how many hoity-toity hotshots were attending this thing, there's the concern that everyone who attended is suddenly gonna be kidnapped too. Well, the cops aren't as concerned as the guests, the cops just want to do their jobs, but the rich and famous feel they're far more important than finding the little girl who's been taken, because they might be taken next, and they're far too important for that."

T'Challa hadn't even realised he'd spoken aloud until Tony had answered.

Tony crouched to look closely at the tracks, being careful not to disturb them.

"Not a particularly heavy vehicle; the tires are too thin to hold a truck or very large car. But given there were twenty-odd intruders, that means they've got to have at least a second vehicle to have gotten everyone away. If people had been travelling on foot, they would have likely been picked up by the cops on the way. Too risky that."

With that, Tony stood and looked to where the guest cars were parked.

"C'mon, we're checking the lot."
T'Challa was confused, but followed.

"Why are we checking here? Shouldn't we follow the mud tracks?"

Tony shook his head as they ran.

"It's too obvious. The reception hall overlooks that bit of lawn, and by the time the cops have finally interviewed everyone, chances are that a good dozen or so people will be able to give a description of whatever left those tracks, which the cops will go and follow. But there's no way those tracks were left by something that could hold twenty-something people. Far more likely, your sister was taken with a larger amount of people in a bigger vehicle, while the smaller car draws the police away from the rest of the group."

They arrived at the lot, and deep skid marks were blazing from asphalt that had been clean when T'Challa and his family had arrived.

"Now why would someone need to leave here in such a hurry do you think?"

Tony ran over to a black Cadillac, pulling a set of keys from his pocket and unlocking the doors before sliding in.

"Are you allowed to drive a car?"

T'Challa wasn't sure what prompted him to ask the question, after all he was worried for Shuri, but Tony didn't seem... old enough to drive a car.

Tony merely shot him a cheeky grin.

"I'm licensed short-stuff, get in."

T'Challa got in.

Tony followed the skid marks to the main road, where they turned to the right, then vanished. T'Challa's heart sank, fear for his little sister growing. Tony merely ran his hand through T'Challa's hair.

"We've got a direction, now we follow it. Trust me kiddo, we'll find your sister. We're coming up to a truck stop in a few minutes, and we'll go from there."

Though T'Challa said nothing, they did indeed pull up to a truck stop -closed for repairs and empty- and Tony pulled over, motioning for T'Challa to follow him.

They quietly moved to the back lot of the building and saw three empty cars, doors left open and license plates gone.

Tony scanned their surroundings before quickly moving to the cars, T'Challa carefully following. Tony leaned into the closest car, not touching anything as he did so, before moving to the next car. At the third car, he pointed to the floor of the back seat.

"That look familiar?"

T'Challa looked, seeing the gold floral headband Shuri had been wearing.

"She was here, she had to have been here."
Tony nodded slowly.

"It could have been a plant, but that seems like way more work than they'd be willing to do in addition to the other car."

Tony moved away from the cars and scanned their surroundings again. The truck stop itself doubled as a corner store when open, and there were a couple places to eat in the area, though only one was currently open, and too far to have seen what happened.

"Over there."

T'Challa followed Tony's finger and just managed to make out a storage facility that looked almost condemned.

A place were no one should want to go.

They very carefully snuck into the building, walking slowly and quietly, and staying close to the walls.

"Bloody hell, I thought the brat would never stop cryin'."

The kidnappers.

"Lay off Jay. The kid's what, five? If twenty masked men came and stole you away when you were five, would you be dried eyed and cheery?"

A harsh sounding scoff.

"You ain't sympathisin' with the brat are ya Mikey?"

"Watch it Jay! I'm looking forward to my pay check as much as you are! I'm not risking that! I'm just saying that the kid's got a reason to cry."

Another scoff, and the sound of heavy steps leaving the room.

"Prick."

Tony motioned for T'Challa to stay where he was, before Tony disappeared into the room. A sudden shuffling, and then silence returned. Tony poked his head out into the hall and motioned T'Challa in.

The man who remained in the room -Mikey- was gagged and tied, unconscious and drooling from his spot on the floor.

"Where did you get rope? And how did you knock him out?"

Tony pointed to a spot behind the couch.

"They've stashed tons of it, at least a half dozen coils. And I pinched a pressure point that sent the guy straight down. Only really works if you sneak up on them though."

Collecting the coils, they moved to the next room, keeping an ear out.

They found Shuri before any other captors.
A quick motion for quiet from Tony before he untied her, Shuri was soon crying softly into T'Challa's shoulder. Tony had just stood up when the door to the room burst open.

"Shit! INTRUDERS!!!"

Tony quickly pushed the siblings behind the pieces of furniture littering the room, barely escaping a small volley of bullets.

"Quickly; the window is empty. Get out that way and run."

"But what about you Tony?!

Tony gave a small smile, leaning over and planting a kiss on both T'Challa and Shuri's foreheads.

"It'll be okay. Time to move!"

Somehow Tony managed to get them both out of the window, and as soon as they were outside, the prince and princess ran, T'Challa leading the way to the still open diner.

The sounds of bullets still ringing in their ears, the two managed to enter the diner and were quickly approached by the concerned waitress.

"Please." T'Challa's voice was clogged with unshed tears and fear. "You've got to call the police here now."

Perhaps it was his begging, perhaps it was the state he and Shuri were in, perhaps it was nothing more than a kind waitress, but in the end the police were called.

T'Chaka was furious at T'Challa having run off to find Shuri, especially when he had been informed of the very real danger his children had been put in.

He was also furious with Tony, having been the one to help T'Challa, but that cooled after T'Challa told of the warning Tony had given him of the handholds. Tony had obviously seen that T'Challa wasn't going to stop, so decided to keep the boy as safe as he could, especially when the bullets went flying.

Tony had been injured in the fire fight, though nothing lethal or even particularly life threatening. He had been treated by a paramedic, and was deemed safe. Shuri was curled up in his lap, cuddling close as though she could take his injuries away, and T'Challa sat next to him while their father spoke to the police.

"Tony, how did you know all that stuff about the cars and where they travelled and hid and everything?"

Tony gave T'Challa a sad smile.

"The same reason I decided to help you find Shuri. Kidnapping is terrifying, and nobody should suffer it."

T'Challa may have only been eleven, but he understood what Tony meant.

Tony had been kidnapped before too.

Cuddling closer, T'Challa took a deep breath before speaking.
"If you're ever kidnapped again Tony, I'll come save you."

Shuri nodded, agreeing to help. Tony just let a small smile curl his lips, this one less sad than before.

Tony was eighteen, practically a full grown adult, definitely a bit older than T'Challa had thought him to be, but he had helped T'Challa save Shuri, so T'Challa and Shuri would absolutely help Tony if he needed it.

Tony cuddled them impossibly closer.

"I hope you never need to."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Dream A Little Dream Of Me

Chapter Summary

For d_aia

Triumphs and Tragedies, Joy and Sorrow, Good and Bad, all are shared with your soul mate through dreams.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Hands made of smoke, small wispy fingers combing through his hair, pulling him and holding him close as a voice lost to a silent wind tries bring him comfort and companionship. He knows it's a dream, knows it's nothing more than a few hours before he'll wake once more to loneliness.*

*But he knows he'll dream again.*

The tears silently trail down his cheeks as his eyes open to the sight of his dorm room at Huntington's.

How he wishes he still felt those small fingers in his hair.

*He's so excited he cannot sit still, constantly bouncing and dancing in place, until strong arms curl around him and hold him tightly, letting some of his exuberance pass so that he can breathe. A voice too quiet to hear shares in his joy, somehow as playful and excited as he has been for the dream.*

*He almost wishes the dream will never end.*

When it does, he still smiles because he's finally going to meet his baby sister and bring her home.

He is sure he'll like her as much as he likes those arms.

*His back still burns from the bruises and cuts, and he can still hear the snap of his fingers. The hands are no longer so small, but aren't yet as big as his own, and once again are carding so gently through his hair. He can feel them shake though, their owner scared for him, worried for him and his pain.*

*It's a nice little interlude.*

He wakes up, knowing that his father is still refusing to pay.

So he prepares to get himself out.

*He's so tired, and it seems like no matter how hard he works its never enough, never good enough.*
Strong arms, still so much larger than his own pull him up and cradle him close, hiding him from those who try tear him down. They are so steady in their grip, so sure in their strength, he feels safe.

It helps him carry on.

He knows his position and has no intentions of failing.

He can be just as strong as those arms.

He doesn't often feel so at peace, so calm and relaxed. Normally he has a thousand and five different things going on, but for once, he can just sit back and cuddle close to those wonderful hands, fully enjoy the way they trail through his hair and rub at his scalp while a voice lost to the wind murmurs to him.

But he knows he has to wake up.

Because the one-armed explorer in his workshop was promised some fine-tuning and some oil.

And he tries his best to always keep his promises.

He's not sure he's still breathing with how hard he cries, even here. Those arms, those powerful, strong arms come around him like a suit of armour and fight off whatever tries to attack him. They let him cry and scream and shout without a voice too quiet to hear saying anything against him only comforting and kind.

He doesn't want to ever wake up.

But he rises and dresses in his mourning robes, black as the garb of the warrior of his people.

Black as the smoke from his mother's pyre.

Should he still be crying? Should he still mourn? He doesn't know, and it kind of feels like he should, but he can't. His throat is hoarse, his eyes are swollen and the tears have run dry. He wished he could cry when he placed the white lily for her, but even with the hundreds of camera flashes he couldn't dredge up a final tear.

Fingers as familiar as his own tell him without words he doesn't need to cry anymore.

But the world beyond begs to differ. They scream and shout, and curse and decry.

'They were here, but now are gone, why are their son's eyes dry?'

He had hoped his choice would bring pride, maybe hope. He doesn't understand why he has been receiving looks of scorn, distaste and hate. He understands that it's a change, a very big one, but for him to be treated as though he were turning his back on everything he has learnt and loved, as though he were abandoning it all.

Strong arms he loves above all brace him, holding him tall and strong too.

He goes for the sake of the future, they'll understand in time.
'It's just not done, he should stay here, it's practically a crime!'

He sways, those ever-loved hands resting crossed on his hips, as though their owner was nestled behind him and holding him close. But all he will ever see and hear of that person in dreams is their hands, still like smoke and a voice stolen by the wind.

It's both calming and sad.

But his father's company is now his, and he has a legacy he doesn't want hanging above his head.

There's barely any time to dream, so he just tries to enjoy them.

He leans back, those lovely arms draped around him lazily, as though he were reclining into their owner. He wishes he could see the one behind such wonderfully strong arms, but is content in their hold and the ever present too quiet voice in his ear.

If they ever meet, they will meet.

Though he'll not ever deny the wisp of loneliness when he wakes to find those arms gone.

He can only ever find pale comparisons, nothing at all like the dreams.

It hurts. It hurts. It hurts so bad. But then those hands are there, gentle as can be around the hole in his chest, and shaking slightly in fear of causing him pain and it's ... still hurting but not as much.

Even a little bit less is a lot right now.

And when he wakes, he has just a little more strength to keep going, to keep fighting, even if he ends up fighting alone.

He straightens his spine, clenches his fists and moves forward.

He doesn't want to move, can't really be bothered, what is the point in trying? He does his best but all he gets is hate or even higher expectations. But those arms draw him near and lift him up and that?

Sometimes just one is enough.

He wakes to demands and legacy and though it would be easy, so damned easy to just give up and leave he doesn't.

He is strong and mighty, and won't give up without a fight.

He can feel the tight grip those hands have on him, shaking in a match to his own excitement. Even though he knows he's dreaming, he's still running on the adrenaline. He can fly, he can fight, he can take on the world with a smile, and there's nothing right now that's dragging him down.

Despite the metal in his chest, he can breathe.

Still giddy when he wakes, he jumps into work.
He's got a new legacy to build.

He's practically dancing, those arms wrapped securely around him as he moves to an unheard beat, loving life and all it's pleasures. He has lightning in his veins and ecstasy in his heart and it feels like the euphoria is never-ending, never-slowing and never-fading from everything that he is.

It is a sign and a blessing all in one.

He watches the video again when he wakes.

He's always believed in heroes.

Smoky hands press cool against swollen flesh and scarred muscle, trailing sadly against lines black as sin. For the first time, he holds those hands -and when did they get to be bigger than his own?- and presses them to his lips. A voice lost to the wind tries to call to him, but it is no use, he's not allowed to hear them.

Just as they will never hear him.

He wakes with fire in his chest that slowly travels with his blood.

It's all he can do to keep a smile on his face.

He feels lost, unsure and weary. Strong arms that he had known all his life have been fading, weaker than ever before. Certainly still strong, but nowhere near what has almost always been the norm. When the arms come to cradle him, he pulls them to his lips. A voice too quiet tries soothe him, but the words never reach.

Just as his have never reached.

He wakes with a hollowness in his chest, an emptiness in his heart.

He smooths his face, so none will worry.

Wispy fingers lovingly trace his newest addition, soothing the still inflamed surroundings, and calming the left over adrenaline from the fight. He grabs hold of those hands again, marveling once more that he hadn't thought to do it for so long, and again brings them to his lips.

He lingers there, the wisps and smoke as familiar as his own hands.

He wakes relaxed and calm and ready to show the world exactly who he is.

Though still hard, he can breathe easier now.

Arms, once more as strong as they have always been, hold him tight and safe, wiry muscle shifting with their movement in a dance just for him, a show of power and health. He raises the arm resting over his heart and places his lips upon it, revelling in the feel and the delight.

The arms lowers, once more shielding his chest, protecting his heart.

Warm and content and unwilling to lose the final threads of sleep, he wakes.
He feels like he could take on the world.

*He knows he won't be in the dream long, but he'll take the comfort he can, fingers once again gently carding through his hair.*

*He doesn't want to ever wake up.*

But frozen blue greets his eyes, and he straightens from where he fell asleep.

There's just no time.

*He's a little scared, not sure how to feel about what he has seen and worried about how he is to react when he wakes up.*

*Strong arms once more brace him.*

But when he wakes the reports are still there, and no one has the answers.

He just doesn't know.

*He's shaking, badly, and it's those hands that are keeping him here, grounded, instead of once more falling through that void of endless black and death.*

*He's survived, but those hands help him live.*

Because he may put on a brave face, but who else has seen what he has seen?

Who else could ever hope to understand?

*He's still as a statue, unable to move lest he remember the footage, relive that terrible scene, barely breathing until those arms wrap around him again.*

*Those arms are all that keep him strong.*

For who doesn't know now of what is possibly out there beyond their home?

Who isn't just a little bit scared to know?

*He holds on to the hands as tight as he can, trying desperately to stay. He can feel the void crawling into this space though, and he won't let it, won't let the empty echoes of space and death cling to the place where those hands wait.*

*He won't let them be trapped in his void.*

He forces himself to wake up.

It doesn't matter that he won't sleep again for days.

*He holds on tightly when he finally feels those arms wrap around him. It's been days since he last felt them, since he was last held, not even the brief snatches that have happened in the past. He desperately wants them to stay.*
To keep holding him and sharing their strength.

But then he wakes up alone.

He's never felt so alone, wishing for those arms.

Hands oh so carefully trail over the new scars on his chest, curious over the absence of heavy metal. He holds them once they're done, peppering them with apologetic kisses, a thousand I'm Sorry's. Finger trace over his face, following the arch of his brows, the line of his nose, coming to rest on the crest of his lips.

He breathes a final kiss.

It should be easier to breathe, and maybe it is.

It still feels like there's a stone in his chest.

Arms pillow his head as he rests on the ground, constantly laying kisses to wherever he can reach. It doesn't matter that he is realistically stronger than whomever bears those arms, they are his protection and it hurt when they were gone. He nuzzles closer to them, revelling in the strength and beauty of them.

He lingers over a final kiss.

He realises he kissed over a scar, an old wound.

That those arms truly have been protectors.

It's only the one night, everything so busy and chaotic that he hasn't the time to sleep, let alone dream, but he clings shamelessly now to the hands he loves most. He has seen the calluses and faint scarring on the palms, backs and fingers before, but they weren't a big deal to him. They mean more now, because how many times have these hands been hurt, their flesh torn and their owner betrayed?

He fears he may be one of them.

The voices of children wake him.

He wishes he could just dream.

He's so tired, wanting nothing more than to just stay hidden in those arms, let them protect him from the world until everything has died down. He feels like he could dream forever, especially if he were to remain embraced in those arms. He runs his lips over every nick and scar that adorns them, wanting to know the stories behind each and every one, until he can recite them all at a glance.

How much they have borne.

He wakes to saddened longing.

But he must get back to work.
He is listless while the hands try so hard to rouse a response. A voice stolen by the wind desperately calls to him. Fingers card through his hair and stroke his face, and it is only the last that he finds strength to respond to.

A kiss for questing fingers.

He wakes feeling more alone than he ever has before.

None of his homes have ever felt so empty.

The arms are still strong, still healthy, but they are tired now, almost lifeless. A voice too quiet murmurs occasionally. If he securely wraps the arms around himself, they will hold him tight, but then and only then.

He kisses them generously.

It is scary having absolutely no idea what to do.

He feels cold, bereft of the arms embrace.

He had been doing better, recovering, growing strong again, but now he feels pulled thin from too many sides. Hands like smoke are the only peace he has recently, has probably ever truly had, and maybe it's selfish, but he so desperately wants to know who bears them.

But long upheld rules state that he is unable to search for them.

He wakes from his doze to alarms and warnings, and red hair bringing him even worse news.

He is getting too old for this, but he gave his word, and really, he has no choice.

He wants to scream and cry and lash out at all and sundry. He wants to hurt like he has been hurt. He wants vengeance, justice, he cares not which, he just wants someone to answer. It's only strong arms wrapped around him that prevent him from breaking down now.

He wishes he knew where to find them, to hug them himself.

But he jolts awake, wipes tears from his eyes, and prepares as best he can for the day ahead.

He knew this would happen, was his future, he just did not expect it so soon.

Tony's in his office at the Compound when T'Challa finds him.

He hadn't bothered to fully dress, the bandages round his chest thick and catching. They catch T'Challa's eye, and shock openly consumes his features, though Tony is grateful the Wakandan King says nothing on them.

Instead, T'Challa sits next to him on the window seat, hesitant a moment, before drawing close enough to rest a steady hand on Tony's shoulder.

It was a shock to the system, to say the very least on the matter.
After being assured Tony was well, T'Challa finds it hard to look away from the red-speckled white of the bandages all over his chest, but after a few moments, he is able to place a hand on Tony's shoulder in comfort.

The man gently stiffens, as though in shock at the kind gesture, before managing to draw T'Challa into a hug, gently wrapping his arms around him.

Triumphs and Tragedies, Joy and Sorrow, Good and Bad, all are shared with your soul mate through dreams.

You'll never see their face, never hear their voice, never touch them but for a single part of them.

But your soul mate is your soul mate, and the powers that be may be cruel, but never evil.

It may not be for years after your birth, it may only be for an instant before one of you is stolen away.

But you will always meet your soul mate.

And you will always know them.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
"You need to be careful you know."

T'Challa rolled his eyes as he continued running on the treadmill.

After working tirelessly with Tony on the Accords and fixing up the mess left behind from the Civil War, the Wakandan King had grown close to the Iron Man. Starting as colleagues, then friends before moving on to romantic endeavours together.

They worked so well together, as both a political unit out to destroy their opposition, and as lovers.

However, after they had secured the pardon and return of the rogue Avengers, T'Challa and Tony realised they may have overestimated their other teammates.

Where Vision had offered his congratulations, Wanda Maximoff offered her hatred.

Where young Peter Parker had wished them the best, Clint Barton wished them swift end.

Where Virginia Potts had carefully smiled, Scott Lang carelessly sneered.

Where Harold Hogan had been cheerful, Sam Wilson had been concerned.

Where James Rhodes had been supportive, Steve Rogers had been dismissive.

And now it was the Black Widow's turn.

"Tony's one of the most unpredictable men on the planet; he's pretty much made a game out of it. And there's something for him to gain out of going after you. It's the only reason he's ever been willing to date men instead of merely continue with the never ending line of women throwing themselves at him in hope of a night of sex."

T'Challa grit his teeth and kept his pace on the treadmill; only a few miles left of his run and then he could leave. If only his self-discipline would allow him to cut a training-session short for once.

"Tony's a show-off and loves to be in the spotlight, soaking up every scrap of attention he can get."

T'Challa lets himself move just a bit faster from his measured pace.
It means he'll be done sooner.

"He's a narcissist too, constantly going on about his appearance, his work, and his popularity. He'll keep bringing up old accomplishments just so he can brag about them again, and any good he does is overshadowed by his need to have everyone know at all times."

Faster again.

Almost there.

"There's a reason why I recommended against having him be an Avenger."

The beep the treadmill gives to signify the end of his run is lost in the crash Romanoff's body makes as it hits the ground.

T'Challa is breathing deeply, and his hand stings just a little from the unexpected punch, but satisfaction burns in his veins as he takes in Romanoff's shock and fear.

"A boy expected to be a man. A man told he could be whatever he wished. A human told to be a god. A god demanded to be a devil. Tony is unpredictable, because he doesn't know how to be anything else. He has grown needing to jump between one mask and the next in the time it takes to blink."

His glare keeps Romanoff from speaking, though he can see just how much she wants to.

"I have as much to gain from my relationship with Tony as he does. First on the list for both of us is the companionship from one who understands our positions. Both of us heirs to worlds we did not create but were taught and expected to maintain and uphold. And before you say something foolish about how a company and a kingdom are not comparable, let me remind you that both through the ages have been called empires for a reason."

His breathing is slowing, just enough for T'Challa to calm his limbs shaking from the flood of anger and adrenaline.

"And I myself am in no short supply of women and men desiring me for nothing more than bragging rights. I am the king to a nation; despite having named my heir, I am still expected to take a bride and sire a child, regardless of my feelings on the matter, or even the laws in place that prevent me from needing to do so. I am also no shyng virgin being laid out for the beast to devour; I know well and enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, and am well experienced in both sides."

Romanoff looks confused, as though she were not expecting T'Challa to react so strongly to her words.

"Tony has been put before the face of the world since the day he was born a Stark, and then thrown to swim amongst the sharks when his intelligence became apparent. When your whole life is on such blatant display from so young an age, you either sink and drown beneath the expectations and flashing lights, or you rise above them and find a way to enjoy it for the sake of your sanity. Looking good for the cameras at all times turns into a level of pride for your appearance. A constant stream of inventions revolutionising the face of technology leads to a pride in one's work. And knowing the ever fickle affections of the media, it is of genuine relief when the world is on your side."

T'Challa takes a step closer to the woman still laying on the floor, takes a fiendish delight in how her breath quickens in trepidation.
"Those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. As a futurist, Tony constantly bringing up the past means he feels there is still something to learn. If the events he brings up happen to involve himself, perhaps he is the one trying to learn, and trying to ask for your help to do so. Even if the events in question hold him doing something good."

He sees the way Romanoff pales ever so slightly, as though she had never for a moment given proper thought to her teammates actions.

T'Challa isn't even surprised.

"And let us not forget that Tony is the reason all of you are back on American soil, no longer hunted by the governments of the world. The man you did not recommend is the only reason the Avengers are even here."

T'Challa turns sharply, swiftly leaving the room and moving to the rooms he shares with Tony.

He finds Tony lounging on the couch, tapping away at his tablet and talking with Friday, hard at work for all he seems relaxed.

T'Challa kneels on the floor in front of the couch and rests his head on Tony's lap, bringing the genius' attention to him.

"Dolcezza?"

T'Challa shakes his head, the last of the adrenaline fading, leaving him tired and sore, and the encounter having him needing to be close to his lover.

Strong fingers cradle his head, digging gently into his scalp and pulling a moan from deep in his chest.

"Take a rest Dolcezza. Have a shower, breathe, then we'll head out and grab dinner, just you and me, and we'll stay at the tower tonight so we can be as loud as we please."

Another moan slips T'Challa's throat as the evening's pleasures are laid before him.

Tony may be a flawed man, but T'Challa is no saint.

But they can be better together.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
The streets are a mess, there are dead aliens everywhere, and it is a fight to get anywhere in the destruction of the city.

T'Challa says my angel in Xhosa.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

The streets are a mess, there are dead aliens everywhere, and it is a fight to get anywhere in the destruction of the city.

Of the many results of an alien invasion, New York had managed to get off incredibly lightly.

And it was all thanks to the six individuals being called the Avengers.

T'Challa leapt over a mound of rubble, continuing onto the tower still lit up despite the destruction.

Emergency workers were pretty much everywhere, scrabbling over the fallen concrete and steel, searching for those trapped, directing those found, and taking note of which areas needed the most work. It had barely been six hours since the portal had been closed, but already an astonishing amount of work had been done to start repairing the damage wrought. Looking closely, one would see that many of the uniforms bore the logo for Stark Industries.

The sky was slowly darkening, especially with so much of the city's power being down.

It was nice to see so many stars in the city said to never sleep.

Finally coming up to the tower, dodging more than a few falling bricks and mortar, T'Challa was reaching from the door-

"Don't even try it buddy."

Turning, T'Challa found himself face-to-face with four of the team responsible for saving the world.

The one who had spoke was none other than Captain America, disapproval clear on his face.

"We've stopped enough people trying to loot Stark Industries buildings today. Do not add yourself to that list son."

T'Challa couldn't help the dismissive scoff that escaped his lips.

"I have no interest in 'looting' Captain."
The Captain's disbelief was obvious.

"Then you'll have no problem stepping away from those doors."

T'Challa scoffed again, shaking his head.

"I may not be attempting theft, but I have reason to be entering the tower Captain."

The only woman in the group spoke, and T'Challa had to fight down his instant dislike of her and her tone.

"The only possible reason anyone wants to enter the tower that isn't filching something is because they need to talk to Stark. No one willingly goes to talk with Stark, and today gives everyone the perfect excuse to delay that. So why are you here?"

It is only the combined efforts of his training and upbringing that stop T'Challa reacting violently.

As it is, he doesn't even have the chance to respond.

"T'Challa?"

Turning back to the doors, T'Challa smiles.

"Virginia."

His training once more keeps him from lashing out when he finds icy water suddenly dripping down his face, eyes wide and disbelieving at the squirt bottle in the red-head's hand.

"Bad kitty. I've told you before; it's Pepper."

A helpless laugh pushes past his lips.

"You have been spending too much time with ngelosi yam."

Pepper smiles.

"Quite probably. You on the other hand, haven't been spending anywhere near enough time. Go on. Shoo. Upstairs with you."

T'Challa smiles, hearing the confused complaints of the Avengers behind him.

"Because T'Challa is here to see Tony, and I have no problem letting the husbands spend time together!"

Silence reigns as T'Challa enters the elevator.

"Welcome back Master T'Challa."

"Indeed. Take me to him J.A.R.V.I.S."

He is taken to the workshop (not surprising) and sees through the glass Tony working on what looks to be a storage container. There is another person in the workshop but they don't matter, not right now. They do not register as a threat, and T'Challa needs his husband in his arms now.

It is perfect when, after a sight jolt of surprise on Tony's part, his husband cuddles close, strong fingers clutching helplessly at T'Challa's jacket.
"You worried me, ngelosi yam."

"Sorry. There was no time and-"

A light kiss, little more than a press of lips, quiets Tony immediately.

"I know you are not to blame. I know you have done your best. And I am so proud."

Shuffling fabric -the other person (is that Doctor Banner?!) leaving the workshop- Tony cuddles even closer, once more pressing their lips together.

Five minutes.

The battle is over. The destruction being fixed. The heroes have saved the day.

The rest of the world can stand to wait five more minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

Dance is one of the oldest forms of storytelling in the world. When people come together, they live the stories of old, they breathe the myths they tell, they become the legends lost to time.

I am not a dancer, so I'm winging this so bad, and am not very descriptive. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa's mother, N'Yami, had first debuted as a professional dancer when she was thirteen.

A spirited little ball of enthusiasm and twists, she had won over the judges for the competition with a smile.

She had been disappointed that T'Chaka had two left feet, but knew that she loved the man regardless of his inability to do anything more complicated than a slow waltz.

But then she had T'Challa.

T'Challa had literally learned to walk by dancing, being held up by his mother as she prodded his feet into the right positions, until he just started doing it on his own. Dancing was as natural to him as speaking, and as the years went by, he got better and better, so it made sense for him to see how he would do competitively, right?

A ten year old T'Challa gained his first of many blue ribbons.

When N'Yami died shortly after T'Challa turned twelve, it had seemed as though the boy would abandon the activity that he had shared with his mother. Curling up in his room, hidden away from the world, T'Challa did not practice, did not choreograph, did not move even for the simplest enjoyment.

T'Chaka intervened.

"We both know I will never be able to dance like your mother. I will never be able to truly understand the joy she and you got from dancing. But even if it is just the simple waltz, I can share one thing of your mother with you. We have already lost her my son. Let us not lose her memories too."

So once more, T'Challa danced, eventually regaining the joy it had brought both him and indeed N'Yami.

T'Challa was just fourteen when his father married Ramonda, and when nine months later, Ramonda made him a big brother.
"Hello Shuri. I'm T'Challa."

His father and Ramonda had met at one of T'Challa's competitions. Ramonda had once danced until a slipped landing had ruined her knee. Now Ramonda could only do the simple dances like T'Chaka, though she enjoyed watching others dance.

Ramonda had no problem when T'Challa taught Shuri how to walk by holding her up and prodding her feet into place.

Once Shuri was old enough, she and T'Challa entered a competition as a pair.

They brought with them a sense of mysticism and fire that the judges did not often see, and swept through the event easily.

More and more blue ribbons.

T'Challa leant against the wall by the chairs holding T'Chaka and Ramonda, all of them feeling their hearts in their throats.

Shuri had been walking her way home from a date when a car had mounted the curb and hit her.

The doctors were confident the damage wouldn't be permanent, but until Shuri was out of surgery, they couldn't be sure.

It had felt far too long a time before the lead doctor finally met them in the waiting room.

"She will be just fine."

A deep release of air, the pressure and tension in the room fading.

"It was a very clean break -no bone splintering off- and the embedded metal didn't catch on anything vital, coming out rather smoothly all considered. She'll still need a good deal of physical therapy and rest, but if she attends to both properly, it's unlikely she'll have any reminders of this incident beyond some slight scarring."

They moved to her room, finding Shuri awake.

After sharing the news, a sigh both relieved and troubled passed Shuri's lips.

"I am going to miss both my next date with James, and the Fallen Stars Dance Competition."

T'Challa bites at his lip.

He had already sent a message to James Rhodes, who had promised to be there as soon as he was able, but had completely forgotten about the competition.

The Fallen Stars Dance Comp. was one of the highest regarded events; competitors had to be invited, then had to be able to pay an entrance fee, and then had to go through the rigmarole of deciding if they'd dance singles or partners, their theme, their music and all the essential minutia that resulted in a flawless performance. At the end of the night, ninety percent of the profit would be donated to a selection of veteran centre's and support groups. The remaining ten percent would be put away in preparation for the next event.

Though Shuri occasionally still did solo dance competitions, T'Challa hadn't danced alone for years. He definitely wanted to participate; the Fallen Stars were a good cause that also came with a
lot of prestige, but he was a partnered dancer, and was notoriously picky about who he danced with.

The door opened before he could become to lost in thought.

"Shit Princess, who the hell did this to you?"

James entered the room quickly, coming to Shuri's side to place a loving kiss to her forehead. T'Challa couldn't help but smile at the way Shuri preened under her boyfriend's attention.

"A drunken buffoon, that father has already sic'd the family lawyers upon. Hello Tony!"

Startled, T'Challa followed his sister's gaze and found himself staring at a rather gorgeous brunet. The only white man in the room smiled softly.

"Hello Princess, it's been a while; neither Rhodey nor I were expecting to hear you were in hospital after what Rhodey assures me was a successful date."

Shuri preened again, nodding, and T'Challa was amused to see James' chest puffing out a little in pride.

Shuri's eyes suddenly widened, darting between T'Challa and Tony.

"Tony..."

The room seemed to focus on her as she paused consideringly.

"You were invited to Fallen Stars, weren't you?"

T'Challa's eyes snapped to the other man as Tony nodded.

Indeed, T'Challa hadn't picked it up at first, but Tony's build was strong and lithe like most dancers, and his looks would be a delight on the dance floor.

T'Challa knew where his sister was going, and he would simply have to see if Tony could keep up.

'Sensational! The fire between them was phenomenal!' John Storm.

'They danced so smoothly, as though they were reading each other's minds.' Charles Xavier.

'Watching them was magical.' Stephen Strange.

T'Challa leaned back in his seat, reading over the reviews given to the performance at the Fallen Stars.

His hand stroking through Tony's hair as the man rested in his lap.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

Inspired by Arukou's Silver Needle.

Clothing tells a lot about not only the person who wears it, but the person who made it.

Hope this satisfies All.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The lights go on and the cameras flash.
Walk the walk, talk the trash.
The catwalk's long, red carpet done right.
The models glare, ignore their spite.
Prove your metal, move forward, go.
Yours is the face of the brand they know.
You wear the threads, have picture's taken, done.
Your head held high, it's over, you've won.

There are people in this world who ooze charm, who breathe charisma, who embody elegance.

Then there are those who live all three.

Long legs taking him smoothly down the runway, bedecked in the latest offerings from Wakanda Wearables, Tony Stark was one of those people.

T’Challa looked on, his lip caught between his teeth as the other man wore his designs. Though he’d told no one he’d been thinking of the very man wearing them when he'd put pen to paper.

And the result exceeded even his greatest expectations.

The clothes clung to the man, nearly a second skin, as the hems and tails so artfully draped behind him. The red jacket with gold trim and highlights would easily look gaudy on most, but on Tony Stark, it was impossible to find anything that didn't in some way flatter the man.

T’Challa swallowed as Tony somehow found his eye, somehow found him out of the hundreds of people in the audience.

And winked.
Breath forced from his lungs in shock, T'Challa could do nothing but stare at the man now once more walking the runway, only this time to get off it.

As T'Challa's eyes lingered on the fitted black slacks, he couldn't help but think of the old adage.

'Hate to see him go, love to watch him leave.'

It would be unprofessional for him to just leave before seeing the offerings of the other designers, hell it would be outright rude of him and reflect badly on his family's company, but...

Tony lingers at the end of the stage, unerringly catching his eye once more with another wink and a smouldering smile before walking off.

T'Challa's father will understand.

Even in a business like this, you don't meet a man like Tony everyday.

And you if you do, you never let him get away.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For jisko2ijsko and ShootMeDead

The X-Gene. The factor that differentiates being Homo Sapien and Homo Superior. The single strand of DNA that when present within the human body, causes the extraordinary.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He doesn't know when it started.

Useless. Completely useless. A true waste of space.

He doesn't know when he first noticed.

Always getting in the way, I have more important things to be doing.

He doesn't know when it started to hurt.

Can't he do anything right? Why do I have to waste my time on him?

He doesn't know when he started to fear.

I should have given him away at the first chance.

He does know what might have happened if he stayed.

It would solve so many of my problems.

So Tony ran and never looked back.

How telling is it, that Howard Stark never noticed his son's absence?

"Hello Anthony. My name is Charles Xavier."

It would be beyond dangerous for it to get out who he really was, for both himself and the school, not to mention those residing within it's walls, so Anthony Stark became Antonio Ferrous. For all that he could no longer use the name, Tony was still a Stark.

Stark men are made of iron.

The other students got used to him fairly quickly; for all that he was super smart and good at building, he was still an eight-year old with a mouth full of sass and snark.
He fit right in.

No one really understood why he refused to be handed things though.

All it took was a second of holding an item at the same time as someone else.

Charles had said it was less telepathy, as it only ever happened when mutually holding something, and more akin to empathy.

He couldn't control the person, their thoughts or emotions.

He couldn't influence them in a certain direction.

He couldn't speak to them through the mind like Charles did, or delve deeper than their immediate thoughts.

In that one second, Tony could only read, hear, feel what thoughts and emotions the other person was experiencing.

In that one second, Tony was captured in another person's mind.

He didn't like to be handed things, because Tony always burned.

"WHAT DID YOU DO TO THE BLACKBIRD?!"

"Made her fly faster. I got Charles and Hank's approval Cyclops, what's the problem?"

"You didn't tell any of the team you were doing upgrades and so we almost crashed because we didn't know how to handle the controls anymore!"

"... Okay, ignoring the fact that you're still alive so you obviously figured it out, you were at the meeting where I asked to do upgrades and was allowed."

Yeah, it was petty, but Tony enjoyed proving Scott wrong.

"It's just unbelievable; like walking into a store with all the TV's playing different channels at top volume."

"... I don't know if it'll help but I can try to think quieter?"

Jean just shook her head, saying it was okay, hardly Tony's fault, but he did feel bad for her when his thoughts gave her migraines.

"..."

"..."

"..."

"... Okay, in our defence, we didn't know Storm could summon that much lightning indoors."

Tony and Ororo were still made to clean and repair the danger room.
Once Tony had dreamed of taking over his fath- Howard Stark's company, building robots and planes to help the world.

Obviously that had changed. Now his incredible brainpower and ingenuity was spent helping the X-Men help the world.

Though he was trained to fight and survive just as well as his peers - perhaps even a little more so given his lack of a more physical mutation - Tony rarely went out on missions or for recruitment, being far more content in the labs and workshops.

The others had noticed his preferences and accepted them, but it meant that Tony didn't really get a cool mutant name, like Beast, or Havok or anything of the like. His empathy really didn't lend itself to a creative title and while he was certainly fit, again, the lack of a more physical indicator meant there was nothing to really define him.

Or so he thought.

The constant, consistent clangs and bangs as his hammer struck hot metal, forging things beyond most imagination.

The way scrap and refuse was collected and turned into toys and trinkets to bring a smile to the most haggard of faces.

How he stood firm, no matter how he was feeling, allowing no cracks to show through unseen armour.

'Iron Man' whispered between the students, as they took on the dangers of the room.

'Iron Man' floated through the dorms, as the children gazed in wonder at their playthings.

'Iron Man' praised the warriors, as they donned their gear for battle.

'Iron Man' revealed the elders, about he who stood so strong.

'Iron Man'

'Iron Man'

'Iron Man'

He hadn't worn the name for over half his lifetime, but, as the report blared over the news and he found himself clenching his fists as tightly as he could, Charles' voice echoing faintly in his head, it didn't stop the well-worn mantra playing, as he allowed no cracks to show.

**Stark men are made of iron.**

It wasn't enough though, to drown out the story of Howard Stark's car crash.

Maria Stark begged any and all for information on the son she had believed Howard to have hidden away.

A careful enquiry at the back of his mind. A gentle shake of his head. A saddened acceptance.
He was not Anthony Stark.

He was Antonio Ferrous.

He was Iron Man.

Despite being surrounded by geniuses, Tony had still needed to venture beyond the walls of the school once he was eighteen so he could go to college and keep learning.

He was accepted to M.I.T. and graduated with full honours at twenty-two.

He still didn't like being handed things.

Charles and a few of the younger kids who adored Tony for some reason all came to cheer as he made the walk.

It was also when he was approached by Obadiah Stane.

Tony remembered Obadiah, remembered the icy indifference and heated hatred that slipped into the papers and toys he'd pass Tony that belied his warm smile and cheeky grin.

Tony felt no shame, regret or embarrassment turning down the job offer.

Stark Industries was failing without a Stark at the helm, and though Obadiah didn't recognise Tony, he did recognise talent that might save the company.

It had once been Tony's dream to work for SI, but those days were long gone.

Even the ugly snarl that curled Obadiah's lips wasn't going to revive them.

But Tony had made himself well known enough to catch S.H.I.E.L.D.'s attention.

"I am sorry Director Fury, but Mr Ferrous has already politely declined S.H.I.E.L.D.'s job offers for years. Why do you keep coming here to harass the young man?"

"That 'young man' is in his thirties Xavier. He can speak for his damn self. And with the mind that man has, it is a waste for him to spend it just upgrading the wings you lot use."

"It is up to Mr Ferrous how his time is spent, Director. Yes, he has upgraded the Blackbird a number of times, but he is also one of the teachers here at the school and does all manner of maintenance and technological work that the school may require. Mr Ferrous has already turned S.H.I.E.L.D. down; why can't you leave him be? What is so vitally important that you yourself, Nicholas, have come here personally to try and convince him?"

"... Damn you Charles Xavier."

"I am already damned Nicholas, but I gave my word to protect those who seek sanctuary here. And despite his age, Antonio Ferrous is still one of my students. Why are you here?"

"... What do you know of Norse Mythology?"

Charles talks to Tony about the situation.
Tony heaves a sigh, but agrees to go.

Tony arrives on the helicarrier and feels a well of disappointment.

He can see the potential, the ideas and dreams that S.H.I.E.L.D. base of operations could be.

What is actually there is a pretty shell filled with crap, a shambled mix of Stark Tech and Hammer Tech, both fighting be the prettiest looking pieces of crap in the room.

Shaking his head, Tony follows his guide to the bridge, ignoring the distrusting, hate-filled stares his uniform brings him.

Whatever, he's an X-Man, even if not on the standard roster, and a mutant.

If the S.H.I.E.L.D. minions don't like it, they can suck eggs for all Tony cares.

The bridge is just as disappointing as the rest of the carrier, though Tony's able to feign polite disinterest instead of disdain to his guide. He takes a seat, hearing how his new 'teammates' are bringing Loki in from Germany. There had apparently been a slight detour in a nearby forest where they picked up the god of thunder, and levelled a good patch of said forest, but the Black Widow, Captain America and the Black Panther were now only a few minutes out.

Tony drums his fingers against the conference table.

He is so bored.

Doctor Banner enters the bridge and comes over to the table, waiting for the others.

Never mind, Tony's not bored any more!

Their slightly dishevelled teammates enter, and a security feed window opens so they can watch Fury's little confrontation with Loki.

Tony doesn't listen to most of it, talking science with Doctor Banner (Bruce Tony, it's only fair) and then a surprisingly astute Black Panther (T'Challa, my friend).

Captain America snaps when the feed closes.

"Are you even taking this seriously?! Who are you?! We are facing a global threat and you're making jokes!"

Tony puts on his best poker face, remembering despite his best efforts bitter words and cruel hands.

'How am I supposed to find Captain America with you wasting all my time Anthony?!!'

'You call yourself a Stark?! You are a disgrace and Steve would be ashamed of you too!'

'You are nothing compared to Steve Rogers! The man was a hero, Captain America himself! You're nothing Anthony!'

"My name is Antonio Ferrous. As far as I'm aware, I am here to assist Bruce in the more
technological aspect of tracking the Tesseract. Who are you? Last I heard, the great Captain was
dead."

The silence that falls the bridge is almost staggering, and Tony takes a small pleasure in the
outright hurt on the Captain's face. Black Widow is looking at Tony like she wants to hurt him, and
if even half the rumours he's heard about her are true, she's more than capable, while Thor just
looks puzzled.

Tony turns back to a slightly shocked Bruce and an amused T'Challa, resuming their conversation
on particle irregularity.

Well that's the plan, but Fury shows up and sends Bruce and Tony off to the labs where they won't
get in the way and won't overhear anything they shouldn't.

Pfft. As if. Tony's a genius remember? He'd already managed to secret J.A.R.V.I.S. into
S.H.I.E.L.D.'s network. Soon he'll know every dirty little secret S.H.I.E.L.D.'s been trying to hide.

Though... he's not gonna deny the happiness he feels when T'Challa follows them to the labs.

The labs (that fail oh so very hard at having all the toys) are soon filled with breathless discussion
and happy laughter.

Tony, for all that he's lived longer as Ferrous than Stark was still raised a showman before he left,
so he effortlessly takes centre stage and has both Bruce and T'Challa swapping between being in
stitches and deep thought easily.

And yeah, there's some tinkering doo-hickory with the shoddy machines S.H.I.E.L.D. is forcing on
them so the things actually do what Tony needs them to do, which catches his companions notice
and leads into further discussion and laughter.

Tony can't think of the last time he smiled so much, and he was the teacher for sixteen years olds,
when clever, snarky sass is at it's highest!

Part of it is the science; he's always calmest when he's learning new things and Bruce and T'Challa
are teaching him so much!

But another part of it is... well...

It's T'Challa's presence.

He won't use words like 'aura' or 'bearing', because even though he's met a couple people who see
those sorts of things, he doesn't, and it's not that anyway.

It's that T'Challa is seemingly always nearby, but never touching.

Even better, without even asking, T'Challa leaves things where Tony can grab them, never once,
not once, trying to hand them to Tony directly.

It really means more than words can say.

The Captain comes in, speaking words of apology that swiftly die when he sees Tony tickling
Bruce, T'Challa off to the side laughing, offering Bruce no support.

It was another weird quirk of Tony's mutation where someone had to be holding something out for
Tony to take; touching someone's clothes or even their skin did nothing, and confused the hell out of Tony, Charles and several others who had tried to make sense of the power.

"What are you doing?"

Tony rolls his eyes, and continues to tickle Bruce, speaking over the man's helpless laughs.

"Having some fun while we wait for the machines to work."

While T'Challa continues chuckling, and Bruce releases breathless guffaws, the answer does not appease the Captain.

"We are up against a villain that is able to brainwash people in an instant and has an artefact of power we can't hope to understand; why can't you take this seriously?!"

Like the snap of your fingers, the happy, relaxed atmosphere of the lab is gone, dragged deep under the strength of Captain America's disappointment.

Tony scowls.

"And how exactly do you expect me to act? Like a chicken with it's head cut off; running around in circles giving off the last pathetic squawks before I expire? Like an emotionless shell focused only on getting the damn job done and nothing else?"

The Captain takes a step back, a look of shock on his face and uncertainty in his eyes. Tony stands, pulling Bruce with him and faces the Captain head on.

"The work is being done, but until the machines load up, we can't track the Tesseract further than we already have. Yeah, maybe having a tickle fight is 'unprofessional', I'll give you that, but what actual harm was being done? To either the mission or to each other? If anything, being able to relax and release tension before shit hits the fan -and it always does in these situations- means we'll be better able to work out a solution.

"So tell me Captain, what is your real problem with me?"

The shock was replaced with a confused frown, as though the Captain himself didn't even know, a theory that was strengthened by his next words.

"Just find the cube."

J.A.R.V.I.S. had started pulling up some of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s hidden files on the Tesseract, T'Challa and Bruce coming to read over Tony's shoulder, when Fury bursts into the lab.

"FERROUS! What the hell do you think you're playing at?!"

Tony rolled his eyes, though felt a brief surge of warmth when T'Challa moved to stand between him and Fury.

"Working, believe it or not."

Fury threw a crushed piece of tech onto one of the benches; the bug that Tony had planted into the system.

"And hacking into our files is supposed to stop Loki?!"
"No, that's just so I can keep an eye on you."

Fury bristled.

"In case you haven't noticed, the world is at risk from the psychopath currently cooling his heels in the tank! What is going on through your head?!"

Tony let the driest, most unimpressed look he could manage cross his face as he looked at Fury, not breaking the gaze even when the Captain entered.

"That I don't trust you."

The silence that filled the air was thick, tension bleeding into the space instantly.

"You're a spy, you're the spy. Your secrets have secrets, and you need to be the only one to hold all the cards, control all the power. Case in point; we are facing a possible alien invasion, yet you have a confirmed taskforce of -at most- five people if you can convince Bruce to fight. That is either a lot of trust in their abilities, or far more likely, stupidity. Not to mention, when you were trying to sign me up, you gave me that spiel of using the Tesseract as a source of renewable energy."

Tony moved the screen J.A.R.V.I.S. displayed the files on so the room at large could see.

"You failed to mention how the intended use of that was for weapons of mass destruction based off HYDRA tech."

The Captain was staring at the schematics with a heart-wrenching expression, Thor looked saddened, Bruce and T'Challa were standing firm beside Tony, and Fury looked ready to blow a gasket as the Widow entered the lab, before actually hesitating slightly at the obvious anger in the room.

"Ferrous, I have bigger and badder than you locked away where the sun won't ever shine just because they looked at me the wrong way and those assholes will stay locked away until long after they're dead! What makes you think an uppity little technopath who had the balls to hack into my systems will get off scot free?!"

T'Challa straightens, opening his mouth to say something, but he never gets the chance.

"Technopath? Who the hell told you I'm a technopath?"

The confused look suddenly on everyone's faces just makes the situation all the weirder, and the Widow speaking up doesn't help.

"Your handle of technology and mechanics is unprecedented, your creations are on a level before unseen outside of maybe Wakanda, we have numerous reports of you talking with technology to get it to do as you want."

"So that means I have a mental connection with tech? Not that I have studied hard, have an excellent I.Q. and imagination, get frustrated like any other person and vent vocally to the cause of said frustration like people beg an old coffee machine to please dispense just one more cup of liquid ambrosia so that they can survive the day? No, none of that, I must be a technopath? Really?"

Beyond stunned faces, he doesn't get an answer.

There's an explosion.
He ends up at the destroyed engine with the Captain -not his idea of a good time by any stretch of the imagination- and all but dives onto the surrounds of the engine, calculating the perfect spot and time for him to jump.

The Captain's terrified squawk is an amusing bonus.

The damage is extensive, a whole section of the area torn off by the explosion. Tony could fix the damage, but not in the air.

"Fury! You need to land now! This plane is coming down one way or another, and frankly, I think you'd prefer to be the one directing how!"

The harsh curse that rolls through the earpiece is followed by Fury ordering the helicarrier to dock.

"Ferrous!"

The Captain's voice called over the rushing winds, the man carefully leaning out of the gaping hole to look at Tony.

"Are you nuts?! How are you going to get back up here?!!"

Tony rolled his eyes.

"There's a service hatch around here somewhere; how else would they be able to do maintenance out here?! You get inside and start dealing with our guests, I'll find the hatch!"

The Captain hesitates, but ends up nodding.

Tony steadies himself carefully as another explosion rocks the helicarrier just as it hits the water.

He needs to find that damned hatch.

He meets up with T'Challa carrying a mostly naked and barely conscious Bruce when they hear Fury calling in an Agent Coulson's death.

Tony hadn't really had ay interaction with the man, but he still felt the stone grow in his gut that the man had died trying to stop Loki.

Tony made a call.

They sat at the conference table on the bridge, Fury standing like a shattered sentinel at it's head.

He was speaking, threw a blood-splattered deck of cards onto the table, but Tony didn't hear anything.

He wasn't listening to Fury, he was thinking.

The Widow had managed to restore a brainwashed agent's mind to him, and the rest of the captured cronies were in the various cells in the helicarrier. Thor was missing, Bruce was exhausted from a hulk-out and resting between Tony and T'Challa. T'Challa appeared to be focused on Fury, as did the Captain.

But Tony was thinking.
"Gawdammit Ferrous! What will it take to get you to pay attention? What has to be done for you to focus?"

Tony's eye briefly flickered to Fury before returning to the section of the table that held the security window.

"If it was so easy for Loki to escape, why didn't he do it sooner?"

Tony could feel the eyes on him as he stood from his seat and slowly paced.

"From what T'Challa has told me, Loki could have easily beaten him and the Captain. Yet he was captured.

The scuffle they had with Thor was easily long enough and had all parties distracted enough that Loki could have snuck away. Yet he didn't.

And we have just enough of the security video to know that Loki was able to escape the cell by himself with no trouble. Yet he stayed until the explosions."

Tony faced the group, a mixture of confusion and deep thought on his face.

"What benefit does his behaviour hold?"

A thoughtful silence hung in the air, only to be broken by the sudden guitars and drums of Tony's ringtone.

Pulling the phone to his ear, Tony heard the calming strains of Charles' voice.

"The team is ready and already flying out. You need to head to New York; Loki's mind -what I could grasp of it at least- is centred around Mr Stane's self-indulgence."

Stane had sold off most of Stark Industries as the company continued to flounder, and eventually started Stane International, building a penis tower to stand as his headquarters. Tony remembered hearing that Howard's old arc reactor had been moved there as a publicity stunt.

Tony looked at the group around him.

"Wheels up in ten; we found Loki."

They meet up with the X-Men mid flight and arrive just as from on top of Stane's building a brilliant beam of blue light shoots to the sky, opening a void to show endless black crawling with Chitauri.

Tony is capable in a fight, but his greatest strength is and always has been his mind, so while the others begin to battle, he makes his way to the tower, intent on seeing if he can dismantle the machine.

Along the way, Tony helps direct the screaming civilians inside, pulling a little girl out from under a toppled car, pushing a crying boy into his mothers arms, picking up a piece of rebar and hearing the satisfying smack as it connects to a Chitauri head.

He also notices that T'Challa, now bedecked in the armour of the Black Panther, stays close, following Tony and fighting off Chitauri while Tony helps the civilians on the way.

That odd little surge of warmth in his chest burns just a little brighter.
The buildings front doors were locked, so T'Challa gave a quick swipe with his Vibranium claws and Tony kicked them in, running past the terrified security guards and a yelling Obadiah Stane.

"I have more important things to do than deal with you Stane!"

They made their way to the roof, finding Doctor Selvig ... _crooning?_ to the Tesseract, mounted up in a device directly below the void.

Widow had informed them of her _cognitive recalibration_, so T'Challa darted forward and a sharp strike had the doctor folding to the floor.

Tony examined the small laptop that Selvig had set up, going through the data quickly to figure out what needed to be done.

T'Challa had secured Selvig and then informed the security guards that had followed them to the roof that Tony was trying to stop the scary aliens, before sending a lingering glance to Tony as he left to join the battle, catching a lift from a passing Jean.

Tony focused entirely on the small screen before him, devoting everything he had to decoding the information and sorting through the data, ignoring the stray energy blasts that came a little too close before one of his many teammates would shoot down the perpetrator.

It took far longer than Tony would like to admit to find what he was looking for.

"Iron Man to all points; I know how to shut off the machine."

"DO IT!!"

"-But I need Loki's sceptre, Captain! Get that to me and we're in business!"

A round of affirmations, and Tony finally glanced up to see the battlefield New York had become.

They wouldn't let him down.

The space whales really put a damper on finding the sceptre, but with Hulk, Thor, Cyclops and Wolverine dedicating themselves to dealing with the monstrosities, the sceptre was eventually found by none other than T'Challa, who swiftly made his way back to Stane Tower.

When he finally reached the roof, tired, out of breath and bruised, he extended the arm holding the sceptre to Tony.

There was no time to waste with his dislike, so Tony reached out, momentarily cursing his lack of gloves, and grabbed it.

_So much pain and destruction. How many have been lost? How many are we still to lose? It's okay; Tony knows how to make it stop. Tony, wonderful, warm, kind and gentle Tony, will stop this; he knows how._

Tony swallowed deeply, tightened his grasp, turned to face the device and plunged the sceptre straight through the shield.

They watched as Thor and Loki held the container holding the Tesseract, turning the handles and disappearing in a blaze of rainbow light.
Hands were shook, words and farewells exchanged and promises to meet up again made.

The Captain would go on a road trip, T'Challa returning to Wakanda, the spy twins would remain with S.H.I.E.L.D. and Bruce had accepted the invitation to stay with the X-Men for a while.

Tony just had to say goodbye to T'Challa when the Prince timidly extended something to him.

The warm, honey-sweet memory of T'Challa's thoughts lay gently on his mind, so Tony took a breath, aware of the stunned faces of the X-Men on him, and grabbed hold of the card.

*I don't want to let him go. I don't think I can. I want him to stay with me. I'm so glad he's safe. We did it because of Tony. Please say yes.*

"If you were interested in ever coming to Wakanda, we would be delighted to have you."

Tony smiled so, so softly, reading the GPS coordinates that would bring him to Wakanda.

"I think I'd like that."

T'Challa's relieved smile was breath-taking.

He extended his other hand, and Tony bravely took the offering it held too.

*He is wonderful. Absolutely perfect. His smile, his eyes, his kindness and intelligence. Those jeans really work for him... they work for me too.*

"If you're ever interested in some conversation."

T'Challa's poker face was brilliant and Tony tucked the card with T'Challa phone number safely away in his wallet.

"I look forward to it."

Another dazzling smile, and they all finally went their ways.

Jean sidled up next to Tony, a cheeky grin playing on her lips.

"You know Tony, he likes you."

Tony smiled, knowing she had spoken loud enough for T'Challa to hear.

Tony spoke at the same level.

"Well isn't it wonderful that I like him too?"

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love

Oky Verlo
All Eyes On You

Chapter Summary

For CieloCarmen

He is not old dammit! Old people things should never be near him, especially not his handsome face. And everyone is a pack of lying liars who lie, because they keep saying it's not a bad thing and forgetting that he is not old and he doesn't need GLASSES!

Tony swears in Italian.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

No one had noticed at first, because there was just so much going on in their lives that even if they picked up on it, it was shuffled to the backs of their minds.

A bit of squinting, taking a longer time to focus, getting headaches more easily, all were easily brushed aside; the workshop is extremely well lit, he hadn't been sleeping again, he had taken a big hit to the head last battle.

Really, it's only when Tony writes down a math mistake that someone realises he's having trouble reading the page.

"I'm fine! I'm just really busy and not focusing okay?! I don't need to get a check up!"

T'Challa stifled a chuckle, knowing it would just incense Tony at this point, and continued to prod him into the chair in the optometrist's office.

"Indulge me my Sweet. If, as you say, nothing is the problem, then we may all rest easier with a professional confirming it."

Tony pouted, but conceded, cheeks oh so faintly pink from the endearment.

The appointment itself didn't take long, a half hour at most, but the optometrist wished to speak to Tony privately afterwards. T'Challa amused himself by reading some of the trashy tabloid magazines in the waiting room, laughing when he came across the stories of how Iron Man was sleeping with Captain America after they had found out that Tony was actually Steve's illegitimate son.

"And so I will see you next week Mr Stark."

T'Challa looked up, seeing the blatantly unhappy look on Tony's face as he was dismissed. He knew Tony would clam up and refuse to speak if pushed, so instead, T'Challa remained silent as they left, staying close enough to Tony to offer support, but not close enough to be smothering or overwhelming.
They make it back to the Tower, to the common floor, onto their couch, before Tony finally speaks.

"I have to get glasses."

T'Challa says nothing, knowing Tony is not yet done.

"My eyes have decided to start deteriorating, which is why I keep squinting and getting headaches and making such stupid mistakes. So I have to get glasses, corrective lenses, if I want to continue to live my life as I do. And yeah, it's glasses, not contacts, because it turns out that the contact solution would likely lead to further deterioration."

Tony's voice is low and monotone, telling T'Challa just how unsettled Tony is. Truthfully the Wakandan monarch is confused as to why it is upsetting Tony so, but he continues to let Tony speak, knowing Tony will eventually give him the answer.

And he does, not too long after.

"I already get constant reminders that I'm flirting with fifty thanks to the grey in my hair, I don't need additional reminders about needing grandpa glasses too."

T'Challa pulls Tony close, running one hand down his back and the other playing with the streaks at Tony's temples.

"My Sweet, the silver in your hair is gorgeous. It adds a distinction and further elegance to your looks. You are blessed with a bloom of youth that appears to be eternal, so you have no reason to fear ever being mistaken for an elder. And glasses are nothing to be ashamed of either. The right pair will bring greater attention to your eyes, which I still consider to be your most flawless of features."

Tony sags slightly in his hold, snuggling closer to T'Challa and considering his words.

"I'll get the stupid glasses, but I won't like them."

T'Challa accepts the concession for what it is and says nothing.

T'Challa swallows deeply a week later, when Tony shows him the new look to his lovers' face.

"Beautiful my Sweet."

He breathes the words, spoken so softly that he's unsure if he actually spoke but the happy smile that curls Tony's lips proves that he did, and that Tony appreciates it.

They run into Clint first, and given that the archer's immediate response to seeing Tony in eyewear that isn't sunglasses is to start cackling, T'Challa feels completely justified in grabbing the man and locking him in a nearby broom closet.

Tony is smiling faintly at Clint's curses and pleas from the cupboard, but he is uneasy again, and before T'Challa can say anything, Tony quickly walks away.

T'Challa sighs, sending a quick punch to the cupboard door that silences Clint, before walking off, asking Friday to alert Natasha to Clint's predicament in two hours if the archer doesn't find his own way out.
T'Challa doesn't see Tony again until the following evening when he is dressing for a charity gala that Pepper is making the Avengers attend.

T'Challa has made a habit of paying proper attention to his lover and immediately notices the change.

"My Sweet?"

Tony pouts a moment before speaking.

"I got a few pairs of glasses in different styles. This one is for the fancy crap I have to put up with."

T'Challa curls his arms around Tony and just holds him.

Aside from sending a warning glance to Clint, T'Challa is content with the lack of response the team shows to Tony's glasses.

At least until the Captain notices.

"Wow Tony! You look good in the glasses! When'd you get 'em?"

Tony clenches a fist, the only sign of his displeasure. T'Challa can't help but agree, seeing as Rogers words made it sound that Tony only looks good because of the glasses.

"Yesterday. Let's go; this evening is already going to suck, I don't want to drag it out."

Rogers looks confused at Tony's bluntness and the glare T'Challa sends him.

The gala goes ... well.

There are constant praises and compliments to Tony's new look, and with Tony the charismatic man he is, the dollars piling into the donation pool climb higher and higher by the minute. Pepper looks on with a proud gleam in her eye and keeps Tony schmoozing for most of the night, actually ensuring that he doesn't stop raking in the donations.

T'Challa knows that it's for a good cause -helping repair all the damages done by the Avengers and the villains they face in battle is important after all- but he does think that she's taking too much advantage over Tony. Even the polite fake smile that Tony has turned into an art form starts to look wane the longer he is forced to glad-hand.

T'Challa eventually tells Pepper that enough is enough and collects the Avengers to go home after Tony has been making the rounds for the better part of six hours.

It takes everything T'Challa has not to follow his lover when he retreats to the safety of his workshop.

T'Challa wakes in their bed the next morning to Tony's muffled curses and threats.

Rising, T'Challa finds his lover in the walk in closet, and now being closer can hear -and sympathises- with Tony's situation.

"-cking one who broke the windows; Sam did that with his shoddy dodging manoeuvre that rammed the wings through them. Why am I the one who gets subpoenaed?"
Tony turns around, starting a little at T'Challa's presence, who, after taking a nice long look at the suit clinging to his man's body, finds himself stopping on his face.

Tony fidgets in the few seconds it takes for T'Challa to draw him close into a kiss.

"Make them burn, my Sweet."

The hearing is once again televised and T'Challa enjoys watching Tony destroy the befuddled lawyers.

He doesn't enjoy why they are befuddled though.

If one more of them attempts to flirt with Tony, especially by bringing up his glasses, T'Challa knows he is going to hit something.

There is a call out when Tony gets back home so T'Challa doesn't even get a cuddle.

Luckily there are plenty of doombots for him to vent his frustrations on.

"SCOTT EDWARD HARRIS LANG!!"

The shouted at man in question runs through the common room laughing, holding a shaving razor in his hands.

"I HAVE TO SIT THROUGH PUBLICITY PHOTOS TODAY YOU CAGNA CAZZO!!"

The team look at the no longer laughing man.

"...I thought that was yesterday..."

Natasha's glare has him curling in on himself.

"What did you do."

It's not a question.

Scott doesn't get the chance to answer because Tony enters the room long enough to grab a thermos of coffee before leaving, the team all stunned into shocked silence.

It is Wanda who speaks.

"It could have been a lot worse?"

Tony's face often graces the covers of magazines and newspapers, but T'Challa cannot deny the appeal of the latest shot chosen.

Tony's always handsome after all.

Tony cuddles up to T'Challa as they wait for the decision for movie night to be made.

While they too could add their voices to the cacophony of options and choices, they are both tired, and will probably fall asleep halfway through the movie if that, Tony not even having removed his
suit from another charity event that dragged on far too long.

Tony's regrowing his van dyke, and as beautiful as he looked clean shaven, T'Challa much prefers the familiarity and sensuality of his lovers' facial hair.

They both swear when the call to assemble arrives.

They don't often deal with mutant problems, mainly because Charles Xavier is very good at spotting them, and sparing the Avengers from having to go through the rigmarole of explaining that no, they aren't hating on mutants just because they beat up this one guy that happened to be a mutant. Said guy was uprooting trees in central park with his mind and throwing them at his surroundings, be they buildings, other trees or people.

But they were having to deal with said guy, calling himself Psycho-Delic.

It's not all bad though; for all that the guy is actively trying to hurt people, he's very talkative, and sounds like he is out of the most dramatic soap opera ever conceived.

"You cannot hope to comprehend the wretched twisted coils that twine upon my soul, such that I feel not grief nor joy!"

It is really hard to keep a straight face, and Tony actually does end up laughing, a wonderful sound given how tired he has been.

Unfortunately, Psycho-Delic takes offense, dropping his trees and instead grabbing hold of Tony.

"Truly, you on this mortal plane of sin and sacrifice dare to laugh?! You dare to express gaiety over the ruins of my tortured existence?!!"

He forces the suit off as he pulls Tony close.

The team moves to stop him but are held back by a slight psychic shield; breakable but certainly a delay.

"Now gaze upon me, gaze upon the one who..."

The words trail off as the man looks at Tony.

"...You... Among the ruins of a society upon the brink of everlasting collapse, you shine. Shine like the armour you don to quell your foes and battle your naysayers. For such a personage of fairest face, it is only right for me to bestow on lips of sweetest peach a ki-"

T'Challa hits the man a second time once he's slumped to the ground and helps Tony collect his suit before they make their way to the quinjet, ignoring whatever happens to the mutant.

They are seated comfortably when Tony can't hold back any further laughter.

T'Challa just watches him, love warming the smile on his lips.

They are curled on the couch alone a few days later.

"Okay... maybe the glasses don't suck too bad. You seem to like them."

T'Challa stares at his lover in amazement before grazing his finger down ribs, pulling out peals of
laughter once more.

"I like them my Sweet, because you are the one wearing them."

The joyous grin on Tony's face is a gift more precious than anything.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Pretty Woman

Chapter Summary

For V-bird

"It's really not all that bad Stark! Some would even call it an improvement!"

"Just like some will call it an improvement when I shove the gauntlet so far up your ass, I'll be shoulder deep before hitting the repulsors Barton!"

A sorta sequel to 'Darkest Side Of Me'. T'Challa calls Tony 'my white panther'. Not really happy with this truthfully.
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fingers tighten in the stiff sheets of the hospital bed, twisting the fabric and turning knuckles white.

As always, the doctors are useless and more interested in getting the blood tests and experiments done, continuously pushing for at least an overnight stay.

The team is out in the hall, shuffling about as they wait for someone to tell them what to do now, unsure of how to proceed.

At least - and oh how this burns- Strange's magic looks like it will be giving them some answers.

"It is reversible. Loki's magic is certainly potent, I'll not deny, but once I gather the components necessary, I can return you to normal Stark."

A breath slowly released in relief is interrupted.

"It's really not all that bad Stark! Some would even call it an improvement!"

Eyes that had calmly closed snapped open, rage and fear both obvious.

"Just like some will call it an improvement when I shove the gauntlet so far up your ass, I'll be shoulder deep before hitting the repulsors Barton!"

T'Challa's arms carefully wrap around shaking shoulders as the archer flees laughing.

The Wakandan King's arms cover more of the now female Stark then ever before.

Tony holes up in the workshop more often than before the run-in with Loki.

It's not that he's ashamed that Loki's turned him into a woman; he knows, fears and respects far too many women to ever think lesser of them or anything.
It's that Tony is a man, and having been one for over forty years, it is very disconcerting to have the face in the mirror not match what he knows.

Barton's taunts are really not helping either.

"Pretty woman, walkin' down the street! Pretty woman, the kind I'd like to meet!"

"I knew you were a drama queen, but this is above and beyond Stark!"

"You need to go shopping Stark. No way are any of your shirts going to support that rack. And don't you want to dress up all pretty for the cameras?"

Tony's been ignoring most of this pretty well all told; Clint's singing was met with a blunt question of if Clint wanted sex, which resulted in Cap laying into the archer for an hour about acceptable public behaviour.

Tony knows he's a bit of a diva, so yeah, drama queen is actually very easily to ignore.

The clothes bit is harder to brush off, but again, Tony is a man and the body he currently wears is temporary damn it!

Aside from losing a bit of height to more closely match the average woman in his situation would likely have, Loki's spell apparently works by social conventions; everything society deemed highly attractive about Tony when male has been replaced with what society generally deems highly attractive in women.

So instead of the short hair that makes working in the shop easier, Tony's now sporting hair down to his ass. Instead of the hard earned muscles from his lifestyle, Tony's now slim and slender with very long legs. And instead of the van dyke that Tony has worn since he could convincingly wear facial hair, Tony now carries a very noticeable bust.

'Strange said he'd be a week at most; I can tough it out for a week.'

His shirts are big enough to cover the breasts, and aside from tightening his belts several notches, his pants still fit, so Tony's staunchly refused to go and buy himself new apparel, despite most of the team encouraging him to do so.

T'Challa's been the only one not badgering Tony, which unfortunately reminds Tony of the only one of Clint's taunts that actually hurts.

"Does this mean you'll give T'Challa an heir now?"

Tony swallows hard against the bile in his throat, and gets back to work.

He hated magic so much.

When Tony and T'Challa had first gotten together after the shape shifting panther incident with Dormammu, it had been met with confused, wary silence on pretty much everyone's part, most specifically the Wakandan elders and advisors.

After all, T'Challa was the king, and would need a child to secure the throne right?

T'Challa had actually snorted when one of his advisors asked him that, stating -loudly- that Shuri was his heir until Wakanda devised a method for two men to have a biological child. Shuri had stood proudly at her brother's side, nodding along to his words, and glaring at those who looked
askance at Tony, who was blinking confusedly.

Though the grumbles and suggestions about appropriate partners had quieted, they were still made, usually where Tony could hear them, along with a list of his flaws.

T'Challa and Shuri both tried to shield him from the slurs, but Tony had grown up with those same words from his own father's lips, so it was background noise; something you heard and knew, but didn't really give your focus to.

But Clint's words brought all those hidden, ignored fears to the surface.

What if T'Challa decided he wanted a kid the normal way?
What if T'Challa got bored of being with Tony?
What if Strange wasn't able to turn Tony back to normal?
Would T'Challa even stay with Tony if that happened?

The questions that Tony didn't want to think about, didn't want to fester over, didn't want to exist in his mind were brought to the forefront every single time Clint made a crack, and it was starting to wear Tony down.

He shouldn't have been surprised when T'Challa noticed.

His lover noticed everything.

"You have been hiding from me, yam emhlophe ingwe yaseMelika."

T'Challa's voice rumbled, catching Tony by surprise and dragging his attention from his tinkering.

T'Challa stepped closer to the genius.

"I understand needing time to come to terms with your situation, but you have been pushing me away."

Tony swallowed as T'Challa drew him in for a hug, arms wrapped tightly to prevent Tony escaping.

"Talk to me yam emhlophe ingwe yaseMelika. Talk to me and let me help however I can."

And it was that, that gentle, heartfelt plea that had Tony speaking.

The words, the worries, the weariness all came forth, and through it all, T'Challa just held Tony close, swaying ever so slightly.

"It seems I shall have to have yet another discussion with the elders and advisors on proper behaviour, and no yam emhlophe ingwe yaseMelika." T'Challa cut off Tony's burgeoning protest. "The way they are acting is disgraceful, not only to me and you, but to the very image of Wakanda that they constantly remind me to enforce. If they cannot see fit to at least treat their King's lover with a modicum of respect, then how can I trust them to treat anyone, including myself, with any respect?"

It was a fair point; by always telling T'Challa to maintain Wakanda's reputation and then acting as they did, the elders and advisors were making the country look bad. If Tony had mentioned their
actions in even one of his numerous interviews since he and T'Challa got together, Wakanda's reputation would be very much lowered.

"Tony, you must remember that I held a fascination with you for years before we met, and I have grown to love and adore you since we did. Your transformation is temporary, and even if it weren't, it is you I fell in love with, not your body. While I'll not deny the feminine you is pleasing to the eye, I am no less enamoured by the male you I'm familiar with."

To Tony's horror, tears welled up in his eyes, and began to gently trail down his cheeks.

Releasing only one hand from the hug, T'Challa carefully wiped them away, gently rubbing the trails left behind.

"We can handle this yam emhlophe ingwe yaseMelika."

Tony took a deep breath and nodded, a gentle smile curling his lips.

"Oh man! You're telling me Stark's a weepy woman?!"

Clint's laughter broke the calm atmosphere Tony and T'Challa had been sharing, and finally broke Tony's temper.

"You have three seconds to leave before I remove all claims you hold towards manhood!"

The archer's startled shriek was satisfying, but not more so than T'Challa's chuckles as Clint retreated back into the air vents.

" Somehow, I don't think divesting Barton of his genitalia would make him learn to control his mouth."

An evil grin found its way onto Tony's face, just as Steve and Doctor Strange entered the lab with the items needed to restore Tony to normal.

"I said I'd remove all claims T'Challa."

A brow raised in confusion as Tony left the hug and moved to the Sorcerer Supreme.

"That 'y' chromosome of his is just as manly as Clint's dick."

A dark, rumbling laughter filled the air as another shriek left the vents.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Kage

A journey of a thousand miles, begins with a single step. They have already walked a thousand miles alone, and he hopes they'll walk a thousand together.

Tony says Lover in Italian. Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Ah, T'Challa, someday, when you are grown and have seen more of this great world we live in, someday, you will find someone who sets fire to your heart, lightning in your veins and ice down your spine. You will find this person, and they will become everything."

His father's words echo in his mind as T'Challa waits for the elevator to reach its destination.

It's surprisingly hard to keep his breaths even.

"You will enter a room and see no other but them, you will wake and fall asleep with their face in your mind, you will smile every time you cross paths."

Having made this particular journey so often, T'Challa was only slightly surprised at how nervous he was.

But then, he was on a mission.

"And when you find them T'Challa? When you find them, you fight for the right to keep them, to never let them get away."

"Virginia? May I have a few moments of your time?"

"James, could I borrow you?"

"Harold, might I have a word?"

Arranging to have the three in the same place at the same time was difficult, all of them with heavy workloads and full schedules.

But T'Challa had managed, and was now facing all three across the table of a café near the tower.

He'd rather be fighting Thanos single handed.

General pleasantries were dealt with, and before an awkward silence could descend, T'Challa spoke.
The surprised looks on their faces was amusing, although not exactly encouraging, so T'Challa made his request and waited.

"I ... I don't think I really fit this position your Highness, but ... you have my approval."

Harold's words had the tightened coil in T'Challa's chest unwind just a little.

"I'm flattered you thought of us your Majesty. And, my answer is yes."

Virginia's acceptance unwinds the coil further.

James doesn't say anything for several long minutes.

"I'll allow it."

And the coil is unwound, the tightness gone and T'Challa smiles, relieved and able to breathe once more.

"But never forget what we promised you if you screw up T'Challa."

**I will do everything to put you down.**

**I don't need to fight to ruin you.**

**Even if all that was left of me was my head, I'd still find a way to rip your throat out with my teeth.**

The three leave T'Challa frozen and pale at the table, the coil once more snapped into place.

The elevator stopped, and T'Challa took a final deep breath before the doors opened.

"Amante? What are you doing here?"

"And when you find them T'Challa?"

Smoothly, T'Challa descended to one knee, barely hearing the shocked gasp.

A box is pulled from his pocket, and he opens it silently, not saying a word, barely even breathing, waiting for any response.

"When you find them, you fight for the right to keep them."

Warm hands, callused by years of work and tinkering, cradle his face, lifting it so a soft kiss can be placed on his lips.

His hands shake ever so slightly when then they place the ring on Tony.

"To never let them get away ."

Chapter End Notes
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For LadyJaye

You don't have to endlessly shower them with gifts and praise, for they know you love them, and they love you. But, my Darlings, you should never, NEVER, completely stop. You should never start to take them for granted. For if you do commit this most heinous of actions, it won't matter how long you have been together, it won't matter if they're Alpha, Beta or Omega, it won't even matter if the two of you have completed the mating bond. Should you take your partner for granted, you are sure to lose them forever.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Broad shoulders.
A gentle smile.
The kindest eyes.
Warm hands.
Tony loves it when he gets to wake up next to his Alpha.

"Tony, Sam and I got a lead on Bucky, so we're heading off to check it out."

"Okay, I'll grab my suit and-" 

"No, Tony. Sam and I are heading out. You've got enough to do here, and I know Ms Potts has been on your back lately."

"...Oh. Yeah, that's a good point. I do not want Pepper to unleash the frowny-face. Okay, I'll stay here, but keep me posted okay? I will be there in a heartbeat if you need me."

"I know Tony. Thank you sweetheart."

It's silent when he leaves.

Strong arms are wrapped around him, keeping him close to a muscled chest he is oh so intimately familiar with.

He finds himself matching his breathing to that of his Alpha.
He's half convinced their heartbeats are in sync too.

"Hey lover. Just wondering how you were doing."

"Tony, now is really not the time to be calling me."

"Are you okay? Are you safe?"

"Yes. I am perfectly fine, and so is Sam, but we are trying to get into the mindset for the mission, and this call is not helping."

"...Sorry. I just... you haven't been back for three months now, and I was concerned."

"I get that Tony, but I have to find Bucky. He's not safe from HYDRA, and I need to be fully focused to deal with this."

"...Yeah. I understand. Sorry, I'll let you get back to it. Just... be safe, and call me when you have a moment, so I don't worry."

"Yes Tony. I know what I'm doing okay? Jeez."

The dial tone sounds before he can respond.

A pleased sound rumbles from his Alpha's chest.

He's pulled somehow closer, and one of those warm hands strokes up and down his back.

"It has been too long since we woke together."

His Alpha's voice is comforting in his ear, still rough from sleep, and as warm as his hands.

"...Hey Cap, it's Tony. Since I've landed on voicemail, I guess you can't answer right now, and I'm sorry if I'm distracting you... It's just... It's been a few months since I've heard... well, anything from you. I don't want to make accusations or anything, it's just I was talking to Nat and she mentioned how you guys have a catch-up call every week and... I guess I'm feeling lonely. I don't want to go all weepy Omega on you; I know you're still searching for your friend, and how much that means to you.

Just... Could you call me sometime?"

He waits for a call, but one never comes.

There is something unfairly attractive about seeing his Alpha cooking.

Maybe it's his hind-brain delighting in the domesticity and care.

Maybe it's the genuine pleasure his Alpha gets from cooking.

Maybe it's the fact his Alpha tends to be shirtless.

He just knows he loves it.
"A pleasure to meet you. My name is T'Challa."

They had met at a gala.

Making the rounds, smile practiced and fake, Tony had laughed at the rote jokes, commiserated over the paltry gossip and rumour, and stealthily redirected conversation away from where his Alpha had been for the last almost year.

Truthfully, Steve should have been at his side, given that the point of this gala was to raise funds to help restoration efforts after battles the Avengers were involved in. It was hurting in many ways that Captain America was absent.

Steve didn’t even have the excuse of not knowing the gala was happening; even if he was ignoring Tony’s calls and voicemails, Natasha had confirmed that she had spoken to Steve and Sam about attending, and Steve ...

Steve had said he’d be happy to come.

With the event several hours in, not a whisper had been heard from the Captain.

Pepper had directed Tony to greet a small group of expected late-comers when he had met eyes.

T’Challa was everything Tony had ever been attracted to in an Alpha, and many things that Tony was drawn to as a person. Matching wits had always been an enjoyable pastime, but to do so cuddled under a muscular arm of an attentive Alpha?

Needless to say, Tony felt appreciated.

At one point, Tony had had to make a speech, leaving T’Challa and his family to make his way to the stage, and he’d found himself waylaid by concerned Natasha on his return.

"What are you doing Tony? I know you miss Steve, but don’t let yourself get swept up with a random charming Alpha."

Tony couldn’t hold back his sigh, and judging by Natasha suddenly looked worried, he hadn’t been able to hide a sad expression from the Beta either.

"It’s not just that Steve’s been gone for so long Natasha. I haven’t even heard from him for over half a year."

The hand Natasha had on his arm tightened, the only sign of her confusion.

"I call and he never picks up, I leave a voicemail, and he never calls back. I know he can because he calls and talks to you. He answers when you give him a ring, no matter when. I understand that finding his best friend is important to him - I do- but Steve honestly is not trying to keep our relationship afloat. I’ve checked Nat; Steve is calling and talking to everyone on the team but me."

Natasha’s hand had tightened again, and a thread of anger shone through her eyes.

"Steve’s been telling me about all the wonderful date ideas he’s been having for when he gets back. I thought you had just been feeling down because he wasn’t here, not because he’s been neglecting you."

A sad smile curled his lips.
“Remember how he told you he’d be here?”

Red curls bobbed as she nodded.

“The night is nearly over Natasha.”

He in unimpeded when he continues on to T’Challa.

They parted ways after the gala, T’Challa with his family, and Tony with the Avengers.

And that night, when Tony dreamed of strong arms holding him, of sweet lips cherishing him, of a heart beating for him, it wasn't Steve.

Despite no longer being the CEO of the company, Tony still had to sit through a lot of meetings.

To be fair, a good number of them were for prospective new employees to the R&D department, which he was, you know, the head of, so those made sense.

A few for them were for reassuring the board that, yes, he knew what he was doing, Pepper is CEO, not the owner, they still have to listen to him.

And the rest were a mix of interviews, catch-up with the other department heads, and miscellaneous Pepper-said-so.

So finding T’Challa as he entered the meeting room was a bit of a shock to say the least.

"I wanted to see you again."

But Tony couldn’t really say he minded.

A gentle kiss to his brow as a plate is placed before him.

Tony doesn't know how to describe the warmth in his chest.

He just knows that it's wonderful, and he hopes he never loses it.

As he grew closer to T'Challa, Tony began to wonder how exactly he and Steve had even gotten together in the first place.

As he and T’Challa discussed their schedules to try and have as much time together as possible, the memories of Steve being around for a few hours before he went Bucky-hunting would flood his mind. Tony would do his utmost to be free when Steve was around, but Steve was never around for long.

When T’Challa would surprise Tony with a single sunflower, his favourite, Tony could help but think on how Steve had once gifted him a bouquet of red carnations. Tony had bought a small bouquet of Stargazer Lilies for Steve previously, as they were the Captain's favourite and he'd been feeling down. Steve said the red made him think of Tony, which was sweet, but Tony had been telling the world for years that he loved sunflowers, while Steve had mentioned Stargazers once. Yeah it wasn't a competition or anything, but it did make it feel a little like he was being ignored.

And T’Challa loved listening to Tony. Steve had lasted up to ten minutes before he had to leave,
unable to keep up and -looking back- uninterested in trying. As long as he had something to do with his hands, Tony could listen to Steve for hours. But when he tried, Steve would get irritated, saying that Tony wasn't paying attention, because of whatever he was fiddling with.

Really, Iron Man and Captain America were brilliant together in the field, but Tony honestly couldn't say how they could have ever hoped to be together off it.

A moan is pulled from his throat as he eats.

T'Challa chuckles, preening at Tony's delight in the food.

Tony smiles. He is happy.

"Tony? Who is this?"

Tony's bliss stutters when he turns and sees Steve in the doorway.

Steve looks angry.

His fists are rapidly clenching and unclenching, and his face is twisted in a half snarl, like he's trying to force it down.

Though a part of Tony wants to curl away in fright (Could you be any more pathetic Anthony?! Useless waste of space, it's bad enough you're a spineless Omega! Are you crying?! Stark men are made of iron, boy!) he's not going to.

He's not the little boy, desperate for his father's approval anymore.

He's not the young man thrown into a world he can't hope to understand alone.

He's not a stereotypical Omega who can't stand for themselves.

He is Tony Stark. Stark men are made of Iron. He is Iron Man.

"Tony! Who is this?!"

A deep breath, fingers entwining with those across the table.

"Since you apparently don't listen to any of my voicemails, as well as ignoring my calls, I'd like to introduce T'Challa. My Alpha."

The sheer rage on Steve's face as he takes a step closer in enough of a threat to T'Challa to have the man rising and standing in front of Tony protectively.

Tony doesn't need protection; he has proven that countless times.

It still has his chest warming, knowing that T'Challa cares enough to do so anyway.

The action also shocks Steve, as he doesn't take another step, instead looking between Tony and T'Challa with a mix of outrage and betrayal, before taking a deep breath and turning to leave.

"I thought you were better than that Tony."

Tony responds before Steve can leave.
"And once I thought the same of you."

T'Challa wraps his arms around Tony as Steve disappears, holding his Omega close.

Tony finds himself matching his breathing to that of his Alpha.

He's half convinced their heartbeats are in sync too.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
To Err Is Human

Chapter Summary

For MelodyPotterSnape

War. It affects everyone who is touched by it. Everyone who fights within it. Everyone who suffers to live through it. The war may have been declared over in 1945, but it's touch still lingered on those it involved.

It had involved the world.

You didn't have to be on the front lines to have been involved.
You didn't have to be a soldier.
You didn't have to be an adult
You didn't even have to been alive at the time, for the cold, cruel fingers of war to claw at your skin and mind.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Okay first off

SHOUT OUT TO THE TONY STARK DEFENSE SQUAD!!!!!!
May we ever join forces to protect this precious man!

Second

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!TRIGGER WARNINGS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
This one shot delves into PTSD, alcoholism, child abuse and victim blaming.
It's why this took so long to write; it is not light hearted, it is not happy, and if this makes you uncomfortable, I implore you to just back out of the page.

I will not be offended if people don't feel able to read this; it is not kind subject matter, and a lot of cruel and ignorant things will be said within. I once again implore you to back out if you are uncomfortable.

These are not topics to carelessly joke about, and I have done my best to respect that, and the people who do suffer under them.

Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

His earliest memory, which is very early, his mind already striving to understand the world, is of having crawled under a table, holding as still as he can, hoping that the shoutinggrabbinghittingpleaseDilettolethimo, won't be able to find him this time.
War. It affects everyone who is touched by it. Everyone who fights within it. Everyone who suffers to live through it. The war may have been declared over in 1945, but its touch still lingered on those it involved.

It had involved the world.

You didn't have to be on the front lines to have been involved.
You didn't have to be a soldier.
You didn't have to be an adult.
You didn't even have to been alive at the time, for the cold, cruel fingers of war to claw at your skin and mind.

And few knew this as intimately as Anthony Edward Stark.

*The scent of scotch on Howard's breath stinging his eyes as the man holds him up by the shoulders and shakes hard.*

*The crazed look in red-rimmed eyes as Howard scream obscenities, screams threats, just screams in his ears.*

*Madre's tears as she begs Howard to please, please just let him go, he didn't mean any harm, please just let him down.*

*The Captain America comic book on the ground, fallen when he was seized, open to the page where a little two year old had scribbled red, white and blue onto the pages.*

Tony didn't like talking about Howard Stark.

General consensus was he was jealous of his genius father, pettily trying to ignore all the wonders his father had a hand in, and trying to boost his own ego claiming to be better.

These were the same people who claimed that Tony had been a drunken party-boy player when he was twelve.

Tony hated alcohol.

He hated the smell, he hated the taste, he hated the burn, he hated how it made him act and he hated how he felt the morning after.

Even more, he hated how much he needed it.

*He was on a visit from Huntington's, so happy to see Jarvis, so delighted to cuddle up close to Madre, so glad to not have to endure countless taunts and hurtful tricks from his peers for being smarter, richer, younger than them.*

*Terrified that Howard was present.*

*Present and drinking.*

"Howard, don't-

"Be quiet woman! Do you want him to stay a little sissy boy forever?"
The sweat on Howard's brow coupled with the manic look in his eyes, making him appear both frightful and pitiful.

"He's got to learn, if he's going to make anything of himself. To be tough. Strong. To be a man."

Madre's hand trembles where it rests on his shoulder, and he can feel her slowly, reluctantly, pulling away.

She's scared of Howard.

"Son, this is a fine, single malt bourbon."

Tony's scared too.

"Drink up."

But he knows worse, far worse, will happen if he doesn't obey.

So he reaches out and accepts the glass.

"Hey Stark! This stuff is baller! Like seriously, you could get wasted so quick!"

"Clint! Go easy on that stuff! If we suddenly get a call out I want you able to function! If it were up to me, all that swill would be poured down the drain, maybe then, Stark, you could give sobriety a try. Who knows, you might like it and I could stop worrying about you taking drunken swings all the time. No one should have to be on guard in their own home; you could be more considerate you know."

Steve sends a stink eye to Tony's glass before shuffling himself and Clint out of the penthouse.

Out of Tony's floor.

Tony takes a deep breath and tries to keep sipping at his apple juice.

Tries to ignore the shakes and the desperate wanting for that harsh burn that he has known for far too long.

He is handed a drink at every meal, and another an hour before he goes to bed, every day of the visit.

Only once had he refused, and Howard had snarled, his face twisting into something vile, his hand snapping back to land sharply on Tony's face, the ring on his finger biting deeply into Tony's cheek.

It doesn't stop there.

Howard is so much bigger than Tony, bearing the strength of a man against a small boy. Tony is still so young, too young, to be able to stop Howard, so he curls into a ball, trying to protect against hits and kicks that seem never ending.

"Howard!"

Madre's arms curl around him, her body covering his own, and miraculously, Howard stops.
Tony can hear ragged breathing; Madre's, Howard's, his own.

Madre shakes as she holds him, rocking ever so slightly.

Howard gives a disgusted scoff and turns to leave.

"Stop hiding behind your mother, boy!"

It is cold comfort that Howard stopped only so he wouldn't hit Madre.

Tony doesn't leave the house for the rest of his visit; the black and blue decorating his skin and the wound on his cheek would mean questions, questions Howard doesn't want asked. So Tony doesn't leave, spending as much time with Madre as he can, avoiding catching Howard's gaze.

And even though his hand shakes and his mind stutters, Tony forces himself to accept every glass.

"Stark, I do not have the patience to deal with your stupid being handed things quirk! Just take the damn files! You are not an infant!"

Natasha ends up throwing the file at his head, but the aerodynamics of the file throw it off course just enough for Tony to catch it.

It's by sheer force of will that his breathing stays even.

"Stop being so childish Stark, we have more important things to do than pander to you."

A part of him wishes he could tell them, wishes he could make them understand that he really has no intention of being difficult but ...

"Hurry up and read the damn report Stark, so that we can maybe save some lives okay?"

But he knows the words will never reach them.

"We could run away Madre! Run and tell the police what he's doing! It's not safe here!"

Madre tightens her arms around him, her breathing short and quick as one of her hands rests oh so lightly against the spot on his head where Howard had thrown the lamp.

"We can't Bambino, because no one would listen."

She pulls away just enough to look at his face, trying not to let her tears fall.

"Your father holds a great deal of power, and an even greater amount of money. If we told someone, your father would find out and buy them off before they could tell anyone else. And if he couldn't buy them off ... Bambino, I fear what he would do to silence them."

The throbbing pain in his arm gives Madre's words more weight than she realises and he snuggles close to her again.

"And ... despite everything Bambino, despite how much he hurts you, and scares me, and causes so much worry ... I still love him. I love him, and I don't know if I can stop loving him. And that scares me even more."

And that?
Tony gets that.

He remembers so very early hiding from Howard, but he also remembers trying so hard to please the man too. Some of it was to try and get Howard to stop screaming, to get him invested in Tony, to stop scaring Madre, but there was a part of Tony that so desperately wanted the man to be proud of him.

A part that Tony knows hasn't died.

"I'm sorry Bambino, but I don't know what to do."

Tony doesn't know either.

Tony is in charge of maintaining all the gear the team uses, and despite the fact that he enjoys working with his hands and finding ways to improve pretty much everything he can get his hands on, there is a large part of him that wishes the team would go easier on their toys, if only so that Tony could get more work for SI done, and hopefully even catch a few hours sleep here and there.

He's brought it up once before, them going easier on their stuff, but all that resulted in was guffaws.

"Seriously? We've all seen the state your suit gets in after every battle, and your telling us to go easy? Pull the other one Stark, it's got bells on."

They laugh at Sam's words, before joining in, mentioning all the ways the armour has taken damage and how it's a miracle Tony hasn't been forced out of the armour yet because he'd surely be dead, and oh what a tragedy that would be.

He knows that they're not completely serious, at least not in regards to saying everything would be better if he'd die -they're better than that- but to hear it even half-jokingly?

He already has enough demons haunting his sleep, he doesn't need to add those words to the mix.

So he doesn't sleep, forcing his hands to remain steady, even when the hours turn into days.

It's okay. He's been a insomniac for years.

He'll survive.

He has never been a particularly deep sleeper.

He couldn't afford to be.

"BOY! Get down here right now!"

He could hide, but he is always found, and the additional punishment is never worth it.

Howard looks like a mad man, his hair sticking up with sweat, his eyes half-glazed and his body swaying, even as he downs another glass of whatever poison he chose for the night. It's coming on three a.m. and the man looks like he's been drinking enough coffee to kill an elephant.

"Stand up straight boy! Show some damn respect! I won't have you tarnishing the Stark name when I find Steve!"

A deep swallow as he straightens, Tony can only hope that Howard is in a reminiscing mood,
instead of a melancholic one.

"Steve Rogers is the best man I have ever known; the best person. He was a good as they come, better even, and he was full of honour and bravery and determination. An example of perfect humanity! The perfect role model!"

Howard’s eyes suddenly focus intently on him, and Tony can feel his stomach sink.

"And yet you keep failing!"

The glass is thrown, narrowly missing Tony's head, and it is only experience that keeps Tony from flinching.

"You stupid, pathetic waste of space! You have Steve Rogers, Captain America himself as an example to live up to, but you just keep screwing up! Look at you!"

Howard storms forward and seizes Tony's shoulders, shaking hard, reminding Tony about the fallen comic long ago.

"You're pathetic and weak Anthony! Steve Rogers was ten times, a hundred times, the man you are before he got the serum, and he became even greater after that! You are a Stark but what else?! What worth do you have?! What use?! What reason could Steve ever have to think you a boon?! What reason could I have?!

The stench of alcohol, the crazed gaze, the harsh fingers digging deeply into his skin.

Tony can't help the reflexive tears, and he knows Howard doesn't miss them.

"And now you're crying! Dammit Anthony, this is why you're so worthless! You can't do a single damn thing right and you just keep shaming me and my name! Why do I even bother keeping you alive?!”

Another harsh shake before he is thrown to the ground.

"Stark men are made of iron."

A swift kick is sent to his chest, another following to his stomach.

"Never let them see you bleed."

A hand grabs at his shirt, twisting tightly before hoisting him up, holding him close to Howard's enraged face.

"They're vultures that will tear you apart."

He thinks he blacked out.

It's the only reason he can think of for waking up alone in Howard's study.

Every year, there is a memorial held for Howard Stark's passing.

It's a highly televised event, and the who's-who are always scrambling to be seen in attendance.

Obadiah had started the tradition, setting up the first five to be held in the Stark Mansion before he finally grew tired of Tony throwing fits and insulting everyone who invaded his home for the day.
Tony has never attended one since they stopped being forced into his home.

Instead, he wanders the halls of the building, looking into the rooms one by one, searching not for memories of Howard, but instead the signs of Madre's hand; the gentle splash of light blue in a room, the few photos of her and Tony in places Howard wouldn't notice, the crystal vase filled with fake sunflowers she had put in Tony's room to welcome him, the precise organisation of her personal room, forever resting, waiting for her to return.

Sometimes, when the stress gets too much, Tony will retrieve her bottle of perfume and spray a few spritzes in the air around the piano before he plays it.

With his eyes closed, he can almost imagine she's in the room with him, listening to him play, relaxing and at peace, because Howard's not at home too.

It's a dream he wishes most dearly never had to end.

He goes to her gravestone, eyes red and throat dry; no matter how much he tries to speak he can't, the spirits and memories stealing his words before they form.

"How can you be so disrespectful Stark?! Howard was a great man; and you can't be bothered to attend his memorial?! I read the reports, you threw temper tantrums Stark! Like a little kid who wants to be the centre of attention! Can't you spare a moments notice for the dead, for once in your life?! How can you be so ungrateful?! He's your father!"

They never speak of Madre's death.

Only ever Howard.

_Aunt Peggy was one of Tony's favourite people in the world for two very important reasons._

_One, Howard was nervous around her, and tended to greet her politely before vanishing for the rest of the day, and the next two days besides, only coming back once he was sure she was gone._

_And Two, she made Madre smile._

_Every time Aunt Peggy came over, she would nod at Howard, shake hands with Jarvis, smile warmly at Tony, and give Madre a great big hug._

"_My goodness Maria, you look divine! Care to share your youthful tricks? I'm starting to look like an old bat, and that simply won't do._"

_Aunt Peggy loved Tony, he knew that, but far more importantly, she loved Madre._

_For the few days Aunt Peggy would be around, Madre would suddenly be freer than at any other time._

_Tony had once asked Madre why they couldn't tell Aunt Peggy about Howard; after all, Howard was scared of her, and she would surely protect Madre._

_Madre had merely smiled ever so sadly._

"_As much as I too love Peggy Antonio ... she doesn't see, and she doesn't hear. She is so busy living her life, that something like this ... about someone she has worked with so closely ... she can't bring herself to believe it ... for as strong a woman your Aunt Peggy is, she is still human, and humans are fallible Bambino. She doesn't want to think of Howard as anything beyond maybe a little_"
Tony loved Aunt Peggy, well and truly, because she gave even just a little light and love to Madre, but he didn't visit her often.

"Howard! How are you? How is Maria and little Tony? You're taking good care of them as always, yes?"

He swallows hard, Ronnie grabbing his hand and squeezing in solidarity. Aunty Peggy sees it and levels a glare at them.

"And who is this? You had best not be cheating on Maria, Howard! It would hurt her beyond anything! And I can't imagine you doing anything that would hurt Tony either!"

Tony manages to drag up a smile, strained though it is, and squeezes Ronnie's hand back before speaking.

"This is Sharon Carter Pegs; she's a relative of yours who has been wanting to meet you. I brought her here because she'd never get through otherwise."

It's an old song and dance they've played a thousand times since Aunt Peggy's memory started to fade. As Ronnie once more goes through the process of introducing herself to the woman who once had a hand in raising her, Tony breathes deeply, forcing himself to wear the mask of Howard Stark.

"I can't believe how much of your life I've missed! Howard, thank you for bringing her to see me; as soon as I've healed up from my last assignment, I'll take you on a proper tour of New York dear."

Ronnie's smile is just as strained as Tony's.

"That sounds amazing Margaret."

"Oh please dear, you're my brother's daughter! Call me Aunt Peggy!"

Tony can't bring himself to visit Aunt Peggy often, and neither can Ronnie.

It's a different hurt from all the others, but it's still just as deep.

__Edwin Jarvis is the only other person that definitely knew as Tony grew up.__

The man desperately wished that he could do something to protect Tony from Howard's fists and anger, and protect Madre as well, but the same problem came up: no one would believe Howard Stark to be anything but the perfect American Family Man. And as the hired help, Howard's wealth and influence could ruin Jarvis' very life in an instant, destroying any help the man could offer his mistress and young master.

So instead, the butler did what he could do; cleaning cuts and bandaging wounds, disposing of broken ceramics and shattered glass, providing safe hugs and heartfelt kisses, cooking secret cakes and special cookies, providing warm broths that helped settle a stomach far, far too young for the poison Howard Stark preferred.

Edwin Jarvis was a lifeline to Tony and Madre; he helped make the dark days just a little brighter.

It hurt more than words could describe when they had to watch the man be lowered into the
"Stark! What are you doing out of medical?! Are you really so incapable of sitting still and quiet long enough to heal so you don't cause anyone more trouble?!"

It doesn't matter how often Tony tells them he has work to do, work that no, cannot wait three weeks to be completed, just because he's got a broken leg; his mind still works and despite the team somehow not realising it, Tony's still got to look after SI as best he can.

He'd like to take a break and rest, really he would, but he can't, and even if he could, it wouldn't be anywhere near medical.

There had been a few times, not many, but enough, where Howard's wrath had been beyond Jarvis' ability to heal, so a Doctor would be called in to see to the damage.

Tony hated Doctors and Hospitals, because experience told him that they never truly cared.

The Doctors Howard called in saw first hand what the man was capable of, but they said nothing, asked nothing, saw nothing, but a way to get some extra cash by staying silent.

But then, who would believe them anyway?

Rhodey knew, and so did Pepper.

They both knew the terrible, terrifying things Tony had lived through, that he still felt the effects of.

Rhodey had known since M.I.T., recognising the signs in the skinny little runt thrown to the sharks of college life, but as unable to do anything to stop it as Tony and Madre and Jarvis. Rhodey was a random nobody, and black at that; no one was going to give his words any weight, and who knew what Howard would do to destroy him for trying? Instead, he did like Jarvis before him, caring for Tony, reassuring him, protecting him as best he could from those that sought him harm. Smuggling Tony to the Rhodes house for holidays so Tony could know the warmth of a good family, away from the darkness of Howard Stark.

Pepper had learnt when it was far too late to do anything, Howard long dead and buried, Madre forever trapped by his side.

Already working as Tony's PA, she had walked into his office to catch Obadiah ranting in anger over how long Tony's latest product was taking.

"-ways so damn lazy Tony! I get that you're a genius, that your brain is doing it's best to come up with better ways to help the troops, but you need to stop slacking son! Honestly, if only Howard had rapped you across the head a few times, you'd be better at this!"

Obadiah had been leaving, so he hadn't seen the abrupt paling of Tony's skin and the sudden shortness of his breath.

But Pepper saw.

It took a good hour, but she had been able to calm him down and drag out the story. She had been disgusted, especially at how there truly was nothing that Tony or Madre could have done; Howard
had been the one with all the power in the situation, and he had made damned sure Tony and Madre knew it.

Tony was grown now, and Howard gone, but wounds like that need to heal long beyond the physical.

Pepper did everything she could to help him direct the Maria Stark Foundation to helping those who suffered abuse.

To making sure that no one had the power to silence them.

"It's alright Bambino, it's okay. He's not here any more, he's gone out. He'll be gone at least a few hours, maybe more if Obadiah decides to get a drink. I'm still here my Antonio, I'm not leaving you."

It hurts to breathe, it hurts just so much, and if it didn't mean he'd be leaving Madre, Tony knows that he would just stop, because it would hurt less.

Madre's crying, holding onto Tony so gently. She knows not to hold him too tight, otherwise he may stop despite what he wishes, and she can't lose him, she just can't.

Obadiah may suspect that not everything's alright in the Stark House, but he has never said anything, not even to Madre or Tony. Though he is something of an ally, given how often he pulls Howard out of the house.

Tony eventually falls asleep to Madre's singing, breathing still coming harsh and pained through a throat bruised with spread fingers.

Howard may not have ever hit her, but Madre suffers just as much from him as Tony.

"Hey Stark, check what I found!"

It's an old interview Tony did when he was twenty-two, after a one night stand released the recording they'd made of their night together. The interviewer had been nice enough, not Tony's favourite, but definitely not the worst he's encountered. They'd been very kind and understanding when Tony revealed that he didn't care for stronger forms of intercourse.

"Seriously Stark? You, the playboy, don't like hair-pulling, raked fingernails, or any sort of domination?! Are you really that tame in bed? Is the playboy title just for how many women you can get into bed, not your technique?"

Tony rolls his eyes over their mocking laughter, slowly gathering his tablet and standing to leave, making himself look as carefree as possible.

"There is nothing wrong with preferring gentle sex bug-boy, where both participants are there as equals."

A derisive snort.

"Oh please, you're totally someone who loves being forced down; you're just embarrassed to admit it."

Tony swallows against the feeling of nausea, manages to keep his pace smooth and unhurried.
"Believe what you will. The rest of the world does."

"Come on Tony; you'll really like it, I promise."

Tony is fifteen and drunk. He can't remember her name, only that she smells of cinnamon honey, and is twenty-one years old.

Tony doesn't mind sex; it's fun and people understand that sex does not a relationship make, so it's a once and done. There are many ways to do sex, and of the ones he's tried, Tony has liked them all pretty well.

He wakes up the next morning with harsh bruises around his wrists and ankles from the old rope, his head throbbing from where she kept yanking, and deep lines running down his chest that are just shy of drawing blood.

He wakes up in pain that's too similar, that's too strong, overpowering the good feeling of sex.

He barely prevents himself from throwing up.

He knows he can't do this again.

It's too similar.

It's too familiar.

It hurts like it never has before.

Tony knows that Steve is stubborn and set in his ways. It's simultaneously part of the man's charm and his most annoying characteristic.

"Really Stark? Howard may have neglected you a little, but he was a busy man who was fighting PTSD! It's a serious issue, and you have no right to hate him for trying his best!"

Especially annoying when he's wrong.

Tony can't really be bothered to fight Steve on this though. He's been having a hard month (a hard life) and today has barely started and Tony has no idea how he managed to drag himself from a bed he barely slept in, plagued by dreams of sand, of poisoned metal, of vast space, of fiery bodies, of falling ships, of alien ships, of broken bodies of flesh and metal, of a man who smelt of booze with fists that were always curled.

He's tired, and right now, he's not sure he can care.

"Are you even listening to me?! Howard Stark was a great man, who risked and sacrificed so much during the war, and you're sulking like an infant because he didn't shower you with unending praise?! He was suffering Stark, while you just played with your toys and spent his money! He worked hard to provide for your lavish lifestyle despite his own pain! Grow up Stark!"

"He's got to learn, if he's going to make anything of himself. To be tough. Strong. To be a man"

Tony can't breathe.

The air is trapped in his lungs, and bile teases his throat. His hands are shaking, but the rest of him is still as stone.
Steve's wrong. Tony knows he's wrong.

"We can't Bambino, because no one would listen."

Just like Aunt Peggy, Steve doesn't want to see or hear anything about Howard that changes his thoughts on the man.

Steve's still talking, still defending Howard's monstrosities like he actually knows what happened. Speaking as though Jarvis never hid him in safety, like Madre never cried out in fear, like Tony never suffered in his life.

Black starts to crawl around the edges of his vision, and the bile climbs ever higher, when strong arms gently wrap around his body.

"For one speaking so strongly on the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, you seem oddly willing to ignore a sufferer undergoing a flashback and panic attack.

Tony knows this voice. It's a voice that's called him back before.

"What? Your Highness, what are you doing here? And what do you mean flashback? Stark's just being childish."

The arms draw him closer to a familiar chest that rumbles gently when the voice speaks.

"I didn't realise that being unable to move or breathe was a mark of childishness; I'll be sure to tell my warriors that."

Tony's lungs suddenly work and he takes a deep breath, his chest aching from going however long without.

A hand rubs soothing circles on his back, aiding his breathing and somehow helping to ease the nausea away. Gentle shakes start wracking his body, and the arms hold him closer, not caging him in, but protecting him.

More words are spoken, but Tony is too focused on breathing, on not throwing up, on how safe he is right now in those arms.

He's not okay.

He may never be okay.

"T'Challa."

But as those arms hold him ever closer still, Tony feels less bad.

And sometimes, that's the best thing you can hope for.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Meet Me On The Other Side

Chapter Summary

For MelodyPotterSnape

There's a saying in most of the scientific community

"If Physics deems something impossible, it just means Tony Stark hasn't tried yet."

And well, being told he can't do something? Yeah that's just asking him to do it anyway.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

This one got pretty intense too... and long...
Sorry?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In his defence, Tony maintains that Thor started the whole thing.

The Norse god was spouting the virtues of the intricacies and power of the bifrost (when it was working anyway) and ended up stating outright that nothing else like it had been nor could be created in all the realms, or something equally flowery.

And well, Tony's an inventor.

Challenge accepted.

So yeah, Thor's fault.

That is what he decides to stick with as he stares at another Tony looking equally shocked through a silvery ring back at him.

"In my defence, Thor started this whole thing."

Apparently the Alternate Tony thinks the same.

It's both disconcerting and the most amazing thing to have ever happened when the two of them get to talking.
Whenever one of them gets bored or lonely or confused or just really needs to talk to someone who understands how their minds work, one or both of them will power up the non-descript black boxes that house the generators for the mini-portals and will be greeted with either the opposing Tony or J.A.R.V.I.S. who will swiftly alert the Tony of that universe about the portal call.

And by Tesla do they get a lot of mileage on nightmares.

"It was the only option that had a higher than twenty-three percent chance of not destroying all of New York..."

"The armour is pretty much air-tight; along with it's controlled flight capabilities..."

They meet each other's eyes, red-rimmed and tired, carrying black bags and the shadows of sleepless night and endless black skies dotted with tiny silver specks, and speak together.

"I was the only one who could do it."

It feels so good to have someone actually understand, to be able to talk to somebody who won't roll their eyes and shrug off what is being said, since he's alive and therefore fine.

It hurts so much that it's himself from an alternate universe.

The multiverse theory has been floating around since pretty much forever, the idea of a million possible 'other' worlds existing, with only the slightest differences between them; the ultimate butterfly effect as it were.

The Tony's were still trying to figure out what the difference between their worlds were though.

"Boarding school?"

"Huntington's since I was eight. First kiss?"

"Rachel Jessica Bissworth at ten. Favourite cake?"

"Jarvis' special tri-tier chocolate orange Jaffa cake with Ana's raspberry white chocolate glaze."

"..."

"..."

"We're going to be here quite some time."

"We are."

They finally came upon the difference quite by chance.

"Tony, you there? Clint ordered in some chinese if you wanted to joi-"

The Alternative Captain Rogers looked through the silver ring with wide eyes and a half-curious half concerned expression.

"Do I want to know?"
A few seconds of silence passed before the Alternative Tony turned to his Captain and said with a flourish.

"Thor started it."

A brief few moments of explanation, which both Tony's did their best to stifle their laughter at the Captain's expressions, the Captain once more turned to the silver ring and smiled.

"Nice to meet you Other Tony."

His voice was warm and kind, and he left the Tony's after being greeted in turn, sending a reminder of the food upstairs over his shoulder as he left.

It was only when he was gone that alternative Tony noticed something.

"Where... where's your Cap?"

They had found the difference.

The Steve Rogers that Tony knew had hauled off on a tour around America as soon as the major components of clean up after the Battle of New York were finished, taking up Fury's suggestion of seeing the world as it now was, exploring what America now had to offer the soldier.

Bruce had stayed at the tower for a few days before leaving, a ticket to India in his hand.

The spy twins had stayed the night after shwarma before descending into the depths of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Thor had made his statements of the bifrost before disappearing with Loki and the Tesseract.

That was the difference.

The Alternate Avengers had stayed at the Tower.

(Well, except for Thor's whole taking Loki and the Tesseract to Asgard thing. He came back though.)

Alternate Tony hadn't been left alone.

Over the following months, the Alternate Avengers were, one by one, invited down into the workshop to be introduced through the silver ring. They were all fascinated by the 'Circle Cellphone' as Alternate Clint had dubbed it, and after a most hearty congratulations from Alternate Thor to both Tony's, it wasn't unusual for Tony to activate the portal and have several people on the other side come to say hello, to catch up.

To care.

He learns their likes and dislikes, their personalities and a million other little quirks that make them them, it's almost as though he isn't living alone in the tower, J.A.R.V.I.S. the only one to keep him company since the Bots are still in Malibu.

(Rhodey being called on to preform more and more missions, almost never having a moment to breathe never mind calling and hanging out with Tony. Pepper becoming more and more entrenched in the business world, destroying SI's opposition, boosting stock and reputation
everywhere she goes, never having time to sit and chat with Tony.)

(It's not their fault, he just feels lonely.)

He sees the easy comfort the Alternates have with each other, the camaraderie, the inside jokes, the family vibe, and he wants that. Tony wants that with his Avengers. So he asks questions, opinions, ideas, sets up floors individualised to each Avenger, makes it so they'll have a ready home in the Tower.

And then he waits.

Still goes about his business changing the face of technology, still signs all the papers Pepper needs him to, still fulfils his role as consultant for S.H.I.E.L.D. while making sure he has backdoors into everything he gives them (fool him once) especially when he installs repulsor tech onto a helicarrier for them, still has long friendly chats with a team from a world not his own.

But he waits.

He keeps waiting.

The Winter winds blowing through New York bite deep, bitterly sneaking in through the tiniest of gaps and openings.

Even with J.A.R.V.I.S. the Tower is so empty that all Tony can feel is the cold.

It makes the arc reactor ache, the metal in his sternum chilled and sitting heavy in his chest.

So Tony decides to take a break and visit Malibu, where it's warm.

And yeah, the Bots are there too...

He's also closer to Happy and Pepper now, so maybe they'll have more time to catch up and hang out.

(It's not their fault, he just feels lonely.)

Then the Mandarin happens.

"I need you to breathe with me Tony. Come on, in and out, nice and slow. It's easier to breathe now isn't it? The arc reactor isn't in your chest anymore. In and out, you can do it, you've been doing it your whole life. That's it, in and out."

He honestly couldn't say where he would be if the Alternate Tony and his team weren't there to help him.

"You're doing great Tony, just keep listening to Shellhead. He's got you."

Pepper had been panicked over being injected with extremis, but once Tony had gotten that sorted out, she was right back to work, sending Tony papers to sign and requests for more tech and ideas.

Both of them mourning that Happy would never be able to join them again.

"Ignore the peanut gallery Tony, they are stupid and I shall throw rocks at them later, many in
your name as well as mine, because it's a nice name and we share it, so it is obviously the best name, so rocks shall be thrown in our awesome name. In and out Tony, just like that."

Rhodey was already back running missions in the War Machine (he'd managed to ask the Alternate Tony and Rhodey, and they both agreed that Iron Patriot was both sucking up to Iron Man's popularity, and really stupid.) after telling Tony he didn't know how Tony could handle that level of crazy.

Rhodey didn't realise, even after everything, that Tony couldn't.

"Hey Tony, have you been told about Jade Jaws reaction to Killian's monologue yet?! It was so satisfying to watch; he just sorta blinked in confusion before grabbing Killian's ankle and throwing him into the water, because Killian was getting hot, and Hulk knows that water puts out fire-"

"DON'T SAY THAT WORD-!"

A sharp beeping fills the air and the Alternates find themselves doused with thick white foam, the Alternate Dum-E wheeling around them in celebration, empty extinguisher held in triumph above his chassis.

"As soon as you clean this up Dum-E, you are being shipped to the nearest McDonald's; you'll be their star employee in no time. Hawkass, you I'll be shipping to the nearest day care where they can use you as a jungle gym!"

Tony can't help but chuckle at the scene of the Alternates chasing after each other, covered head to toe in foam, spewing threats of both violence and terrible television.

The Alternate ButterFingers and U join in on the mess, dragging streamers and uninflated balloons that they've pulled from somewhere into the flame retardant and cheering for the still being chased Alternate Avengers and Dum-E.

He feels like he can breathe.

He ends up getting an email from Fury cursing him out for his actions.

Normally he'd just roll his eyes at the pirate and send off a pithy response, full of sass and snark and asking where S.H.I.E.L.D. was when the president had been abducted, but a single line of the email hooked his attention and made it hard to breathe again.

*It's this kind of bullshit that proves I was right not to add you to the Avengers' roster! You need to prove yourself worth it Stark!*

But... he was there in New York too...

Coulson had called him in...

He had had been the one to finally figure out where Loki was going...

He had fought alongside gods and monsters and trained assassins and helped protect people...

Fury had called him, and he made the sacrifice play...

Hadn't he proven himself?

Tony's hand presses hard on the fake sternum, forcibly reminding himself that the arc reactor is
It feels like he can't breathe.

The Alternates all have nicknames for each other, cute little endearments to identify one another that Tony himself starts to pick up, eventually dropping the mental Alternate when he thinks of them.

Hawkass for Clint.

Jade Jaws for Hulk and Doc for Bruce.

Itsy-Bitsy for Natasha.

Thor gets called Goldilocks more often than not.

Steve gets called any variation of Cap, along with Winghead by his Tony.

And the Alternate Tony is Tin Man to the team, and Shellhead to Steve.

There are many others that each team member has, but those are the main ones, and they all call Tony just by name, to avoid any confusion and it's ... it's nice, in a way Tony hasn't felt before, that people care enough to make a distinction.

"You're okay Tony, just breath for me okay? Antoshka will be here soon."

Tony drags small breaths in, his lungs straining with the effort, but Itsy-Bitsy's voice stays calm and smooth, cajoling him to just keep breathing.

"Yes, that's it, in and out, just like Antoshka always says right? In and out."

Her voice is soon joined by another, not the one he really needs to hear right now, but they join in, trying to get him to breathe.

"You are doing well Tony, very well indeed, to continue breathing despite your pains. Anthony is almost with us again, only a few minutes more, so you must keep at it, and breathe my friend."

"Come on Tony, Antoshka is almost here, you can do it. In and out."

He wants to, by damn does he want to, but the small drags are not enough, nowhere near enough, and his vision is getting fuzzy and black is creeping in-

"BREATHE TONY!!!"

His doppelganger's arrival forces a deep breath to enter his lungs.

It burns so good.

Once he is breathing again without trouble, Tony talks about Fury's email.

There's a large part of him that isn't actually surprised; he knows most of S.H.I.E.L.D. doesn't like him, because they can't control him. They've tried and failed numerous times. But there is that small part of him, the last remaining fragment of the little boy who wanted Howard's approval, that is deeply hurt by the whole thing.
A look of shock passes his doppelganger's face and he calls up his own email stack.

Sure enough, the same email is present, albeit with an altered line of pulling the Avengers in to deal with his crap.

The growl that leaves Goldilocks is more akin to the bears of the tale, and the Thunderer abruptly turns to leave, promising swift return and swifter vengeance.

"I know you've got a date with Jane planned Goldilocks, so you better be back here no later than an hour!"

The Asgardian looks over his shoulder with a grin both mischievous and frightening.

"I can do much with an hour when properly motivated."

Tony huffs a laugh through still uneasy breaths.

(A blue ring filled with silver dotted black, fire consuming everything, so hard to breathe, a little boy smarter than anyone can deal with, Pepper screaming, Rhodey crying out in pain, fire, so much fire, Pepper falling, Pepper glowing orange, Pepper being okay, Rhodey being okay, Happy not okay, leaving again, it's not their fault, he just feels lonely.)

But they're getting easier.

He gets the alert from the Trojan J.A.R.V.I.S. left after their last jaunt through S.H.I.E.L.D.'s 'secure files' that Fury's dead during a conversation through the portal with Doc about the possibilities of stretchy pants.

("No one needs to see that Tony; Jade Jaws is in no way petite, and even size queens would back away.")

J.A.R.V.I.S., both of them, pulls up news feeds, reports and files already filched from the men in black and tuning into the comm frequencies.

Tony's counterpart joins them as they start trying to figure out from the mismatched jumbles of information what the hell is happening.

The day passes, and the most common thread, from both worlds, ends up being that Captain America is currently persona non grata.

That's when, through the silver ring, a call is made to the workshop.

"Shellhead, it's me. I hope you're doing okay. I need your help."

He swallows past a thick lump in his throat when no matching call is made.

Eyes tinged with anger and sorrow briefly meet his through the silver ring, before moving back to the displays.

"Just fine here, and you've got it Winghead; tell me what you need me to do."

A deeply relieved sigh filters through the speakers before the Captain speaks again.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. was born already infected with HYDRA; the government gave German scientists amnesty in return for their supposed allegiance. Operation Paperclip. The SSR piggy-backed that
Well shit.

Tony heard more than enough of Howard's rants as a kid about both HYDRA and Arnim Zola to know that mixing the two with an organisation as wide-spread as S.H.I.E.L.D.?  

Bad shit gonna happen.

"Zola's been spreading HYDRA ideals from the start, and he was so scared of dying before seeing HYDRA take over the world that he developed a way to upload his brain into a computer. He's been pulling strings S.H.I.E.L.D.'s didn't even know it had from the beginning. And worse, Pierce is his successor."

Eyes widened greatly at that.

"Fury's still alive, by the way. Itsy-Bitsy and I are currently hiding with him and Hill. We have a plan... sort of, on what to do, and we kinda roped my running partner into this -he says hi- so we should be able to get back into the Triskelion. If you're still haunting their systems like I know you have been, look up Project Insight. It'll explain more than I can. Too long, didn't read. HYDRA is planning genocide, hidden within S.H.I.E.L.D.'s ranks. The only way to really put a halt in their plans is to spread the word."

The three scientists stop, shocked into stillness by the implications of Cap's words.

"You're going to throw everything online aren't you?"

Cap's silence in enough of an answer.

"Your favour... it's not asking me to suit up and come on down... it's asking me to filter the information and protect the good agents, isn't it Winghead?"

A rough chuckle.

"No. I know you'd do that anyway Shellhead; we both know those people don't deserve to suffer."

"Then what exactly are you asking of me Steven?"

A slow sigh.

"I need you to let Tony know, because I don't count on his Steve doing so."

A beat of silence, and Tony decides to speak through the silver ring.

"Believe me Cappy, I thank you for the heads up."

Tony turns back to his displays, and gets to work.

Starting with Project Insight.

Insight makes something dark and terrible roil in his stomach, sends him to the sink to dry heave, trying to ease the nausea.

Doc spares a few troubled looks his way, but it's his counterpart that sends him understanding from
his own sink.

He wipes his mouth roughly before straightening his spine.

Returning to the files, he finds Fury's 'emergency shut-off' for the three (he had only provided the engines for one) helicarriers and can immediately see that it's a stop gap.

Turning off the engines won't cut all their power.

Weapons systems would still be online and armed.

Luckily Tony has a backdoor hidden away in all his tech now.

Unluckily, the helicarriers are already airborne (he hates that the efficiency he was so proud of is now, once more, being used against him.)

He sets J.A.R.V.I.S. to prepare with the deluge of files shortly to come, and sets himself to breaking into the helicarriers and deactivating as much dangerous shit as he can while also getting an idea of how the battle is going.

And it is a battle, just not only between S.H.I.E.L.D. and HYDRA.

But a terrible, terrifying clash of past, present and future.

"YOU ARE MY MISSION!"

"Then finish it. 'Cause I'm with you 'til the end of the line."

Tony knows he's not alone in silently mouthing a prayer.

The carriers go down, one by one, and both Tony's set their sights on mitigating the damage when a call once more is made to the other workshop.

"Hey Metal Man, it's me. Just caught sight of DC on the news. I'm buckling Laura and the kids down then heading out. Think you can do a fly by for me?"

Tony grins along with the other two scientists, trying to ignore the faint burning in his eyes.

"Quinjet already on it's way to you now Hawkass. Doc and I will meet you there. Give the small Agent and smaller Agent hugs for me okay?"

"Always. See you guys soon. Make sure Tony knows this shit is happening too, yeah?"

The call ends before Tony can respond, but he merely forces himself to swallow past the rock in his throat.

His own workshop stays silent.

Tony splashes a lot of cash to have as much of this mess fixed as he can, including covering the hospital bills of the poor civilians who managed to get caught up in it. J.A.R.V.I.S. has been sorting through the dumped files at a phenomenal rate, finding, pulling out and rescuing non-HYDRA agents faster then most people can stop to take a breath, whether they be on assignment, vacation or retired, all of them receiving the protection they now need.
He is so damned proud of his son.

Tony's just finishing up a visit with a young couple whose daughter had been hit with a car during the freeway chase, reassuring them that they wouldn't have to worry about postponing her surgery due to financial issues, when finally, finally, Steve decides to call him.

"Bucky's still alive and I need to find him."

While he agrees to help, Tony finds himself ... disappointed.

No greeting. No asking how Tony was doing.

Just a statement and expectation.

He tries not to think about Cap's call to a workshop a reality away.

He sets Steve and his running buddy Sam up with cash and gear as they go on a search for the missing Sargent, and they leave with looking back.

They don't even stay long enough to look at the floors Tony made for them.

It's a twisted sense of wounded pride that prevents him from activating the black box.

S.H.I.E.L.D. agents are weird. Like really weird.

After J.A.R.V.I.S. had done what was needed to protect them, a third of the agents came to SI looking for jobs.

Tony knows that they're out of work, what with the collapse of their super secret organisation, but they all came to him ... and given they all visibly dislike him, he doesn't know why.

Hell, Maria Hill just turns up demanding a job, bringing both Natasha and Clint with her, and even ferreting out Bruce, which is weird too, but hey whatever, he can manage this, he's had floors prepared or the team for almost a year now, and Hill has her own living accommodations outside the Tower, so he sets the three loose on their floors and goes to the penthouse, expecting that in an hour or so, they'll seek him out and they'll start planning how to get to know each other.

He sighs and tells J.A.R.V.I.S. to shut off the lights as he makes his way to bed, almost nine hours later.

(It's not their fault, he just feels lonely.)

It's a live-feed going viral that alerts him to Thor's return to Earth.

Which is such bullshit because Hill has more or less taken control of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s intelligence lines and from the looks of things the Thunderer has been fighting for a good half hour or so.

The battle ends thankfully quickly, and Tony's already sending out orders for how his money is to be used for relief when he finally gets to ask Hill.

"The team was informed and on standby if it proved too much for Thor alone. Seeing as it was a straight forward battle, there was no need to inform the consultant."
And then she just walks away.

As though she wasn't employed by Tony.

As though he wasn't funding the Avengers and paying her wages.

As though he wasn't Iron Man.

(Pepper wanted him to stop, wanted him to forget about the armours and just focus on building phones and tablets for SI.

He couldn't do that.

Not even for her.)

He is Iron Man.

He is.

"Come on Tones, breathe man, T's on his way, and he's bringing Happy with him. You're okay, just breathe."

He curls tightly into himself, letting the Rhodey through the silver ring talk him down from his anxiety.

For all that both Rhodey's don't seem to 'get' what's happening, they are both scarily good at calming either Tony Stark.

"I need you to keep breathing Tony, that's all I need you to do."

He's always done his best for Rhodey.

"Come on Iron Man, breathe."

He- Yes. That's right.

He is Iron Man.

He talks with the others, particularly Happy, for a good few hours, learning about their version of the London Invasion, and just what's going on in their lives.

He misses having people to talk to.

(Pepper alive and safe but not the same after Happy didn't make it, not able to look Tony in the eye, hasn't even seen her for months.)

(Rhodey always busy, always so busy, being the poster boy for the air force, always flying off to save the day, hasn't seen him for months.)

(It's not their fault, he just feels lonely.)

And he's just a consultant, so the team doesn't want to talk to him.

He entered the Penthouse, returning from a business trip, to find Natasha, Clint and Bruce watching movies on his TV.
And they all looked at him like he was intruding, as though he didn't belong in his own home. They even rolled their eyes when he pointed out that the Penthouse was *his* floor.

He prefers the team through a silver ring.

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After the ex-agents came looking for jobs, Tony primarily set them to take over the file dump sorting. For the most part, they don't like him, but they need him because they've got bills to pay and Tony has money, so whatever at least the devil you know, even though he doesn't know them.

There are exceptions (*When the hell did Ronnie, his cute sweet little cousin Ronnie join S.H.I.E.L.D.?* *And what the hell have the bastards done to her?* *She's never pretended not to know him before.*) and it's a guy called Mark -who shares Tony's proper appreciation for coffee- who notifies him about the files regarding Loki's sceptre.

Thor had come to reside in the Tower when he was on Earth, reluctant approval over the floor Tony had decked out for him with help from Goldilocks, and Steve had returned for now, Sam needing a break from keeping up with the Super Soldier, and both had leapt upon the information, needing to do something, unable to sit and relax in the Tower. Tony didn't fail to notice how he was nudged from the planning circle, the other five pouring over the files and ignoring him, not looking for or wanting his input.

He swallows hard, and slowly retreats to the workshop, taking a deep breath before moving to the ever familiar black box.

"Sir, are you alright? I cannot help but notice the blatant exclusion the Avengers force upon you."

Tony runs his fingers across the box, smiling softly at the nearest camera.

"I'll live Jay. But thank you so much for caring."

A tiny burst of static comes from the speakers, J.A.R.V.I.S. sighing before he responds.

"With that group upstairs, someone has to, and I am honoured that it is me."

Another smile and Tony activates the box, unsurprised when the silver ring shows the other team in the workshop with their Tony, trying to figure out the details and clues that S.H.I.E.L.D./HYDRA left behind.

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A new file drops onto the table in the middle of the circle the Avengers made, all of them jerking away from their own files before turning to glare at Tony from where he threw the new one.

"Found the sceptre. I'm leaving in ten, with or without you."

He's already on the quinjet, having just finished getting permission from the Sokovian Government to enter the country legally, when the team enters in full gear five minutes after his ultimatum, shocked that Tony's there.

"Oh good, you're early. Time to go then."

He turns and starts to power up the quinjet, ignoring how much they don't want him there.
He sees them lying on the ground, cold, bloody, bruised and broken.

He's closest to Steve, reaches out to the man when a hand holds tight to his wrist.

"You ... could have saved us ... why didn't you do more? ..."

The grip goes lax, then falls away completely, Steve's eyes closing one final time. Tony struggles to breathe, looking around the space for something that could help him help them; they're his team, regardless of how they get along, and he needs to do something to help-

He sees, just hidden in the shadows, himself, eyes blank and face slack.

No.

Not himself.

The other Tony.

With a dawning sense of dread that is even greater than what he felt before, he once more looks at the team, seeing the differences, so slight and yet so enormous, that mark these fallen as the alternates, his friends through a silver ring.

He screams.

The others are in good spirits as the quinjet flies back to the Tower, the retrieval of the Sceptre casting a jovial atmosphere.

They're even treating Tony like one of them.

He only feels a little guilty getting Thor to agree letting him study the Sceptre.

As soon as he can, Tony gets into the workshop, setting his scanners on the Sceptre, and activating his little black box.

"It's been one hell of a day huh Fratello?"

"Si. And I get the feeling you're about to tell me something to make it worse."

A humourless smile crosses the other's lips, the team behind mirroring the gesture.

"Sounds about right. I take it that your lot crossed paths with two enhanced at the base?"

He nods.

"Yeah, one a young man with super speed, the other a girl with something akin to telekinesis."

"That isn't all she has. She herself doesn't know all she can do, but one of her powers is kinda like telepathy. Their names are Pietro and Wanda Maximoff by the way. Wanda used her powers on me so we could essentially talk without anybody noticing."

Tony pulled a chair close and sat down, still listening.

"During one of Sokovia's rebellions, Wanda and her brother got trapped in a house for a few days with one of Stane's faulty black market models of the Lockjaw missile. Stane stamped everything with the logo, so the twins were stuck staring at our name for all that time, and they were ten, so
they kinda fixated on the name. Their parents died in the attack, and once they got out, they were scared and angry and wanted someone to blame. That ended up being me -us- so when they got approached by someone telling them they could help get revenge ... the twins took it."

Wanda never talked to Tony, he can only assume that the vision he saw came from her or the sceptre, and he's not sure which is worse.

"Wanda and Pietro went along with HYDRA a few years, not really realising what was being done to them. By chance, one of the soldiers left out a file that pretty much explained how the bomb that they got stuck looking at was Stane's doing more or less, and the twins are resourceful; they managed to research for themselves and find out just how corrupt Stane was and all the double dealing he was doing. But by then, they'd been with HYDRA for too long to get out easily. They've got trigger words that more or less shut them down, forcing them to stop and drop if they hear them. They want out, but they need our help. So she talked to me."

Words stop as they all realise that Tony didn't get that conversation.

"I'll do what I can for her, but I don't think my version knows about Stane."

J.A.R.V.I.S.' voice interrupts the heavy mood.

"I am sorry sir's, but Doctor Banner is about to enter the workshop, and given his sudden fall in mood, I think it might be better to not introduce our realities further today."

Nodding with a final farewell, Tony turns off the box, standing to go look at what the scans have managed to pick up.

It doesn't make sense, it doesn't make any sense!

Ultron, his newest little boy, was nowhere near completion, even with the sceptre!

So how? How did this happen? How could he come online? J.A.R.V.I.S. was watching-

What happened to J.A.R.V.I.S.?

This being in front of him.

It is both his greatest dreams and his most terrifying nightmares.

It is not his Ultron, not the son he was creating, but it is still undeniably a Stark.

Looks like Ultron received his grandfather's cruelty.

It takes a lot more effort then Tony realised to pretend he doesn't know the Barton family.

(Laura is only a week or so out from bringing in the smallest agent, and has been craving pulled pork on vanilla ice cream for months.)

(Cooper wants to be an astrologer, has been studying the stars from the roof of the barn, no matter how many times he's told not to climb up there alone.)

(Lila has decided she is going to be a ballerina archer, already planning out how to shoot an apple on someone's head while performing a Grand Jeté.)
After all, they've never met in this universe, and from the looks everyone but Natasha is sporting, Clint certainly hasn't mentioned them.

He fixes their tractor before he leaves.

J.A.R.V.I.S. is okay, and they have a plan.

It's not much of a plan, but no one else is offering anything, not even 'suddenly' alive Fury.

So yeah, they have a plan.

"J.A.R.V.I.S.?"

"I am not J.A.R.V.I.S. I am."

They win, but not without casualties.

They all look at him like it's his fault.

The compound was meant to be an enticement, an encouragement to start actually working together off the field as they do on.

Instead, it's now a way to create distance.

He may be Iron Man, but he is still just a consultant.

Rhodey finagles his way to joining the team in place of Iron Man, much to the obvious delight of said team, but he uses it as an excuse to spend more time with Tony.

Which is great, amazing even. Pepper's finally told Tony outright she can't be anything more to him then the CEO of his company (he hasn't heard from her for months, hasn't seen her in even longer, sometimes wondered if they were still friends, doesn't have to wonder anymore) and even though their interactions had been limited, Tony had gotten used to there being more people around, so Rhodey coming by was nice.

Vision would come by too, gently speaking, and getting to know Tony regardless of the memories he might have retained from J.A.R.V.I.S. It hurts, but in a good way, to get to know the child of his child.

On a day that he knows he won't have visitors though, Tony powers up the black box, looking through the silver ring.

"TONY! There is suddenly a second you!"

The shock of silver hair runs from the other lab, leaving an equally startled brunette looking at Tony in confusion.

"There ... there are two of you?"

Thankfully the other Tony arrives to help explain to Wanda and Pietro.
Maybe he's biased, but he likes these Maximoff's more.

After explaining the Circle Cellphone ("It's the coolest name ever Tony! Get over it!") Tony is shocked to hear a voice he thought lost.

"Sir, I must remind you that Prince T'Challa will be arriving soon."

"... J.A.R.V.I.S.?"

Only his counterpart can instantly tell why there is grief in his voice.

As it turns out, there was Ultron in both worlds, brought about by the sceptre basically magicking it's way into the computers and latching onto Ultron's programming, then twisting to fit what the sceptre and mind stone had been exposed to, i.e. Loki and HYDRA.

So yeah ... bad.

With the team and the twins backing him up though, the other Tony had been able to duplicate J.A.R.V.I.S.' programming as intended, download the copy into Vision's body, while maintaining the original A.I.

Tony's not ashamed to admit that he cries, knowing that he had the chance to save his son, if only his team had trusted him.

By the time the many tears have dried, Itsy-Bitsy appears, leading someone new into the workshop, not realising the really long distance call going on. Too late to prevent the man next to her from seeing, she shrugs and smiles.

"Hi Tony. How are you?"

He offers a tremulous smile.

"I've been better, but I've been worse."

She smiles back in commiseration.

The man next to her moves closer to the silver ring, speaking with awe in his voice.

"This is amazing! You have managed to create a safely contained tear within the universes, opening a window through space into a world not our own! The scientists back home would be in raptures over this!"

He breaks off into mutters that Tony recognises thanks to the desperation of a seven year old to please his father.

"Why exactly am I looking at the Prince of Wakanda?"

The Sokovia Accords.

Tony's heard whispers about something like that in the works, but it's just been the faintest of rumour so far, so he hasn't really looked into it, especially given how much work he's been putting into rebuilding Sokovia. (It rankles something deep within him that only he, Vision and Rhodey are actually trying to clean up the mess.)
T'Challa's Father is one of the driving forces behind the Accords, has been since the fall of S.H.I.E.L.D. brought up the need for oversight actually, and T'Challa himself has come on behalf of his father and the U.N to talk about the Accords with the Avengers.

"It'll affect you all, so it only makes sense to include you in the process no?"

The meeting ends up being held in the workshop so Tony can more or less sit in, T'Challa's lips twisting in disapproval when he hears about how the Avengers in Tony's world don't try to include him.

Tony may not be a politician or a lawyer, but he is a Stark; born in the spotlight and raised amongst the sharks, he knows his way around legalese and political talk, so having the two of them to help translate and explain to the team is a huge time saver that has the meeting end far quicker than T'Challa expected. The team heads out, shouting warm cheerful farewells to Tony, Pietro and Wanda smiling gently at him as they too take off, leaving just the Tony's and T'Challa in the lab.

So of course Tony's mind jumps into the gutter.

"Anyone interested in a three-way?"

T'Challa has a gorgeous laugh.

T'Challa -Dubbed Kitty King for his fondness of cats- is slated to be in the alternate New York for a few weeks, and spends most of it in Stark Tower, talking with both Tony's.

It's amazing because he can not only keep up with them, but actually instruct them in his own fields of study, something that rarely happens when you have an I.Q. like Tony.

That he's very easy on the eyes is just a bonus.

It makes Tony sad, when he realises that this means the T'Challa of his world probably wouldn't care about him either.

Life gets very busy soon after T'Challa leaves, so Tony doesn't have the time to talk to himself, literally.

He's been working on the Binarily Augmented Retro Framing device for years, and it's finally really coming together, and hey, it should be done by the time he makes that speech at M.I.T.

He's disappointed when Pepper doesn't show up for her part of the presentation.

The part that she decided she was going to have.

At least the students will be looked after.

"I blame you."

It takes him a moment to swallow back his first response, knowing that it won't help.

But he thinks it, oh does he think it.

'There's a list for that, and I'm first on it.'
He has to bite back a flurry of curses when he realises that the team wasn't keeping him out of the loop.

Unlike the other universe, they weren't involved in the process, and they definitely haven't been taking extra care, hence the situation in Lagos, which is being paraded around in front of them.

And that was making them feel trapped and attacked.

And none of them bar Rhodey and Vision really trust Tony to mitigate the damage.

He gets a text from Ro-Sharon, and it breaks his heart in ways he didn't know could be done.

*Aunt Peggy has passed away.*

*Don't you dare show up.*

*She deserves better than your mess.*

He struggles to breathe, and tries to remember the Ronnie that lives on the other side of a silver ring.

The one who still smiles at him.

The signing in Vienna is bombed and King T'Chaka is killed.

Tony can't help but feel grief for T'Challa, a good man who has lost a good man.

He can only hope that the other T'Challa, in that world so much kinder than this one, is still alive too.

Video footage of what appears to be the Winter Soldier, AKA Bucky Barnes, comes to light and a manhunt starts for him.

And Steve decides to go in guns blazing.

Tony is really tired of cleaning up the man's messes.

He wishes he had the time to look through a silver ring, and ask for advice on how to handle this; the others are always so helpful.

Maybe his counterpart could help him figure out how to buy more time to get his ducks in order.

He knows this Wanda doesn't like him, so he asks Vision, who she's trying to cajole into dating, to keep her in the compound until he can sort out the mess of her visa (*which wasn't even filed correctly the first time, Steve, what have you been doing? You said you'd take care of it.*) and Steve's lone gunslinger behaviour.

Vision smiles at him, and says it won't be a problem.

"I ... I do think I'm dying ..."
"Vision?! Vision, hold on! I am on my way right now, you just hold on!"

"I'm sorry ... but ... Nonno, I think I shall be ... going to sleep now ..."

"VISION!"

The bright jewel mocks him, but it is all he has left of his grandson.

In the English language, you have widows, widowers and orphans, but no word for those who have lost their children.

He gently detaches Vision's head from his body, and setting the remains to be incinerated, hides Vision's head next to J.A.R.V.I.S.'s old server case, locking the stone in one of the suit's compartments.

There is no word for Grandparents who have lost grandchildren either.

No word, but unfortunate.

"What did you do to Vision Stark?!"

"Laid him to rest in the peace he deserved, after you destroyed him."

Maximoff's face could be so pretty, he's seen it through a silver ring.

The snarling creature before him though, is nothing like the Little Red he knows.

"I merely prevented him from stopping me! How dare you kill him Stark?! Haven't you taken away enough of the people I love?!"

He can't help but wonder if Pietro were still alive, like Speedy-Socks is in that other reality, would this Wanda be as beautiful as she could be.

He barely registers when Romanoff leaves.

He's busy trying to convince himself that Rhodey will wake up.

"You have to watch your back with this guy; he might just break it!"

Stark men are made of iron.

"Hank always said you could never trust a Stark!"

Never let them see you bleed.

"If I tell you, you go as a friend."

They're vultures that will tear you apart.

He stumbles into the workshop, chest heaving with so much pain, the thick scar from the vibranium shield pulling, threatening to reopen, threatening to leave him bloody and bruised on the floor.
"He's my friend."

"So was I.")

He wants, oh how he wants, to just slide down onto the couch he smuggled from M.I.T.'s staff room with Rhodey.

(The gun metal grey of the War Machine falling, no power to keep the suit aloft.

Faster and faster, hands reaching out in a desperate, hopeless plea.

The sound of impact, of thick metal curling and crunching in on itself, as all momentum is forced to a stop.

Rhodey, his Rhodey, will never fly again.)

How he wants to have a minute, a fucking moment, to breathe and grieve and mourn.

("Please! Spare my wife!")

But Tony knows he doesn't have those luxuries.

"Boss? What's going on? Why are they coming after you?"

Friday, his sweet Friday, his darling little princess and daughter.

She's scared, and has every right to be.

"Ross needs someone to blame. Whose feet are better to lay the blame at, then the blood-soaked boots of the irredeemable Merchant of Death?"

He can hear the slight surges of electricity spark through the speakers, signs of his baby's distress.

"But why? You have been good Boss. You've obeyed the law, you signed the Accords, and you tried so hard to do what the U.N. needed you to do. Why?"

He manages to make his way to his workstation, and immediately starts tapping at the keys for the console, typing in codes and protocol programs.

"...Daddy, why?"

He can hear her heartbreak, and he hates himself all the more for pressing the final keys.

"Because people fear what they cannot understand, and hate what they cannot control. And we're Stark's my gal. The world will burn, the sky will be ash, and all life will end before we let ourselves be either. For us it must be earned. But the world believes it it's due. I won't let that happen my gal. If there is something I can promise you, it's that I will never let that be your or your brother's fates. You're going to go to sleep for a while princess, and when you wake up, everything will be better."

The panic in her voice as the program slowly shuts her and the bots down, downloading them into portable server, just hurts all the more.

She doesn't understand -she can't yet, still so young, but growing every day- and just like he said, that makes her scared.
He roughly scrubs his hand across his face, glancing at the now lifeless frames of his boys, the silence in his shop both alien and far too familiar.

He cradles the server that carries his children close, and goes to activate a long loved black box.

It has been far, far too long since the silver ring floated in the air of the shop.

His hand shakes as he turns it on.

What he sees through the ring is ... devastating.

The other shop is upended and broken, as though someone had set to destroy everything, black marks where flame had tried to consume everything.

And sitting amidst the rubble and ruin-

"What happened here Doc?"

The man's head snaps to look at Tony, and absolutely heart rending mixture of joy and sadness on his face.

"H-hey Tony. It's ... it's been ... it's been way too long."

The stutters for desperately sought after breath just add to Tony's concern, growing even more when Bruce doesn't actually answer.

"Just ... just give me a sec okay? The others, they'll be so, just so damn happy to see you too."

The man pulls a small device out of his pocket and quickly presses a button on it, constantly glancing at Tony, a helplessly sad and hopeful smile on his lips.

Within moments, people flood into the destroyed space, calling out to Bruce in worry before silencing themselves when they see Tony.

And all of them, all of them, wearing that same mixture of joy and sadness.

And Tony understands why, when only one person is missing from the group.

"What happened to him?"

The sadness increases, and Steve comes forward.

"A man named Zemo, with a grudge against the Avengers, had a plan to destroy the team."

Steve looks around at the team, seeming to both seek comfort and offer it, before turning to face Tony once again.

"He managed to sneak in here and plant a bomb. It went off when Tony sat on his chair, destroying the workshop and everything in it. Zemo killed our heart."

There is not a single dry eye in the room beyond the ring, and Tony cradles the server in his arms ever closer, noticing the dilapidated husks of the bots in a corner.

He's not sure what to think about the death of his counterpart, but even as he's so acutely aware of the seconds ticking down, he's no longer sure that he can ask.
"Tony? What are you holding?"

T'Challa's voice surprises him, thankfully in a good way. It seems like the Wakandan Prince is desperately seeking a sense of normalcy.

It makes Tony smile.

"I was going to ask the Tin Man for a favour."

They all seem to come closer to the silver ring, all willing to listen and wanting to hear him.

He can't stop the tremors that now run through his body.

"Zemo attacked us too. But his attack was only so successful, because we were already so splintered. Thaddeus Ross was put in charge of the Accords."

A shocked snarl escapes Bruce, and dismayed gasps the others.

They all seem to come even closer.

"Zemo bombed the signing of the accords, killing King T'Chaka, and blaming Barnes for it. Rogers went off to save Barnes, blaming the accords for everything, and causing a divide between the team, his side and mine, those who wouldn't sign the accords and those who did. And Rogers refused to become an attack dog of the government, even though the accords weren't about that."

The Steve he's looking at appears distraught at his counterparts behaviour. Ronnie, sweet, still smiling Ronnie, is rubbing gently at his shoulders.

"Rogers is off the grid, hiding away with Barnes and the rest of the team, waiting for all the fuss over the destruction and death caused by him and his team to die down so he can then return the hero who stood against the injustices of governments with agendas."

He sees anger in their faces, but it's not directed at him.

Pepper looks like she wants to bundle him in a blanket and hide him away from the world.

He's not sure he'd say no to be honest.

"Though inhumane, which I was working on, Rogers' team got arrested and put in the RAFT. After leaving me for dead, Rogers broke out Barton, Maximoff, Wilson and ... New Guy, sorry I don't know your name."

Said New Guy smiles sadly.

"It's okay, we were never introduced. My name's Scott Lang."

"Oh, the hacktivist!"

Scott stands a little taller, proud to have been recognised.

"Anyway, Rogers broke them out, and Ross needs a scapegoat. He's already got the warrants for my arrest, citing my apparently aiding said escape. I've already sent out every scrap of information on Ross that I could find, so he's going down, but I can't guarantee that I'll be alive to see it. So I wanted to ask Tony if he'd look after my kids for me."

Eyes fall to the server still cradled in his arms, now realising the weight it carries.
T'Challa steps ever closer to the silver ring, desperation in his gaze.

"You said Rogers left you for dead. We won't. Your children will be safe and welcomed here, but Tony, we can do the same for you."

The others seem to light up at the idea, smiles starting to claim lips and hope igniting in their eyes.

And Tony's tempted.

It's unlikely Ross' warrant on him isn't shoot on sight (the man wouldn't want to risk Tony's knowledge being used against him) and aside from his kids, there isn't a reason to stay. He's sent money for Harley's schooling though the kid no longer wants to talk to him, and after hunting down the vigilante Spider-Man, Tony awarded the kid a scholarship for a contest the kid forgot he entered.

Pepper doesn't want anything to do with him.

Rhodey, Happy and Vision are dead.

The team gone.

Why should he stay?

He once more meets T'Challa's eyes, remembering the delight and happiness they shared in long passed conversations, the sense of closeness they were building, the warmth and welcome he has gotten from everyone beyond that floating silver ring.

A hand reaches out, warm skin to warm skin, steady strength easing trembling limbs, broad arms drawing around to protect.

The silver ring closes for the last time, the workshop left empty.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MelodyPotterSnape and bronwe_calen

In and out.
In and out.
He keeps focusing on his breathing, because if he doesn't, at least one of them is going to die on his claws.
In and out.

Hope this satisfies Hons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa rubbed wearily at his tired eyes, before trying once more to focus on the documents in front of him.

He sighed as he realised it was futile; he'd been awake for too long, and Shuri had decreed a limit on how many cups of coffee he could have a day.

Never mind that he was trying so damned hard to finish his section of work for the Accords to be finalised, nothing could make his sister budge from her three cups a day limit, not even the (foolish in hindsight) argument that T'Challa knew she often drank far more than he did.

Shuri had merely raised a brow at him and confiscated his empty cup.

Leaning back in his chair, once more rubbing his eyes in a futile attempt to stave off the incoming headache, T'Challa breathed deeply, silently praying to the Panther God that his trial would soon be over.

'Well' he huffed gently as he once more glanced at the documents, 'Most of the trial anyway.'

Indeed, as they often had for the last almost year, his thoughts turned to the fiercest backer of the Accords, the man doing the most to protect the people of the world.

The Golden Avenger.

The Iron Man.

Tony Stark.

A ripple of desire curled it's way through T'Challa at the thought of the genius, particularly the memory of how the man had been able to remove Thaddeus Ross from not only the Accords, but from government. Yes, the former general was currently cozing up in solitary confinement that made the RAFT look like a luxury resort.

The best part was it was all legal and above board.
Now, even in the hidden borders of Wakanda, everyone knew about Tony Stark; the genius had been born, raised and burned in the spotlight, seemingly every single moment of his life records for public consumption, after all. But even with the near constant surveillance there was just so much about the man that was a mystery.

And T'Challa did so love to unravel a mystery.

Another curl of desire slithered down his spine as his thoughts turned to the other man's body; the strong, lithe muscles, the long legs, the delectable firm backside. Tony Stark was a man made of temptation and sin.

And by the Panther God was T'Challa tempted.

"It was a pleasure working with you Binx. Let's hope the Accords will go as smoothly eh?"

He can feel his physical response to his arousal, growing harder easily at his thoughts, and tried to even his already choppy breathing.

But he was alone in his office...

It was late so he had no further meetings scheduled...

T'Challa swallowed around the rock in his throat.

Technically, this was his own time, and he had been hard at work, so it was acceptable, hell expected, for him to take a break right?

He opens a sound file on his computer and prepares to hit play as thoughts of eyes like whiskey and amber had his hand moving lower, lower, low-

"BROTHER!"

The door slammed open, Shuri rushing in, absolute rage twisting her features. T'Challa had started moving as soon as he heard her voice, Shuri's tone more than effective in killing any intent his manhood had mere moments earlier.

"Shuri, what is-"

His sister slammed her fist into the hardwood of his desk, a sharp crack now splitting the surface in twain.

"If I have to sit through one more complaint our people have to offer about the fugitives, I will personally throw them from Wakanda!"

T'Challa felt his spine straighten upon mention of their guests.

"They are rude, self-entitled and pay absolutely no respect to the citizens, those who work in the Palace, or even to the few rules you have asked them to obey!"

Shuri manages to somewhat calmly hand him a thick sheaf of paper. A quick glance on the top sheet has his hands trembling in a rage matching hers.

T'Challa barely manages to tamp down on a snarl.

"Where are they?!"
It takes what feels to be every ounce of his training for T'Challa not to throw open the doors to the suite the rogue avengers are staying in the way Shuri did his office, but he cannot stop the way he enters the room.

He believes it's called a 'murder strut'?

Regardless, it certainly gains the attention of the occupants, and a silent gesture has them swiftly moving to the sitting area, obviously able to tell that he is not in a good mood.

It does little to curb T'Challa's anger.

As he stands before them, T'Challa gives them a quick look over.

They are full of his people's food, dressed in his people's clothes and sheltered by his people's buildings.

They are protecting by T'Challa's and his people's good will.

And yet-

"You all disgust me."

They have the audacity to rear back in surprise, as though they have no idea what they could have done to earn his ire.

They will learn.

"When I granted you all sanctuary here, all I asked of you was obedience to three rules. Each and every one of you agreed, saying that there would be no trouble following them. And yet I have found you have not only lied to me, you have completely disregarded any human decency."

The Dora Milaje are located in certain parts of the room. It's only their presence, the reminder of the cool and calm they portray, that keeps T'Challa from flying off the handle.

Rogers starts to speak.

"T'Challa, what-"

A brief glare is enough to cut the man off, and T'Challa spares another glance at those in the room.

"The first rule; You are wanted criminals, so do not go beyond the areas pointed out to you, for the safety of both yourselves and my people. Each and every one of you agreed. Yet I find that Maximoff has been regularly spotted in the market places far from the boundaries allowed, Wilson has been seen wandering the city walls, Lang has had to be repeatedly removed from the R&D Division, Barton and Romanoff caught attempting to access the Palace Security Centre, and you Rogers, have been entering the jungle surrounding our Sacred Temple. Not a single one of you obeyed."

Holding up a hand to cut off the no doubt pitiful attempts of defence, T'Challa continues.

"The second rule; This is not your home, so treat it and the people within it with respect. Again, each of you agreed. Maximoff has been threatening the maids to get her more clothing than she could possibly need, Wilson demanded my technicians fix his wings after he damaged them in a stupid stunt that also damaged some of my Palace, Lang has been shouting at my chefs because he wanted American food, Barton and Romanoff have both gotten into numerous fights with both the
palace guards and the Dora Milaje because they were bored, angry or both, and Rogers bullied one of the young serving boys to get art supplies. I can absolutely see the respect you have been showing."

He is met with shocked silence when he pauses to catch a breath, all of them looking down or at each other, realisation for some, disbelief for the others.

"And rule three; *My Father was one of the strongest supporters for the Accords. He is held in the highest respect by me and my people, so regardless of your views on the Accords, do not speak of them outside your suite.*"

The silence becomes heavily laden with guilt.

"Did you, any of you, really believe I would not find out about you spouting such hateful words about not only the Accords, but those who support them, *like my Father did*?!"

They all start speaking, shouting out pathetic excuses and reasons, trying to absolve themselves from blame.

"It seems you have all forgotten that you are here through my benevolence, and my people's trust in me. What, pray tell, was so hard to follow in those rules?"

It is Rogers T'Challa looks at for answers, and the blonde takes a deep breath before speaking.

"I can't speak for the rest of the team, but I felt that people should really know about the Accords, and what Governments were trying to make us do. With hindsight, I can see that I may have been a little over enthusiastic about it, but-"

"Over enthusiastic? You literally grabbed a young man and forced him to stand and listen to you when he showed no interest in what you were saying! The youth was seventeen, and on his way to visit family, of course he wasn't going to want to listen! Your grabbing him not only made him late to a family gathering, but you actually fractured his arm!"

Rogers paled.

"And my people were kept well informed of the Accords; all those over fourteen were directed in school and their workplaces to read up on the Accords ever since the first revision! They know the Accords -judging by your words- better then you do!"

Further squabbling breaks out, and T'Challa grits his teeth and clenches his fists.

In and out.

In and out.

He keeps focusing on his breathing, because if he doesn't, at least one of them is going to die on his claws.

In and out.

Okoye comes forward with copies of both the original and the latest revision of the Accords and drops them on the table.

"You are *all* to read both versions of the Accords, front to back, and then you may try to convince me that you know the Accords better than anyone. The Dora Milaje will be guarding you, as you
have lost the right to leave your suite at all unaccompanied, and they will ensure that you do read them. Should you choose not to, I am giving explicit permission for them to throw you right out of Wakanda."

The vicious glares the women bear obviously concern the rogues, and that calms T'Challa.

Without another word, he leaves.

Back in his office with strict instruction that he is not to be bothered again for the night, T'Challa locks the door and forces deep breaths down his throat.

The ignorance, the audacity, the thrice damned selfishness of them!

He wishes -not for the first time- that he had not offered them all sanctuary, for they clearly did not deserve it.

But he tries to be a man of honour, so for now, he must let them stay.

But the sooner the Accords are completed, the sooner he may see the back of them.

Sharpened by a mix of resolve and anger, T'Challa returns to his desk, careful of the crack Shuri left in it and wakes his computer screen.

He has a few hours more before he will retire for bed and if he can make his way through three or four of the forms, he can-

The sounds file waits for him.

T'Challa stops, heat flooding his body as he remembers what he was about to do not so long ago.

There is work to be done, especially if he wants those fools gone sooner but...

T'Challa swallows hard as his hand moves lower.

He hits play.

"Good evening. For the few of you who don't know, I am Tony Stark. Tonight, I am going to be sharing with you quite the story, so sit back and get comfortable as I share with you a tale unlike anything you've heard before."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
He held his head high, his shoulders back and spine straight as he and the team were led down the hall to the council room.

It took everything in him not to shake his head and start yelling about how much bullshit the entire situation was, but Steve could play this game, would come out on top and make them all see that he had done the right thing, and that he would accept their apologies with dignity.

The vibranium chains linking his fists together chimed as they rattled together, and his head still throbbed from the magic that forced him still through their application.

He just needed to be patient a little while longer.

After successfully breaking the team out of the RAFT, Steve had brought them to Wakanda to recuperate, meeting up with Natasha on the way. T'Challa hadn't been thrilled, but Steve understood that it was because the man hadn't been given warning of further guests; Wakanda took it's hospitality very seriously for a nation that had isolated itself for so long.

Everyone had been unsurprised and disappointed by Stark's behaviour when Steve told them of Siberia, Sam even apologizing for giving out the information.

Of course, Steve kept the video out of his report; no need to keep dragging up painful news that wouldn't help the situation.

With Bucky frozen once more, it was better if Steve worked to make everyone truly understand that his best friend was innocent.

Though, in a moment of nostalgia, Steve sent Stark a way to communicate with him when the
genius inevitably bit off more than he could chew.

Hopefully Stark had learnt from this experience that he needed to be more open with the Avengers, but Steve wouldn't hold his breath.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, so glad that you could join us today."

For the first few months or so in Wakanda, T'Challa would often come and speak with them - always individually oddly enough- about what happened from their points of view. Steve came to the conclusion that the one-on-one was so T'Challa could get as clear a picture as he could, but still felt that having a group debrief would have been more effective and efficient.

At least T'Challa was trying to make up for hunting down Bucky.

It really was the least he could do.

"As you should hopefully be aware, given your behaviour, you are here to stand trial for your actions, deemed criminal by the international community."

Wakanda was a beautiful place, an eclectic yet elegant mix of nature and technology, and far more approachable than anything Steve had seen Stark come up with.

Just from the lab that Bucky was asleep in, a rustic yet familiar warmth permeated the air, reminding Steve of the cobbled together labs Howard had pulled together during the war.

Stark's labs always reminded Steve of the few HYDRA bases they came across; a vile mix of far too sterile and uncaringly chaotic.

Stark may be called a futurist, but Steve felt there was much more value in learning from the past.

With the blatant differences in labs, Steve was surprised when one day, entering the lab to visit Bucky, he found a group of scientists with T'Challa chattering over what was found to be the latest StarkPhone.

Steve couldn't help rolling his eyes; After turning his back on everyone, siding with the likes of Ross, and trying to kill Bucky, Stark was spending his time not fixing his mess but making more phones and toys that people had no use for?

Well, at least it seems that the group was tearing the thing apart; maybe they'd been excited over destroying something of Stark's?

"This trial is being broadcasted live internationally, so that all your actions have affected may in some way be witness."

T'Challa was a good man, albeit sometimes overly emotional in his actions, and Steve thought with some training, it would be his pleasure to invite T'Challa to join the Avengers when they got back into action. He was a good fighter, and was smart, and amazingly actually had more money than Stark, so getting the Wakandan to join would also have the benefit of forcing Stark to pull his weight for once instead of throwing his money and supposed intelligence in everyone's faces; a
win-win.

Though they hadn't really even seen T'Challa for the last little while.

Natasha had called the man a King, so he probably had some sort of 'official' duties to attend to, but the days of a Monarch being anything beyond a figure head were long over, so any duties he had shouldn't take up so much of T'Challa's time that he couldn't spend time with the team.

Steve would bring it up the next time T'Challa came by.

"Your whereabouts over the last twelve months have been both duly reported and recorded, along with video surveillance and a report on why you were there."

The team had been watching the news.

Ever since a channel-hopping Clint had chanced upon a report Iron Man facing what appeared to be a giant squid alongside Iron Patriot, Vision and three children, the team would sit together and watch, trying to get as much information as they could, while Steve waited for the phone to ring.

He honestly couldn't say if it was better or worse that it hadn't.

After all the fuss Stark had kicked up about Wanda being a kid and locking her away in the compound, he pulled three children onto the field?

At least Wanda was in her twenties!

It made Steve grind his teeth, and a quick glance around the room told him he wasn't alone there.

They couldn't just let Stark's utter recklessness and hypocrisy go unchecked! He needed to be held accountable!

Hearing a report of how the dictator of Latveria had set an army of robots loose on New York - no doubt inspired by Stark creating Ultron - they went to their rooms to gather their gear.

The world needed them.

"At this point in time, I am to inform you that it is only the actions of those here today that will be placed under scrutiny, by which I mean those of you on trial; any attempts made to disparage the actions of someone not on trial will be recorded and set aside for the length of the trial. Further attempts will be met with consequences dependant on your sentencing."

The palace guards had been shocked to see them in full gear, and not understanding that the team had to go save New York, tried to detain them.

Steve felt bad about how he and the team needed to fight their way through, but they had to deal with the immediate threat Victor Von Doom was presenting to New York.

The Wakandan's would understand later, he knew.

"Any shows of force will be met with extreme prejudice, so please spare us all the time and effort and refrain."
They had finally landed in New York, but whatever Steve had been expecting when they arrived, it certainly wasn’t what happened.

The fight was somehow already over, emergency response teams sweeping the streets for both civilians who were unable to evacuate and the battered remains of the robot army, barricades around the worst points of damage were already set up, and the never-ending swarm of the press had been dictated to and were in the process of leaving to get their reports written.

It made no sense; while the emergency response teams and barricades could be wonderful or terrible depending on the day, they were never both excellent at once, and the press always hounded them until Stark got bored enough agree to a proper press conference at the Tower, almost always claiming he needed a shower, despite never doing as much work as the rest of the team.

As the team stared in confusion though, they were distracted from seeing, until too late, the thick coil of webbing Spider-Man shot at them, binding them in one large clump. Before Scott or Wanda could set them free, the young girl -Miss Marvel she called herself?- enlarged her fist and sent it connecting to Ant Man, knocking him out cold, and Vision sent an energy beam at the Scarlet Witch, rendering her unconscious.

They were then air-lifted by the third child -Iron Soul- Iron Patriot and Iron Man.

The were placed in the Hulk-room at the Tower, and informed that as soon as possible, they would be attending trial.

"If you would be seated, we may begin."

The team sat as directed, looking up at the table on a dais in front of them. Once Clint had filled the final seat, a door opened and five people walked to the other table.

"Director Phillip James Coulson of S.H.I.E.L.D. Standing as neutral party.

Professor Charles Francis Xavier of the X-Men. Standing as representative for Mutants and the naturally enhanced.

King T’Challa of Wakanda. Standing as representative for the unnaturally enhanced, both scientifically and magically.

Valentine Sendanyoye Rugwabiza of Rwanda. Standing as representative for the countries who have signed on in agreement and the UN.

Doctor Anthony Edward Stark of the Avengers. Standing as representative for the otherwise average person.

You may proceed."

Before the team could get over their shock and betrayal, Coulson began speaking.

"While yes, this is called a trial, it is rather informal in behaviour. Our jobs here are to try and understand why you did what you have done, how we can prevent it from happening again, and what you will need to do to make amends and learn from your mistakes. Before we get into that though, I feel like I should inform you that all members of this council were voted for by the UN and will serve a term of a single year, before another vote happens deciding if we are to stay or be
replaced. Thusly, if you were to be brought before the council again in a year's time, it is possible that not a single one of us would be there, so please focus on why you are here, and not who you are seated before.

Let's start with Scott Lang."

A guard urged Scott to rise and Coulson continued to speak.

"Mr Lang, your record shows a good, if somewhat misguided, man, who was out on parole after breaking and entering. Given your work and sponsorship with Hank Pym, you were well on your way to being completely cleared. Could you please explain to us what led to you being present at the Leipzig Airport?"

Scott began explaining everything from receiving the call to his capture, and Steve couldn't help the curl of pride that warmed his chest.

_They were finally listening!_

The whole staging of a trial was unnecessarily flamboyant and pointless, but if it made them willing to actually hear what Steve and the team were saying, then he could allow it. Scott finished speaking and was gestured to sit.

"Samuel Wilson? If you would please explain what led you to being in Bucharest, and then to the Leipzig Airport?"

And one-by-one, the entire team stood and spoke, explaining why they did the right thing, Natasha even explaining why she let Steve and Bucky go at the airport.

And finally, it was Steve's turn.

Head high, shoulders back, spine straight, Steve told them about Ross and Stark working together to muzzle the Avengers with the Accords, how he had attended Peggy's funeral and been bolstered to do what was right by Sharon speaking her aunt's words, how he had to protect Bucky who had been framed, how Steve hadn't been able to work with Stark after he had locked Wanda away, how he'd had to protect Bucky again after the Winter Soldier programming was activated, how they discovered the threat of the other soldiers, how Stark tried to stop them at the airport and split up the team and got them arrested, how Tony came to Siberia pretending to have see the error of his ways only to try and kill Bucky, how-

"Mr Rogers, in the interest of preventing you from humiliating yourself further, you should know that we have witnessed the automatic recordings -both visual and audio- taken by the Iron Man armour, and thus know _exactly_ what happened in Siberia."

Steve could feel the colour drain from his face, and could not help but shoot a betrayed look towards Stark.

Stark, who had also paled, and was oh so faintly trembling.

Stark, who had one hand covered by T'Challa, having gentle circles soothed into his skin.

Stark, who wore a ring peeking through the gaps of T'Challa's fingers.

Coulson sighed before standing.

"We were all aware this would be taxing, and I feel we have more or less heard everyone's story, so
I suggest we move on. Given by the retelling, I motion for Scott Lang to be released under probation and serve no less than one hundred hours community service. His new probationary officer would need to be chosen from a list of select individuals, and he would need to undergo daily reports."

"I agree Director Coulson."

"A wise ruling."

"I have no objections."

"Sounds good to me."

Coulson nodded.

"Guards, please escort Mr Lang out."

And just like that, Scott was gone, all objections and arguments from the team ignored.

And it doesn't stop there.

One-by-one, Coulson mentions one of the team, suggests an ever increasing in severity internment and community service and the other four either agree or suggest changes. Once the five do agree, the team member is escorted out.

Sam on house arrest for six months and two hundred hours community service.

Clint for one year, with six hundred hours.

Wanda under house arrest at Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters until her probation officer, one James Logan, deems her fit to re-join the world.

Natasha set to once more be working with S.H.I.E.L.D, only this time not as the prized asset she had been in the past, instead as one of the trainers and specialist instructors, not being assigned any field missions for three years under very strict scrutiny.

All of them needing to attend weekly sessions with a psychologist.

His fists are clenched tightly and he can feel the ugly scowl that's crossed his face.

"Mr Rogers, though your actions were carried out with ...honourable intentions, you have caused an amount of destruction and subsequent loss of life that cannot be written off with mere house arrest and community service. And unlike your compatriots, you show no signs of true remorse. As such, I ask my fellow council members for ideas for your sentence."

While the five had a few moments silent thought, Steve grit his teeth, eyes wandering over them, hating the power they had over him.

Coulson had been a good, fair man when they had first met, and Steve had been genuinely upset at hearing Fury speak of his death (he did his best to ignore the oh so familiar voice in his head whispering 'Fury doesn't tell you everything.').

Steve had heard of Professor Xavier whenever Stark happened to (rarely) mention people he respected, which was instantly reason for Steve to be wary -the fact that he ran the 'school' Wanda was to be incarcerated at not helping.
The lone woman on the panel was from the UN, and given how hard the UN tried to shackle and muzzle his team, Steve wouldn't trust her to water his plants without something going wrong.

But really it's T'Challa and Stark that have Steve grinding his molars to dust.

Two men that Steve had trusted to do the right thing, to have his back and be his friend, but both have betrayed him, both have allowed selfishness and greed to dictate who they are.

Hell, they're not even treating the farce of a 'trial' seriously, constantly leaning closer to the other, T'Challa holding his hand over Stark's and Stark threading their fingers together to rub his thumb over the Wakandan's knuckles. Whispering to each other so softly, even Steve's enhanced hearing can't pick it up, no doubt keeping secrets and mocking the team as they're forced to go through this humiliation.

"It is perhaps not the best solution, but I am willing to continue sheltering Mr Rogers in Wakanda, though with a stricter set of rules and harsher penalties should he err."

The glare Steve receives from a single eye suddenly has him remember punching a number of Wakandan guards to the ground, and for a few seconds, all Steve's anger at T'Challa is gone, replaced with apology to those he hurt.

It doesn't last though; Steve and the team had to get through, and the Wakandan's wouldn't get out of the way.

"Could you give an example of a stricter rule, your Highness?"

"Of course Director. Before Mr Rogers left Wakanda, he and his associates had more or less free-reign in a wing of my palace; a set of boundaries large enough to keep them from feeling trapped and lashing out at my people, but still small enough to easily keep an eye on them. Now, seeing as it is only Mr Rogers we would be dealing with, the amount of room he had to wander would be significantly decreased, and no longer be of the accommodations set aside for guests. We would also have him doing community service in the manner of assisting with construction and farm work."

By the looks on their faces, Coulson, the professor and the woman saw the appeal in the suggestion but weren't totally convinced.

Steve barely withheld a scoff.

He had done nothing wrong, and if they sent him back to Wakanda, he'd just send his time with-

"James Barnes, also known as the Winter Soldier, is being moved to Stark Industries highest grade medical facility to undergo trials with the Binarily Augmented Retro Framing device, to see if it is able to remove the programming HYDRA installed. As Rogers has proven to be volatile when he perceives Barnes to be in danger, I will be providing a suppression bracelet, made in conjunction with both Professor Xavier and King T'Challa, that will ensure that Rogers is no stronger or dangerous than the common man."

And Steve's world stops.

His eyes lock with Stark's and ... there is nothing warm to be found in the once familiar amber.

Instead of reminding Steve of the whiskey Stark over-indulged in, they look as hard as the stone they so resemble.
Hard and cracked, as though ... as though they could shatter ...

And Stark doesn't care.

He knows he's broken, he knows that he's one strike away from falling, and so he doesn't care; about himself, or the people he once called friends.

Steve's too out of it to fight when the guards lead him away, and the doors close before he can see T'Challa wrap his arms around Tony, whispering words of love and encouragement, lighting sparks that will one day soon become fire, raging and burning and melting down the scrap to forge something new.

The only thing that breaks through the fog in Steve's mind is Coulson's closing statement.

"With that, I close the case of the Rogue Avengers, and remind everyone watching, that the duty of the Super Human Oversight Committee is to set and hold the needed limits. To quote Doctor Stark, if we can't accept limitations, we are no better than the bad guys."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Remember To Alway Think Twice

Chapter Summary

For MelodyPotterSnape

"You're treating her like a child!"
"Go easy on her, she's just a kid!"

No. This simply won't do.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

... Yeah ... this happened...

Not hugely IronPanther, but hints of it, so sorta pre-IronPanther, I guess?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A small, satisfied sigh left her lips as Wanda stretched her arms high, revelling in the release of tension, before settling once more in the luxurious couch set on the balcony overlooking the jungle in the place she had called home for the last year.

Wakanda was a wonderfully decadent country, well suited to providing the comforts Wanda deserved after everything Stark had put her through.

She could only shudder in a vile mix of hate, fear and anger when she recalled every way Stark had brought her misfortune, starting of course with his damned missiles killing her parents and leading up to his mad A.I. Ultron killing Pietro.

That Stark had then tried to buy her forgiveness when she joined the Avengers just made her angrier.

Though, she had enjoyed pulling every cent from him that she could.

It was the least he could do after all, and Steve had pretty much said that she didn't have to forgive Stark until she felt he'd earned it.

Seeing as there was no way for him to repay all the devastation he had wrought, what with making the Accords and throwing the team into the RAFT, Wanda knew she'd never have to forgive the murderer at all.

Truly, the only thing that would make her situation better would be having Vision lounging with her.

(Well, that and having her family still be alive, but given how Stark made that impossible, she
Thinking of the synthetic human made Wanda smile.

Vision was so wonderful, so pure, that it was so easy to forget Stark had ever had a hand in creating him, but Wanda consoled herself with the knowledge that Vision's personality and mind came from the Mind Stone, and not Stark; Stark just worked on the body that allowed Vision to move.

Wanda had been gently bringing Vision to the conclusion that they would be wonderful together; she could already picture them truly living side by side in every way, be it waking in the same bed, flying into battle together or teaching Vision to properly cook.

And Stark had to ruin that too.

An angry scowl twisted her lips and Wanda remembered the way Stark had used Vision's affection for her to keep her locked in the compound like she were some criminal villain.

Vision had just wanted her to be safe and happy, and Stark had fed such vicious lies about Wanda being unable to control herself and her powers and getting arrested for it.

Please.

She was arrested because Stark was Ross' lapdog.

Thank goodness she had done the right thing, putting her trust in Steve and his leadership. When he and Bucky had come to break them out of the RAFT, Steve had personally carried her to the quinjet, like a princess from all the old stories.

Admittedly, she was confused as to why Bucky didn't seem to like her, especially after Steve had vouched for her, but then again, Bucky seemed uneasy around pretty much everyone, so she didn't take it too personally.

Though she'd like him to stop leaving a room whenever she entered it, even cutting off conversations with Steve to do so until he eventually had himself put into cryo.

Really, after she had helped protect him from being arrested, that sort of behaviour was just rude.

"Maximoff. You and the others are being summoned by his highness. Come."

Wanda grit her teeth at the disrespect, but followed the servant.

When Steve had first brought them to Wakanda, their reception had been ... lukewarm.

T'Challa (who apparently was an actual king) had been furious that Steve and Bucky had just left without informing him, stating that he could grant them no protection if he didn't know where they were, but had eventually calmed once Steve had explained that there had been no time to waste in getting the team out to safety.

T'Challa's sister Shuri still didn't care though, making no effort to hide or disguise her distaste for the team.

For Wanda in particular actually.

Which made no sense, because Wanda had never done anything to Shuri to warrant such distrust.

But distrust her, Shuri did, and the distrust extended to a good number of the servants, particularly
the many women who followed T'Challa around.

Wanda had felt disgusted to realise T'Challa was just as big a womaniser as Stark. And Just like Stark and Miss Potts (how a woman as fearsome and amazing as her had ever, even briefly, fallen to Stark's false charms Wanda would never know, and never again bring up after the positively frigid glare she'd received the only time they'd met) T'Challa was going after the women in his employ, seeming to set them against each other to prove their worthiness to be at his side.

It was repulsive, and she knew Steve felt the same, his brow always furrowed when they saw the women trailing after the figurehead monarch.

Still, T'Challa was helping them, giving them room in his palace, so when he called them (she refused to say she had been summoned, like some common cur) they would answer. The few times it had happened, it was usually a discussion on what happened during the Civil War, so at least Wanda could help T'Challa fully understand every thing he had done wrong.

Entering the small sitting area, Wanda saw she was the last to arrive, and quickly took her seat next to Steve.

"Thank you Aneka."

The servant smiled kindly at T'Challa before swiftly moving to stand a little ways behind him as he turned to face the group.

"Today, during one of my meetings, some information was brought to light, and I would like to know why you have lied to me."

The shock that everyone was feeling managed to slip past Wanda's shields, briefly knocking her off balance before she righted herself.

Steve was especially angry; after all, Stark lied to Sam to get the information on where Steve and Bucky were. The rage Steve was feeling made her feel a little jealous of Bucky, safely hidden away in cryo.

"And how exactly, have we lied to you?"

T'Challa rolled his eyes at Steve, as though Steve was being childish.

"When you told me that Wanda Maximoff was one of HYDRA's victims."

She froze at the glare T'Challa sent her. There was something so dark and dangerous in that glare, as though she were facing a wild animal that would happily tear her apart.

Steve and Clint leapt to her defence, explaining how she and Pietro had been tricked by HYDRA members, how their fear and grief at Stark's hands had clouded their thoughts and made them susceptible to suggestions and hints of control and power, how it wasn't their fault, and how they helped the Avengers against Ultron and lost Pietro, and how Wanda was a good girl, not HYDRA scum.

T'Challa merely scoffed.

"You say all this, but you leave out how she and Pietro willingly joined at eighteen, with the explicit and very well recorded intention to murder Tony Stark. You leave out how she was willingly helping Ultron until she realised that his intent to kill all humans included her and her brother. You leave out how very eager she was to play with the mind of the Hulk, unleashing him
upon a populated area. You leave out how she has been recorded as willingly torturing people for the sake of Baron Von Strucker."

Wanda felt her face drain of colour, her gaze flying wide as the others froze at T'Challa's words. He knew.

"Yes Maximoff, I know. Because HYDRA was a parasite living inside S.H.I.E.L.D., they shared a database. When surveillance tapes of you happily volunteering to enter and warp prisoner's mind are uncovered and brought to my attention, you would be beyond foolish to believe I would do nothing when you are such a considerable threat to me and my people."

Steve jumped up and stood between them, facing T'Challa.

"How can you be so sure that those tapes weren't doctored to look like Wanda? We had thought the Bucky had been the only Winter Soldier, but then discovered a whole corps. Who's to say that Wanda is the first one HYDRA gave those powers?"

T'Challa scoffed again.

"The many computer technicians and experts under my employ and acquaintance for one, and Maximoff's own behaviour for the other."

The look T'Challa gave Steve was just as dark, just as dangerous as the one he had given her.

"The sudden loss of colour to her face, the trapped expression, and of course the lack of any denial or defence."

Steve turned to look at her, his face urging her to speak up and do just that but...

But she remembered laughing as the S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who had stumbled upon the base screamed in agony over the hallucinations of his family's demise.

Remembered humming a chirpy little melody as she rooted around his brain to find out how much he had discovered and who he might have told.

Remembered being so damn elated when Strucker had praised her, telling her she was such a boon to the cause.

Remembered being so proud that she was the one in control, and not caring about the people she was hurting.

And she knew she was hurting them; the screams, the begging, the tears shed when her magic caused them to feel the deaths of their loved one, just like she and Pietro had felt their parents die.

She remembered the satisfaction when she caused the Hulk to lose control.

She hadn't cared then that people would be hurt, because the Hulk had sided with Stark.

And she needed Stark to suffer as he always made her suffer.

Her mind latched onto the idea, and she could feel her lips purse into a scowl.

"Stark is the one who put you up to this, isn't he?"

It made so much sense; angered by their escape from the RAFT, and unable to find them, Stark
was now acting like a child and airing all her dirty laundry. It didn't matter that she had joined the
Avengers and was fighting for the sake of the people; no, Stark hadn't won in his little attempt to
have them sign themselves to be government slaves, and was now slandering her.

Gods only knew what he'd been telling Vision if this was what he had told T'Challa.

"No. I am."

The team's eyes flew to the entrance where Bucky stood, nervous but determined. Steve jumped
from his seat, running to his best friend.

"Bucky! What are you doing up?! How long have you been out of cryo?! Why wasn't I told?!"

Bucky brushed off the hand Steve had placed on his shoulder, moving to stand next to T'Challa.

"I been awake for about three weeks now. As promised, T'Challa and his scientists founda way to
remove the programmin, and woke me up to talk to me about it."

Bucky took a breath before facing Steve once more, apology written over his features.

"And you weren't told, cause I asked him not to."

The look on Steve's face was heart breaking, but before he could say anything, Bucky turned to
face Wanda, and the gentle sorrow gone, replaced with hate, pure and simple.

"It's amazin the sortsa things we found in my head once we started fixin it. Most of it was about the
missions I was sent on, but every now and then, there would be a little somethin extra. Like one of
my handlers talkin about teamin me up with HYDRA's new Red Menace."

Wanda's breath caught at the very first codename she had carried.

Everyone in the room noticed.

"Yeah, I had no clue on who the Red Menace was -the team up plan never ended up happenin- but
I figured if there was a chance I could have worked with them, it'd be a good idea to track them
down you know? After all, not many woulda been considered to team up with the original Winter
Soldier. So T'Challa's techs went off and did research, bringin us what they found today."

Clint once more jumped to her defence.

"Wanda was just a kid! She was hurt and angry, and didn't know better! She's been doing so much
good once she realised!"

Bucky's glare somehow grew deeper.

"Now that's funny; you call her a kid, but I distinctly remember Steve here rantin about Stark
treatin her like a child. Why is it you can but Stark can't, specially since Stark is older than you
Barton?"

Clint seemed to be struggling for words, and Bucky turned back to Wanda, angry glare still in
place.

"It took the techs some time, but they uncovered quite the folder on you. Startin, interestingly
enough, with a report of that missile you keep rantin about, the one that made you decide to try and
ekill Stark."
Wanda felt anger well up inside her. He was mocking her, mocking her pain, as though she hadn't been forced to lie and wait for Stark's bomb to kill her and Pietro.

"The report proves that Stark had nothin to do with it."

Suddenly, it felt like there was no air in the room.

He couldn't be right; he was making it up. Stark's name had been branded across that missile clear as day! He killed her parents!

"That missile was a faulty model of a Stark Lockjaw, a heavy duty piece with a success rate of almost one hundred percent durin testin. And SI guidelines, back when they were in weapons, decreed that any weapons that didn't match code were to be dismantled immediately. That Lockjaw was meant to be dismantled, but the COO of SI at the time -one Obadiah Stane- instead stole it and a whole buncha others away and sold them to the highest bidder on the black market."

No.

"Any guesses on who bought that one?"

No.

"Baron Von Strucker."

Wanda didn't even feel it as her knees connected harshly to the floor. Voices rang throughout the room, but she couldn't hear them.

All her life, she was able to remain steadfast and strong because of one ironclad truth.

Tony Stark killed her parents.

But now ... now she was being told that was a lie? That her one truth had been wrong the whole time?

No!

She knew Stark was responsible! He was the one who made the missile in the first place! He was the one who didn't make sure it was dismantled; hell, he probably told Obadiah Stane to sell them so he wouldn't be out of pocket!

It was Stark's fault, it was Stark's fault, it was Stark's fault!

She could see the ever familiar scarlet red of her powers rising from her fingers.

She would not let them disrupt her truth! She would not let them make a mockery of what she had suffered!

She would not-!

"My apologies your highness, but I felt it better not to let her power grow to full strength."

T'Challa shook his head, and smiled gently.

"No apologies needed Aneka. Thank you for doing your duty."
Aneka nodded and returned to ranks, leaving T'Challa to return his gaze to the fallen witch and the team that surrounded her.

Rogers looked up confused, a great many questions obvious in his eyes.

"Duty?"

T'Challa raised a brow.

"Aneka is one of the Dora Milaje, the elite Body guards of the King and Royal Family."

The gape Rogers wore was an ugly sight and Sargent Barnes rolled his eyes at his friend.

"You thought they were all call girls, didn't you punk?"

The red that claimed the man's face was answer enough, and T'Challa could feel the disgust his protectors felt at the slight.

Yes, the Dora Milaje were originally a way for the King to choose a bride, but times had changed and most of his retinue were otherwise romantically engaged.

T'Challa shook his head to clear his thoughts. This was not the time.

Stepping forward and getting to the unconscious woman with Sargent Barnes' assistance, T'Challa pulled a bracelet from his pocket and secured it around Maximoff's wrist.

"What are you doing?! What is that?!"

T'Challa turned to glance at the archer, before he turned and made to leave the room.

"It is a suppression bracelet. She will be unable to use her powers until it is removed. As it is made with mutants and enhanced in mind, the piece has been crafted from Vibranium, so you are more likely to cut her hand off then the bracelet if you try to force it."

Giving a final nod to the Sargent, T'Challa left, heading to his office where he released a deep sigh as he reclined in his chair.

After a few minutes, he sat up and activated a program on his computer.

"Go on and speak; I only look like I'm not listening."

T'Challa smiled gently as the screen showed the figure hunched over a lab table, hard at work.

"I called to give you an update on my guests Dear Tony."

Gorgeous brown eyes met his own over the display.

"After a few sessions with B.A.R.F., Sargent Barnes remembered a codename of Red Menace."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Close Your Eyes And Make A Wish

Chapter Summary

For Egsparks and Maria Klassen

He didn't ask for much.
Just for them to be present.

Hope this satisfies Hons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a big day, a very big day indeed.

It was such a big day in fact, that Tony had gone to bed at a reasonable hour the night before, had even managed to sleep through the night, and woke up at the preferred social hour of the rest of the Avengers, just to make sure he wouldn't miss them.

It almost worked.

Tony entered the common floor, dressed comfortably and looking well-rested \textit{(which he was for once)} and ready to hand out the cards when-

"Where's our almighty Asgardian Tempest and localised spacial distortion?"

The team was looking at him in a mix of disbelief, fear and annoyance, most of them shooting him a glare before returning to their food and conversations.

Bruce cleared his throat roughly before answering.

"Thor got an emergency call from home, so he went off immediately after asking Vision to help. What are you holding Tony?"

Clicking his tongue at Thor and Vision's absence \textit{(but really, it wasn't Thor's fault that he had princely obligations, and Vision was providing aid)} Tony then beamed and moved from person to person, handing out the cards.

They were a rough and tumble affair -uneven squares of red construction paper with a messy yet still legible scrawl in gold pen- that carried basic words in an equally basic message, but Tony was so, so proud of them.

DUM-E had made each and every one by himself.

"It's the Anniversary of the first day DUM-E came online, and he wanted to invite all of you to celebrate with him."

Still beaming, especially when Rhodey let out a small whoop of excitement, Tony nodded, and moved back to the elevator.
He had a workshop party to decorate for.

Rhodey had joined him in setting up the final decorations for DUM-E's little party, and they were laughing as they remembered the many, many hurdles and trials the AI had gone through his first few weeks of life.

Said bot was currently with his brothers charging in preparation for the party -there were so many people DUM-E wanted to spend time with, he'd need a full battery- and safely away from the setup process, Friday keeping silent despite how often her big brother pestered.

Until finally it was time.

Eleven o'clock, and the bots immediately disconnected from their charging docks and entered the main workshop, beeping and trilling in obvious delight at the fireman themed décor, DUM-E racing around the room to find his favourite of the depicted heroes.

Rhodey laughed, following the bots around and asking their opinions on whatever they happened to be looking at, and Tony couldn't help but smile at the interactions. He kept an eye on the clock though.

The invitations had been clear -DUM-E's Code Initialisation Day! Come to workshop at 11 for smoothies and games!

Rhodey kept the bots busy for twenty minutes before sending a questioning glance to Tony, who promptly tapped his ever present earpiece.

"Friday, my gal? Are the others on their way? They're late."

A brief silence as Friday scanned her cameras before...

"Boss... they're not coming..."

Tony felt himself freeze.

"Upon reading DUM-E's invites, Rogers scoffed, complaining about how you remembered when you first built a 'toy' but can't be bothered to remember people's birthdays, Barton, Romanoff and Wilson instantly agreeing. Doctor Banner shows signs of having actually fallen ill and has retired to his quarters where he is now asleep, while the Maximoff twins claimed you were pandering for attention before leaving the Tower. Mister Barnes had a decidedly difficult night though, and is feeling too twitchy to be around others, and sends his congratulations to DUM-E."

It's only when the chirping and trilling have stopped that Tony realises Friday didn't respond through his earpiece.

Rhodey looks furious, as in get-in-the-War-Machine-armour-and-break-faces kind of rage, but his hand remains gentle and soothing where it circle on DUM-E's support strut. DUM-E's camera has lowered down, ad it makes Tony's heart clench so painfully to see his first son so down trod.

Even after everything, everything, that the team has gone through, everything they have witnessed and participated in, they treat Tony and his children like this?

It's maddening! It's unfair, unkind and-

"I'm sorry, I truly did not wish to be late."
It is interesting to note that in most stories depicting royal life, they never mention paperwork. The Princes go on epic quests, the princesses are either stolen by some manner of beast or are bemoaning their lack of a love life, and the rulers are either bland good guys, evil despots or dead.

T’Challa sighed as he looked over the myriad of files covering the desk in the Wakandan embassy. They never mention the paperwork.

Breathing another sigh as he signs off on another form, T’Challa gladly accepts the distraction of his phone going off, opening the text message immediately.

Good day, your Highness.

I know this is rather abrupt, but I was hoping to ask for a favour.

Today is the Anniversary of DUM-E’s code initialisation, his birthday, as it were.

He has been looking forward to it greatly, and I had hoped to join him in celebration, alas, duty has called, and I am soon to be off to Asgard, despite receiving DUM-E’s invitation last night.

I was wondering if you would be willing to attend in my place?

DUM-E made the plans and invitations all by himself, and I truly regret my absence.

If you’re willing and able, the party will be held at Mister Stark’s Tower workshop at 11.

My thanks to you.

Vision.

T’Challa could feel his lips turn in a grin, before doubling down to work.

He would need to clear the desk before he could go to the party.

"By the Panther God, the elders will be the death of me."

After somehow managing to clear his desk, a sudden video call with the elders back in Wakanda had demanded his attention, and it was only when T’Challa had noticed that it was already eleven had he managed to end the call, citing an appointment he needed to rush to.

He entered the Tower lobby, nodding in recognition to the security guards, and quickly boarded the elevator.

"To the workshop please Friday."

"Of course your Highness."

The young AI seemed confused by his presence, but T’Challa figured it was because he was so late; the party would be well and truly started by now, and she must have taken it that he would not be coming.

The elevator doors opened and T’Challa swiftly moved to the workshop doors, apology already
falling from his lips as he passed through.

"I'm sorry, I truly did not wish to be late."

He is met by silence.

Looking around, T'Challa peripherally takes in the numerous fire fighter decorations, the abundance of streamers and balloons, but aside from Colonel Rhodes, Tony and the three AI units, there was no one there.

"Was ... was I given the wrong time for DUM-E's party?"

The most joyous chirping came from one of the AI's, the bot trundling over to him and gently clasping it's claw onto his shirt.

Giving a warm smile and friendly stroke to the arm, T'Challa looked up and met Tony's eyes.

And saw such a wonderful mix of wonder and appreciation.

"No, you're right on time."

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Tony was amazed that his voice didn't break as he welcomed T'Challa in, gently reminding DUM-E not to tear the shirt he was holding onto.

Much like Rhodey had before, T'Challa walked around the workshop with the bots, asking yes and no questions and treating them like their beeped answers were as deep and meaningful as that of one of the teams.

Tony could damn well feel his heart clenching at the mans kindness.

Far more kindness then most of the team upstairs.

Tony could totally forgive Bruce not coming (seriously, Bruce and Hulk never got sick, so resting and healing up when symptoms showed up was for the safety of everyone) and given that Barnes had actually sent congratulations to DUM-E went a very long way to forgiving his absence (that Tony happened to remember more than a few nights where an absolutely distraught Winter Soldier would sneak into the lab just to be surrounded by machines that wouldn't be used to hurt him helped to forgive his absence even more).

It was still beyond disappointing that the team members DUM-E had invited weren't there, but ... somehow T'Challa had come.

And there was something oddly lovely about that.

________________________________________________________

Though he had been in Tony's workshop before, T'Challa couldn't supress his joy at seeing the physical manifestation of the genius' mind.

Everything had a place, no matter how odd that place may be to the unobservant mind, and there was such care to be seen in the treatment of his tools and creations.

More times than he could count, T'Challa could recall how Rogers would bemoan how careless and destructive Tony was with his things, usually devolving into a lecture on how much more respectful everyone was during the thirties and forties (ignoring the little matter of a world war but, hey what did T'Challa know?) but for all his taunts and threats, T'Challa could see how much
Tony adored his AI's, how gently he treated them, how even though they were worn and old, every tool was in near immaculate condition.

He had admired Tony from afar for a long time, and the peeks and snippets into what made the man tick were amazing.

A little trill brought T'Challa's attention back to the birthday bot. DUM-E was holding a metal cup in his claw, extending it to T'Challa.

Taking it and peering into the cup, T'Challa found a green smoothie.

"Thank you DUM-E."

Chirping happily, DUM-E trundled off to bother his brothers, and T'Challa took a mouthful of the drink.

"NO!"

"DON'T!"

The twin cries had him start, looking first at Tony, who was looking at the cup in fear, then to Rhodes who was chasing an extinguisher carrying-

"DUM-E! Why are you trying to kill T'Challa? He came just for your party and you treat him this way?"

"Your daddy is way too nice to you D; when I catch you, I'm gonna drop you off at the nearest high school!"

He was sweaty, he was covered in flame retardant, and he's pretty sure there was motor oil or something in the mouthful of smoothie he consumed.

As Tony clung to him, laughing at the Colonel still chasing the bots, T'Challa couldn't think of anywhere he'd rather be.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
From the Ashes

Chapter Summary

Inspired by Hello-Shellhead.

Never has a phoenix metaphor been more personified.

Hope this satisfies Hons.

Chapter Notes

It Christmas.
Merr Christmas.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's said that for every event in your life, the powers that be leave a mark of proof upon your skin. Some are small, near inconsequential, like gaining a freckle, or scraping your arm.

Some are longer lasting, deeper, a cut in the flesh, or lingering burns.

Some are around for your life, jarring, like a scar or rotted away extremities.

And some leave a mark that, though rare, will remain long after you are dead.

Big, elaborate marks, so precise and perfect that they are often dismissed as tattoos and self inflicted.

No, this is not so.

These marks, these detailed, vivid marks, are a sign from the creators and maintainers of life, that you have survived, that you are still here.

For these marks only ever come when one escapes sure death.

T'Challa lets his fingers and lips linger as they trail over the golden tail feathers as he moves down Tony's back.

His husband has returned to him from Afghanistan, after escaping from his captors.

His husband had escaped in a ball of great flame, burning his tormentors to ash.

It is only right that T'Challa give due worship to the phoenix.
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Starks Have Iron In Their Bones

Chapter Summary

For I_kill_Zombies

It hurts. Oh it hurts. The metal simultaneously curling inward to pierce and wrenched outward to warp. It hurts. It just hurts so much.

Where is mio amato?

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, I haven't updated in a while because I've been catching up on my reading of other peoples fics (something like twenty of you updated at the same time, what even?) but I am still here! I love you all! Affection!

Oh yeah, apparently Shuri is only sixteen in the Black Panther movie (I haven't seen it yet, I just don't have the time to go to the cinema) so for all the oneshots I've paired her with Rhodey? And likely any other oneshot I put her in? She is older in them, and you can all either accept that I've screwed with her age, or you can leave. Your choice.

Still love you all though XD

And Tony and T'Challa call each other 'beloved' in their respective languages.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

T'Challa sat heavily behind his desk, hand already rising to massage the pressure building up between his eyes.

Too much was happening, and needed to happen, in such a short span of time, it felt like it had been weeks since he'd had the chance to just sit down and be, to gather and order his thoughts, to just breathe without this council member or that diplomat demanding his attention.

His father's funeral, the accords, taking in Rogers and his team not to mention taking on the mantles of Black Panther and King.

He hadn't had the time to sit and eat a full meal, let alone call his bathandekayo.

Taking a deep breath, his headache eased for the moment, T'Challa punched in the number of his most dear.

"Is Boss with you, your Kittiness?"

And felt terror, ice cold and harsh, fill his being at the desperate question voiced by Tony's young
"Friday?"

The lilting tones of the female A.I. took on a further desperate note.

"Please Mister T'Challa, please tell me the Boss is with you? I can't find him."

The world stops, completely frozen in its tracks by the heartbreaking pleading of the A.I.

"I can't find Daddy anywhere."

By the cries of a child begging for her father.

Something snaps in T'Challa's mind.

"He is not with me now little one, but I am going to find him."

A tearful farewell and Friday hangs up, leaving T'Challa to stand and leave his study.

Okoye takes a single glance at him as he opens the door, before snapping her fingers to summon the Dora Milaje who had been hidden in the shadows.

"Your orders your highness?"

T'Challa doesn't hide the snarl that twists his lips.

"Find and detain Rogers. I have questions for him to answer."

---

_They had met at a gala, some pretentious piece of nonsense thrown by the Hammer family._

_T'Challa had still been a little one, only just eight years old, and thankfully for his parents sake, enamoured of his new little sister._

_Despite how much he adored her however, T'Challa was still a little boy plagued by the curse of boredom, and when he could no longer stand watching baby Shuri stare in shocked delight every time she managed to catch her feet and shove them into her mouth, he decided to go explore the gaudy house the gala was held in._

_He had walked down a couple of hallways, staring in utter confusion at the 'art' on the walls (why anyone would want paintings of a white stripe on a blue background was beyond T'Challa) when he had suddenly been approached by a reporter._

_"How exactly has your no-name family been invited to the Hammer Family Gala celebrating America's Political greatness?! Surely the Hammer's have contacts and acquaintances of greater repute and importance than you?!"_

_Okay, accosted by a gossip journalist, but semantics really._

_T'Challa had never been treated so rudely before and had been panicking when the reporter suddenly careened to the side, a bowls worth of tapioca pudding covering their face._

_"Quickly now."_

_A hand gently grabbed his own and pulled T'Challa into a run as the reporter spewed vitriol._
Re-entering the ballroom, T'Challa slowed to catch his breath from the mad dash, and finally looked to his rescuer, who was calming their breathing as they gave him a cheeky grin.

"Hi there, I'm Tony."

T'Challa forced himself to breathe slowly as he entered the wing of the palace he had set aside for the Rogue Avengers use.

Already he could hear the angry yells from Rogers and his group demanding to be released and quoting their right to answers.

T'Challa could feel his lips once more twisting into a snarl, but swiftly forced the action down.

He needed answers first.

Stepping into the room, T'Challa found all of the rogues held at spear-point by the various members of the Dora Milaje, silently enjoying just how powerful his elite bodyguards were. Rogers quickly noticed T'Challa's presence.

"Your Majesty, what is going on here?!"

Nakia holds her spear a little closer to Rogers neck, forcing the man to back down unless he wants his throat slit by the Vibranium blade.

"What is going on Rogers is that I need answers from you. Answers that you had better give me or there will be consequences, for though I try to be a good man and keep my word, should you push me now, I will cease to care about my word."

Perhaps it's his words, maybe the way he spoke them, or perhaps he failed and is wearing the snarl once again. Whatever the reason, Rogers pales and remains silent as he nods.

"Good. Now then Rogers, what state was Tony in when he left the bunker?"

Tony was a being full of light and energy.

He had spent the remainder of the gala with T'Challa, keeping him entertained and distracted from all the boring talks the adults were having with hilarious stories of the things the teenager had gotten into at school, horrible jokes that were actually really clever once you thought about them, and a discussion on the science of building robots.

A discussion that only ended when T'Chaka came to collect T'Challa at the end of the night.

"Come my son, it is time to leave. Say goodnight to your friend now, and be off to your mother."

T'Challa had pouted, only for the expression to fade when Tony pulled him in for a quick cuddle, before gently digging his fingers into T'Challa's sensitive sides.

"Off you go now chuckles, you should never tempt an angry momma; that is Rhodey Lesson number one."

Still huffing with laughter, T'Challa snuck a final cuddle before returning to Ramonda, T'Chaka speaking with Tony quietly as he did.
"What?"

The utter confusion on Rogers face was irritating, for T'Challa didn't know how much time he had before ... before.

"It is not a hard question Rogers. When Tony left the bunker in Siberia, what condition was he in?"

The confusion doesn't abate, and T'Challa has to tightly leash his anger.

"He was fine I guess; Bucky and I left before Tony could get back up."

The room silences.

"Get back up? What exactly do you mean by that?"

T'Challa is proud of how even his voice is.

"Just what I said; when Tony lost it and started attacking Bucky, I had to drop him to get him to stop, and I grabbed Bucky and got out before he could get back up. Given how much he was still mouthing off, he probably left a few minutes after we did."

T'Challa feels the deep bite of his nails in his palms, half wishing he were in the garb of the Black Panther so they would bite deeper, hurt more, because they are the only thing keeping him on topic instead of ripping Rogers throat out.

"And how exactly, Rogers, did you 'drop him'? Better question; what caused Tony to 'lose it' to make you need to 'drop him'?"

The confusion and self assuredness that had been surrounding the man suddenly vanishes, to be replaced by ... something.

T'Challa finds it harder and harder to keep the snarl away.

Nakia lets the slightest edge of her spear kiss Rogers throat.

"Answer the King. Now."

When T'Challa got his very first letter from Tony, both his parents ran to him in response to the squeal he let loose. Apparently it had sounded like a panther cub had gotten caught in an industrial fan.

(T'Challa dearly hoped his father hadn't actually encountered that scenario.)

T'Challa had ended up writing a letter that was three whole pages of childish rambling, only realising after it had been well and truly sent that a teenager like Tony likely wouldn't be all that interested in an eight year olds adventures.

Tony's return letter of questions all about T'Challa's awesome adventures had ensured T'Challa walked on air for a week.

Back and forth their letters went, literal years where they didn't see one another, but they knew everything important in each other's lives.

They got each other through highs and lows from a distance, and even when they eventually switched to emails to cut down on the response time, they still sent each other proper letters for
Rogers has the look of a trapped man, his eyes darting to every person in the room, desperately looking for a way out of the question.

T'Challa has to fight to not tighten his fist further for fear of blood spilling from his palms.

He hasn't got time for this.

In a flash of movement, T'Challa has pushed Rogers out of the range of Nakia's spear, and holds him up by the throat.

The sudden outburst of furious cries from the rogues are just as suddenly silenced by the Dora Milaje.

"You are here due to my benevolence, but I owe you nothing Rogers. My debt extends only to Barnes, you and your hangers on are reaping benefits from his misfortune and my regret, but I have no problem with throwing you out should you give me trouble. Answer me now. What state did you leave Tony in?"

Rogers manages to swallow once, before opening his mouth.

They met again after Afghanistan.

It was only their second meeting face-to-face, yet...

Yet they knew each other, wholly and completely.

They had spent years after all, getting to know each other piece by piece, bit by bit, until they knew each other just as well as -if not better than- themselves.

Really, it was a surprise to no one that they ended up in bed together.

And to them, it wasn't a surprise that they stayed together.

T'Challa dashed out of the jet, once more garbed as the Black Panther, and with a team of the Dora Milaje behind him, swiftly cutting through the Siberian cold until they entered the bunker, dashing through the empty halls and broken doorways.

As they entered the final room, it took all of T'Challa's training to keep moving, to not just drop to the floor when he caught sight of red and gold.

Coming to rest at Tony's side, T'Challa immediately pulled a glove off and pressed his fingers to Tony's throat, desperate to feel...

There.

It was faint, so barely there, but Tony's pulse registered and T'Challa made room for Ayo, who had the best field experience when it came to first aid. A proper medic waited in the jet, of course, but Ayo would be relaying to them everything she could about Tony's condition so that they were prepared.
"-nd it doesn't appear that he's suffered any frostbite, but I put that entirely down to luck as opposed
to the conditions of the bunker and- wait... is he? Is he speaking?"

T'Challa leans closer, and yes, the quietest of whispers comes from Tony's throat.

"Hurts. It hurts. Mio Amato, where are you? It hurts."

It breaks T'Challa's heart, and he grips Tony's hand as tightly as he dares while the Dora Milaje
prepare a stretcher.

"I am here bathandekayo. I am here."

It has been five days. Five days since Tony has been betrayed by those he trusted, beaten and
bruised by one he called friend, and left to rot in a HYDRA base.

T'Challa is here in time, yet it still took too long.

A kiss placed on a frozen brow as they enter the jet and the medics hook up various IV bags.

"I am here."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Beyond The Walls Of Jericho

Chapter Summary

For Asarita

Perhaps he shouldn't have been surprised, though he would always be insulted. He had turned them away, throwing them out and locking the door behind them. Yet they sought to break him, like the walls of his last missiles' namesake? They sought to sneak his favour where, for them, there was none to be found.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Yeah, this time I was just lazy in regards to updating. This one switches P.O.V.'s and T'Challa says Lover.

I have not seen Infinity Wars yet, I'm probably not going to see it in cinemas (I never seem to have time) and I am fine with spoilers, and have more or less heard what has happened, but others may not, will not, are not, so please avoid spoilers in the comments for the sake of those people okay? Thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Breaths deep and heart beats slow, he fights the urge to open his eyes, to wake up and face the day.

He's warm and comfortable and safe here; why on Earth would he ever want to leave?

"I'm here to talk to you about the Avengers Initiative."

"Get out of my house before I make you."

"...What?"

He snuggles into the warmth a little deeper, relishing in the peace.

So perfect, and wonderful, and unlike anything he's experienced before.

"Nicholas Joseph Fury, current Director of the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement Logistics Division."

"Yeah, no, I'm not dealing with them; J.A.R.V.I.S., if they try to get in again, you have my permission to remove them."
"My pleasure Sir."

Fury sent a lot of goons and agents to try to worm their way into Tony's good graces, but thanks to J.A.R.V.I.S.' searching, picking out the S.H.I.E.L.D. flunkies is easy, and they all shuffle off in shame once Tony either subtly gets them to admit their affiliation with S.H.I.E.L.D. ("But really, working at SI you are going to come across quite the characters and that's normal okay? So don't be surprised if the leather fetishist pirate comes by." "Do you really call Director Fury that?!" "Well thank you for your time Josiah Stannel, but Jasper Sitwell does not have a place in my company.") or just outright referencing one of their worst missions ("Oh and Miss Rushman? I was really impressed reading about Budapest, that was some solid work." "What? I...I don't-" "Honestly, the thing with the bread was particularly artistic, but I've got to say that I don't particularly care for black widows. And finally, get out.") which is always good for a laugh.

And it seems that S.H.I.E.L.D. is smart enough to not send idiots after him when he's on business trips, which is useful, because seriously, having a squad of men in black (and why is it that male S.H.I.E.L.D. agents are in full suits, but the female agents are in pretty much whatever? Weird.) following you around does not help seal a business contract, no matter what the movies might tell you.

But then Fury starts getting personal.

"Mr Stark? I'm Steve Rogers."

A hand, so big and warm, gently starts rubbing circles into his back, occasionally cupping his neck, before resuming the steady motions.

He snuggles in deeper.

"Mr Stark! How are you today? Would you like to go to dinner with me?"

"Mr Stark! That board meeting was important huh? Want to get some lunch?"

"Mr Stark! You were away on the trip for ages! Let's go get some coffee, okay?"

Steve grit his teeth as -once again- Stark brushed off his offer for a date and left.

It made no sense! Fury had shown the footage of Stark coming out as bisexual (and wasn't it amazing that the world no longer sought to imprison those who didn't fit the norm?) and Steve knew that after the serum he had become an attractive man, at least enough for a shallow man like Stark to be interested given the records of his previous partners.

After the first few times Stark declined dinner, Steve thought that maybe that was a bit too intimate for this modern era, a bit too 'old-fashioned', so he'd gone and gotten advice from the S.H.I.E.L.D. agents he interacted with. When lunch had been suggested, it made sense to Steve; getting together during the day, when you still have stuff to do later on, would be a welcomed distraction, instead of having to go out again after a long day.

Yes, Stark didn't really do anything for the majority of the day, but even hours of just sitting around could make one lethargic after all.

But lunch was a bust too. Stark always said no.
So Steve went back to the agents, wondering how he was going to do this, when another suggestion that made sense came up.

Go for coffee.

Stark was a caffeine addict, more than enough footage to confirm that, and going out for coffee could easily evolve into grabbing food, so Steve could keep up with his metabolism as well, but the idea of going for coffee was that it was friendly, calm and short, perfect for a man like Stark who had a notoriously short attention span.

Stark still said no.

(Steve wonders how on Earth Howard dealt with Stark as a kid.)

"I love waking up beside you."

The sleep-warm voice sends shivers down his spine, and he cuddles ever closer.

If he opens his eyes, he'll be greeted by his granter of peace and safety.

If he opens his eyes, he'll have to deal with the world that much sooner.

Steve takes a step back and watches Stark, gathers first-hand intelligence, because obviously S.H.I.E.L.D. has missed something about the man.

And what he finds is... enthralling.

Stark is a man who will spend hundreds of dollars in a week on fancy business lunches, and though Steve shudders at the excess and waste, Stark buys street vendor hotdogs and chips and donuts whenever he can.

Stark turns up at the office dressed to the nines in tailored suits that cost more than Steve earned in his life, but goes out incognito in jeans and band shirts that are obviously well-worn and loved.

And when Stark goes out as Iron man...

Steve has to rely on footage taken at the scene, because S.H.I.E.L.D. can't keep up with the suit, but watching the red and gold glowing in the light of explosions as it takes out the bad guys?

Well, Steve's an artist after all.

Steve had at first thought the suits colouring unnecessarily flashy, but the haunting beauty of Iron Man in battle is quite compelling, and Steve goes into battle decked in the American flag, so he's not exactly Mr Stealth himself.

And Stark does the decent thing of telling his charities to clean up the mess he makes after the battle, so in the long run, Stark's got a pretty good heart under his smug selfishness.

Steve starts to think of him as Tony.

"Oh, are you hiding? Yes, that is definite hiding. But are you hiding from the world, or me, I wonder?"
He places a kiss to the chest he's resting on.

"Never hide from you."

He can feel the smugness in the following silence, as that warm hand starts massaging him.

"I am glad to hear it."

Tony knows that Steve Rogers is a stubborn man, hell it was one of the 'great' characteristics that Howard never shut up about, but one of the reasons all of Tony's bed partners left satisfied was that Tony listened to what they told him. When they said they weren't interested, Tony backed off.

Rogers takes a 'not interested' and hears 'try harder'.

Rogers takes a 'go away' and hears 'prove you're worthwhile'.

Rogers takes a 'Please leave me alone' and hears 'I am unsure of myself and need affirmation'.

The one time Rogers tried to slide a 'friendly' hand over Tony's shoulders, security happened to be nearby and tased the man, threatening a lawsuit if the man showed such behaviour on SI grounds again.

Tony increased security's pay for that.

He groans as tight muscles ease and sore flesh is soothed, mottled bruises lingered over before a second hand joins in, melting him further.

"This is not encouraging me to get up you know."

A chuckle rumbles through the broad chest.

"If you get up, it means you leave; why would I ever encourage that?"

Why indeed.

Tony hasn't been well, for a long time, and when Fury comes and tells Steve about how the arc reactor is poisoning him, Steve is all for doing anything to save Tony.

Fury doesn't disagree, explaining how the threat of looming death has got Tony acting reckless and getting rid of his belongings before he passes on, like handing over CEOship of SI to Potts, so that Tony can go off and do whatever pleases him for days on end, giving an Iron Man suit to his best friend before ducking out of his own birthday party to again, go off and do whatever, and how before the abandoned party, how Tony had usurped the driver of his race car to drive himself, and getting into a fight with someone who had managed to replicate the arc reactor.

Steve had to wonder if maybe Tony had an adrenaline death wish so he didn't have to die slowly from the poison.

So he went with Fury to confront Tony after they had finally located him the day after his birthday party.

"That's it, just relax and stay with me."
Tony doesn't plan to be at the donut place long, really he planned to just grab the donuts and go, but as he rose into the air, the sunrise was just so pretty, so he stopped to watch for a little bit, sitting in the giant donut because *why not?*

It's wonderful to see something so pretty after everything that's been happening lately.

"Sir, I'm gonna have to ask you to leave the donut!"

Tony looks down and spots Fury, Rogers right alongside him with a ... concerned? look on his face.

A quick quirk of his fingers is enough to have J.A.R.V.I.S. sending out an alert, and he slowly rises to leave the giant donut only after he's received a confirmation.

Steve takes note of how carefully Tony extracts himself from his perch, how slowly he moves, to ensure he doesn't hurt his poisoned body further, and something deep within him aches.

Tony's known about the poison for a while, but never actually told anyone; S.H.I.E.L.D. found out because of how closely they watch the man, and Steve now has no doubts that it's the reason Tony never accepted any of the dates or meet-ups.

Tony was sure he was going to die, and didn't want to burden anyone with it; didn't want Steve to end up too close before the end separated them.

But S.H.I.E.L.D. has a temporary fix.

Fury is certain that with the files S.H.I.E.L.D. has, Tony will be able to solve the problem with the arc reactor, but would lack the necessary physical time to implement it, so they brought along a medicine to slow the poison for a while until Tony can pull the answer together.

Steve was unsure about having Natasha surprise inject it, but Fury explained how Tony would never allow them to just give it to him, and Tony is too important to lose to his own hard-headedness.

So Steve sat at Fury's side in the booth and waited for when Natasha would help save Tony's life.

Tony sits in the booth across from the pirate spy and the walking flag and waits.

He has J.A.R.V.I.S. watching his back and keeping an eye on everything, so he feels pretty safe all told, and he knows the alert has gone out so he feels even safer, but dammit, he just wanted to get donuts and watch the sunrise, not deal with shadowy organisations who don't know how to leave him alone!

Fury starts talking after a minute or two of silence, looking like he expected Tony to speak first but Tony doesn't want to talk to the Director, and is really only half listening to Fury's spiel.

"-company to your girl, let your friend fly off with a suit, before haring off to do who knows what,
makes me wonder what exactly your preparing for Stark."

Tony raised a brow, silently asking Fury how it was any of his business.

It was Rogers who answered.

"We're worried about you Tony. We know, okay? We know about the arc reactor poisoning you, and we're worried about you. But we can help you Tony. We can help, and all you have to do is let us help you."

Tony lets his scepticism show on his face, but like always, Rogers takes what he's given and hears something else.

"I understand now why you were so uncomfortable around me Tony, but it's okay. We're not going to let you die; with the files and information we've put together, you'll surely be able to put together something to fix the arc reactor, and once you're all better, we'll try again to get to know each other, okay?"

Tony raises a hand to pinch the bridge of his nose, despite the gauntlet still covering his fingers, as he tries to parse the drivel coming from Rogers' mouth.

He opens his eyes to see a flash of black and red reaching for his neck.

"Oh, you do not want to do that."

When T'Challa had received the alert from J.A.R.V.I.S. he had swiftly dressed and left the apartment he had been sharing with Tony.

They had met on one of Tony's many business trips, and the older man just captivated the Wakandan prince. Despite his reputation, Tony was one of the most wonderful examples of humanity T'Challa could think of; a man aware he is flawed and human, and striving to be better, to learn from his past and correct his mistakes.

T'Challa loved to just sit down and talk with Tony, and so long as Tony had something to keep his hands busy, they could talk for hours about anything, everything and nothing at all.

And the first time they made love...

T'Challa still shivered as remembered sensation coursed through him. He was no shying virgin, but Tony was a very generous lover, so generous in fact, that T'Challa had dedicated a solid day to repaying the favour and still felt that he hadn't done enough.

The continued sessions of repayment received no complaint though.

Coming up to the small diner that Tony went to collect donuts from (a guilty indulgence for T'Challa, who normally didn't enjoy most American snack food) T'Challa quickly noted the spread out perimeter (easily evaded if one had proper training) and took to the shadows to remain out of sight.

He had just reached the entryway itself when a woman in a catsuit came up and entered.

He recognised Tony's description of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s Black Widow.

T'Challa quickly followed her in and swiftly caught her by the wrist before she could inject Tony with whatever was in the syringe.
"Oh, you do not want to do that."

Wrenching her hand and the syringe away from Tony, T'Challa felt deeply satisfied when he saw not only the Widow's shock but Fury's and Rogers' shock.

And perhaps he was petty, but after Tony's stories about the man, T'Challa was extra pleased to slide into the booth next to his lover and enjoy the hurt look that crossed Rogers' face as Tony cuddled up to him.

"Tell me Umthandi, what is going on?"

Tony cuddles as close as he comfortably can in the armour, and mumbles into T'Challa's neck.

"S.H.I.E.L.D. knew about the palladium poisoning, and instead of offering their help as soon as they found out, they waited as long as possible before appearing with the information that would let me do something about it. Given that they then tried to inject me with something, they waited until they figured I couldn't physically do anything for myself but they have a quick-fix that I would then feel indebted to them over that they were willing to inject me with despite not completely knowing my medical history."

T'Challa raises an unimpressed eyebrow at the three across from him.

"So not only are they pathetic, they are bad at their jobs; the palladium has been gone for almost a month now. You are just still recovering your strength."

Tony nods as the three look a mix of shocked (the Widow) confused (Rogers) and angry (Fury) and T'Challa levels a glare at them that silences them before they can speak.

"You are not wanted or needed. We are leaving now, and should you follow us, or further make nuisances of yourselves, I will do everything in my power to destroy you."

T'Challa says it with the full bearing of the weight of the Wakandan Throne, and he knows it translated by all three paling.

They grab their donuts and leave, swiftly returning to the apartment, and then ... Then they return to bed, Tony curled up on T'Challa's chest as T'Challa massages the stress from Tony's body.

"That's it, relax. Relax for me. The rest of the world can wait."

And for a little while, it can.

They are here together.

The world can wait.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Tony sighed as he watched the Newton's cradle *tack, tack, tack* away on his desk.

The IRS and SI's accountants and in-house lawyers had been working round the clock to try and fix the mess, and Virginia had been both sincerely apologetic and gently hopeful, but Tony still sat at his desk, seemingly hypnotized by the gold-titanium spheres swinging.

"Omnye umhlobo."

The flinch Tony gives at the sound of T'Challa's voice hurts, oh how it hurts.

He has never shied from T'Challa before.

A plastic grin curls his lips as Tony forces himself to appear *normal* despite knowing it's futile.

"Hey there Bubsy, how are you?! I didn't realize you were dropping by today!"

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**Chapter Summary**

For V-bird

Born into wealth, and being as successful a business man as he was, Tony's not used to emptiness of his wallet.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

**Chapter Notes**

Alrighty my dears and darlings, yes this took me ages, I'm lazy, and sorry, but here it is. T'Challa calls Tony 'My Darling One', while Tony calls T'Challa 'My Strength'.

I also apologise for all the mice who will soon be nomming on your computers. This got pretty cheesy.

*Of Mortals and Gods by d_aia.*

Read it.

Oh my gosh, just read it.

Totally unrelated to this chapter, but read it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Tony averts his gaze, another action he has never taken with T'Challa before.

But it means he doesn't notice.

"Things have been going nuts around here, so I'm afraid that there isn't much fun to be had unfortunately, but if you head on to the Tower you can."

The rambling words cut off with a half-desperate sob as T'Challa comes up to him and winds his arms around Tony and holds him close, not caring for how shaking hands cling to his shirt, wrinkling the fabric.

T'Challa is far too concerned with the vicious black moons beneath his lover's eyes. The pale wax-paper of his loved one's skin. The worry-stricken thinness that cuts his Tony's cheeks.

Once more, T'Challa damn's Ted Calloway and his faked hedge fund.

Virginia had been proclaiming the virtues of the SpyMaster Hedge Fund, after having been a beneficiary to it's services for years, and Tony, in an act of both good faith and curiosity, had put money into the fund as well.

Whereupon Ted Calloway the owner/operator/saleperson/whatever else of the fund, had hacked into the bank accounts of both Tony and Stark Industries and made off with billions.

The IRS had been called in, and investigated everything they could, eventually finding Calloway and bringing him in to face Justice, but until the man was trialled, all the money he had stolen was still considered evidence and couldn't be returned to either Stark Industries or Tony.

The Company was actually still okay; the SI account hacked was only one the Tech Empire held, so all the workers and operations still had the finances needed to keep them afloat.

Tony had been left with nothing beyond whatever cash he'd been carrying.

Thankfully Tony hadn't been making a purchase when the discovery was made, since he tended to buy in bulk or very expensively, but it was still a hit Tony hadn't expected to have ever undergone.

And given how many people had jumped ship and ditched both Tony and SI, it wasn't a surprise Tony was taking it hard.

"I am here Omnye umhlobo. I am not abandoning you."

Another sob as Tony's grip tightened.

Tony had been born into wealth, and being as successful a business man as he was, Tony was not used to emptiness of his wallet, the sudden inability to just live his life. The vulnerability he felt was expected, and despite what the memories of Howard Stark whispered in his head, Tony was not weak for this uncertainty and fear.

He was a simple man, who had had quite the obstacle thrown his way without warning. SI shares had taken a massive hit, and news feeds were all lambasting Tony for his plight, not the criminal who stole literal billions (some idiots were even praising Calloways actions, as though Tony deserved this destitution) and claiming that Tony should have somehow known the hedge fund was false, despite literal decades of flawless conduct in the past.

T'Challa's arms tightened.
Tony just couldn't win.

"Please... I need you La mia forza."

Tony managed to cuddle even closer.

The coming days to the trial would be tough, both emotionally and mentally, but-

"I am here Omnye umhlobo."

They would manage it.

"I am here."

Together.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Melodic Musings

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

I was given a bunch of lyrics and free reign. ONWARDS!!!

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"When I'm falling down
Will you pick me up again?
When I'm too far gone
Dead in the eyes of my friends
Will you take me out of here when I'm staring down the barrel
When I'm blinded by the lights, when I cannot see your face?
Take me out of here"

Pendulum - Watercolour

The burning in his lungs is harsh and painful, yet drowned out by the agony his body is going through. So many breaks and bruises, he just knows it, his skin must be a damned stone fruit patchwork by this point, and if he weren't in the armour, Tony knows he would be oh so much worse.

Yet even that was buried beneath the pain in his heart and mind.

Did you know?

He can't seem to think, is reacting off instinct, and he just wants someone -anyone- to hurt like he is.

Did you know?

Fists are flying, the shield is being thrown, and repulsors flash brightly in the darkness of the bunker, yet everything, all of it, is instinct, beyond Tony's ability to think.

Did you know?

He's on his back, breathing harshly as, still, he fights, trying to just make the hurt go away. Cap-Ste-Rogers is on him and ripping off his helmet, the bitter chill of the air bringing a little bit of sense back to Tony, enough to see the shield being raised high.

Did you know?

The look in Rogers' eye, that utter, blatant distaste and anger, is one Tony grew up with, saw every
time he crossed paths with his sire, saw every time he surpassed what should have been possible for his age, saw every time he was deemed a failure and mistake.

Did you know?

The shield starts to descend, and Tony does the math; the vibranium disc would easily *easily-* sever his neck with Rogers' full force behind it.

Tony raises his arms.

Did you know?

The crack of the arc reactors protective glass is terrifying. The original reactor had enough power to nearly vaporise Stane's War Monger suit, and the Mark I arc reactor was at least ten times as powerful, with the power upping with every tweak and adjustment.

Tony's not thinking about Stane ripping out his heart, or slivers of metal straining ever deeper in his chest, or even that yet another man he considered his friend is possibly killing him, no.

Tony's thinking on the miniature bomb that Rogers seems set on detonating.

Did you know?

Adrenaline is an amazing thing.

It gives Tony the strength to ignore his injuries for just a little bit, just enough to shout out a demand for Rogers to drop the shield, to drop the item that identified him as a paragon of virtue so many decades ago.

Did you know?

Yes Howard made the shield, but really, Tony's made certain by now that everyone knows he doesn't miss Howard Stark.

When Rogers drops the shield and keeps going, hauling Barnes along with him, Tony knows that that flawless image is now broken.

Did you know?

He doesn't know how long he's been out, but when the blackness starts to fade, and his brain once more begins to tick, Tony notes that he's warm, that nothing hurts, that a strong, callused hand that isn't Rhodey's gently cards through his hair.

For some reason, that's the tipping point. That one act of kindness, be it selfishly or selflessly giving, is what pushes Tony over the edge.

A tear falls from eyes still closed.

It doesn't take long for others to follow.

Did you know?

The kindness continues, and a voice, both familiar and not, begins to soothe him, to try and calm his distress, so that Tony may feel better, and continue to heal.

Tony opens his eyes.
Did you know?

He finds himself looking into deep brown eyes, far deeper than his own, but eyes that are tinged by the same brush of sadness and loss. Eyes that share an understanding, and an appreciation, of how easy it is to fall.

Did you know?

Eyes that do not judge, even after learning the full story.

T'Challa gives a gentle smile, shadowed ever so slightly with melancholy, and his hand continues to card through Tony's hair.

Yes.

It feels like a beginning.

"There he is
My A+ superstar
Strong like a lion
Danger ain't far
Smart like Einstein
Fast like a cheetah
You ain't far my A+ superstar"

Basslovers United - A+ superstar

He couldn't help but sigh, a gentle exhalation of air, as he once more catches sight of that glorious, delicious red begin to cover darling cheeks.

T'Challa had never really thought of himself as one to fall for looks, but that was exactly what had happened. Granted, he had swiftly discovered the object of his affection was far, far more than just a pretty face, but initially, he had taken one look at the beautiful brunette and he was gone.

T'Challa thought that Tony was just the most wonderful being in creation.

From the quickness of his mind, able to overly familiarise himself with heretofore unstudied topics to a level that had the teachers hating him, to the venom of his wit, able to shut even the most virulent of bullies down with ease, to the sharpness of his gaze, which left one feeling pierced to the soul, yet cradled forever, Tony was just amazing, and that wasn't even including the other teens unfairly good looks.

Goodness but the Panther God knew T'Challa had received quite the mileage just from Tony's looks.

Particularly that perfect blush.

Tony pretty much always seemed to be in control, but his one give away was that delightful splash of red. The intensity of the colour would tell those who knew what exactly Tony was feeling.
The ever so gentle brush of blush across the cheeks meant surprise, while the smattering of rose indicated excitement.

When apple coloured his face, Tony was flustered, and cherry said he'd undergone something physical, like running or the type of laughter that leaves you breathless.

T'Challa's favourite shade on Tony however is when deep ruby red paints his skin.

After all, Tony's face only ever takes that colour after T'Challa has whispered all that he wants to do with his boyfriend that night.

"Oh baby, I'll try to make things right.
I need you more than air when I'm not with you.
Please don't ask me why, just kiss me this time.
My only dream, is about you and I."
Edward Maya - Stereo Love

No one had really thought they would work as well as they did. One was born and bred royalty while the other was a rich white kid. Once appeared to be the epitome of grace and elegance, while the other was a devil-may-care party boy. One was a classic gentleman while the other was a brat who got lucky enough to be in the right place in the right time.

They payed no heed to the cowards and fools who whispered such things behind their backs. They gave no attention to the bitter and self-righteous who proclaimed it to their faces.

They knew better.

Two boys forced to be men in a world that would give them no kindness or quarter.

Two souls that learned fast to swim in the deep end or be pulled beneath the waves of expectation.

Two hearts that had found kinship and love in the other.

The tests of time and obstacles of life were faced in the knowledge that the other understood, and was there when needed and as needed, as a friend, confidant, colleague or lover.

"I wish our hearts could be one."

Whispered dreams in the darkness of night

"You will always have mine. I hope to always have yours."

Gentle answers in the ephemeral twilight.

"Always."

Chapter End Notes
Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Stories From The Body

Chapter Summary

For Kage

Open heart surgery in a dark, dusty cave. Thrown through buildings and rammed into the ground. Monsters clawing at him with everything they are.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

T'Challa calls Tony 'Sweet One.'

I'm not sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The smell of salt hangs thick in the air, causing a low-grade drowsiness to cloud the mind and slow one's thoughts.

It's honestly one of the reasons Tony was so damned determined to get his Malibu house built, regardless of the scientific impossibility.

(He's Tony Stark; if he doesn't like the two options you give him, he'll take number three, even if he has to create it himself.)

The breeze is cool, greatly appreciated to the heat of the sun, but not so much as to make the day cold, instead making the air a pleasant warmth that adds to the drowsy effect.

Tony reclines on the beach chair, stretching slightly before once more relaxing as much as he can, soaking up the sun where it hits his face, arms and legs.

Taking a quick mental roll-call, Tony smiles as he sees Thor building an enormous sandcastle with Jane and Ian, while Selvig laughingly gets buried by Darcy. Harley, Peter and Kamala are all out in the waves, being taught how to surf by Rhodey, with Vision lazily floating by to watch and rescue if needed. Jessica and Luke had disappeared twenty minutes ago, and shouldn't be back for another twenty at least, while Danny and Misty were both snoozing in the shade.

The Rogues (for reasons Tony isn't even interested in trying to work out) have turned the day off at the beach into a training session and spend half their time glaring disapprovingly at the team for not joining them in running, sparring and timed swimming, though Scott has been successfully derailed several times by Hope sunbathing.

(Tony remembers when the glares were for not joining them for team games because he had meetings to go to, designs to create, the future to build, an actual damn job that paid for their games and food and clothes and apartments.)
Shuri was standing at the waterline, camera in hand, either recording the kids, Rhodey and Vision or taking pictures (With Wakanda tech, Tony wouldn't be surprised if it was doing both simultaneously while also finding the best places nearby for both Italian food and pancakes) and T'Challa was-

Tony swallows hard at the sight of T'Challa rising from the waves, water tracing oh so lovingly down every sculpted curve of muscle.

The temptation to copy the water droplets, to chase the lingering taste of salt from chocolate skin, is strong and obvious if T'Challa's smug grin when he meets Tony's eyes is anything to go by.

"See something you like Elimnandi?"

Tony smirks back.

"Oh you know I do Crookshanks. Seriously, you were put onto this earth to be living temptation; to drag unwitting souls into sin and lust."

T'Challa chuckles.

"Well I'm only interested in dragging you down with me, so I see no problem."

Rolling his eyes, Tony opens his mouth to respond-

"Are you for real?!"

Only to be interrupted by a tabloid journalist.

Miriam Birchwood, a gossip journalist for the Daily Bugle, dressed in high couture business wear (On the beach? In Summer? What even?) is storming across the shore to stand in front of Tony's chair and scowl at him like he's kicked her dog or something.

"...What?"

Birchwood just glares at Tony harder for a minute before doing a quick -yet punctuated- once over the rest of the group, returning an angry gaze to Tony.

"You are at a beach, surrounded by gorgeous people, in the height of Summer, yet you break the lineup by what you're wearing!"

Silence on the beach, broken only by the gentle crashing of the waves. From the corner of his eye, Tony can see Rhodey, Vision and the kids making their way back. The sandcastle has been abandoned, and Hope has raised her sunglasses to stare in disbelief as Danny and Misty have woken up startled by the noise, while the Rogues look a mix of amused, confused and annoyed. T'Challa and Shuri look downright baffled, and honestly Tony's not far behind.

Tony looks down at himself, wondering what exactly is so offensive with his red and gold board shorts and white top.

When he looks back at Birchwood, she only looks angrier at his confusion.

"The shirt Stark! You are the only one here covered up like a cranky old geriatric! Take it off right now!!"

Tony is in shock when the woman lunges forward to grab onto his shirt, and he doesn't think when he grabs hold of her wrist when she does.
Instead he's remembering.

It's too dark and it's hard to breathe with all the dirt and dust in the air, then it's suddenly too bright and he still can't breathe and he hears yelling, then it hurts hurts hurts why are you doing this his chest is open he can feel them touch his bones his lungs his heart why please

He's flying fast and hitting as hard as he can, sometimes catching the Chitauri, sometimes not, one of them manages to snipe him from behind and then he can't stop spinning the HUD can't latch anything he can't stabilize hit something hard that was a building he just took to the chest.

He's the only one with controlled flight right now, and the only one fast enough so he grabs the warhead and pushes it through the wormhole and then he sees everything that endless void filled with so many ships there's only six of them against all this they won't survive this

It's fire and anger and molten rage and he can feel every hit before it even lands on him, but he can't let Killian win, can't let A.I.M. beat him, not now, never his chest hurts from hits that burn like fire and as heavy as steel and he's so tired and scared and why can't he just rest it hurts it hurts.

It's too bright and it's hard to breathe with all the chemicals and cleaners in the air, then the lights come on and he's so thankful for the mask of drugs then when he goes under he can still feel the heavy metal in his chest and the deep twinges scars she knows she will wake up with

He comes back to himself when a big warm hand gently presses his cheek.

T'Challa is there, concern in his eyes while Rhodey and the kids tear a strip out of Birchwood, Vision standing behind them as an unamused sentinel and Shuri recording the event as both proof and blackmail.

And Tony doesn't look for anyone else.

He just returns his gaze to T'Challa.

Once Birchwood is gone, T'Challa will snuggle down with Tony for a while, ignoring the rest of the world while Tony regains his equilibrium, and then they'll challenge Thor to a sandcastle building contest, making sure to cajole the kids into it as well, before forcing Rhodey and Vision to join too. Eventually they'll gather everyone up and go to dinner, at whichever restaurant Shuri says is best before everyone will retire for the night but Tony and T'Challa.

Tony and T'Challa will return to the beach and Tony will take off his shirt so that T'Challa can see the twisted white scars that glow silver under the moon, and then they might try to swim a little, just a bit, or maybe they'll just walk the length of the shore, or maybe they'll be stupid and cliché and make love on the sand, who knows?

Tony cuddles closer to T'Challa.

They'll work it out.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Joyful Anniversary of Not Death

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

BERFDAYS!!

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One of the biggest lies you are ever told in your life is that your life is your own.

From the moment you are born to the minute that you die and every breath of time after, your life belongs to those who remember you.

You can be sinner or saint, politician or pauper, geriatric or juvenile, it doesn't matter, your life is owned by those who know you will exist, do exist, used to exist.

It's why those who live in the public eye are held to standards higher than the common man.

The more people that see them, the more people that own their lives.

Tony was born in the spotlight, the much needed heir to the aging titan that was Howard Stark.

T'Challa was born in the spotlight, the prince and heir to the Kingdom of Wakanda.

They were born owned by the expectations of their stations.

As the child of a business giant and a socialite, Tony's birthdays were events of pomp and production, where Tony was to be seen, not heard, and be seen with the elite, chosen for the benefits they'd give the Stark name. They were events of luxury and largess, gifts of high expense and simultaneous worthlessness given for the sake of being seen as generous. They were events of showmanship and surveillance, leading the mindless around on a merry chase as they gave away secrets and information.

They were never really about Tony at all.

As the child of the King and his Queen, T'Challa's birthdays were affairs of duty and discipline, long tales regaling the importance of devotion and maintaining the glory of the kingdom despite the kingdom being nearly non-existent to the world outside its borders. They were affairs of capitulation and covenant, dignitaries of all the tribes gathering to swear once more their loyalty to Wakanda and it's Crown, even though they would resume their squabbles and battles with the Crown and each other. They were affairs of pride and perseverance, where all would look on in delight and satisfaction and dark amusement as T'Challa did his best to reach ever higher standards.

They were never really about T'Challa at all.
Not any more though.

Now, birthdays are just between them, no visitors or guests invited or accepted.

They will come together somewhere warm, where they can see the sky, and from the beautiful brilliance of the rising sun to the gentle glow of the setting moon, they will be together. They will take no calls, accept no letters, address no emails or texts. They will come together and simply be, as two men whose lives, for so brief a time in the grand scale of their existence, will belong to only each other.

And their birthdays are now only about them.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Kage

Well, they've gotta meet the family sometime, right?

Hope this satisfies hon.

Chapter Notes

The only strict canon I'm following is names.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

T'Challa would like it to be on record that he is not afraid of much.

He fears losing his loved ones, he fears failing his people, and he fears that one turtle from Elder Bashenga's garden that he has seen be killed but was right back to normal the next day, but there's nothing else that he can say he's scared of.

Until that night.

"Hey there Calcipurr. Rhodey's family has come to New York for the holidays and invited me to dinner. Wanna come with me?"

He had said yes without thought or hesitation, not knowing the utter terror of what the night had in store for him.

"Tony!! Hello precious boy! Oh my word, it's been so long, just look at you, thin as a stick! You sit yourself down on the lounge and I'll have Terrance bring you something to tide you over 'til dinner! Oh and you brought someone with you! Pleased to meet you dear heart, you go sit with Tony, alright?"

Roberta Rhodes, James' mother was a whirlwind of warmth and welcome.

It should have been his first warning.

"Little Tony! You need to stop by more often kiddo! You're as much my boy as my own son is and we just don't see enough of either of you 'cept on the news. And you heard Momma Rhodes, eat your snacks kiddo, you're a damned twig. And your man next to you as well of course."

Terrance Rhodes, James' father was an elder man who focused almost entirely on Tony, making him smile and laugh.

It should have been his second warning.
"Uncle Tony! I got first prize at my school's science fair and was actually approached by one of the SI recruitment team! They really loved my ideas and you should be getting the email about it soon! Who's your friend? He's never met us before."

"Lila! Calm down, you should welcome Tony before you bombard him like that. We all know you're awesome but take it easy. And this is the first time you've met his friend so of course he hasn't met us before."

Lila and Jeanette Rhodes, James' niece and sister respectively, both young, very young, and bearing the marks of a hard life, but the determination to improve.

They should have been his final warning as Roberta summoned them all to the table.

"Now then, T'Challa was it?" Roberta asked halfway through the meal, attention fully on him and no longer devoted to ensuring Tony was actually eating everything on his plate.

T'Challa smiled at the woman, nodding to show she was correct.

"If I think for even a single moment you will hurt my precious boy, I will saw your genitals off with a spoon, gouge your eyes out with a fork and cut your body in two with a butter knife."

Tony stated coughing loudly, choking on his food while James moved to aid him, and the rest of the Rhodes looked to Tony with concern.

T'Challa however was frozen.

It was the smile, he decided later, that had scared him most. From the moment Roberta had seen Tony and T'Challa arrive, she had worn a warm smile, the kind of smile that spoke of home and safety and love and care, that smile that in movies meant hope and protection.

The smile hadn't dropped during her threat.

Her voice hadn't budged an inch from her friendly pitch either, as though promising mutilation and pain and death was just another part of regular dinner discussion.

(And if it was, T'Challa had some serious concerns to bring up with Tony and James.)

Tony finally cleared he airways and spoke with a rasp.

"Momma Rhodes! You do not just threaten my boyfriend!"

Roberta moved her smile and gaze onto Tony.

"You are one of my babies Tony, and I will vet your significant others just like I do Rhodey's and Jeannie's, and will do to Little Lila's if I'm still around at that time. Eat your food precious boy, there is not enough meat on you."

And just like that, she returned to her meal.

T'Challa didn't know what to think.

They all returned to the sitting area once dinner was done, the television turned on for background noise while the Rhodes caught up with Tony and James. Lila excused herself briefly to the bathroom, and Jeanette began asking James about advice for schooling while Terrance and Roberta asked after Virginia. T'Challa was calming down from the shock that dinner had been when he felt
a gentle tug to his sleeve.

He turned to find Lila.

"Uncle Tony is the absolute best and I may be a kid but I will devote my life to destroying you if you make him sad."

And then she skipped off to her mother and uncle, leaving T'Challa once more off-balance from her whispered declaration.

Jeanette, happy with her brothers advice came over to T'Challa and began to ask questions about his family, grateful for the distraction from her daughter's proclamation, T'Challa shared stories of his mothers, sister and father, getting laughs and commiserating groans from the tales of mischief and mayhem from his youth. It was a rather nice conversation, and he was about to ask for some stories of her own when-

"Momma has dibs, and I know Lila has staked her claim, but I will have my pound of flesh if you screw Tony over."

And then she excused herself, following her mother to the kitchen where they began to converse.

T'Challa was again thrown.

What was going on?

They are readying to leave for the evening when T'Challa realises he took off his jacket at some point after dinner and left it in the sitting room. Leaving Tony and James to their coats, T'Challa quickly moves to retrieve his clothing, finding Terrance in the room, waiting.

Given the rest of the evening, T'Challa swallows hard.

"I know that all my girls have said their piece, and here's mine. Take care of him, because if you don't, you will lose a treasure and never get it back."

Terrance hands T'Challa his jacket, and leaves.

For some reason, T'Challa is finding it the hardest warning to breathe after.

About three months pass when T'Chaka calls them to come visit Wakanda. Tony is more or less up to date with SI (so far ahead he's making the R&D division cry again) so Virginia gives her blessing and so they pack their bags and are off to the kingdom of T'Challa's birth.

Nothing compares to the warmth of Wakanda.

It is only once they have landed and are settled away in their rooms that T'Challa realises this will be the first time Tony has ever actually met his family face-to-face. And after informing Tony and James of the other warnings given by the Rhodes family and receiving laughter in turn, T'Challa feels a smug little grin curl his lips.

It's Tony's turn.

"Big Brother! He is amazing and if you ever hurt him I am going to shred you into itty bitty pieces
and feed you to the panthers!"

What the hell?

"Tony is just so darling! I will be so disappointed if you break up with him Prince T'Challa."

What the Hell?

"You have a wonderful partner My little T'Challa, and you had better strive to be worthy of him."

What The Hell?

"He is a good man My Son, and I hope you know to value him always, for he will not look back should you betray him."

What. The. Hell?

"WHY ARE YOU THREATENING ME?!"

Tony laughs off to the side through the lectures on manners T'Chaka, N'Yami, Ramonda and Shuri lay on T'Challa.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
With This Ring, I Thee Wed

Chapter Summary

For ylaris

"Big Man in a suit of armour; take that off, what are you?!"

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Again, Shuri is older than MCU Shuri.
I had fun with Steve's vocabulary XD
The Art of Manliness.
Flapperspeak.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Steve Rogers considered himself to be a good man; he stood up for the little guy, did what he thought was right, and never backed down from bullies.

And damn but was Stark one hell of a bully.

"Dammit, why is it crying again Maria?! Can't you get the damn thing to shut up for five minutes?!!"

Since waking up seventy years after putting the Valkyrie beneath the frozen waters, Steve had been feeling out of sorts and left adrift; his best friend and brother gone, and a dance with his best gal forever stolen by time.

But he persevered, kept going onwards for the sake of those who needed him to, who needed some guidance and someone to look up to.

Like how he had looked up to Howard Stark.

"What are you doing in here?! Get out of my workshop before you break something important! People depend on my inventions!"

Receiving the file detailing Howard's death had been hard, but he had been interested in Howard's son; a close link to a dearly departed friend, with whom Steve could reminisce and learn intimately how Howard's life had progressed.

But then he had received Stark's file.
"Hold this, I need my hands free while I- Dammit I had just finished welding that! Why the hell did you drop it?!"

How on Earth Howard had gotten such a gadabout for a son, Steve had no idea; Howard was a hard worker, eager to see what the future could hold and endlessly patient when explaining things or dealing with difficult people.

Yet his son was an obvious fop.

"Even after I put you into Huntington’s, you're still so pathetic?! Why can't you be useful?!"

Sure, some of the files may have exaggerated a situation, that was to be expected and no one was immune to such mistakes; Steve himself had been subject to mission reports claiming he had single-handedly saved a town of five hundred from a million and three HYDRA agents or something, so the most outlandish of Stark's files were taken with a grain of salt, but the endless stories of parties, of drinking, of drugs, and debauchery, they couldn't all be wrong, couldn't all be exaggerated.

Stark was honestly an unlicked cub. When he wasn't being a party-boy, he was like a robot, never showing any emotion, as though no one deserved to see that he was still human, not the god-like being he tried to present himself as.

"Are you crying?! When will you learn?! Stark men are made of iron! Never let them see you bleed! They are vultures that will tear you apart!"

It seemed like Stark was trying to do good with the Iron Man armour, but honestly, Stark was so ill suited to the task, his attempts to help, though moderately successful, were kind of embarrassing to watch; while the suit was impressive, the fact that Stark was so inept and caused so much damage made Iron Man's actions tainted.

Steve had no idea why Fury brought Stark in.

"You utter disgrace! Steve would be just as disappointed in you as I am! Why are you so useless Anthony?!"
"Hello, my name is T'Chaka. Could I possibly ask you to watch over my son for a few minutes? T'Challa will get into so much mischief if one lets him."

Loki had been giving Steve a pounding, so having the alien just give up when Stark arrived and gave off a single shot felt wrong, even if Steve was a little impressed with just how much weaponry the Iron Man suit carried.

But when he told Stark of his worries, the man brushed them off, unconcerned.

So sure of his own ability to contain Loki.

"I am T'Challa ... You have very pretty eyes."

Then he just hares off after Loki and his abductor, with a glib little one liner, as though this was nothing more than a harmless game.

Why couldn't the man take this seriously?

"Tony! It's been so long! Are you here to play?"

Once they're finally on the helicarrier and listening in to Fury's talk with Loki, Steve can't help but feel further validation about Stark's behaviour when the man doesn't even show up. At least Thor is reasonable. Steve shudders to think about what would have happened if he hadn't shown up; Loki could have gotten away after all!

Steve actually manages to get the team to try and figure out what Loki's plan is, when Stark finally shows up and starts babbling away with no concern that no one but Doctor Banner understands what he's saying.

Why does he keep joking and rambling? Why can't Stark try and be helpful?

"Augh! You have to help me Tony! I normally don't mind maths, but I hate math tests! All through the chapter it's really easy, so you think you've got it and then you go into the test and it's like 'If I throw a triangle out of a car, and the car is going twenty kilometres an hour, and wind resistance is a thing that exists, how many cupcakes can Pedro buy for one human soul?' How exactly does one answer that?! Stop laughing Tony, I'm being serious!"

A while after Stark and Doctor Banner have left to the labs, and the team has tried to get some planning done, Steve thinks that maybe Stark just needs to have a serious conversation; from Agent Coulson's flustered words, Steve understands that Stark was in the middle of some sort of celebration when the call out arrived, so maybe, just maybe, his behaviour is a petty response to annoy Fury, and he doesn't actually understand how he is putting out the team.

After all, Agent Romanoff's report of Stark said he wasn't a team player, but Steve was certain even Stark could be taught.

Maybe Stark needed to actually surround himself with people who could learn to care for him instead of a never ending line of quiffs.
"Tony ... I ... I think I am in love with you."

As Steve made his way to the labs, he felt more and more assured of his thoughts.

Stark did have a bit of a cake-eater and daddy vibe to him, so he'd likely been surrounded for years by gold diggers, so he'd probably be used to people not caring, and not care about them right back; not a good way to live, but again, Stark could be taught.

Stark surely didn't want to live life alone.

"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

Steve stormed out of the labs in a rage, barely keeping himself in check.

The utter gall of Stark, treating this whole thing like a game!

Doctor Banner was at least taking things seriously, but Stark, sitting pretty in his big ugly tower (and who needs a whole dang tower?) chooses to shock the Doctor?! Yeah, sure, unleash the Hulk, kill everyone, sure it'll all be a laugh.

And all his jabs at Steve! Why the hell couldn't Stark just follow orders? Why couldn't he care about others?

"I don't think I'm ready for this. So many things could go wrong... I am so excited, but I can't seem to forget the fact that we could so easily lose them."

Steve was determined to prove Stark wrong, so he went deep into the helicarrier, searching through the darkest corners of the aircraft; if Stark was so sure that secrets were being kept, Steve would find the evidence to say otherwise.

Steve had put his faith in S.H.I.E.L.D. and that meant the organisation had his protection.

Undoubtedly, Stark had never had the desire to protect anything but himself.

Tiny chocolate fingers curl so gently around a white one that dwarves them so much. An equally tiny yawn and squeak as she cuddles deeper into the warmth of his arms and chest.

Small, small, so small. How on Earth could two such precious, tiny beings survive in a world that seemed geared towards destroying them? They cuddle close to his warmth, and it's all he can do not to crush them to his chest. They're so small.

He adores them, these precious, wonderful people who have taken him into their hearts and home. They're his, just as he is theirs, and he is a selfish man.

No. No. How could this be?
Steve looks down at the weapon cradled within the case before him, the sound of the engines drowning out most everything else this deep within the helicarrier.

Steve doesn't want to admit it, doesn't want to even think it.

Stark was right.

They keep him grounded, keep him in the present, so his mind doesn't forever float away into the future. He doesn't know what he would do without them.

Steve enters the lab and drops the missile onto one of the benches.

He needs answers, and as much as he can't stand the guy, at least Stark seems interested in getting them.

That's a lie. He knows what he'd do if they were ever taken away from him.

The argument comes from nowhere, and everyone is trying to speak over one another and finally Steve snaps at Stark.

"Big Man in a suit of armour; take that off and what are you?!"

The world would burn.

"A man who is still more than willing to punch you if it means I get back to my kids sooner!"

For a few brief seconds that lasted an eternity and a half, the lab was silent beyond the beeps and whirrs of the machines.

Stark was breathing heavily, obviously trying to calm himself, before he turned from the group and moved to leave the lab, pulling his phone from his pocket to his ear.

Before the door closed behind him, all could just make out the excited voice on the other end of the line squeal out.

"Papa!"

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Shi_Toyu

"You are not allowed in here. Leave. Tony is mine!"

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE! XD

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Migraines suck.

Like, on a scale of one-to-ten, migraines were a seventy full of suck.

No sleep was only a mere seven, no coffee was a thirty-five, and Justin Hammer was at fifty-two, but migraines beat them all.

But then there was magic.

Magic was the King, Queen and Jack of suck, hitting ninety-nine on the scale, only missing out on being the Ace of a full one-hundred by virtue of healing magic, and even then, Tony was iffy about it.

And situations like this certainly didn't help.

"Tony! Up please."

A pint sized T'Challa was scooped up into Tony's arms, where the mini Wakandan King snuggled in close, delighting in being carried.

A battle with the Serpent Society had resulted in the Black Panther being injected with acidic venom, and in a bid to save him, Doctor Strange tried to reverse the venom's path.

It would have worked had Stephen not been so exhausted already from the battle.

Spells are infinitely intricate and tricky things, requiring a firm, yet gentle touch, endlessly fragile while impossibly strong.

Doctor Strange had ended up, through a mess of exhaustion, panic and the bending of a pinkie that he shouldn't have, reversing not only the venom's path, but T'Challa's body as well, resulting in the seven year old currently cuddled into Tony's neck.
Hence Tony's migraine.

Stephen had apologised, while literally swaying on his feet, but Tony had merely shaken his head and sent the man back to his sanctuary to rest.

Which left Tony and the rest of the Avengers with taking care of the tiny T'Challa.

T'Challa appeared fairly mature for his age -speaking politely, rather obedient to instruction, seeming rather calm- and given how he had latched onto Tony and hadn't once asked about his home or family, there was a chance that he retained some form of memory, though he had actually outright hissed and bared his teeth after the battle when Steve had tried to pick him up. He had claimed that Steve hadn't asked, nor had T'Challa indicated he wished to be carried, which was fair, but Tony had still had to explain why T'Challa should have used his words.

At least T'Challa had promised not to do that again.

They were on the third day since the magic mishap, and Wong had called to let them know that Stephen had recovered and would be by in a few hours to correct his mistake.

The Avengers were relieved at the news, given that little T'Challa wasn't particularly open with them, preferring to be around Tony above all others. T'Challa himself didn't seem to care, contenting himself with draping himself in Tony's lap when the genius was seated, or requesting to be carried for cuddles.

And slipping from his bed each night to join Tony.

Clint had come in that first morning to wake Tony, and received a dozen pillows to the face courtesy of an unhappy T'Challa standing guard -literally- over a confused and sleepy Tony.

"You are not allowed in here. Leave. Tony is mine!"

It had really set the tone. T'Challa would hang out and interact with the team, but by all signs, he was completely miserable. At least until Tony turned up, then he was sunshine and lollipops, with nothing wrong in the world.

Unless someone tried to touch Tony of course.

"No! You are not allowed! Leave! Leave now! Tony is mine!"

T'Challa stuck to Tony during meal times and movies, and refused to sleep in his own bed beyond the few hours that first night.

So yeah.

Migraine.

It wasn't like Tony had a problem with T'Challa per se. Hell, when T'Challa was his normal height and age, he very, very much didn't have a problem with T'Challa. The kid thing was throwing Tony off though.

Tony liked kids well enough, though likely wouldn't ever have any of his own, and kids generally didn't care about his reputation, they just wanted to hang out. But it was hard for him not to recognise that the tiny one seeking cuddles and laughter and protection was still the gorgeous beefcake of a man that gave Tony many a pleasant dream.
And that was not a pleasant thing for him to feel.

Strange needed to hurry up.

Though some details were fuzzy, T'Challa remembered his time returned to his youth and it was ... humiliating, to say the least.

He had, for months, been striving to appear as an intelligent, caring suitor to the most amazing man he had ever met ... and then as a child basically stalked Tony without shame!

T'Challa muttered an oath as he stared at the ceiling from his bed.

He could understand latching onto someone in those circumstances, he could understand clinging to what was familiar, he could forgive sticking close to an unknown that proved friendly, but by the Panther god, T'Challa had been whiney, arrogant and selfish, demanding all of Tony's time and attention, even going so far as to commandeer the man's bed!

And, at least to himself, T'Challa wasn't too proud to admit being jealous that his younger self had succeeded in that certain something that he had not.

Goodness, but how on Earth was Tony to take T'Challa as a serious suitor now? His whole plan was ruined!

T'Challa would be reserving strong retaliation should he ever cross paths with the Serpent Society again, that was for sure.

"Hey, Cat Damon, you got a minute?"

T'Challa shot up from his lying repose to sit, wide eyed at Tony.

"For you Tony, I have two. How may I assist you?"

T'Challa could feel his heart pounding in his chest, and could only be glad that his voice had remained steady. Tony smiled and took a step further into the room, lightly wringing his hands.

"I just wanted to make sure you were okay. Strange said you'd probably remember a lot from the last few days, and it's gotta be screwing with your head a little, so ... I'm not actually sure where I'm going with this; I figured I could be a sounding board if you needed one, or I could try to answer questions you may have or something like that oh god why am I still talking why are you letting me talk, this was a stupid idea I'm just gonna leave now sorry bye."

T'Challa was up and in front of Tony, gently holding onto a wrist, just as the man finished speaking and began to turn to leave.

"Please ... please don't ... I have never wished for you to leave."

The surprise on Tony's face was both sweet, and painful.

"Excuse me, T'Challa. Have you seen Tony? It's games night and he's mine for-"

A dozen pillows went flying straight into Clint's face, sending the archer to the ground with a startled squawk, courtesy of an unhappy T'Challa standing guard over a confused and sleepy Tony.

"You are not allowed in here. Leave. Tony is mine!"
Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
The sun had set hours ago, the red that painted the sky growing thinner and thinner until the deep blue coloured all, marred only by the seemingly never ending lights of the city trying to cover the stars and smother the moon.

It was nights like this, as T'Challa looked over his work, that he hated this damn city.

New York, the city that never sleeps, was a crowded cesspit of debauchery, violence and sin, and no one stayed innocent for long.

T'Challa couldn't help the sigh as he thought of how many kids in his street had already seen men killed, women abused, and kids -both others and themselves- forced to the streets desperate for anything they could get their hands on to survive.

Hell, T'Challa had nearly been one of them.

His father, T'Chaka, had nearly saved up enough to move the family out of this forsaken pit, when he was killed at the bank one day, and the murderer stole every coin to their name.

T'Challa was still hunting the bastard down, for forcing T'Challa and Shuri to make their own way so young.

It had been Tony who had saved them, taken them under his wing.

A sudden cough broke T'Challa's train of thought, and he returned his gaze back to the man strung up from one of the warehouses cross beams.

Justin Hammer was scum that had managed to trick, steal and scam his way to the top of the food
chain into becoming a rich business owner, and had then inserted himself into the city's underbelly, claiming himself king.

Well, tried to anyway.

Despite the grotesque nature of the city's daylight hours, there was some beauty to be found in the dusk, and the residents didn't take kindly to vermin like Hammer infringing upon it.

In particular, the Avengers refused encroachment on their turf.

And when big shots like Hammer start combing the streets after hours, looking for kids to be put to work in his factories for half a damn pittance if that, and offering dope for more money than a month's worth of groceries, actions were always taken.

New York may be sinkhole of depravity, T'Challa may hate it with most everything he had, but it was still his home, still where he and his sister made their beds, still where Tony was.

A wet chuckle spilled like blood from Hammer's lips.

"Heh. Don't really know what I was expecting, going up against Iron Man's guard dog."

T'Challa felt his lips curl in a sneer.

"You are a fool to believe me a lowly dog."

A confused look from Hammer as T'Challa drew closer, changing to undisguised fear when he caught sight of the gleaming claws over T'Challa's fingers.

"I trail no leash for any to carry. One must earn my loyalty."

A scream rends the fake silence of the night, yet all who hear it turn their gaze elsewhere.

*See no evil,* and you keep your eyes.

*Speak no evil,* and you keep your tongue.

*Hear no evil,* and you keep your ears.

And heaven forbid you be a repeat offender.

That's the street law in this side of New York, and why they smuggled Hammer into Hydra territory to deal with him.

It's both a message, and a threat.

T'Challa cleans his claws, and the team moves to erase all signs of their presence, bar the deep slash through Hammer's throat.

When they leave, the police won't find even a hair from them, and Hydra will be frothing at the mouth trying to figure out how the Avengers snuck in.

It's their own fault really.

They were the fools who had tried to capture Iron Man.

T'Challa smirked as he slid into his car.
Tony had no interest in playing nice with them anymore.

Pulling up to the estate, T'Challa took a slow breath before he left the car and moved to the front door, where Jarvis answered before he could even knock.

"Sir is in his study."

Following a well tread path, T'Challa knocked thrice on the study door before entering, unconsciously drinking in the sight of the man sitting at the desk.

Brown hair that was surprisingly soft, warm golden skin, a slim, firm body with legs that went on and on, and an ass that wouldn't quit for love or money.

But really it was the eyes.

Molten amber and whiskey and gold, warm you to your heart, and freeze your soul cold. Softer than lambskin and yet diamond hard, as smooth as fresh honey, yet as piercing as a metal shard.

A deep chuckle filled the air.

"You've got your poetry look on again. Tell me my stella, what part of me has your mind wandering this time?"

T'Challa couldn't help his sheepish smile.

"Your eyes. It's almost always your eyes."

Tony laughed again, gesturing to the seats off to the side.

The country knew of Anthony Edward Stark, the great businessman who controlled most of the city, but that was essentially the man's day job, the persona he wore for the masses to observe and consume, inherited from his father.

Antonio Eduardo Carbonell, the most powerful man in the New York underworld, and co-leader of the Avengers however, was when the mask came off, and he took reign of his mother's legacy.

No matter how much any denied it, from dawn to dusk till dawn again, Tony owned this city.

Taking a seat and waiting until Tony finished with the final forms before making his way over, T'Challa simply breathed.

He hated New York, steeped with hatred and crime and disgust, haunted by the hardworking and the innocents stolen too soon, and plagued by a seemingly never-ending supply of vermin and filth.

But slowly, carefully, with infinite patience and skill, Tony was fixing it.

Tony had no interest in being the ultimate mob-lord like Schmidtt, couldn't give a damn worth being the unchallenged messiah that Loki strove to be, had zero care for being the benevolent dictator Doom professed himself as.

No, Tony simply saw himself as the man behind the scenes making the machinery work.

Orphanages set up outside the city, and transportation for the kids stuck on the streets to get there as often as possible.
Well paying jobs for any who could apply as best he could.

Cleaning the streets of the likes of Stane, Vanko and Hammer, before their poison could spread too far.

And never allowing the cracks of his humanity to show to those who crossed him.

Iron Man they called him, those who slept soundly beneath his protection.

Iron Man they called him, those who knew their jobs were secure.

Iron Man they called him, those who had houses safe from intrusion.

Iron Man they called him, those who feared to suffer his wrath.

Iron Man.

Iron Man.

Iron Man.

And somehow, someway, he had chosen T'Challa.

The man's delicious weight settled into T'Challa's lap as perfectly plush lips caressed his own, and of their own accord, T'Challa's hands moved to cradle the man.

T'Challa worked for Tony, as he owed Tony for taking him and Shuri in so long ago, and asking nothing of them, despite what Stane had so vehemently claimed, despite what Vanko had spat out, despite what Hammer had so dearly believed.

T'Challa was Tony's lead enforcer, but he was no dog.

He was a Panther, whose loyalty had been earned.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Curing Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy

Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

An apple a day keeps the Doctor away, but if the Doctor is cute, screw the damn fruit.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

I know nothing factual about how emergency rooms work.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

\textbf{STARK, Anthony E, M.D.}

\textit{Ugh, why do I have to fill out these damn reports so often? Like, for every single patient? Boring. But Pepper yells at me otherwise so whatever, let's do yet another piece of paperwork that is slowly destroying the environment, okay? :)}

\textit{So it's Friday, I'm in the last ten minutes of the triple shift from hell -I am not exaggerating! Romanoff, Barton and Rogers all bailed, and the Maximoff interns disappeared twenty minutes into their shifts too!- and only Rhodey, Vision and I have been taking care of the emergency room for almost a full thirty hours. I am at that point of exhaustion where anything and everything is hilarious, Rhodey is not far behind, and Vision had reached that really slow blinking stage, as we finally hit a lull in the incoming patients.}

\textit{We're counting down the clock, having just received news that Thor, Bruce and Strange's team are almost there to clock in, so we can leave for the next couple days to recover when a few people stumble in, blood on face and limbs and the young woman of the group looking close to freaking out, which I don't blame her given the amount of said blood. Rhodey, being the most empathetic of us given the hour of work, takes the young woman aside and gently calms her down and questions her; see RHODES, James R, M.D. for more details there. Vision takes care of larger of the two men; see Vision, Aisling S, M.D. for more details. And lucky, lucky me took the last.}

\textit{Damn I need coffee.}

\textit{Or sleep, I've reached the point where I really don't care.}

\textit{Patient about 36 years old, male, Wakandan tourist I'd say, given his accent.}

\textit{Decided that parkour would be a hoot.}

\textit{He has never done parkour before, but has seen a couple of youtube videos on it and thought 'How hard can it be?'}
Answer? As hard as the concrete you slammed into face first.

So yeah, broken nose that was bleeding a lot, a friend who is in a similar state for the same reasons, and a terrified little sister who was looking for her brother and found the two idiots lying on the ground, moaning in pain, and covered in blood.

I set his nose, cleaned him up, gave him some painkillers and sent him off, then sat down to write this stupid report that honestly could have waited until I was functioning on more than coffee and spite and now I am done, I am heading home, leave me alone.

Tony Stark.

______________________________

STARK, Anthony E, M.D.

So, about a week ago, I wrote a report on a guy who very much failed at parkour, and it seems he only sort of learned a lesson from that experience.

He came in today, covered in blood, with his little sister freaking out, which again, I don't blame her for.

Turns out he decided he wanted to try to backflip into his hotel pool.

But hey, not parkour, right?

He re-broke his nose, but I was able to set it back in place again, and he had gashes all over his face that I cleaned and sterilised. None of them needed stitches, but I gave the guy a lecture on letting his body heal, which included not doing stupid things so soon after he was treated; we are not videogame characters you know?

He looked like a soaked kitten once I was done.

Tony Stark.

______________________________

STARK, Anthony E, M.D.

Broken nose guy was in again, for -you guessed it- another broken nose.

At least this time wasn't his fault; he and his sister had been walking in central park when a group playing ultimate Frisbee managed to catch him hard.

I managed to set his nose again, but the cartilage can only take so much damage you know. I'm actually impressed that this third break was able to set so cleanly.

He was really embarrassed, and slunk away as soon as he was able.

Tony Stark.

______________________________

STARK, Anthony E, M.D.

... We lost a little girl in transit today. She was on oxygen, and shuffled in her sleep, blocking the tube. No one noticed.

I didn't notice.
Rogers came up to me, with that damn self-righteous pity on his face, and told me that 'We can't save everyone.'

I do not apologise for punching him.

I accept my two week suspension of duties, and will look back over my actions when I am in a better frame of mind to do so, but I do not, and will not apologise.

I had told that little girl that everything would be okay. I told her parents all would be well.

I was wrong.

Tony Stark.

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**BANNER, R, Bruce M.D.**

Male Patient.

36 years old.

Wakandan Heritage.

Came in with sister, bearing injuries up his right leg. Questioning resulted in informing us of a close-call car collision, wherein the patient and his sister were waiting at a crossway when a car mounted the pavement and clipped the patient. No obvious signs of breaks, and scans taken confirmed.

Injuries were cleaned and bandaged, none needing stitches, and painkillers prescribed.

Patient asked after Doctor Stark before leaving.

I hope Tony's okay.

Bruce Banner.

---

**STARK, Anthony E, M.D.**

Broken nose and car leg guy turned up again, and I'm kinda curious how he's still alive if he's this damn accident prone.

Today's misadventure?

"Takotsubo Cardiomyopathy?"

T'Challa couldn't help the smirk that curled his lips at the sound of pained disbelief leaving Doctor 'Call me Tony' Stark's throat.

"Indeed. I was unsure of what I was suffering so I looked up the symptoms. And you have been most gracious in looking after me before, I had hoped you would be able to help me now."

Tony started giggling, desperately trying to stifle the sound, and T'Challa couldn't help the full smile in return.
"Very smooth Kit-Kat."

Getting a date.

Tony Stark.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For MistressLuna

"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

There is some pretty deep emotional gut-punching in this chapter so, heads up, and tread carefully.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A low groan escaped his lips as T'Challa slowly stretched the aches from his body.

Truly, there was an obscene amount of paperwork involved in running a kingdom, even for one as unified as Wakanda, and there were times, like now, when he could feel every hour hunched over his desk.

By the Panther God, he felt old.

"Oh for goodness sake, you are sickeningly young Lucipur; if anyone gets to complain about the pains of age and desk hunching, it's me, capiche?"

T'Challa sighed, and finally moved to leave his office, nodding to the Dora Milaje as he made his way to his room.

He had been working since lunch, but the sky was dark now, and filled with Winter's wind, and though he hadn't eaten, he could find no appetite beyond his exhaustion.

"Coffee counts as food! It does! Do not raise those judgey eyebrows at me!"

Releasing a small, tired chuckle as he prepared for bed, T'Challa looked over the frames hanging from the walls.
So many years, captured in singular moments, thousands of stories remembered from a lone image.

“So, if I connect the final wire here, that means we should have-”

A mechanical whirr cut off his words, but not the cheers when the little bot regained control of his body, letting out a loud series of beeps and chirps, telling any and all of his delight, laughter ringing out into the air in accompaniment.

It was wonderful.

“You know, with the amount of germs that collect on our skin, it's actually healthier to kiss than shake hands.”

“...”

“...”

“Why is that so effective? Get over here.”

It was calming.

“Hey, welcome back. I'm just finishing up here, but I got you something. I left it on your pillow.”

A distracted hand waved towards the bedroom and, curiosity piqued, the box on the pillow was quickly investigated.

For an eternity contained within a moment, shocked silence reigned.

“...You got me a ring?”

It was utterly heart-breaking.

“NO!”

The battle had been long and hard, a never ending army constantly hammering at whatever was in reach. No one could have foreseen Doom and Ultron joining forces in this way, the murderous AI greatly enhancing Doom's robots to cause as much devastation as they could.

T'Challa didn't even know what Tony had done to finally switch off the robots, but it had angered the two villains so much, they had instantly gone for the armoured avenger.

Doom's magic had stripped Tony of his suit, and Ultron's hand had gone straight through.

The rest of the battle was a blur from there, T'Challa's vision a complete daze, only sharpening for the briefest moments when he glanced at Tony's body.

All he could really remember was falling to his knees when all was done, crying into Tony's hair as he held him close, begging for his Love to wake up.
T'Challa sighed deeply, dragging his hands over his face to dry the few tears.

It was a pain that never lessened.

______________________________

Sipho didn't understand where her Papa was.

Her Papa had just always been there, always able to come home, no matter how grievous the injury may have been, and even against medical orders just to see her.

She didn't understand how he wasn't able to now.

Vitale didn't want to understand where his Papa was.

He had gone silent, occasionally whistling the first few bars of his Papa's favourite songs, before breaking off in tears, when the one he wanted to join in never did.

He didn't want to understand what had happened.

T'Chama understood too well where his Papa was.

He breathed deep, straightened his spine, clenched his fists, and kept moving forward, dealing with the problems that arose, and helping his siblings as best he could.

He understood too well his Papa was gone.

T'Challa held all three of them close, as close as they would let him, as often as they let him.

It didn't matter that they were a young woman and teenagers now.

They were missing their most important member.

______________________________

T'Challa slid into the cool sheets of a far too empty bed.

Even though no one had shared it with him for many years, he still found himself reaching to the other side hoping, wishing, that perhaps this was all some terrible dream, that he would wake up, and Tony would be there again.

But just like every night, the ritual remained unchanging, and T'Challa felt the heavy reminder that Tony was gone.

______________________________

But their children were Starks after all.

Though T'Chama was first, soon after Vitale and Sipho had pulled themselves up by the boot straps, and forced themselves to continue on.

It was utterly humbling to watch.

Vitale and T'Chama smoothly inserted themselves into SI with Harley and Peter, bolstering the company in the wake of such a great loss, protecting the interests of the hundreds of thousands employed under the SI banner.

Sipho had thrown herself head first into the political arena, learning everything she could about how the system works, how it doesn't work, how to fix it, and how to play it to your advantage.
T'Challa could not deny his shock when his princess managed to have Doom removed from Latveria permanently.

And he is just so proud.

The lights turn off and T'Challa feels his breathing slow as he relaxes further into the bed.

He knows Tony would be so proud of their kids too.

"Uncle!"

Unable to suppress his smile, T'Challa quickly scooped up his precious niece, adoring that even as a teenager, she relished in physical affection, demanding cuddles and hugs from all her loved ones.

"And how have you been, Little Antonia?"

She was the only child between Shuri and James, though certainly not for lack of desire. Shuri, after having been surrogate for Sipho, Vitale and T'Chama, had been well prepared for her own kids (and how blessed T'Challa was for Shuri's generosity in carrying his and Tony's children) but had been shocked to discover that Little Antonia's birth had rendered her unable to carry another.

Shuri and James had been saddened that they wouldn't make Little Antonia a big sister, but at least she was never lacking for company from her cousins, who all adored her.

"Missing my namesake, but I know you must be missing him more, so I came for emergency cuddles."

T'Challa holds her tightly while tears fall from his eyes.

The ache in his chest is ever present, and seems heavier when he's alone.

At least he no longer bears the burden of the reigning Monarch.

With Sipho carrying the weight of the crown, coming to T'Challa for advice and aid, it's just a bit easier for T'Challa to breathe.

It slows even more as he finally falls to sleep.

He is walking through a field, golden as honey, and warm as Summer sun.

It is odd.

He feels ... light. In a way he hasn't felt since-

"I wondered when I'd see Calcifurr."

For a moment, a great and terrible moment, he thinks he has gone mad, but he still turns, still must see, must find out-

Brown hair softly curling, a gorgeous smile framed by a beard, eyes as warm as the air around them, and a gentle laugh more familiar than anything.
"Miss me T'Challa?"

He throws his arms around Tony, holding him tightly as he hasn't been able to for over three decades.

"How? How are you here? How is it that I have you with me once more?"

Tony's arms tighten around T'Challa in turn.

"Oh T'Challa, don't you remember our vows?"

A breathless laugh escapes him as he pulls back enough to see his husband, a smile that hasn't curled his lips since Tony's death.

"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

Tony smiles back at him

"For as long as you hold my heart T'Challa, you are just as much mine, and I know you'll never let go."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
T'Challa's eyes narrowed as his hand hovered over his study's door handle.

Something was not right.

Taking a deep breath, and focusing on acting naturally, T'Challa carefully opened the door and swiftly scanned the room, finding nothing amiss.

He fought not to grit his teeth, an obvious sign of displeasure, and moved to his desk slowly, still searching the room for whatever was setting him off.

He still found nothing.

A quick check to his chair and desk showed nothing wrong, and his terminal was in proper order too.

Sitting down, T'Challa couldn't help the feeling of unease roiling in his gut.

"Not too shabby."

The sudden voice had T'Challa jumping from his chair to face the man who had stepped from shadows too light for him to have realistically hidden within.

T'Challa's fist clenched.

"To what do I owe this unexpected visit, Director Fury?"

Fury let loose a small chuckle.

"Nothing beyond the concerns of an old man."

Fury moved to take the sit in front of T'Challa's desk and gestured for T'Challa to sit once more, who was busy sending off silent notifications to the Dora Milaje that someone had gotten through their defences, which as a matter of pride was unacceptable.

"I received information that you've decided to partner yourself to Stark."

T'Challa bristled at the tone Fury's voice took when mentioning Tony; it was infuriating how so many looked down on Tony, as though the kindest, gentlest man T'Challa had had the privilege to
meet was somehow lesser than everyone else.

"If you have secreted your way into my country simply to join the ranks of those who have warned me of the 'futility' of entering a relationship with Tony, you had best be prepared to secret yourself back out quickly, for the Dora Milaje will spare nothing in hunting you down."

Fury merely smirked.

"Oh I'm not here to tell you of any futilities, Highness."

The man leaned over the desk and set his eye to T'Challa's.

"I'm here to prove that there is nowhere on this planet you can hide from me if you screw Tony Stark over."

What?

Fury loomed closer.

"I have spent more time, resources and effort in keeping that boy alive than anyone on the planet. I may be down an eye, but I am not blind; Tony Stark is one of the most valuable men this hunk of rock has. And despite what the rest of the world may believe, I actually care about his happiness and well-being. So here I am as proof, your Highness, that I am very serious about what I can do to you, if you ruin a damn good thing."

The words are enough of a shock, that T'Challa doesn't even register when Fury leaves.

Instead he reaches for his phone.

"Heya Puddy Tat. What's up?"

T'Challa cannot hide his helpless grin.

"Do you remember telling me the story of how you first met Fury when he broke into your home?"

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Kage

Food is Love.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

T'Challa groaned as he stretched, feeling the pull of stiff muscles as he straightened from his hunch over the table.

The meeting had been going on for close to six hours now, and they still weren't done, only taking a lunch break because people were struggling to stay focused over all the growling stomachs.

He waited for the mass exodus to slow a bit before moving to leave himself, though halted when he realised someone was still seated at the table.

"Mr Stark? Are you not going to get food?"

The Iron Man pilot's eye briefly flicked up from the tablet he was working on to look at T'Challa before retuning to the screen.

"I've got a couple things to finish up real quick, I'll be gone in a few Chairman Meow."

Wrinkling his nose at the reference of the Chinese Leader, a leader T'Challa did not seek to emulate, and the dismissal, T'Challa left the room, quickly meeting up with Okoye and Ayo.

Ayo was smiling, and by the time T'Challa had collected his food from the special stasis container they had brought from Wakanda, he sighed.

"Alright, what has you smirking so?"

Ayo smiled wider.

"Chairman Meow."

T'Challa felt his lips curling down, and was about to reprimand her when she continued.

"A character from western fiction, he is a tiny little kitten owned by a warlock."

T'Challa is speechless in realisation, while Okoye speaks up to admonish Ayo's love of outside literature.

Stark wasn't being insulting, he was just making another of his endless cat references.

"-and besides, he could have been referring to the ever-victorious leader of the Kitty Revolution."
T'Challa just blinked in befuddlement as his bodyguards begun a quiet argument on which cat Stark had called T'Challa after.

Sighing, T'Challa decided to leave them to it as he looked for a place to eat his meal, before deciding to just return to the conference room.

He carefully balanced the two plates as he made his way back to the conference room, the women following him bickering quietly all the while.

He was so glad to have brought the stasis container so he could enjoy proper Wakandan food; American food wasn't bad per se, but T'Challa had missed the comforts of home, and was delighted to have the plates of Wakandan savouries and desserts.

When he entered the room, he froze.

Stark was still seated at the table, working on his tablet -two of them now- and had even pulled out his laptop and was tapping away at it as well.

T'Challa slowly reclaimed his seat nearby the engineer and watched as he ate the meal before him.

Stark just kept working, at an impressive speed, constantly switching between devices and then bringing out his phone to make some calls.

By the time T'Challa had cleared his plate, Stark had started and finished five calls, pulled out another tablet, and appeared to have designed eight different systems for water purification.

And he hadn't realised T'Challa had entered the room.

T'Challa looked at his plate of desserts -small pastries and cakes and semi-frozen treats- and sighed before pushing it within reach of the other man.

A few moments later, a distracted hand wandered over to the plate a snagged a berry pastry and brought it to Stark's mouth.

After a single bite, the man froze and looked at the treat in shock before swinging his gaze to T'Challa.

"What the hell did I just put in my mouth?"

T'Challa wants to be insulted, and he is a little, because the berry pastry is delicious, but he knows that not everyone, even in Wakanda, likes the same food he does.

"It is a Wakandan treat. You have been in this room working for almost half an hour now, when you should be resting and recharging for however long the meeting with the Accords Council drags out to. You need to eat, but I am sorry that it was not to your liking."

The look Stark gives him is one of insulted confusion.

"Not to my liking? You do realise that sentence makes it sound like people exist who don't love the heavenly orgasm I just put in my mouth, right? Oh Thor, don't tell me there are people who don't like this. Are they insane? Have no tastebuds? Nazis? Are they Nazis? I bet Nazis are the only people who don't like this piece of perfection!"

Stark continues to speak on the virtues of the pastry he slowly consumes, somehow both condemning those who don't enjoy it and flirting with the pastry in the same words, before landing
his curious gaze over the plate of desserts.

"Out of scientific curiosity, what else is resting on this plate of seeming deliciousness?"

Chuckling helplessly at the other man, T'Challa leaned forward and quickly grabbed the plate.

"A selection of my favourite desserts, but you have to share."

Though pouting, Stark indeed shared the sweets, and after the meeting ended close to ten that evening, Stark invited T'Challa, Okoye and Ayo to dinner.

"I know some excellent Italian places that are still open this late, and I owe you for lunch."

The dinner is truly delicious.

It somehow becomes routine after that during the weeks of far-too-long-meetings they both sit and suffer through; T'Challa will share lunch with Stark, because the genius continues to work through lunch, and Stark will take T'Challa and whoever his guards are that day to one of the many restaurants in the area that Stark thinks they'll enjoy.

Stark is not wrong once.

Stark even becomes Tony.

They have been at this for a month when T'Challa finds himself stopped before he can leave for the latest -and hopefully last if all goes well- meeting by Aneka and Tetu handing him an extra plate to store in the stasis container, loaded with an absolutely decadent berry dessert and both women give him stern looks.

"You need to ask him out your Highness. Your pining is getting embarrassing."

T'Challa cannot help but think of their words through the first half of the meeting, missing pretty much everything being said around him. Somehow he is not called upon, either for his opinion or for ideas, he can only thank the Panther god for that mercy, and on auto-pilot moves to retrieve lunch for himself and Tony when the break is called.

It is only when he is once more sitting at the table, sharing food with Tony, that T'Challa takes a deep breath and lifts one of the desserts.

"Tony?"

The other man looks over with a smile.

T'Challa takes another breath.

"Say ah."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
A is For

Chapter Summary

For Shi_Toyu and inspired by 26 Secrets About Superheroes (You're Dying To Know)

Know your Letters

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Okay this chapter has references of child abuse, nothing graphic but if it bothers you, skip the door paragraph, and a couple fade-to-black scenes, you've been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aquarium

For all its lush beauty, Wakanda was still a fairly dry country, and water not used for living was left where it fell, including the creatures within it.

So T'Challa adored walking through the New York Aquarium with Tony at his side, fingers brushing his own with every step, it was an utter delight, as he examined the thousands of different types of aquatic life around them.

Brag

T'Challa straightened his back and pulled back his shoulders, looking at the man before him with such a look of disdain, it was actually rather artistic in Tony's opinion.

"My dearest is the owner of one of the most recognised companies in the world, if not the most recognised, he was the CEO of said company for years before choosing to stand down so that he could dedicate himself elsewhere, he is formally recognised as one of the most intelligent individuals on the planet, he has one of the biggest hearts I have ever seen, an in-built generosity that is aweing to witness, he is the pilot, engineer and mechanic of the Iron Man armour, and he has an ass that is unmatched. And you are trying to tell me that your daughter is a better partner for me?"

Tony can't help but laugh as the politician stops and starts, trying to respond to a very smug looking T'Challa's bragging.
Court

T'Challa had never given much thought to how he would gain a spouse; he was a prince, he had wealth and power, he was attractive and he was intelligent. He didn't foresee any difficulties in attaining whoever caught his interest.

He hadn't foreseen Tony Stark.

Tony was everything and more that T'Challa had ever desired in a partner, from his wisdom and smarts to his curiosity and generosity. The man's appearance was nothing to scoff at either, and the way he dressed to accentuate everything was a large plus as well.

T'Challa couldn't just rely on his status to win over Iron Man, no sir! He had to pull out all the stops, with all the bells and whistles.

T'Challa glanced once more at the flowers he carried, before entering Tony's workshop.

He was going to court Tony like the man deserved!

Door

T'Challa tried his hardest to stem his tears as he gently held the ice pack to Tony's blackened eye, swallowing harshly when Tony didn't even flinch at the sudden cold.

He hated it! Hated it so much when Tony was hurt and he could do nothing! Hated when Ho-

"Hey, it's okay T'Challa. I just tripped and clipped the door handle. It's okay."

T'Challa sobbed openly as the older boy pulled him close, trying to still the shakes of a body so obviously beaten and bruised, and hugged him gently.

T'Challa hated how he could not protect Tony.

Excitement

He holds his breath, even though he doesn't mean to, even though the excitement is pumping through his veins like adrenaline.

The guests have all arrived, seated in place and the food set and waiting. His clothes are flawless and he's checked his teeth.

The music they had slaved over begins to play and he finally takes a deep breath, before moving to the door, opening it and looking across the hall to the matching doors opening to reveal his new husband.
His smile grows as they meet each other halfway.

_Freighter_

They come together, kisses hot, breathing hard, and bodies even harder, delighting in the others touch, marvelling at the feel.

The freighter jolts yet again, and they are forced even closer together, groaning long and loud at the press and heat.

They are not meant to be here, not meant to be together, certainly not meant to be intimate, but after the mission went south and they had to find as quiet a way back as possible, they cannot help but hold each other close.

Another jolt, more moans, and all thoughts but each others pleasure are gone from their minds.

_Gold_

He had been born to riches, lived in riches, seen and done pretty much all that money could buy, but none of it compares, not even a little, to the tiny being cradled in his husbands arms, worth all the gold in the world.

_Heavy_

Tony held him close, oh so close, as T'Challa's whole body shook from his tears. It wasn't right, he wasn't ready, and all he wanted was Baba.

But that couldn't happen, not anymore. T'Challa had to be strong, fierce and controlled, but just for now he clung tightly to his dearest.

Soon enough he'd fully bear the heavy weight of the crown.

_Initiative_

His dearest had been working so hard lately, bending to complete the task deemed necessary by SI's board of directors while also continuing his work with the Avengers and dealing with the Accords Council and attending The Maria Stark Foundation charity galas, and maintaining the Iron Man armour, his dearest was so tired, but had no time to rest.

But T'Challa had a plan.
It had taken careful conversations, and a little bit of underhanded threatening, but with him taking the initiative, he could surely clear the final hurdle towards Tony getting to go on vacation (perhaps to Wakanda with T'Challa, but that was neither here nor there) and rest.

"Excuse me Virginia, might I have a moment of your time?"

Jury

Everything was sore, thankfully not in an injured way, but just the general-abuses-of-daily-life-taking-their-toll way.

And it sucked.

Tony stretched slowly, letting the pull of his muscles ease just a little before he made his way to the coffeepot.

"Oh no, you do not need any caffeine my dearest. You are going to bed."

Tony felt his face transform into a snarl.

"I have just spent the last week dealing with shitty politicians, corrupt taskforces, my traitorous ex-teammates, and Thaddeus Ross. There is no jury in the world who would convict me right now. Give. Me. My. Coffee."

Later, gently sipping his life giving ambrosia, Tony still felt a little smug for the terrified look on T'Challa's face.

Knowledge

People always tried to pit them against each other the moment they were discovered together, as though it were impossible for them to find enough in common and enough in difference to ever enjoy the others company. They were simultaneously too similar ("Opposites attract, you know! Why date your practical reflection?") and too different ("How could you ever hope to understand each other? You're nothing alike!") But they ignored the naysayers of the world.

The knowledge that they had each other would pull them through.

Love

His chest always feels tight, but not because of the arc reactor. It's because of T'Challa.

It's a pretty common side effect of being in love, he's told. Constantly thinking of the one who holds your heart, feeling a tug and pull in the chest when focussing on them, and damn if you don't want to focus on them.
Tony keeps finding himself looking for the next step, what he has to do to keep this, but people don't have a next step, which is where he keeps tripping up.

But that's half the point, isn't it? People don't need a next step. You take the plunge together, and hope the fall never ends.

**Morning**

"Morning is evil. The sun is a bad place. Alcohol is never again."

Tony chuckled as T'Challa tried to burrow even deeper into his blankets.

"I told you not to drink anything Thor offered you. He's made a game of how many people he slips proper Asgardian mead to, and that stuff kicks."

T'Challa emerged from his blanket cocoon to glare a baleful eye at Tony.

"I saw you drinking it; how are you okay?"

Tony smiled indulgently as he smoothed his hand through T'Challa's hair.

"Practice at being an alcoholic T'Challa. You just rest now, you'll be fine later."

T'Challa merely pouted as he leaned into Tony's hand.

**Nap**

The warm rays of the afternoon sun were a sirens call to all sleepy geniuses it seemed, and T'Challa couldn't help the adoring smile on his lips as he watched Tony and Shuri, curled into each other on the floor near the windows napping.

**Offspring**

They stand over the crib, dazedly taking in the sight, and cannot help but repeat their thanks to Shuri, resting in the nearby bed.

Shuri is tired and hurting, but she still gifts them a smile that is two parts smug and one part joy.

"Well, your offspring is to be a future queen, so I fully expect to be lavished alongside her for my assistance."

They both laugh and hug her, before coming to finally hug their child, their precious little Sipho.
Tony loved T'Challa's voice; it was deep and smooth and delicious to hear, a treat to listen to, especially when they were being intimate.

T'Challa loved Tony's voice; it was sweet and melodic and lovely to hear, and when he sang he had the perfect pitch to reduce men to nothing.

"You know, I'm not sure I feel comfortable doing this."

"You will be fine my dearest. I promise, nothing will go wrong, you will be fine."

Tony shook his head, wide eyes darting about.

"You never make those sorts of promises T'Challa; everything bad that can happen will, just so the universe can spite you."

T'Challa chuckled, pressing a kiss to Tony's cheek.

"You have looked over the bots and your company for decades my dearest; you are more than qualified to look after our sons unsupervised for the afternoon."

"You are going to be okay my dearest, you are, just stay awake for me, okay?"

Tony forced his eyes back open, desperately fighting the exhaustion and pain his body was feeling, gripping as tightly as he could to T'Challa's hand.

"That's it my dearest, that's it. The medics will be here soon, you just need to stay strong a little longer, focus on me, my dearest."

Tony managed a gentle squeeze of T'Challa's hand, immediately receiving one in return, and forced his eyes open yet again, as T'Challa kept speaking to keep Tony awake.

It was a mutual reliance not to fall apart as they both wanted to.

He can't seem to catch his breath, every movement a jolt of exquisite agony, pain and pleasure
mixing so thoroughly he's not even sure what he's feeling.

He jolts again at the tongue that begins to lave the sweat on his chest, and cannot help the sounds that escape his throat when patterns begin being traced.

"Oh, is it too much? Do I need to stop?"

He shakes his head, revelling in the shivers that wrack his body at the others laugh.

It is too much, but it's also never enough.

Title

They had both born many titles in their lives, some they shared, most not chosen themselves -prince, heir, prodigy, genius, orphan, Merchant of Death, Black Panther, Iron Man- but they had one that they both adored.

"Husband."

Undress

"That's enough of that. I have meetings to sit through all day, stop it!"

Tony couldn't stop his laughter as he slapped away T'Challa's wandering hands, pressing a quick kiss to his husbands pouting lips.

"I know you just got here, but after today I am all yours, so behave for now, and you can undress me later."

The predatory look in T'Challa's eye as Tony left had a shiver of anticipation running down his spine.

Variable

Tony hasn't had a lot of success when it comes to relationships -Stone, Bain, Pepper, Rogers- but the only common factor between them all is him, so it makes sense that he's the problem, right? Right.

So to spare himself further heartbreak and pain, Tony took a step back, away from dating, and didn't fall back into his bed-hopping days either. Decided to just let the whole situation settle.

But then T'Challa happened.

And ... it shouldn't work, should be falling down around Tony's ears like it always does, not
It doesn't make sense, is all.

Tony was the common denominator; how does changing one variable change everything along with it?

(He knows how changing one thing changes everything, he's a genius, alright, but this is different! It is!)

He's so confused.

Worth

In Tony's defence, he had been rudely woken up from three hours of sleep after a seventy-two hour binge; of course he wasn't going to be happy!

And being woken up by his boyfriends bodyguards so that they can evaluate him? Yeah, he reacted badly.

So now he's sitting on the semi-flattened remains of his bed, nursing a bleeding nose and at least bruised ribs, and if he hasn't broken his ankle it will be a miracle.

He does feel a little vindictive glee at the shock on Nakia's face, bruised from where Tony landed a very solid hit.

"What on earth has happened here?!"

T'Challa quickly moves to Tony's side, letting Okoye continue to care for her and Nakia's cuts and bruises, and gently examines Tony's injuries.

"Was the Tower attacked? What happened my dearest?"

Tony just points at the two women who didn't enter with T'Challa.

Okoye looks unabashed at T'Challa's questioning glance.

"How else were we to determine if he was worthy of you?"

She mentions, just before T'Challa regains himself to lecture them, that Tony's hit on Nakia should suffice.

X-ray

The black and white images do nothing to counteract the gruesome nature of the injury, do nothing to hide the sight of steel rebar piercing through the flesh of his dearest's stomach.
T'Challa knows intellectually that the x-ray will help the doctors operate on Tony, but he wishes they had not left the film out in the observation room, thinking it would keep him calm. Who could keep calm knowing that their loved one was so badly hurt?

*Yearn*

They had grown up constantly surrounded by people, because of their fathers and status, and had grown to yearn for someone who could understand and wouldn't judge them for their distaste for the attention. They wanted someone who wanted *them*, instead of the attention they had.

Who better but another in the same situation?

*Zero*

They both go to sleep one night, and just don't wake up.

Tears are shed, screams are loosed and begging and pleading abound.

But nothing can be done in the end, and eventually they are released to the flames together.

They burn until they are ash, and then keep burning until even the ash is gone.

No one could bring themselves to collect it before it was claimed by fire and wind.

And when the flames died down, no one could bear to go and collect the vibranium rings that rested in the burnt dirt.

Eventually T'Chama and Vitale push themselves to retrieve their father's rings, but that space where there pyre stood is left alone, ground zero for their pain.

But they keep on.

They just keep on.

They're Stark's, after all.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
I Pray The Lord, My Soul To Take

Chapter Summary

For Kage and everyone who asked for it
A continuation of If I Die Before I Wake
Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

So I said I'd write a follow up to If I Die Before I Wake after I'd culled a few prompts off my list ...
So a few kinda turned into ... fifty ...
It's been a few years, it's a little late, but it's here!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

T'Challa breathed deeply as his father's soft voice filled the air, occasionally joined by his sister's.

Shuri was incredibly angered to have been left in Wakanda, even more so having been informed about the attack on the Accords meeting and the very real chance their father could have died had it not been for Doctor Stark's intervention, but had quickly linked her lab to Doctor Stark's to begin filtering through all the security footage from the venue as thoroughly as possible, all the while holding a conversation through her lab speakers with Doctor Stark's amazing AI Friday ("I'm not going to let a thing slip by my circuits, you can bet on it! Stark's do not take attacks lying down, and I'm as Stark as they come!") and constantly texting with Doctor Stark as he coordinated with the security teams to find out as much as he could about the attack.

"While I do not doubt your diligence, my Inkosazana, why exactly are you comparing accelerants?"

T'Challa perked up in confusion, hoping that his sister had not suddenly gotten bomb happy. Again.

Shuri merely rolled her eyes.

"Because the damage to the venue came too quickly for a standard bomb. That indicates either a top shelf model, or a specially made one. Top shelf are all pretty well regulated, so we would have a solid starting point towards finding the who. Specially made implies hand-made, which means that we have to find out what went into the bomb, so that if there is more than one, we have a better idea of what it can do.

And if it was a hand-made explosive, then the maker has access to some very potent stuff, which they likely shouldn't. Doctor Stark mentioned that for an explosion the size you suffered, the bomb was either exceedingly large -which presents a further worry of how it was smuggled past security-
or was more likely made of very restricted materials. Restricted as in 'Level Ten clearance required alongside Retina, Palm and Finger scan for authentication' restricted, at minimum."

T'Challa felt his throat tighten as his father muttered a few choice oaths under his breath.

Neither was a comforting option, but that the restricted materials one was more likely?

T'Challa found himself wrapping his arms around his father, once more so grateful for Doctor Stark bringing in his little energy shield.

A knock on the door to their rooms matched with a high chirping through the feed of Shuri's lab.

"I come bearing mysteries of the universe!"

Doctor Stark entered the room, sharing a quick hello with Shuri as she fiddled with one of her scanners, before sitting down and facing the Wakandan Royals.

"First, sit-rep; Security has forwarded all camera footage for the last four weeks to Friday. They only hold onto footage for that long, and there was a large local event being held then, one that didn't require security as strict as today, so there is a chance that the bomb may have been smuggled in then, we're making sure.

Emergency services have finished checking up on everyone, and aside from a few of the older UN reps who are now in hospital for observation, the worst injury was a broken leg, the recipient of whom is also in hospital, and apparently complaining about how hospitals are cursed to smell of camembert or something; I was only half-listening and they were on the good drugs for pain.

The venue has been all but emptied for safety reasons, but security is on site and tripled just in case anyone tries to sneak in, either our perp to get rid of possible evidence, or those weird people who go exploring abandoned and condemned buildings like they're small scale Indiana Jones or something; I don't even know, they're weird and get pissy at you when their own stupidity gets them hurt.

Romanoff was able to find a lot of fragments from the bomb -at least we think so, some of the parts look like they're from a really low tech coffee machine, and that is just an insult to coffee if it was stripped for bomb parts- and is going through the process of scanning them for Princess Shuri's perusal, as well as checking for any identifiers she might recognise.

And finally, a group of the Avengers are on their way to join us in the investigation; a few are remaining at the Avenger's Compound for now."

Doctor Stark leaned back in his chair, raising his feet to rest them on the chair next to him.

"So, how was your day?"

T'Challa huffed a little, still reeling from the amount Doctor Stark had managed to accomplish in the last two hours.

T'Chaka spoke.

"Exhausting and not nearly as productive, I'm afraid. Aside from the last fifteen or so minutes talking to my daughter, I have spent all the time since evacuation talking down my council about cancelling Wakanda's reopening to the rest of the world. They seem to think it a waste of time."

Doctor Stark rolled his eyes with a loud groan.
"Advisory boards are necessary, I get that, but they are always somehow full of people who aren't willing to go beyond the box and try something new. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, and then we stagnate as a species!"

Both Wakandan men smiled at the genuine distaste in Doctor Stark's voice as he began ranting.

While they could understand where the council was coming from, especially after this attack, both men were thinking of the long term.

Wakanda had been safe for so long thanks to the superiority of their technology, but as already proven by aliens, Ultron, and Doctor Stark himself, that gap was no longer so wide as to be the moat around a castle. Yes Wakanda was still at the top of the list, but if the current trend continued, they could be overthrown from their once lofty position.

This was the time, while they were still ahead to make up alliances and trade agreements, strengthen bonds and borders, and actually interact with the rest of the planet openly, instead of on the sly every few years.

And forging a working relationship with none other than Doctor Anthony Edward Stark, was a very, very good way to start.

Doctor Stark wound down his spiel about board members and further sunk into his chair, rubbing gently at his left arm as he closed his eyes for a moment. T'Challa saw the deep bags under the other man's eyes, and the ever so faint tremor running through his body.

The man was clearly overworked and over-tired, but he kept going, kept working and putting one foot in front of the other, just like everyone else on the planet.

It was humbling in a way.

A person could barely turn around these days without hearing something about Stark Industries and it's owner, and so much of it was so ... fantastical.

Constant reimagining's of the building of the first armour in a cave, endless depictions of the fiery god laying waste to his foes, countless reshowing's of red and gold carrying a missile through a portal, whispers told of the phoenix who drowned only to rise from the snow, stories claiming he became Icarus and came too close to the sun only for his wings to become a monster, woeful mutterings about a tired man who was paying for sins not his own.

And he kept on.

Just kept on.

The man in question startled a bit when his phone began blaring the guitars from some song or another, and quickly moved to answer the call.

"You have my attention, go."

The utterly pained face he pulled at whoever was on the other end, made T'Challa want to comfort him.

"That? That is not a good. That is several not a good's, and requires far more caffeine than I think the human body is able to survive to deal with."

A brief moment of Doctor Stark listening when all colour faded from his face.
"Please, if you have ever in your life held positive feelings towards me, tell me you're joking."

Another brief moment, and then Doctor Stark gently rested his forehead on the table.

"I'll see what I can come up with. Keep me informed."

The call ended, and the man gave out a heart-rending whimper.

T'Challa, eyes wide, actually took a step forward, intending to comfort the man.

But before he could get close enough to actually do anything for the other man, Doctor Stark was up on his feet and a look of determination resting on his features.

"Romanoff was looking through the more recent security footage when the team arrived and Rogers was with her when they came across images of an individual seemingly planting the bomb. Friday is still properly checking the footage, but it appears to have been James Barnes and Rogers has run off to 'save' him."

Doctor Starks fingers raised to mark the word, and he sighed, running a hand through his hair, before lifting his phone.

"I'm going to set the rest of the team to bring the two of them in, because we need answers and Rogers is being an idiot. Anything you can think to add?"

T'Challa once more eyed the deep bags under the genius' eyes, before straightening.

"Send me with them. Though you and the Avengers are not familiar with me, I will do my best to be of aid, and if James Barnes proves to be hostile, an extra set of hands can only be for the good."

Doctor Stark appraised T'Challa silently, phone still held to his ear.

"Rhodey, Honey Bear, Sugar Drop, Platonic Light Of My Life; I need you to go collect Steve before he breaks something. I'm sending along someone to help if needed."

James 'Rhodey' Rhodes liked to think of himself as a fairly laid back individual.

Oh he could be serious when the situation called for it, and he had certainly developed quite the poker face after years of hanging out with Tony that had been invaluable throughout his career in the air force, but over all, Rhodey felt he was someone who knew how to have fun, laugh and relax.

He wished he could relax right now.

He had been flying the War Machine to Vienna to help out, about a half hour behind Steve, Sam and Maria. Pietro was still not healed enough to be out and about (a fact which was swiftly driving the younger man to madness and threats to actually tie him down if he didn't stay in the damn bed and stop trying to literally climb the walls) and Wanda was still rebalancing herself after her major loss of control in Lagos. Vision had stayed behind to keep an eye on them both, in case they needed anything.

Rhodey had pretty much just landed when he got the call from Tony.

And it probably said way too much about their friendship that Rhodey instantly agreed that Steve was going to break something.
Rhodey really didn't like the exhausted tone he could hear in his little brother's voice though.

It always seemed like Tony was going full throttle, twenty-four-seven, because there was always one more thing that the world had decided only Tony could deal with (Rhodey, Pepper and Happy did everything they could to ease the load, but there was always one more thing) and with the way Tony's mind was so damned busy, it was a wonder the man got any rest at all.

Add on his godmother's death, and Rhodey knew Tony was due a melt down.

Rhodey was waiting in the main foyer when Tony and help arrived.

The guy was wearing black armour, and speaking with Tony about it's specs. Given the light, gleeful look Tony was sporting, Rhodey was certain the armour was far more than treated leather-look-alike.

"Platypus! The Wakandans want to adopt me!"

And Rhodey experienced a minor blue screen moment.

He recovered though.

"Oh hell no! You know well and good that Momma has dibs! You really think she won't march herself right to Wakanda to drag you back home?!"

Tony started laughing, as did the older gentleman who had walked in with him and the other man.

"While I have little doubt your mother is a wonderful woman Colonel, I do not think she would be able to march over an ocean."

The guy in armour was a little stiff in his language, but Rhodey could see the humour on his face, and snorted a laugh.

"Oh boy, you are a fool to think that would be enough to stop my Momma. You ever heard the story of Moses parting the Red Sea? My Momma wouldn't need a fancy stick and higher power, she'd glare that bitch down in a hot second."

Tony just laughs harder at the confusion on the other man's face.

Natasha and Maria meet up with them by the time Tony has settled, and hands Rhodey a file.

"This is the file I put together on the Winter Soldier, and gave to Steve. For reasons I don't even want to think about, Steve decided to black out a lot of it, but thankfully the last known location wasn't one of them. Do you want me to come with, or to stay here?"

It was a fair question, and Rhodey was weighing the pros and cons as he began flicking through the file.

Natasha certainly hadn't been kidding - a lot had been blacked out, and when the current mess had been solved, Rhodey was going to get a copy of the original file Natasha had made.

"If Maria's willing to stay here and coordinate, The Black Widow is a useful person to have with us. Speaking of, what do we call you, and what can you do?"

The armoured man stood a little straighter upon being addressed.

"My name is T'Challa, but on the field I carry the title of Black Panther. I am actually not too
dissimilar from your Captain America in that I am faster, stronger and more agile than the standard person. My suit is woven with Vibranium mesh, so it is difficult to harm me, and I have decent training in tactics and general warfare. I will do my best to follow instruction, but a way that I am dissimilar to your Captain is that as the Black Panther, I do act a little more instinctually and animal like, so I apologise in advance if I give you difficulties."

It was a fair summation of his abilities, and Rhodey appreciated the frankness of T'Challa's answer.

"Alright, both of you are far more suited to fighting indoors than me if it comes to that, and we need to do our best to keep collateral damage on the low, because for all the good we try to do, right now, everyone is going to be focussing on the bad, so let's not make things worse for ourselves."

The two nodded and with a few moments to ensure everyone was on the right comm frequency, they headed to the quinjet Natasha had arrived in.

Rhodey set the War Machine armour on one of the bench seats before exiting it and moving to his team mates for the mission.

"Okay, obviously no plan ever survives first contact with the enemy, but we do have some consistencies we know about. Barnes is pretty much the cheap man's Captain America, but still high quality; HYDRA weren't able to inject him with the proper super soldier serum, but whatever it was they did give him is damn close. Strength and speed are high, and from what mission reports of his I have read, he's a slippery bastard, so he's going to be a tough one to bring in.

And I'll be frank here; even if he had nothing to do with the bombing, I want this guy brought in so we might be able to get some answers about the more mysterious Winter Soldier missions."

Natasha raised a brow.

"Steve said that aside from sort of remembering him, Barnes had no memories."

Rhodey shook his head as the quinjet finally took of, chasing after their team mates and target.

"If he had absolutely no memory, he wouldn't have been able to evade Steve for so long. More to the point, he wouldn't have been able to avoid Tony's searches for him for so long. The average person doesn't think about how many cameras there are out in the world now; it's how we have so many cell phone films about people doing idiotic shit on the internet. No, Barnes remembers enough to know that Steve is a conflict to HYDRA's mission, but is also familiar, so in his confusion he's staying away. He remembers enough that Stark means tech, and with Steve connected to a Stark both in that familiar feeling and in the now, he's been laying real low in some of the most tech free areas he can that still have a lot of people he can get lost in.

Our boy remembers, and we need to find out just how much."

Natasha and T'Challa both nod, and they get to work hashing out battle plans.

Hopefully they won't be needed.

Tony massages the bridge of his nose as he listens to Steve's impassioned spiel on 'the evilness of the Accords', and 'how they were going to turn the Avengers into attack dogs', and 'how pathetic it was that the UN had already gotten Tony, Rhodey and Natasha on a leash', and 'who the hell was that other guy', and 'Bucky's innocent' and-
"Please, sweet Tesla, please shut up."

Steve was actually shocked into silence, and Tony was quick to take advantage.

"We, the Avengers and myself, are not saying that Barnes is guilty. We are, in fact, trying to prove his innocence. To do that, we need to make one hundred percent certain that there is no doubt to his innocence. That means bringing him in and asking questions to get answers. We have called in a highly certified psychiatrist to look over Barnes and determine what sort of questions we can even ask him. Are you following so far?"

Steve managed a shaky nod, and Tony continued before he could reply.

"Right now, because of the attack on the venue and Accords meeting, as well as some of Ross' misdeeds coming to light, the Accords are on hold, and they will remain on hold until this situation is cleared up and the Avengers can be properly involved in the process. The UN is not turning us into attack dogs, they are literally asking us to listen to them if they say to stay out of their country."

Steve rallied himself.

"But if we can help we have a responsibility to! Governments with agendas-"

Tony slammed his hand onto the conference table.

"Newsflash Steve! Every human on the damn planet has an agenda! We wake up every morning and go to sleep every night with an agenda! We are BORN with an agenda! Agendas are not, in and of themselves, bad! And a country telling us they don't want our help is something we should respect!"

Steve scowled and drew himself to stand straighter.

"Compromise where you can. Where you can't, don't. Even if everyone is telling you that something wrong is something right. Even if the whole world is telling you to move, it is your duty to."

"Plant yourself like a tree, look them in the eye, and say 'No, you move'. I know the damn quote Steven and how-fucking-dare you use Peggy Carter's words about being a woman trying to make it in a workplace dominated by men in this situation?!"

Steve had startled at Tony picking up the quote, and Tony took a deep breath to calm himself.

"The actions taken in Lagos have made people scared. It doesn't matter that you didn't intend to get anyone hurt. It doesn't matter that Wanda tried her best. It doesn't matter that Rumlow had access to explosives and possibly even stole a biological agent. When people are scared, angry or hurt, they react emotionally, not logically. Ever since you and Natasha dropped S.H.I.E.L.D., and yes I am still so pissed off at you about not even giving me a heads up, people have been concerned about what stops the Avengers from becoming dictators. It takes more to ease their concern then just promises to be good."

Steve scowled again, but Tony cut him off.

"You could be the very embodiment of purity and justice and good that ever existed -and I know you are not Steven, I have heard you at a baseball game- and people still wouldn't trust you because you are too powerful. They have no way to stand up to you, to stop you, if somehow you went the other way. You may not intend to ever go evil and start kicking puppies or whatever, but
there is a chance, however small, that you could, and they want assurances against that, by proving that you can listen to them now.

Governments have the right to say we can't enter their countries. What the Accords will do is allow blanket permission, so not only will we not have to ask each and every time we cross borders, if we're chasing someone, like Rumlow, we don't have to stop if he jumps borders, we can just keep going and explain the situation once it's done. Yes, there will always be some Politian or other who wants us to do this or that which elevates them or defeats a rival or something, but just like the governments can say no to us, we can say no to them."

Steve jolted, confusion very apparent on his face.

Tony just sighed.

"You would have known that if you had read the damn thing."

The door opened before Steve could respond and T'Challa walked in, obviously noting the tension in the room, but continuing regardless.

"The psychiatrist has arrived, and Agent Romanoff is taking him down to see Sergeant Barnes. I also received a text from Shuri saying that the scans of the footage will be done within the next few minutes, so she will be calling you soon."

Tony sat down and released a deep sigh.

"Yay, good things. I like good things, and today has not had enough of them."

T'Challa gave a weary nod of agreement before making his way over and handing over a small paper bag he had been holding.

Where had it come from? Had T'Challa been holding it the whole time? Who even knew?

Damn Tony was tired.

But he brightened considerably at seeing the blueberry Danish inside.

"You need food, and James told me you appreciate blueberry items most."

Tony quirked a no doubt hopelessly fond smile at the mention of his big-brother figure.

"Rhodey is too good for this world. Thank you T'Challa."

T'Challa smiled as he took a seat of his own, and Tony eagerly dug into the pastry, ignoring Steve for the moment, as he took a little time for himself.

Rhodey had had nothing but praises for the prince's behaviour during the collection of the super soldiers and Falcon. Natasha had been fairly complimentary too, albeit suspicious of how he came about his powers.

T'Challa had managed to soothe both Sam and Barnes into letting themselves be taken to a secure site and have a psychiatrist look at Barnes -hell Barnes had been the easiest to convince apparently- and in the end the damage had amounted to a broken door because Steve immediately assumed Barnes was about to be killed (which-what? Just what?) and charged, and Steve temporarily having a broken jaw because Rhodey was the one Steve charged.

Rhodey had already shared the HUD footage of Steve's bewildered face, and it was glorious.
And the blueberry Danish was divine, he wanted ten, no twelve more! Tony turned to T'Challa to ask where he picked it up when alarms started blaring and the emergency light began flashing.

Natasha's voice burst over the comms.

"We have an active Winter Soldier! I repeat, an active Winter Soldier! Assume armed and dangerous!"

Well shit.

Steve was already gone, the door to the conference room now hanging off one hinge.

Tony sighed and looked back to T'Challa.

"No rest for the wicked."

T'Challa was already activating his suit, the black armour quickly creeping over his body.

"No rest for the virtuous either, or you would be long asleep Doctor Stark."

A helpless laugh slipped past Tony's lips, and a tiny little blush heated his cheeks as they made their way out.

They had moved swiftly, leaving the conference room and making their way to the lower levels; T'Challa to try and subdue the Winter Soldier and Tony to check on the psychiatrist.

Half of the plan worked.

T'Challa grit his teeth as they both ran into the Winter Soldier, Barnes having acquired a gun, and very intent upon leaving.

Just as Tony had said earlier, today had not had enough good things.

Barnes was fast, able to dodge or counter T'Challa's attacks, not necessarily with ease, but it wasn't as difficult as to wear him out.

He also managed to get a good kick at T'Challa's side, sending the Black Panther to the far side of the room.

T'Challa forced himself up, winded from the strike to his ribs, though thankfully nowhere nearly as bad off as he would have been without the Vibranium mesh weave.

And promptly felt his heart stutter as Doctor Stark engaged the Winter Soldier.

And may or may not have had to readjust a little, but that's neither here nor there.

Rejoining the fight gave Doctor Stark the opportunity to head further down, resuming his goal of checking on the psychiatrist, and T'Challa found himself more on the defensive than was his preference.

The Winter Soldier's training had Barnes taking advantage of every possible opening before most would even realise they existed, and T'Challa actually found himself giving his all against the other man.

It made him shudder to realise Doctor Stark had engaged in nothing more than a Tom Ford suit.
Alas, that shudder was the opening that led to his downfall, a powerful left hook and T'Challa's world went dark.

He wasn't out for long, more dazed than anything, but the temporary blindness and fall had been enough time for Barnes to escape.

"Your Highness? Your Highness?! T'Challa?! Can you hear me?!"

T'Challa turned his head, seeing the relief flash across Doctor Starks face at his movement.

"Come on, let's get you up and to the medics, just to be sure. Your father is on his way back from the embassy, and then we all need to do an information share."

With little aid from T'Challa himself, Doctor Stark pulled him to his feet, slinging an arm over his shoulder and gently walking him to the medical personnel.

Once he had been declared fit, T'Challa joined his father, a few of the Dora Milaje, Doctor Stark, Colonel Rhodes, Agent Romanoff, Agent Hill and Everett Ross in a fresh conference room.

Everett was rubbing his hands over his face as he spoke first.

"We have an active Winter Soldier who has run off, Captain America and Falcon have appeared to join him, and a lot of people who are starting to ask questions about how effective the Accords will actually be. Please, someone, give me some good news and some options."

Doctor Stark spoke up.

"Princess Shuri has contacted me with conformation that it wasn't Barnes who planted the bomb?"

Everett actually looked as though he had just started believing in a higher power.

"We don't know who they are yet, but we are able to prove that through a mix of cosmetic prosthetics and tech probably salvaged from the fall of S.H.I.E.L.D. they were able to replicate Barnes appearance very convincingly."

It was certainly a start.

"I've also informed security here to check any hidey holes for the psychiatrist; there was no body or blood, so whatever triggered the soldier probably had the guy running for cover, and if he's somehow involved, well, we need to bring him in, so I think that's good news?"

Everett was nodding.

"It is. If you could Mr Stark, please see if you can recover any footage from the consultation. Maybe we prevent a repeat of this event."

Doctor Stark nodded, pulling out a tablet and beginning to tap at it. T'Chaka began to speak.

"I truly wish to say this without being rude, but have the rest of the Avengers been kept informed about what is going on? There are news reporters about, and I do not think it would be wise to let them discover the situation through the media."

Agent Hill suddenly raised her phone to her ear.

"On it."
Agent Romanoff also raised her phone.

"I'm calling Clint; we don't need him freaking out when this hits the news either."

Clint ... ah yes, Hawkeye, another member of the original team who had retired. Yes, it would be best not to have him worried either.

Colonel Rhodes spoke.

"I'm working with Friday to track down the soldiers and Falcon; we're scanning through street cams mainly, but that is still giving us a lot of footage to search through, given how many cameras there are everywhere."

Everett nodded, taking down some notes, and moved to speak when the door was flung open, a blond woman all but running in.

"Agent Carter! What's going on?!"

Agent Carter briefly turned to Everett.

"I'm sorry to interrupt sir, but I needed to let you know that Steve contacted me."

A few shocked exclamations filled the air as Agent Carter turned to Doctor Stark.

"He called me asking me to sneak him and Falcon the gear that was confiscated. Something about it being an emergency and there was no time, and they weren't going to wait for the leash to tighten?"

A dark look crossed Doctor Stark's face, but he managed to take a deep breath and relax his features, before standing and giving Agent Carter a hug.

"Thank you for letting us know Ronnie. Rogers is being a idiot, but we'll do what we can. I assume he gave you a place to meet up?"

Agent Carter burrowed into the hug, shaking her head.

"No, I'm to call him when I've gotten them and he'll let me know where to go. Tony what do I do?"

Doctor Stark started to gently smooth her hair as the hug continued, and looked to Ross.

"Personally, I think the best option would be to have Ronnie call them back, pretending to give them their gear so we can catch up to them and figure out what the hell they're doing, but I'm open to opinions here."

T'Challa mulled the thought over. It certainly had the benefit of them knowing where the others would be, and hopefully any aggression could be talked down again.

Agent Romanoff lowered her phone, biting her lip.

"Clint left the house about a half hour ago, telling Laura that Steve had called with an emergency. She's not happy."

Doctor Stark Sighed, finally releasing Agent Carter, much to T'Challa's embarrassed delight.

"Maria? Any luck with the compound?"
Agent Hill was also lowering her phone.

"To an extent; Vision and Wanda both understand what's going on, and will keep us informed if Steve or Sam contact them, but Pietro is still too fidgety to register anything right now, so make of that what you will."

Doctor Stark let out a long breath.

"Okay. Okay, okay, okay, let's talk options."

Eventually, they decided to go with Ronnie pretending to return them their gear, so the team could figure out just what was going through Rogers head.

Ronnie put the phone on speaker as the room fell silent.

"Sharon? Do you have them?"

Ronnie glanced at Tony at Rogers demand before speaking quietly.

"Yes, I have them Steve. I have to be careful though; even just one person looking too closely is enough to ruin an op after all."

Rogers laugh came from the speakers.

"Ain't that the truth? I don't know how many times Natasha had to beat that into my head before it stuck."

...What? Wasn't there some sort of emergency that Rogers was freaking out over? One that had him needing his and Sam's gear?

Tony gave an encouraging nod to Ronnie when his cousin looked over to him again.

This whole situation was messing with her composure something awful, and the stress his cousin was under was putting Tony under stress as well; he was supposed to make her life easier, but there wasn't anything he could do in this case.

Though the sympathetic glance he got from the Wakandan prince when their eyes met made a little flare of heat warm in his chest.

"Steve where are you- I mean, where do I meet you? I can't just nonchalantly hold onto the shield and wings forever."

Rogers seemed to snap out of the carefree mood he had fallen into, his voice serious once again.

"Right. There's a parking complex close to where you are, going North. Bucky, Sam and I should be there in thirty minutes, maybe a bit longer depending on traffic."

Tony pulled up a map, confirming the location. Ronnie nodded.

"Okay, I can get there... Steve, you said there was an emergency right? I can tell Tony and the Avengers."

"NO!"

The suddenly shout had the room flinching. Poor Ronnie looked to Tony with real fear and
confusion in her eyes.

"I shouldn't have yelled. You didn't deserve that. Tony and the others have agreed with the Accords, and won't be able to do anything until it's too late; I can't let that happen, not after how they locked Bucky up. Trust me Sharon, they can't do anything, so why even bother telling them? Once the Accords are scrapped, things will go back to normal."

...

...

...

What?

"Besides, something weird's been going on with Tony, and he even tried to tell me he knew Peggy better than me. Until he calms down, I don't want him involved with stuff like this. See you in thirty."

The call cut off and for a few moments all was still and silent.

"I am going to wring his damn neck."

The entire phone conversation had T'Challa's hackles rising with nearly every word.

There was just something so ... wrong about the way the Captain was speaking.

To begin with he had not even greeted Agent Carter at the start of the call, instead making a demand of her and the way he had denied any involvement of Doctor Stark or the rest of the Avengers?

What was going on through the man's mind?

Shaking his head as he once more donned the armour of the Black Panther, T'Challa waited in the dark shadows in a corner of the roof of the parking complex. With the small ledge the I-beams provided to perch on, T'Challa slowed his breathing as much as he could, and did a quick scan for his team mates.

Agent Carter was waiting in front of a small car, scanning the area every few minutes, obviously going through a few exercises to calm herself. Not that she could be blamed, this whole situation was a mess.

The Black Widow was hidden in one of the other corners of the floor they were on, deep in the shadows behind a few cars.

War Machine was flying high above the complex, out of sight but able to get to them quickly.

Agent Hill was working with T'Chaka and Everett to inform members of the UN what was going on as best they could.

And Doctor Stark had emptied the complex, bought it, and then a selection of used cars to strategically park throughout the structure to avoid rousing suspicion.

In less than thirty minutes.
T'Challa might have swooned were that not an action that would have resulted in lifelong teasing from his father and sister. And probably even his mother as well. And the Dora Milaje. Actually, especially the Dora Milaje.

Doctor Stark had also been working to find the psychiatrist, who was still missing, and had asked for permission to check the man's lodgings. He was waiting for approval now.

By the panther god, when did the man have the chance to rest?

The rumble of a car engine filled the air, pulling T'Challa from his distracted thoughts as he once more settled his breathing and waited.

A Volkswagen Beetle pulled up next to Agent Carter's car, Steve Rogers, Sergeant Barnes and Sam Wilson climbing out of the vehicle.

T'Challa knew that behind his mask, his face was a mien of confusion; all three were fairly large men, why on Earth had they chosen a beetle of all cars?

"Sharon!"

Rogers wore a wide grin as he walked up to Agent Carter. T'Challa was amused to note that she looked just as confused about the car as he felt.

"Steve. I know you want to keep things close to the chest, but my training means I need to think about the long term. You said that there's an emergency; even if you can't give me specifics, can you at least give me an idea of what's going on so I can figure out what'll need to be done after?"

Rogers looked very hesitant, obviously torn between keeping his silence and the open, honest distress on Agent Carter's face.

However Barnes was the one to speak.

"Stevie's been praisin' you a lot, so I figure you're trustworthy. After I got myself back together from that trigger episode, I remembered that I'm not the only Winter Soldier HYDRA had."

T'Challa felt his heart skip a beat.

"There were five others; the Winter Corps. A big, big difference between them and me though, was they were loyal HYDRA agents, volunteers to the cause. But they came out ... wrong. They were powerful and healed well and shit, but ... they were too angry, volatile, the handlers couldn't control them. They may have been loyal, but they were after power, that's one of HYDRA's goals, and the serum affects what's already there right? When they proved too much for the handlers to deal with, I was brought in to knock them out so they could be put into cold storage until HYDRA could fix the problems.

Part of the reason I've been in hidin' since HYDRA was revealed is because aside from electrocutin' the shit outta my brain, HYDRA somehow planted trigger words in my head. When I hear certain words, I revert back to the Winter Soldier, like I did at that facility I was goin' to be questioned at. When the psychiatrist came in, at first he asked me a couple questions bout my general health and shit, but then ... then he started sayin' the words. And I was bein' restrained for safety reasons -which I had no problem with, I am dangerous- but I was restrained, so I couldn't get at him to stop him from talkin'. I don't recognise him at all, but since he knows my words, that means he's gotta be linked to HYDRA right?"

Barnes looked afraid, near tears even, yet he brushed off the comforting hand Rogers tried to place
on his shoulder.

"I remember where they were stored, and I think that the psychiatrist might be there too. I don't ... I
don't want to be the fist of HYDRA anymore, I don't want to be the Winter Soldier. I want to find
out who I am and just live my life and make up for all the lives I've taken."

Rogers pulled Barnes into an embrace.

"It wasn't you Buck. HYDRA's the ones to blame not you; you didn't want to hurt anyone."

"But I still did it Stevie! Intentions don't count for nothin' when the action was still done, when
people get hurt by it!"

Rogers looked like he wanted to argue more, but Agent Carter tapped the comm unit in her ear.

"You get all that Tony?"

And Rogers froze.

"I did indeed Ronnie. I'm forwarding the recording to the people who need to hear it. Widow,
Panther, War Machine, please do what you can to bring our friends in, so we can make plans to
deal with this Winter Corps."

Tony turned off the comms then, not interested in hearing how the team went about dealing with
Rogers, as he began rapidly typing on his tablet.

Marie Curie, he was tired.

T'Chaka gently patted his shoulder as he placed a steaming mug of coffee in front of him.

"It just seems to be one thing after another. Is this normal for you Doctor Stark?"

Tony took a deep gulp of the coffee before he answered.

"Yes and no. It's not normal, in that I and the Avengers don't face this sort of thing every day, or
even every mission. It is normal in that when a big event happens, several thousand smaller ones
all happen at the same time. It's kinda like a snowball rolling down a hill; it's just keeps picking up
more and more snow, getting bigger and bigger and bigger, until you can't even remember how
little it was at the start."

T'Chaka nodded thoughtfully as he sipped his own drink.

"What do you plan on doing, if I may ask Doctor Stark?"

Tony sighed.

"First is get some damn answers about that psychiatrist; how he was chosen, how he got the trigger
words -speaking of, Friday my gal, rush order on recovering the security footage of Barnes session,
and then black list it so those words don't just get handed out to public circulation- my next point
of business is stabbing Rogers in the throat, because why the ever loving hell did he think this was
something to keep to himself? My third action is going to be to reviving Rogers so I can wring his
neck for what he put Ronnie through; seriously, my cousin is under enough stress without Rogers
guilt tripping her and then reminding her of our very recently deceased aunt. I've already informed
the Compound of what's going on, and both Vision and Wanda are prepared to join us if deemed
necessary, though Wanda is hoping not because she's the best at keeping Pietro in bed so he can
actually heal.

I then need to revive Rogers from his double death so that I can kill him a third time. Mainly just so I feel better, as opposed to anything he's done.

And after a final resurrection, I then plan to have everyone sit down so we can work out the best way to both investigate the validity of the claims of the Winter Corps, because no offense to Barnes but his mind is Swiss cheese at this point, and then deal with the Winter Corps if they prove to be an actual threat.

Then I might kill Rogers again; I haven't decided."

T'Chaka laughed as Tony settled down to get some serious work done. Approval had come in for investigating the psychiatrist's hotel room, which Tony forward to security, who replied they were on it. Shuri sent him constant updates about what she had decoded from the security footage. UN members needed reassurances that yes Tony did know what he was doing. Emails from Pepper about SI, and emails from Happy about Pepper. A bit of coding for some of Tony's projects, and a little design tweaking for others.

All in all, about an hour and a half passed before the conference door opened the team wandered in, a little worse for wear but alive.

And despite what he had said to T'Chaka, Tony decided to hold back on the killing Rogers thing.

For now anyway.

Even through the Black Panther armour, T'Challa felt the deep bite of cold as they all disembarked the quinjet and stood before the Siberian bunker.

Once Agent Carter had revealed Doctor Stark had been listening in, both Rogers and Wilson had moved to fight their way out, but with the reveal of The Black Widow, Black Panther and War Machine, and a surprising amount of cooperation from Barnes, they had managed to once more drag the three back into custody, ignoring Rogers disappointed looks and claims of betrayal.

Agent Carter had looked so tired.

Agent Romanoff had lifted both Rogers and Wilson's phones, and found that Barton had been sent to the Compound to try and recruit Vision and the Maximoff's to the Captain's cause, which just further baffled T'Challa, given Rogers vehemence in denying involvement from any of the Avengers closer to him, and had called him, telling him to either stay put or return to his family or she would make Budapest seem like the '95 Christmas party in comparison to what she would do to him.

No, T'Challa didn't know what that meant, but given the terrified squawk Barton had let loose, T'Challa wasn't sure he wanted to know what it meant either.

The security team Doctor Stark had sent to investigate the hotel room the psychiatrist had stayed in had reported back about finding the man's corpse, killed hours before the session with Barnes, so they were dealing with an imposter.

And now, after careful, monitored examination had concluded that Barnes memories were sound enough to investigate and getting full approval from the Russian government, They had flown to the HYDRA bunker hidden in frozen lands.
"Let's make this quick, metal conducts cold like a bitch, and I still have to get up for work tomorrow."

T'Challa found himself wanting to wrap the man in a blanket; Doctor Stark sounded tired even through the voice modulators of the Iron Man armour.

And yes, T'Challa was amazed by the latest iteration of the suit, already planning on how he was going to tease Shuri about getting to see it up close first.

The bunker appeared abandoned, but the group stayed fairly close, determined to protect against whatever came their way.

Slowly they cleared the base, finding nothing, until they came to a large room holding the Cryo tanks.

Each of them with shattered glass and carrying a body with a bullet through the head.

"I don't understand."

Barnes was not the only one confused.

"Well now, I was not expecting you so soon. Nor so many of you."

As one, the group turned to face the man who had triggered the Winter Soldier.

"But then, it simply provides me with a larger audience."

T'Challa actually stopped focusing on the man's words, instead paying attention to his body language.

The simultaneous slump yet straightened shoulders.

The strain lines on his face with the manic gleam in his eyes.

The thinness of a body frame that indicated a fair broadness.

T'Challa had seen this before, in warriors that succumb to madness.

This man was preparing to die.

In the time it took T'Challa to realise this, the man was indicating for the group to watch something on a laptop.

Instead, War Machine shot the man with a repulsor and went to cuff him.

"Tones, grab the laptop, Widow, double tap all the corps, everyone else back to the quinjet and let's leave this to the feds."

T'Challa was fine with that.

"Please ... spare my wife."

"Howard!"

Tony was so tired.
He was sitting in a corner in a conference room far away from Rogers and Barnes and Romanoff, the lights off and just trying to breathe.

A warm body slid down onto the floor next to him, a reminder that someone was there.

"I am so sorry for your loss."

Tony forced back the tears that were so close to the surface.

Stark men were made of iron after all.

"He killed my Madre."

"He did."

"He lied to me."

"He did."

A warm arm came to gently rest over Tony's shoulders, allowing the genius to huddle under the protective warmth.

"What do I do?"

Weak. He felt so weak. Howard was surely laughing in his grave over how weak his only child was being.

"You take a breath, and then stand back up. Just like you always have Doctor Stark."

Tony let out a breathless, near humourless chuckle.

"I think after all the bullshit of the last couple days, you can call me by name you know."

The arm held him tighter.

"Just breathe for now. That is all you need to do Tony."

Breathing, yeah, he could do that. And then he could stand back up. It would be hard, he was sure but he'd be okay.

T'Challa would help him.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Jisko2ijsko

Amnesia Tony.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

So, I saw Endgame...

It should come as no surprise that I want to hug Tony.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

T'Challa let out a shaky breath, trying desperately not to show any further signs of his discomfort. Rogers would suffer for this.

It had happened so quickly that for a long while, T'Challa doubted what he had seen. But he most certainly heard the crash and crunch of Iron Man being thrown to the ground. Tony had been put into the Compound Medical wing immediately. For a long, heart-breaking three months, T'Challa would visit his Dream, constantly hoping for the other man to wake. Rogers had been the one there when Tony awoke.

Teeth tightly grit, T'Challa forced his breathing to even, to smooth and calm.

After Friday had contacted him, T'Challa had left Wakanda as soon as he was able, to return to his Dream as swiftly as he could. Friday had told him that Tony was fine aside from losing several years worth of memories. And just how often Rogers had been 'regaling' Tony with what had happened in that time.

His fingers began to flex, curling in before releasing, as the memories swarmed him again.
Friday had opened up a connection so that T'Challa could see exactly what Rogers was doing as he bordered the quinjet to leave Wakanda.

T'Challa could barely hear his own growl over that of the Dora Milaje at what they witnessed.

"-and you agreed to go at my pace, which again, I am so thankful for. There are some days when I wake up that I think I'm back in the forties, and I could be arrested for liking fellas, but you always help me calm down about it. I really am a lucky guy to have you as my fella, you know?"

T'Challa forced his breathing to calm again.

It was hard to refrain from lashing out at hearing Rogers' description of the events with Ultron.

"You thought you were doing the right thing, and I respect that, I really do, but you ended up a little in over your head, and panicked. Once everything was done, you decided to take a step back from being Iron Man, and keep me informed of what you're thinking. We're still working on getting Wanda more comfortable around you, but I'm sure we'll get there. She's such a sweet kid Tony, and I'm sure you'll love her when you meet her again."

T'Challa noticed that Rogers said the Witch had to be comfortable, not the other way around.

In and out.

Curled and uncurled.

For the entire flight to the Compound, T'Challa listened to every half-truth, omission and lie that Rogers told Tony about their relationship and how they had fought against the injustice of the Accords.

"I knew right away that the Accords were wrong. They were nothing but pretty words trying to hide the leash they wanted to tighten around our necks. You thought that you could change them from the inside, pretend to sign on, then change them into something actually good, and I am so happy that you did. It would have been easier to just fight them, but you went through the rigmarole of playing nice and pretending to be a Politian and got them changed, so I guess I don't really have any complaints."

In.

Out.

Curled.

Uncurled.

It was a heavy silence in the quinjet as they were only a few minutes from the Compound.

"Zemo managed to get to you good. He forced you to watch the video HYDRA made of your parents deaths, and you just lost it, attacking Bucky and me. You were just so angry about seeing Howard die you lashed out, trying to kill us, we defended ourselves and you managed to come to enough to tell us to leave. You focused on fixing the Accords then, and we slowed down a little after
that, just figuring out again how we fit together, you know?"

The quinjet landed.

"It would be a hell of a lot easier if T'Challa would stop flirting with you though."

And the Wakandan's all froze.

In.

And.

Out.

"I'm still not totally ready to come out, so I can understand that T'Challa doesn't realise we are together, but he's so obnoxious! He's constantly touching you, but he doesn't really speak to you, unless he's calling you some of the cheesiest pet names I've ever heard! He just sits and watches you when you're holed up in the workshop rambling, instead of trying to get you to look after yourself! I don't like telling you what to do, but you really need to let him know to back off and leave you alone."

A chirp from Rogers' phone had him check his messages, then rise from his seat.

"I've got to go; Nat's waiting on me for training. I'll see you later."

And left.

In.

And.

Out.

T'Challa pulled a few harsh breaths into his lungs before all but running to medical.

He could not let this stand; he would not let Rogers' lies take his Dream from him.

Turning the corner and rushing through the door, T'Challa met beautiful brown eyes, wet with unshed tears.

A brow raised in question.

A voice asking it.

"Are you here to tell me more utter bullshit, or is it just the prerogative of the centenarian?"

T'Challa's knees almost buckled under his relief.

His breathing calmed.

His heart slowed.
In and out.

His Dream was no fool; while he was indeed missing several years of memories, it didn’t mean Tony suddenly lost all the instincts he had developed as a businessman.

The first damning piece of evidence was that Rogers had not once spoken his name, nor substituted any nicknames.

"If we were really as close as he was saying, he would make that acknowledgement, honey. Hell, most people make that acknowledgement to everyone they speak to -like I just did- unless they don’t want to be speaking."

Then there was how Rogers hadn’t spoken to Tony, rather at him.

"It's a common tactic of steamrolling. You just keep going on, without ever asking for opinions or questions. I use it often when I'm forced into board meetings."

The obvious-to-Tony gaps in behaviour.

"Again, if we were really as close as Rogers' says, he wouldn't have started his spiel with how we were together; he would have let me talk to J.A.R.V.I.S. -or rather as I just discovered a few moments ago Friday, I'm sorry my gal, I'm working on that."

"It's alright Boss. I know you're not being mean. To you, it's still twenty twelve, and my big brother was still your co-pilot. You'll get there."

The passive-aggressive blame and responsibility assigned to Tony.

"Honey, I have enough self-respect to not stay in a relationship where I'm so obviously put down. The way Rogers was acting was only a little worse then how he was when we first met, so unless he had a huge one-eighty and then slowly returned to being such a dick, I cannot imagine having put up with that."

The lack of care shown to Tony.

"I mean, I have amnesia and he just casually drops that my parents were murdered and doesn't slow down to let me absorb that? What the hell?"

The dismissal of Tony's desires.

"Someone I let into my workshop just sitting by as I ramble? Someone returning nicknames, as I give everyone nicknames, honey? Someone not forcing me to behave in a certain manner? That doesn’t even have to be romantic; Rhodey's like that a lot too. I don't have a lot of people in my life like that so why would I ever tell them to leave?"

And finally, the most damning thing?

Tears finally spilled down Tony's cheeks.

"He said I was upset over seeing Howard die. Madre was there too."

Oh so gently, fully allowing Tony the chance to push away, T'Challa wrapped his arms around shaking shoulders.

Cradling his Dream, as emotion overwhelmed him.
My name is T’Challa, codename Black Panther. We met in 2016...

In and out.

"I’m not saying I don’t believe you. I just need time to find out the facts, and take this all in."

"You take all the time you need. I will accept whatever choice you make, my Dream."

"... heh. Cute Nermal."

Eyes glimmered in the darkness as the door opened, hidden from the figure who entered.

The door closed, the automated lock a sharp snap in the silence of the room.

T’Challa’s teeth bore a snarled grin.

"So glad you could join me Rogers."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Shuri took a deep breath, taking a final look at the hall before dashing away to her quarters to finish getting ready.

Her fingers trembled as they tightened the straps of her dress and she forced them to still as she maintained an even breathing pattern.

Nothing could go wrong today.

By the Panther god, she would suit up and fight aliens all by herself if she had to, but no matter what, nothing was allowed to spoil today.

Shuri had been working for this for well over twenty years.

She would tear apart the world if it sought to interfere today.

A knock on the door preceded her mother's head ducking in.

"Ah, my dear, quickly now; it is almost time."

Shuri tightened the final strap and moved to slide her chosen jewellery on, Ramonda joining her to quickly pull her hair into place.

They were then both walking as quickly as they dared back to the hall where T'Challa stood waiting, muttering lowly as he rubbed his hands over his face.

"I cannot do this, I simply cannot. I won't be able to focus, on anything, and I just cannot do this. I can-"

"Brother!"
"You are mine now Tony. Mine until I leave this earth to run in the fields of the Panther God, and will be mine again when we meet in those same fields."

"For as long as you hold my heart T'Challa, you are just as much mine, and I know you'll never let
go."

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Chapter Summary

For Alice8

_Ever. Always. Endlessly._

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Sooooooooooooooooo ....................
It is ridiculously hard and/or expensive to get amazing Iron Man merch in my country.

I came across images of the Iron Man Q Poskets, and I want, but not at sixty bucks each before shipping.

So have some IronPanther as I pout.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He can see his breaths misting in the bitter chill of his cell, staggered though they are through the broken ribs that send piercing agony through his chest.

He heard, let alone felt, the crack they made when his captors swung a sledge hammer at him, laughing as he dropped from the pain.

He still managed to send one of them to the ground though, a vicious kick that had cost him dearly in breath and pain, especially when he was _punished_ for his actions, but was worth every measure of discomfort to see the crony drop.

But he had managed to bite off every scream before they could ring through the air, his captors only hearing his grunts and groans.

It had earned him numerous beating throughout his imprisonment here, each one accompanied by taunts and sneers and curses, but he knew better than to give the bastards the satisfaction.

_Stark men are made of iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart._

Tony had learned that lesson far too young.

He winces as a just-too-sharp breath pulls at his ribs, and can taste the copper on his tongue.

A punctured lung, the bitten through lip, the cut of his inner cheek from a cracked tooth, Tony can't tell where the blood he's tasting originates.

But it is of no matter.
He has work to do.

Slowly, oh so very slowly, Tony forces his aching body to rise; bracing himself against the wall as he gently pushes himself up. It took him longer than he would have liked, but Tony reached his feet, and began shuffling towards the door to the cell.

Credit where it's due, Tony kidnappers have locked him in a room with no technology, no tools or scraps, nothing beyond a raggedy, threadbare blanket, so as to prevent him from engineering his escape.

Tony clucks his tongue at their naivety.

Five minutes is all it takes to see Tony free from his cell, the zippo lighter he had lifted from a goon's pocket as they beat him stripped into a long, thin length of metal able to pick the lock, and the actual mechanism still working should he need it.

Tony knows far too many ways to make a bomb with household objects after all.

The base or whatever it is he's shuffling through is suspiciously empty of mooks though, so he stops a moment, studies his surroundings as best he can.

It is faint, but now that he has stopped and is focusing, Tony can hear in the distance gunfire.

Some sort of attack perhaps? Or maybe the idiots got themselves drunk as they congratulated themselves on his capture and are shooting each other in their stupor?

As ludicrous as it may sound, Tony doesn't rule it out.

Tony is just turning a corner when a flash of movement ahead of him has him falter.

"My Light!"

T'Challa runs to him, hands coming to cradle Tony's bruised and bloody face, obviously restraining himself from grabbing Tony's body in fear of aggravating his wounds. The fear in his eyes as the mask lifts from his face is plain for any and all to see, mixing now with tendrils of relief that won't fully bloom until Tony has been given medical care.

Tony's face is a mien of utter confusion.

"What... what are you doing here?"

T'Challa displays his own confusion before the tremors and roar of a bomb going off cause them both to snap back to the situation.

As quickly as they can, Tony and T'Challa leave the base.

But deep in the back of his mind, Tony knows that they will return to the subject.

*Stark men are made of iron. Never let them see you bleed. They're vultures that will tear you apart.*

The Doctor leaves after he finishes bandaging Tony's ankle, a deep sprain, nearly a break, that Tony genuinely hadn't noticed, T'Challa and Shuri a mix of amusement because

"*How* on Earth do you miss something like that?"
And confused horror because
"How on Earth do you *miss* something like that?"

Tony gently rotates his ankle, testing the little give in the bandages, before finally looking up at the siblings.

"So, we were disturbed last time; T'Challa, what were you doing there?"

T'Challa raised a brow in confusion.

"Rescuing you?"

Tony could feel his own confusion on display.

"... Come again?"

The Wakandan King repeated himself, but it did not clear up anything for Tony.

"... Why?"

Shuri huffed.

"Because you were taken, of course! As though we would just leave you to those cretins!"

Tony could feel his confusion growing, and it appeared T'Challa noticed.

"My Light ... You *do* know that we would do everything in our power to find and rescue you ... right?"

It is amazing how telling silence can be.

Shuri looked both enraged and gutted, muttering to herself in Wakandan as T'Challa drew closer to Tony.

"My Light, did you not think we would search? That we would do anything to retrieve you once we received the ransom call?"

Tony gave a half shrug.

"SI has a no ransom policy, and I always get myself out eventually."

Both royals froze.

"... When you say always, why does it make me think this has happened more times than just now and Afghanistan?"

Tony raised a brow at the Princess.

"Because I was referencing all the times I've been kidnapped?"

T'Challa gently cradled Tony's cheek in his warm hand.

"My Light ... how many times?"

Tony shrugged again.
"I stopped counting by the time I was ten and the novelty had worn off."

Not just the novelty, but also dealing with Howard's anger when Tony freed himself and returned home.

*Waste of time and resources!*

*Do you have any idea the trouble I've had to go through to keep this out of the media?!*

*How are you so stupid, so careless as to be caught?!!*

*They had the nerve to demand money for your return! As though you were worth a cent!*

*You are such a disappointment! Steve wouldn't be able to even look at you!*

*Stark men are made of iron! Never let them see you bleed! They're vultures that will tear you apart!*

The strangled gasps of the siblings drew him from his memories, and given the heart-breaking shock on their faces, Tony had been mumbling those same memories aloud.

The two ever so gently enfolded Tony in an embrace, Shuri softly nuzzling into his shoulder, T'Challa pressing kisses to his hair.

"*We will always come for you My Light. Ever, always, endlessly. You matter to us, we love you. I love you. We will never just leave you to suffer, My Light.*"

Though still gentle, the arms around him are firm and warm.

His breath comes out in staggered huffs, and he can feel his ribs twinge.

But he can't stop himself from holding them tighter.

Because he can tell they mean it.

They'll come for him.

Ever.

Always.

Endlessly.

Chapter End Notes

**Toodles and Love**

Oky Verlo
Fallen Angel

Chapter Summary

For Alice8

If an angel falls into a war, is it better to kill it than to introduce it to the evils of the battle field? Or are you just playing God with something that never should have been touched in the first place?

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fear is a very powerful thing.

It can control you.

It can over power you, and throw you off your game.

It can hold you in a grip so tight it can even stop your heart from beating.

As a streak of beloved red and gold flash through the sky toward a ring full of endless black and monsters, carrying a missile upon it's back, T'Challa feels fear like he never has before.

(A call from a distraught AI, begging for forgiveness, pleading for help, hoping desperately for reassurance as satellites scanned the sands)

The shouted denial he screams when Iron Man disappears is something dark and near feral.

It takes both his parents and his sister to restrain him, to stop him from running to the hanger and boarding any of the aircrafts ready to fly.

(They are always ready to fly, always ready to serve Wakanda)

When the armour reappears in the skies, the portal quickly shrinking, T'Challa feels as though air returns to his lungs, and he takes a few greedy breaths to ease the burning in his chest.

(Screams ringing through the night as desperate cries to stop, to leave him alone, for air, tumble from the lips of one lost in memories that are truly nightmares)

It takes the live footage of the armour falling, falling, falling for T'Challa to gather the strength to free himself from his family and run to the hanger.

(So many desperate failed attempts to speak, to explain, eventually followed by a whispered wish to stay together, to not leave)

T'Challa doesn't remember the flight -how could he, with fear paralysing any thoughts beyond getting to New York?- and he doesn't remember the landing, or the trek into the city to get to Stark Tower.
All T’Challa can remember is pushing past an obstructing Captain Rogers and being allowed by J.A.R.V.I.S. into the elevator, the doors quickly closing on the spangled man's face.

All T’Challa can remember is counting the floors as they passed by on the way to the penthouse, a comforting hum of electronics buzzing gently in the background.

All T’Challa can remember is entering the living room to see Tony standing before the shattered remains of the window overlooking the city beneath and beyond them, lost in memories that are truly nightmares.

All T’Challa can remember is wrenching his Angel away from the gaping hole tempting him to fall.

All T’Challa can think of as he cradles his shaking Angel is that he has never moved so fast, never reacted so swiftly, as he has with fear nipping at his heels.

Fear is a very powerful thing.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Growing up the genius son of an uncaring businessman father and a distant socialite mother, and being raised by the butler and his wife, had the unsurprising side-effect that Tony didn't really know how 'normal' families are supposed to behave.

At least, he didn't know until he has unofficially adopted by the Rhodes family.

"As long as you want a mother's love Tony, I have room in my arms for another baby."

Roberta Rhodes was all kinds of amazing.

She and her husband Terrance had done an amazing job raising their son and daughter, and the world simply did not have enough people like the Rhodes family, but Tony was selfish enough to be glad that they had chosen him.

Especially when he could now tell how to treat the people you love and care for.

"How are you feeling sfarzoso?"

A deep hacking cough answered him before T'Challa's voice weakly sounded.

"I feel like the time in Cambridge someone decided it would be a laugh to mix a hallucinogenic in the water tank for the change room showers, and I had to spend three days in hospital after the come down."

Tony winced as he replaced the damp cloth over T'Challa's brow.

T'Challa almost never got sick, certainly never the conventional sick of a cold or cough.

No, T'Challa went straight to pneumonia with a side smattering of the flu.

If it weren't for the fact the man was enhanced by Wakanda's heart-shaped herb, Tony would have
rushed him to the hospital immediately. As it was, he was still considering it if the Wakandan treatment of another serving of mystical-possibly-from-space-herb didn't show signs of working by morning.

And given the heavy weight of the reactor sitting in his chest, Tony was keeping note on his own health as well; he didn't want to end up in hospital himself either, and he was at a far greater risk of it than T'Challa.

After a few minutes of keeping his boyfriend's head cool and noting how he was breathing as T'Challa began to doze, Tony carefully rose from his vigil and moved to the kitchen.

Disastrous attempt at cooking while he was dying aside, Tony knew his way around a kitchen, first thanks to the Jarvis' as a child, and then thanks to Roberta during M.I.T.

It wasn't too long before Tony had a fresh steaming bowl of chicken soup and a small plate with bread slices on a tray.

"Probably doesn't actually make your body better Tony, but it makes your soul better, and that makes you feel better all around."

Carrying the tray back into their room, Tony smiled as T'Challa turned his way.

"That smells amazing, and given that I am not able to smell much right now, it makes it all the better."

Chuckling gently, Tony helped his boyfriend sit up enough to eat, dipping pieces of bread in the soup to help fill T'Challa's stomach without making it feel heavy.

T'Challa made numerous sounds of pleasure with every spoon and bite, until finally every drop and crumb were gone and he was back to lying down, drowsy with his belly warm and full.

Tony smiled as he once more replaced the damp cloth on T'Challa's brow and gathered the tray to let T'Challa rest.

"Sleep well sfarzoso. There's more food for later, and you can eat as much as you want when you're well again."

Tony felt warm as he walked down the hallway.

He was actually able to help T'Challa when he needed it.

Tony planned on calling Roberta to tell her he had even made soup for his boyfriend.

Soup just like Momma used to make.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
The Enemy Of My Enemy

Chapter Summary

For Leefdoor

In Wakanda, the name Stark is synonymous with backstabber. No Stark would ever survive should they try to enter the country. Yet somehow, it is the safest place for Tony to be.

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

Writers block issa bitch.

I am not super happy with this, it's more a series of randomly connected thoughts than a story, but hey, it's something right?

If any of you lovely dears and darlings like Batman fics, please go give some love to HarcourtHolmesII. They have just recently joined AO3, and I adore them.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"The traitor has managed to make off with some of the Vibranium your Majesty! Just say the word, and the Dora Milaje will hunt him down!"

The King just shook his head, an angry snarl twisting his lips.

"I will not have my warriors wasting their time. Call all our people back; let the world suffer in this war, while we remain safe. No more will cross our borders."

The woman bowed, signalling for the king’s orders to be followed.

"And if Stark tries to return, your Majesty?"

The King growled low in his throat.

"If Stark, or any bearing his name and blood try come here, then pleasure will run as we hunt them down."

The entire left side of his face burned, and Tony forced himself not to wince and make the pain worse.

Howard was in a right temper, something about how the man’s latest missile designs had completely failed to live up to hype.
The military and the Government had noticed that Howard's work had been getting worse and worse over the last few years, and after this last gaff, had finally issued an ultimatum; do better, or lose all contracts.

With Howard obsessively searching for a dead man, those contracts were needed to keep the wealth that allowed him to search for said dead man.

He didn't have the time to actually do his damn job to fulfil those same contracts.

Hence the temper that had led to him smashing a thankfully empty glass decanter across his son's face.

Not that Howard apologised or hell, even stopped his ranting and noticed. The elder man had merely continued spewing his vitriol towards the officials who had had enough of his crap as Jarvis had quickly helped Tony move to a different room to be treated.

Even now, resting on his bed, the door securely locked when Jarvis left, Tony can hear Howard's shouts.

"And what the hell has Anthony been doing?!"

Tony cannot help the flinch; the evening has just gotten even more dangerous now that Howard remembers his son exists.

"Wasting time and money messing about instead of learning how to take care of the company as my damned heir is supposed to! Fiddling about with robotics and green energy instead of fulfilling our military contracts; why the hell do I even keep him around if he's going to be so useless?!"

Something shattered, perhaps the decanter he had been swinging around earlier.

"Letting himself be used by that bitch from Baintronics, screwing around with that Stone brat; what possible use could he be to me?! It's only thanks to my genius that I've been able to take his pathetic tinkerings and turn them into something worthwhile!"

Tony's heart skipped a beat.

Howard couldn't possibly have meant-

"That stupid little claw thing he's working on, with a lot of work, could easily become a new tracking system for missiles! Instead, he's got the damned thing playing fetch with nuts and bolts! If it weren't for Maria not being stupid enough to ever contemplate cheating on me, I'd be certain that Anthony could not be my child!"

Another something shattered, and Howard's voice began to fade, the man still screaming but moving to where Tony couldn't hear him.

Not that Tony would have been able to hear much above the roaring in his ears.

How many times?

How many times had Howard loomed over Tony as he worked, berating his ideas, sketches, math and dreams, before sweeping up the paper Tony was working on and throwing Tony from the room?

How many of those times had Howard then claimed Tony's work as his own, adjusted, tweaked or
otherwise?

How many people had Tony's ideas hurt, when all he wanted to do was help this world?

A tear trailed down a burning cheek as Tony rose from his bed.

There was much to be done.

---

It takes a surprising amount of work to be able to run away.

Either that, or Howard has chosen now of all times to actually pay attention to his kid.

It means Tony is under far more scrutiny than usual, but he can work it.

*Only let them see what they expect to see.*

The guards and Howard expect the layabout party-boy, so that's what Tony lets them see, and every time they look away in disgust, Tony speeds through his work that will grant him his escape.

DUM-E was legally made the property of Rhodey, so Howard couldn't touch him.

Tony managed to quietly gain patents for all his existing designs, and then *struggled* to come up with any more.

He let slip to Jarvis a warning that had Madre visiting her family in Italy.

And finally, when he was sure he had done all he could to make safe what was important, Tony absconded with Howard's car and made his way to the airport.

A single ticket, and Tony was gone.

"*Your Majesty, we have visual confirmation that Stark's son is making his way closer and close to Wakanda's borders.*"

*A deep snarl that startled his family.*

"*Drag the scumspawn in should he make it.*"

---

The ache of his lungs send steady pain as he breathes, but Tony's breaths are just as steady, showing no sign of he hearty punch the brutal lady in red served him.

He doesn't fight the man-handling as the small team of women drag him before the Wakandan King, he in fact tries to make it as easy as possible for them, something he can see confuses them.

The King glares at him, and in the privacy of his mind, Tony admits it's a fine glare, mean and potent and likely to scare a lot of people into compliance, especially as the King has a face that seems more predisposed to smiles.

Doesn't really hold much weight compared to Howard's though, and Tony grew immune to his father's glares long ago.

"I swore a long time ago that any with Stark blood to come within my borders would be exterminated. After the crimes your father committed, you are beyond foolish to try and come
here."

Tony made a noise of acknowledgement.

"So you guys kill the child for the sins of the father, good to know."

One of the ladies in red actually growled.

"The apple never falls far from the tree and blood will out! Why would we allow Stark's issue here?!!"

Tony shrugged.

"I'm not saying you should, but I feel that I should point out that I am also Maria Carbonell's child, not just Howard Stark's."

The woman snarled again.

"And what do I care for this?!"

"Well if the apple never falls far from the tree, is the tree Howard or Maria? Because, frankly, the world could do with a few more women like my mother."

The small group of people in the room spend a few precious moments looking at each other in confusion before Tony speaks again.

"Anyway, more importantly, I came here because this is the safest place for me to be."

The King's lips curled in a snarl.

"And how, exactly, is your coming to Wakanda in anyway a safety?"

Tony smirked, a self-deprecating little curl to his lips.

"Because you'll make sure that I can't be used to hurt anyone else."

T’Challa did not know what to think about the young man currently napping on the cell bed.

Anthony Stark, the only son to Wakanda's number one enemy, had willingly walked up to them, willingly let himself be put in chains, with a smile on his face that never reached his eyes.

All because he thought he was a danger to the world.

Oh, the white man had explained; Howard Stark drunkenly admitting to stealing the robots and designs his son had made and adjusting them into his bombs and missiles.

But that he felt it safer, both for himself and for others, for him to come to a place where even now, with all the information he had shared, the people were baying for his blood?

Anthony Stark was a fool.

But a fool who felt he had no other options.

A few of the scientists had been granted permission to ask the young Stark some questions, to see if he really did know about the inner workings of Howard Stark's more recent inventions, and Anthony had known them practically inside out in a way that only the one who made them could.
T'Challa simply did not know what to think.

Three months pass before word comes that the Stark Heir is missing.

Maria Stark is desolate; openly weeping with worry for her child, the family butler and his wife wringing their hands with concern and fear as they try to comfort their Mistress and each other, and a young man named James Rhodes moving to protect her from the constantly circling vultures.

Howard Stark is quoted numerous times - all of them drunk - cursing his son for being out partying instead of working on SI's newest missiles so Howard can continue looking for Captain America, never seeming to realise that his only child and heir is not even in the same country.

Obadiah Stane, Stark Industries second in command, is scrambling desperately to keep the American Government from dropping all their contracts as they witness Howard's abhorrent behaviour, and has been caught grinding his teeth as Stark senior continues despite regardless.

Anthony shows concern only over the first.

It's somehow not very surprising.

Anthony is given scraps and pieces to keep him occupied, constantly watched to ensure he's not making any weapons.

He makes a robot.

He calls it U.

T'Challa cannot help gawping when he can see the machine beginning to learn.

It takes almost a full year before Howard Stark realises his son is gone.

This realisation comes during a live interview, as he's answering questions about why Stark Industries, once a proud mighty company, is now verging on bankruptcy.

When he's asked if he has been absent because he's been looking for his son.

Howard's genuine confusion at his heir's absence ends up being the final nail in Stark Industries coffin.

T'Challa starts calling him Tony.

Tony starts smiling with his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Showing the Ropes

Chapter Summary

For Leefdoor

So Tony's been kidnapped a number of times.
Like, a *lot* of times

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1.

Tony's four the first time he gets kidnapped.

*(That's a lie; he was kidnapped thrice before then, but he barely recalls them, having been drugged, carried off, and retrieved within a matter of hours.)*

It was a big man who wanted money from Howard Stark.

The guy was an idiot though.

He snatched Tony up as the Stark family were leaving the studio that Howard had arranged Tony's first interview at.

Everyone saw his face.

He was caught and Tony returned within twelve hours.

Tony has a tiny scar under his ear from where Howard's ring cut him open with a slap, annoyed that Tony had been so unobservant and captured.

2.

Some of the nicest people Tony has ever met are the couple that kidnapped him when he was seven.

They were desperately in need of money, several tens of thousands of dollars in debt, if the man's panicked muttering were correct.

For all his genius though, Tony's never really had proper interaction with money, so he honestly couldn't say whether or not that was a large amount.
Tony's had very nearly fifty kidnappings by this point; it's actually kind of impressive just how many people are willing to try to snatch him up for ransom. After the first few however, Tony got tired of Howard's hits and lectures about how useless he is, so Tony had begun learning how to get himself out as quickly as he could.

(He hadn't meant to send his mother's old maid to the hospital when he bit her during that kidnapping, but in his defense, he hadn't expected her to flail like that and trip down the stairs of the house she had brought him to.)

This couple though ... Well, the lady has fed him a couple of sandwiches and gave him a large bottle of water, and the man wrapped a blanket around his shoulders to keep Tony warm.

They let him go when they realise Howard doesn't care enough to even consider paying a ransom for him.

Tony almost considers staying.

3.

Tony breathes slowly, gently rolling his tongue in his mouth to see if the blood dripping form his lips is from a cut, a missing tooth, or his lungs. The bright flare of pain in his cheek means a cut, which is the least worst option.

He can work with that.

M.I.T. has kept him beyond occupied, which has been amazing as so few things truly can, but the downside is that Tony being able to work himself hard means he is in a less likely state to protect himself.

The man who had chloroformed Tony and dragged him to wherever the hell they are now, has been demanding pretty much everything under the sun; money, designs, insider secrets, access to SI, ownership of SI, it's crazy just how much this guy thinks he can get from Howard just because he has Tony. He's so focussed on his demands, he never even notices Tony breaking free of his restraints.

Rhodey is going to smother him with mother-hen fussiness when Tony gets back.

The nice solid punch he landed on his kidnapper though?

Despite his slender size?

That is hella satisfying.

4.

Okay, this is just insulting.

Tony has no idea who these mooks are, or who they're working for, but one would think by now
it's common knowledge not to give Tony access to pretty much anything during a kidnapping. Even if you want the young engineer to make you a super powerful bomb to threaten the world with.

Tony's shoulders are back, his chin raised and his steps sure as he walks away from the burning remains of the warehouse he'd been taken to.

Idiots.

5.

Sometimes, not very often, Tony isn't the only victim in a kidnapping.

The other boy is considerably younger than Tony, maybe twelve at most, and is trying to appear stoic and unaffected, though that mask is still clearly a work in progress.

With a practiced hand once their guards have finished making their threats and have then wandered off, Tony slips the ropes that tied his hands and moves to free the boy from his binds too.

The other is wide eyed when he sees that Tony so easily freed himself and then scowls mightily down at his hands.

"Hey kiddo, give yourself a break; I've been kidnapped more times then I can count, and you really learn the tricks of the trade that way. I'll show you how to get out of those, and then we'll get outta here, what do you say?"

There are tears in the kid's eyes, but he nods, and when Tony extends him a hand, saying it's time to go, Little T'Challa follows without hesitation.

1.

He's lying back on the raised hospital bed, forcibly breathing shallow puffs of air as he gets used to his unwanted modification.

Though the arc reactor is a thing of scientific and engineering beauty, Tony hates it, for all that it keeps him alive.

He keeps trying to breathe normally, when a heavy, most painful presence reminds him why he cannot.

"Only you, my friend, would be able to turn a kidnapping into revolutionising science as we know it."

Tony's head darts up catching sight of T'Challa's gentle smile as the younger man carefully, oh so carefully pulls him into a hug.

No doubt T'Challa can feel the trembles wracking Tony's body from sleepless nights and a difficulty with water.
"Rest Tony. You once protected me, so now, I shall protect you. Rest. I shall stand guard."

The hospital bed is simultaneously too soft and too hard. The doctors keep trying to have the arc reactor taken out to study. The soldiers in the base keep looking at him like he's traded away all their military secrets, and the brass keep dragging Rhodey away, telling him to convince Tony to make better weapons to attack back.

But with T'Challa watching over him, with the grown version of the little boy who refused to let Tony disappear from his life standing guard, Tony finds his eyes slipping shut, and his breathing ease, and before he knows it.

Tony sleeps.

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo
Derisory

Chapter Summary

For ifinditkindafunnyifinditkindasad

Who doesn't appreciate good, helpless laughter?

Hope this satisfies Hon.

Chapter Notes

I'm from Australia my dears and darlings.
And right now, Australia is on fire.
Everyone, take care.

By the way, I collaborated on a Batman story! Check out my works page and let me know what you think!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The English language is absurd.

The majority being of West-Germanic origin with Anglo-Frisian dialects, words and phrases have been stolen from other languages, words made to sound like they are from another language but mean nothing, conflicting spellings, sounds and meaning, identical spellings, sounds and meanings, the language as a whole is a cruel, ever evolving mess, and yet, somehow, it was the language that replaced Latin in predominance on the planet.

“Why are you glaring at the dictionary Pilchard?”

T’Challa’s eyes briefly left the page to glance at his lover, before returned to the mess of black letters.

“This language is obscene and every time I think I’m beginning to properly understand it, it laughs in my face and proves me wrong.”

Tony stroked a hand through T’Challa’s hair as he moved to sit beside the monarch.

“Hey now, deep breaths. Don’t take it too seriously; English is the delinquent who hangs out in alleyways, beats up other languages, then rifles through their pockets for spare vocabulary.”

T’Challa couldn’t help the snort that escaped him from the unexpected humour.

His day had just been so full and stressful that Tony’s little quip just … broke him.

Tony looked utterly delighted at the odd honking guffaws spilling from T’Challa.
“And there is a lot of fun to be had in reading up some of the more obscure English words you know; Bumfuzzle, for instance, means being confused and perplexed. Fits you right now I’d say. Or you have something like Bumbershoot, which is an umbrella; Margery! I’m heading out! Be a dear and grab my bumphershoot!”

T’Challa wrapped his arms around his stomach as he continued laughing, listening despite himself to the nonsense Tony was telling him.

“Snollygoster is when someone, usually a Politician, does or says things for their own personal advancement instead of following their own principles.”

T’Challa could feel the tears welling in his eyes.

“There’s also this word cattywampus, I’m not even joking, which means messy or askew. It can also be called catawampus, catty-corner, or kitty-corner. So you wouldn’t be wrong to say my workshop is a kitty-corner.”

Tony placed a light kiss on T’Challa’s forehead as the King dissolved in giggles.

“Especially as it’s always got room for you.”

Chapter End Notes

Toodles and Love
Oky Verlo

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