Summary

The story of a slow-build romance between Tony and Stephen, as they overcome the events of the war against Thanos.

Notes

Well well, I didn't think I'd be sitting here and posting this, let alone writing a fanfiction for this pairing. I love Ironstrange and I honestly think this is the most wholesome Tony ship out there. So yeah, here I am. I've had a pretty shit morning playing competitive deathmatch on Overwatch, too many fucking Junkrats and Brigittes. It's what you get for being a D.VA main I guess but I placed gold and I haven't been that rank since season four. Anyways, my arm is hurting like a bitch and writing this in succession probably isn't the best idea but if I don't, I know I'm not going to post this every week. I sort've taken this as a respite from writing my book which has consumed my life and destroyed my soul tbh. I love it with all my heart but fuck me is finding a literary agent the most stressful thing. So yee, this obviously isn't all of the story because there's much more to it. Take this as an introduction. Thanks for reading, honestly and letting me post this to heal my sorrow from competitive overwatch and continuous writing. It's honestly appreciated. <3

Also just a quick fyi; Veni, Vidi, Vici means I came, I saw, I conquered.
Fear

Fear. Everyone's felt it at some point in their lives but it's hard to define. Fear is different experience for everyone; for some it feels like the floor is collapsing from under them, for others it feels like they're drowning but for him, for him it feels like shards of ice scraping down the back of his throat and settling heavily in his chest. Tony Stark and fear are old friends but this, this kind of fear is something else. It travels and lodges itself into his very soul because they've lost and in the worst way possible.

Everything’s gone, halved because the mad titan deemed it so. He knew, had known, for a very long time that someone was coming for earth and that death would be inevitable. But he knew that if it came to it, he would be the one to die not p-if it meant saving the world, Tony would give his life and then some. What is one life compared to them all? At one point in his life, Tony would’ve believed in that saying and a part of him still does. But peter and the wizard-Stephen, he said his name was Stephen, are dead and two lives are more then enough lost.

Half the universe is gone and he isn’t the only one feeling the pain of being left behind, of failing to protect the ones he cares for. Although he didn’t do it outright, wasn’t the one to snap his fingers, Tony knows he’s just a responsible. Which is why he hatched a plan, one final reunion of the heroes who were supposed to protect the world from this but ultimately failed.

Tony’s still not sure how they did it, taking down Thanos was no easy feat and to him, it went down in blurs and hot pain. Throughout it all, he was scared. So, so scared of what would happen if they failed this because there was no second chance. It had been a gamble, using Antman’s technology to travel back in time and build his own infinity gauntlet but it was the only way they could think of.

Thanos wasn’t easy to defeat but they all knew he wouldn’t be. The infinity stones are the strongest objects in the universe and he had them in his possession, upon his arm in a gauntlet. That’s why they went back in time and made their own. It was the only way to win.

The fight, which had felt more like a war, hadn’t been without it’s sacrifices. Tony’s left arm still burns and fizzes with the weight of the gauntlet despite it being discarded on the street and far, far away from him. Distantly, he can feel arms around his neck and squeezing. There are tears falling down his cheeks and mixing with the dirt and blood littered there.

Peter, he thinks blearily, Peter is safe. We saved him. We saved them all.

He can’t take it all in now; the victory, the sacrifices and the overwhelming sense of loss that Tony’s having trouble placing. For now though, he’s content with knowing that they’ve won.

The horrors that the aftermath will bring can wait.
Sloth

Chapter Summary

A year after the fight against Thanos, the Avengers, along with the community meet for a celebration of those who lived and those who died. Stephen Strange seems to be adamant on explaining to Tony why he gave the time stone to Thanos in exchange for his life. Tony, however, doesn't want to know. At least not yet.

Chapter Notes

Yikes, sometimes I wonder if this site just hates me. I seem to always have trouble uploading chapters on here. I'm posting twice today, just so that if I'm not able to get anything out in the next week, you have at least two chapters to read through. This is just being written as I go, so if there's inconsistencies then that's why lmao. Also, I forgot to mention this in the prior authors notes but this story follows the popular theory for Avengers 4; that they will go back in time and create their own gauntlet to use against Thanos. I'm in full support of this theory because if it means it get to see 2012 Loki again after what fucking happened to him in infinity war. My boi deserved so much better tbh. In other news, I'm 100 comp points away from getting Mercy's golden weapon and I'm super fucking salty that I won't be getting it until the season is over bc deathmatch comp is broken af.

But yeah, once again, thank you for reading this. It's really helping me gather my thoughts, writing this. I've always wanted to re-write or continue a movie or TV show. I guess this is my version of what's to come after Avengers 4.

Tony’s not sure why he agreed to do this. He’s positive that he isn’t the only Avenger regretting the decision of coming here—he isn’t exactly sure where here is, a museum of some sort—but it’s a celebration for their victory on that day and also for the lives lost in the midst of it all.

He doesn’t like parties, not anymore. There’s something about all eyes being on him that makes his skin crawl. Tony knows he’s made mistakes, especially in the fight against Thanos. It was his idea to go back in time and build them a gauntlet of their own but he knows they changed things by meddling with time, something movies explicitly tell you not to do. The only way he sleeps at night is by telling himself that it had to be done.

He digs his nails harshly into the sleeves of his dress suit’s jacket, bunching it up at the elbows. The drinks on the tables behind him, housed in tall thin glasses, are tempting but he made a promise to never fall into that lifestyle again. And for Peter, he’ll keep it.

Tony’s eyes filter over to Steve, who’s conversing and waving his hands at Natasha. They’re to the back of the museum, huddled together with drinks in their hands that are half full. It isn’t the first time Tony’s thought about the two of them being together, it’s a plausible enough assumption but he catches Steve side-eying Bucky every now and then. He doesn’t miss Bucky doing the same and neither does Sam, who’s smiling over the brim of his glass next to him.

He’s happy for them that in the midst of this chaos and sadness they’ve found love. Most people, namely him, have a hard time finding a connection with someone after traumatic events and the fight between the Avengers and Thanos was nothing sort of traumatic.

They’re still not on good terms—he, Steve and Bucky—but they’ve sorted through their problems like they should’ve done before the whole universe was halved. Tony understands that Bucky wasn’t himself when he—when he did what he did but that whenever he sees Bucky, he sees his parents dead and it’s a hard sight to swallow.

“You’re awfully subdued,” comments a familiar voice, saddling up to his side.

Tony gives him a half-hearted smirk that’s nothing short of tired. “What can I say? This isn’t really my kind of scene anymore.”

“I find that hard to believe,” Stephen Strange murmurs, lifting his glass to his lips and taking a large gulp that leaves Tony blinking.
“After everything we’ve all been through, you find this hard to believe?”

Stephen is wearing a red velvet suit, with a black bow tie and silver glinting cufflinks that are mildly distracting. Tony feels startlingly underdressed standing beside him, the red velvet suit only highlighting how plain he looks at a party which was completely unheard of, until now.

“I suppose I didn’t think anything could faze you,” the other man replies with a wave of his hand. “Apparently, I am wrong about that.”

“That’s adorable,” he snorts but there’s no real humour behind it. “I’m not invincible, nobody is. You think I’m not fazed by anything? Good. I want you to think that. Now, if that’s all you wanted to say, I’m going to be taking my leave.”

Tony unfolds his arms with one last squeeze to them and stalks forward, away from Stephen and away from a conversation he knows is long overdue.

“We haven’t spoken about it. What I did, I mean.”

Tony freezes, hands clenching and unclenching at his sides. He turns his head and looks at Stephen through narrowed eyes.

“You’re smart. You should know why we haven’t spoken about it,” he winces internally at the coldness biting his words.

“It’s been a year today,” Stephen replies with caution, a frown playing on his lips. “And I know what I did. I let Thanos win, I let him take half the universe and I left you, alone. You deserve to know why.”

Tony reaches up, uses a finger to push the bow of his glasses up and through his hair and pinches the bridge of his nose. He’s aware of Natasha and Steve’s eyes on his back and a few stares from people he doesn’t recognise. Keeping to yourself for almost a year will do that.

“I c-wont talk about it here. I meant what I said about taking my leave. If you’re so desperate to tell me why you fucked us all over, go ahead. You know where I live and I’m sure you know that I never leave the place anymore, right? Seeing as you seem to know everything.”

“That’s unfair and you know it Tony.”

“One,” he holds up a finger, not caring for the audience they’ve gathered throughout this exchange. “I’m aware but I don’t really care. Two, only my friends call me by my name. To you, it’s Stark. Got it?”

“It was the only way,” the man says, voice taking on a desperate edge and Tony suddenly wants to scream at something.

“Yeah, you’ve said that. You remember that?” he holds a hand up, stopping Stephen before he can say anything further. “People are staring and I’ve told you that I’m not having this conversation here and now. It’s the day of celebration, right? So, let’s give them a chance to celebrate. Like I said, you know where I live. If you work up the courage to explain your shitty actions, drop by. Until then.”

With a wave and a crooked smile, Tony continues on and keeps his head held high as he passes by the other attendees. He knows this is going to public news tomorrow, two Avengers having an openly heated talk and because it’s the first place he’s been seen out in months. Tony’s aware that he went hard of Stephen, knows that he lost just as much as they all did-hell, he had died. But forgiveness, for him nowadays, is not something that comes easily. Like fear, everyone deals with pain differently and Tony can hold onto it for years and never let go.
Chapter Summary

there is a past and present to these things. sometimes you cannot live without the burden of what you’ve done and other times, it takes another person to help you let go of your past. Stephen explains to Tony the reason why he gave over the time stone.

Chapter Notes

i'm literally just going to update this whenever I can or if I'm bored tbh. I usually either write or draw in my spare times so there's a good chance this fanfic/story will be complete by the end of the week. In other news, how does one send a functional/well written letter to a literary agent bc I'm sweating buckets at the thought of even doing it and i'm putting it off but if I keep doing that i'm never going to send it in. (I can assure you that my book is way more well written then this, as this fanfic is more for fun then anything else and a write as you go kinda story). Also can someone tell me whats going on with the weather in the UK? One minute it's sunny and the next I'm being spat on by rain???

The italics section of this chapter is a flashback, as i'm sure you guys can gather but just a quick fyi in case y'all didn't.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We need your help,” Tony says, eyes flickering to their exit. “And we need it now. Time is running out.”

Loki peers upward from where he sits slouched on the floor, “And what ever could you need my help with? If I remember rightly, you are an Avenger, are you not? Why bargin with me?”

“Yes, okay. I should’ve known this wouldn’t be easy. Look, I’m just going to come out and say it. You’re a god right and a-what did Thor call them? A frost giant? That doesn’t matter but my point is, that I’m from the future. A very bad future.”

“Ahs, If that is the case, then I believe I won?”

Blue eyes, Tony thinks. In passing, Thor had told them that sometimes those I Asgard would tease Loki by saying his eyes were green because he was so envious of Thor and his power. Then why are his eyes blue like Clint’s?

“You don’t get it, do you? Never did the first time around so I can’t exactly be surprised,” he grumbles, rubbing his forehead before casting a solemn look at the Norse god. “Thanos won.”

He notices it instantly. The shifting in the god’s posture from semi-relaxed to down right rigid. He’s afraid, Tony’s mind had implored helpfully. There was something in his eyes at that moment, a look almost haunting.

“Impossible.”

“As much as it probably soothes your soul to know that Thanos is out of reach-yeah, we know about that by the way-he’s not anymore. Something happened in Asgard and it left only a ship of your people alive. Thanos came for you Loki and he killed you to claim the tesseract. After that, he came to earth to take the time and mind stone. We tried, dammit we did but, in the end, we failed.”

“I was killed by Thanos?”

“That’s all you’ve taken from what I’ve said? Jesus, you’re just as bad as I remember. Yeah, you died but from what Thor told us, you died saving his life. I’d say that redeems you, maybe a little to late but hey,” Tony thrugs with nonchalance that he doesn’t have. They need Loki’s help in this. “In the future, Thanos snaps his fingers and half the universe is wiped from existence. He has all the stones and he’s sitting somewhere up in the big ol’ universe at peace. At peace! Whilst we all have to suffer down here. We lost that fight to him and it was our duty to win, not just for earth but for everyone and everything. All you’ve done, all we’ve done, will have been for nothing if we don’t stop him now. This is our second and final chance. We need your help Loki.”
Tony can see the blue paving way for green as it returns to the god’s eyes. So he was under the control of the sceptre. Loki shuts his eyes briefly, barely noticeable if you aren’t looking, before fixing them back on Tony.

“He said that there would be no corner, no crevice, where he could not find me,” the god bites, mouth settling into a grim line. “You have come for what I possess. The mind stone. You plan to wield your own infinity stones against him.”

“Yeah, we do but we can’t do it without your help. That’s why I’m here.”

“How did I die Stark?”

“I-Thor never told us how you died, just that you did.”

A feral, toothy grin, spreads across Loki’s lips and he tilts his head back and laughs. It’s a crazy sound but a stark contrast with the world Tony knows, that only houses the sound of the weeping and mourning.

“I will give you what you desire. You have my word.”

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“Honestly, no. I wasn’t expecting a visit so soon Doc. You really missed me that much, huh?”

Pinching in-between his eyes, Stephen shakes his head, “I’ve been here for less than a minute and I can already feel a headache coming on.”

Tony shrugs, settling down on the couch and throwing an arm over it. Stephen follows suit.

“Well, you didn’t have to come. Nobody forced you to.”

“You want the truth behind my actions,” the other man begins with a bite to his words. “And I am here to tell you the truth.”

“Never said I wanted them. Now you’re just putting words into my mouth and not the fun kind.”

Stephen rolls his eyes, “We haven’t had a proper conversation in almost a year. When you claimed victory and those who died, had returned, you could barely even look at me. I can understand that but you still fail to understand my reasoning behind handing the time stone over to T-”

“Just-if were going to have this talk, let’s get it over with. I like the past to stay in the past. The less I have to talk about it, the better.”

Stephen nods, casting a quick glance at Tony’s arm on the couch before looking back at the man, “I told you back then, there was only one possibility where we one. You were part of that one outcome where we win. If Thanos had killed you, then the world wouldn’t be as it is now. You were vital to the world’s survival and the defeat of the mad titan. I couldn’t let you die, knowing that.”

Tony chokes on the air, sputtering before smacking his chest. His face scrunches as he asseStephen sitting beside him, not quite sure what to do with the words he’d spoken.

“You’re telling me, that I was super important to winning the fight against Thanos?”

“Were my words not direct enough?” Stephen narrows his eyes, not bothering to conceal the sarcasm that lace his words. “I gave the time stone over because you need to be alive for us to win against Thanos.”
“So, you’re saying that without me, the world would still be as it was when he snapped his fingers?”

“Exactly. It was you or the stone. There never should’ve been a choice to make in the beginning.”

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For doubting you,” he laughs bitterly. “God, I hated you. I blamed you for everything but in reality, you’re the one who saved us.”

Stephen frowns, eyebrows knitting together, “I may have traded the time stone for your life but it is you, who saved the world. There is no question about that.”

“Still, I wouldn’t have been able to save the world if it hadn’t of been for you in the first place.”

Tony’s gut plummets with the guilt that Stephen’s words carry. He’d hated the man for so long, at times back then, it was all he could focus on. Anger was better then grief. But the hatred should never have existed in the first place and he knows that now. It still doesn’t change the fact that he’d thought it.

“I suppose but I am not the hero of this story. That title belongs to you.”

Stephen stands, cloak fanning out as he rises, “I’m glad that you no longer see me as an enemy but as much as I wish to expand on this…” he waves his hands, seemingly trying to chose what to say next, “conversation, I actually have somewhere to be. The sanctum is always open to friends. If you have any further questions, you can find me there.”

Tony blinks, watching as Stephen steps through what looks like a wagon wheel firework and disappear, the portal closing behind him.

“Huh,” he mutters, still staring at the place where the portal had been. “I just might take you up on that offer.”

Chapter End Notes

A little fyi for the Loki/Tony flashback section of this chapter; when Loki asks him how he died, he’s referencing a theory that my horrible friend suggested. Basically the theory goes that only those who have been killed by Thanos using the time stone can be restored to their previous living state and as we all know Loki didn’t die in such a fashion, there’s a slim chance of him returning if the theory actually happens. So Loki knows full well in this chapter that he is dead and that’s why he agrees to help Tony and hand over the mind stone.
Greed

Chapter Summary

Tony remembers what it feels like to ask the people who hurt and betrayed you, it's painful and grating but sometimes you have to let the bad blood lie. But seeking out help, from someone you don't hate because you want it, that feels altogether entirely different. But it's a good different.

Chapter Notes

Friction by Imagine Dragons is fucking awesome. they have like my favourite sound in music and that's saying a lot because I listen to a load of music that varies from classical and all the way to K-pop (BTS all the way bby). Sometimes I enjoy watching streams (mainly Overwatch players) when writing, other times I really dig music to set the scene for the chapter I'm writing. Also, Sigrid's cover of 'Everybody Knows' for Justice League is a fucking masterpiece. She can sing like no-other and she's insanely pretty. If I'm feeling particularly vindictive, I'll make myself listen to the Infinity war soundtrack. That's also a goddamn masterpiece but it's also painful.

Anyways, enjoy

<3

"I don’t care-really I don’t. Let’s put things in perspective, shall we? We’ve done a lot of bad, what the press have dubbed 'the civil war' tore the Avengers a part and when he came, we were practically defenceless. That’s on us for not being able to get our shit together, I see that now. I’m not saying I forgive any of you for what happened, that’s going to take some time but right now, we need to come together once more and do what’s right."

There’s a tenseness in the air, everyone in the room can feel it. The original team, the one formed to bring down Loki and his army, haven’t been in the same room for years.

This isn’t something Tony is ready for, like he’d said, it’ll take time for him to accept what happened and maybe find forgiveness for each of them.

There’s an overlying sense of pressure on his shoulders, trying to push him into the ground and keep him there but Stephen-Doctor Strange-died to give the time stone over in exchange for his life. His life.

Tony will never understand why the wizard did it. His life is worth nothing in comparison to others, to Peter but it’s done and he can’t change it. Yeah, he stands in front of the original Avengers for the purpose of defeating Thanos but he’s also here to make sure that Stephen didn’t make the wrong choice. He died for Tony and that means his life is worth more now.

He doesn’t hate Steve or his childhood friend Bucky, not anymore but the betrayal still lingers and clings to his heart. They were friends, maybe not in the same sense that Steve and Bucky are but friends nonetheless.

“You have a plan?” Steve asks but his tone is knowing.

Tony shoots a quick look at Nebula who stands beside him and she sends him a firm nod. He focuses his gaze back on Steve, “We have a plan and I’ve got a feeling you’re not going to like it.”

““This is a really fancy place and all but why? I know you-I mean I knew of you before you enrolled into Hogwarts. What changed?”

Tony collapses into the chair Stephen has lead him to and the other man follows suit, sitting in the one opposite. It’s been a week since their chat and semi heart-to-heart. It’s a conversation Tony won’t long forget, it meant too much to him. There’s was a conviction that Stephen’s words had
brought him. Sure, it was nice to know that he actually had a purpose in the war against Thanos but it was never the way he wanted to be needed.

Seven years, he and the whole universe had spent mourning in the wake of what Thanos had done. Nobody had gotten over it. Half the universe disappearing is not just something you get over. Tony’s always liked problems, that’s why he considers himself a god at every Professor Layton game but this, despite it being the biggest problem he’s ever faced, wasn’t something he could solve on his own.

He’d had Nebula with him at the time, the two of them teaming up after watching everyone on Titan disintegrate into dust. For a long time neither of them had known what to do, the Infinity Stones aren’t something to be considered without caution. They’re the most powerful objects in the world and taking Thanos down with them, wasn’t an option.

“You’re asking for my life story?”

“Ah,” Tony huffs, raising a finger. “So, it is a sob story! I’ve seen the scars on your hands, figured something bad must’ve happened seeing as your hands were quite important to your work. From that, I’ve managed to put two-and-two together but I’m not going to force you to tell me. That decision is yours.”

“You’re a smart man and like you’ve just said, you’re aware of what happened to me. There’s no need of me to tell you, is there?” he says it all with a ridiculously soft smile that has Tony struck dumb for a moment.

It’s a fucking nice smile, he thinks.

“And you’re okay with that? With me, Tony Stark, knowing?” he asks dryly, hands running up-and-down the armrests.

“Why wouldn’t I be?” there’s amusement in his tone that Tony doesn’t quite know what to do with.

“Most people tend not to trust me,” he answers, eyebrows raising and voice pointed. “You know, because of who I used to be.”

“You saved not only my life but the entire universe. Who you were doesn’t matter, at least not to me. You are a friend, after all.”

Tony has no doubt that he looks dumb, what with his mouth hanging agape and eyes wide. Friend. Stephen had said it so easily and like it had meant something. He doesn’t know what to do with any of this.

“Right, well,” he mutters, clearing his throat as he stands. “I suppose that does make us friends.”

Stephen copies him, still wearing that stupid, stupid smile and nods like he’s pleased.

“This has been fun, really it has, you’ve got a shit ton of cool stuff here but I’ve actually got somewhere to be. Believe it or not.”

“So you’re finally coming out of hiding.”

“I wasn’t in hiding!” he hisses lowly but he’s not angry, far from it. In fact, there’s clear amusement lacing his words. “I was just does it matter?”

“We were concerned for you, even Wong.”
“Now, I know you’re just lying to me.”

The amusement slips from Stephen’s face and his expression becomes so carefully blank that it has Tony reeling for a moment.

“In all seriousness, it’s good to see you out-and-about. Don’t lock yourself away again, Tony.”

“Doctor’s orders?”

The grin returns, all soft and mysteriously fond, “Doctor’s orders.”
Pride

Chapter Summary

Frienship is strange but Tony likes what he and Stephen have going on.

Chapter Notes

i feel like i'm becoming a subway, that's how much I've eaten it over the past week. It's crazy but I loooove it. I've spent the past two days watching Fitzy vods and now i want to become a sombra main again but I'm pretty trash at her. this is a short chapter, i know but it was just something quick and fun. the pacings probably a little off but hey-ho this is all in the name of fun! I'm struggling to find a good movie to watch at the cinemas; I've seen Avengers obvs and Deadpool but there's nothing else out currently that interests me. I like Star Wars but i just don't see the purpose behind a Han Solo movie. I just don’t ??? maybe that's just me but yee.

Also, how does one get rid of a pepsi max addiction bc if'll probs kill me rip

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pride has always been a problem of his. It’s nowhere near where it had been now but still, the emotion had consumed a large part of his life and determined the way he acted toward others he met. Tony’s not proud of who he was back then but he is now.

But things were different back then, he had less to lose and more to gain. Pride didn’t mean death when he was younger but it’s what stood in his way for years in the build up to the war against Thanos again. He was scared. Scared to confront Steve more than anyone else. They’d been friends once but the betrayal, it had cut deep and left little room for him to breathe.

Pride had almost cost them the win but when he let go of, Nebula of all people convincing him to do it, everything became a lot clearer and less less lonely. Tony wont ever admit it to anyone other than himself and Nebula.

There’s a drink in his hand, nothing alcoholic, just a can of Pepsi that he knows is just as bad. Tony used to go through a pack of Pepsi a day, and it never really went well, the sugar going straight to his head. Contrary to belief-the press mostly-he’s not an angry or prideful man when drunk or high on sugar. He’s honest which is more of a reason why he shouldn’t drink alcohol or Pepsi. Sometimes though, Pepsi is the only thing that’ll calm his nerves. It’s a familiar comfort from his past that he can’t quite seem to let go of.

“You know, you’ve visited me a lot over these past few weeks. People are going to start talking,” he murmurs around the rim of the can before taking a sip. “Not that they already aren’t.”

It’s been four weeks since Stephen Strange told him the truth of why he handed over the time stone and Tony’s been busier than he has in almost a year. So many people visit him nowadays; Steve, Natasha, Pepper, Rhodey and even Sam when he’s free. But it’s Stephen who visits him the most. They usually see each other three times a week. Sometimes they stay and chat at Tony’s place, other-times Stephen will take him to the sanctum and on the rare occasions, they’ll actually go out and get something to eat together.

The whole thing between him and Stephen—it’s strangely nice. When they’d first met, things had been different between the two. Both were so similar that they clashed and couldn’t speak without the words being filled with rudeness and snark. But with the amount of time they’ve been spending with one another as of late, the rudeness and the snark has disappeared, being replaced with fondness and the snarks still there but it’s less biting than it had been.

Tony’s not sure what to think about this sudden change. It’s nice, really it is, but he hasn’t felt this connected to a person in a long time and the whole thing is terrifying. Sometimes he sits and wonders what it would’ve been like if he and Stephen had met each other before the attack on New York. But then that’s like asking what it would’ve been like had he not become Iron Man and that’s not something he ever dwells on. If it can be helped. The mind can turn on you sometimes.

“You do that a lot,” Stephen comments, taking a sip of the drink he’d ordered. “Disappearing into
Tony raises an eyebrow, looking down at the melted marshmallow’s in his hot chocolate, “Is that a bad thing?”

“Not necessarily. It depends on what you’ve retreated into.”

Tony eyes the people to their right, who are trying and failing, to cast inconspicuous looks at them. It’s been a while since he’s been seen out, especially in any place that’s overtly public because the questions people asked sometimes got too personal, too deep and he hadn’t been ready to answer them. He still isn’t.

“This,” he shrugs, looking back at Stephen. “Our friendship. I was just thinking of what we’d be like, if we’d met before all of this.”

“You don’t think we would be friends?”

Tony nods and pushes his mug away, leaning back into his chair with a sigh, “I think that without the shared trauma of what Thanos did, we’d exchange pleasantries at best.”

“I disagree,” and the smile is back on Stephen’s face, too soft and just slightly smug.

“That’s it? You just, disagree?” Tony asks, shooting him a pointed look of exasperation. “You never explain things in full. It’s like you’ve got to be all cool and mysterious to keep up the act of being a wizard.”

“I am a sorcerer not a wizard. We’ve discussed this.”

“Yeah but it annoys you,” he grins, reaching for his mug. “But seriously, you think we’d be friends if you weren’t a magician and I wasn’t Iron Man?”

“I would use the term ‘friends’ loosely but I think we would get along just fine. They say that opposites attract, I believe the same can be said for those who are similar too.”

Tony raises his eyebrows, “They usually say that in a romantic sense.”

And Stephen’s face sets with amusement. Tony likes that look on him.

“I suppose they do.”

Chapter End Notes

I’VE DONE ALL MY LETTERS FOR THE LITERARY AGENTS AND I DON’T KNOW WHAT TO DO! !! SO MUCH PANIC! I DOUBT MYSELF A LOT SO ILL PROBS PUT THIS OFF UNTIL MY MUMS READ THE LETTERS. FYI THE LETTERS ARE THE SYNOPSIS AND QUERY (? IS THAT HOW U SPELL IT?)
Wrath

Chapter Summary

An attack on central park leaves Tony questioning his position and Stephen is the only one who can help him figure it out.

Chapter Notes

trash chapter, i know and it's also short. i'm a horrible human being but I've had the worst day and i just wanted to get this out there because once i stop, i wont start again for a long time. I have no intentions of leaving this story behind. none. 0. Once again, i'd like to give special thanks to my bois BTS for providing me solace when writing this chapter, their music is just so goddamn good.

on another note, I've written another ironstrange fanfic, that I've had a lot of fun with. It's called; 'In your heart shall burn', if any of you would like to check it out. ALSO, i do not hate Steve Rogers, i adore him but this chapter kind of wrote itself and yeah, just a heads up incase any of u get the wrong idea. peace out]
<3

It’s a sick realisation but one that Tony knew was always coming. There’d been villains before Thanos and he should’ve known better than to think that there wouldn’t be any after.

Half of the Avengers; Tony, Steve, Stephen and Peter, were called in after an attack on Central Park. At first, he’d flat out refused to go back there, it’s where everything had begun and where it had ultimately ended. Tony hasn’t been to Central Park in years, too afraid that if he does, everything will come rushing back and smother him.

But innocent people were being killed by a madman going by the name of; Blackheart and Tony’s had more then enough of people thinking that just because they have the power to destroy the world, that they should.

Blackheart had been a kid, the same age as Peter but that’s where the similarities stopped. Green had shone from his palms, blasting into an oncoming school bus and toppling it over. None of them had been fast enough to stop it. Children had died under the protection of the Avenger’s, killed by a kid who had been failed by the same system put in to protect him.

Everything had gone to shit after that. Steve was thrown into a nearby building, slumping down the wall of it, until he hit the ground in an unconscious pile. Peter had been hit by the green glow from Blackheart’s palm and sent flying through the park. And Tony had been stabbed through the suit of his armour by the green glow that Blackheart had manipulated to fit the shape of a sword.

It was Stephen who had won them the fight, going toe-to-toe with the kid and winning. He hadn’t come out unscathed, cuts and bruises adorning his face and if Tony hadn’t been so shaken by the whole thing—of seeing Steve and Peter flung through the air lifeless—he would’ve said it was a good look on him.

Stephen had helped him up and blood had run from the corner of his mouth and in that moment Tony didn’t think, he had acted. Throwing his arms around Stephen’s neck and pulling him closer, scared that he would disappear into ash like he had before. It’s an image that keeps him up at night sometimes.

“Everything’s okay, Tony,” Stephen had whispered softly into his ear before withdrawing. “We need to check on Steve and Peter.”

With wide eyes and a shaky breath, he’d nodded, “I’ll get Peter, you take Steve.”

Wrath is not an emotion Tony is unfamiliar with. Some days it burns more brightly then others or sometimes it just simmers below the surface, waiting to be used on the right person. There’s a lot
he’s got to be angry at; the past, mistakes, Thanos.

When he was younger, Tony used to cope with it by drinking himself stupid. It wasn’t always alcohol, Pepsi seemed to do the trick just fine in making him loosen up and forget everything that was playing on his mind. Now, now he has people to help him through his wrath.

“I’m not to sure that Avenging is my thing anymore,” he mumbles, wandering over to his couch and throwing himself onto it, legs and arms sprawling across the cushions. “It was once but after-after everything, I don’t think I can do it.”

He can’t see Stephen’s face or the expression he’s wearing but Tony’s gotten pretty good at reading him lately. He knows it contemplative, maybe concerned.

“What makes you say that?” the other man asks, voice annoyingly calm and soft, how it usually is when he talks to Tony.

“Sure, Iron Man saved my life and the Avengers—it’s all been like a new lease on life for me. A way to redeem myself but I don’t think I could lose another person to people like Blackheart or beings like Thanos. I don’t have that strength in me anymore,” he rushes, feeling like a weight is being lifted from his chest as the words leave his mouth. “I lost everything with Pepper and we don’t speak much anymore. That’s on me, my refusal to leave behind Iron Man. I just-can’t really explain it well.”

“You don’t need to explain yourself, not to me and certainly not to anyone else,” Stephen’s voice rings from behind him and suddenly there’s two hands on Tony’s shoulders, pressing down. “This is what it feels like, isn’t it? Every time you step out to fulfil your role as an Avenger.”

Tony nods, swallowing down the lump in his throat, “About a hundred times worse but yeah, you’ve pretty much nailed it.”

“Think about it, Tony. You’re clearly undecided on the subject at hand. Speak to Peter, maybe even Steve. They may be able to help you better than I can.”

He scoffs, turning around to face the other man and knocking Stephen’s hands off his shoulders, “What makes you think that Steve could ever help me better than you?”

Stephen backs away, raising his hands, “History, I suppose.”

Tony shakes his head furiously, struggling to get to his feet gracefully and turns fully to face the other man. He points a finger and waggles it, “Nope, Nu-ah, No. Me and Steve have history, yeah but he tried to kill me. You literally died to save my life. There’s no competition and there never will be, Stephen.”

A small smile decorates the sorcerer’s lips and Tony can’t help but mimic it.

“Dully noted.”
Chapter Summary

Gluttony

another fight ensues and tony just wants to help, he really does but sometimes people can't be saved.

Chapter Notes

I've never been in love so if this is taking a while to develop or there's no real proper hints at their friendship becoming more, than that's why. i'm super proud of myself because today, i played like three hours in quick play on overwatch? like my anxiety has been preventing me from doing so for so long and this seems like a smol victory but one that i'm proud of nonetheless. honestly tho, i'm such a trash at sombra despite the fact that i have 100 hours on her? i guess its bc i'm a filthy mercy man, i just can't handle her mechanics and need to aim lol. i would like to state that i'm a reformed mercy main and now one trick d.va.

anyways, thank u for all your sweet comments on the chapters. honestly teared up a little bit. i love y'all truly. jesus christ i cannot feel my arm as i type this. it's what i get for further straining my already bad arm. see you all in the next chapter, toodles.

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tony's thrown across the sanctum, hitting the wall and slipping down it. Now, on any other day when he was in his suit, Tony would find it mildly annoying. He's used to be thrown around by the villain of the week but he's always had the comfort of his suit right there with him.

Without it, Tony feels nothing but exposed and he hasn't felt this way since Thanos. He'd gone against him both with and without the suit and almost died. When Tony had agreed to remain as an Avenger, he'd meant in the sense of doing the occasional job here and there.

When he'd sat and asked Stephen whether or not he should remain in the Avengers, Tony hadn't known his answer then. He does now. Picking himself off the floor, Tony wipes the blood from the corner of his mouth and stares down the man responsible for it.

“Kid, let me tell you something,” Tony wheezes, thumping a fist on his chest. “There have been people before you and there will be people like you after. You're not special.”

“You think your something special, Thanos? A martyr for all people to look up to?” Tony barks out a bitter laugh. “There have been people like you before you, Thanos and there will be people like you after.”

“The people shall remember your sacrifice and your failure,” Thanos's voice rings in the distance. “But they will know me for all the good I have done.”

Tony laughs again, baring teeth, "Know you? Yeah, they do alright but not for all the good you’ve done. The universe will know you as nothing but a bad memory that sometimes haunt them at night. What else did you expect when you took away half of the universe in your tirade of self-righteousness? If I die, they’ll remember me as an Avenger who tried to save the world, rather than destroy it like you did.”

Tony blinks the memory bad, hard and he sees stars for a moment.

“You’re just a man in the suit,” the kid spits, hands outstretched and in front of him. “Take away the suit and what are you?”

Blackheart was a problem, one that he and the entirety of the Avengers had thought, was dealt with. Turns out, that hadn't been the case. He’d managed to escape a secure S.H.I.E.L.D facility using his powers due to the fact that nobody had a clue as to what his powers actually were. Blackheart could launch people through the air with his green blasts but that’s all he’d shown. They’d all dismissed him as a kid that had the power of telekinesis but with the way his holding cell had been burnt to the ground with acid, showed differently.
“There’s a lot more to me then the suit, kid.”

Tony manages to dodge a blast of green by throwing himself to the side. Unfortunately, that had meant diving face first into some kind of artefact that connected with the corner of his chin, clinking his two rows of teeth together painfully.

“You can’t even defend yourself without the suit, Tony Stark,” the kid spits out his name like it’s something rotten. “It’s all you are and all your ever be.”

Tony laughs, pushing off his back and sitting up. He opens his arms, “Do it.”

Blackheart blinks, green eyes swirling with confusion. “What?”

“You came here to kill me, so do it.”

The kid takes a step back and then another, before raising his arms that swirl to life with some kind of green vapour. Tony’s not quite sure what it is from this distance.

“The mighty really do fall, don’t they?”

Tony is surprised by the softness of the kid’s tone but he doesn’t show it, opting for a shrug instead. Blackheart shakes his head and the green vapour shoots off his arms, heading straight for Tony. He shuts his eyes and waits but the blow never comes. Instead, something soft flutters onto his shoulders and tickles at his cheeks.

Tony opens his eyes when he hears a body connect with the ground and looks down at himself, finding Stephen’s signature red cloak upon his shoulder and one of the sides covers his face, blackened by the blow it had absorbed for him. The cloak flutters from his shoulders and over to Stephen, who stands before him with an arm outstretched.

Tony flickers his eyes to Blackheart, who lies on the ground unconscious and then back up at the resident sorcerer.

“I’m gone for five minutes and someone tries to kill you,” the other man shakes his head, walking over to Tony before bending down to meet his eyes. “And you almost let him. Mind telling me why that is?”

Stephen’s voice is level and soft, not accusing like Tony had expecting it to be.

“I don’t know,” he answers honestly. “Maybe I thought he wouldn’t do it, that I could teach him a lesson. He’s just a kid, you know?”

The sorcerer’s blank expression falters into one of sadness and Tony instantly regrets his words because he hates that look on Stephen, even more when he’s the one responsible for putting it there.

“You can’t save everyone, Tony.”

“Yeah, but I can damn well try.”

Stephen reaches out and Tony lets him, their hands clasping together. And in that moment, he feels peaceful and safe, safe from the nightmares that never leave.

Chapter End Notes
ALSO THANOS IS A PURPLE GRAPE AND IM NOT SORRY FOR HIM BEING OOC. HE SUCKS.
Hope

Chapter Summary

Tony talks with Peter about what he should do; stay or leave the Avengers?

Chapter Notes

Yeeeee, I actually really enjoyed writing this chapter and after downloading and reading this fanfic, I realised that I probably should’ve read over my chapters before posting it, as there’s some mistakes that made me laugh. But I’ll probably go over this when it’s finished. Talking about finishing this, we’re two chapters away after this one. It’s honestly been a lot of fun.

<3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So, whose going to wield it?” Tony asks, clapping his hands together and stepping back.

Steve shoots him a look and Tony glares back at him. He hates that expression on Steve’s face, it’s always condensing and only ever aimed at him.

“What? It’s a valid question,” he bites, not bothering to sound pleasant. He’s bone deep with exhaustion and there’s an absence in his chest that’s been widened even further after leaving Loki behind. “We just went to hell and back to get this goddamn thing. Somebody actually got to use it.”

After the fight with Loki, all those years ago, Tony had wanted nothing more than to return the favour and throw the little shit out the window, to see how he liked the feeling of free-fall. Now, after actually talking to Norse god and hearing his story; Loki’s real heritage, the fall, the torture Thanos had subjected him to, the poor father figure. Tony wanted nothing more then to fix the entire situation for the god because he knows exactly how Loki had felt and what torture could do to a person.

But in this timeline, Loki’s dead and with the way the god had spoken before his departure, he wasn’t likely to come back from it this time. Tony had no idea how Thor would react to that kind of news.

“Tony,” Steve starts in his annoyingly patronising voice. “The infinity gauntlet can’t be harnessed by just anyone. It could kill any of us if we tried. Thor is the only one of us who could even hope to wield it with some form of success.”

“Mr. America is right,” Thor nods, thoughtfully stroking his chin. “I am of Asgard and the God of Lightning. I am the only Avenger who can wield the gauntlet.”

“That’s true,” Bruce mutters, pinching the bridge of his nose. “You’re brother was able to use two stones at once, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah but that almost killed him,” Tony interrupts and looks around at his fellow Avenger’s. They shoot him looks of confusion and he sighs. “Come on guys, don’t tell me you’re blind now? When we reprimanded the guy and he looked about three seconds from passing out cold. Thor’s a god, yeah, but he’s not invincible. Wielding all the infinity stones could kill him, even if they’re contained within the gauntlet.”

“I am the only one who can try, Man of Iron,” Thor’s voice rumbles through the room. “This is our only option.”

“So, none of us could?” Tony asks again, wanting to confirm if that was the case. There’s something heavy sitting in his chest and it feels wrong, almost like the feeling you get when you’ve let someone down.
There was no other way.

Tony swallows, closing his eyes, “So, it’s not the sword of the stone kinda case then? That sucks.”

Thor’s brow furrows, “Sword in the stone?”

“Thou who is worthy can pull the sword from the stone. Something like that.”

The God lifts his hand, eyes twinkling and he slaps a hand on Tony’s back, jutting him forward. Tony shakes his head, eyes narrowing at the god.

“I have heard whispers in the cosmos about that being something possible but Man of Iron, they are mere whispers, speculation. Would you wager so much on such baseless words?”

The time stone was exchanged for his life because there was no other way. A man, who he barely knew, gave up his life for his. Tony doesn’t know why he was spared, but there’s an idea floating around in the back of his mind as to why. It’s more of an absent thought that he pushes back whenever it threatens to leap to the surface but now, it seems prevalent. It seems right. He grabs his left arm, massaging the ache that had started after the universe was halved.

“Why are you so adamant on this, Tony?” Steve questions.

“I was told by Doctor Strange that in the event that he had to choose the time stone over me, Peter or the time stone, that he would choose the stone every time,” he answers, hating the way his voice falters on the names. “But he didn’t. He gave the time stone to Thanos in exchange for my life. Why?”

“How are we supposed to answer that?” Natasha raises an eyebrow. “We’ve never met the man.”

“That’s unfortunate, honestly, he’s got a nice face,” Tony blinks, taken aback at his sudden rambling. “Ignore that. My point is, before he died, Doctor Strange used the time stone to look forward in every possibility our fight with Thanos would lead to. Fourteen-million, I think he looked through and we only won one.”

“You think he exchanged the time stone to keep you alive because in that one event where we win, we need you to wield the gauntlet.”

Tony glances at Scott before nodding, “It’s been more of a thought, really but it’s plausible. Traveling back in time and building our own gauntlet wasn’t my idea, so clearly I wasn’t needed for that. So, what was the reason for keeping me alive?”

“That’s enough,” Steve cuts through, voice firm. “Speculation will get us nowhere. Thor’s the one to wield the gauntlet, end of.”

Tony’s tired, way too tired to bother arguing with the guy. He throws his hands up, “You better be sure about that, Rogers because we only get one shot at this.”

Hope isn’t something one considers in this line of work. The line of work where you risk your life, every waking moment, to ensure that the people of the world remain safe and sound. It doesn’t take long to realise that you can’t save everyone, that innocent people will die under your watch. The pain that comes with that kind of failure, having somebody die under you watch, can destroy a lesser person. When you’re a hero, an Avenger, you have to be strong because if you display an ounce of weakness, the enemy will latch onto it and never let it go. Not until they succeed.
“You’re thinking about leaving the Avengers, Mr. Stark?” Peter asks, blinking over at him from the booth they’re sitting in. Lowing his voice and leaning in, Peter asks, “But why?”

Tony sighs, swirling the straw in his milkshake absently and looks up at the ceiling, “I’ve fought a lot of bad people in my life and then T-and then everything happened. I don’t think I’ve got much fight left in me anymore, Kid.”

Peter looks down at his empty plate, closing his eyes and swallowing before he looks back up at Tony. His eyes are wide and sad but his mouth is pressed into a thin line. Almost like he wants to say something but is stopping himself. Peter shakes his head and leans back.

“Mr. Stark, I won’t lie and say that you leaving is a good thing. I know people see Captain America as the leader of the Avengers but that’s not—that’s not true! You were there before him and you’re like…like the figurehead of the Avengers!” Peter says, catching himself in places to lower his voice. He shoots Tony a sad smile. “But I’m not going to stop you. If you want to leave the Avengers, then nobodies going to stop you. I think it’s about time, Mr. Stark, that you do things for yourself and not others. You’ve given more than enough of your life to the citizens of America and the world!”

Tony leans back in his seat and a fond smile, tinted by sadness, falls on his lips. He turns, looking out of the window beside the booth, “So you are capable of not blabbing seamlessly.”

Peter sputters, reaching for his Coke and downing it quickly. He points a long, bony finger at Tony, “I can be serious when I want and when it’s needed of me.”

“Sure you can, Kid.”

Tony continues watching the people on the street move about their daily lives. There’s something fascinating watching people and knowing that you’ll probably never come into contact with them again. Whenever there’s a window near Tony, he’ll often situate himself by it just to watch the world as it goes around. He used to do it all the time when he was younger and has never really grown out of it.

“So, what happened to you the other week? I heard someone attacked the Sanctum whilst you were there visiting Mr. Strange,” Peter speaks up after finishing his drink. “And you’ve got a like, a huge bruise on the side of your face. Did it hurt? It looks like it hurt.”

Tony can’t help the grimace that crosses over his face, “Yeah, I fell onto some kind of artefact when I was trying not to die.”

Peter’s eyes widen even further, “Wait, you almost died?”

“A series of unfortunate events, Kid. Blackheart escaped his holding cell at S.H.I.E.L.D and still held a grudge against Strange for being the one to defeat him. When he got to the Sanctum, I was the only one there and without my suit. Obviously,” he tacks on the last word as an after-thought. “Wasn’t really the highlight of my day but hey, I’m still alive.”

“You don’t sound happy about that last part, Mr. Stark.”

Peter’s voice is hard with concern and Tony turns away from the kid, feeling guilty by just looking at him.

“I don’t know, Kid,” he answers honestly and is shocked at the waver in his words. “I haven’t really known much since the fight against T-I just feel like I’ve been in a daze and I haven’t been able to break out of since.”

Their booth is quite for a moment as Peter studies his empty plate and bites his lip, eyebrows drawn together. Tony just stares out the window, wondering what life would be like if he’d been born to your average couple. What would he have been without his parents, the company, Iron Man?
"I get what you’re saying Mr. Stark. I really do but maybe somebody could help." Tony shoots him a look, not quite sure what the kid is getting at. Peter frantically waves his hands and says, "You feel like you’re trapped in a daze ever since your fight against ‘he who shall not be named’. So maybe, talking to someone who was there might help you break out of it? This is more of a thought than a suggestion, I just—from personal experience, I know that it’s best to embrace they people you’ve got around you when you’re in need of help and not to turn them away.”

Tony remains quite, still staring out the window as he mulls over Peter’s words.

"The world is a cruel place, Mr. Stark but only if you let it be.”

“And who, just who, would I unload all of this onto? All of this that I’m feeling, it’s not just from ‘he who shall not be named’. I’ve met and trusted some bad people and those kind of things don’t ever leave you.”

“Talk to me about. I’ll always listen to what you have to say!”

Tony turns to look at the kid, a steel kind of sternness to his eyes, “No way I’m sharing all this with you. Peter, you’re just a kid, who’s been through a hell of a lot. I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“But—”

Tony cuts Peter’s protest off with a raised hand, “End of discussion. I’ll deal with it, in my own time and in my own way.”

“What about Mr. Strange?”

“Strange. You want me to talk to Strange,” he blinks, voice deadpan.

“You two have been hanging out ever since the celebration months ago. You’re friends and no— you can’t deny it to me, Mr. Stark!” Peter lifts a triumphant finger and waggles it. “You’ve both been through a lot of shit—whoops, please don’t kill me for using that swearword, but it’s true. He’ll understand, probably better than most. Isn’t it worth a try?”

Tony reaches over the booth and pats Peter on the shoulder, directing a fond smile at the kid, “We’re friends but I don’t want to…”

He removes his hand from Peter’s shoulder, resting it on the table before him. Tony watches as his strawberry milkshake melts in a kind of transfixed boredom.

“You don’t want to burden him with all your stuff?” Peter asks gently. “Is that it, Mr. Stark?”

Tony flicks the glass cup his milkshake’s in and shrugs, “Something like that.”

Peter reaches forward, grabs his hand and squeezes it, “Don’t be. You never have and never will be a burden.”

“You’re not going to let this drop until I say yes, are you?” he sighs but still squeezes the kid’s hand in return before withdrawing it.

“Nope. Just talk to him, Mr. Stark.”

Chapter End Notes
fyi, I reckon Loki's probably going to play an important part in Avengers 4 (maybe
he won't be in it long, bc for some reason the writers b8 him, but i think what he has to
say will be prevalent in taking down thanos. that's why he's in this fic a lot, another
reason is bc I'm a loki stan and i cant help it, rly.
Nightmare

Chapter Summary

tony speaks to Stephen about his nightmares and learns the importance that friendship brings.

Chapter Notes

dthis is a very short chapter, i think over 800 words but don't worry, the last chapter will be long, long, long. this is just wrapping up the small snippets where you see tony and Stephen talking and becoming closer. the last chapter will focus upon on that development and take it further, thank you for sticking with me this long and for all the beautiful comments, seriously some of them have made me cry. god bless you all. and forgive me if I've used punctuation in the wrong places, i was never taught it properly at school so i just kind of rely on word to sort it out for me. it's so exciting to see this fanfiction almost finished but it's also sad bc I've loved writing every minute of it, despite the torturous uploading parts. for some reason a03 has to join together all the paragraphs and makes it one big sentence, so i have to upload it and then edit and it's all really confusing and irrelevant.

thanks for sticking with me this far and i'll see you one last time for the final chapter.

<3

“It’s always the same,” Tony begins, taking in a deep breath. “That—that didn’t come out right. The nightmares always have the same messages to them; failure, weakness, death. There’s never an outcome where I win. The nightmares are never the same. Sometimes I fall to earth and die, after the attack on New York. Other times, I watch as you and Peter die. I don’t sleep much anymore and to be completely honest, I haven’t gotten a good night’s sleep in years.”

Stephen peers at him over the rim of his glass, takes a sip and puts it down on the table between the two of them. He leans forward, elbows resting on his knees and hands clasping together. The sorcerer looks exhausted, eyes rimmed red and cheekbones even more prominent then before.

“I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve died,” he huffs and at the look Tony shoots him—a mixture of concern and confusion—adds; “It’s a long story, one I think, for another time. The point I was trying to make is, that nightmares in this line of work will never truly go. The same can be said with all bad things; we tend to remember the bad more than we do the good. Some say it’s because it forces us to grow stronger and others, to teach us not to make the same mistakes. Me personally, I think the bad sticks because it leaves scars behind and scars never disappear. They may fade, yes but they will always remain.”

Tony frowns down at the table, lips pulling into a taut line. Every-time he closes his eyes, there’s a flash of a distance memory; Peter dying in his arms, falling from the portal, Captain America beating him down. He doesn’t know how long he can survive without the sleep.

“I get what you’re saying, I really do,” he huffs out a humourless laugh and looks up at the other man, meeting his eyes. “But I don’t know how much longer I can deal with this. Every-time I shut my eyes, all I see is what I failed to do and the mistakes I made. So many people have died under my watch and just, how do I move past knowing something like that? How do I get rid of the weight that all those deaths bring?”

“ ‘You live on for them,’ Stephen answers without hesitation. ‘A good many people have died under my watch too, Tony. They died because I failed to protect them but I live on to honour the way they died, so that no-one has to die again but that’s no easy feat. Where there is good, evil will always follow and where there is war, death will be too. You cannot save everyone and although I made a promise to those I failed, I cannot protect everyone, no matter how hard I try.’”

There’s a hard look on the Sorcerer’s face and Tony can hear the pain seeping into his words the more he speaks. Every word, Tony understands, he can feel the all-to familiar ache in his chest that always re-appears when he thinks on those he failed.

“I know I can’t save every-one but how can I stay as an Avenger, knowing that?”

“You try your best because in the end, that’s all you can do.”
Tony holds his head in his hands, shaking it and he can’t stop the emotions rising within him, from bubbling to the surface. He hates the sinking feeling that the thought of death brings; it’s always cold, harsh, sharp and feels like a dagger pressing and twisting under his skin.

“Tony,” Stephen begins, reaching out and taking his hand. “I can try a spell that might help you sleep but it will not rid you from the nightmares when day comes.”

“I just want to sleep,” he hisses, squeezing Stephen’s hand. “I want to forget everything and just sleep.”

“Life would be too kind to grant us that small mercy. Tony, the world is a cruel place and so few people ever look at it for what it could be, instead of what it is. Don’t focus on your failures, focus on your achievements and what the Avengers truly mean to the world. It is as I said before, where there is good, evil will always follow. The world still has use of you yet, so chin up because I will be there with you every step of the way. Always.”

Tony leaps forward, wrapping his free arm around Stephen’s neck and crushing their joint hands between their chests. Back on Titan, when everything had begun and ended, if you’d have asked Tony if he and Stephen Strange would be friends, he would’ve laughed in your face and walked away. Now, now he knows that you can find friends in the people you least expect.
Love

Chapter Summary

the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end.

Chapter Notes

well, here we are. finally reached the end of 'Veni, Vidi, Vici.' i was supposed to get this up yesterday but i went out with a friend up town, watched Teen Wolf when we got back to mine (i ate a whole 20 piece chicken nugget box myself, yiiikkkeeeessss) and then watched Infinity War with my parents later on. by the time i got around to writing this yesterday, it was like 11pm and i was tired. so, i made the decision to get this up today. i've enjoyed writing every moment of this fanfic, it's honestly been a wild ride and all you're comments have been wonderful, in the happy tears kind of way, thank you for the support on this fanfic and i can assure you that this one wont be my last in the Ironstrange department, i have another idea already floating around in my brain. i could say more about this chapter but i think it's time to let it go. so, here we go. Chapter ten, the final chapter, of 'Veni, Vidi, Vici'.

Tony can’t breathe. There’s no comfort to be found in his suit, it lies in mangled heaps all by him and the Avengers lay broken and bruised across the sidewalk. Thor is somewhere further down the street, dead.

They’d followed the plan to a T—with Thor being the one to wield the gauntlet and take on Thanos. It had worked, at first and for a moment, it felt like winning. The victory had not been long lived, snatched from between their fingers by the Mad Titan. The feeling of tasting victory, having it in your hands, only for it to be snatched away, is soul crushing and Tony feels defeated.

Thor is dead. Bruce is missing an arm. Steve has been knocked unconscious, along with Natasha, Clint and Scott. Only he and Nebula remain but neither are in any condition to take on Thanos.

The gauntlet faces Tony, only meters away from his head and where Thanos had launched it off Thor’s arm. It glints in the sunset, enticing and Tony can feel it calling to him.

There was no other way.

He crawls, using his arms to pull him forward and reaches out for the gauntlet. Thanos watches him, amusement sparkling in his eyes and lifting the corner of his lips.

“Earth’s mightiest heroes, that’s what your people called you. Now look at where you are; beneath me and beaten. It’s as I said once before; Dread it, run from it, in the end destiny still arrives.”

Tony pushes himself up, the gauntlet hanging from his left hand and faces Thanos. Exhaustion weighs him down and the burning of the jagged cut the Mad Titan had delivered all those years ago on Titan, reminds him of what he’s lost and that by doing this, wearing the gauntlet, he has nothing left to lose. If the Avenger’s fail this time, then there’s no third chance. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. He’s the only one who can stand, the only one who can fight. I think Strange new this would happen. I think this is why he kept me alive on Titan.

“Peter Parker, Stephen Strange, Pepper Potts, Thor Odinson, Loki Odinson. Do you recognise those names?” He meets eyes with the Titan, face distorting to try and hide the fear that Tony can’t quite manage to hide. Thanos has been with him for over ten years and as much as he wants not to feel afraid, he can’t. He can’t. “Those are just a few of the people’s who lives you took in order to fulfil your vision of justified genocide. You think that taking lives is mercy? Hell no. Knowing when to take and spare a lives is what separates you from goodness.”

The gauntlet is weightless, clasped in his left hand but Tony can feel the power running through it and that alone is enough to weigh him even further down.
"Just because you have the power to do something, doesn't mean that you should."

Tony’s proud of the conviction in his voice and thankful for their being no waver. He has no doubt Thanos knows how terrified he is of him but he’ll fight against it, every step of the way because he knows the Mad Titan basks in it.

“And look who it is, who has yet to truly fall. The righteous man,” Thanos brings his gauntlet clad arm down, clenching his hand into a fist. “I always knew it would be you, Tony Stark, who would make the final stand.”

“You may have the power of a god,” he grits, gauntlet slipping onto his own arm and it burns with sharp coldness, sending tingles up his arm. “But that doesn’t make you one. I wear the gauntlet but I know exactly who I am, do you?”

“Someone once said a similar thing to you and I remember squeezing the life from their body. I am not a god, Tony Stark, I am so much more.”

Tony stretches his fingers in the gauntlet, it’s unpleasant and he can already feel the power weaving it’s way through his fingers and up his left arm. Thor’s story about ‘the worthy one’, held some merit then, seeing as he hadn’t disintegrated on the spot.

“The most dangerous person, is the one with nothing to lose. You took everything from me, Thanos and now I’m going to take everything from you.”

Tony falls to his knees, gauntlet slipping from around his arm and clattering to the floor. There’s noise all around him, the blaring of horns, screams, shouts and cries. It’s overwhelming and suffocating all at once and he covers his ears, pressing his eyes firmly shut.

There’s two hands on his shoulders, stabilizing him and Tony deems it safe to let his eyes open and there’s Peter. He’s still in his Iron Spider suit, dirt and sweat making his hair cling to his forehead but the kid’s alive and breathing and suddenly everything’s too much. Tony can’t breathe but he doesn’t let that stop him from surging forward and pulling Peter down and tight to his chest.

They did it. He did it. Thanos is dead and everything is back to normal.

“Mister Stark, you did it,” Peter cries into his shoulder. “I knew you would do it.”

“I’m glad to have you back, Kid,” he huffs and there’s tears sliding down Peter’s uniform because Tony Stark is crying, a mixture of sadness and joy. “And I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

“You’ve got nothing to be sorry for, Mister Stark. Absolutely nothing.”

There are footsteps approaching, soft patters on the ground and Tony’s surprised he can hear it over all the noise. The world hasn’t been this loud in years and it’s so strange.

“Thank you, Stark,” Stephen starts and his voice is soft and quiet. “For saving everyone, like I knew.”

Tony grabs the Sorcerer’s cloak, pulling him down by it and wraps an arm around Stephen, pulling him into his embrace with Peter.

“Just shut up, please. Let me enjoy this.”

Thor looks out at the world, namely Times Square in New York. There’s a hollowness to his face,
that makes the god look older. Tony saddles up beside him, hands in his pockets and watches as the sun descends into darkness. The quiet is relatively peaceful and though he doesn't want to break it, Tony knows he's got to but Thor beats him to it.

“It was always destined to be you,” the god turns to him, voice scratchy. “You were always to be the one to end the doom of the universe.”

“Well, I wouldn’t go as far as saying ‘destined’ but I think that’s what Strange saw when he looked back in time.”

Thor returns his gaze to the sunset, “That is the Sorcerer, yes?”

Tony nods, “He disappeared on me not to long after he came back, so I don’t know for sure.”

“I am sorry for not believing in you back then, Man of Iron. My foolishness nearly cost the world. I am lucky that it only caused my death,” the god sighs, face looking even more sunken then before. “I thought I’d lost my foolishness when I came to earth the first time and I shall work on ensuring that it never gets in the way again. You have my word, Man of Iron.”

Tony reaches over and pats his back, “You did what you thought was right and that’s all you can do.”

“I miss my brother,” Thor says suddenly.

Tony hates the absolute distraught expression on the god’s face. It’s heart-breaking and he can hear the pain in Thor’s voice. Loki meant the world to him, despite everything.

“Before I left the him that invaded New York, Loki told me that he knew he wasn’t coming back. The people who returned from the dead, were brought back with the Soul Stone because their lives had been taken by it. Loki didn’t die that way, did he?” Tony questions gently, squeezing the god’s shoulder before letting go.

“No, he did not.”

“Just—I know it feels like you’ve got no-one, big guy but family doesn’t always end with blood. The Avengers are your family too, don’t forget that.”

Thor turns on him once more, a small smile playing on his lips and nods, “I have always known that, Man of Iron.”

“You’re kidding, right?” Tony exasperates, crossing his arms. “Blackheart was apart of something bigger? He wasn’t just some rouge kid with superpowers?”

“He’s not just some ‘rouge kid with superpowers’ Stark,” Fury snaps, all patience lost. “Blackheart isn’t just a codename, it’s an organisation. One run in the black market. They inject all kinds of people for the right price and this injection gives them powers.”

“Jesus,” he hisses lowly, leaning more toward Stephen as Steve comes to stand beside him. “So this black-market organisation recruits kids then?”

“That’s where this whole story gets interesting, Stark. Blackheart is the son of the woman who runs it, Meliora Blackheart. She’s been on our list for wanted fugitives for over five years now but it’s pretty hard to track someone down when they have the ability to shape-shift.”

“What exactly is your point, Fury?” Steve cuts in, waving a hand.
Director Fury gives Steve a nasty glare and Tony turns to the side and sniggers. Steve shoots him a sharp look but he doesn’t pay attention, winking up at Stephen who shoots a quick look down at him.

“My point is, Captain America, that we’ve located the base for the Blackheart organisation and seeing as the three of you have already gone again a member.”

“Well, a kid who probably had no idea what he was doing,” Tony interjects. “Who we still don’t know is innocent, by the way. His mum or the rest of the Blackheart organisation, could’ve manipulated him into doing their dirty work.”

“Blackheart tried to kill you, Tony,” Stephen adds in darkly. “And he didn’t look like he needed much persuasion to do so.”

Tony kicks him in the shin and Stephen returns the jab.

“Ow,” he hisses, reaching down and grasping at his ankle. “That was just plain rude.”

Stephen rolls his eyes, “You can be a drama queen sometimes.”

“If the two of you are done flirting,” Fury bites, throwing the two a sarcastic smile. “I’m going to need the three of you to suit up. The sooner we take out Blackheart, the better.”

“Aye, Aye,” Tony salutes at Fury’s retreating back.

He get’s the middle finger in response.

The thing about evil, is that it never understands the fundamental law to the universe. Good always defeats evil. Sure, sometimes the good guys lose the battle but that gives them the experience and strength to ensure they don’t lose the war and the war is what counts.

“Yeah, no,” Tony huffs out through the comms, holding his palms outwards and ready to fire the repulsors. “I can’t take this guy out. He keeps taking my hits like it means nothing and these repulsors aren’t anything to laugh about. They do serious damage but apparently not to him.”

“Tony, calm down,” Stephen’s voice comes over the link, crackling as the connection wavers. “You’ve taken on so much stronger. You can defeat this man.”

“I don’t think I can, Stephen,” he sighs, looking down at the half of his suit that’s been destroyed. “He’s taken out half my suit already by throwing me around like a rag doll.”

“You wont be able to take him out with that attitude,” the other man grunts, exertion clear in his voice. A female voice cuts through the comms, “Cease your chatter. Your boyfriend does not matter when you are fighting me.”

Tony chokes on the assumption, clearing his throat to pass it off as a cough but Stephen is annoyingly intuitive, so he probably knows.

“I think you find that he does matter,” Stephen hisses and Tony can hear crashes and bangs. “You on the other hand, do not.”

Tony throws his arm up quick enough to catch, the seemingly invulnerable Blackheart subject’s, fist from pummelling into his face. He has enough time to let out a shaky breath before the guy lifts his other fist and hits Tony in the lower stomach, making him surge forward and cough up
“I’m telling you, right now, that I’m not going to be able to do this without back up,” he wheezes, collapsing to the floor. “Stephen, I need your help.”

The guy, there’s a tag on his shirt, one of those stupid ‘HELLO, MY NAME IS’ and it reads; ‘Sonner’. grabs the back of his suit and throws him back. Tony goes rolling across the floor and his back hits the wall.

“I want to help you but I can’t. Fury failed to inform us that this woman is well versed in the mystic arts.”

“Yeah,” Tony grunts. “That sounds like something he’d do.”

“Stay alive for me, Tony.”

Stephen’s comm crackles and Tony knows he’s lost all communication with him for now.

“Look, Sonner,” he starts, pressing his back against the wall and raising his hands. “I’m not your enemy, okay? This is an illegal act that’s doing god knows what to your body.”

Sonner stops advancing toward him, head tilting to the side.

“They’ve done some really bad things to you but you don’t have to be the way they wanted you to,” he clears his throat, tasting metal and grimaces. “I read the files on Blackheart during the flight here. Let me tell you, buddy, they don’t give you these powers out of the kindness of their hearts. They did it for the money. You know the serium they injected you with? That’ll kill you, eventually.”

“You speak lies,” Sonner hisses spit dripping from his mouth. “You want to placate me. You do not care.”

“No offense, dude but if I didn’t care I wouldn’t be having this conversation with you. Plus, if you didn’t care about what I have to say, then I’m pretty sure I’d be dead. Or am I wrong?”

“You speak too much for a man without his armour.”

“I’m trying to help you. If you remain with Blackheart, then I can’t administer the antidote to you and you’ll die. Do you want that?”

“I have looked death in the eye and laughed. I do not fear it.”

“Do you have a family?”

Sonner’s eyes cloud over, his face hardening and Tony knows he’s hit the right nerve.

“I’m assuming that’s why you payed for the injection then and became a part of Blackheart. For the money? Or was it for the power?”

“My daughter was always such a fan of you Avengers but more so Iron Man. She said it was because she could see herself in you.”

“And where is your daughter now?”
“With a new family, after her mother’s passing. I do this for her.”

Tony sighs, running a hand down his face. He feels more exhausted than he has in the past few months. Morales always get messy when it comes to protecting kids.

“Tony, me and Doctor Strange have taken down the rest of Blackheart. How’s it going on your end,” Steve’s voice crackles through, only expanding his already pounding headache.

“I’m in the middle of a little chat, Cap. Be a dear and ask Strange how is for me. His comm cracked out on me.”

“Tony, I’m—”

“Hold on a minute, Strange.”

He glances up at Sonner, who’s face is still passive but there’s an openness to it that wasn’t there before. I’m getting somewhere.

“You joined Blackheart, got the injection and did all the dirty work to provide money or your daughter?”

Sonner nods, “There was no other way.”

“Might’ve felt like that back then but there’s a way now, Sonner,” Tony grumbles. “I tell you what, if you testify against Blackheart and promise me never to return to that kind of life, I’ll pay for it all.”

Sonner blinks, “Pay for it all?”

“You need money for your daughter, to continue to provide for her? I just so happen to be filthy rich. I’ll give you everything you need and more. All I ask is that you testify against Blackheart.”

“You would do that, for someone like me?”

“There’s such a thing as second chances and I’m giving you one. Take it or leave it.”

“I’ll take it,” Sonner rushes out. “I’ll take it.”

Tony sighs, pressing two fingers to his right ear, “Everything’s good here, Strange, Cap. I’m bringing Sonner down now.”

“The black market is rigged to blow, Tony Stark. Everything is not good.”

“Well, shit,” he hisses, trying to push himself up but failing. His hands are too shaky. “Why didn’t you share that information with the class sooner?”

“I was still undecided on what to do with you!” Sonner defends. “The black market was rigged to explode if Blackheart was to ever be compromised. I got the notification two minutes ago from that slimy greaseball, Windel. We have three minutes to get out.”

Tony holds out an arm, shaking it, “Help me up, big guy.”

Sonner steps forward, grasping his arm in a strong grip and pulling Tony up, onto his feet.
“Did you hear any of that, Cap, Strange?”

“We heard it, loud and clear,” Stephen’s voice rings grim across the link. “You’re in the deepest section of the Black Market, Tony. I’m coming to get you.”

Tony staggers and Sonner stables him by placing both hands on his shoulders, “Easy.”

“Don’t worry about me, Strange. Get everyone out of the Market, now. I’ve got my suit—well, half of it. There are kids here, Doc. They’re way more important than me.”

Silence rings through the comms until Stephen finally speaks, “I disagree, Tony. You can’t keep sacrificing yourself for everyone else.”

“I’m doing my best, Stephen and I’m asking you to trust me. I’ve got enough time to get out here with my new pal, Sonner. We’ll meet you on the other side. You’ve got two minutes, can you handle that?”

“Oh course I can handle it,” the other man huffs over the line. “Don’t die on me or I’ll kill you.”

Tony grins, all loopy and far too happy. He’s been feeling happy around Stephen as of late and Tony likes it. Likes him.

“That kind of defeats—”

A loud bang echoes throughout the market and Tony turns, eyes meeting bright fire before everything goes dark.

Tony wakes up to a white light blaring down knot his eyes and he bolts upward, pulling at the wires in his arms.

“Hey, Mister Stark!” Peter yelps, jumping from his seat and gently pushing Tony back onto the bed by the shoulders. “Try not to move too much, you’ve been hurt pretty bad.”

“What the hell happened?” he groans, feeling a headache come on. “Oh god, I feel like I’ve had another moon thrown at me.”

“You really are a drama queen, Tony,” Stephen’s voice echoes through the room and Tony’s eyes snap over to meet him. “But it’s good to see you awake. You’ve been out for a day, almost two.”

“That still doesn’t answer my question,” he mutters but there’s a grin on his face. “But it’s also good to see you. I like your face.”

There’s a beautiful moment where Stephen flushes pink and Tony just laughs at the reaction.

“Oh my god,” Peter rushes out, covering his eyes. “This is so gross. Get a room.”

Stephen rolls his eyes, “Your new ‘pal’ saved your life. Turns out that he’s invulnerable to nearly every form of attack, including a bomb.”

“Aww, is that jealousy I detect in your voice,” he coos, trying to sit up but he just let’s himself fall back. Tony already feels exhausted at the small exertion. “But how is he, still breathing?”
“Still breathing,” Peter affirms. “But in a worse state then you.”

“How bad am I?” he asks, glancing down at himself wrapped in bed sheets.

“You hit your head, Tony and have a few bruises and burns. Nothing life threatening.”

“Thank fuck!” he cheers and then bouts into a fit of coughs. “I feel like shit.”

“And you’ll feel that way for a few days to come,” Stephen grins, amusement twinkling in his eyes. “It’s what you get for not listening to me.”

Peter’s face scrunches and he looks between the two men, “I’m leaving, Mister Stark, Doctor Strange. I don’t think I can stand the flirting anymore.”

Tony glances over at Stephen, “Am I flirting with you?”

Stephen just shrugs and Peter throws his hands up, clearly annoyed.

“Oh my god, Mister Stark. Yes, you are flirting and very badly.”

“What can I say, kid? Strange has stolen my heart,” he preens and winks at the other man.

Peter salutes, spinning on his heels and throwing open the door, exiting through it. Tony huffs out a laugh at the Kids antics.

“What you said, did you mean it?”

He blinks, still feeling groggy and off after waking.

“The thing about you stealing my heart?”

Stephen nods, a small and shy smile playing on his lips. Tony can’t help but mimic it, the smile growing into more of a grin.

“Yes, I meant it. What about you?”

Stephen shifts from foot-to-foot, ducking his head down, “You’re asking me if you’ve stolen my heart?”

Tony nods, positively beaming.

“I suppose you have.”

Tony shakes his head, narrowing his eyes, “I suppose? Come on, Doc!”

The other man rolls his eyes, stepping forward, “Yes, Tony. You’ve stolen my heart.”
Eight months later

“Will you stop fidgeting?” Stephen hisses, jabbing an elbow into Tony’s side as they walk together.

Tony returns the jab and smirks when the other man let’s out an irritated noise, “I can’t help it. These kind of events make me antsy.”

“Yes, I remember the last celebration.”

Tony laughs, a little uneasy and shakes his head, “I wasn’t in the best of places back then.”

“But you are now?”

Tony reaches over, grasping Stephen’s hand and squeezing. He glances around the museum—the same one from last year—and catches the eye of Peter, who has the audacity to wink at him. Tony shakes his head, shooting the kid a wink and tilting his head to gesture at the girl standing beside him. Peter flushes, turning away.

“I’ve got you and Peter. The Avenger’s too. Why wouldn’t I be happy?”

Stephen swings their hands between them, “You had us then and you have us now.”

“I guess, after everything, it’s taken me this long to realise it.”

Stephen stops them, in the centre of the museum and lifts his hands to cradle Tony’s face. Tony laughs at the display, his hand still held in Stephen’s.

“I love you, Tony Stark. We all do.”

“I know, Stephen. I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

‘I came, I saw, I conquered.’

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