

Some Idiots are Allowed in the Garage

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Some Idiots are Allowed in the Garage

by [ThirthFloor](#)

Summary

After a catastrophic end to their sophomore year of college, Tony Stark and Steve Rogers meet at the start of the next school year back at their off-campus home, shared with two (to be three) other roommates. Pressure is put on them to resolve their conflict.

Bruce Banner is uncomfortable in his own skin, in his reactions and feelings. He finds a friend in Scott Lang, an adorable mess of a student who lives on the same block and works at 7/11.

Loki is forced to go to the family legacy school, when he would have much preferred a private academy for the arts. He finds a challenge with a philosophical rival.

Thor believes he ruined his college football career when an injury leads to wrecking the university's 15 year championship against their rival school. He tries to fit in with a hodgepodge group of art kids.

Peter Parker has trouble making friends back at his high school. Luckily, he is easily taken in by his distant cousin and mentor, Tony Stark, along with his friends and roommates.

Peter Quill wants to start a band called “Masters of the Universe”. His friends say no. “Guardians of the Galaxy” it is, then.

For Those About to Rock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A lazy breeze drifted through the garage, following the bright midday sun and accompanying the shade that kept the inside cooler than the pavement outside. The air was starting to get those spicy scents of approaching fall, even though there was still little more than a week left before classes started. Move-in had been the day before, but the street was still over-parked with parents, relatives, and students bringing the last of their belongings to the rickety but modest off-campus houses. Those who were done arranging furniture and unpacking boxes were lounging on their front lawns or milling about the block to reunite with old friends. The smell of a distant barbeque mixed with the rising heat of late August.

Bruce Banner caught himself staring out the open garage door at some distant clouds, big and fluffy, promising for a nice summer day; but on the horizon lie darker, more ominous signs of a coming storm. Expression small and distracted, his fingers gently turned a slim screwdriver over and over in his hands.

Part of him toyed with the superstition that this sign of weather could be foreshadowing for the coming year, but the logical side of his brain quickly squashed that thought like a bug before it could grow into a nagging worry. He didn't need any more of that on his plate.

"Banner? *Bruce*? Hello, screwdriver please?" Tony Stark impatiently waved his hand from under the shell of an old car. Bruce's best friend since freshman year, a bit of an ass, but also the only other triple major that he had met and actually got along with to some extent, he and Tony lived and worked on most projects together. They shared majors in physics and engineering, and spent the majority of their time in garages or workshops constructing, patenting and selling what their professors called "inventions that visionaries couldn't hope to structure themselves".

They also often found themselves fixing people's cars, as Tony was now, or appliances and electronics for fees. Neither of them had a real job, but with Tony's wealthy inheritance, and their patents and repairs, they didn't need it. They were just fine, the four roommates in their junky off-campus house. They found a way to make it their own no matter what.

Bruce quietly apologized and handed Tony the screwdriver, bending over to peek under the car at him. "How's it coming?"

"Easy as it could be. Honestly, I'm amazed at how some people can mess their stuff up. This guy's entire axle is broken off, and he still drove it here. Look at this, Banner, the wheels were almost doing a split! Can you pass me that?" Bruce handed him a small wrench.

"Thanks. Anyways, I'm tempted to charge them extra for being stupid. Probably ran over a space divider in a parking lot."

Laughing softly, Bruce stood upright, once again looking out at the street. "You know we don't need that. Just fix it and we can get it out. We need to pull our cars up before the others

get here.”

At that mention, Tony got quiet for a second, tensed. The soft clattering of the repairs continued, but he didn’t say anything.

Bruce let out a soft sigh and thought carefully before his next words. “Look, Tony... the rest of us don’t know what happened between you two, but his name was already on the lease and he’s coming back. No amount of sulking and throwing fits is going to change that, so can you... just *try* to power through? And if it’s really terrible, we can work something else out for next semester. We all care about you, but no one wants your attitude ruining our junior year.”

Tony’s voice was bitter when he responded, too quickly. “I don’t care. He’s coming back, but that doesn’t mean I have to like him, and that doesn’t mean that I have to *pretend* to like him. He knows what he’s coming back to, so don’t expect a sugar-coat.” He briefly wheeled out from under the car to look at Bruce directly. “And you’re right, you *don’t* know what happened, so don’t tell me to get over it.”

The response that took a few moments to form came out softly, an attempt at reason that was almost pleading. “Tony... just talk to him. You’ve had all summer to think things over. He’s your best friend.”

“No, you’re my best friend. Apparently, you always were, because it sure as hell wasn’t him.” He wheeled back for the blockade of the underside of the car.

“Tony,” Bruce squared his shoulders a little, letting out a quiet breath. *Tony was a great guy, but he could be damn annoying. And petty and rude and arrogant as all hell, but the list only went on.* Bruce wouldn’t stand for it this year. For his own sake, he couldn’t. “I’m going out. When he gets here, you talk to him. If you don’t, well... no, that’s not an option. Do it. Deep down you know you want to, so *do it*.” With a huff, he pinched the bridge of his nose. “This isn’t about you anymore; you’ve dragged us all into your shit and now I want it over before classes start. None of us need this negativity loitering around.” Finally grabbing his glasses case off of the table, the sound of his footsteps fell as he walked to the door at the back of the garage that would lead into the kitchen. “Talk to him.”

Tony’s voice followed after him, drifting out from under the car in a single syllable. “Nope.”

When Bruce ignored him and turned to step inside, he almost bumped into the broad chest of Steve Rogers. It was easy to replace his bewildered expression with a tired smirk. “Well speak of the devil. Here to see Tony?”

In the background, Tony’s work had stopped again. Steve’s charming, all-American smile was in place, a gentle assurance to the tension in the room; and yet, that same smile didn’t reach his eyes, which danced with an awkward, uncharacteristic anxiety. “Uh – yeah. Is he in here?”

“As usual.” Bruce glanced back at Tony. “We didn’t see you pull up, are you-”

“I parked a block down, helped Bucky unload some stuff. He moved in with the Wakandan kids because... well, they’re all friends.” Steve’s smile remained tight, his glance darting uncertainly over to the car, and the legs belonging to their housemate that laid out from underneath it.

Bruce nodded as exhaustion crept into his amicable expression. “Sounds good. How’s his arm by the way, Bucky’s?”

Steve still answered despite clearly being in a rush, wanting the small talk to be over. “It’s great. You guys really helped him out, thank you... He said he’d start to come get it checked for updates before PT really starts for us, though.”

“Of course, our pleasure. Um...” Bruce gazed back over the interior of the garage, then looked to Steve and said with finality, “Well, I guess I’ll leave you two alone. Call if you need anything, either of you.” He moved aside to let Steve pass, going into the house and closing the door behind him.

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Stepping into the garage, Steve tried not to focus on anything for too long but still tried to distract himself, tried to avoid the impending conversation.

Little details brought back memories that warmed his heart and broke it at the same time; late nights playing cards on the fold-out table that never seemed to stop wobbling, coaxing Bruce and Tony to bed after realising that they’d been gone for about ten-too-many hours, clambering up the outside wall next to the garage door to shoot fireworks off the roof on Fourth of July... They all blossomed warm feelings of safety, family, of *home*... This was a place that they had established as their own, this was a family they all had chosen.

But the end of last semester had ruined that all. A few misplaced words, a few emotional, impulsive reactions, a confession uncalled for...

Yet, the memories that stung the most were the quiet minutes that he got in here, alone with Tony. He was always working when it was just the two of them, but sometimes Tony would stop and look up and they’d exchange just a split-second, breath-taking glance, and Steve would think that maybe – just maybe – there was something more in that moment. Even after it all went wrong, he couldn’t help but *know* when he thought back on the way Tony’s dark eyes would soften and he’d stop talking for once and Steve’s world would slow down; and when he would look away, it would always feel like waking up for the first time in a long while.

But now it was too quiet, because he was being deliberately ignored. The air was thick with unspoken rancour.

Yes, Steve had come to apologise, but only if Tony would too. He had learned too late that apologies only made a person feel better if they had something to apologise for; if not, then it left a couple new, gaping wounds called guilt and shame. Sum it all up to get a whopping load of regret.

Steve looked at a chair, considering sitting down and acting casual, like this was the start of any other year. It didn't feel right, and instead, he stood as tall as his tired shoulders would allow, and said firmly but softly, "Tony, get out here."

The following silence was stifling. For a moment, Steve actually believed that Tony wouldn't listen again, and that he'd be left hanging, suspended in unwanted resentment for god only knows how much longer. But then, the trilling, crunchy sound of wheels on the cement garage floor cut the silence, giving him air, as Tony rolled out from under the car.

He stood and dusted off his jeans – *a little tight*, Steve reluctantly acknowledged – and rolled up the sleeves of his red and black flannel, unbuttoned over an ACDC t-shirt. *For those about to rock, we salute you.*

Steve almost snorted with the irony of it again, as his ROTC scholarship was the only thing that brought him to this university. Here, where he had found all he ever wanted, but was still reminded of the bitterness that life had; that by holding something just enough out of reach, it could force one to take a deep, harsh look at themselves and decide just how much they were willing to struggle for it. Under that standard, his own priorities had been shifted a few ground-breaking times in the last three years, but he had always seemed to find a way to power through.

It was the only thing he knew *how* to do. Just like right now, facing someone he couldn't decide if he hated or missed more than ever. Someone he couldn't decide if he was hurt by or hurt instead.

Tony's eyes were a dark brown that could only be compared to dark chocolate, but they carried none of the softness that resided in Steve's good memories. Right now, they carried an accusatory, condemning glare, like that of the expensive interior of a court room. Despite having the height and muscle advantage, Steve wanted to shrink under that stare.

It was only the knowledge that half of this was not his fault that kept him matching Tony's cold demeanour.

"You must have missed the memo, but we have new house rules," Tony feigned recollection, but his bitterly sarcastic tone displayed that this was probably one of many greetings he'd prepared. "Rule number five, I believe it is, says clearly: 'No idiots allowed in the garage'. There's a list on the fridge. That in mind, your room is in the same place as it was, so about-face, soldier."

"Glad to see you're well, too," Steve said with politeness despite the irritation bubbling in his chest, "and sorry to disappoint, but I'm not leaving just yet. We need to talk. Bruce won't be gone for long."

"If he's stopping by the 7/11, then he will be." Then he waved a hand dismissively. "Oh – wait, never mind, shift change."

Steve blinked, momentarily confused by the blunder. "What's 7/11 got to do with anything?"

"Shut up."

“Only if you’ll talk instead.”

“I’m going to stop you right there, because I strongly dislike you, don’t want to have this conversation, and you need to leave.”

“I’m uncomfortable too, but we’re both still here. And I’m going to be in this house for a while longer, so you’d better get talking,” The petty banter came easier than Steve expected, and even though he was no less livid, he felt some of the tension that had been at the base of his neck all summer begin to melt away.

Tony let out an exasperated sigh through his nose in reply, crossing his arms. “What do you even want me to say? You started this whole mess, you wanted to leave and I thought you had a plan. You know exactly what you said, and I’m sorry if I would rather protect the friends that have never stabbed me in the back than the failed boyfriend who...”

Tony trailed off. He pursed his lips and looked down, obviously caught off-guard by even acknowledging what Steve almost was to him.

Steve’s cheeks burned red with a sense of embarrassment and for a moment, he let his gaze drop to the floor.

“We need to talk, but you need to plan what you’re going to say first. We don’t need an incident like last time. I regret everything that happened then and... and *this* time, I want to say everything right.” Steve spoke slowly before he looked back up at Tony, soft blue gaze hesitant.

Tony held his stare for a few painful, stunning moments, and Steve almost felt himself slip into those eyes that met his own. They were thoughtful, and something resembling doubt flickered behind them. But then Tony let out a short, decisive exhale, and the doubt was gone. “Finish moving in, we’ll talk another time. I need to fix this guy’s car before Thor gets here.”

“How can I be sure that you’ll follow through?” Steve’s voice came out as a cross between desperate and accusatory. He winced – that had probably been the wrong tone to use.

Sure enough, in response, Tony bristled, shifting his weight to the other leg, his hip jutting out in an intentionally sassy way. “And now we’re back to not trusting me. I’ll do it, not because I want to, but because you’ve got it fixed in your head that I’m not big enough of a guy *to* do it. You’re not better than me, and I’m going to talk to you just to prove that point. Now, rule number five, ‘No idiots allowed in the garage’. Time for you to go, Mr. Rogers.”

Steve took one last look around the space, the clutter and work that inevitably made it more *home* than anywhere else he had been. His attention inevitably returned to land on Tony, avoiding his eyes and instead observing his posture, the way his attitude seemed to emanate from every shift, every motion he made. So obvious, and yet able to hide so much beneath intelligence and expertly handled words. He didn’t know the next time he’d be able to look at him this surely, this confidently, as painful as it might be. He tried to take it all in.

With conclusiveness, he nodded and said, “Okay. Talk to you soon, then.”

Offering one last hint of a polite smile, Steve headed back inside. The heavy door to the garage that closed behind him as he stepped into the kitchen sounded as if it was packing all of the events of the garage away in that space.

What happens in the garage, stays in the garage, it seemed to say.

Steve didn't know if he minded that or not.

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On the other side of that same door, Tony let out a tense breath before rubbing his eyes. The pressure squeezing, suffocating his heart and chest wouldn't leave. He blamed Steve Rogers – for showing his face here again, for all of the things he made him *feel* this summer, for all of the pain from last year... he blamed him for everything, and knew he wanted to.

But deep down, in a place Tony refused to acknowledge, he also knew that this wasn't entirely Steve's fault. Tucked right next to that feeling, like peas in a pod, Tony knew that he still harboured deep, unexplainable feelings for Steve. Feelings that he couldn't understand, no matter how many degrees he had or how many classes he took, or how much money he had socked away to buy his way out of things.

But he begrudgingly admitted that he wouldn't grow to understand them any time soon, so instead of standing and processing his thoughts, he returned to fixing the shitty Volvo parked in his garage, and hoped that Thor was feeling generous with the beer he undoubtably would bring upon his arrival. Tony wheeled himself back under the car and got to work, the familiar clinking and clanking of the metal something to focus on.

Yes, this year would be challenging, but yes, Tony would find a way out of it. He would find a way to avoid this or fix it, or delegate the task to someone else if it came down to it. He would get away from the conversation, the feelings, the recurring sense of absence that tainted the desire to embrace the belonging.... He had found a way around it before, and he could do it again.

I think I'd just cut the wire, he recalled with a smug smirk.

Chapter End Notes

Hello!! Omg thank you so much for reading!!

Please comment!! I respond to each and every one and I would LOVE feedback!!

This chapter was more of a prologue than anything, but each one is going to just be a part in an overarching slice of life dynamic story.

DISCLAIMER: I am painfully aware by the way, that college is not actually how I will depict it in this fic. This fic is character centric, so I will likely not showcase many

scenes of them in classes, doing homework or studying, or any other busy college things. For those of you that are younger readers - do NOT take this as a representation of college! It is much harder and you must be very responsible and do your work! For those of you that are in college or have passed it - I am aware that this is a FICTIONAL and inaccurate representation of the balance of work and social activity in college life. Thank you!!

Find me on Twitter @thirteenthfloor for updates or just to see what I'm up to! I'm always open to discussion, or really just a chat if you're looking for someone to talk to in these troubling times...

Thanks so much again!! Do your best to stay safe and stay clean!! Happy Pride Month!

Take Me Home, To the Place I Belong

Chapter Summary

Later the night of the same day, Thor arrives at the house with his younger brother Loki, a rising freshman, in tow. Loki is not pleased with the arrangements for his coming school year. They run into Bruce in the kitchen.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Night had already fallen when Thor pulled his pickup truck into the driveway. Porch lights up and down the street caused a dim golden glow to reflect on the black asphalt of the road, making it appear murky and depthless. The shadows of cars, bikes, and students walking on the sidewalks and pavement stretched across the houses under lengthy beams of streetlights. The distant sound of thumping bass signalled that there was a party raging somewhere on the block, as did the number of irresponsibly parked cars.

But when the churning engine of the old red and white pickup sputtered to silence, Loki's mind reluctantly stopped wandering, vision settling into focus rather than blearily merging the colours of what was outside the window. He must have been half asleep, because when he righted himself, his stiff neck protested with a few tiny pops.

He sat forward and rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands, then looked hazily through the windshield at the place they had arrived. This was house he would be living in for at least the next year. He took a moment to process what he was seeing, and shuddered.

It was a two-story with slightly overgrown bushes, branches and twigs scraping the siding. Leaves were scattered about the lawn, and the whole structure looked slightly tilted to the left; on top of that, it was desperately in need of new paint.

In perspective, though, it fit in perfectly with the rest of the structures on the block. Each was clearly inhabited by students, in various stages of disrepair but liveable enough to be packed with roommates... There wasn't a lot of neat, comfortable privacy like the younger son of Odin was used to. At the truth of this observation, Loki put his hood up and scowled heavily, getting out of the vehicle and slamming the door.

The echo resounded off the surrounding buildings, and Thor poked his head around the bed of the truck, manbun flopping lazily to one side with the motion, fly-aways present from hours of driving with the windows down. "Don't slam the doors, Loki. You didn't pay for her."

"The thing is ancient anyways, a few dents and scratches would only fit in," Loki spat as he slung the strap of his messenger bag over his shoulder. "And I thought we were moving in

with someone rich. This place is filthy.”

“Well, Stark only pays his share of the rent.” He huffed contentedly, stretching while speaking. “Now quit whining and start unloading, little brother, or you’re sleeping in the laundry room.” Thor smiled and started freeing their boxes from the bed, and Loki felt his blood boil at that idiotic grin.

He picked up a box that was open on the top, and after sighing loudly enough to get Thor’s attention, tipped it over and let the contents spill onto the driveway. DVD cases, a few tangled pairs of headphones, and some chargers clattered across the cement, pathetically skittering in opposite directions like frightened insects.

Although growing more forced, now showing mild annoyance, Thor’s amused smile remained in place. For a moment, he just stared at his brother, then laughed softly and nodded at the things on the ground. “You’re picking those up.”

Ignoring the sneer Loki shot his way in return, Thor turned to lift three enormous boxes with ease and headed up to the porch, propping open the screen door with his foot before unlocking the house and stepping inside. A light in an upstairs room flicked on, the tell-tale sign of their roommates beginning to wake to greet them.

Loki let out a frustrated huff through his nose and glared at the junk on the pavement of the driveway, finally giving in with an audible groan, and cleaning it all up unceremoniously. Without much concern for their condition afterwards, he tossed the items back into the box, almost relishing the chaotic noise as they toppled over each other. It was like throwing Tupperware frustratedly into a cabinet.

He stacked another small container on top of the box he was holding, spitefully trying to avoid the impending number of trips that would need to be made, and balanced the load as he made his way up the wobbly stones leading to the porch. The steps were precariously slanted, and Loki cursed them quietly and foully when he almost stumbled.

While still hazardously balancing the burden, he reached out for the handle to the screen door. With the hinges squealing in violent protest, Loki threw out his foot to hold the door open, and ended up sending both boxes crashing into the bushes off the edge of the front step. Sticks and leaves rustled and fell into the silence as the contents were lost to the dark abyss of the overgrown shrubbery.

“Thor, get your buffoonish, drunken ass out here and get the boxes!” Loki hated how weak and childish his voice sounded, but he was exhausted, irritated, and wanted anything more than to be here. He was already forced to go to his last choice of university, and now had to room with his grossly popular older brother and *his* gaggle of friends, some of whom had made it quite clear that they didn’t want another roommate. But Thor had obviously insisted, and now Loki was dragged along to share a basement with him as he struggled through freshman year.

He would have much preferred to stay in an on-campus dorm where he could forge his path through the year with someone totally new, and maybe make a few new friends – or any at all for that matter, considering it seemed that his unpopularity was doomed to follow him even

into young adulthood. But Loki saw the continuation of his fateful trend, his chances at getting a social status disappearing like the lost boxes vanishing into the void behind the bushes.

The disappointment was not an unfamiliar feeling.

Displaying the feeling, he sighed heavily and stepped down, squeezing between the house and the foliage to gather as much as he could of the fallen items. When he thought he had them all, he threw them back in the boxes and lifted his leg to step back onto the porch.

And just his luck, no sooner had he moved than the screen door suddenly opened and smacked him right in the nose.

“Shit – ow!” Loki exclaimed, hands flying to his face, fingers brushing gingerly over the bone and arch to make sure it wasn’t serious. Everything structurally felt fine, but it still hurt like hell, and he intended to express so fully. He expected a bruise in the morning, but that could be an exaggeration.

His upward glare was only met with the image of Thor shrugging apologetically and slightly confused, laughing to himself. “What are you doing on the ground?”

“Your stupid stuff fell into the bushes so I thought I’d do you a *favour* and retrieve them. Next time, though, I’m definitely leaving them there.” Loki stood and faced his brother, matching his muscle with a powerful scowl and taking up the boxes, heading inside.

The interior of the house was shockingly not as terrible as the exterior. The doorway opened into a hallway with a staircase directly on the left, and coat pegs and a shoe rack along the wall. To the right was a living room, and both the hallway and the far end of this room opened into a kitchen and dining room. The walls of the house were slightly darker than cream-colored, more of a comforting light tan.

Loki was surprised at how clean the floors were, given his first impression from the leaf and stick-riddled, nearly overgrown lawn. He walked down the hall into the dining room and looked around, seeing the space opened into a new room on the left. Behind him as he turned was a door under the main staircase, so after assuming that this led to the basement, he nudged it open and began a slow, careful, descent downstairs, his line of sight obscured even as he attempted to crane his neck around the boxes.

The basement was finished, with dark, scratchy-looking carpets and white walls. There was a room to the right connected to a shadowy space that was hopefully just a laundry room, but that looked to be mostly storage, with stacks of totes labelled in unfamiliar handwriting in every corner. To the left was a long room housing a corner couch and a large television, along with some movie shelves and other coffee tables. There was another door at the end of this room, but it looked heavier. Maybe it led outside.

Loki walked almost warily to the end of the room and turned down the small, hidden hallway, seeing the light on in the room on the left. There was a massive empty mattress inside, perched atop a large but rickety bed frame, and some of Thor’s boxes were already stacked to the side. Loki looked to the smaller, pitch-black room on the right.

This was his, then. Small, dark, tucked away as if it had no use. How fitting.

He dropped the boxes in Thor's room before stepping into what would then be his own; and upon entering, the darkness instantly engulfed him while the temperature seemed to drop ten degrees. Something might have skittered across his foot. Fumbling along the walls until he found a light switch, he was momentarily blinded by the pale but bright white shine that came from the ceiling. It was disgustingly industrial. Loki made a mental note to quickly install the lamps he had brought instead.

There was a full-sized mattress pushed into a corner, the frame it rest in wooden and sparse, but that was it. And yet despite the negligence of character apparent, he was already being swarmed with ideas, envisioning what he'd do with the space. He could tuck a desk into the corner opposite the door, and an armchair into the one under the window well. He could put his clothes in the totes he brought with him and keep them under the bed, and have a short bookshelf under the window itself. That would certainly be enough to hold all his books and journals, while still leaving space on the walls for decoration at will. The closet behind the door was small but workable, and honestly more than he expected.

As much as he wanted to complain, Loki actually kind of liked the space. It had potential; he was open to the idea of it growing on him, becoming inhabitable. It was neat, secluded enough for clear thought, and his own. He'd never had much of that in his life before.

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When he went back upstairs to get his own boxes, there was another man in the kitchen, talking to Thor. He was much shorter, with messy, slightly curly black hair and wire-rimmed glasses, and was sporting a pair of plum purple sweatpants and a long-sleeved black shirt. He had a glass of water in one hand, and an orange pill bottle in the other, with three others lined up on the counter behind him.

He seemed tired.

Loki shrunk back against the doorway and crossed his arms, but was noticed by the conversing pair, the stranger of which turned his head and raised the fingers of the hand holding the pill bottle in a slight wave.

"Oh, Banner, this is my brother, Loki," Thor smiled and walked over to whom he introduced, clapping one large hand onto his shoulder. Loki fought the urge to hiss, still cringing away from the touch, and instead nodded in greeting at who he reluctantly accepted to be his new housemate.

"Hey," Banner responded, shifting his feet and standing straighter. Despite his efforts, his shoulders still sagged in terrible posture, making his likely average height seem all the less. "Welcome to the house, I guess, and no need to call me Banner, that's my last name. You can just call me Bruce..." He shuffled where he stood for a moment, as if he could not decide how to stand, and glanced up at Loki's brother before looking back to him. "I don't know what else to say except for that it gets a bit strange around here. I'm sorry if any of the others are rude to you." His eyes flicked back to Thor. "Is that all you wanted me to do?"

“You had to convince him to say hello to me?” Loki scowled up, at the both of them. “What on earth have you dragged me in to?”

“No, no I’m sorry,” Bruce interjected. “I was up anyways, but I forgot that Thor was bringing you along. He just asked me for some... uh, words of advice, but I didn’t have anything prepared.”

Loki mumbled under his breath, “Oh, it’s okay, you just didn’t know I existed, that’s all.”

Before Banner could seem to slouch further away or Loki could spit out another desperate gripe to alleviate his own anxiety, Thor’s voice broke the awkward tension, a little too loud for the hour. “Well, Loki and I should finish moving in, and we can finish doing proper introductions tomorrow. Does that sound good?”

Bruce responded with an indifferent if not pleasant “fine with me”, while contrarily, Loki just grumbled out a “fine” with as discouraging of a tone as he could muster.

“Great, come on then, Loki. I know you don’t like me touching your things.” Thor patted his brother’s shoulder again before heading down the front hall to continue to retrieve their things from outside. Loki stood for a moment longer.

It was only when he was about to turn that he could not stop himself; he asked quickly, as if doing so would lessen the intrusiveness of his inquiry. “What are the bottles for?”

And he cringed as soon as he said it. Loki himself hated when his father and brother invaded his privacy by asking about things he’d rather not talk about and snooping around in his issues; as if they really cared how he felt. He knew that they truly didn’t, so he favoured the action of closing himself off. He found it easier to be rude and dismiss them than it was to try and explain himself, his feelings, or search for the words to ask questions of his own.

But now he wanted to know what kind of people he was living with, and something about this tired, polite guy made him curious.

Bruce had since looked up, surprised that he had even spoken before the supplementary discomfort of the question settled in. He glanced at the pill bottle in his hand and then down to his feet.

He paused before he spoke. “This house is... a bit odd. Everyone here has got their thing, and well... these are mine. Well, I *have* these because of mine. That being said, don’t take any negative comments too seriously, if you can. We’re all just figuring it out as we go, as much as some of us pretend to know exactly what’s going on.” Upturned eyes locked on Loki, something softer stirring within that attention. “Honestly, as much as they might try to push you out, I think you’ll fit right in.”

Loki stared at him. For the first time in a long time, he felt something stir in his chest that was akin to understanding. It came hot and cold all at once, causing his head to spin at the reaction.

Why did everything that Bruce just said make sense? The feeling was far from likeable. It made him feel vulnerable and small and ugly, and he *especially* didn't like the sliver of hope that had snaked up his spine at the delivery of the sentiment. He didn't like thinking that maybe he *did* belong here, and he didn't like the fact that he was *hoping* he did.

So, he tilted his head, sneered through whatever confusion may be present on his features, and said bitterly, "Well, that was rude. Now you're calling me a freak."

Bruce sighed softly, looking down at his glass of water, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "I'm not."

But Loki had already turned on his heel and left to finish helping Thor unload the truck. While he stepped outside and took a deep, gasping breath at the liberating fresh night air, Bruce finished taking his medication.

He put the bottles back in the tiny cabinet above the sink and finished his glass of water, then glanced once more towards the door, now an open maw to the summer evening setting. Bruce didn't know how well his mental health would persist this year, but he was determined to assert control into his environment to keep it as steady, as anticlimactic as possible.

It seemed so backwards that the most unstable of them all was the only one trying to keep things sane in their home. No one else was stepping up, though, so he was left to scold and comfort and talk them all through their own drama. Between Steve and Tony this year, Bruce could already see his role as the mediator; it was a role he would have to learn to refuse, if anything was ever to be truly resolved between them.

For a moment longer than he would appreciate, Bruce doubted if any of them would do the same for him. Would any of them stay up at odd hours – outside of the odd hours that already made up their chaotic schedules – to talk him through emotions and stirrings he couldn't explain? Would they be more understanding when he needed space, or needed someone to talk him down from fighting the care of those closest to him? Before it could spiral, he shook his head to clear those thoughts and headed upstairs to his bedroom.

Of course, they would, he assured himself. *They're your best friends, and they've done it before. Why wouldn't they now?*

Because you can't be fixed. Your issues are permanent, and theirs are temporary. Bruce almost winced at the dark voice that crept into his head, so abrupt, and yet it had been lurking since the start of his contemplation. He stopped in the hallway, staring at nothing, barely seeing the closed doors around him.

Three steadying breaths, counting to ten each time. *One, two, three, four...*

When the pressure at the base of his throat went away, he continued the trudge to his room, closing the door and lying safely back in bed once he reached it. The covers around him were his shield, the walls of his room his fortress. His heartrate slowed as he tried to drift off. He counted the beats.

The thought that often sent him to sleep, along with the small dose of melatonin taken earlier, floated into his mind tonight. *Get some rest. Tomorrow might not be as easy as today.*

~

Standing in the front lawn while the recently uncut grass teased at the cuffs of his jeans, Loki looked up at the window in which the light had turned on when they arrived. That must have been Bruce's room, with the rectangular frame of the window now darkened once more.

He found himself wondering what he could have said differently before he stormed out. There was no question that what he said was harsh, especially because the guy seemed like he was trying to help Loki feel welcome. It had just come as a defensive response on his part, a sting to lash out and keep himself from saying anything more, to keep his tongue from running loose. That didn't change *what* he had said, but perhaps there was a chance that Bruce understood the reaction, and had already forgiven it?

Regardless, Loki felt he should apologise. These weren't exactly the best terms to begin on with a new housemate, at a new school in a new stage of adult life.

Despite this train of thought, the night carried on, dwindling like the contents of the boxes as he continued to organise in an attempt to feel settled. And by the time he finally laid down at an early hour of the morning, hoping for a few hours of sleep before people started waking up, he had dismissed most thoughts about Bruce.

They were replaced by unwelcome memories, insecurities that crept into the corners of the room and dripped through the window well. He closed his eyes to keep them out, but they remained. He tried to ignore them.

Falling asleep was a bliss Loki often craved, seldom got enough of, and would miss as soon as he opened his eyes the next morning.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!! Leave a comment if you enjoyed - I respond to every one!!

The course of this story is going to progress with day-to-day situations, developing the relationships of the characters as well as their unique personalities and histories, and how they will continue to learn and grow from their experiences and time shared with each other.

Bruce is likely going to be the epicenter of most of this, because as was mentioned in the chapter, his focus this year is to take control of his situation and set down ground rules for how his friends should behave for the sake of them all if they are going to continue to live together. Additionally, Bruce is an amazing and sweet person and needs so many hugs, so I am going to give him so many friends ;-;

Anyways, thank you so much for reading!! If you would like to follow me on social media to chat, discuss, or discuss my work more personally, follow me on Tumblr @aegir-emblem, or on Twitter @thirthfloor.

A Hard Day's Night

Chapter Summary

Bruce spends some time with Scott after his shift at work, and they discuss the drama on the block.

Loki has a tense run-in with a classmate, and makes a brave decision.

Bucky texts Steve.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The doughnuts in the small glass display, illuminated by a feeble yellow light unable to match the fluorescent whites of the ceiling, were looking temptingly appetizing as the sun began its steady task of coming through the windows. Scott Lang sat slouched on the stool behind the counter, leaning unprofessionally against the racks of cigarettes behind him, rustling some Marlboros in a way that would likely damage their packaging – not that anyone would mind, really. A pack of smokes was a pack of smokes to those who cared to buy them, it seemed.

He checked his watch, the analog display showing a half hour till the end of his shift. Scott scrubbed the heels of his hands over his eyes, willing the groggy, itching sensation to go away, and diverting his attention from the junk food around him. Without time to go to the gym as regularly as he should, Scott knew he had to be careful with exactly how much he ate with as little sleep as he was getting. He was blessed with a high metabolism, but he could only rely on that for so long before it would begin to show.

Minutes ticked by as pale eyes now targeted the clock on the wall, seeming to slow down the second hand with the intensity of their stare. 20... 15... 10...

“Catch you at a bad time?” Scott jumped embarrassingly when a voice jerked him from his thoughts, skittering off the stool and just barely managing to catch himself on the countertop. The question was followed by a surprised bout of laughter, and when Scott lifted his gaze again, he met the concerned expression of one Bruce Banner.

“Are you alright?” Bruce asked instead as his chuckles died down, softening his tone even more than its normal form of delivery. “Sorry for scaring you.”

Scott attempted to straighten up, adjusting his uniform polo with a sigh. “No, no, you’re fine... I just *totally* spaced out for a bit there. My shift is almost over, so...” He moved to gather his wallet and phone, dragging his feet over to the edge of the counter. His destination was escape to the computer in the backroom that would grant him his freedom.

“Yeah, that’s why I stopped by.” Bruce rocked back on his heels, following Scott even as he meandered; a small upwards tug of his lips revealed a smile. “Can I take you to breakfast? You’ve been eating stale packaged muffins for at least three weeks now.”

Bruce earned a weary, slightly confused blink in response. “What, like, in the dining hall? Sure, you’re welcome to come along, but usually I go home to sleep about now...”

“No, I meant like, actual breakfast. Do you want to go to Manchester? I don’t want to keep you long, so we can order to-go if you’d like.” Bruce chewed his lower lip almost shyly.

To his reassurance, before he even finished speaking, Scott’s face had lit up. “The bagel place? Oh – oh, if we went there, I wouldn’t want to rush it! I don’t have classes today anyways so we don’t even have to bother, seriously I can post-pone sleeping for *that!*”

Bruce could not help from beaming fully at Scott’s puppy-like reaction. He wasn’t a person that should be so tired, with all of that bubbly energy just waiting to brighten someone’s day. “Perfect, then. Go and clock out first, you forgot last time...”

“Well I was almost late to bio last time, but... alright, whatever you say.” Scott rolled his eyes with a giddy grin and darted through the doorway in the corner of the store.

In enough time, the younger of the pair was ready to leave, changed into a much more comfortable t-shirt and jacket and practically bouncing with excitement as he followed Bruce out of the corner store. When they exited, Bruce took a moment to glance at the small home on the end of the street, just opposite them on the crosswalk.

“Do you need to get anything from your place before we head down there? I didn’t drive, it’s a really nice morning and I intended to walk...” His question came with an absent expression, almost apologetic in the sense that he genuinely did not consider the fact, now sorry for it.

“It’s fine, don’t worry.” Scott waved him on, already a few paces into the street. “Come on, you can’t psych me up for the best breakfast ever and then stand around!”

~

Sitting across from Bruce at a wobbly table and unwrapping the foil of his second bagel sandwich, Scott was familiar with his distraction sometimes. He smiled around a mouthful and managed to mumble out despite still feeling the pangs in his stomach crying for more food. “Don’t worry about the schedule and stuff, I never leave my place unprepared. Plus, it’s right next door, so there’s not even a commute! It’s a shitty job, but it could be much worse, couldn’t it?”

“Of course,” Bruce’s smile was a little tight, naturally fatigued as it seemed from the shape of his downturned eyes. “Sorry, you know I hate the thought of inconveniencing you...”

“Oh, don’t even get me *started* on that! *You* are far from the problem, if anything you’re the one that makes it all better.” Scott managed to swallow before he spoke, trying his best to remember table manners, as a new boiling sense of irritation flared, easily quelled by light

exasperation. He took another munch of his perfectly toasted sandwich. “They *literally* gave me the shifts that no one else wanted, and you know *why* they gave them to me? Because they’re *awful*, no one *wanted* them because they suck!” He threw a hand in the air before bringing it down onto his head, slender fingers tugging at his fluffy dark hair.

Bruce kept a pleasant expression, a staple factor of his appearance, but anyone could tell that he felt sorry for the sophomore seated in front of him. “But you’ll get to quit in the spring when lacrosse starts, right? You know you don’t actually have to work because of your scholarship, you could quit sooner...”

“I just like having the security of it though,” Scott rolled his eyes as he finally finished eating, wiping his hands on a napkin and leaning back in his chair. “The thought of not having money makes me really nervous, always has... I don’t have a roommate, let alone four like you do, and you *know* how I get out of hand with the take out and movies sometimes...”

Scott deflated more and more as he spoke, his glance turning sideways to meet the floor as his knee began to bounce timidly under the table.

Sympathetically, Bruce muttered, “If there’s anything I can do to help out then, please let me know... Coming by to see you is one of the only things that seems to keep me sane sometimes, I would hate for needless drama to find its way to you as well.”

There was a soft, appreciative pause. Bruce stared at Scott, and Scott’s jaw shifted as he watched the floor.

“That being said,” Finally then, Scott glanced up to change the subject, his pale eyes lighting in the way they always did when he was ready to listen, to pay attention, “how are Cap and Tony doing? You haven’t filled me in much on what’s happened at your place.”

“It hasn’t been a nightmare.” For the long conversation, Bruce rationed his coffee into little sips. “Nothing like last year, not yet. It’s just been incredibly... awkward. Tony and Steve have – without real communication – coordinated their schedules to avoid each other. Showering, eating, cleaning, you name it. They haven’t spoken a real word since the first day, even though they both said they would.”

“That still seems... Really bad.” Scott frowned deeply and furrowed his brows. “What even happened that caused the fallout? The whole street knows about it, but everyone’s been dying to know the gory details.”

Bruce shrugged defeatedly, a sardonic smile forming at the irony of it all. “I don’t know myself. The worst part of it all is that the rest of the house is just as in the dark as you guys. I think the only person who might know is Bucky, since Steve went to live with him for the spring semester... But even that’s a stretch. None of us really talked to him to begin with, unless it was *through* Steve, or to help out with the arm he paid us to fix.” A long sigh pulled itself out of Bruce as he watched Scott; his waiting expression, patient and on the edge of his seat even as he heard bad news.

His eyebrows now furrowed up, frown lessening to a pout revealing his concern. Scott was so attentive and empathetic, it was almost cute.

The curious, concerned spark never left his eyes even as he ventured with another question. “And what about the new guy? Thor’s brother, right? How’s he?”

“Loki? He’s... fine, I guess. He avoids us for the most part. Sends mean looks and whatnot, but anything he *says* is directed at Thor, who takes it all in stride. I’m assuming that’s his normal attitude at home though, more family-centric. He seems kindof... Lonely, actually.” A brief memory of the freshman’s cutting words from the first night still puzzled him.

“What makes you say that?”

“He snapped at me when we met, and then he looked upset. He’s just a kid, you know?” Bruce spoke slower as he continued, working through the process even as he said it aloud. “I can’t imagine having Thor for an older brother is easy, and it doesn’t seem like he had much of a choice in where he got to live. I hope he can find his way while he’s here, but unfortunately, the truth is that Tony and Steve are making things at the house a little rough for everyone.”

“Just seems really tense, awkward, like you said.” Scott paused, leaning forward and propping his elbow on the table. He brushed his thumb over his lips thoughtfully before pointing loosely at Bruce. “If you ever need a place to come stay, you know, and get away from all that? I’m available.” He jolted back suddenly, hands waving apologetically. “Well – not like, ah, shit that sounded strange. Not *available*, I mean, I’m just saying that you could come stay with me if it gets bad there. I could use a Friday night movie buddy, and of course above all else with you and your health and stuff I want to make sure you’re a place that is comfortable...” At the end of his outburst, his hands were folded in his lap and his gaze shyly downturned.

Bruce smiled kindly, heart warmed by the gesture and feeling a present, albeit weak, flutter in his chest. “I’ll consider that offer, Scott. We should spend more time together aside from me rescuing you from your terrible job.” He stood and collected their trash onto one of the black plastic trays that their sandwiches had come out on. “All that being said, we should get you home so you can rest. Also, that Quill guy is having trouble with his van again, so Tony and I are gonna get that fixed up and out of our driveway before the end of the day, hopefully.”

“Oh, jeez, good luck! I’m glad I don’t have a car yet, it sounds like a hassle... But I suppose you’d help me out if I had issues, right?” Scott couldn’t help but smile as he trailed behind Bruce, out onto the sidewalk into the crisp, budding air of a lovely, warm day.

~

The view from the third-floor window of the East Campus library was much nicer than Loki had accounted for, finding himself distracted from his studying yet again and instead taken by the way the late morning sun made the lawn below look so *green*.

By this point though, any change in scenery was bliss compared to the boring beige of the house, the noise from his housemates and overall, the unwanted negativity that seemed to

lurk at the edges of everyday niceties.

Only as he turned his attention back to the notes on the table did he notice that someone was standing on his other side. Loki felt his cheeks flush, out of annoyance or merely wondering how long the company had been standing there, but all the more he rose his eyes to meet the unexpected stranger.

This man was in his Philosophy and Theology introductions lecture, identifiable by the fact that he had a strange pale stripe of hair and an impressive goatee despite still being close in age to the seated freshman. He was an upperclassman, late to take the class, having switched over from something else; that was as much as Loki remembered overhearing throughout the first couple weeks. His friend, a rotund and serious looking Asian man stood beside him, holding his own number of books under his arms.

“I hope we’re not interrupting anything too immediate.” The taller man spoke, glancing down at Loki’s laptop and workbook. “But this is kind of our reserved table.”

“I didn’t see a sign.” Loki didn’t know if the dryness in his mouth was from intimidation or irritation that he was being moved.

“Well, no, it’s unspoken, but the thing is we’ve been studying at this table for the past three years, so... Seniority rules, in this case. Would you mind moving?” He spoke it all with cold eyes, a blank and direct expression, his voice lacking a question.

Loki wormed under that stare, feeling his blood begin to boil. He changed the subject spitefully. “You’re in my class, aren’t you? Care to introduce yourself before you boot me out of a public space?”

“Stephen Strange. And this is Wong.” He nodded in what Loki thought was greeting, before he realized it was directed at the table itself. “And this is our table.”

Holding his ground and attempting to manage a comeback, Loki then snorted huffily. “What’s a junior doing in an introductory religions course? I’m tempted to give you this space out of your apparent *need* to study, if you’ve flunked it that many times.”

A twitch of those bold eyebrows betrayed Strange’s distaste for the direction of his tone. “I was on the pre-med track and decided to switch to psychology and philosophy. And I have enough credits to allow myself to double major, which means I take more classes than your average *freshman*. Could you move now, or should we just sit across from you?”

At the threat, Loki shifted his jaw, looking between Strange and Wong, before he ended up gritting his teeth. His barely contained frustration was kept in check by stiff movements as he got up and gathered his things. “Fine. Only because I don’t like to be interrupted by senseless chatter.”

Strange smiled briefly, smugly, a mere squint of the eyes and close-lipped grin. “Thanks. Don’t forget we have a quiz next week, and good luck.”

“I *know* we have a quiz, that’s why I was trying to *study*.” Loki couldn’t keep his words from coming out as a childish whine, and walked briskly away to hide the burning of his cheeks.

He didn’t get to see the way Strange’s expression dissolved apologetically, already past the common seating area by the time the upperclassman opened his mouth to apologise.

~

Without glancing back, Loki marched himself the short distance off campus and back onto the nearby block he was begrudgingly forced to refer to as *home*. He walked around the tilted siding of the house to reach the small stairwell and door that led straight to the basement from the backyard, finding that this entrance provided less disturbance for himself and the others than trying to go through the front. He tugged the door open and slipped inside, already feeling better when the heat of the day was replaced with blessed basement AC.

There was still a stuffiness to the space as he entered though, and Loki scowled when he heard the aggressive blaring of Thor’s workout playlist, the bass buzzing from the aux and sound speakers for the television.

“Don’t you have a gym for this, brother?” The younger spat, raising his voice above the din of the music and Thor’s huffing breath. It stank of sweat down here. Loki felt like he was choking.

“Oh, Loki, hello! How was your morning?” Thor’s grin remained steadfast even as he rose and wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand.

His brother only scowled, turning away and heading to his room. “Dreadful, I *hate* it here, and you know that, don’t you?” He pinched the bridge of his nose with a long, despairing sigh. “I *asked* if you could use the gym. At least – *Febreze* the room when you’re done, for any god’s sake.” And, not wanting to deal with another idiotic response, Loki left for the quiet sanctuary of his room, closing the door behind himself with finality and turning on one of the soft lamps kept by his bed.

His laptop made a soft humming noise as it powered up, harmless as it was brand new, and comforting in its cadence. Loki watched the screen absently before typing in his password and waiting for his work to reopen. But after a moment’s pause, he instead opened the school’s student activities website.

Finding new people to spend his time with would be better for his health. Finding new people that didn’t drive him up the wall, who could potentially help him study, would make him feel better. Finding new people in general, that wanted him around... Maybe that would make all of this miserable semester easier.

Where even to start? Loki frowned at his screen, unnerved by the idea of athletics or prominent social gatherings, even more organized activity... He just wanted a place to go, people to meet, to discuss common ideas and thought processes, views and expressions.

His fingers hesitated over the keyboard, an idea coming to mind that was exciting and intense all at once. It was almost disturbing how well he *knew* this would work; more so disturbing in

the sense that he seemed to have unconsciously been pointedly ignoring this very idea.

It was just three simple letters, and a support system could be there. People who cared could be there, just three simple letters that spoke for a larger acronym, one he had tried to explain and gave up on when he decided the effort was not worth the passive response from his family.

Click. G.

Click. S.

Click. A.

~

01:37 – Bucky Barnes: Three weeks. Everything okay?

01:40 – Steve Rogers: Not really. He won't talk to me.

01:40 – Steve Rogers: But things aren't BAD if that makes sense.

01:41 – Bucky Barnes: Good

01:41 – Steve Rogers: yeah

01:45 – Bucky Barnes: If you need someplace to stay, T's said our place is always open. I told him about last year. He's cool about it. Really.

01:54 – Steve Rogers: Thanks, Buck.

01:56 – Steve Rogers: But I really think I need to stay here. For a bit.

02:02 – Bucky Barnes: suit yourself. Just let me know if you need anything.

02:03 – Steve Rogers: Yeah, of course. Thanks. I'll let you know.

02:04 – Steve Rogers: good luck with him, by the way.

02:06 – Bucky Barnes: save that luck for yourself. shut up and go to sleep.

Read 02:06

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for reading!! Leave a comment - I reply to every one!!

If there's a particular character mentioned in the tags (or unmentioned but is in the main MCU movies) that you would like to meet sooner, mention them in a comment and I'll see how I can work them in! Since there are so many, I'm afraid of forgetting someone, but I have roles for most of them if I need to bring them in!!

How is everyone feeling about this fic so far? Let me know!

Support my writing and see what I'm up to! Follow me on Twitter [@thirteenthfloor](#) and on Tumblr [@aegir-emblem](#)!!

Hooked on a Feeling

Chapter Summary

Bucky and Steve meet face-to-face to talk about Tony. Bucky has a secret crush.

Peter Quill narrowly escapes causing a stadium brawl with his friends. Well, alright, they cause the stadium brawl.

Bruce is afraid of his feelings for Scott - but he's just so darn cute! How can he resist an offer to sleep over?

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the hiatus on this chapter!! I've had a ton of other projects going on!!

Quickly before you start this one - considering the Guardians of the Galaxy, I wanted to clear up their appearances. This is a strictly human AU, so characters like Gamora, for example, resemble their actors. The exceptions to this are Rocket, who is merely a short and angry friend, and Groot, who is in fact a potted plant.

Anyways, that was all that I had to say! I hope you enjoy this chapter! It's twice as long as the others!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Thanks for meeting me, I know things have been, er... Weird.” Bucky scratched the back of his head, disheveling his hair a little, as Steve sat down across from him in the café. His expression was guarded as usual, boding that he definitely didn’t just call this lunch meeting in the dining hall for fun, but he still offered a small smile of greeting to his friend. He had become softer since last year, at least that was a good thing.

“Of course, it’s no problem, really,” Steve said despite the ripples of nerves fluttering in his stomach. He put his coffee down on the table before unwrapping his sandwich, the business of his fingers in the plastic offering some comfort. “It’s not like we’re not allowed to hang out, still. We’ve just been busy.”

“Well...” Tilting his head, Bucky sighed softly, his glance seeking eye contact but not receiving it just yet. “I mean, you know what I want to talk about already. How have things been, with Tony especially? And we’re in person now, so no one-word answers.”

Steve bristled, sitting up straighter in his seat. “I don’t give you one-word answers when we talk, anyways.”

Rolling his eyes, Bucky gestured defeatedly at him. “Right, but you’re always vague. I want to know what’s going on, Stevie. I know I was only half of the problem last year, but I feel like I have a right to know how the aftermath plays out, at least.”

A pause followed, before Steve sat back in defeat. He finally managed to tear open that pesky plastic and unwrapped his sandwich just enough to take a bite. Bucky raised a brow at him and Steve raised one back, challenging his blame with a look that demanded he may eat in peace if only for a moment. He swallowed, and thought before speaking. “Things have been... better than I expected. You know, I expected fights. Throwing stuff, walls breaking, something catching fire in the garage. Like what happened before. I was expecting... *noise*. But it’s been quiet. He’s avoided me, and I’ve avoided him.”

Bucky watched, fingers tapping restlessly against his coffee cup. His prosthetic arm, the one that Tony and Bruce had made up for him at the beginning of their sophomore year, rest on the tabletop, a still and condemning symbol of the topic of conversation. “Is that better or worse?”

“It’s better, much better. I feel like... I feel like we might be getting somewhere. I don’t think Tony is *angry* anymore, I think he’s just hurt now.” Steve sighed heavily, taking a drink from his coffee and looking out the window beside their little table. He knew it even as he said it; *of course*, Tony was hurt, that much was obvious. But deciding that as the source of his reaction to Steve’s arrival somehow gave it a new, more serious meaning. He sagged even as he tried to keep his perspective positive. “It’s definitely some sort of progress with him. Or at least a change, which can account for something.”

Bucky bit his lip, his gaze not once leaving Steve’s face. He caught every change in thought. “Steve, can I be honest with you?”

“You can always be honest with me, I would be offended if you weren’t.” His permission was careful, cautious towards what he was about to hear.

“I worry that... he strings you along. From the outside, it doesn’t look like Tony treats you very well.” Before any refutations could start, Bucky held up a hand. “I’m not saying he’s a bad guy, I mean, sure he can be kind of an ass. What I mean is, I don’t think he’s a good person to be in a relationship with. He’s petty and smug, and you guys... seemed to have a really good thing last year. If he really cared, he would at least *talk* to you about it, instead of letting you stay in that house just to ignore it. He’s messing with you, man. He’s keeping everyone from moving on. It’s selfish.”

Steve listened, nodding along, but he didn’t exactly like what he was hearing. He waited too long to respond, and Bucky shrugged at him. “Well, what have you got to say, Rogers? Do you agree?”

Turning the words over in his mind before letting them out, Steve replied slowly. “No, I don’t. My name was already on the lease, he told me not to come back, and I insisted on moving in. I put myself in that position. So, I’m not surprised that he’s trying to avoid me. He

doesn't want me there. And..." Another pause, a sigh. Pondering evermore, he tried to make sense of his own thoughts even as their truth came to light. "Tony doesn't treat *himself* well. He doesn't think he's deserving of any of this. Even when things were good between us, he never... believed it. And that's what scared him. When he realized *how* committed I was."

Steve looked up at Bucky, waiting to see if it was alright for him to continue speaking. His one man audience had leaned forward, chin propped against his fist, and nodded encouragingly, interested for him to continue.

Drumming his fingers on the tabletop, he shifted them to his leg when the noise interrupted his thought process. "I asked him to move away from his friends, to have a place that was just our own, and I got pissed when he said no. I wasn't mad at *him*, I was mad at the fact that he didn't think that was something he was allowed to have. For all the snob and snark, Tony is one of the most selfless people I've ever met... But it's because he's afraid of having things that are really his own. He's afraid of having something good only to lose it. Which is why he doesn't want to talk to me; he realized we had that, and now he doesn't want it anymore. He doesn't *want* to want it."

"That may be true. But you're – you're so *good* of a guy, Steve, I know you messed up and I know you said some bad things, but he should be able to see through that."

"And he will, god, I *hope* he will. That's why I'm staying. We've had our time apart, and now we need our time together to fix it..."

"Okay. I get that. Okay. Just – don't let it take too long. If he leads you on forever, you'll burn out, I know you will." Bucky brushed his hair back over his ear, finishing his coffee and tapping the cup gently back down on the table. "And again, if you need somewhere else to stay, T said that our place is open... I mean, they let *me* in of all people, he's willing to let you crash if you *have* to."

"Talking about me, Barnes?" T'Challa's accented voice betrayed his grin before he stepped into view; the instant he even spoke, though, Bucky shrunk down in his chair, shoulders hunched almost comically. His eyes widened and he glanced to the side when T'Challa clapped a hand onto his shoulder comfortably, grinning that crooked grin all the while.

It was the most immediate change in Bucky's expression that had happened the entire meeting, so far.

"Hey, T... Yeah, I mean, it's just Steve. I was telling him again what you said about his uh... living arrangements." Steve bit his lip to hold back a laugh at the way Bucky stiffened, a blush creeping up his neck no matter how much he fought to keep it down. What was even better was the apparent frustration in his eyes at the matter that he was failing to control himself.

Deciding that his friend would do enough of a job embarrassing himself by breaking his cool demeanor, Steve waved. T'Challa nodded in acknowledgement; but he turned his head, his attention solely on Bucky, clearly the person he stopped by to talk to. His lips quirked up to turn an already teasing grin into more of a smirk when he saw the way that Bucky was

awkwardly recoiling from his hand, and yet trying not to, just frozen under his touch with a mildly panicked look.

He chuckled deeply, warmly, signifying that this was a regular level of behavior to be joked about. Of course, it was; Bucky, for all of his seriousness and lecturing, could be hopeless at times. Steve put a fist up to hide when his grin broke through.

“It’s your turn to go grocery shopping, Shuri texted you a list. Get them before you get home this time? We’d rather have more than frozen pizzas for dinner just because you decided that midnight was a good time to remember your errands.” Patting his shoulder once more, that faint beam was briefly directed at Rogers.

“Yeah, for sure...” Bucky squeaked out without protest. And if it weren’t for the pink flush that had now reached his cheeks, Steve would have bet that he had arguments and excuses building up. It was funny to see how much T’Challa had him wrapped around his little finger, especially since they had barely gotten along when they first met.

Steve’s mirthful distraction at his friend’s expense was cut short when T’Challa spoke to him this time. “And he is right. We’re willing to keep *him*, and you’d be much more of a docile presence, Rogers. Our doors are always open to friends.”

“Thanks, really, but I’m alright.” Steve smiled briefly, just a subtle lift of his lips. “Things are going well, progressing at least. I don’t know where Tony and I will end up, but we’re – you know – definitely *better* than last spring.”

“Oh, Captain Rogers,” Steve blushed a little himself at the use of his ROTC rank, “*Anything* is better than where you and Tony were last spring. Bucky told me all about it. Needless to say, I’m glad he decided to live with us than your team from the beginning.”

And when he moved his hand to ruffle Bucky’s hair, the dam finally broke. Bucky batted his hands away and the two dissolved into their usual show of light bickering. Steve sat back with a grin and tried to pinpoint the exact moment where Bucky’s face reached the colour of a tomato.

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“I’ve got Pepsi! Pepsi all around!” Peter Quill grunted as he maneuvered his way around his friends and unceremoniously dumped five soda cans onto the bleachers, swiping down to catch one before it tumbled back to fall away beneath their feet. “Come on, guys, they’re cold and making my sleeves damp.”

“Oh, quit your whining. Did you get Groot a water, like we asked?” Rocket practically snorted, snatching a can and cracking it open in one swift movement. He glared with dark brown eyes over the rim, challenging their height difference with the intensity of his stare. From this angle, Peter could see the top of his short friend’s buzzed head.

Quill shifted uncomfortably, now that the entire group’s attention was on him, and not just due to his gracious delivery of caffeine. A quick glance down to the dark blue cans only

condemned him further of his negligence. “I... forgot. Sorry. The line was super long and I was focused on getting to pee, too!”

“You peed while holding this can? Ew – *god*, Quill, *ugh!*” Rocket made an exaggerated show of pairing a disgusted face with the hasty motion of setting the can down on his seat, wiping his hand quickly on his shorts. “Please tell me you at least washed your hands, and you guys call *me* the Trash Panda, or Raccoon or whatever!”

Aghast, Peter protested, “Of course I washed my hands, what do you think I am?”

“A freaking *animal*-”

“An idiot, but we’ve been over that.” Gamora untied her red sweatshirt from around her waist, taking a moment to tug it over her head before she began to speak again. She was forced to raise her voice when the crowd around them began to shout and cheer. “Now Groot is going half a day without being watered. And don’t you *dare* try and give him Pepsi again, he got sick last time.”

“I thought that maybe we could warm him up to it, but I guess not, jeez! Am I so bad for trying?” Tossing his hands up in defeat, Peter grumbled. “I’ll just go and get a water after the third quarter, he’s not gonna *die*.”

“He could die. Plants need water. These are signs of irresponsible parenting.” Drax leaned in unnecessarily close to Peter’s ear to state such a fact, causing him to cringe away from the breath on his skin, shoulder rising defensively to protect it. Drax narrowed his eyes and leaned back.

“Well, yeah, I know that!” Whining, Peter looked around for anyone to be on his side. When no one came to his immediate rescue, he cracked open his Pepsi and took a sip, still waiting for support.

Rocket hid a snicker and raised one dark, bushy eyebrow. “Do you? Because I think you would have gotten water for him if you really knew that.”

“I *know* that plants need *water* to survive, jerk!”

“*Do you?*”

“Yes!”

Rocket jabbed his finger in a point back to the stairs, almost hitting Mantis in the shoulder, where his height was more equal now that he had risen to stand on the bleachers. “Then get your ass back up there to *concessions* and get him a *freaking Dasani!*”

Peter’s heated response was swallowed up by the sudden uproar of the crowd around them, fans rising to their feet to jump up and down and scream as their players streaked across the field towards the endzone. The argument was momentarily forgotten as they all turned to watch, joining in the celebratory cries with their own incoherent shouting. At last, the quarterback crossed the final yard line after an impressive trek, throwing the football down in

favour of tossing his hands in the air to meet the impossibly increasing volume from the student body.

“Another touchdown for Odinson!” The announcer bellowed over the loudspeakers, with gusto that would have rattled the bleachers if people weren’t already jumping and stomping to express their energy.

“Hell yeah, let’s *goooo!*” Rocket stomped on the bleachers while keeping his upper body as still as possible, so as not to disturb their potted Groot, which sat nestled in a custom-fashioned harness strapped to his chest. “Odinson is the *GOAT*, man! Greatest of All Time!”

As much as Peter would normally refute the opinion, it was moments like this that floundered to come up with much to complain about. Being petty is easy, of course, but genuine distaste for a big, cheery quarterback who is actually nice and definitely good at bringing bragging rights to their school? In his third year at their school, Thor Odinson had easily risen to be the top player, and helped maintain the university’s going on fifteen year championship streak against their rivals; winning each game just put them closer and closer to that fateful night.

It boiled Peter’s blood but – hey, the dude was shredded. Can’t complain against that unless he’s face-to-face.

Only when the shouting continued past the dying down of the crowd did Peter allow his interest to be snapped back, along with the sudden weight thrown onto his leg to knock him off-balance. His hands flew down to support Rocket, who had tumbled back against him, and with a bewildered expression, he found the source of the ruckus. Some jackass in front of them was turned around to face the group, his clear plastic cup condemningly empty.

Some drink that was definitely *not* water was dripping from Groot’s leaves.

The five of them froze, staring at the guy, and he stared back until he scoffed. “What? It’s a fucking plant. Why the hell do you even have it in a baby harness? At a football game?”

“He is not just a plant, oh my god, dude do you have to be such an asshole?” Rocket growled, deep in his throat with the feral rodent energy that earned him his nickname, and slowly began unstrapping the harness.

By now, the few people surrounding them had turned to watch, but the chump just rolled his eyes again and faced forward. Which was the first of his many mistakes, as anyone in their right mind would know not to turn their back on Rocket, renowned for being the rowdiest student in the Fine Arts department. The very one who had countless fought tooth and nail in junk yards for things to repurpose for sculpting projects and weird knickknacks.

Especially when it involved the group’s prized baby tree.

So, it was only a little bit of a surprise when Rocket handed Groot to Quill, basically shoving the pot against his chest, and then leapt onto the back of the guy who had spilled the drink into Groot’s pot. Crying out in shock, the guy swore profusely as Rocket attempted to drag him down by the shoulders, managing to get him to bend back until he sat on the bleachers.

Anyone within a few person radius was startled by the motion, and once the onlookers were shaken out of their stupor, they lurched in to break up the impending fight.

“Rocket, for god’s sake!” In one motion, Gamora wrapped her arms around Rocket’s middle and yanked him away from the back of their fellow student, holding him easily up in the air as he kicked and thrashed in protest, still shouting obscenities at the offender.

But now the others were riled up, a whole group turning to face the five of them. Peter pushed Groot’s container into Drax’s hands, who instantly buckled up the straps to secure him to his broad chest. If it was going to be a fight, then they were going to be ready.

To vamoose.

“Scatter!” Peter grabbed his Pepsi and tipped it forward, splashing the sticky soda all over the main guy that had caused this mess, and the five of them bolted, climbing over people and ignoring their irritated shouts, running along the bleachers in various directions and tumbling over other students.

At last, they all respectively reached a staircase and began running, descending dangerously fast, even taking the steps two at a time. Gamora still held Rocket up so he wouldn’t fall behind; meanwhile on a separate set of stairs, Drax had one hand over Groot to protect him in the incident that he crashed into anyone. His other hand was gripping Mantis’ and pulling her along, as she couldn’t seem to keep from turning her head over her shoulder to see if they were being followed.

Peter was in the lead, jumping and waving to them when he reached the bottom, briefly putting his hands on his knees, heart hammering in his chest. His breath came cold and laboured, and sweat was definitely brimming under his hoodie. *Gross, but tough. Awesome.*

Once they were on level ground, Gamora put Rocket down, and he snatched up Quill’s wrist to drag him along. “Come on Quill, this is the exercise you always say you’ll get around to doing! We gotta go!”

“They’re not even chasing us, I don’t think, I mean-”

“Yeah, but security might, so let’s go!” Gamora took his other arm and helped drag, her strength surprisingly much more effective than their stocky friend. Drax and Mantis soon caught up, and they fled in an almost comical escape frenzy of knocking into anyone that came in their way with almost exaggerated momentum.

Outside the stadium, the lights barely breached the dark night sky, although still shining brightly enough to mask the tiny twinkling stars high above. There were more people milling about on the sidewalks due to the game coming to a clear end (with their team in the lead, of course) and the comfortable fall evening temperatures still staying on the warm side.

Peter finally doubled over again, hands on his knees as he caught his breath, the others standing around or pacing while they all regained their collective team energy. It didn’t take long for Peter to start giggling though, soon to be joined by Gamora’s breathless chuckles and then erupting into boisterous laughter from the other three. Echoing off the high metal of the

back of the bleachers, the adrenaline surging, their laughter took nearly five minutes to die out.

Wiping his eyes as his giggles finally faded away, Quill straightened sorely and grinned broadly at his friends. “Well, we *almost* made it through an entire game for once! Does anyone want to go to iHop, instead? This blows.”

“Oh, *hell* yeah, man! iHop is always best in the middle of the night. And you’re right, jokers who can’t hold onto their drinks? That definitely blows.” Rocket slapped Peter’s back just hard enough to hurt, then marched off on his own in the direction of their staple breakfast – or any meal or time, really – location.

The others followed at their own pace, a little ways behind and on the verge of reviving their mirthful giggles. Huffy, Rocket turned around just to call over to them, “You losers coming? You did not make me bolt out of a perfectly awesome football game only to *not* pay for my Number 14. Hurry it up!”

~

Bruce had to wrestle the bowl of ice cream out of Scott’s hands, so that the melted remnants wouldn’t spill over their laps, or the sofa, and only barely managed to land it onto the coffee table before Scott was fumbling over him for a box of Kleenex.

“I keep telling you that we should keep the tissues on your side...” Mumbling, Bruce cleared his throat awkwardly when Scott used his thigh for support, nearly dropping the box twice before he finally got a grip and sat back.

“But I never know when you’re gonna need them... It doesn’t make sense for our competition for them to only be on my side.” Scott wiped his eyes, light green shining against the red that rimmed his cheeks, and then blew his nose softly before tossing the tissue in the wastebasket waiting at the foot of the couch. “I don’t understand how you *can’t* cry during... well, *any* Pixar movie. And Up just kills me...”

“I just don’t really cry during movies,” Bruce shrugged innocently, but a fond smile crept to his lips as he watched Scott sniffle his way through another three tissues.

It was cute, really, when he found out that Scott spent the weekends just watching movies and doing schoolwork to relax. And when he learned that Bruce had never really watched kids’ movies, he instantly insisted that once every weekend, they force their way through a “real tear-jerker”, as he described basically all Pixar films.

Now though, the end credits were rolling, and Scott’s full attention was on Bruce himself. He handed him the box of tissues instead, as if the gesture would conjure tears to rise. “One day, I’ll get you to cry during movie night. Do you have time for another? Maybe Ratatouille will get you, or something that you wouldn’t expect like that...”

For a moment, his heart leapt. Bad news. He could tell the direction this was quickly headed. “I don’t have time, I’m sorry... I really should be going back.” Bruce’s smile turned apologetic, even as he knew that yet again, for another weekend in a row, he was making an

excuse. “Someone in our house might forget to eat, or remember and leave the stove on, honestly you never know what could be happening back there... And Thor had a game tonight, and he’s the other sort-of responsible one...”

Of course, that wasn’t the only reason. Bruce had noticed recently how the tension in his shoulders was practically nonexistent when he was here. He noticed that he slept easier when he fell asleep for brief naps on this couch. He found that his cheeks would be sore whenever he left, unused to actually *smiling* for so long, rather than the half-hearted smirks he usually passed around.

It wasn’t something he could ignore easily, recognizing that he overall felt better, *happier*, when he was spending time with Scott rather than fussing over his housemates, their drama and their attitudes.

Scott was easy. He was sweet and kind, cheerful enough to let hours of conversation pass by without even realizing, but always making sure that Bruce had something to stay too. He was thoughtful and understanding, working his already stupidly challenging schedule around Bruce’s so that they could meet up for nights like this; that was, until he cut back on hours so they could actually have more time to just hang out like students. He always made sure the cabinets, fridge or freezer had one of Bruce’s favourite snacks, or he would swipe him something on his way home from work in the morning.

And also, Scott Lang was bubbly. Pause – *Scott Lang*, what a cute name! He *liked* having Bruce around; that was the craziest bit, that he didn’t feel like he was imposing.

Really, Bruce understood that he could stay as long as he wanted. He knew that he could definitely, comfortably stay up watching movies all night until they fell asleep... Especially when just looking at Scott, sleepy and curled against his side, was enough to send a blush to Bruce’s cheeks and make butterflies dance around his belly, enough to make his hands shake as he sometimes raked his fingers delicately through Scott’s hair when he was *deeply* asleep and snoring.

But it was the knowledge that it *was* so easy that scared Bruce. He knew it, he definitely did, and yet he did not want to break whatever charming friendship spell they were under by pushing his welcome. Sure, Scott might be eagerly inviting him to stay over now, but what if he got tired of having Bruce there? What if he wanted to come over to *their* house, and one of the others pushed him away or made him feel unwelcome? Honestly, the petty stress there didn’t make it unlikely.

There was just too much at risk, too much that Bruce liked about this blissful happy medium. And so, yet again, he shrugged when Scott’s face fell into a pout. “Okay... Well, we really have to start planning better. Talk to them and see if you can get something worked out. I haven’t had a sleepover since high school, and they’re certainly much easier than the thought of me booting you out to have you walk home alone, in the dark, at like – midnight on a weekend.”

“We live a block away from each other in a well-lit neighborhood, Scott, I think I’ll be fine.” Bruce tried to joke, but something tugged at his heartstrings when he got up, and Scott looked away as he folded the blanket.

Hands running over the quilt to flatten it into a nice rectangle, Scott rushed out another quick proposal. “Just know that you’re always welcome to stay here, under any reasons, not just movie nights. I know I offer a lot, and I don’t want to be weird or make you uncomfortable, but not only do I really like spending time with you... but I know that it’s not easy at your place. I mean, you’ve told me yourself like a billion times. S’just... you’re one of the best friends that I have here, I don’t want to bother you by asking you to come back and forth, and I want you to have fun here and feel like you can tell me anything. And that you’re safe with me. I just want you to feel okay here. This is a safe space. Am I rambling? I’m rambling...”

“Yeah, just a little...” Bruce was quick to respond, if only to cut him off before he continued to spiral. “And thanks, Scott, it really means a lot... I know that I can always rely on you when I need anything. But this is fun, let’s just keep this up...” He tried to smile encouragingly, but by now Scott had started putting away his dishes and wasn’t looking. “I take it we’re watching Ratatouille next week?”

“For sure, I own almost every Disney movie though, just let me know if you change your mind!” And there it was, even when Bruce was certain that Scott was really upset, he still turned around to flash a big, adorable grin his way before he dried his hands on the towel next to the sink. “Oh, wait, before you go, can I have a hug?”

“Huh?” Bruce felt his fingertips grow cold, a sure sign when his nerves spiked a little. Only this time, it was accompanied by a flush of heat to his cheeks.

“Yeesh, oof, sorry if that was weird...” Scott rubbed the back of his neck, looking to the side awkwardly – and *awkwardly* just translated to *adorably* whenever it was something he did. “I just – I’m a really cuddly guy and you’re a really good friend, and you always look like you could use a hug and I just wondered if you wouldn’t mind if I gave you one? Also, my feelings are still raw from the end of the movie, so that could just be me...”

Bruce struggled to clear his throat, giving up and nodding when words didn’t come in time. “N-No, I mean, yeah... that’s perfectly okay. Whatever you want, man.”

Scott beamed and scooped Bruce into a hug, the minimal height difference between them still making Bruce feel somehow small in his arms. It was a nice hug though, really heartfelt and... Well, by the time Bruce found himself hugging back, he decided that maybe he could get used to this.

Hey. Screw it.

“Hey, you know what? I think I can um... I’ll just text the group chat. If your invitation still stands? And I sleep with two pillows.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!! If you liked it, please please please leave a comment!! I love to hear what you guys have to say, and I respond to each and every one!!

I hope to see you guys in the next chapter!! I absolutely love writing this series, even if not as many people read it... (That being said, spread the word!! I would love to share this with more folks!)

Hit me up on social media!! Tumblr @aegir-emblem, Twitter @thirteenthfloor!!

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