

Chapter 5 – A Night in the Office

Tony sat in the expensive ergonomic chair in his office. Now that he didn't have anyone around, he allowed himself a moment to lean back and relax from everything that had happened over the past day.

He tried to shut his brain down. He didn't want to deal with everything that had happened today; it was too much of a good and bad mix.

But with his mind racing as usual, Tony decided he might as well be productive. He leaned forward on the wide metal table and called to Friday, "Okay, baby girl, let's get this ball rolling. Call Underoos."

"Of course, Boss," came the soft reply of the voice Tony always loved to hear.

A holographic screen appeared on the opposite end of the table.

It was blank for a few moments before Peter's worried face filled it.

The kid barely waited a moment before starting the onslaught of words, "Mr. Stark! Oh my God, you are okay! I was so worried. And that video... I thought that maybe you were dead and that was my fault too. I should have done more... I could have..."

Tony shook his head and screamed, "Peter! Take a breath!"

The kid did as he was told, and Tony used the time to process everything he said. The fact he was worried for him was shocking to Tony, but today a lot of people seemed to care about his wellbeing. Tony wasn't sure how to feel about that. The fact the kid blamed

himself broke Tony's heart. He personally knew how it felt to carry everyone's burden; he would not have the kid suffering like him.

But the most pressing question that came to Tony's mind was, "What video, kid?" He asked with a confused tone.

Peter gave him a very odd look and said one word that caused Tony's blood to freeze in his veins despite the Extremis now flowing there.

"Siberia." The kid behind the mask of Spider-Man said it as if it was the most obvious answer. And honestly, it was. Tony simply forgot he gave Fury the go-ahead to release the footage. He groaned as he could already guess what Sharon and Matthew were calling about.

Shaking his head back to the present, Tony scowled at the kid, hoping to drive his point across. "Pete, you did a hell of a lot more than I asked you." Then Tony's thoughts drifted back to that fight.

Rogers didn't care who his opponent was. He had no idea if Spider-Man had super strength, and still he dropped a gateway on top of him without a second thought. The kid then fought another super-soldier, this one a professional killer with the aid of the fanboy Wilson. Then the fucking huge man trying to crush them all. The only good thing was that the kid managed to avoid Maximoff.

Tony felt shame washing over him for involving a kid in that mess.

He could lie to himself and say he didn't expect Rogers to actually fight his friends like he did, but Tony knew better. Nick taught him better. And still, he brought the kid—no, he didn't just bring him in, he convinced him to come!

Oh goodness, what the hell is wrong with him?! And then he agreed with the kid to keep it a secret from his hot aunt. Tony's heartbeat kept increasing, but he kept fighting it to remain calm. He didn't want his powers to act up right now.

With a final deep breath to calm himself, Tony spoke gently, "I owe you an apology, Peter. I should have never brought you into it."

Peter's eyes widened; his lips began trembling. Tony quickly added, "I don't mean it like that, kid! I'm happy I met you. Did you even wonder how I found out about you?"

Peter's face calmed, his eyebrows frowned, and he gave what for him seemed to be the most obvious answer. "Friday."

Tony smirked back at the kid. "Fri was a good guess, kid. But she was a little busy tracking Rogers, the Accords, SHIELD's rebuilding, and so on. No, I hired someone I trust to find everything about you because it was obvious you were in dire need of help."

Peter's eyes were wide, his mouth hung open. Tony chuckled for a moment, enjoying the youth's expression, but then Peter's jaw shut close, and his eyes were filled with sympathy as he said softly, "I'm sorry for what Rogers did to you, Mr. Stark. He deserved that punch."

Despite himself, Tony let out a small smile and replied, "Thanks, kid. And you can call me Tony, you know." Peter's face became scandalized, but Tony spoke again, this time firmly, "Which brings me to your aunt. You need to tell her the truth, Pete."

Peter's eyes widened with fear. His jaw moved up and down without any sound making it out of his mouth.

Tony decided to take mercy on him. “Tell you what, kid. I’ll make you a deal. I just hired a combat instructor to train any team member requiring it. How about we tell your aunt together, and then I’ll bring you to the tower for your first session.”

Peter was obviously biting the inside of his cheek while bouncing in his seat. After a moment, he squeaked out, “I’ll be an Avenger?!”

Tony’s eyes rose at that. He raised his palm out and motioned for Peter to calm down. “Whoa, kid, take a breath. You’ll be more like a trainee. Full Avenger must be 18 years old at least.”

Peter seemed to deflate. But still, after a moment, he raised his eyes back to meet Tony’s and said with a determined look, “Deal.”

Tony smiled at the kid. “Awesome, Pete. It’s good to see you can be a grown-up when needed, and for that, I’ll give you a little gift. I’ll wake up the AI in your suit.”

Peter returned to bouncing in his seat. “There is an AI in my suit? Can I call her Karen? Wait, since when do I have AI?”

Tony sighed at the end of Peter’s ramble and chose to answer all his questions. “Yes, sure, kid. Since the moment I gave you the suit, but she was asleep until now because I wasn’t sure if you were ready for her. You proved to me you can be responsible and sensible, so I feel I can trust you with Karen.”

Peter sat up straighter, his chest puffed out with pride as he said, “Thank you, Mr. Stark. I promise I will make you proud.”

Tony smiled gently at him. “It’s Tony, kid,” he reminded him before saying, “I know you will. So, I’ll come around the day after tomorrow so we can talk to your hot aunt.”

“Mr. Stark!” Peter whined just before he ended the call.

Tony kept smirking until the screen went blank again.

With a heavy sigh, Tony put his face in his hands while leaning forward on his desk.

“That went well, Boss. Karen will be happy to help take care of Mr. Parker. They already began bonding as we speak.” Friday’s gentle tone soothed his thoughts. But then she had to go on and add, “I believe Captain Danvers will be proud as well once she hears about that.”

Tony’s head snapped to the closest camera, his eyes wide and heart rate increased as he asked, “Why would that matter, Fri?” He tried to sound casual, but his voice came out slightly too high for it.

“I didn’t say it has to matter, Boss. Just pointed something out.” Friday’s smug voice told Tony she knew exactly what she was doing, but whatever it was, Tony couldn’t figure it out.

Finally, his AI decided to take pity on him and asked, her voice amused, “Who shall you call next, Boss? Miss Van Dyne or Carter?”

Tony was glad he had something to concentrate on in that moment because Friday’s comment about Carol caused a lot of confusing feelings in Tony.

Tony sucked in a breath, taking a moment to marvel at Helen’s workmanship. With the previous Arc Reactor, such a thing caused him to feel like someone just stabbed him in the chest. While he still felt the presence of this one, it was more in a way of annoyance than pain. With a forward look, he said, “Call Hope, please.”

A picture of his old friend appeared on the screen. The picture was from a couple of years ago. It was taken during a gala they both attended without her dad there or the Avengers. They were both smiling in a way that Tony didn't smile while he was in the company of most of the Avengers.

"Tony?" The concerned voice of Hope Van Dyne penetrated his thoughts.

Tony didn't even notice when the picture was replaced with the live stream of said woman. Her hair barely reached her shoulders. She was wearing her usual business suit. Her eyes were filled with concern as she leaned toward her camera.

Tony shook his head before smiling weakly at her. "Sorry, Hope, my thoughts swept me too far for a moment."

Hope gave him a searching look for a long moment, her brown eyes kept moving around his face until she stalled to stare him back in the eyes. Her eyes still wide with concern, she spoke. "I noticed. I had a couple of things I wanted to talk to you about, but then I saw the news and that video. I had to know how you are doing..." Her eyes narrowed then. "But you don't look like a couple of super-soldiers beat the shit out of you just a couple of days ago."

Tony snorted before saying, "Way to sugarcoat it, Honeybee." Her eyes narrowed even further. Tony wasn't sure if it was because he didn't answer her question or because of the nickname. Tony sighed, and his entire body sagged when he said, "Extremis 3.0 as well as this." He leaned back so the glow of the reactor would be in the camera frame.

Hope's eyes widened in sorrow. She was just like Tony; she never wished to have powers. She preferred to rely on her mind, create her own power, and let people follow her because they wanted to, not because they were afraid not to. That's just one of the reasons the two of them always got along so well despite their fathers' rivalry.

Hope wiped her eye from a tear that dared to escape. Again, like Tony, she despised displaying such emotion in front of anyone else; it could be considered a weakness. But between the two of them, they always knew they were safe with each other. “I am sorry, Tony. I know how hard it must be for you. But I have to say I much prefer you alive and enhanced than dead.” She said in a soft tone before a smirk spread in the corner of her lips. “And if it’s worth anything, even Dad is pissed at Rogers after that and siding with you.”

Tony felt his eyes almost escape from their sockets, and he choked out, “Old Hank actually said that?”

Hope chuckled before saying amusingly, “Yep. Finally opened his eyes. This video, while it was horrible, did some good things.”

Tony filed that comment away. He would have to ask Friday later to report what was going on in the news; better he do it before his meeting with the president.

Hope’s tone became more serious. “He actually told me to ask you if you are willing to call him when you have the time. I think he wants to apologize and talk to you about a private project we were trying to run. I think you will be very interested.”

Tony was already curious about a few things. “Oh. Color me intrigued. I have a hectic couple of days in front of me, but I will give him a call as soon as I can. By the way, this Bang... No, Dang guy mentioned Hank. Does he have anything to do with it?”

Hope leaned back in her chair, her face suddenly exhausted and the bags under her eyes more permanent. “That idiot Scott Lang stole the suit from us when Rogers called him. We wouldn’t have allowed him to use it if he asked. You know Dad; even if it wasn’t for the law, he wouldn’t want his particles becoming common knowledge.”

Tony figured as much.

Hope then leaned forward and lowered her voice, “Actually, that was why I called earlier in the first place.”

“Oh?” Tony raised his eyebrow, not sure where it was going.

Hope waited for a long moment before hesitantly saying, “I am sure Nick already told you about Wakanda and the rogues.”

Tony just ‘hummed,’ trying to control his temper. He could feel his heart start beating too fast again already. It wouldn’t do to have glowing eyes now.

Hope released an exasperated sigh. “Scott made a deal with the king for a passage home in exchange for his silence about the whereabouts of the rogues. Right now, the idiot is in my penthouse moping about his choices in life.” She finished with a roll of her eyes.

Now Tony saw what was going on. His face went blank, and his tone was flat. “Why would you think I would help one of Roger’s minions?”

Hope flinched slightly, but then she looked Tony in the eye—or into her camera, more likely. “He isn’t like the others, Tony. I get that you are angry, and with a hell of a good reason. But he is just an idiot who jumped on the first train of heroism he saw. Dad didn’t help with his Stark rants, but the man was even too stupid to realize Dad was talking about Howard and not you.”

Tony shrugged, trying to detach himself from the conversation. “And why should his idiocy be my problem? I already dealt with that kind of idiot, and we all know how that ended.”

Hope rubbed her eyes. “Tony, please. He regrets his choices. He is willing to give up the suit if it means he doesn’t end up in jail. And if not for him, then for me and his daughter Cassie.”

Tony's eyes bored straight into Hope. He never saw her like that. Eyes wide and pleading, hands clasped together. Hope Van Dyne never begged, not even to him until now. "You love him," Tony stated dryly.

Hope blushed and looked away. "I...I..."

Tony considered it for a moment. He knew Hope better than most people. She had a few relationships before; none ended well, but she never behaved about any of them like she behaved for this Lang guy.

Maybe he could afford to give a man a second chance. If for no other reason than so he wouldn't leave another girl without a dad.

But Tony also knew his old friend better than to believe she would simply ask for help. She was a CEO, after all, and one he helped train himself after that all Yellowjacket business. Tony raised an eyebrow and asked with no emotion in his voice, "You have a deal in mind, don't you?"

Hope perked up at that, seeing the opportunity Tony was offering her. Her back went straight again, her eyes back to the screen, and her palms flat on the table in front of her as she spoke. "I do."

Tony rolled his wrist, telling her to keep going. And with a determined look, she did. "Get Scott off the hook, and you will have both Ant-Man and the newly active Wasp for your roster of the Avengers."

Tony leaned back in shock. He considered making sure Lang got house arrest or something like that, but getting him into the New Avengers... Now that would be a challenge. Although he could claim that Ross's imprisonment was illegal and inhumane, combined with the fact

he would willingly turn himself in, they could argue for time served and community service as an unpaid Avenger.

But did Tony really want a man who fought with Rogers in the new team? Then Tony realized it wasn't his decision. He is not the leader, nor is he on the council.

Tony let out another sigh and said, "Fine. We have a deal, Honeybee." Hope had a wide smile on her face; she didn't even glare at him for using the nickname. "But wouldn't it interfere with you being CEO of Pym Tech?"

The smile faded from her face, replaced by a deep, sad look as she said weakly, "Well, with Scott's public support of Rogers after the video was released, our stock keeps dropping steadily. Soon, me and Dad will have to liquidate the company." She shook her head and said only slightly joking, "If you have job openings, I know a few people that will need the help soon enough."

The gears in Tony's head began spinning. His idea had a lot of merit, but would he manage to sell it to his board? He actually believed he and Pep could do it, and the benefits of it would be worldwide.

Tony smirked at his old friend. "Actually, I can do you one better if you can get your dad on board."

Hope raised an eyebrow but smiled. She was familiar with this smirk of his, and she looked excited about what he had to say.

They talked for about an hour longer, finishing the details of the idea Tony proposed and Hope eagerly accepted.

The call was finished with both of them satisfied with its results.

Tony rubbed his eyes and waited for what he knew was coming.

“That was very nice of you, Boss. Promising to help Ms. Van Dyne and Mr. Dang like that.”
The Irish voice praised.

The corner of Tony’s lips twitched when he heard Fri’s jibe at Lang. He was a bad influence on his baby girl.

Tony ignored her compliment and instead asked, “Fri, show me the highlights since the release of the video.”

The screen showed him the first video of Christine Everhart, probably right after she saw the video for the first time on live news. Her eyes looked bloodshot and her complexion green, but her pupils were narrow and determined as she spoke. “The USA government is joining five other countries in issuing an arrest warrant for Steven Grant Rogers and James Buchanan Barnes. Their list of crimes is extensive, but now includes attempted murder of one Anthony Edward Stark, obstruction of justice in the cases of Howard and Maria Stark, and accessory after the fact for aiding Hydra in hiding such high-profile murders for over two years.”

Christine tilted her head, obviously listening to something in her earpiece. She released a relieved sigh and said to the camera, “We are happy to announce Pepper Potts, the CEO of Stark Industries, has confirmed Dr. Stark is out of critical condition and will make a full recovery.”

Another pause, and this time Tony could see her fighting a smirk that tried to spread on her lips before she said, “The US military just confirmed Mr. Rogers’s Captain title had always been honorary alone. But nonetheless, they are announcing the dishonorable discharge of Steve Rogers, James Barnes, and Sam Wilson from their ranks. With that, we mark the end of the once American idol turned international criminal Captain America. When asked

earlier today, the president confirmed that short of a world-ending event, the so-called Rogue Avengers will not receive pardons.”

Friday changed the image to the news about the Pym Technology stock drop. “With the disgusting misuse of their technology, who will want to support their company? With the continual fall in their stock, only a miracle can save the company now.” said the anchor.

Tony smirked, knowing that the miracle was already in the works.

The next video showed a UN courtroom while the anchor said, “Using the momentum after the arrest of the former Secretary of State Ross and the sympathy from the released Siberia footage, Stark’s team managed to push the Accord Council to accept many of the amendments Tony Stark promised will come during the next months, advancing the law almost a year into the future. One of the clauses added is the option for a superhero to sign the accords under his code name, allowing them to keep their secret identity.”

The screen changed again to a video of people walking in Iron Man or War Machine merchandise while burning any of the Rogues’. “With this footage from outside Stark Tower, it’s safe to say the people of America chose a side, and in an ironic twist of fate, it’s Iron Man’s. City Hall announced the Captain America exhibition will be replaced by what they call the Superhero Area Exhibit, which starts with every hero since the rise of Iron Man. Excluding, of course, the recently rogue ones that followed Rogers.” reported the woman in the corner of the screen.

With that, the screen went blank again.

“If I may say so, Boss, it looks like the people saw all along who their true hero was. And now, without the fear of the legend of Captain America, they are letting their true loyalties show.” Fri commented, her voice giddy with the development.

Tony doubled over in laughter. “Can you imagine Rogers’s face if he is seeing that?”

“Would you like me to try and hack into Wakanda security footage and look for it?” Friday offered.

Tony chuckled. “Thanks, baby girl, but we’d better not.”

There was a silence for a long moment. And Tony could admit to himself he was avoiding what should come next.

Friday, the precious angel that she is, nudged him with her soft voice. “Shall I call Miss Carter now, Boss?”

Tony let out a heavy breath and said before he could change his mind, “Let’s get this over with.”

Tony stiffened his back and hid all the emotion on his face, mentally preparing himself.

A few moments later, a blushing and wide-eyed Sharon Carter filled his screen.

Before the blonde had a chance to say something, Tony asked flatly, “Agent Carter... oh excuse me, I mean Miss Carter. What can I do for you?”

Tony’s heart clenched with guilt when he saw Sharon’s entire body flinch and tears start flowing down her cheeks. “Tones...” She whispered brokenly.

Tony wanted to drop the act and find a way to hug his little cousin, his Sherry-Bear. But there was one thing he needed to make clear before that. “Did you know?” he demanded.

Sharon reared back in shock that he would even ask. But Tony wasn't one to give her an easy out this time. He looked her straight in the eye. "I know you fed Rogers info about Barnes since the fall of SHIELD. I know you kept feeding him info all during the Civil War, and I know you were the one to check his weapons out of lockup. So did. You. Know?" Tony asked again slowly.

Sharon shook her head so fast her blonde locks flew around to cover her tear-stricken face. Then she spoke, her tone sincere, "Of course not, Tones. If I knew, I would have shot Barnes myself. You know how much I loved Aunt Maria."

And Tony did. He let his expression relax slightly but still remained stiff as he asked, "Then why?"

Sharon shrugged helplessly and asked him back, "Why did you hold your punches? Why did you go to Siberia as a friend when you knew Rogers's plan was shit? We were both raised to idolize the man. You never quite bought into the hype, but enough stock for you to tolerate him for so long."

Tony's entire body sagged as well. "I guess you're right."

Sharon's eyes were full of hope when she looked at him again. "So... you forgive me?"

Tony raised an eyebrow at her. "Are you still on his side?"

Sharon's lips curled, and her eyes narrowed in offense as she retorted, "Did he give you one too many hits to the head? After what he did to you? And not only in Siberia, but everything Nick told me before? I'm going to put a bullet in him the first chance I get."

Tony chuckled. Allowing himself to act as he would normally around his little cousin, he teased her, "Do you even still have a gun, Ms. Carter?"

As Tony watched his cousin flinch again, he realized it may have been too soon for that joke. She sagged again and replied lamely, “Well, no. But then again, if it wasn’t for Nick, I would have ended up in federal prison. Rogers sure as hell didn’t spare a second thought on me, thank God.”

Tony considered it for a moment. “How would you like a job in the new Avengers Initiative, cuz?”

Sharon’s eyes widened, but Tony didn’t miss the longing in her eyes. “You are serious, Tones? But why would you?”

Tony shrugged and smiled at her. “We are kind of building a new family around here. And what family would it be without my Sherry-Bear there.”

He noticed Sharon’s eye twitch. She was obviously trying to hold back from snapping at him about the name. Oh, Tony is going to milk that for all it’s worth.

He still has an appointment with the president, and he needs to prepare for Rhodey’s arrival tomorrow. But he can spare a few more minutes to speak with his baby cousin. They are family, after all.