

## Chapter 3 – Out of the Shadows into the Light

When Tony woke up, he was surprised by a few things.

First, the fact that he woke up at all. He remembered Ste—Rogers—raising his shield, ready to deal the final blow to his head. Tony had a shot; he knew he could fire the thruster and fry the traitor’s face, but he didn’t. Even Tony wasn’t sure why anymore. Rogers, of course, didn’t want to be directly blamed for his death, so he went for the reactor and left him there in a dead suit. The last thing Tony remembered was choking on a sob before his world went black.

Second, the fact that he wasn’t feeling any pain. Actually, he couldn’t recall the last time he felt this good. How long ago was he in Siberia? Maybe he was out for months, which would explain the progress of his healing. The warm feeling inside of him could be the temperature of the room he was in. Then he noticed an odd yet familiar weight in his chest. He could actually feel the power coming from the device, like fire spreading through his body from his chest.

When Tony’s head cleared even more, he recognized the familiar feeling in his chest. It was the Arc Reactor! Tony guessed his injuries forced Helen to put it back in, but he could only think about one reason she would install the reactor again. Tony wanted to cry. Who the hell made that decision? He had asked Pepper specifically to never allow Extremis to be used on him. Now he could feel the warm liquid flowing through his bloodstream, and it scared him.

With his mind now finally working at full capacity, Tony opened his eyes.

The first thing he saw was a ceiling he recognized. That was the design of his tower. He was very glad now that he changed the name back to Stark Tower after the team moved to the compound. He then looked down at his chest, and sure enough, under the white shirt he was wearing, a familiar blue glow was visible. Tony wasn’t sure how to feel about that either.

“Fury,” Tony heard a female voice he couldn’t recognize calling. He turned his head to see Nick and a woman he recognized only from pictures as Captain Carol Danvers sitting next to his bed.

The ex-director rose from his seat and stepped closer to Tony, asking with a worried tone Tony rarely got to hear, “You doing alright there, kid?”

Tony stared into the man’s eye and asked hoarsely, “Extremis?”

Nick’s features hardened as he said, “Yes. It was my call.”

Tony was about to point out he knew it would require Pepper's approval as well as a certain AI's cooperation, but at that moment, Captain Danvers came to his side and handed him a glass of water.

After gulping all the water in a single go, Tony cleared his throat before speaking with a much more normal voice. “Thank you, Captain Danvers.”

The captain smiled at him and replied politely, “Don’t mention it, Mr. Stark.”

Tony returned her smile and said, “Tony, please.”

“Then call me Carol,” the blonde said.

Tony was about to sit up when Helen entered the room. Without delay, she was at his side, poking and pulling. He groaned before whining, “Helennnn, I’m fine.”

Helen sent a glare his way. “Yes, after I had to cut a new hole in your chest and inject an experimental drug into your heart while leaving a new Arc Reactor inside. Lucky for you, this one is shallower than the previous one, so it shouldn’t interfere with your breathing too much.”

Tony gave the doctor a relaxed smile as he said, “I always have full confidence in your abilities, Helen, so I don’t see any reason to worry while you got me.”

The glare on the Asian woman’s face melted into a smile as she shook her head and said amused, “My my, Doctor Stark, if I didn’t know any better, I would say you were flirting with me.”

Tony chuckled and replied, “I think my doctor will disapprove.”

Helen adopted a mock firm expression. “She certainly will. Now try to stay still while I keep checking you. You can talk if it will keep you out of my hair for a while.”

Tony tried to look offended, but his small smile betrayed him.

He decided to follow his doctor’s advice and looked at Carol. “So, Starburst, what are you doing around these parts?”

Carol raised an eyebrow at the nickname but didn’t comment. Instead, she answered, “Fury called me.”

Tony turned to his godfather. “I hoped she would come in time to help you deal with the rogues, but as it was, she was the one to rescue you from Siberia.”

Tony winced at the memory but tried to hide it behind a smile as usual as he turned to Carol and said, “Thanks, Starburst. Things got...intense there.”

Carol gave him a gentle look as she spoke. “Yeah, we know.”

Tony blinked. “You know?”

This time Fury replied to his confusion. “Friday showed us the security footage. And soon the world will see it too.”

Tony felt panic starting to settle in as he practically yelled, “Are you crazy?! People will stone me in the streets for hurting their beloved Captain America.”

Fury smirked at him and showed him the screen of his phone, which displayed poll results from last night. “You see, Tony, even in America, 64 percent of the people are on your side. Outside of the country, your approval rating is above the 90 percent mark. Releasing this video will get justice for both Howard and Maria while showing the world what kind of man Rogers really is.” Nick moved the phone out of his face and somehow managed to stare into both his eyes with the one he had uncovered. “Do you trust me, Tony?”

Tony knew there were very few people in the world he could trust. The business with Stane made it clear, and Rogers was a sobering experience. But still, he knew that his godfather was always on his side, even when everyone around him tried to get to him. Nick protected him. So Tony just nodded.

Fury gave him a firm nod and said, “Then leave it to me.”

Tony sighed. He knew it was the smart idea; it doesn’t mean he had to like it. Speaking about things he didn’t like, “What about Rogers?”

Fury's face hardened, and he took a calming breath before saying, "He and Barnes made it to your jet and got out of Siberia while we were busy tracking you. A couple of hours ago, I got a call from the asshole Ross. Rogers broke out his band, killing a lot of guards on their way out."

Tony frowned. Leave it to Rogers to make everything more complicated and create even more death while doing it. "Do we know where they are?"

Nick's body somehow tensed even further before replying, "Just before you woke up, the jet landed in Wakanda."

Wakanda?! Tony felt his heartbeat increasing. He could feel the Extremis in his blood getting hotter and his muscles getting tenser. He grabbed the edges of the metal frame of his bed and tightened his hold. He saw Nick's eye widen. Helen took a quick step backwards while Carol did the opposite.

Tony was confused until Carol's calm voice called to him, "Tony, the glowing eyes are cool, but you need to calm down."

Tony did no such thing, but instead of anger, it was fear now that gripped him. He looked around the room and asked, "Glowing eyes?"

Carol nodded and then pointed out, "Yep. They are glowing orange like there is a flame behind them. Maybe you want to release your fists and look down."

Tony took a deep breath, let his hands go limp, and then looked down. His eyes widened when he saw the metal he was holding a moment ago crumpled to the size of his fist. Did he do it? He wasn't even trying! It felt like crumpling a piece of paper. Then Tony breathed out his realization, "The Extremis..."

But Helen beat him to that punch. “Did more than just heal you.” She was looking down at the screen of her tablet. “And I think I know why.”

She turned the screen so all three of them could see the 3D scan of his internal systems, including the Arc Reactor. While Tony fixed his eyes on the screen, he listened to Helen as she explained to Nick and Carol, “The Arc Reactor integrated itself with the Extremis. This means Tony can now use the reactor’s increased output to jumpstart the Extremis in his system and let it work as an enhancer. In that state, he will have strength that far surpasses a super soldier and a healing factor off the charts.” Helen looked back at him with a smile and said, “Congratulations, Tony, you perfected the Extremis in the way Killian and Hansen dreamed of.”

Tony shook his head slowly. “Oh no, my dear. You were the one that came up with the idea and performed the surgery. The credit is all yours. But I got to warn you, both of them turned out to be terrorists, so I’m not sure you want that connection.”

Helen seemed to consider before looking back at him with a grateful expression and said, “I will think about it. Thanks, Tony, you are a good friend.” Tony felt like he should protest. He did nothing special, but Helen saw that coming and cut him off. “You are, Tony. Very few would share credit for something like that, far less give it up completely. Not to speak about the fact that my career wouldn’t be where it is right now without your help.”

Tony blushed a little. He wanted to respond, but that was when Friday chose to speak. “I am glad to see you are okay, Boss.”

Her voice was filled with such genuine relief that it melted Tony’s heart.

“And I’m glad to hear your voice, baby girl,” Tony replied, genuine happiness in his voice. Tony noticed Carol smiling softly at the exchange; he couldn’t figure why, though.

“Boss, you need to be more... BOSS!” Whatever his AI was about to say was cut off when she shouted, alarmed by something.

“What is it, baby girl?” Tony responded, instantly worried.

Friday’s answer was immediate, and her voice panicked. “The alarms at the Barton farm—they are all active. I have visual confirmation of Secretary Ross on the property with armed forces.”

Tony jumped from the bed, ignoring Helen’s protest. He could guess his eyes were glowing again. “Son of a bitch! Friday, send me the Mark 45 right away. Try to contact Laura and report everything to the accords council. You can tell them I am going in to apprehend a rogue member of the accords unless they allow lethal force.”

Friday’s response was instant. “The Mark 45 will be on the roof by the time you get there, Boss, and I am contacting the council now.”

Tony began leaving the room but was surprised when Carol joined him. She raised an eyebrow at him and said, “You just healed and are not used to your powers yet. I’m coming to watch your back.”

Tony shook his head. “Sorry, Starburst, but you didn’t sign the accords. Can’t give Ross the ammunition right now.”

Nick intervened with a firm tone. “I will smooth everything with the council. You are taking Danvers with you. Helen and I will be ready for you to come back in case medical care is needed.”

With no time and no counterargument, Tony just moved toward the exit to the landing pad. The armor was already there, opened and ready to let him step in. Once it closed around him, both he and Carol took to the sky.

Tony looked at Carol; she gave him a thumbs-up, so Tony activated the full power of his thrusters. They were both flying at top speed toward the Barton farm.

“So what does Ross want?” Tony heard Carol’s question through the comms.

They had about seven more minutes of flying, so a conversation wasn’t a bad idea, and it would be better if she knew what she was getting into. “He wants to control all enhanced individuals. It started with the Hulk and then moved toward the accords. Now that the rogues escaped his prison, he wants to try and draw them out with Hawkeye’s family.”

“And drawing them out for recapture isn’t something you want?” Carol asked back.

Tony sighed. “Well, yes, but not like this. One, I don’t want Ross to get his hands on them, no matter how angry I am. And two, I’m drawing a line way before using children as bargaining chips.”

“Agreed on that. Who are we looking for?” Carol’s voice was emotionless; he recognized it from Rhodey. It was the voice of a soldier in a mission mindset.

Thinking about Rhodey caused him to remember his injured brother in all but blood. But now Tony had an idea to treat Rhodey.

Tony shook his head and focused back on the mission. “A wife, woman, brown hair in her 40s named Laura. A baby, Nathaniel, and two kids. A girl, Lila, and a boy, Cooper.”



“Got it. I think it will be better if you keep Ross busy. He probably expects you, but he has no idea about me, so I will be able to sneak around.” It was a good plan. Tony was all of a sudden very glad for her support.

Friday’s voice came next. “Boss, the council gave a preliminary approval to the rescue mission as well as the involvement of Captain Danvers. They cautioned you against using lethal force for now, but they sent a team to apprehend Mr. Ross. The team led by Agent Ross will arrive soon as well.”

Tony let out a relieved sigh. That was one less thing to worry about, though he would have to hold himself back from killing the bastard. “Thank you, Fri. You got it, Starburst?” Tony asked.

“Got it. You know I do have a code name,” Carol tried to point out.

Tony just smirked inside his helmet and responded, “Oh, I know, Captain Marvel. I just like mine more.” He saw the farm getting closer.

Clearly, Ross couldn’t make too big of a scene here as he only brought two assault vehicles and about two dozen men who were looking around the property while he was standing in front of the main house watching the smoke coming out of it. And indeed, the main house was beyond salvation now.

Tony pointed at a small wooden shed on the ground and said through the comms, “They’re probably hiding in the shed. Friday will unlock the security door for you. I’m going down to keep the asshole busy.”

Carol increased her speed, taking a long flight around the boundary to avoid being detected. Tony, on the other hand, asked Friday to play AC/DC from the speakers and landed loudly in his signature crouch.

It's showtime.

Carol landed silently between the closest trees to the shed. She began to wonder how to get rid of the eight armed men in her way when loud rock music followed by an even louder 'bang' caused most of them to go around the shed.

Worried it was a new threat, she took flight so she could peek over the shed. What she saw made her smile. Tony sure knew how to draw attention to himself.

Carol landed right behind the single guard who was left. She watched for a short moment while he tried in vain to break into the shed, but then she cleared her throat.

The man turned quickly to her, his eyes widening once he saw her. Carol smiled, raised her hand in a wave, and said, "Hi."

The guard reached for something on his belt, but Carol's wave turned into a punch, and seconds later, the man was on the floor, out cold for a good while.

Carol took a step toward the exposed metal door behind the wood and said, "Friday, if you will please."

"Of course, Captain Danvers," came the response in her comm a moment before the door opened.

Carol took a step in and barely managed to avoid a bullet shot at her. When she turned to the direction the bullet came from, she saw the woman Tony described standing firmly in front of her three children, gun held up high and steady with an expression that promised the next bullet wouldn't miss.

Carol raised her hand in a placating manner and said gently, “Hi, the name is Carol. I’m a friend of Tony’s.”

Those seemed to be the magic words. The woman lowered her weapon but wisely kept it ready to shoot if necessary. The children took a step from behind their mother, and the girl, Lila, she recalled, asked excitedly, “Uncle Tony is here?”

Carol had to hold back the snort that wanted to escape when she heard the girl saying ‘Uncle Tony.’ There had to be a good story there, but this wasn’t the time. Carol smiled at the girl. “Yep. He is out talking to the bad man. Now, at the risk of sounding cliché, you should come with me if you want to live.”

Carol expected a snort from the older woman, but instead, she received a full laugh from Cooper. She sent the boy a wink.

Laura seemed to consider her for a moment before nodding. Then she turned to the children and said, “Lila, Cooper, each of you grab your emergency bag, and we follow whatever Carol tells us. Understood?”

Both children nodded, and all of them left the shed.

Once they were back in the open air, two armed men approached them slowly. Carol stepped in front of the family, her eyes and fists glowing. “You better drop the weapons and step aside. You don’t want to be on my bad side.”

Both men raised their weapons above their heads, and one of them spoke. “We are under Agent Ross, sent by the accords council to ensure the Bartons’ safe transport to Stark Tower.”

And then Carol did notice that both the color of their uniforms and the insignia were different from the first guy she knocked out. Carol stopped glowing and took a step back, giving a nod to the family.

The second man spoke. "If you will follow us, we have a jet waiting to take you to New York."

Carol froze in her place at the sight in front of her. They had just stepped around the shed to see Tony Stark sitting on the steps of the ruined house, rubbing his shoulder where the shirt had a burned hole in it. Yes, the shirt. Because his armor was left in the same spot Carol saw him land. A man with white hair was standing next to him, a look of both awe and concern etched on his face.

Carol couldn't stop herself from marching toward the man while screaming, "Damn it, Stark! I left you alone for five minutes. What the hell happened!?"

Tony kept himself in the crouch pose for a moment longer, making sure all eyes were on him. Then he stood to his full height and allowed the helmet to collapse back into the suit, revealing his media shark face.

"Ah, Mr. Ross, it's funny how you meet people you know in the oddest places. Don't you agree?" Tony asked through his smirk, his voice full of fake wonder.

The asshole seemed a little surprised to see him, but the surprise quickly faded into a look of annoyance, and he said flatly, "Stark. Fury told me you were injured."

Tony shrugged, smirk still in place. "My doctor is the best. Now, Ross, what are you doing here?"

The bastard gave him an evil smile. "What you failed to do, Stark. And it's Mr. Secretary to you."

Tony's smirk became real and predatory as he mocked the old man. "Oh dear, someone wasn't checking his phone for the past couple of hours."

Tony watched with satisfaction as the ex-general checked his phone and probably saw the email from the Oval Office.

The man's face turned red. He threw his phone to the ground and shouted, "It won't matter when I get the international criminals behind bars. I will be the president." His face got a nasty smirk, and he said calmly, "And I can start with you, Stark. You are, after all, in violation of the Sokovia Accords."

Ross signaled his men to arrest him, but Tony wasn't worried. With a bored smile, Tony responded, "Who says I'm not just visiting a good friend?" He saw the asshole was about to retort, but Tony cut him off. "But in this case, I do have a warrant from the council. Do you have one, Ross?" He saw the man's face begin to color again, and Tony still had one more knife to plunge. "No? What a coincidence! Because the warrant I mentioned is for your arrest." Tony finished, barely having to fake the chipper voice he was using.

Ross's face became cold. He reached inside his coat and pulled two objects from there. Tony instantly recognized the weapon and, with a frown, commented, "That's Chitauri weapon, Ross. I don't remember you registering that with the council."

The bastard just raised the weapon in Tony's direction. Tony raised an amused eyebrow. "You know those things didn't work on my armor four years ago, and they won't work now."

Ross smirked and raised the other device in his hand, which Tony recognized as well. A pit began forming in his stomach, but he kept his bravado. "Not sorry to tell you this, but I protected my suit against every known EMP device."

“Not this one, Stark. This one was created specifically for your suit in case you went rogue. It won’t disable your reactor, but it will destroy every engine you have in that suit.” Ross said smugly before pushing the button.

Tony was used to people underestimating his AIs, especially Friday, because they thought she was too young. What no one knew was that Tony and Jarvis spent a lot of time teaching Friday as much as they could so she could become Tony’s co-pilot while Jarvis piloted the Iron Legion on missions. So even though Jarvis was lost and Friday took on more responsibilities than any of them expected from her, she was fully prepared for that.

But it was rare for Tony himself to be surprised by the initiative of his baby girl. The moment Ross’s finger started pushing the button, Friday activated the release protocol of the armor, causing Tony to stumble out of it. Tony considered why she would do it. After all, even if immobile, the armor offered better protection. She should have used the time to close the helmet and deny Ross any vulnerable place to shoot him at. Then he remembered...the Extremis! He has powers outside of the suit now. Clever girl, Jarvis would have been proud of his little sister.

Ross laughed at him and mockingly said, “You sure you don’t have a brain injury, Stark? Stepping out of your armor...” The man shook his head with a dark smile. “Oh well, if you chose to make it so easy, I will be a fool to decline...”

“Thaddeus Ross, you are under arrest for breaking the Sokovia Accords and misusing authority by both the U.S. government and its military,” called the voice of Agent Everett Ross as he approached the two of them with a gun aimed at the former politician.

Ross scowled for a moment, probably annoyed by being caught red-handed breaking the law he supported. But then an even darker smile spread across his old face, and Tony began to worry again.

The old man changed the aim of the alien gun from Tony to Everett while looking at Tony. “Once he is in range, he dies. It’s such a shame I couldn’t stop Iron Man from blasting the

good agent away while he tried to stop you from killing me against the council's order. But luckily, I used the distraction to make sure the next blast killed you, ending your rampage.”

Tony felt his heart's speed increase again, just like in the tower. He watched in slow motion as the asshole Ross began pulling the trigger. Everett's eyes widened, realizing what was about to happen but helpless to stop it.

Tony sprinted forward. His increasing speed allowed him to grab the gun and pull it toward him before the energy blast left it.

Tony then tensed his muscles and used his enhanced strength to charge a punch toward the bastard's face with his other hand.

The punch landed on the old man's face at the same time the energy blast hit Tony's shoulder.

Ross was knocked out and fell to the floor limp. Tony was forced to take a few steps backward, his shoulder burning in pain so much that Tony closed his eyes and tried to push the pain out of his mind.

He heard Everett's voice calling, “Mr. Stark!” Tony heard him running toward him, probably bypassing the knocked-out man, but it wasn't like he was going anywhere anytime soon.

When Tony felt a gentle hand on his uninjured shoulder, he opened his eyes to look at the man. Everett gasped and stammered, “Mr. Stark... Your eyes... They are glowing.”

Tony groaned in pain as he moved to look at his injured shoulder while absently replying, “It's Tony, and I know.”

His shoulder was almost completely healed, but the veins under the tender skin were still glowing red as the Extremis was still active.

Everett led him to sit on the stairs of the ruined house, pretty much the only thing from the house that stayed in one piece. He began rubbing the tender skin of his now-healed shoulder. Everett seemed ready to say something, but suddenly Carol's voice boomed in his ears, "Damn it, Stark! I left you alone for five minutes. What the hell happened!?"

Tony was about to answer her when two small bodies crashed into him, squeaking together, "Uncle Tony!"

Tony flinched from the weight Lila put on his still tender shoulder. Laura probably noticed his reaction because she called, "Kids. Uncle Tony is probably hurt. You shouldn't jump on him like that."

Both kids immediately jumped back and apologized in unison, "Sorry, Uncle Tony."

Tony shook his head with a smile. "It's okay, Laura. And hello to you too, mini agents."

Carol crossed her arms impatiently and pointed out, "I'm still waiting for an explanation, Tony."

Tony looked around. Everyone's face held interest in the answer, even if the reasons were different.

Tony sighed and offered, "How about I tell you on the jet? There are people waiting for us in the tower."



Everyone accepted and began to move toward the jet. Tony stopped to watch Ross being cuffed and dragged into a different jet, all still unconscious. But while doing so, Tony caught sight of his immobilized suit.

Tony called Carol, and when she turned toward him, he pointed toward the suit and asked, "Care to lug it along to the jet?"

The blonde raised an eyebrow at him. "Why not do it yourself? You can now, after all." She tried to point out, which caused the two other adults to look shocked at the idea Tony was capable of something like that.

Tony sighed and gave Carol a pleading look until she rolled her eyes and went to get the armor.