

the lingering remainders

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the lingering remainders

by [oh_simone](#)

Summary

In which, a visitor from Tony Stark's past drops by the Avengers compound to drink his top shelf liquor and provide some perspective.

Notes

I am such a fantastically slow writer that this is both my emotional processing of CA:CW, AS WELL AS the end of Agent Carter. Please forgive any inaccuracies; I've only seen the movie once and relied mostly on my fairly shoddy memory and Marvel wiki to write this, so liberties taken galore. And also, unbetaed, woops.

Also, I'm not much for Spider Man canon, but it amused me to make crossover connections, so there you go. Jack is now related to another blond asshole who eventually makes good.

“Sir,” FRIDAY said, cool and unperturbed, “There is a disturbance at the west gate.”

Tony glanced up from where he was reviewing the results on Peter’s suit from his last training session and spinning a spanner between his fingers. “Threat level?”

“Based on the participants involved, threat level is low. You may want to involve yourself, however.”

“Oh?” Tony murmured, having lost interest already. “Why is that?”

“Because one of the men is claiming to be your uncle.”

“Don’t have any uncles,” he replied absently. After a moment, he set the spanner down. “Huh.”

The car wound down the gravel road, slowing to a stop just outside the compound. There were two figures visible through the windshield. When the driver parked and exited the car, Tony could see he was still just a kid, maybe Peter’s age or so, though not so weedy. The kid went around to the passenger side to help the other passenger out, who was significantly older. This second man was slow to gain his footing, and Tony watched as the driver reached into the back seat and extracted a cane for the older gentleman to use.

The pair made their way slowly up to the entrance of the Avengers Compound, while a valet navigated the car to the guest parking garage. Tony came forward to meet them halfway.

“...knew his old man, back when,” the elderly man was telling the teenager. “If you think this is nuts, I got some *stories* to share.”

“Gramps,” the kid said, sneaking mortified looks at Tony. He was big and good-looking in that blond, quarterback kind of way, but at the moment, he seemed a little cowed by his surroundings.

“Well, aren’t you a sight, Anthony,” the old man called cheerfully as Tony came to a stop in front of them. “It’s been some time.” He must have been in his nineties or so, his hair white and neatly combed to one side, liver spots dotting his face and hands. The temperature had crept into the high eighties this week, but he was dressed in a blue suit and red tie, not because it was a formal visit, but because this was how he’d dressed for most of his life. Under the shaggy white brows, clear hazel eyes eyed Tony in good humor.

“Uncle Jack?” Tony ventured, and the old man broke into a wide, toothy grin.

“You see?” he crowed, slapping his grandson’s chest with the back of his hand. “The boy’s not so braindead after all.”

“My grandson, Eugene,” Jack told Tony as they slowly made their way into the compound and towards the bank of elevators to the private residences. “Goes by the asinine nickname of the ‘Flash’.”

“Gramps,” Flash protested half-heartedly.

“What? It sounds like you have a habit of running around naked in public. Which you did, when you were three,” his grandfather cackled as the elevator zipped up to the residential levels. The doors opened onto the Avenger’s common area, an airy, open space with a sunken floor dotted with plush sofas and lush carpeting. Jack whistled appreciatively.

Peter, who’d just wandered into the room in costume, made a strangled sound as he caught sight of the visitors and nearly walked into a chair.

“...Spider Man,” Tony introduced after a beat. “Avenger-in-training.”

“Ohmygod,” Flash breathed, eyes wide. “*Spider Man*.”

“Yeah, that’s him. You know him?”

“Oh, yeah. It’s-its an honor, sir.”

Tony couldn’t see Peter’s expression, but he imagined it was hilariously uncomfortable.

“Spider Kid,” Tony said, ignoring Peter’s squawk of indignation, “why don’t you show Thompson the Younger around, take him through the obstacle course, show him the garage, whatever. FRIDAY can make you guys milkshakes or whatever the cool kids are having these days. “

“Mr. Stark, I don’t know...” Peter hedged weakly.

“Oh, I mean, if Spider Man... isn’t busy, that would be really cool,” Flash said at the same time very quickly. The kid, for all he looked like the archetype of the popular high school jock, looked like he was about to vibrate out of his skin with pure glee.

“Go on and make his day,” Tony ordered, smirking at Flash’s little squeak of excitement and Peter’s defeated slump. “Besides, the grownups are having a conversation. Shoo.”

Reluctantly, Peter slunk out of the living room and towards the kitchen, Flash trailing him eagerly. The old man’s eyes tracked the two until they’d disappeared from sight, then switched his sharp gaze to Tony.

“You got any whiskey?”

“Are you even allowed to drink at your age?” Tony squinted at him, but Jack just snorted and slapped his shoulder with surprising force.

“Don’t play games with me, kid. I’ve been at it longer than you were a gleam in your old man’s eye. Now come on, show me what you got in your cabinet; I’m worth you breaking out the good stuff.”

He wasn't really his uncle, in the strictest sense of the word; Jack Thompson had always been a peripheral figure in Tony's life, usually encountered in some combination of social gatherings and the Carter-Sousa clan. Tony's first memory of him was at a Stark garden party hosted in the Long Island property, and even that was fuzzy and imprecise. At the age of five, Tony had been more interested in running wild with the older Carter-Sousa twins and losing bowties in the fish pond than he was in sitting next to his mom and picking at pasta. He certainly wouldn't have remembered the tall, blond man who arrived with the Carter-Sousas, except that when Tony had committed some minor dinner-table faux pas, Howard had sternly told him to cut it out, or the FBI would take him away. And then his dad had gestured absently at Jack Thompson, who'd given Howard such a look of intense irritation that Tony couldn't hold back the giggles, which meant Jarvis whisked Tony back into the house to finish his dinner in the kitchen. It was more relief than punishment, since he got to sit on Ana's lap and sing along with her silly nursery songs while she coaxed him into finishing his peas. After dinner, Jack had stopped by the kitchen with the Carter-Sousas to chat with Ana, but before they left, he'd crouched down at Tony's eye level and pulled a chocolate coin out of his ear with a wink.

They met again a few times throughout the years, and almost always in semi-formal settings; the last time Tony had seen the older man had been at Daniel Sousa's memorial service, over ten years ago. He hadn't even thought about Jack Thompson since then.

And now the man was making himself comfortable in Tony's office, happily sniffing at the glass of Kavalan and commenting on the view. Tony took a fortifying sip from his own glass before sitting down across from him. Jack watched him with a half smile as he did so.

"You know," Tony began, "it's great to see you and all, nice surprise that you're still alive and kicking at—what must it be, 90? A hundred? Congratulations, you tough motherfucker. You outlasted Battleship Carter."

Jack's eyebrows rose. "I'm as shocked as anyone else."

Tony raised his glass in ironic cheer. "Not that this hasn't been an interesting turn of events. I especially liked the delightful revelation that Spider Man has a number one fan, but for the sake of clarity, what the hell are you doing here?"

"Oh, well. I'm a retired spy, and I'm bored as hell, so I had Eugene print me out the Sokovia Accords and did some reading. Very dry writing, by the way," Jack shrugged.

"And what, you here to lodge your complaints?" Tony asked. "Well, you'd better get to the back of the line. If you haven't noticed, I just finished going to war over these things. Arguing with a nonagenarian over semantics just isn't the same."

Instead of getting angry, Jack threw his head back and laughed. "It sure ain't. I thought you kids got a little carried away; you shoulda locked yourselves in a conference room to work it out. But I'll say you had a rough time of it, even though you weren't all wrong. And I sure as hell know what that's like."

“Really? Somehow, I’m not reassured,” Tony said, raising an eyebrow.

Still chuckling, Jack reached into his suit jacket and retrieved an honest-to-god leather wallet picture holder. He pushed it across the coffee table to Tony and waited until he’d hesitantly picked it up and opened it.

“This is... is Peggy and Daniel and yourself?”

“1951,” Jack agreed. “The day we moved into SHIELD’s new offices in DC.”

Tony nearly dropped the pictures. “Hold on, ‘we’? You were SHIELD?”

“Your pop ever tell you about the early days? Just after the war?” Jack asked.

“Nope. We didn’t do much talking, Dad and I,” Tony said dryly.

“Time was, you couldn’t get him to shut up,” Jack said. “Ah, well. I headed the SSR New York office after the war. Marge and Daniel used to work in the same office, but Daniel was promoted to West Coast chief out in Los Angeles, around 1948. Peggy joined him shortly afterwards. Didn’t come back until the following year, to manage the transition and head up SHIELD.”

“I... vaguely knew that,” Tony said, eyeing the picture of Jack, Daniel, and Peggy outside an office building with SHIELD’s logo on the door behind them. They looked serious but at ease, in sober suits and trench coats. It was still weird to see Aunt Peggy with neat, dark curls instead of a practical white chignon.

“That’s the day we moved in to the old headquarters. Before then, we’d been working out of the basement of the old patent building,” Jack mused. “You don’t know the meaning of too close until you can smell what your partner had for breakfast, and if he likes milk with his coffee.”

Tony made a face, because ew. “But you left.”

“Oh, yes,” Jack agreed. “By then, SHIELD was practically family, but you know as well as anyone else, that can cut many ways. Your Aunt Peg and I, well. Sometimes, we got along better when we didn’t have to. Besides, Peggy needed eyes in the Bureau, so that was as good an opportunity as any.” He shrugged.

“I feel like there’s a crime in there somewhere, but I’m not sure how,” Tony said. He handed the picture back to Jack. “So, you and Aunt Peg and Uncle Daniel and the old man. How’d it feel to see the Nazis take it over?”

The old man stared steadily back at him. “I imagine it must be about the same as having to drag yourself back from Siberia after your teammates left you there.”

Touché. “How’d you even know about that?” he demanded, but Jack just scoffed and tapped his head.

“I spent nearly 50 years up to my eyeballs analyzing and deciphering whispers and rumors faint as a mouse fart. This was Sunday Sudoku. Thank you for confirming my theory though.”

Tony raised his glass at him and took a bigger sip of his own whiskey than strictly necessary.

“I’m glad Daniel didn’t live to see it happen,” Jack sighed. “Woulda broke his great big heart. Peggy though,” he grinned. “I know her mind came and went at the end, but oh, when she was clear-headed, she was so angry about it. Damn near convinced me to come out of retirement and help her set things in order.”

“I would have liked to see that,” Tony admitted.

“Spitting and kicking to her grave, that woman,” Jack said. “Who woulda thought I’d be the last one standing?” As he spoke, he looked pensive and a little sad, and very, very weary.

Tony cleared his throat and looked away.

“Did you go to the service?” Jack asked. Tony shook his head. He’d been knee-deep in negotiations with Ross, but had arranged for flowers and a substantial donation to Peggy’s favorite charity. Now, with all that had happened since, he was both regretful and resentful that she had died before he could have seen her one last time. To say goodbye. To demand answers.

“Steve did,” he said instead.

“Oh, I know,” Jack said. “I had Peggy’s oldest, Mikey, I had him set up some sort of internet video so I could watch from home. He made sure to point the screen at the Captain to let me have a good long look at him.”

“What’d you think?” Tony asked curiously.

“I’ve only got a few years on him, but he’s winning this round,” Jack said good-naturedly and wriggled his right hand, gnarled and knobbly with age and arthritis. “I don’t envy him otherwise though. What a lot in life. ”

Tony nodded, fiddled with his glass, then set it down. Finally, the words spilled from him, rapid-fire and perplexed. “He wrote a letter to me. Rogers, that is. After- all this,” he made a frustrated, violent motion with his hand. “At some point, he sat down, wrote a letter, and mailed it to me with a frankly offensive piece of technology. Not sure why I’m telling you this. Not sure why you’d even care. But it’s been a really long month, and the only people I care about, that I can talk to about it, half are in the wind, the others are locked up in board meetings or physical therapy.” Tony made a frustrated gesture. “Is this arrogance? Some sort of old timey coping mechanism?”

Jack raised an eyebrow. “What did he say?”

“Nonsense,” Tony said bitterly. “Nothing. Something about never fitting in, and how the Avengers were my family, which must be a joke, since at least three quarters ran with him.”

He fell silent, but Jack waited patiently, watching him with a deceptively mild expression.

Tony stared fixedly at the carpet. “He apologized for not telling me earlier that Bucky Barnes murdered my parents.”

“Ah,” Jack said.

“Yeah.” Tony ducked his head, scratched his nose. “And you know, I’m still furious. I’m— sometimes, I’m— incandescent with *rage* that he had the gall to write this—that he just dropped everything and—you know, it’s not even that he didn’t sign the Accords? I knew it was going to be a hard sell, alright, I *knew* his stupid stubborn ass would get in the way. I mean, hell, I’d prepared for it. I had at least three different plans for working them out with him. I knew he wouldn’t go for the first pitch, so I’d been ready to go to Plan B, C, whatever. I thought, we may not always get along, and we might fight like the devil, but we have trust. Friendship.

“But Barnes lands like a grenade in all of this.” Tony pressed a knuckle to his temple. “I was fighting to- to show the world that we understood our responsibilities, to keep governments from burying us deep in some forgotten godforsaken cell. I’m trying to show that as Avengers, we are good citizens of the world, with understanding and tolerance of different perspectives. That consequences for our mistakes are costlier and more devastating than the average fuck-up. That we aren’t heroes anymore, if we are causing more pain and destruction than we are ending.

“He was fighting for his friend,” Tony said, bitterness echoing each of his words. “He just wanted Barnes back, and to hell with everything else.”

“Oh, kid,” Jack said, not unkindly. “You weren’t even having the same argument.”

Abruptly, Tony stood up and wheeled out of the office. In his chair, Jack drank some of the whiskey before turning to the window and admiring the view.

(“Sir, you have- oh. Hello.”

“Jesus Joseph and Mary, my heart ain’t the same as it was, don’t you know better to go around walking through walls?”

“I apologize for startling you. I was looking for Mr. Stark.”

“He stepped out a minute. I- Jarvis?”

“I am Vision. JARVIS was my predecessor, in a way.”

“Right, yeah. You just sound like an old... acquaintance. Uncanny. Jack Thompson.”

“A pleasure, Mr. Thompson. I will take my leave of you now.”)

“You said earlier, you and SHIELD didn’t get along in the end.”

Jack had been studying the paintings hung on the wall—Pepper’s choices, tasteful and expensive. “That’s right.”

“You mean, you and Aunt Peggy didn’t get along,” Tony clarified, coming back into the office. He looked tired, but clear eyed. In his hands he held a flip phone absently, as if he’d forgotten he had it.

“That’s a simple way to describe a complicated relationship,” Jack told him. “We were both young, stubborn. It made for spectacular disagreements. Drove Daniel crazy, stuck between two hot-headed lunatics.” He chuckled.

“I can relate,” Tony said dryly.

“You know, four out of five times, we agreed on what needed doing. It was the how that tripped us up the most. And there’s no trick to a perfect solution, because there’s no such thing, so it was just endless shouting and negotiating and phone calls until we’d driven each other to opposite corners of the room. Daniel got real good at refereeing the both of us.”

“Really?”

“And you know, we had to go through phone operators then? If we argued or made up, Clarice was the first to know and would spread the word. And let me tell ya, those girls liked to pick sides,” Jack said, grinning.

Tony stared down at the phone in his hand, turning it over and over. He had Peter’s test results to see to, a few Stark Industry reports to sign off on. FRIDAY was about done running the numbers on the new suit redesign, and Rhodey was due to wrap up PT for the day, and Tony wanted to be there, because he didn’t know what else he could do. He also, desperately, selfishly, despite everything, wanted to press the call button and see what lay on the other end of the line.

“You ever get to a point, where you think there’s no return?” he asked.

Jack hummed and rocked back on his heels, watching Tony with sharp, thoughtful eyes. He stumped his cane a few times thoughtfully. “Thing is,” he finally said, “you set your own limits, kid.”

“So you’re saying I should... give in,” Tony said testily. “Just ignore the international governments and the law and the paramilitary forces just waiting for a chance for us to screw up.”

“Slow down, junior,” Jack cut in. “I’m not saying you roll over for anyone. Only that when facing a choice between your convictions and your friends, well, you go for the obvious thing.”

“Stand strong, never back down?” Tony asked wryly.

“That only works when you’re up against jerks who can’t find their ass with both hands,” Jack snorted. “No, kid. You make the choice you’ll regret the least. And afterwards, you’ll usually find there was another choice all along.” When Tony raised an eyebrow, Jack shrugged. “You’d be surprised how long it took me to learn that lesson.”

Tony gave him a long, hard stare before he cocked his head towards the door. “I want to show you something.”

“FRIDAY, lights please.” The AI obligingly lit up the empty lab. Jack followed leisurely, glancing around curiously at the spacious concrete-lined space. There were piles of broken prototypes and metal sheeting, hollow pipes and cracked glass lenses stacked in the steel shelving units along the walls in some arcane order. The floors were smooth and empty, if oil stained and streaked with scorched black starbursts. Tony crossed to the desk in the middle of the lab and picked up a small black case. He hesitated before handing it over to Jack.

“What’s this, sunglasses?” He unfolded the legs of the glasses and peered through the lenses.

“It’s a prototype,” Tony said, rocking on his heels. “Binarily Augmented Retro Framing.”

“Huh,” Jack said. “BARF.”

“I’m working on that.”

“What does it do?” Jack asked, and returned the glasses when Tony reached out.

“You deduced Siberia, you got it,” Tony told him, and activated BARF. “FRIDAY, give us a hand, darling.” He heard Jack’s swift intake of breath as the air flickered around them, and suddenly the dark, icy walls of the Siberian bunker stretched above and around them infinitely. There were the deactivated pods in grim shadow, Zemo’s face a ghastly green in the low light. There was Steve, his stupid square-jawed face serious and sincere, and behind him, disheveled, exhausted, the Winter Soldier.

“Incredible,” Jack murmured, carefully making a slow turn.

“This is before it happens,” Tony said. “It’s a good moment. We should have ended here—bad guy arrested, heroes reconciled. He moved to shake Steve’s hand, and the illusion around them wavered once before the Captain steps forward with a cheerful grin to pump his hand enthusiastically. Tony shudders at the wrongness of it, and abruptly, Steve snaps back to before, tense and sober-faced. The scene played out as it happened in reality, Tony and Jack watching silently. The security footage rolled, Steve tries to explain, Zemo monologues, Bucky looks miserable, and past! Tony snaps.

“Stop,” Tony ordered. The scene froze around them, Iron Man mid-charge, the bunch of Steve’s muscles impossibly tense. He took off the glasses and the scene dissolved back into the neutral, well-lit walls of Tony’s lab.

“Well, that was some hard knocks, alright. I’m sorry, kid,” Jack said, and patted his arm briefly.

“Me too,” Tony said, staring at the glasses a moment longer. He was still angry. So, so angry. And hurt. But he was tired and exhausted, and he didn’t want to be angry anymore.

“It’s okay to miss your friends, even if they are assholes. Even if you were an asshole too,” Jack told him, as if reading his mind, and Tony laughed because that was ludicrously inadequate.

“Who says I do?” Tony shot back, but the old man just shook his head. Tony hesitated a moment before offering the glasses to Jack. “Any demons need purging?”

“Oh,” Jack said, taking the glasses. “I’ve made my peace with my sins long ago, and I’m not about to worry about ‘em until I’m standing before St. Peter himself. What other tricks can this thing get up to?” He slipped the glasses on before Tony could say anything, and the display around the room flickered, rapidly changing shape. Tony caught a glimpse of a night-time jungle, flashes of the New York skyline, but eventually the scene steadied and solidified into the family room of the old Stark Palisades property in Los Angeles. It was late evening, judging from the warm glow of sunset through the oversized windows, and the sound of chatter and laughter lingered in the air. A youngish blond man was seated in the center of a great leather sofa, wrapped in a simple dressing gown with his knees tucked under a thick blanket. His sickly pallor made it clear he was recovering from something, but the mulish set to his face broadcast his resentment of every moment of it.

“Ha! Look at my face,” Jack cackled, the young man’s face flickering as the real Jack laughed, and Tony blinked and stared harder. That was Jack Thompson, younger than he’d ever seen him, and wow. Now he knew where Flash got his good looks. The voices grew louder, and then Aunt Peggy and Uncle Daniel appeared, bearing steaming mugs and bowls of popcorn. Tony startled and took an involuntary step forward. They were so... young.

“You ready, Jack?” Peggy asked, plopping the popcorn in his lap and herself down beside him.

“I am always eager to watch Howard Stark’s ego blow itself up out of proportion,” young Jack drawled back, already looking less cranky.

“He promised me dancing girls in French bikinis, so cheer up,” Daniel said, carefully levering himself down on Jack’s other side.

“Oh, in that case,” young Jack said, cheering up accordingly.

“You boys,” Ana chided warmly, coming into the room with Jarvis. Tony felt his breath catch in his lungs. Here she was—here they *all* were. Jarvis—with his hair still thick and dark, face smoothed of worry and age, and Ana in fashionable heels and a bright red polka-dot print dress that matched her lipstick. “Like you’ve never seen a bellybutton before.”

“Alright, everyone, ready?”

Tony tried not to, but he couldn't help it. His eyes drew like a magnet to the door, just as Howard darted through, hair as black as Tony's own head, mustache neatly trimmed, grin as manic as a loon's. He looked nothing like the Howard in Tony's memory, more carefree than he'd ever been as Tony's father. He looked barely out of his twenties, full of energy, wild with enthusiasm. Tony stared and stared and stared.

"Hurry up," young Jack called, and threw popcorn at him. "Sorry Mr. Jarvis."

"Apology accepted, Mr. Thompson," Jarvis said as he swept up the stray kernel, and the familiar accent of his voice was a physical ache in Tony. "But please do not exert yourself with such banal tasks. Dr. Wilkes advised limited strenuous activities while you recover from your gunshot wound."

"He's not that kind of doctor," young Jack muttered.

"Drink your tea, Jack," Peggy ordered.

"I'm about to float away on a damn ocean of this stuff, Marge," he griped back. "When can I get coffee?"

She ignored him completely. "Howard, do you need help? Honestly, I don't understand why you can't just buy a projector like a normal person. Why do you need to make everything yourself?"

"Because I make 'em better!" Howard shot back, fiddling with the dials on his homemade projector and nearly upturned the entire canister of film when something sparked and popped ominously.

"Oh dear," Mr. Jarvis said, starting forward.

"You know, film strips are highly flammable," Daniel said conversationally.

"I'll fetch some water," Ana proclaimed serenely and made for the kitchen.

"You ever see your old man's movie?" the real Jack asked Tony. Without taking his eyes off the scene, Peggy and young Jack competing to see who could toss as many kernels into Howard's hair without him noticing while Daniel muttered mock commentary, Tony shook his head numbly.

"Me neither," Jack said with great satisfaction, and before Tony could ask why, Howard and Jarvis both yelped as the projector burst into riotous flames. Peggy jumped up and Daniel groped for his cane as Howard batted ineffectively at the projector with his jacket. It caught fire as well, and Howard dropped it onto the tile floor with an alarmed shout. Peggy threw open the patio doors, thrust a finger out, and shouted, "Daniel, the pool!"

With great presence of mind, Daniel hooked the flaming jacket with his cane and Mr. Jarvis took it up from him to take three long strides outside to fling the whole thing, javelin-like, into the pool. Ana Jarvis returned to the room with her daisy-spouted watering can, took one look at the scene, and calmly upended the contents onto the projector, leaving a smoking,

hissing, foul-smelling black mess in its wake. For a moment, it was utterly silent, broken only by an alarmed squawking from outside.

Jarvis twitched and his eyes narrowed. “Bernard,” he breathed, and stalked outside.

A sharp gasp came from young Jack Thompson, still on the couch and covered in blankets and pillows. As everyone stared, he slowly toppled sideways onto the couch, laughter wheezing out of him in great, joyful gusts and tears rolling down his face.

“This was a good memory,” Jack said out loud, smiling fondly as one by one, the others joined in. “This was... oh. This was the start of our best days.” He turned to Tony, and slid the glasses from his face, the scene disappearing abruptly. His hazel eyes were sparkling and a little damp as he gently returned them to their case.

“Thank you,” he told Tony gently, pressing his hands. “Thank you for reminding an old man what he’d almost forgotten.”

Tony nodded, staring at the BARF device as though he’d never seen it before.

Flash and Peter were playing Mario Kart in the living room.

“Hey, kid, time to go home,” Jack called, and Peter took advantage of Flash’s distraction to ram his opponent’s car off the Rainbow Road with a red shell.

“Yes! Booyah,” he crowed, flinging his arms above his head triumphantly.

“Hey, that’s cheating, Spider Man!” Flash protested, but his cheeks were pink and he was grinning.

“Alright, back to work,” Tony said, clapping his hands. “Flash, great to meet you, swing by again sometime.”

“Really?” Flash squeaked, eyes darting to Spider Man.

“Sure,” Peter said, while making a big X with his arms and frantically shaking his head when Flash turned away.

“Spider Man, stick around to go over a few things. I’ll walk them out.” Tony snapped his fingers, and FRIDAY, ever obligingly, slid the elevator doors open.

“Show-off,” Jack said, lifting an amused eyebrow.

FRIDAY had also alerted the valet, so by the time they’d reached the exit, Flash’s car was already idling at the curb.

“Well, it was good to see you, Anthony.” Jack leaned on his cane and shook Tony’s hand firmly. “It’s a damned shame these weren’t better circumstances.”

“Yeah, great to see you again, love it when blasts from my past drop in unexpectedly. Maybe call next time?” Tony said, though he wasn’t serious. The amused glint in Jack’s eye made it clear he wasn’t fooling anyone.

“Good luck,” was all the old man said though, and began making his way to the car. His going was slow and relied heavily on his cane, but his back was as straight as it could be. Tony watched from the top of the steps as Flash carefully handed his grandfather into the passenger seat and stowed the cane in the backseat. As the engine started, Jack’s window rolled down and his face popped out. “And Tony?”

Tony cocked his head attentively.

“Peggy woulda called you both idiots and bashed your heads together ages ago. But she woulda been proud of you anyways. Now, for the sake of her memory, call your friends and talk it out like normal folks.”

Tony scoffed and shook his head, a self-deprecating grin tugging at his lips. “Be well, old man.”

Jack waved as the car began crunching down the long gravel drive. Tony watched until they turned out of sight and returned to his office. He stood uncertainly at his desk for a long moment. Finally, he slid the flip phone from his pocket and flicked it open with his thumb. The case was smooth and warm from his body heat, the display blank—he’d let the battery run down out of spite that first week. Now he fished out a spare charger from his desk drawer, plugged it in, then set the phone carefully at the center of his desk.

He headed back out as the phone charged, his thoughts already turning to a million other things—Peter’s suit, Rhodey’s exoskeleton, Stark Industry’s next board meeting, yet another excuse to avoid Ross, his next call to his head of R&D about the additional uses of BARF...

“Steve,” T’Challa said, stopping him in the corridors of the royal guesthouse they were housed in. “I have a delivery for you.” He held out a brown package stamped with the Stark Industries logo in black on the sides.

“What’s this?” Steve took it carefully. There was no label on it, but he guessed, from the logo, it was from Tony. His head shot up, a look of alarm on his face. “Does he know where we are?”

T’Challa gave him a dry look. “He has neither asked, nor have I confirmed. But I imagine he has some idea, as he requested, in what he perhaps thought was a subtle manner, for me to pass this on to a mutual patriotic acquaintance.”

Steve smiled a little even as a pang of regret zipped through him. He peeled back the taping and folded the lid back, tipping the contents into his palm. A box and a folded card slid out. Steve unfolded the card, read it, and gave a small huff of surprised, relieved laughter.

Spangles,

Your attempt at reconciliation via outdated technology is insulting. Are you trolling me? Do you want to start another war? A rematch won't go well for you, I guarantee that, my word as a GBPP (Genius, Billionaire, etc.).

As always, it falls to me to show you how it's properly done. I'm sending you something for your basketcase buddy. Use it to remind him of the good times.

-Tony

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