

Green Without Limit

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Green Without Limit

by [silvershadowkit](#)

Summary

Tony doesn't think much of the dark marks on his leg, until they start to spread. Do these marks have a special meaning behind them, and why does Steve look so happy all of a sudden?

Notes

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

The shapes had started on his shin, indistinct and mottled in color. Tony had mistaken them for bruises at first and had dismissed them as a result of flight in the Iron Man suit. The marks had been in all the right places, and his blood work showed normal white blood cell counts and clotting factors, so they would vanish soon enough.

Except, they didn't fade. They didn't cause him any pain, so it was a bit strange that they hadn't faded at all after a week. Poking and prodding didn't change the green and brown marks, but there was no physical deterrent to discourage his examinations. His blood tests continued to show normal, so Tony didn't feel like trying to explain the situation to a doctor and let it be.

After a month, a new spot of color begins to emerge, partially overlapping the dark green and conquering new territory day by day. The dark purple spreads its veins and pales to a lavender hue, and finally settles its borders after a week into a shape vaguely familiar from his childhood with four-petaled flowers.

Photographic analysis (courtesy of JARVIS) indicated the shape and colors closely resembled different varieties of lilac flowers, like the ones Tony could hazily see in his memories on his mother's piano, their delicate scent enveloping her while she played. The memory brought tears to his eyes, but it was a happy memory, so he kept looking at the strange shapes on his legs with fondness rather than concern.

The yellow had started after dealing with a particularly difficult piece of concrete and rebar, so Tony once again mistook it for a bruise until it started to colonize his thigh. The edges feathered out, making it difficult to identify where the marks ended and his regular skin tone resumed. The yellow grew more vibrant the longer it remained, until there was no way to claim 'It's just a hematoma.' JARVIS identifies it as coreopsis, mostly due to the feathery, delicate leaves of green. Tony doesn't have any recollection of encountering this plant before, and adds it to the potential planting list of the Start Tower Green Space Initiative. Similar shapes in different hues appear behind the blooms, but Tony is busy trying to get the Tower off of the city's power grid, and there's no time or mental space to spare in the face of his engineering trials.

Then New York happens. In the immediate aftermath, bruises do manage to hide the blooms canvassing his skin, and then his head is buried deep in restoration and can barely keep track of eating, let alone his epidural garden. Bruce occasionally is in a position to observe the shapes, but Bruce says nothing, so Tony offers no explanations, and life goes on.

The other Avengers eventually make their way to the Tower, and start to claim a space for themselves. Tony does get a few emails from Accounting regarding a high rate of replacements for the gym equipment, but that seems to handle itself within a few weeks, so Tony doesn't investigate any further.

Live settles into a rhythm in the Tower, and Tony even finds it pleasant to have other people living under the same roof as him. After his parents' death, he had been unable to handle the all of the tiny, yet constant, reminders of people that had once occupied the mansion, but would never walk its halls again. He had crafted his Malibu home to suit *him* exactly, and it

had shown in how awkward everyone beside him and been under that roof. The open window views of the sea had made Tony feel in control of his life, but all of his guests had edged away from the windows, as if in fear for their lives.

The Tower was still distinctly his and in his style, but after the invasion, a lot of things needed work, and hints of other occupants began to emerge from the chaos. Strange foods and spices in the cabinets, a few gaming systems (not Stark-branded) and DVDs piling up on his shelves. Subscriptions to biology and chemistry peer-reviewed journals and modern political histories in the living room. Pillows and blankets that did *not* matching his designer furniture. It should have felt haphazard and intrusive, but it didn't. Like his floral decor, it was painless and almost comforting.

The burst of reds on his hip surprises him, thought it remains hazy for a week. Its growth is slow compared to the purple and yellow, but comes to take up a larger acreage of skin. The red lightens as it spreads and blushes to pink in wide, showy petals, the deepest colors clustered in together. JARVIS identifies it as camellia, and Tony remembers reading a few papers about trying to engineer plants that bloom continuously, but then he gets a message from Rhodey, and all thoughts regarding the research flee from his mind in the face of trying to get Rhodey to tell a flattering story from their college days, which Rhodey claims, 'do not exist, Tony!'

A minor Norse mythological figure lands in Central Park while Steve is on his evening jog, so Steve disarms him with little fuss and brings him back to the Tower in a fireman's carry for Thor to deal with. Thor looks impressed, but Tony just asks, "Should I order an extra pizza for our guest, or will we be violating the Geneva Convention?"

When Thor manages to arrange a pick-up for their wayward guest, he insists that Steve accompany them to Asgard, "to ensure your captive's security," and to be presented to the Asgardian court. Steve tries to duck out, but Tony has just given Clint some new tranquilizer arrows to test, so Thor has some leverage to wield in the form of the archer who will help out in exchange for unusual handmade foodstuffs. Steve succumbs ungracefully to the pair and is whisked out of the Tower with Clint smirking at his back.

Two days later, Steve and Thor return in a blaze of light that seems to send a wave of comforting heat along Tony's flowers. Steve has a look of contentment on his face that Tony has never seen, and Thor is beaming with happiness and fondness.

"My mother has deemed the Captain to be worthy of her regard, and has bestowed a blessing upon him," Thor proudly boasts. "It is rare for the All-Mother to take notice of mortals, but she has conferred upon him her support."

"So, does that mean free mead for life?" Clint asks, and Tony laughs. Natasha slaps both of them on the back of the head as she walks into the kitchen, but Steve doesn't seem offended. In fact, he is acting mellow to a degree that Tony had thought wasn't possible without certain herbal intervention.

“Steve? Did they give you something?” Bruce asks as he comes over to the blond, checking his pulse and pupil reactions. Steve manages to gently bat away the hand with the penlight, but consents to the impromptu physical peacefully otherwise.

“I had some mead as a toast before we let, but I'm fine, Bruce. This is the closest I've gotten to being buzzed since 1943.” Steve answers with a warm smile. “Frigga is very kind, and a good conversationalist. She makes it seem like everything will work out just fine.”

“What kind of boon can you get from a goddess in another dimension?” Tony wondered out loud. Steve's eyes crinkled in a hint of confusion, but his face remained calm.

“She said that my hopes would finally flower and I would see the fruits of my dreams at last.” Steve gives a slight shake of his head. “Not quite sure what it means, but I feel better having heard it.”

Thor came forward with a slight frown of his own. “Does this mean that all knowledge of the heart garden has been lost?” When the Avengers merely looked at the Asgardian with confusion, Thor sighed. “‘Tis no wonder Jane did not understand. I weep for this realm.”

“Weep later, explain now,” Natasha instructed, holding up a box of Pop Tarts as a bribe. “What do you mean, heart garden?” Thor accepted the box and began to open it with one-handed deftness.

“It is a phenomenon common throughout the Nine Realms, though not all are able to recognize it. It has been known on this planet as well, though I suppose that knowledge has been lost. When two or more beings are connected, the tie ripples across space and time. It normally has no effect, but for some, a change occurs. When one half of the tie wishes or longs for something, and the other can fulfill it, a sign becomes visible. Until it fully blooms, only the marked can see it. Steven has been gifted by my mother with the knowledge that not only is his heart garden near, but perhaps he will be able to see before the last bloom emerges.”

Tony strolls into his workshop, already speaking. “JARVIS, go black-out for the next six hours. No calls except actual ‘end of the world in less than four hours,’ okay?” I need to think.”

“Yes, Sir. You do have a note in your calendar for a movie session with Captain Rogers this evening. Should I inform the Captain you need to postpone?”

Tony considered that. “Ask me again in three hours. Let's see what we can dig up first.”

“Of course, Sir. What topic are we researching today?”

Tony strips off his shirt, shoes, socks, and jeans and moves to stand in front of his virtual interface Input. “Let's get some new info on my body art, JARVIS. I want to know genus, species, habitat, and any and all possible meanings and interpretations. I think we might finally know the source, but I need to understand this before I can make any conclusions.”

“Are we actually applying the scientific method, Sir? Or is this a lapse in judgement that will not be repeated?”

“Save the snark for after our deadline, and get to work.”

Tony lay sprawled across his chair, his head draped on the arm rest with his gaze nominally focused on the ceiling. JARVIS had adjusted the holographic display to be visible from his current position, but not a lot of the displayed data was making it pass Tony's eyes and into his actual brain.

Of course, the lilacs marking his skin couldn't be found in nature. No one had managed to genetically engineer a bush to produce multiple colors on a single stem. This only further supported Tony's theory that Thor's 'heart garden' wasn't as unrealistic as it had sounded at first.

The flowers had changed since their first appearance. Deep magenta, almost black, decorated the base of the stems. Gradually the colors shifted to a more purple hue, and then rapidly lighten to a pale, almost white shade at the top of the stem.

Lilacs, the purple flowers, had several possible interpretations depending on color, but all of them pointed to love of a romantic natures. The dark purple at the base of the stems seemed to indicate both mourning and the thrill of living through a harrowing experience, while the white at the tips showed youthful innocence and the rush of first love.

The coreopsis with its delicate, lace-soft leaves, was meant to represent cheerfulness. How on Earth was anything associated with Tony cheer-y? The other yellow hiding behind the coreopsis was supposedly English daisy, meant to show innocence? According to Time Magazine, nothing associated with Tony Stark could be associated with innocence.

And the camellia on his hip, according to JARVIS's research, also represented love, especially for someone that was missed. Tony could only draw one conclusion from the present information: despite Steve's apparent acceptance of the modern era, the soldier was still longing for the past and all that he had left behind. Perhaps even specifically missing his romance with Peggy Carter.

“Okay, JARVIS, here's what we're gonna do. We're going to delete all of our images and photos of this shit, bury our research, and I am never going anywhere less than fully clothed. Start searching for a fabric composition we can use for the undersuit that breathes like as well as skin and that can mimic natural flesh texture. This is never going to know about this, let alone Steve.”

“That might be somewhat difficult, Sir,” the AI said as program windows were closed, “given that Captain Rogers has been observing you for the last forty-five minutes.”

Tony jerked as if he had been electrocuted, and just barely avoided spilling out of his chair onto the floor. With a casually deceptive calm, he turned to look at the glass workshop walls.

Yep, the glass was transparent, and Steve was leaning against the far wall with a small smile on his face.

“JARVIS, what happened to my black-out?”

“That expired two hours ago, Sir. You did not respond to my queries regarding renewing it, so I let it expire. You also did not respond to queries regarding of how to update Captain Rogers regarding your evening plans, which were scheduled to begin thirty minutes ago. Given that I had no other instructions, I informed the Captain that you were involved in a new project, and I believe he came down to offer you assistance.”

Tony glanced down at his still exposed body. “And he’s been able to see me since?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Tony sighed and scrubbed at his face with his palms. “Great,” he muttered, pulling on a tank and a pair of conveniently coated sweatpants before approaching the workshop door. Steve offered him a warm smile, which Tony tried (and probably failed) to mirror back.

“So I don’t supposed I can convince you that you saw nothing?”

That garnered a frown from Steve, who simply asked, “What?” Tony sighed ruefully and beckoned Steve into the workshop, and the blond followed without protest.

“JARVIS, black-out, and don’t disengage until I tell you to.” Tony hopped up to sit on his workbench and gave Steve a hard, considering look. “Look Steve, let’s just agree that nothing has changed, okay?”

“Tony, I don’t know how I could possibly do that,” Steven said, and his gaze flickered between Tony’s face and left leg, still shielded by the sweats.

“It’s easy, you keep acting as if you saw nothing, and I will act as if I don’t know you barely tolerate this era and wish you were back in the forties. It’s easy,” Tony explained with a dismissive shrug.

Steve’s frown deepened, a furrow developing between his brows. “Tony, I like to think I’ve gotten better at following your leaps of logic, but you’ve lost me. Why do you think I don’t like being here?”

Tony let out a deep sigh, his shoulders slumping in defeat. “Okay, you’ve already seen this,” he said, stripping off the shirt and sweats gain. “JARVIS, pull our research back up.” The holo images reappeared. “Based on this and Thor’s explanation about the bearers being able to answer ‘wishes,’” his finger quotes made his disdain for the word visible,” I can only assume you want me to make a time machine or some kind of quantum mechanics alteration field, and i like having you around here, so can we please pretend none of this,” his flung arm encompassed both his leg and the screens, “and just keep things the way they are?”

Steve turned in place slowly, taking in the screen with their lists of flower meanings and interpretations, the comparison images of Tony’s markings and the real plants, the scientific

papers on genetic manipulation. When he was facing Tony once more, the blond's smile was wry and fond.

"I never understood how people could have such completely different ideas about the Mona Lisa. Now I'm getting how people can see the same thing but get completely divergent meanings." Steve stepped closer, and Tony stiffened as the space between his knees became occupied.

"Let me tell you what I see when I look at this," Steve murmured as he placed a warm palm on the length of Tony's shin. "This showed up darker at first, didn't it?" Tony could only nod in confirmation, his breath stuck in his throat.

"After I work up, I was so lost. I was somewhat happy to be alive, but I didn't have a purpose for myself. I couldn't see where I should go, or what I should work towards. I was so confused at first."

"SHIELD had given me Peggy's file, so I knew she had moved on, and I was happy for her, to know that she could be happy without me. I didn't know her all that well, despite what others may have assumed. I had a bit of crush, but I didn't know her well enough to love her. I would beat up the punching bags at SHIELD and pray that I could have the same hope that got all of the other Joes through the war: a new life after the fight with someone I loved."

The hand on Tony's leg slid higher, above the knee, firmly in the territory of yellow. "And this. Cheerfulness. I was looking for something to keep me going, anything. I needed a reason to get up in the morning, and I was having a hard time finding it on my own. So I prayed for someone to help me see the good in life. I knew how harsh humanity could be, I had seen it first-hand. Now I needed someone to remind me why it was worthy fighting all that evil."

"And then New York happened. I know that it was a bad time for all of us, but for the first time since I woke up in a SHIELD bed in a room that didn't make sense, I knew what I had to do. I knew that people needed my help, and I could offer it without worrying how it would be twisted into someone else's gain. And then there was you."

"You have seen the darkest parts of humanity, and you still try to do what's right rather than what's easy. You don't compromise on the things that truly matter, because you know that doing otherwise would be wrong. In a way, I call that innocent. You've seen people at their worst, but you know that humanity can rise above it."

"You opened up your home to us, and didn't ask for anything in return. You made us better, and let us find ourselves in a world that had tried to wash us under. You took in the outcasts that no one else wanted, don't shake your head at me. You know that SHIELD wouldn't have anything to do with Banner or Barton after New York, other than locking them up in The Fridge, if it wasn't for you. You cared about me, not because I was Captain America, but because here, I wasn't Captain America."

The hand moved higher still, past his boxers and settling on the muscled indent of Tony's waist, the warmth seeping into him and making him shiver. Steve was looking at his hand and the pink and red flesh beneath it, a strange look that Tony couldn't interpret in his eyes.

“You made me welcome, but you would always keep yourself separate, and I didn’t understand why. How you could be so warm and open and caring, but not allow us to return the favor. I knew I could turn to you for anything, like if I needed to understand something that I heard and had no frame of reference for, but it didn’t seem like you knew I would do the same.”

Tony could only breathe in small, barely heard gasps, otherwise completely frozen under the weight of Steve’s gaze, which was now boring into his own with the weight of the Hulk’s fist.

“And then I realized that despite the trouble it might cause, that I had already fallen for you.”

“You can’t,” Tony whispered, closing his eyes as his head fell forward to keep the tears at bay. “You’re wrong. I’m not innocent, I’m not cheerful. The magic must be wrong, or our understanding of the flower meanings are wrong, but you can’t love me. It’s not possible.”

Tony felt a gentle touch under his chin, lifting his face back up. “Tony, you can’t decide what I’m feeling to protect me.” A gentle finger ran under his eye, gathering the moisture that had managed to escape. “Didn’t you hear what Thor said? We’re connected across time and space. There isn’t a place where I would turn my back on you.”

Tony shook his head, flinging more tears away from himself, dislodging Steve’s hand. “Steve, it doesn’t work like that.”

“Tony, despite what you may think about yourself, you can be wrong about something.” This caused Tony to glare at the Captain, who merely smiled in response.

“Name one time I was wrong, Rogers!”

“How about that time in Pennsylvania where you tried to predict how long it would take you to pass out from blood loss, and you fainted 3 minutes sooner than expected?” Steve retorted, the smile transforming into a smug grin. Tony winced.

“In my defense, biology isn’t my strong suit--”

“Neither is magic, or interpretations of flower arrangements. Tony, listen to me.” Steve placed both hands on Tony’s shoulders, keeping the engineer from twisting away. “The intention behind art can always be debated, unless the artist comes forward. Since these marks are originating from my wishes, that makes me the artist, and what I say goes. I love you, Tony.” And with gentle pressure, Steve placed his lips on Tony’s.

Tony gasped as a wave of heat travelled up his shin, his knee and thigh, his waist, and settled just below the arc reactor. Steve pressed his advantage, and Tony could feel his spine melting under the weight of Steve’s kiss and the heat in his center.

When they finally managed to disengage from each other (which took some time, because even if Tony’s rational mind didn’t understand what was happening, his body was well trained to react to physical stimulus), they glanced down in sync at Tony’s chest. Under the blue glow of the arc reactor, a new flower had appeared.

“JARVIS, what am I growing now?” Tony groaned, leaning back to allow the workshop cameras to pick up the new shapes.

“It appears to be a bird of paradise flower, Sir. Most common web searches for this flower’s symbolism relate to joy, love, freedom, and the concept of paradise itself,” the AI answers. Steve blooms with his own smile, as bright and strong as the break of dawn.

“See? Told you I was right,” he murmured, and Tony could only stop the flood of words trying to escape Steve by kissing him again.

Wise men say
Only fools rush in
But i can’t help
Falling in love
With you

Shall I stay?
Would it be a sin?
If I can’t help
Falling in love
With you?

Like a river flows
Surely to the sea
Darling, so it goes
Some things
Are meant to be

Take my hand
Take my whole life too
Cause I can’t help
Falling in love
With you
-Elvis Presley

End Notes

Thanks to @ficlicious for being my beta and cheerleader on my first solo project in years.

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