

Time Casts a Spell on You

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Time Casts a Spell on You

by [Finny3120](#)

Summary

The Avengers are living together again, following the events of their civil war, but things aren't quite right between Tony and the others, and it's driving Steve crazy. Steve doesn't know how to make things right. Luckily, Tony and his intern are working on it.

Notes

When I first wrote this fic, I thought it was going to be a cute mashup of fall activities and then somewhere along the way, it turned into 5000 words on remorse and the power of love healing old wounds. Hope you enjoy~

Pete... Pete was making Tony soft.

“Do you think he knows?” Natasha whispered to him and Sam one night as they watched Tony and Peter sitting in the grass, carving into pumpkins. They were disappearing in the gloaming.

“No,” he said decisively, trying not to smile at the sight of their mechanic.

“I’ve never even seen Tony sitting in the grass,” Sam said conversationally. “I didn’t know he went outside.”

Steve didn’t say anything. Below them, Peter was telling Tony a joke- the others couldn’t hear it, but Steve could thanks to super soldier senses- and Tony, Tony was laughing, and Steve hadn’t made him laugh like that in a long time...

He was glad that Tony had found Peter, surprised but pleased that his engineer had taken up such an interest with the teen. But he wished...

“It’s starting to get creepy, doing this,” Sam said, and Natasha shrugged. “Let’s make dinner. Do you think we should call them up?”

“They’ll be up soon enough,” Natasha said. “When the sun goes down the rest of the way.” She got up too.

Sam headed for the communal kitchen, but Nat hesitated. Steve shrugged sheepishly, looking up at her. His girl. “I think I’ll just stay here until dinner’s ready, if that’s okay?” he asked. Looking at her desperately. ‘Please say it’s okay.’

“Of course, Steve.” And then she surprised him- she hugged him, pressing his head into her chest and kissing him lightly. He closed his eyes, letting her embrace him. She’d been his rock this past year. He’d needed her to get through all the days.

“I love you,” he said lightly and she flicked a smile at him.

“Things will get better between you two, you know,” she said, and then she was gone, off in the kitchen with Sam. He could hear the two of them talking to each other, he could hear Tony and Pete out on the lawn, and he was alone, caught somewhere between two worlds. He closed his eyes momentarily. How could he have been so stupid?

Something flicked against the window, startling his eyes open. He turned just in time to see another pebble hit the window and he got to his feet, approaching the glass, and-

Tony was down there. He should have known he couldn’t keep a secret from the mechanic. Tony always knew.

Dumbly, he lifted a hand, waving awkwardly to his former... teammate.

Tony gave him a perfunctory salute. That would have always made Steve laugh in the past; now- stupidly- he felt like he was going to cry.

But Tony was twisting away now, walking back to where the teenager was, Tony's intern, Peter Parker, Spiderman extraordinaire, and Steve watched Tony light a long match, dipping it into the pumpkin he'd been working on and then Peter's, lighting them up so that flickering flames danced out of the carvings.

Tony half glanced up at the window again and Steve found himself moving again, fumbling with the window latches, pushing the window up.

"They look good," he called down, wincing at the vulnerability and wistfulness in his voice. Tony would hear it, for sure. "You both do good work."

"Mine's better," Tony called up to him and Steve could hear Pete scoff ("listen, I was the one that fixed the-")

"We're working on dinner," he called down. "Will you eat with us?"

And Tony had blinked at him, cocked his head to look at the teen- Pete had shrugged- and they'd agreed.

That night, Steve and Tony had sat on opposite sides of the table, quiet, while Tony's intern excitedly discussed things wildly beyond Steve's reach with Natasha and Sam, explaining Sam's Falcon equipment to the black aviator in a way that was somehow accessible and inaccessible all in one.

Tony sat, an arm slung over the back of his chair, listening and nodding occasionally as Pete rambled. Clearly following exactly what the kid was saying, even though Steve knew, by the expression on the others' faces, that he might be the only one.

"You're so smart," Steve marveled somewhere around dessert, making the intern flush a little and duck his head.

"He's right," Tony cut in, poking Peter with his fork. "My smart cookie."

"No..." But Pete had glowed at the words. Tony's praise lingered on the boy's shoulders, affecting the way he walked when they left that night, Tony's hand pressing into the small of the boy's back. Steve leaned into his hand, watching them leave.

"Do you think he's smarter than Tony?" Natasha asked.

"He's definitely humbler," Sam joked.

"He's so good," Steve said softly. Getting up, he began to grab the dishes, snagging Natasha's before she could get up. It was true. Pete was a good boy. Steve wished he'd been around to see Tony get close to the kid. What had that looked like? He'd always known Tony would be a good dad and here was the proof.

So really Steve couldn't be jealous of the time and attention Pete got from the mechanic, even if he'd been inclined to. Pete didn't just make Tony soft, he brought out the best parts of him. And... and Tony wasn't nearly as sad or as angry as Steve had been expecting, when they'd come back. Not as defensive.

Steve found them, one Friday night, when he was limping his way up from the gym- Natasha had body slammed him, somehow- They were in the kitchen and Tony was cursing. Pete was laughing. He paused on the steps, afraid to break into whatever they were doing and unsure how to get to his room otherwise.

"Captain Rogers?"

He'd been found out. Peter was there, treading out of the light of the kitchen and into the darkness of the living room. "What are you doing?"

He didn't know what Tony's intern thought of him. There was an odd formality to the way he spoke to the Rogue Avengers, particularly him, a reluctance to be alone with them. Steve hadn't missed the way Pete's eyes would flick over to wherever Tony was in the room, any time they approached. And yet, now the kid was seeking him out.

"Hey," he said weakly. "I was just heading for my room."

"Oh." Pete glanced over his shoulder at Tony. Tony was leaning on the kitchen counter, watching them. "Do you want to join Mr. Stark and me?"

"I probably shouldn't," he started to say. Tony interrupted. "Pete doesn't bite, Steve--"

Their eyes met and Steve swallowed, knowing they were both thinking about- remembering- the same thing. Different times. "What are you guys doing?"

Tony shook his head, but he seemed more exasperated than annoyed. "Pete here wanted to make a pie for his aunt. Scratch that, pies. Multiple pies."

"I took Tony apple picking--"

"He seems to be under the impression that I've missed out on the traditional fall festivities so now we're on a dubious mission to do them all." Tony flicked flour at Pete when he started to protest. "And for the record, I took you apple picking. Remember me putting you in that big box with the wheels? Pull up a stool, Steve. Laugh at my misfortune."

"He's only kidding," Peter said to Steve. "He likes it. I know he does."

And Steve, for his part, nodded, wishing he could say that he knew it too, that he'd known Tony for over ten years now. What did Peter know of Tony and his relationship? Did Pete just think he was the asshole who had hurt his mentor and left him for dead? Did he know that it was so much worse than that?

Pete was bustling around the kitchen, chattering away, but when Steve chanced a look up from the counter, he found Tony watching him, a line between his eyebrows. He bit his lip

and Tony looked away. “Exactly how many pies does your incredibly attractive aunt need?” he asked Pete.

Pete shrugged. “One for her. Five for me. Oh- one for you.”

“Pete’s also got a super metabolism,” Tony said, dragging his bowl of apples over to where Steve was sitting and climbing on the chair not immediately next to Steve but on the other side of it.

There was so much Steve wanted to ask about Peter, to know about this boy that had captured Tony’s heart, but he didn’t know how to navigate a conversation with the kid. He started to ask why Peter lived with his aunt and realized that was a terrible question. Instead, he said, “I’m sorry I dropped that plane on you in Germany.”

Pete had frozen comically. “It’s okay,” he began awkwardly, but Steve was shaking his head.

“No, it’s not- I shouldn’t have. I definitely wouldn’t have if I’d known...”

“Known you were a munchkin,” Tony broke in helpfully.

Pete scoffed. “I am so not a munchkin.”

“Oh you’re just a baby, Pete,” Tony said, peeling another apple. “Since we’re making confessions, I wanted to say I’m also sorry, sorry for bringing you to Germany. I wouldn’t have done it if I’d known how old you were.”

“You didn’t know,” Pete mumbled. He pointed an accusing finger between Tony and Steve. “Alright, listen. We’re not making this a sad moment. That’s not what fall is about. Finish peeling that apple. We have two pies about to come out of the oven and then we’ll be putting more in.”

“You see how he orders me around,” Tony shot at Steve.

Steve blinked. Tony was... almost joking with him. He grinned. “You were always good at taking orders.”

“If I want to,” Tony said loftily. He gestured to Pete. “Come here, kid. Look at my hands. They are practically pruning up from skinning all these big guys. Do we have enough apples cut at this point?”

Pete looked around at the five different bowls, heaped with apple pie filling. “Oh. Yeah.” Tony groaned and Steve had to literally bite his knuckle to keep from laughing. They were so similar, he thought fondly.

“Can I have a piece of pie when it comes out?” he asked Tony, his voice low. Never sure these days how his engineer was going to respond. The engineer, he amended. Not his anymore.

“Yeah, do I look like I can eat an entire apple pie on my own? Everyone’s going to have a piece.”

It was time to get up. Steve could feel himself getting more emotional with each passing minute. “Thanks, guys. I’m- I’m going to go.”

Tony locked eyes with him and for a minute, none of it had ever happened, he’d made the right decision, and Tony was going to get up and peck him on the lips, give him that playful smile. They stared at each other, frozen- would Steve ever make up for what he’d done?

“Could I-?” Steve began, but Tony had started talking at the same time.

“Night, Cap-” he said-

And Steve had shut his mouth with a click. Tony raised one eyebrow, looking faintly concerned, and curious, and that curiosity, that was close to Steve’s Tony, but it wasn’t quite it. “Could you-?” he asked, but Steve was shaking his head. “I was just being stupid- sorry. Gotta go.”

“Goodnight, Captain Rogers,” Pete called out and Steve waved a hand in response, speeding out of the room.

He stalked down the hallway and took a right towards his room, shutting the door with a snap behind him and sliding down the door to sit on the floor. “I’m sorry, Tony,” he whispered, his voice cracking. He pulled at his hair, feeling like he was in a straitjacket. “Oh god, I’m really sorry.”

Tony... Tony wasn’t the problem. It was Steve.

“I should have told him,” he said miserably the next morning, having woken Natasha up to go on a walk with him. She’d blinked at him blearily, rolling out of bed to pull on a pair of jeans. He’d enticed her out with a travel cup of coffee.

“Told him about-?”

“You know.” Steve ducked his head. “Bucky. Knowing he was the one who killed Tony’s parents. I should have-”

“Steve?” Natasha paused, looking above them at a maple that was in full autumnal color. “Are you okay? You’re- you’re more sad than I’ve ever seen you. Maybe coming back here wasn’t our best idea.”

But rather than calm him down, that made Steve’s heart jump unnaturally. “I don’t want to leave,” he said quietly, emphatically. “Please, Nat, I can make this work-”

“Steve, Steve,” she said, putting her hands up. “I just don’t like to see you sad. I wasn’t saying...” She blew out a breath. “We’re not going anywhere, big guy. Have you talked to Tony?”

“We’ve been talking.”

“About what happened?”

“No, uh, no. Not that.”

“I think... I think you should, Steve. If we’re going to stay here. I need to talk to Tony too. We’ve been putting it off. But he deserves at least an apology. Right?”

“Right,” he breathed.

She started to walk again, but his hand shot out, encircling her wrist and she paused, looking at him questioningly. He pulled on her arm, careful not to hurt her and she sighed, stepping closer to him. “You protest but I couldn’t make you do anything you didn’t want to do,” he said into her hair, folding her into his arms.

She smiled faintly up at him, tracing his jaw and gripping it lightly between her fingers. Tugging on his jacket so that he bent forward, she pecked him on the cheek. He felt his heart slow down a little, the first traces of calm touching his heart with bony fingers.

“You’re going to work out a way to get him back,” she said lightly. “You’re miserable without him. It shows.”

“Do you think he knows?”

“I think he wonders.”

Steve hummed. He glanced up at the Compound, its windows reflective and dark in the early morning light. Tony was definitely asleep right now, would be for another couple of hours. Steve had heard him walking down the hallway last night around two in the morning; it had woken him and he’d been confused momentarily. Why wasn’t Tony climbing in beside him?

And then it had come back. The worst moments were the ones where he had sudden clarity, the moments after he woke up when it all came rushing back.

Could he talk to Tony? Tony seemed to have moved on while he was away. And he couldn’t blame him. He’d-

“Don’t think so much,” Natasha chided him, poking him as they walked back to the main building.

He nodded vaguely. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m trying.”

“Try harder.”

He bit his lip. “Okay.”

He meant to talk to Tony, to pull the man aside, but suddenly that wasn’t so easy. Tony and he were both busy, in their own ways. Part of the Rogues plea bargain had been mandatory service- he was out on missions more often than he could count and when he was home? When he was home, half the time, Tony was out.

They snuck up on him, one Saturday afternoon, when he was out mowing the lawn. One moment, he was pushing the mower through the grass, the next, his path was being

obstructed by two brunettes.

“Oh,” he said, looking up at them and wishing he wasn’t so sweaty. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Tony said. “You know we have a ride on mower. Or a mower with a motor at least.”

“I like this one,” he said. “I wouldn’t do the whole yard with it, but I can do the front like this.” He noticed Pete was shivering slightly. “You cold, Queens?”

“Bit cold. We just took a long hike.”

“Got a little lost,” Tony added. “We were heading in when I noticed that you were using 1920’s best technology to cut the grass.”

“Push mowers were invented in the 1870s,” he said smoothly. He looked around. “Here, Pete. I’m not even wearing this.” He grabbed his sweatshirt off the chair where he’d discarded it and brought it back to them. “It’s warm,” he said softly, holding it out. Not sure the kid would take it.

“I’ll be okay,” Peter began, but Tony had snagged the sweatshirt out of Steve’s hand. He snorted a little, holding it out in front of him. An old Stark Industries sweatshirt that Tony had given him nearly a decade before.

“This is what the logo used to look like,” he said, pushing it into Pete’s arms. “Put it on.” To Steve, he said, “He gets cold easily.”

Steve nodded. Looking around him, he realized he’d nearly finished the lawn. “I’ll finish this tomorrow,” he said.

“Whenever it pleases you, Cap.”

He watched Pete wrestle his way into the sweatshirt as he walked in front of them. “How’d you get lost? I thought you had Friday with you everywhere?”

“Friday’s doing some updates. Anyways, we thought we’d be able to figure it out. There was a map and everything...”

“You’re limping.”

Tony huffed. “I’m tired,” he said. “I may have slid down part of the mountain at one point. Anyways- want a piece of pie? I think you earned it. Big lawn.”

“Yeah...”

Instead of Steve’s big talk that he’d thought out in his head for the past week, he found himself watching Tony moving around the living room. He followed the mechanic when he gestured them towards the couch and watched Pete sink further and further into Tony’s space as he got closer to falling asleep.

“Friday,” Tony said, watching his young charge, “Call May Parker. Pete’s going to stay the night, I think.”

He felt like he should go when Tony started talking to Pete’s aunt, but Tony waved him back into his seat when he tried to get up. He snagged his sketchbook instead, grabbing it and doing quick sketches- Peter leaning on Tony, the push mower, Natasha as she’d looked that morning at the breakfast nook.

“Is he going to sleep the rest of the night?” he asked, watching Tony card fingers through Pete’s fringe.

“Nah. He’d be mad if I let him. I’ll let him sleep an hour or two and then we’ll make dinner or something.”

“I’ll get a blanket,” Steve offered, because Tony couldn’t get up. He found the softest one in the cabinet and pulled it over, shaking it out and covering them carefully. Tony mumbled his thanks when he was done. Steve hesitated at the man’s feet. “Have you been okay, Tony?”

Tony rolled his shoulders. “More okay than not okay.”

Steve touched his own chest lightly with the tips of his fingers. “What about-?”

“Helen fixed it with the Cradle. And honestly, it was an excuse to fill in some of the other... damage. Looks better than ever.”

“...Good.”

“Show me your sketches,” Tony ordered next and Steve didn’t need a lot of prodding to follow his directions. He flicked his way through the book, turning it to show the older brunette. He decided he’d mess up this moment if he spoke.

Tony stretched out a hand when he’d reached the last page and tapped Steve on the shoulder. The soldier looked at him questioningly. “You go away too much.”

“I have to do what they tell me.”

“Mm, about that. I told them to cut their shit out. You’re still human beings. So the load will be lighter, going forward.”

He leaned his head on the back of the couch. “Still looking out for me after everything that’s happened?”

“I’m not done with you yet.”

The statement punched through Steve’s defenses and hit him in his core. He turned to the last of the sketches and turned a new page. Working from memory, he began to sketch, fleshing out movements and almost feeling the sinews under him once more. Tony watched him.

“That’s the night we watched all those scary movies and you wouldn’t sleep alone.”

“Yeah.” In the corner, he began a different sketch. “Remember Natasha’s flower crowns?”

“I remember it all.” His pencil paused; he pushed too hard and the tip broke. Tony was looking to his left, shifting Pete into a more comfortable position. “I’d forgotten about the sweatshirt though.”

“My favorite,” he managed. He ducked his head; combed through his hair with his fingers idly.

“I’m not angry with you anymore, Steve.”

“You should be,” he bit out and he was on his feet without knowing rightly what he was doing.

“Gotta go?” Tony asked, and god, he had no right to look so sad. Steve nodded. Tony held up a finger though, pausing the captain in his escape attempt. “Next time we go hiking, you ought to come too. My boy scout would have never gotten us lost.”

“Your boy scout?” he asked, his lips twisting.

“Mine.”

That hurt his heart. He wanted so desperately to still be Tony’s and he knew he could never be his again, not properly. “Why aren’t you angry?” he whispered.

But he never found out what Tony was going to say. The others came up at that moment, calling out to them, and he let the general confusion mask his exit. He flashed an unhappy smile at Nat, skirted around Sam and Clint, and took off down the hall, not running, but walking stiffly, shutting himself into his room. “Lock the doors, Fri,” he ordered, when back in his room. “I’m going to bed for the night.”

“Tony’s worried about you,” Natasha told him the next morning. She’d crept into his bed in the early morning, tunneling close to him when he was half asleep.

“He’s worried about me?” he asked, incredulous.

“About you,” she agreed, pressing her face into his shoulder. Stroking his hair. “Are you going to get up for your run?”

“I think I just want to stay in bed this morning.”

“Hmm.” She pressed a kiss to his bicep. “I’m worried about you too.”

“Don’t be.” He closed his eyes again. “I’m okay. Just... just tired.”

When he woke up again, it was nearly noon and she was gone. He showered and shaved slowly, wandering out to find an empty Compound. “Friday... Where is everyone?”

“Boss is attending a field trip with the Parkers. The other Avengers went out, with various intentions.”

So he really was alone. Forgoing lunch (breakfast?), he headed to the gym.

He was napping in the back garden by the time everyone came back. Waking up with a jolt, for a solid minute, he didn't know where he was. He gazed blearily around at the familiar landscape, hearing voices from up in the Compound, music playing in Wanda's room. And... he scrunched his eyes shut. Tony and Peter, somewhere nearby.

They hadn't seen him; he knew he was hidden by the shrubbery.

He could sneak back into the Compound, but that would mean walking through all the others- Natasha who read him like a book and Clint who was still pretty angry, all things considered, Sam and Bruce... He found that he couldn't do it. Clutching his sketchbook, he couldn't help but listen to the two genius brunettes talking.

Tony was laughing and Peter protesting- "This is a horror novel, Mr. Stark!" Pete sounded scandalized; Steve smiled faintly, surprised at his feeling.

"But it's funny, Pete, I never knew it was this funny-"

"Dracula is a classic and you're maligning it," Peter said sulkily.

Tony was giggling- actually giggling- his laughter breathy and light and so carefree. "I'm sorry, Petey," he gasped. "I'm sorry, buddy. I know. I know. This is horror. Give me a moment."

"You're impossible," Pete shot at him, but Steve could hear the amusement in the kid's voice. Two sides of the same coin. It occurred to him that Peter was what Tony could have been from the start, had Howard done a better job.

"If you didn't want me to laugh, you wouldn't do the accent-"

"But the accent's fun-"

Steve knew he shouldn't be listening to this- they likely didn't even know he was out here. He started to get up, but then the mention of his own name made him pause. "When are you going to talk to Captain Rogers?"

He froze, unable to pull away without knowing Tony's answer. The guilty part of him had to contend with all the other parts- the loneliness, the fear, the yearning- and he found that he couldn't pull himself away.

"Concerned about my love life, Pete?" Tony asked after a minute where he'd said nothing, a minute where Steve's palms had sweated and his heart had beat quick in his chest.

"Mm, no, I don't want anything to do with your alleged love life. But you miss him, don't you? Bruce thinks you do."

"Bruce should keep his opinions to himself," Tony said, but there was no malice in his voice. "Maybe I do miss my captain." And- "I thought you were mad at him."

Tony's intern was mad at him? Steve's stomach had inflated when Tony had called him 'his captain;' now it seemed to fill with rocks. Pete's voice was embarrassed. "I was. Still am, sort

of- he hurt you. But..."

"It's hard to hate the good captain," Tony finished for him. "Yeah, I know, Pete. I'll think about it... Go find your aunt. Dinner's got to be almost ready."

And with Peter gone, it was just the two of them, sitting in the dark and the silence.

He went down to the lab that night and knocked on the glass, hovering in the door. Tony had glanced up, rolling back in his chair. "Capsicle? Why not just come in?"

"I didn't want to interrupt..."

Tony just gestured him forward impatiently. Steve swallowed and moved in. He hadn't been in the lab since they'd come back. Here was where he used to sketch when Tony was up late. He sat on that corner of the desk when they bantered. Tony had kissed him, right where he was standing now. "Something wrong, Steve?" Tony asked, his eyes glued to a hologram projected in front of him.

"No. Yes. I don't know," he said heavily.

"Well that clears it up, then," Tony joked and Steve looked up, his mouth twitching into a smile. "You're not normally so indecisive."

"I'm a little lost," Steve said and then flushed. "I mean. I-"

"Like you forgot what you came down to do? Or something else?" Tony sent him a swift glance.

"I know what I want to do," Steve whispered. "I want to apologize."

Tony quirked an eyebrow. "For...?"

"Everything."

The mechanic hummed. "Everything. Wow. That's a lot. Sure that you're to blame for everything?" He circled Steve, not looking at him. His eyes up on the screen still.

"I hurt you."

"And I hurt you." Tony took a deep breath in, letting the air out. He settled down next to Steve, flipping a screwdriver in his hand. "You've been thinking about this for some time?"

"Every day since I left." He reached out his hand, hesitant, and covered Tony's with it, holding the screwdriver in place. "I'm sorry, Tony. Sorry I didn't tell you. Sorry I got so angry. Sorry for hurting you."

"I'm sorry too." The mechanic shifted, pressing his shoulder into Steve's. "I missed you too. You're not the only one who made mistakes."

They were quiet. Tony hadn't tried to remove his hand. Steve ran his thumb down the knuckles, reacquainting himself with the familiar scars. It couldn't be this easy. "What are you working on tonight? Curing cancer?"

Tony huffed. "The kid wants glow in the dark webs for Halloween. I'm working on integrating it into his formula."

Steve laughed, a startled laugh that broke out of him. "Of course he does."

"Oh, this is important, Steve."

The soldier nodded, tucking his head down so that his chin touched his sternum. "You love him." Not a question. More of a statement.

Tony pondered it as if he had asked anyways. "He's a good boy. I like him. He makes me laugh. He's, uh," he stood up, turning to face Steve, "he's kind of like me- have you noticed? But better. He's smart and kind and-

"You're all of those things too."

The mechanic grinned at this. "You might be the only one to think so." Steve shook his head violently. Tony bit his tongue, staring up at him with those warm hopeful eyes. "He's not the only one I love. I still love you. Always have."

Steve kissed him then, surging forward and cupping his face. He pulled Tony close, making the brunette laugh; folding him into his body and leaning on him, he kissed every inch of the mechanic that he could reach. Tony collapsed into his hold, the screwdriver slipping out of his hand and landing on the ground with clatter. "Pete's been good for you," he whispered, looking Tony in the eyes. "I'm so glad."

"Of course," Tony said, his voice muffled by Steve's shoulder, "he's also kind of obnoxious. Have you heard? He's making me create glow in the dark web slingers."

"I bet you volunteered. I bet it was your idea to start with."

"Maybe so. I prodded him in the right direction, you might say." Tony's hands worked their way up his shoulder and brushed against his neck. "We're going to be fine, Steve."

"Good. I'm a mess without you. I need you."

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