The Days of Reckoning Are Upon Us

by Ana (Anafandom)

Summary

Steve Rogers always does what he thinks is right. Unfortunately, believing he is right isn't the same as being right. Sometimes he's wrong. And sometimes he has to face the consequences of his actions.

Or, what if Team Cap was actually called out on their poor decisions and had to deal with consequences instead of being rewarded? A series of unrelated drabbles of what might have been.

And in case the tags aren't clear: this is not Steve or Team Cap friendly. If that's not your thing, just don't read it.
So I was re-reading Rjslpets’s amazing There Is Always Enough Blame to Go Around (along with the comments) and started thinking – or rather re-thinking – about how Steve never had to suffer any consequences for his actions in the MCU. He made a lot of terrible choices – due to his selfishness and short-sightedness – and either got lucky that things went his way or managed to get someone else to work some magic to free him from any responsibility. That led me to think about how things would have gone if there had been consequences, and thus this story happened. It’s just a bunch of unconnected snippets, dealing with what might have been.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter 1

1.

Steve wheezed and coughed, trying to draw a breath. Beside him, his mother rubbed his back and kept up a litany of soothing words until the worst of the attack had passed. He smiled weakly at her and received a strained one in return.

“Stevie, you need to stop this,” she said, exhaustion coloring her voice.

“Mom, it wasn’t my fault –”

“Stop,” she interrupted, holding up a hand and looking at him sternly. “You can’t keep fighting people, Steve. You can’t.”

“But they’re bullies, mom. What am I supposed to do? Just let them win?” His eyes filled with tears, of frustration and the lingering effects of his struggle within his weak and frail body.

“And how is this,” she gestured at him still fighting for breath, “winning? Oh, honey, I understand how helpless you feel, but you can’t keep doing this. You’ll get yourself killed or seriously injured, and I won’t be able to help you. We can’t afford another trip to the hospital, Stevie, we’re barely holding on as it is. Please, just… try to understand.”

He didn’t. He didn’t understand how he could just let it go – or why he should. And his mother didn’t seem to understand that he had to stand up for himself, he had to prove to them (to himself) that he was just as good as them, that this stupid body would not define his worth. He wouldn’t let it. Still, he nodded anyway, because he didn’t want to upset her.

The next time he got into a fight (a few days later), he fell on his back awkwardly and ended up breaking two of his already fragile ribs. His mother used up all their savings to pay for the treatment, and had to miss a lot of days of work to take care of him. She ended up losing her job and they were evicted from their apartment. When they were and begging on the streets to get enough to eat, his mom kept looking at him in pain and despair.

“Why couldn’t you just listen to me, Stevie?”

2.

Being in the army and fighting for his country was all Steve had ever wanted. He had listened as his mother told him stories about his father and about how he had fought bravely in the war (and died), and he wanted to be like the father he had never known.

So he enlisted, all enthusiasm and conviction and the desire to serve his country.

He was denied.

He stared at the paper in dismay, even though a part of him had expected that outcome – Bucky had told him it was likely to happen, but Steve had hoped. And now that hope was gone. Denied.

“You’re not strong enough”, the officer had told him, “we need able-bodied men.”

Steve wanted to cry, but that was a sign of weakness, and he was not weak – not in mind, not in
conviction, not where it mattered.

After a few days of licking his wounds, he decided to try again. Maybe he’d have better luck in another recruitment post. Everywhere there were posters for recruitment, the country needed fighters, surely someone would give him a chance.

He stood outside the office watching the men – big, strong men – go in and come out with a green stamp on their paper. One of them looked over at him, eyes roving up and down Steve’s tiny frame, and smiled. “Guess you won’t be going to war, huh, shrimp?”

Steve saw red. He wanted to hit the man, but the other walked away before he had the chance. How dare he imply that Steve wasn’t good enough? He was! He was strong and good – his mom had always told him so. He squared his shoulders and went in.

He lied on the application form. He knew it was technically wrong, but he had to try, he had to prove to everyone (to himself) that he was just as good as everyone else.

He was denied again.

The third time, he was caught. The doctor who saw him was kind, but warned him that he would get in trouble if he kept lying on the forms to try to get in.

“I’m sure there are other ways in which you can help,” he said and Steve clenched his hands into fists. He was a man, his father’s son, he had to be strong enough. He had to. He wouldn’t be shipped off to do factory work, he had to be better than that.

The fourth time he was also caught and he had to pay a fine.

“You’re not qualified for military service,” the officer said. “You’ll only endanger the people around you. You try this again and you’ll go to jail.”

Steve set his jaw and walked out. Bucky was already out there fighting. He had to find a way to join him.

The fifth time he went all the way to New Jersey to apply.

He ended up in jail.

3.

Steve hated the USO tour. Despised it. After everything he’d done, all he’d suffered through to prove himself worthy, they had him performing like a monkey in the circus. It wasn’t fair. He hadn’t done all that to get into the army to end up as a showgirl.

So when he heard that Bucky’s unit had been captured, he knew he had to go rescue him. Bucky had always had his back, Steve wouldn’t abandon his friend. Not now when he could actually do something, was actually strong enough to do his part.

He convinced Howard and Peggy to help him when Phillips refused to give him permission to go. He was Captain America, he was a soldier, not a circus performer. Wasn’t that why they’d given him the serum in the first place? He would not allow himself to be bullied by stupid politicians anymore.

The battle at the holding facility was the most exhilarating experience of his life, and he emerged
triumphant, as he knew he would. He, Bucky and all the other soldiers marched back into camp laughing and singing, glad to have won and to be free.

Colonel Phillips and several officers met him at the entrance with weapons drawn. He was told to get on his knees and surrender himself.

“What? Look, I rescued all these people,” he said, still flying high on his success.

“You were not given permission to do so. This is the army, not your personal playground. There are rules to follow, and if you can’t do that, then you’re no good to us.”

“But I was given the serum. What’s the point of that if I don’t use it?” Steve said, standing his ground when the soldiers made as if to approach him.

“Just because you got the serum doesn’t mean you get to do whatever you want. And I’m sad to say giving it to you was clearly a mistake.”

Steve reeled back as if struck. No, it wasn’t a mistake. He was a good man, that was why he was chosen. Because he was worthy.

“You’re under arrest for disobeying a superior officer and for being away without leave.”

“But I did a good thing. Look,” he pointed at the amassed group of soldiers again, desperate.

“It doesn’t matter. You clearly can’t follow orders and obviously think actions have no consequences. I need a soldier who knows his place and respects the hierarchy of the army, not a loose cannon that thinks he’s above everyone else.” He turned to the soldiers. “Take him away.”

Steve was too stunned to fight. This couldn’t be happening. He’d done the right thing, he’d rescued Bucky and his entire unit. He was a good man. After everything, it could not be over, it just couldn’t be.

It was.

4.

(This starts out similar to 3, but has a different ending. I couldn’t decide which issue to tackle so I figured I’d do both.)

Steve hated the USO tour. Despised it. After everything he’d done, all he’d suffered through to prove himself worthy, they had him performing like a monkey in the circus. It wasn’t fair. He hadn’t done all that to get into the army to end up as a showgirl.

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laughing and singing, glad to have won and to be free.

Colonel Phillips and several officers met him at the entrance with weapons drawn. He was told to get on his knees and surrender himself.

“What? Look, I rescued all these people,” he said, still flying high on his success.

“And because of your stupidity Howard Stark is dead. Agent Carter will likely be soon as well.”

Steve blanched. “What? No!”

“What did you think would happen when they flew into enemy territory, you utter idiot?! Their plane was shot down!” Phillips was almost purple with rage. “Take him away,” he told the soldiers, disgust written into his features.

The others – the ones he’d rescued – all looked shocked. Bucky stared at him in horror. “Steve, what did you do?”

Steve could say nothing as he was handcuffed and led to a vehicle.

From his prison cell, he heard how badly the war effort was going. The loss of Howard Stark, his money and his weapons was remarked constantly as being one of the worst defeats of the allies.
I might do more of these at some point, but for now this is all I have.

5.

Steve woke up in the hospital, Sam by his side with a grim expression.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, immediately thinking about Bucky. Had he been found? Was he hurt?

“It’s…” Sam sighed. “Sorry, man, but… we’re in a lot of trouble.”

“What do you mean? We won, we exposed Hydra, stopped their plans.”

A couple of men in suits entered the room then, eying Steve warily.

“Mr Rogers, we’re here to tell you that you will be escorted to a congressional hearing regarding your… actions,” he sounded like he wanted to say something else “as soon as the doctors clear you. So please don’t go anywhere.”

“I don’t understand. Why? What’s going on?”

“People are dead, Mr Rogers, that’s what’s going on. People are dead and you need to explain yourself.”

Steve frowned, not quite getting it, but nodded in agreement anyway.

The next day he, Sam and Nat spent hours telling the panel what had happened and why they’d had to do what they did. He though that would be the end of it, and they’d be free to go, but it wasn’t. At the end of the hearing the panel’s spokesperson rose and looked at them harshly.

“You have endangered countless lives through your poorly-thought actions. We have already received several reports of SHIELD agents – and their families – murdered in their homes because their identities were compromised. No doubt there will be many more.” Steve swallowed. That wasn’t supposed to happen, they’d just wanted to expose Hydra. The man continued. “And that’s not counting the deaths and billion dollar property damage that occurred as a result of the hellicarries that crashed in DC.”

“But we were trying to save people!” Steve exclaimed, starting to get nervous about where this was going.

“That may be, but you did so in a careless manner that cost people’s lives and a great deal of financial loss. You informed no one of your plans and therefore there was time to prepare or to put safeguards in place to deal with the fallout and protect the public.”

“I didn’t know who we could trust! Anyone could have been Hydra!” Didn’t they understand? He’d had no choice.
“Yes, that’s true. But by your careless action you endangered not only Hydra but everyone else. Releasing the information the way you did, with no filters, caused a hell of a lot more harm than good.” He stared them down for a moment before continuing. “Furthermore, you had no authority to act as you did. You overstepped yourselves by a wide margin, and we cannot overlook that. You will remain in custody until we can decide what to do with you.”

“You… you can’t do that!”

“You are already on thin ice here, Mr Rogers.” For the first time Steve realized that during the entire hearing no one had addressed him by his military title. “Don’t try my patience any more than you already have.” Beside him, Sam bowed his head, shaking slightly, while Natasha sat ramrod straight, not giving anything away. “If you attempt to leave without authorization, you will be arrested and the consequences will be even more severe.” He gestured at the guards. “Take them away.”

Numb with shock, Steve allowed himself to be led away. It wasn’t supposed to end this way. He’d save the world.

Hadn’t he?

6.

The Avengers had just come back from Sokovia, having finally recovered Loki’s scepter. Steve was glad that thing would be going back to Asgard as soon as possible.

Clint was taken to the medical wing, accompanied by Nat, while Thor said he was going to get some food (he was always hungry after a battle). Tony took the scepter from its case and grinned.

“All right, Brucie bear, we have some science to do!” he exclaimed, clapping Bruce on the arm as the other man passed by. “It’s gonna be fucking awesome!”

“Language,” Steve said with a slight scowl in Tony’s direction. Could the man never talk without cursing?

Tony’s smile faded and he turned away. Ashamed, maybe, Steve thought. Then he turned back, shoulders back and chin up.

“Okay, you know what? No. You don’t get to scold me for using a bad word. I’m not a kid and this isn’t kindergarten. I am a fucking adult in my own fucking house and I’ll use whatever fucking language I want.”

Stunned, Steve froze, unsure what to do. He turned to Bruce, seeking an ally, but the man shook his head.

“He’s right, Steve. I know you don’t mean it that way, but you sound incredibly condescending when you say that. Like Tony said, we’re all adults here, there is no need to censor ourselves.”

Tony smiled at Bruce and took his arm. “So we’ll see you later, Steve.”

Steve was left alone, feeling like a schoolboy told off by his teachers.

(AN: This isn’t really a big thing, all things considered, but it bothered me in the movie. Maybe Steve meant it as a sort of joke, but given his general attitude, it kinda pissed me off.)
Steve was ecstatic. He’s finally done it: he had Bucky back.

It had taken a lot time tracking useless leads (and occasionally beating people up for information) all over the world, but it was finally over. He’d found Bucky. He had his best friend back.

Well, Bucky wasn’t really doing all that well, and it had taken a lot of persuasion to get him to agree to come back to New York with him. Bucky hadn’t wanted to come at all, worried about endangering people, and Steve had had to explain, again and again, that all those things had not been his fault, and that he was free of Hydra now. Steve would never let Hydra get their hands on Bucky again. Never.

It was understandable that Bucky was worried, but he had no reason to be. Everything was going to be fine now that they were together again. He’d get Bucky some help, if he really thought he needed it, and soon enough, Steve was sure, Bucky would join him as an Avenger, and it would be just like old times.

They got off the quinjet at the compound, Steve leading Bucky carefully while Sam and Nat came up behind them. They showed Bucky the place, and the room where he would be staying – right next door to Steve’s.

“Who is this?” Vision asked as he ghosted through a wall beside them, making everyone jump and tense up. Bucky flattened himself against the wall, eyes darting around as if searching for an escape route.

Steve frowned at Vision as he laid a protecting hand on Bucky’s shoulder.

“Damn it, Vision, use the doors, all right?”

Vision raised an eyebrow. “My apologies. I wasn’t aware we had guests. Who is this?”

“This is Bucky, he’s my friend. He’s going to stay here with us, and will eventually be and Avenger.” He turned to Bucky, who had a distant, guarded expression. “Right, Bucky? To the end of the line.” He smiled, hoping to ease some of Bucky’s tension. It didn’t really work.

“I see,” Vision said. “I had not been informed that we were welcoming new members.”

“I’m informing you now,” Steve said, impatient. “Come on, Bucky, let’s get you settled.”

Over the next few days, Steve barely left Bucky’s side, showing him all the nice things about the future that they had at their disposal. Bucky didn’t say much, but Steve wasn’t deterred. It would take time for Bucky to go back to normal, he figured, after everything he had gone through. He just needed to be patient and to be there for his friend.

A week after Bucky arrived, Tony came by the complex. They had not been expecting him, as he rarely came by anymore, and it was an unpleasant surprise.

“Tony, nice to see you,” Steve said, somewhat strained. He didn’t want Tony near Bucky. “Why are you here?”

“I heard we had a guest,” he said, watching Bucky from a distance.
Vision must have told him, Steve thought, since it was unlikely that any of the others would have talked to Tony.

“Yeah, Cap’s friend, Bucky.” Sam gestured at Bucky. “Poor guy’s been through a lot.” Steve was, once again, grateful for Sam.

“Hmm,” was all Tony said. Then he grinned that irritating press grin of his and nodded at Bucky. “Right, well, I have some stuff to do. Catch you all later.”

After Tony left the room, Steve relaxed a bit.

“Who was that?”

“That’s Tony.” It was Sam who answered Bucky since Steve was still preoccupied with Tony’s presence here.

“And he is…?”

“Oh, you don’t know? Tony Stark. Iron Man.”

“Stark?” Bucky looked at Steve. “Howard’s kid?”

Steve nodded. “He’s… not as nice as Howard.”

Bucky had paled a bit. “And why is he here?”

“Well, he does own the building, so technically he can come over as much as he wants,” Sam said with a shrug. “But he doesn’t, usually.”

“Owns the building?” Bucky repeated. “Steve, did you tell him you were bringing me here?”

“No, why?”

“What do you mean, why? Because maybe he doesn’t want me here!”

“Why wouldn’t he want you here?” Sam asked, looking bewildered.

“Because I killed his parents.”

There was a heavy silence following that declaration, before Steve said, “it wasn’t you, Bucky, you know that.”

“Wait, hold up. You knew about this, Steve?”

Steve looked helplessly at Sam and Bucky, willing them to understand. “It wasn’t Bucky’s fault, it was Hydra. Anyway, it was all so long ago, there’s really no reason to bring it up now.”

“Wait, wait. So Tony doesn’t know? No one knows? You’ve just been sitting on this information for…? Jesus, Steve, how long have you known?” Sam eyes widened in horror.

Steve shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. Look, let’s just not tell him anything –”

“Are you fucking kidding me, Steve?!” Sam backed away from him. “How long have you known?”

“Sam…”

“How long?!”
“Since we confronted Zola in that bunker. It –”

“What!? You mean all this time we’ve been using Tony’s resources to look for Bucky, you’ve… I can’t believe this. No fucking wonder you didn’t want him involved! What the hell is the matter with you?!” Sam was shouting now, which wasn’t at all usual.

“Sam…”

“Are you saying you used Tony’s money to look for me, Steve? And then you brought me here, to his house, all while lying to him? Jesus, Steve.”

“I wasn’t lying…”

“A lie of omission is still a lie, Steve! God, I can’t believe you.” Sam looked disgusted and angry and Steve realized he had lost control of the situation.

“Look…”

“No. I’ve heard enough. I’m not staying here another second.”

Bucky turned to leave and stopped dead. Standing in the doorway were Tony, Vision and Natasha. By the look on their faces, they had heard far too much.

“Tony,” Steve said, placing himself between the man and Bucky. Bucky shoved him away none too gently and addressed Tony.

“I’m sorry. God, I’m so fucking sorry. I didn’t… I didn’t really remember until just now… I would never… I would never have come here otherwise. I’m so sorry.”

“Stop it, Bucky, it wasn’t your fault.”

“Shut the fuck up, Steve! Stop telling me what was and wasn’t my fault. Stop making decisions for me. Stop telling me what to do, what to think, what to want. Just fucking stop.”

Steve didn’t know what to do. Sam walked away from him, shaking his head. He went to stand next to Tony and the others. “I swear I didn’t know, Tony. I had no idea.”

“Nat,” Steve tried the only person who might understand.

But Natasha shook her head. “I thought you’d told him.” She turned to Tony, who was still standing there, frozen. “I knew, but I thought Steve had told you. I’m sorry.”

“You knew and you still thought it was okay to use Tony’s resources to find Bucky?” Sam asked, aghast. “What the hell is wrong with you people?”

No one said anything for a while. Steve got more and more nervous. He tried to put a hand on Bucky’s shoulder, but his friend pulled away with a snarl.

“I’m surrendering myself,” Bucky said, approaching the others slowly with hands raised.

“No!” Steve shouted. “No, you can’t. Bucky…” He tried to step forward, to reach out for Bucky, but Vision got in his way.

“Stand down, Captain.” He looked at Bucky, then at Tony. “We accept your surrender. Sergeant Wilson, could you please escort Mr Barnes to his quarters until the proper authorities arrive?”
“No!” Steve launched himself at Vision, who knocked him down easily.

“Stop it!” It was Bucky who yelled, a fury Steve had never heard in his voice. “Enough, Steve. This is my decision, and it’s the right one. I should never have let you talked me into coming here. This ends now. I can’t… I can’t live like this.”

“But it wasn’t you,” Steve pleaded, desperation in his voice. He’d fought so hard to get Bucky back…

“If it was or wasn’t doesn’t matter right now, Steve. There are other people to consider here. It isn’t only about what you want. It isn’t about you at all.”

“Get your stuff and get the fuck out of my house, Rogers. If you’re not gone in thirty minutes I will blast your fucking ass out.” Tony sounded calm, but his clenching fists told a different story. His eyes were blazing with anger and pain. Steve saw it but couldn’t really process it. He couldn’t believe this was happening. After everything…

“Bucky,” he tried again before Bucky disappeared out of the room. “Till the end of the line, remember?”

There were tears in his friend’s eyes. “Steve, this is the end of the line. I’m sorry.”

Alone in the room, Steve collapsed to the floor. It wasn’t supposed to end like this.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

So thanks to people’s response and suggestions (thank you, people, I love these discussions), I have lots of ideas for these little snippets. Some of these are not so much big consequences as people (mostly Steve) being called out on their shitty behavior. Some of the ideas come from discussions in comments for a lot of Team Tony fics (I love reading comments on fics). So if some of it sounds familiar to the people who also follow those discussions, that’s why. I’ll keep posting them as I get them written down. If you have other suggestions let me know.

I did the AoU bits from memory (‘cause I didn’t really feel like watching it again, it’d just make me angry), so if it’s not quite how it went let’s call it dramatic license.

8. (as suggested by JackSparrow789, another Team Cap member has some consequences to face)

When the doorbell rang, Sam had just finished dressing after his shower. He hastily put on his shoes and went to see who was at the door.

There were three men in Air Force uniforms standing there, one Major and two Captains according to their insignias.

“Sergeant Sam Wilson?” the Major asked.

“Yes, that’s me. Can I help you?”

“Please come with us. We have some questions we need you to answer.”

“Hmm, okay, sure. What’s this about?”

“It’s about the theft of the Falcon flying gear.”

Theft? Well, yeah, Sam supposed that they had technically stolen it, but… Well, the world had been in danger.

It had been four days since everything had gone down with the Hellicarriers. Sam knew Natasha was going to appear before Congress today to answer some questions and she’d told him (and Cap) to lay low, so he’d been doing just that. He’d talked to Steve briefly and the man had asked for some space to wrap his head around everything. He was convinced his friend had broken Hydra’s conditioning and could be reached, if only he could be found. Sam wasn’t sure that would be a good idea just now, but he’d be there for Cap if the man needed him. (It still gave him a little thrill to think Captain America had needed his help.)

The major motioned for Sam to step outside.

“Hang on, let me just get my wallet and phone.”

The two Captains walked into the house with him and while one kept watching Sam like a hawk as he picked up his stuff, the other one went further in.
“Hey, where are you going?”

“Major Larson!” the man yelled, and too late Sam remembered that the damaged Falcon suit was in his bedroom. Shit.

There was really no way to explain that away, so Sam didn’t object when Larson handcuffed him. “You are under arrest for possession of US Air Force stolen property.”

He was taken to a nearby airbase for questioning. The interview room was intimidating and Sam had to remind himself he’d helped Captain America save the world to keep the nervousness under control.

“How did you come to be in possession of the Falcon gear, Sergeant Wilson?”

“I… Well, I’m sure you’ve seen the news. About Hydra?” Despite his best efforts, Sam was starting to sweat.

“Yes. We have seen the footage of you using the Falcon gear. You were not authorized for that.”

“Yes, I know, but… Well, it was an emergency, you see. Captain America needed my help.”

“You are retired, Sergeant. It is not your job to ‘save the world’,” the air quotes were clear in Larson’s voice. “If you had information of a threat to national security it was your duty to inform the proper authorities, someone in the Air Force or in another agency, following the proper chain of command. Instead, you took it upon yourself to deal with the threat by stealing Air Force property.”

Well, put like that it sounded really bad, Sam thought.

Shit. What had he done?

What could he say? He was guilty of everything they’d said. And ‘because Captain America needed me’ or ‘because I wanted to be an Avenger’ probably wouldn’t cut it as an excuse. Shit. He’d really fucked up here, hadn’t he? How could he have been so stupid?

He confessed to everything. What else was there to do? Cap tried to intervene on his behalf, but it didn’t help much. Sam got a dishonorable discharge and a 3 year jail sentence. As he sat in his cell, he realized he should have thought things through instead of letting hero-worship cloud his judgment.

9.

“What footage?”

They had just finished debriefing about the alien invasion. Steve was tired, but happy that they’d saved the world. It felt good. For the first time since he’d woken in the future he’d felt like he could breathe, like he had solid ground under his feet. He was still Captain America and the world still needed him.

Natasha and Clint were talking quietly in a corner. Dr Banner was still sitting looking exhausted and Thor was nowhere to be seen – probably checking on Loki. Tony Stark – Howard’s kid – was standing next to Steve’s chair, looming over him.

“What?” Steve asked, standing up. Now he was taller than the other man, which made him feel
“You said before that you saw the footage. What footage was that that made you decide you know who I am?” His voice was level and calm, yet there was an intensity to his eyes that Steve found disconcerting. He took a small step back.

“Look, it’s all done –”

“No, no, I want to know,” Stark cut him off, raising his voice just slightly. Banner was watching them now.

“The party, the Senate hearing.” Steve said, annoyed. He would not be cowered. He might have been wrong about the man a little bit, but he would stand his ground.

“Right. So you watched… what? 30 minutes of film and decided you knew everything about me.”

“You were disrespectful and reckless. You put people in danger and –”

He was interrupted again. “Oh, so you do think you can judge me based on a couple of clips you have no context for. All right. Let me explain it to you, then, in small words so you can understand. The party. Yeah, okay, that was stupid, but I was dying and not really thinking straight. Heavy metal poisoning is a bitch.” Banner gasped and stood as well, coming closer looking concerned. Stark smiled and waved him off. “I’m fine, all taken care of.” He turned back to Steve. “The Senate hearing. Well, the Iron Man suit is my intellectual property and I have every right to want to keep it out of the Army’s hands. As for being disrespectful… well, I don’t like people trying to steal my stuff and dragging in my friends to get their way. If you wanna think that’s disrespectful…” he shrugged. “Frankly, I find it worse to talk shit about people you know nothing about, but that’s just me.”

No one said anything. Clint and Natasha were looking their way now too.

“So, Cap, explain to me again how you’re so much better than me.”

Steve clenched his jaw in anger and said nothing.

“Good, glad we got that straightened out.” Stark turned away from him in a clear dismissal to address Banner. “You wanna come to the Tower and play in the lab, Brucie bear?”

Banner smiled tentatively. “Yeah, sounds great.” He looked back at Steve. “For the record, Tony wasn’t bothering me in the lab. And even if he was, I could have told him so myself. I’m not a child.”

They left without acknowledging the rest of them. Steve felt small and helpless again. He hated it.

10.

“Every time someone tries to win a war before it starts people get hurt. Every time.” Steve was angry and tired. He broke the log he was holding with his bare hands in frustration.

Tony looked at him and the log, now in pieces on the ground, and straightened.

“Okay, first of all, that is the biggest pile of shit I have ever heard in my life. Trying to win a war before it starts? It’s called preventative measures, in case you’ve never heard of it. It’s when people
anticipate problems and deal with them before they escalate and become all out war. It’s been done for ages and without it we’d have utter chaos. In case it escaped your notice, we had a huge alien fleet trying to destroy the world a couple of years ago, which we prevented by a fucking miracle. And that was not the end, believe me. I saw what was out there, and if we don’t make plans to deal with it, we are gonna be wiped out next time. If you think a handful of people can beat them up, you’re dangerously delusional. And yeah, Ultron didn’t work out, but it was supposed to protect the fucking planet from aliens dropping from the sky. Again. But I guess you’d rather wait around until people are actually dying before doing anything about it.

“Second, that little power display just there – ‘oh, look at me, I can rip a log in two with my bare hands, look how strong I am’,,” he said in a mocking voice. “Fuck you! I haven’t forgotten how you just stood there while Thor nearly broke my neck. I am sick and tired of your holier than thou attitude. You and anybody else in this so-called team threaten me again and you’re gonna regret it. You got it?”

Steve clenched his jaw.

“And for the record – again, since it looks like you weren’t paying attention the first time – I did not activate Ultron. I don’t know how it happened, but it wasn’t me. I know computers and I know what I was doing, and what happened there shouldn’t have been possible. So stop blaming me for shit that had nothing to do with me.”

He turned around and walked back to the house, leaving Steve feeling like a chastised kid.

11.

The new… person, or whatever he was… handed Thor the hammer and everyone just stared, unsure what to think of what had just happened.

“All right, people,” Steve said, taking charge of things again. “We have work to do, so let’s go.”

He expected the others to get to suiting up, but no one moved, probably still confused.

“Guys,” Steve tried again.

“Hell no,” Tony said. He made a gesture and the rest of the suit locked around him. “Murder twins over there aren’t going anywhere but a cell.” he pointed the repulsor at Wanda, who raised her hands in defense.

Steve stood in front of her, putting a hand on her arm to calm her down. “They’re here to help us –”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Tony didn’t move an inch, repulsor still in place. “They just tried to kill us yesterday! Have you forgotten that? That bitch messed with our heads!”

Bruce stood close to Tony, glaring at Wanda. “I’m not going anywhere with them.”

Steve tried to get control of the situation again. Damn it, they didn’t have time for this. “Look, they’ve made mistakes but they helped us in Seoul. They’re on our side now.”

“Oh, really? And why should we believe people who were hell bent on killing us not 24 hours ago? And who sure as hell didn’t give a shit about the people who got caught in the crossfire?” Tony looked around at the others. “Hey, Clint, I thought you didn’t like mind control. You want that fucking witch near you?”
Clint came over to where Tony was standing with Bruce, notching an arrow and pointing it at Wanda. “Gotta go with the nerds on this one, Cap. Don’t trust them. And I don’t know why you do either. They’re Hydra, remember?”

“We are not Hydra!” Wanda said.

“Oh, I guess you just accidentally walked into their secret base and decided to volunteer for experiments and to kill people just for shits and giggles then,” Tony said. The faceplate was still up so the disdain could be seen clearly in his expression.

“We were trying to kill you, you murderer!” Wanda was yelling now, red mist gathering in her hands. “You killed our parents, destroyed our home, our lives. You deserve to die!” She launched herself at Tony but was intercepted by the new guy, who held onto her hands until he red glow that surrounded her disappeared.

“You will cease your attack, Miss Maximoff. You have done enough harm.” He sounded like Jarvis, it was weird.

“What the hell are you talking about, you lunatic? I haven’t murdered anyone. I don’t even know you.”

Wanda was still struggling in the new guy’s arms, snarling and twisting ineffectively. Steve felt bad for her, he knew what it was like to be helpless.

It was Pietro who answered, watching his sister’s plight with an expression Steve couldn’t read. “When we were 10, a bomb fell on our house and killed our parents. Wanda and I were trapped in the rubble for three days until rescue came.” Jesus, Steve thought. Poor kids. “One of the missiles didn’t blow. We just stared at it, wondering when it would go off and kill us too. It said ‘Stark’ on the side.” Jesus, Steve thought again. That was horrible. He looked up at Tony, wondering what he was going to say to that.

“Yeah, that’s awful and I’m sorry you had to go through that, but it’s not my fault. A weapon built by my company – used by who knows who – is not the same as me killing your parents. If you think that, you’re clearly delusional and need help.”

Steve stared at Tony incredulously. How could he be so callous about the harm his weapons did?

“You’re a murderer! A monster! I should have killed you when I had the chance instead of letting you take the scepter!” Wanda tried to get to Tony again, but the red guy wouldn’t let go.

“Okay, I’ve heard enough.” Tony nodded to the… thing… holding Wanda. He touched her forehead and she went limp in his arms. “And you,” he looked at Pietro. “You’re just as guilty as she is. Because of her there is a murderous robot trying to destroy the world.”

Pietro lowered his head. “I’m sorry. This wasn’t… we didn’t want this.”

“Oh, right, you just wanted to kill a man who had nothing to do with your personal tragedy,” Banner hissed, eyes glowing slightly green. “And now there are probably kids in Johannesburg who lost their parents because of you.”

“Stand down or we’ll knock you down.” Tony raised the second hand to point at Pietro. Clint had an arrow ready and Thor his hammer. They all looked angry.

Pietro raised his hands. “I surrender. Please don’t hurt my sister. She’s… she’s not well.”
“Oh, cry me a river.” Tony motioned for the kid to sit down. “Tell us everything you know about Ultron’s plans.”

As Pietro talked Steve just stood there, unsure of what to do. No one had listened to him before, and they were clearly not inclined to give the twins a chance. It bothered Steve, though he couldn’t quite articulate why. They had suffered, and they had decided to do the right thing eventually. Didn’t that deserve some consideration?

Maria Hill came to take the twins into custody once Pietro had told them what he knew. “Keep her sedated and isolated,” Tony told her. “She’s crazy and dangerous. I don’t want any more people getting their heads messed with.” Hill nodded and followed the security guards carrying an unconscious Wanda and a hand and feet-bound Pietro. Steve tried to protest that treatment, but no one paid any attention to him.

Tony, Bruce and Thor began making plans to deal with Ultron while Clint tried to contact Natasha through some of their old channels, or whatever it was. Steve was completely ignored, like he wasn’t even there.

“All right, guys, suit up. We have a world to save,” Tony said, standing up and nodding to the others.

“Wait. You can’t just –”

“Shut the fuck up, Steve. I haven’t forgotten you almost killed me on the word of little Miss Delusion there. I don’t give a shit about anything you have to say.”

Steve bristled. “I didn’t –”

Banner interrupted. “You threw your shield at him. If the armor hadn’t activated just then, he’d probably be dead.” His eyes, which had gone back to normal once the twins had been taken away, burned green again. “You sided with the woman who deliberately unleashed the Hulk on a civilian population for her misguided revenge. Your judgment obviously can’t be trusted.”

Clint nodded. “Yeah, Cap, that was bad. Really bad.”

“And Thor,” Tony said, “you put your hands on me again and I will end you. Got it?”

Thor shuffled uncomfortably. “My apologies, friend. I got carried away in the heat of the moment. I forget sometimes how fragile you are.”

“That’s no excuse. That was assault, plain and simple. You got a problem? You talk like fucking civilized people. I’m done being your doormat.” He turned to Steve. “And you, Cap,” he spat out the name, “I’m done with your sanctimonious bullshit. You’re in this one because we need everyone. After this is over, if we’re all still alive, we’re all gonna sit down like fucking adults and have a long talk about team building and what constitutes appropriate behavior. ‘Cause, frankly, at this point, this isn’t a team, it’s a fucking disaster.”

Steve could only stand there as the others left to go get ready, feeling small and insignificant. It wasn’t supposed to be this way.
Chapter Notes

Hello, people. A few notes before we start:

First, something I’d like to clarify: the scene in drabble 6 (Chapter 2) in which Steve reprimands Tony in the Tower was made up. I remember that he says “language” in the opening scene, when they’re getting the scepter, and I’m pretty sure it came up in another scene in the movie, so I created that little scenario to address that point. I mean, if Steve calls out “language” in the middle of a fucking *battle*, I assume it’s something of a habit and I extrapolated from there, but as far as I know it didn’t actually happen in canon.

Second, I’d also like to say that I’m working on another story (the sequel to Second Chances) that will have Consequences (that’s the title) for all of Team Cap in the aftermath of CW. So I’m not gonna do that here. This story will have little what-if drabbles for events *before* the end of CW.

Also, I’ve updated the tags and summary since this story has grown and changed a bit from what I originally posted thanks to your lovely response.

So, without further ado, here are a few more drabbles. Thanks everyone for the prompts (and for the kudos and comments). I’m slowly working through the list. And if you think of others, let me know. There’s always room for more. ;)

12. (prompt by ldskfjl)

Steve and Bucky entered the base silently, looking around for any sign of the Winter Soldiers and the fake doctor. They came to a large room with huge fishbowl-like structures. Cautiously, they came closer to see what was in the nearest one. There was a man, seemingly asleep.

“Well, well. What have we here?”

The voice came from everywhere at once. Steve swirled trying to find the source. Bucky touched his arm and pointed to a speaker on the wall.

“Where are you? Show yourself!” Steve shouted, still attempting to locate the man.

“Where is Mr Stark?” the doctor asked. “I was so hoping he’d come.”

Steve gripped the shield harder, but there was no target to throw it at. “Show yourself and face us, you coward!”

“Do I look stupid to you, Captain? I am well aware that I have no chance in a fight against you.”

“Then what do you want? Why did you do this? Kill all those people?”

“I wanted to destroy the Avengers, the same way you destroyed my family. But it looks like it’s just going to be us, unfortunately. It’s a pity. I guess I’ll have to settle for destroying you one at a time. It
will not be as satisfying, but needs must, I suppose.”

“You’re not gonna get away with this. We’ll defeat you,” Steve said, putting all the conviction he felt into his voice.

“Oh, Captain. You are very wrong.” He started to say things in a language Steve didn’t understand.

Bucky backed away, hands going to his ears. “No. No! Stop it!” he yelled, but the voice just got louder.

“Bucky! Bucky, it’s okay. Listen to me! I’m here, it’s gonna be okay. I won’t let him hurt you.”

“You should be more worried about yourself, Captain.” The doctor said two more words and Bucky went still, straightening up and staring off into space.

“Bucky! Bucky!”

The doctor said something else in that strange language and before Steve had the chance to do anything, Bucky backhanded him hard enough to throw him all the way across the room.

“Bucky, please… You don’t want to do this.” There was no answer. Bucky just kept coming, throwing kicks and punches Steve was having a hard time dodging. “I won’t fight you. Please!” It felt like being back in the Helicarrier, trapped and unable to help his best friend. He could only hope that Bucky would snap out of it.

He wasn’t sure how much time had passed when he heard movement coming from behind him. His whole body ached from the many hits he’d taken, and Bucky was still going strong, never letting up for a second. As much as he didn’t want to, Steve realized he’d have to fight back or he’d end up dead. He tried to stand and turn around, but a kick to the head sent him back down. There were two more people standing there now, both men with the same blank face. Shit. The other Winter Soldiers.

Desperate, Steve tried to run, only to find three others (two men and a woman) suddenly blocking his way. He’d already lost the shield at some point during the fight with Bucky, now it was only him against the 5 (no, six, with Bucky) Winter Soldiers. As hard as he fought, Steve was outmatched and was soon bleeding helplessly on the floor. No, it couldn’t end like this.

“I wasn’t going to release the Winter Soldiers, you know.” The doctor’s voice rang out in the quiet that followed, though Steve could hardly hear it with the way his whole body screamed in agony. “But since Iron Man didn’t show up, I guess making the threat real is the next best thing. Now you can die knowing that this happened because of you. So long, Captain. May you rot in hell.”

Steve heard the man’s steps fading away just before a metal fist closed around his neck and lifted him up like a rag doll.

“Bucky,” he mumbled through an increasingly crushed throat. “Please…”

There was a slight twitch in Bucky’s eyes and he was released. Steve fell awkwardly and another of the soldiers grabbed him from behind in a headlock. The last thing he saw before his neck was snapped was Bucky’s horror-filled eyes.

(AN: Since the movies always ignore real-world logic, let’s assume Steve’s notion that the Winter Soldier could be de-frosted by popping them in the microwave in a matter of minutes, and were therefore an eminent threat to be dealt with immediately, makes sense.)
Bruce tried to pay attention to what Tony was saying, but he was tired. It had been a long flight and he just wanted to go to bed and sleep for a few hours. He should have told Tony they could talk later.

He startled awake when his glasses fell on his lap and saw Tony looking at him.

“Are you with me?” Tony asked.

“Sorry… I was, yeah. We were at… uhm..” Damn, he should have been paying attention.

“Where you actively napping?”

“I was… I drifted.” Shit.

“Where did I lose you?”

“Ah…” What had Tony been talking about? “Elevator in Switzerland.” Bruce hoped he’d only dozed off for a moment.

“So you heard none of it?” There was an edge of hurt in the other’s voice that made Bruce feel very uncomfortable.

He tried to play it off. “I’m sorry. I’m not that kind of doctor. I’m not a therapist, it’s not my training.”

“So?”

“I don’t have the…”

“What? The time?” There was definitely hurt there now.

“Temperament.”

Tony looked at him for a long time, expression closed off and distant. “I wasn’t looking for a therapist. I thought I was talking to a friend. Guess I was wrong. Sorry, my mistake.” He gave Bruce one last cold look and stood up. “I won’t bother you anymore. Jarvis will show you out.” He left.

Bruce sat there for several minutes, realizing he’d acted like a complete jerk and Tony had every right to be upset. He wanted to find him and apologize, to explain that he hadn’t been dismissing Tony, he was just not at his best just now.

“Dr Banner,” Jarvis said in an icily polite tone. “If you’ll please proceed to the elevator.”

Reluctantly, Bruce got up. Shit, he’d really fucked up here. Idiot! He’d find a way to make it up to Tony, he thought. If I even get the chance, that is. Damn it!

As he walked out of the building, he couldn’t help wonder if he’d just destroyed the best friendship he was ever likely to have.
Steve ran into the living room at Sam’s shout to find the TV on on a news channel.

“We have just received confirmation that 6 people were killed this morning by the assassin known as the Winter Soldier,” a reporter said. A picture of Bucky appeared on the screen on her right. “Details are still sketchy at this point regarding the motive for the killings, but we know that this man began attacking people in a convenience store in Seattle early this morning. Images from the store’s surveillance camera clearly show the Winter Soldier punching a man and kicking another.” The video showing just that played as she spoke. “Those two men died at the scene. Another five people, including a 12 year-old boy, were injured in the confusion. The Winter Soldier then fled the scene on foot and was chased by police officers. The chase caused several car accidents, resulting in 4 more deaths, including a 5 year-old child, and 12 injured. At the moment, both the FBI and the CIA are searching for the suspect and a hotline has been set up for anyone who has information about this man.” Bucky’s picture took the center of the screen, a phone number underneath. “If you see him, call the police immediately. Do not approach. He is extremely dangerous.”

Steve stared at the TV as the reporter began talking about something else. “We have to go. I have to find him.”

Sam, looking rather uncomfortable, nodded.

They got Natasha and their gear and took off in the new Avengers’ quinjet.

Once in the air, Steve couldn’t sit still and went to stand by Nat in the pilot seat. “How long till we get there?” he asked anxiously.

“An hour.”

It wasn’t supposed to be like this, Steve thought. He’d been sure that Bucky had broken out of Hydra’s conditioning, that he’d remembered who he was. How could this have happened?

He went back into the jet to speak to Sam. “What else do we know?”

His friend got his phone and began to search for more information. They found the full video of Bucky attacking people in the store. With one kick he sent a man flying. He broke the arm of another one who tried to get away from him. Steve watched, horrified, as people screamed and ran in terror.

“It wasn’t Bucky,” he whispered. “He’s not in his right mind.”

“I don’t think that will matter much to the families of those people,” Sam said, just as horrified as Steve. “Damn it, Cap! I thought you said he was out of Hydra’s control!”

“That’s what I thought. I thought…”

“We should have gotten Stark and the others on the search for him. We might have been able to find him before this, got him some help. Those people might not have died.”

Steve shook his head. No, he couldn’t involve Tony, not after what he’d learned about the Starks. Tony wouldn’t help if he knew the truth. It was better if he was kept away from Bucky.

“Guys!” Natasha called, and Steve and Sam crammed themselves into the cockpit to see what was going on.

On the jet’s small screen, the same reporter from before was speaking. “Breaking news. The Winter Soldier has been killed in a confrontation with a SWAT strike team just a few minutes ago. Following an anonymous tip, the team closed in on the assassin’s location. One of the SWAT
officers was hurt in the struggle, but a sniper was able to take down the Soldier before any more people got hurt.”

*Oh god, oh god. Bucky!* Steve slumped to the floor of the jet, tears running down his face. No. No, this couldn’t be happening. Bucky couldn’t be dead. *Oh god…*

(AN: The idea here is that Bucky was triggered and had a flashback because of his massive PTSD and snapped. He didn’t mean to kill people, but he’s dangerously unstable and, let’s face it, a disaster waiting to happen.)

15.

Wanda sat quietly in a corner of an empty room in the big ship. Pietro was dead. Her brother, her *twin*, was dead. Ultron had killed him and now she was all alone in the world. There was nothing left for her. Ultron had already been destroyed, so she couldn’t even take it out on him anymore.

“Wanda?”

She turned to see Clint standing by the door. He looked at her with pity. She hated it. She didn’t want pity, she wanted Pietro back. She wanted her country whole again.

“Come on, we need to debrief.”

He took her arm gently and she repressed the urge to throw him across the room. He was the reason her brother was dead.

They entered a big conference room where the others were already waiting. The Captain gave her a smile as she walked in, but she turned her head away. The Black Widow and Thor were standing further back and Stark was speaking to that… thing… he’d created. Only Banner was missing. Her eyes narrowed at Stark and her hands itched to wrap around his neck. He was the reason for all of this, he created Ultron and got Pietro killed and Sokovia destroyed.

A black man with an eye patch and a white woman in a body suit similar to the Widow’s entered and sat down, motioning for the rest of them to do the same. The woman watched Wanda with suspicion. Wanda thought she should just kill them all.

“All right, what the fuck happened?” the man asked, looking around the room.

After a somewhat strained silence, the Captain answered. “We defeated Ultron.”

The other man raised his one visible eyebrow. “Really? That’s what we’re calling it? Doing a Pollyanna there, Cap?” Wanda had no idea what that was supposed to mean, and by the look on the Captain’s face, neither did he. “It seems to me that’s not really all that happened.” He paused. “And where the fuck is Banner?”

It was the Black Widow who answered this time. “He’s gone. Took off after the fight.”

“Well, I wonder if it has something to do with the fact that Cap there invited Little Missy Red Misty to fight with us. ‘Cause I sure as hell don’t want to be anywhere near her,” Stark said, glaring at Wanda. She bristled.

“Hey, lay off.” “Leave her be, Tony, she helped us,” Clint and the Captain said, almost at the same time.
“Fuck you both. She tried to kill us, messed with our heads, unleashed the Hulk on a civilian population, and you’re defending her? What the fuck is the matter with you?”

“I should have killed you when I had the chance, Stark. This is all on you! You killed my parents! You killed my brother!” Wanda gathered her power and threw it at him, but the thing he’d created intercepted and absorbed it.

“Stand down, Miss Maximoff,” it said.

“And I didn’t kill anyone. You fucked with my head and you sided with Ultron to help him. If anyone is to blame here, it’s you, you fucking crazy bitch!”

No, she would not be denied her vengeance again. She should have killed him before. She would not fail again. Pietro deserved it, her country deserved it. Red mist surged through her hands, her anger and pain making it even stronger. This would be the end of him; he’d pay for everything he’d done.

The thing rushed at her before she could unleash her full power. She tried to free herself from its grip to no avail. It did something to her and she felt herself losing consciousness. “No!”

When she woke up, she was in a cell. When she tried to use her power nothing happened. No matter how hard she concentrated it wouldn’t come to her. No, it couldn’t be. All she’d been through with Hydra to get it, to make herself strong enough for her revenge on the man who’d destroyed her life… it couldn’t have been for nothing. “No!”

She screamed for what felt like hours. No one came.

Months later, she stood in a courtroom listening as the prosecutor gave his closing argument, painting her as a monster. She could see the members of the jury watching her in fear and disgust. They deliberated for less than 30 minutes before coming back with a guilty on all charges verdict. She was sentenced to 40 years.

(AN: Since I don’t think anyone would have developed the collar at the end of AoU, I’m going with the idea that Vision took away Wanda’s power – something I’ve seen in several fics and which I particularly love. Also, I have no idea about sentencing and all I know about law is what I learned from watching Law & Order, so let’s pretend all that court stuff happened and this sentence makes sense.)
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

I’m sorry for the delay with this chapter. I was really busy with work last week and the one day I had for writing I woke up with a killer headache and didn’t get anything done. So, to make up for it, this time we have 5 drabbles. I hope you like them.

16. (prompt by gottabekiddinme)

Natasha walked into the building calmly and confidently, wondering why Pepper Potts had called her. It had been a couple of weeks since the incident at the Expo with Hammer and Vanko, and Potts had most certainly been very busy. Being CEO of a company like Stark Industries was a lot of work, and wrangling Tony Stark was probably even more challenging. Natasha was rather glad she no longer had to deal with the man. Her assessment was done and she could go back to more important missions than baby-sitting reckless billionaires with huge egos.

The woman at the reception desk greeted Natasha and told her Miss Potts was expecting her.

Always vigilant, Natasha kept a sharp eye on her surroundings but saw nothing unusual. Potts’ secretary smiled at her as she passed by.

“Miss Potts,” Natasha said, slipping back into the Natalie Rushman persona effortlessly as she entered the office. “You wanted to see me?”

Potts was typing on a tablet in front of her and speaking to someone on the phone. “My appointment is here. We’ll finish it later.” She then looked over at Natasha, gesturing at the chair in front of her desk. Once Natasha was seated, Potts smiled. It was not a friendly smile.

“Miss Rushman,” she began, then paused. “Oops, sorry. I mean Miss Romanoff.”

Natasha inclined her head but said nothing, waiting to get a better understanding of the situation.

“I suppose you are wondering why I asked you here.”

“I’m sure you’ll tell me when you think it best.” Natasha made herself look as harmless as possible, even if she knew it wouldn’t entirely fool the other woman. Potts was smarter than that.

“Yes, I will tell you.” She smiled a shark-like smile again and reached for an envelope on the desk on her right. “You entered this company under false pretenses, lied to me and Tony and sought to use that position to manipulate and endanger Tony. I will not stand for it, Miss Romanoff.” She handed the envelope over to Natasha, who took it warily. “We are pursuing legal action against you and your superiors for falsifying documents, industrial espionage, and sabotage.” Potts leaned back in her chair and watched Natasha coldly.

This was not what she’d been expecting, Natasha thought. For a while she did nothing, trying to figure out the best course of action to take.

“I’m sorry, Miss Potts. I think we have a misunderstanding here,” she said at last, voice meek and apologetic. Placating Potts seemed like a better idea than taking her on as an enemy. Perhaps she
could talk her way out of this one. Natasha still had some tricks up her sleeve, after all, and some leverage with Stark.

“Yes, I think we do. I think you think you can just get away with this, and you can’t. You and SHIELD will not mess with Tony or this company.”

“Surely we can work out a civil solution to this problem. I’m sure Mr Stark would prefer that.”

Potts narrowed her eyes. “Do you see Tony here? No, Miss Romanoff. You are dealing with me now, not Tony. And you will find that I am not nearly as forgiving.” She stood, looking down at Natasha as if she was a disgusting bug. “You stood by as Tony was dying and did nothing to help him. You lied to him and used him for your own gain. You pretended to be concerned and helpful, all the while lying through your treacherous teeth.”

“And he lied to you about a lot of things.”

“Perhaps, but that doesn’t change what you did. I will forgive Tony a lot of things, Miss Romanoff, because I know what kind of man he is and I care about him. You, on the other hand, are nothing to me. So I will see to it that neither you nor SHIELD ever get your dirty little hands on him again.”

Natasha remained seated as if they were still having a civil discussion. “I was only sent to do an assessment, Miss Potts, to evaluate how Mr Stark behaves under duress and this seemed like the best way to do it. I am not to blame for his health problems or his reckless actions.”

Pott’s eyes narrowed again. “I don’t give a rat’s ass about your mission,” she hissed the word, “or your evaluation or any of that. And I also find it extremely concerning that you risked this company, with all the hundreds of thousands of people who depend on it for their livelihoods, for an ‘evaluation’. That, Miss Rushman, is sabotage.” She pressed a button on the tablet. “I hope you have some good lawyers, because you’re going to need them.”

Two security guards appeared at the door.

“I’m sure you could take them if you wanted to, but then we’d have to add assault charges to your list of crimes, and that wouldn’t really go well for you, would it?” Potts said. She turned to the guards. “Please escort Miss Romanoff out.”

Natasha stood. Fury was not going to be happy about this.

“Oh, and there’s a restraining order in there too, barring you from going anywhere near Tony, myself and all Stark Industries properties.”

Clenching her teeth silently, Natasha allowed herself to be led out. She hated to admit it, but she’d been bested.

(AN: Thank you to the people who explained industrial espionage to me and to izumi2 for a bit of dialogue up there.)

17. (prompt by Crosshairs and AmbitiousWitch)

“She’s a kid!” Steve said, exasperated. God, it was hopeless to even try to talk to Tony. He just didn’t understand anything. It was already bad enough that poor Wanda was being vilified by the media, now Tony was locking her up too? And calling her a weapon of mass destruction? Damn it!
There was silence after his outburst. Sam opened the door and came in, giving Steve a friendly nod. Good, Steve thought, someone he could count on. Maybe the two of them could get Tony to see reason.

“Okay, so let me see if I got this straight,” Tony said, looking at Steve with an intensity that made him uncomfortable, still sitting calmly. “Wanda is just a kid?” He paused before continuing. “Even though she is actually 26 years-old and therefore not a kid by any sane definition.”

“You know what I mean.” Christ, Tony was so aggravating.

“Actually, no I don’t. I have absolutely no idea how she could be a kid in your mind. Do you know what I was doing at 26? Running a company. Hey, Sam, what were you doing at 26?”

Sam frowned. “Look, guys –”

Tony cut him off. “Oh, I know, you were serving your country as an Air Force officer. Do you think you were a kid then? And Cap, at 26 – which was only, what, four years ago? – you were fighting aliens. So, explain to me how she’s a kid when the rest of us – hell, the rest of the world – were doing very adult things at that age.”

Steve didn’t know how to answer that, which frustrated him to no end. This was why he hated talking to Tony – he always felt like he was losing and he hated it.

“And furthermore, if she is a kid, somehow, by some crazy definition, then what the fuck was she doing with you in the middle of a fucking battlefield in Lagos? Shouldn’t she have been at home, safe and protected from the big bad world? Or is she just a kid when it’s convenient to you? Like when she has to face consequences for her actions?”

Again, there was nothing Steve could think to say to that. He clenched his fists and glared at Tony.

“So I’m going to say it again,” he looked at Sam now, who seemed pensive. “I’ve managed to get a deal to clear you both from your idiotic actions and get Barnes the help he desperately needs. All you have to do is sign the damn Accords and let me handle the rest.”

Sam looked from Tony to Steve as if searching for something. Steve shook his head slightly, teeth grinding together in silent anger. He didn’t want to let Tony win.

“Let me be clear here,” Tony said, standing up and giving Sam the other pen in his fancy set. “If you don’t sign this now, you’re going to end up in a world of trouble. More than you already are, that is. Signing will show the world that you can be reasoned with. We can go over the Accords together and get amendments for the things you’re uncomfortable with. It’s not set in stone.” He sighed. “Come on, guys, work with me here. We can do this together.”

There was no hesitation anymore as Sam picked up the stupid pen and signed the document Tony shoved in front of him. Steve felt betrayed.

“What about Wanda?” Steve asked, still displeased about giving in.

“What about her? She’ll stay at the Compound until the worst of it blows over. It’s for her own protection. As I said, her visa is up in the air and there are a lot of angry people who’d like nothing more than her head on a platter.”

Steve came closer to loom over Tony. He needed to do something about the anger and helplessness that seemed to be trying to choke him. “And whose fault is that?” The situation had spiraled completely out of his control and he hated it.
Tony didn’t back down. “Yours, actually. You’re the one who took her in that mission when she’s clearly untrained and doesn’t know what she’s doing.” He turned to Sam. “Is that how things were done in the military, Sam? Did you just take untrained people on a dangerous mission?”

Steve didn’t like where this was going. “We didn’t –” Steve tried to say before Sam could come up with a reply.

“Oh, shut up.” For the first time, Tony raised his voice, eyes blazing. “This is all on you, Cap. You fucked up and now people are mad as hell. And that’s fine, it happens. But instead of admitting it, acknowledging it and making amends, you stand there like your shit doesn’t stink. Wake up! It’s time to face the music. Sign it now, before things get even worse. And in case it’s escaped your notice, it’s bad enough already. Grow the fuck up and take some fucking responsibility! Start acting like a fucking leader!” He gestured at the second copy of the Accords on the table.

Sam was looking away from him, out into the hallway. It was obvious he agreed with Tony – he’d signed the damn thing, after all. Steve felt defeated, small and alone as he picked up the document. This was not the kind of fight he could win, or even knew how to fight. He had no choice but to sign.

(AN: I know that Sam and the Accords document weren’t there in the movie scene, but since this is an AU I took the liberty of putting them there for dramatic purposes. And because Sam deserved to know about the deal he’d been offered.)

18. (prompt by Leefdoor)

“Stand down, now,” Col Rhodes said. He had repulsors aimed at Steve and Bucky. They were all surrounded by task force people with guns. There was nothing to do but back down. Steve put his shield behind his back. “Congratulations, Cap. You’re a criminal.”

The officers came closer and forced Bucky to the ground, cuffing his hands behind his back as Sam came out of the tunnel with guns pointed at him. Steve was also cuffed, still staring at the man dressed in black who had been trying to kill Bucky. Was he with Ross? The man had his hands raised already as the officers approached him with guns drawn. He took off his mask, but Steve had no idea who he was.

“Your Highness,” Rhodes said. “I’m afraid you’re under arrest.” Highness? Steve thought. Who the heck was this guy?

Royalty or not, he was cuffed like the rest of them and they were all taken a line of waiting vehicles, one to each. When Steve realized he’d be separated from Bucky he couldn’t stay silent anymore. “Look, this has –” he began, but Rhodes cut him off, still in the armor but now with the faceplate up.

“Shut the fuck up, Rogers. At least three people are dead because of you and several more might still die before the day is over. So. Shut. Your. Damn. Mouth.” There was fury in Rhodes’s eyes and voice, and Steve was momentarily taken aback.

“This wasn’t –”

“I don’t care. Romanoff told you not to get involved but you didn’t listen. Now people are dead. Do you understand that? This is exactly what the Accords were about. Congratulations, you’ve just proven everyone’s fears right. Again. I hope you’re happy.”

“They were going to kill Bucky,” he said, because no one seemed to understand that.
Rhodes only stared. “Are you kidding me? Are you saying it’s okay that you killed innocent people because you were trying to save your assassin terrorist friend? Is that really what you’re saying? That no one else’s lives matter, only his?”

Steve looked around and noticed several cameras pointed their way, people gaping and staring. “He wasn’t responsible for the bombing.” He needed to make people understand that. “He’s innocent.”

“So again you are saying that your friend is the only thing that matters. Because even if he is innocent of the bombing – and the evidence shows otherwise – he’s still guilty of what just happened. As are you. And you’re saying none of that matters, that the people you just killed don’t matter.” He paused, looking back at the cameras. “This is not what the Avengers are about. We’re here to protect people. All people, not just your best friend. You don’t deserve to be an Avenger.” He turned away, as if he couldn’t even look at Steve anymore, disgust clear on his expression. “Just get in the car.”

Steve thought about fighting, making a break for it and taking Bucky with him. He sought out Bucky’s eyes further up the line of cars and found his friend watching him with a sad look. Before Steve could say anything, Bucky got into the car. Sam did the same, not even meeting Steve’s eyes.

At the trial, the prosecution played the tape of Steve and Rhodes’s conversation and Steve could see that it didn’t go over well with the jury. He tried once more to explain what he’d meant, but it didn’t make any difference. He was convicted and sent to jail.

Bucky was sent to a psychiatric facility after it was discovered that he really hadn’t been responsible for the bombing and evidence of what he’s suffered at Hydra’s hand was taken into consideration. Sam got a lighter sentence, as he hadn’t been involved in the fight until the end, but still ended up in jail. The black guy, the son of King T’Chaka of Wakanda, was sent back to his country in disgrace and his sister took the throne.

The man actually responsible for the bombing, a guy from Sokovia named Helmut Zemo, was apprehended trying to sneak into the place Bucky was being held and confessed to everything. He was also convicted and sent to jail.

In his cell, Steve got news of the Avengers, now led by Rhodes and working within the Accords.

He lost everything.

(AN: I originally wrote this scene with Tony, then I actually re-watched the movie and realized it wasn’t Tony there but Rhodey. So here he gets his moment to shine.)

19. (prompt by hyzenthlay2323 and JackSparrow789)

It was supposed to be an easy mission. Steve and the Commandos had heard of a possible Hydra based in occupied Austria. The plan was to get in, destroy the place and get out. It was supposed to be simple, but it started going wrong the second they stepped into the town.

First, there were too many people on the streets, a lot more than they’d anticipated, and they were spotted. Bucky and some of the others thought they should abort the mission, arguing that they needed more intel on the situation. It was only their fourth mission, and Steve was eager to prove himself, and for that he needed results, not to turn back home at the first sign of trouble, so he’d told them they could still complete the mission and not waste a trip.

They got to the base quickly and Steve gave the order to storm in and take everybody down. He
went in first, letting the shield fly and killing the three startled guards instantly to prevent an alarm from being sounded. Time and stealth were essential, after all. He barely looked at them, moving swiftly on, eager to finish the mission before reinforcements arrived and high on the adrenaline of the fight. He had just burst into a second room and easily dispatched the other guards when he heard a shout from one of his men.

Gabe came running in, face pale. “Cap! Cap!”

“What?” Steve asked, getting ready for a real fight.

“This isn’t Hydra.”

“What?” This time Steve looked back at the soldiers he’d just taken care of. Their uniforms were wrong. It wasn’t the black of Hydra, it was more grayish, and there was no swastika. Shit.

“It’s just a regular factory,” Gabe said, staring with horrified eyes at the people on the ground.

No, Steve thought, that can’t be. Their intel said it was Hydra. Maybe they were just hiding it better now that they knew the Allies were on to them, and that there were people around in the town.

Bucky entered the room and grimaced at the sight if the dead soldiers. Factory workers. “We need to get out of here. Now.”

They got back to their transport in record time. Morita and Falsworth seemed really shaken and stared off into space the whole trip back to base, occasionally muttering something under their breath. Dum Dum gave Steve a hard look but said nothing. Bucky wouldn’t meet Steve’s eyes. Steve didn’t know what to do, and was trying very hard not to think about the people at the factory.

When they arrived back at base, Philips called them all to the conference room for the debrief and stood at the head of the table with an unreadable expression.

“So, Cap,” (and the title seemed to be more insulting than respectful) “what the fuck happened?”

“We had intel about a Hydra base, you know that,” he said, trying to stall so he had more time to think of something to say, some way to explain what had happened. “Our goal was to destroy it.”

“And what did you do before you rushed in guns blazing?”

“There were too many civilians in the area, we had to move quickly or we’d lose the element of surprise.”

“So you didn’t bother to do any checking before you started killing people? No recon into the building? No scouting of the area?”

“We couldn’t have known –”

“Bullshit.” Philips looked him dead in the eye and Steve felt even smaller than he used to be before the serum. “You could have known if you had checked. That’s exactly why we do recon! What kind of moron are you?!” He turned to Bucky. “Sergeant? Anything you’d like to say?”

Bucky lowered his head and answered after a slight hesitation. “I thought we should abort the mission when we realized how many civilians there were around the area.”

“Anyone else?” Philips stared at each of the Commandos in turn and they all fidgeted and murmured the same thing as Bucky. “You’re all confined to your quarters until I decide what to do with you.”
Dismissed, everyone filed out, leaving just Steve and Bucky standing by the door.

“Bucky…”

“Steve, you fucked up. You fucked up badly. Innocent people got killed.” Steve winced. “You…” Bucky sighed, running a hand through his head and looking away from Steve. “You’ve changed. You’ve always been too eager to get into fights, but now… now you don’t even think about it anymore, you just charge in.” He turned his gaze back to Steve. “I’ve been trying to cover for you, but we have to face it, Steve. You don’t know what you’re doing, and that makes you dangerous.” Steve opened his mouth to reply but Bucky continued undeterred. “I know you want to help, but you’re not. Not like this, not without serious training. Being strong isn’t all there is to being a soldier, and you need to realize this.” He shook his head. “I don’t think I can help you anymore.” With one last sad look, Bucky walked away from him.

The next day, Steve was shipped back to the States. After everything, he wouldn’t get to fight in the war, wouldn’t get to stand beside Bucky. He was useless again.

20. (prompt by izumi2)

“Who are they?” Bucky asked, looking warily at the new-comers. There was something odd about the woman, something that made the hair in the back of his neck stand up.

“This is Clint,” Steve pointed at the shorter man.

“Hey,” the man said.

“This is… uhm…”

“Scott Lang.” He smiled widely. “Nice to meet you,” he said, nodding at Bucky. Bucky thought he seemed a bit like an overeager puppy, but maybe it was just that Bucky wasn’t used to being around people anymore.

“And this is Wanda.”

She smiled at him and Bucky turned away discreetly. There was something creepy about her. Sam asked Clint a question and Bucky took the opportunity of her distraction to get closer to Steve.

“What’s the story with her?” he whispered.

“Wanda? Tony had her locked up at the Compound.”


“It wasn’t her fault, she was trying to help people. She did help. We can’t save everybody.” He shrugged and Bucky was confused. None of that made any sense to him.

Still, he let it go, just kept an eye on her. It was several minutes later that Bucky remembered something he’d seen about her on the news – damn his crappy memory. What had he heard exactly? Something about Hydra…

“Bucky?” Bucky startled, tensing up. “It’s just me, it’s okay,” Steve said. Right, just Steve.

The woman was sitting farther away talking with Clint. Bucky turned to Steve. “She’s Hydra.”

“What? No, she isn’t. I mean, not anymore. She was just… misguided, that’s all.”
Bucky could only stare. He stood abruptly, making a loud noise as his metal arm hit the wall behind him with a clang. The others turned their attention to them.

“You were with Hydra,” Bucky said, voice cold, staring at her. “What did you do? Who did you kill?”

She looked like a deer caught in headlights, staring from him to Steve and the others. He took a step toward her, fury and pain surging within him. No, no more Hydra.

“I didn’t…”

“I saw the news,” he said, as things started to come back to him. She had been with that robot thing in Sokovia, the news had said. She had powers. Powers that she got from Hydra. “You’re Hydra. Who did you kill for them?”

“Bucky,” Steve tried to say, putting a hand on his arm and drawing him back a little.

He shook the hand off. “Are you crazy? Why are you defending her? Don’t you know what Hydra is? What they do?” His voice broke a bit at the end and Bucky took a deep breath, trying to get himself under control. “She volunteered for their experiments. Volunteered!”

“She was misguided, Bucky, she didn’t know –”

“Why don’t you let her talk, Steve? Let’s hear what she has to say. She still hasn’t answered my question. Who. Did. You. Kill?” He enunciated slowly, glaring at her with hatred.

“I didn’t… I didn’t…”

“Liar! You messed with people’s heads! It was on the news. People in Sokovia talked about it.” He looked at Steve. “She messed with people’s heads! Like they did to me! How can you stand to be around her? Has she messed with your head? Is that why you’re defending her? She killed people and you’re defending her?” He shook his head. “No, I can’t… I can’t… get her away from me. Steve, help me, please.”

Steve looked torn, switching his gaze between Bucky and Wanda. The creepy woman had tears in her eyes, but Bucky wasn’t fooled. She was no innocent girl. She was Hydra. Shit, that Tony guy had the right idea in locking her up. And now she was free again because of Steve. Free to invade people’s minds and warp them to her own gain… No, no, he wouldn’t let her. With an anguished cry, he launched himself at her, and was thrown backwards into the far wall. Red mist gathered around her and Bucky could only stare, horrified, as she wrapped it around her hands. Oh, God.

“Wanda, stop it!” Steve yelled, getting in between her and Bucky. While the rest of them were distracted trying to calm her down, Bucky ran. He heard Steve call out to him but didn’t stop, just ran as fast as he could. He had to get away. Away from Hydra, from the chair, from everything. He just wanted to be left alone.


“Are you with the Hydra woman?” Bucky asked, readying himself for a fight.

Vision frowned. “If you mean Miss Maximoff, then no. In fact, she and Agent Barton attacked me and left the Compound without permission. We are here to apprehend her, as well as Mr Rogers and Wilson.”
“They’re over there.” He pointed at the way he’d come. “If I surrender, can you promise to keep her away from me?”

The man tilted his head slightly. “If that is your wish, certainly.”

“Then I surrender. Let’s get out of here quickly, before she catches up.”

Bucky was led to a jet where other people were waiting, including the black guy from before. “I didn’t set the bomb, I swear. I had nothing to do with it,” Bucky said, trying to avoid another fight. He was tired of fighting…

“If that’s true, we’ll clear it up soon enough,” the guy in the red and gold suit of armor said. Bucky thought this was the Tony Steve had mentioned earlier.

Bucky waited in the jet with Vision while the others left to get Steve and his team. Bucky asked what had happened at the Compound and was appalled at the attack Vision had suffered at the Hydra woman’s hand. Bucky had been right about her. She was dangerous and Bucky wanted nothing to do with her. He also remembered about the threat of the Winter Soldiers and that doctor and told Vision so someone could do something about it – he certainly never wanted to go near that man again. Vision assured him it would be dealt with.

It wasn’t long before Vision got the message that the others had been apprehended. As he was promised, Bucky was taken back to the detention center in a different jet from the others and didn’t object as they put him in restraints. Vision remained by his side to protect him and others from him. Bucky was grateful.

It didn’t take long for him to be cleared from the bombing, but he would still have to answer for what had happened in Bucharest. He was promised help and a secure environment, and Bucky was almost glad. As long as he stayed away from Hydra, it was fine with him. He was tired of running. He should have just surrendered in Bucharest.

Steve kept trying to contact him, but Bucky refused to talk to him. He needed to figure out who he was now, and having Steve around to remind him of who he used to be – and would never be again – would just be too painful. It was time to be his own person and make his own decisions. And he wasn’t sure he could trust Steve anyway, not if he was so ready to defend Hydra…

(AN: Okay, this got away from me a bit. Hope it works anyway.)
Hi everyone. First, once again, I’d like to thank everyone for your support and encouragement. And for all the ideas. My prompt list currently has 54 items on it. I can’t promise that I’ll write them all, but I’ll try to do as many as I can.

I think I can manage a weekly update for this story while also having time to work on the next story in the Second Chances series. Fingers crossed.

This week we have some Ant-Man-related drabbles and a couple of others.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

21. (prompt by VeraNera)

They were having dinner when the doorbell rang. Scott looked at Hank and Hope, who seemed surprised by it. They clearly weren’t expecting anyone (Hank was a bit of a recluse, after all, and it was rather late for deliveries or services).

Hank got up to answer it and Hope and Scott followed, curious.

“Hank Pym?” a man who looked like a courier asked.

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“Please sign.” He thrust a rather thick envelope at Hank and a clipboard with a pen. Hope came forward to take the envelope while Hank signed. The courier thanked him, wished them a good night, and left.

“What is it?” Scott asked once Hank had closed the door and turned his attention back to the ominous package.

Hope shrugged and unsealed the envelope, walking back into the dining room. “Shit,” she exclaimed.

“What?” Hank and Scott said together.

In answer, Hope showed them the pages. It looked like legal papers.

“We’re being sued by Stark Industries for theft and industrial espionage,” she said with a hard look at Hank and Scott.

Scott raised his hands. “Hey, it wasn’t my idea,” was the best he could say in his own defense. Shit. That did not sound good. After everything that had happened with Cross, Scott had been sure he’d be okay.

They had to appear at court the next day. Scott stood stiff and uncomfortable, reminded of the last time he’d been in this kind of position, right before being sentenced to prison. Damn. He should have run for the hills as soon as he’d heard Hank’s crazy proposal. Now he was screwed.
He couldn’t really say he understood what the lawyers were on about, but from the look on Hope and Hank’s face, it was not good.

In the end, Pym Technologies had to pay a heck of a lot of money to Stark Industries for damages or something and Scott ended up back in prison as he’d been the one to actually do the stealing. In his cell, he cursed himself endlessly, unable to forget the look of disappointment and disillusionment on Cassie and Maggie’s face.

22. (prompt by VeraNera)

Scott was grinning from ear to ear as he reached out and took out another wire. He was inside the Iron Man suit! He was fighting the good fight beside Captain America, his childhood hero!

“You’re gonna have to take this into the shop.”

“Who’s speaking?”

“It’s your conscience. We don’t talk a lot these days.” He said, gleeful and giddy. He reached for the next wire and suddenly his whole body went stiff, then convulsed as electricity surged through him. He didn’t even get to scream, jaw locked in place.

When he came to, he was on the ground, still in Ant-Man mode. His body tingled and sparkled with pain, but he managed to press the button to get himself back to normal size, just in time for a flying car to land on his head. He passed out again.

The next time he woke up he was in a hospital bed, one hand handcuffed to the railing and Hope’s angry face staring down at him. She screamed for what seemed like hours, telling him in excruciating detail just how much of an idiot he’d been.

“Not only did you almost get yourself killed, you almost killed Tony Stark with that stunt. You are fucking lucky the man has multiple failsafes on his suit, or you would be looking at a murder charge in addition to all the other charges!”

Even in the Ant-Man suit, Scott had never felt so small.

Once he was recovered, he was sent back to jail to await trial (bail was denied, not that he’d even had any money to pay for it, and Hope made it more than clear that she was done with him) alongside other members of Cap’s team, Wilson, Barton and Wanda. Cap and his buddy with the metal arm had managed to flee in the confusion after Scott’s injury and were still at large.

Scott felt even smaller when Maggie brought Cassie over for a last visit and told him she was done with giving him chances. Scott could only curse himself for his stupidity and for all that he’d lost. Again.

23. (prompt by FoxDragon)

“We need a diversion,” Wilson said. “Something big.”

“I got something kinda big. But I can’t hold it very long.” The fight really wasn’t going their way, and Scott wanted to help. He wanted to say he’d been useful to Captain America. That he’d helped save the world from Hydra. That was the whole point of being a superhero, wasn’t it? “On my
signal, run like hell. And if I tear myself in half, don’t come back for me.” Not that that would happen (Scott hoped), but it was a good dramatic gesture, right? He was in the big league now, and that was what they did, right? Sacrifice themselves so that the world could live? Scott was totally getting into the superhero groove.

“He’s gonna tear himself in half?” someone asked. Scott thought it was Cap’s friend, but he couldn’t be sure. He’d barely talked to the guy, after all.

“You sure about this, Scott?” Cap asked and Scott glowed with pride. Cap was gonna depend on him for something.

“I do it all the time.” He wanted to brag, but he also didn’t want to be a liar, so he went on. “I mean once. In a lab. And then I passed out.” But it would be fine now. They were the good guys, fighting the good fight. That meant the universe was on their side, right? ‘Cause the good guy always win. Cap didn’t answer, so Scott figured the idea was a go. “I’m the boss. I’m the boss. I’m the boss.”

Scott grabbed on to War Machine and fiddled with the suit’s controls to change it to giant mode. He said a silent prayer to whoever might be listening (the patron saint of superheroes of something) and pressed the button. Like when he’d done it in the lab, he felt a sudden rush of lightheadedness as he grew to a seemingly impossible height. He grabbed onto War Machine’s leg and just held the guy in midair, hearing amazed exclamations from all around him. Scott smiled to himself, feeling at the top of the world (almost literally, hooray!) and giggling madly.

He tossed War Machine away and turned, looking for something else to do. Man, this is way cooler than the lab, he thought as he kicked a bus over at the guys from the other team. Then he saw the plane and couldn’t resist tearing off a wing and throwing it at someone. It was like being a kid in a toy store. So awesome!

Suddenly, Scott felt dizzy and nauseous. His stomach clenched and he thought he was going to throw up. His arms dropped down like dead weights and little by little he lost control of his body. For a few moments he swayed in place, disorientated and confused about what was happening to him, until gravity took over and he crashed to the ground like a felled tree. He couldn’t think, couldn’t move, couldn’t speak. Dread and horror filled him as a fierce and throbbing pain shot through his head and body.

He had no idea what was happening anymore and it felt like an eternity before he remembered that he needed to get back to normal size. With an effort, he managed to move his finger enough to press the button.

Shrinking back felt like being put through a wood-chipper. He screamed. There were tears running down his face inside the helmet. The pain was excruciating and all consuming. Oh god, I’m going to die…

When he regained consciousness, Iron Man and Falcon were standing above him, shouting at the others and looking panicked. Someone had removed his helmet.

“Scott! Scott! Oh my god, can you hear me?”

Scott blinked at Wilson and tried to nod only to be seized by intense pain and nausea once again. He didn’t even have the strength to turn his head, just vomited all over himself.

“Fuck!” Stark said, stepping out of the suit to kneel beside Scott and move his head to the side so he wouldn’t inhale his own vomit. “We need a fucking ambulance here!”
“It’s on its way,” someone said. Scott couldn’t identify the voice. His vision was blurry and it was getting harder and harder to focus on anything.

“Mr Stark! Mr Stark, they’re getting away!”

Scott couldn’t see Stark’s face, couldn’t see anything anymore (not even the ground in front of his eyes). Oh god, please don’t leave me here…

“Never mind that now kid.”

Scott didn’t even have time to be grateful before his body started convulsing and he lost consciousness.

The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was the white ceiling of a hospital room. He blinked a few times then tried to turn his head. It was a mistake.

As his body shook with pain, he heard a concerned voice beside him. It took a while to recognize it was Hope.

“Scott?”

People came in and adjusted things around him, but Scott couldn’t really make sense of any of it.

For several days Scott drifted in and out of consciousness. Sometimes Hope was there and sometimes there was no one, just the nurses and the white walls.

Finally, after a week (or so they told him; he’d lost all track of time), he began to be more aware, more there. He watched the nurses and doctors as they came in to talk to him, though he couldn’t speak. Every time he tried all that came out of his mouth was gibberish. They said the problem might be temporary, but it still scared the hell out of him. They tried giving him a pen and paper to write with and Scott only stared at them as if he’d never seen the like before. His hand shook as he picked up the pen but all he managed was squiggly lines. He couldn’t write either.

Days later – and after several inconclusive tests – Scott still could only communicate using body language, which was frustrating and frightening. What if he never got better? What if he’d actually managed to fry his brain with that stupid stunt? Oh god, help me.

He was startled out of his depressing thought by the door opening. He turned, hoping for… well, Hope. It was Stark.

“Hey,” the man said. He looked tired. “I know you can’t talk, so I’ll do all the talking myself. I’m really good at that.” He flashed Scott a winning smile, and for some reason it made him feel a bit better. “Anyway, I guess you might be wondering where Hope went. She’s caught in some bureaucratic crap, but she’ll be back as soon as possible. You’re in London, as I’m sure you’ve already been told, and will probably still be here a while, ‘cause the doctors don’t think moving you now is a good idea.” He paused, taking a seat in the chair next to the bed. “What you did was incredibly stupid, but I guess all this” he gestured at the hospital room “has made that clear enough. Do you want to know what happened? Has anyone told you?”

Scott shook his head, then grimaced and nodded, hoping he’d be understood.

He was, because Stark started speaking. “Well, after you kinda just dropped for no reason – I thought you were dead there, for a while – and then screamed your head off, the fight kinda ended. Well, almost. Rogers and his buddy Barnes used the distraction to steal the jet and get away. T’Challa tried to stop them and got his ass kicked. Clint and Wanda got the hell out of dodge while
the rest of us were trying to help you. Hate to tell you, but except for Wilson, none of them seemed
to give a fuck about you.”

Scott swallowed hard, blinking back tears. God, what the hell had he been thinking? He’d risked his
life and… for what? (When he’d told the others not to come back for him, he’d been joking – of
course he’d thought they’d come back for him. That was what heroes did, right? *I guess not these
ones…*). Stark – the one he’d been fighting *against* – had shown more care than his own supposed
team.

“Anyway, we got you to a hospital and here you are, though it was a bit touch and go there for a
while.” He took a deep breath and continued. “The rest of your so-called team is in jail awaiting trial.
And you’re probably looking at another stint in prison after you recover, for violating your parole
and… well, other things. Pym wanted to charge you with theft of the suit, but Hope talked him down
from that. I don’t know what Rogers told you to get you involved in this mess, but you really should
have stayed out of it.”

Yeah, Scott thought, *that about sums it up. I should have stayed out of it.* And to think he’d been
*enjoying* it… Like an idiotic kid right before sticking his fingers in the wall socket… (Except he
wasn’t a kid. He was just a moron.)

Scott never fully recovered. He got his speech back (though sometimes he stumbled and sprouted
nonsense instead of the words he wanted), but continued to have dizzy spells and seizures on
occasion, as well as terrible migraines. Stark actually helped to get him a reduced sentence (Scott
wasn’t sure *why*), and eventually he went back home, though he lost Maggie and Cassie. Hope too
distanced herself from him (though at least she’d waited until he was a bit better to dump his stupid
ass) – not that he blamed her (any of them). Despite the frustration with his constantly shaking hands
and general weak body, Scott was more or less grateful. He wasn’t dead, which could very well
have happened, and he was free. The rest of “Team Cap” was still in prison 7 years later.

24. (prompt by Crosshairs and VeraNera)

Wanda had been moping about at the Compound ever since they’d come back from Lagos. Every
time she turned on the TV she heard people saying horrible things about her. It wasn’t fair, she’d
only been trying to help. Steve had told her that she’d done her best and that had to be good enough
sometimes, but no one else seemed to get it.

“Hey Wanda,” Steve said, coming into her room. “How are you doing?”

Wanda only shrugged. She’d turned the TV off, but she could still hear people’s condemnation.

“Come on, why don’t we go for a walk? Get some fresh air. It will do you good.” He smiled and
reached out a hand to her. She found herself unable to resist. She was glad for Steve, he was a good
friend, looked out for her, like Pietro used to do.

Thirty minutes later, they were strolling along the street and Wanda did feel better. They settled into a
coffee shop and got coffee and those little cakes she loved.

Everything was going well until a hand was slammed on the table next to them. They looked up to
see a tall black man standing there with a murderous expression.

“How dare you?” he hissed angrily.

Steve got up and Wanda followed. She didn’t understand what was happening.
“Sir, I don’t—” Steve began.

“How dare you sit there drinking coffee after what you did?”

“How dare you sit there drinking coffee after what you did?”

The man picked up the photo he’d slammed on the table and shoved it in their faces. “This is my brother Akoni. He was in Lagos. You killed him.”

Wanda glanced at the photo, seeing a young black man with a strong resemblance to the one standing before them.

“We’re from Nigeria, came to America to get a better life. Akoni went back there to visit family and you killed him! My brother! My best friend! You killed him and now you sit here drinking coffee and eating cake like nothing happened? What kind of monsters are you? Don’t you care? What if it was your brother?”

Wanda felt frozen in place, remembering the moment when Pietro had died, the despair and helplessness she’d felt seeing her twin, her only family and best friend, lying motionless on the ground.

“You ought to be locked up like the murderers you are instead of sitting here like the people you killed don’t matter. You’re scum! Murdering scum!” The man was shouting now and everyone was looking at them.

Wanda didn’t know what to do, what to say. She recognized the grief and pain in the man’s face. It was the same she saw in the mirror every day.

“Look, sir,” Steve said, “I’m sorry for your loss, I really am, but… we can’t save everyone.” It had sounded so comforting when he’d said it to her earlier, but now… Pietro had died to save others, yet that made no difference to her loss, her pain. “Sometimes—”

“You fucking son of a bitch! You go to hell with your stupid speech! It’s easy to write off as collateral damage when it’s someone else, isn’t it? What if a bomb had fallen on your house and killed your family? Would you still be saying it just happens?”

Wanda thought back to the awful days she’d spent trapped in the rubble looking at her dead parents and waiting to die. Lots of others had died in the bombings. And people had probably written them all off. *Collateral damage.*

Steve said nothing.

“And this wasn’t a war,” the man continued. “You had no business being there in the first place. You had no business taking your stupid fight into a crowded city. Don’t you have any care for the people who were there? Or did you think they just don’t matter? Just some negroes in a little country in Africa, who gives a shit, right? That’s what you Americans think, isn’t it? You fucking piece of shit!”

Hadn’t she thought that, once? Sokovia was burning, but the world didn’t care. Just some Eastern European country no one cared about. Most people had probably never even heard of it (at least, not before Ultron had destroyed it).

Oh god, what had she done? What had she become?

“You won’t get away with it! You won’t! Murderer! Murdering scum!” The man spit on the ground.
and glared at them with such hatred Wanda took a step back. With her powers, she could easily have taken him down, but she didn’t. Because she understood. She understood how he felt, and she was the cause of it. It didn’t matter that she’s been trying to help, people had died and their families had nothing but grief left, the same grief she carried with her every second of every day. Oh god, what have I done?

The commotion had attracted attention and a police officer appeared to see what was going on. The man was still shouting profanities and calling them names, and all Wanda could do was stand there, tears streaming down her face.

At some point the man was led away and Steve took her by the arm in the opposite direction. “Let’s go, Wanda.”

She barely noticed the trip back, still in shock over the realization that she was a monster. She same monster she’d believed Stark to be. The same monster she’d once sworn to destroy.

“I’m so sorry, Wanda. Don’t listen to him, he was just upset.”

Earlier Wanda had thought Steve was good and kind, now she looked at him and could only see the people who had dismissed her parents’ death as “a tragic accident”, people like Stark. He was a monster too, just like her. A monster who killed people and then went on living like other people’s pain didn’t matter.

“How can you say that? Don’t you see? It’s our fault!” Oh, my god, what have I done? “It’s your fault! You’re a monster too!”

She felt her power surging up, red strands coiling around her hands and her body. The last thing she thought before she completely lost control was that she should have died with Pietro.

25. (prompt by VeraNera)

Steve and Bucky got into the jet while Natasha kept the black guy occupied. Steve was glad that Nat had eventually understood that he was right – he didn’t like being at odds with his friends, and he hadn’t wanted to fight her.

“Come on,” he told Bucky as they strapped in.

And then just stared at the jet’s controls, trying to remember how to fly the damn thing. He grabbed the steering wheel (or whatever it was called on a jet) and pressed some buttons. Nothing happened. He started hitting things randomly, hoping for some kind of response and still got nothing. Damn it, why won’t this stupid thing work? They were wasting time.

Beside him, Bucky was also trying to get them off the ground.

“Unauthorized access. System shutdown,” a female voice said. Steve thought it was Tony’s new computer voice. Before he could tell it that he had access, War Machine landed next to the jet.

“You are under arrest, Rogers. Get out with your hands in the air,” Rhodes said.

“Guys? Sam? Clint? Wanda? Anybody copy?” Steve called through the comm. Then he saw Vision helping a stumbling Wanda while the black guy dropped an unconscious Natasha next to War Machine. Sam, his wings and jet pack completely destroyed, walked in with hands raised, followed by a limping Scott. Tony had a struggling Clint bound over his shoulder and one glowing hand
pointed at Sam and Scott.

Steve looked at Bucky, frantically trying to come up with a plan.

“We’d better surrender, Steve. We’re not gonna win this one.” Without waiting for a response, he stepped out with hands in the air. Steve had no choice but to follow.

“Look guys,” Sam said, “there are some bad guys about to be let loose, bad Hydra guys.”

Rhodes looked supremely unimpressed. “Really? And why didn’t any of you say anything about it before?”

“The Accords—” Steve started, only to be interrupted by Tony.

“The Accords have nothing to do with this, Steve. You’re just being an idiot. And if what you say about this threat is true, it will be investigated and dealt with.”

Back in the holding facility, they were taken to individual cells, including Natasha. Steve learned later that Tony, Rhodes and Vision were dispatched by the Accords committee to deal with the Winter Soldiers without any problems.

When they returned, they had the fake doctor (who had apparently killed the other soldiers rather than releasing them as Steve had thought) in custody and a tape of Bucky (the Winter Soldier) killing Howard and Maria Stark. Steve tried to say he hadn’t known anything about it when Tony and Rhodes asked him, but they didn’t buy it.

Steve, Sam, Wanda, Clint, Scott and Natasha ended up in prison. Bucky was sent to a psychiatric facility. Tony never spoke to him again.

Chapter End Notes

A special shout-out to VeraNera, who has given me a lot of great ideas. Thank you! :)}
So, my idea of a weekly update was a bit too optimistic. I’m having trouble juggling multiple stories at the same time. I made a lot of progress on the Second Chance series the last couple of weeks, but that meant not working on this one. So I’m sorry for the delay. Can’t guarantee when the next chapter will come, but it will come eventually.

As always, thanks everyone for your incredible support, the lovely discussions and all the ideas.

26. (prompts by Core, VeraNera, DaughteroftSilverMoon and Ushimipan – this drabble incorporates things that a lot of people asked for, so that’s why I put all these names here)

Steve looked out the window, waiting for the signal from Sam that Rumlow was approaching. Below, on the street, Natasha and Wanda were also in position. So far, all was quiet.

“I think I have them,” Sam said, and Steve was about to tell the others to get ready when the other continued. “Wait.”

“What’s going on?” Steve asked. From where he was he could only see the police station they thought was the target of Rumlow’s attack.

“Someone else is engaging. The truck is surrounded and guys in tactical gear are clearing the civilians from the area.”

“Who are they?” Steve and Natasha spoke almost at the same time. Steve saw Nat casually standing up and walking in the direction of the commotion.

“Looks like a counter-terrorist unit.”

Damn. What were they doing here?

Suddenly, there was an explosion and Steve ran out of the building.

“Rumlow’s crew are taking fire,” Sam reported. “Their retreat is cut off. They’re going down.”

By the time Steve arrived at the scene, the truck was on fire and people were being kept away by the police while the counter-terrorist unit officers cuffed three of Rumlow’s guys.

“Sam, do you see Rumlow?”

“No. Wait, yeah—”

Steve had seen him too now, trying to sneak away from one side of the burning truck. He threw the shield, which hit the truck and sent it careening to the left, blocking Rumlow’s path. Rumlow took out a couple of guns and started firing. Steve took cover and was just about to shout for Sam to engage when the shooting stopped. He looked back and saw Rumlow on the ground, his helmet shattered and blood seeping from it.
“What the fuck do you think you are doing?” Two task force officers were approaching him with guns trained on him. “Stand the fuck down now!”

Steve slowly raised his arms. “We’re on the same side–”

“The hell we are. What the fuck are you doing here? No one called the Avengers. This isn’t your jurisdiction.” The man spoke with an accent Steve couldn’t place and didn’t seem particularly friendly.

“Look–”

“No, you look. How did you even get here? The Nigerian authorities didn’t mention anything about Avengers in the country.” He paused, eyes narrowing at Steve. “Did you inform the Nigerian government of your presence here?”

“We had information that a Hydra cell–”

“So that’s a no. Great. You do realize that you basically just invaded this country, right? I don’t care what intel you had, you don’t have the right to just walk in wherever you want without informing anyone.”

Steve didn’t know what to say to that. Hadn’t they always done that? Get intel, go in, deal with Hydra, get out. Why was this guy taking issue with things all of a sudden?

As they spoke, a task force van showed up and the prisoners were shoved into it.

“Get your team here. You’re going to have to answer some questions.” He gestured to the man with him and spoke in a language Steve didn’t know. The other man kept his weapon trained on Steve while the first one, who seemed to be in charge, walked off, barking orders at his officers.

“Cap?” Sam asked.

“Come in, guys. Guess we’ll have to talk to these people.”

Sam landed beside him with hands raised. Wanda and Natasha were allowed through the perimeter, though the officers kept their guns at the ready.

They were marched at gun point to a second van and told to surrender their weapons. Steve didn’t want to do that – what if these guys were Hydra?

“I have confirmed with the Nigerian authorities that you are here illegally, Captain,” the man in charge said, making the title seem like an insult. “You have to right no carry weapons. So, I will ask you again. Surrender your weapons.”

Sam gave him a look and disengaged the Falcon suit, giving it to another officer. Natasha followed suit. Wanda shrugged, telling them that she had no weapons. Steve had no choice but to give them his shield.

They were taken to a police building and placed in cells like common criminals, which infuriated Steve. He held on to his temper, though, sure that soon enough this whole misunderstanding would be cleared out. He would make sure to demand and apology when this was all over.

The same officer from before finally came to see them. “I am Armin Nogu from the Joint Counter Terrorist Center. What are you doing in Nigeria?”
“We were here to apprehend Rumlow, a Hydra terrorist,” Steve answered.

“Really? Because I have just spoken with Maria Hill in New York and she has no knowledge of it. In fact, she had no idea the four of you were here. Who gave you authorization for this, then, since it’s clearly not an official Avengers’ op?”

Steve wanted to say that Hill didn’t tell him what to do, but that would sound childish. “We don’t need authorization. We’re the Avengers.” He put as much certainly and authority in his voice as he could. Nogu didn’t seem impressed.

“Oh? Are the Avengers above the law now? Are you kings of the world?”

“We don’t need authorization,” Steve repeated.

Nogu gave him a disgusted look. “Well, we’ll see about that. You are under arrest for illegal entry into this country and for possession of weapons. You will be transported to a United Nations’ facility to face the charges against you and explain yourselves.”

“We will not be locked up!” Wanda said, but Nat put a restraining hand on her shoulder to calm her down, shaking her head.

“This is ridiculous,” Steve protested.

“Ridiculous? You think you can just come in here and do whatever you want, Rogers? You can’t. And did you even give any thought to the civilians on the street back then? Or were you just going to attack a Hydra cell in the middle of a crowded market? You didn’t have enough people to clear the place and engage, so I can only assume that didn’t cross your mind. Furthermore, the idea that you don’t need authorization is idiotic. The Avengers have always acted in concert with local authorities. But I guess that was Tony Stark’s doing, since without him you have no idea what to do.”

Steve bristled. “Now wait a minute–”

“It’s quite obvious that all the propaganda about you was just a pile of crap. You’re not a strategist. You’re not any kind of leader at all, just an arrogant idiot. Does this woman even have any training?” he asked, pointing at Wanda. “Do you? Because if you did, you’d know that you can’t just do whatever you want. If you knew about a terrorist threat, you should have notified the proper authorities, like the Joint Counter Terrorist Center. You know, professionals. People who actually know what they’re doing.”

Sam had his head down looking uncomfortable. Nat seemed as composed as ever, but Steve noticed a slight narrowing of her eyes. Wanda just seemed confused and angry.

Nogu shook his head. “Your transport will be here soon.” He gave them all one last angry look and walked off.

They were taken to a facility in Berlin where they had to answer a lot of questions before being allowed to go back to New York on the condition that they did not leave the US. A month later the Sokovia Accords were proposed and everyone signed. Steve didn’t want to, still bitter about being treated like he was incompetent, but he was told that if he didn’t he would not be able to continue on as an Avenger. With no one to stand beside him, Steve had no choice.

As stipulated in the Accords, Rhodes was made leader of the Avengers and Steve had to undergo extensive training before being allowed back in the roster. He hated it all.
(AN: Please note that I have no idea how the military works in real life, so I’m claiming literary license here. Also, let’s pretend someone messed up and Steve actually got to a war zone, but it wasn’t because of Erskine.)

Steve was just coming back from the showers when he overheard the guys at the barracks talking about their training unit being sent overseas to complete the program there. *Finally*, he though, *my chance to prove myself.*

A few days later, they were on the way to England and Steve could barely contain his enthusiasm. He’d get to be a real soldier and fight for his country! Just like he’d always wanted. And Bucky would be there (maybe). He might get to fight alongside his best friend!

Some of the other guys were just as excited as him, but some seemed to be almost in tears at the thought of actually doing anything, of being “in danger”. *What a bunch of cowards*, Steve thought. Men shouldn’t be afraid of danger! They were soldiers! Fighting for their country! For the whole world! Against the bullies!

There was more training, which left Steve gasping exhaustedly at the end of each day, but he would never give up. He could hardly wait for the opportunity to be on the front lines, to be *useful.*

Said opportunity came nearly three weeks later. It was only supposed to be a training exercise in an area that the Nazis had already left. Suddenly, someone shouted something on the radio and they looked up to see an enemy plane coming in their direction. Steve scrambled for cover along with his fellow soldiers as the ground around them exploded. Stumbling, Steve looked around and found his unit’s leader a few feet away.

“Ramsay!” he yelled.

“Rogers, get down,” Ramsay shouted and Steve did so as another explosion hit close by.

“Get cover!”

Steve nodded and ran. After a while, the explosions stopped and Steve left his hiding place to search for the rest of his unit. He found Ramsay, Colton, Briggs and Lloyd. They were a bit bruised and scraped but not terribly hurt. Donald and Martin were dead. Steve looked at their bodies lying motionless on the ground, Martin with half his head blown off, and felt sick. He retched into the floor, swaying dangerously.

“Rogers!” It was Ramsay, holding on to his arm to keep Steve from falling over.

“I’m okay,” he croaked out through the lump in his throat. He’d never seen this kind of dead body before, this kind of bloody death with guts and gore everywhere. He’d seen his mom, but that had been different. That had been an illness, and he’d had time to prepare himself. This… this was war. Real war. It wasn’t what he’d expected. (He was scared.)

Steve raised his head and looked around him at his dirty and frightened mates, at the holes on the ground, the bits of smoking grass and destroyed equipment. He swallowed down the panic – he was a soldier now.

“The radio is busted,” Lloyd announced, holding its shattered pieces for them to see.

“We need to find shelter and get back. Come on, move out.” Ramsay took Donald and Martin’s tags and bowed his head as if in prayer. “We’ll get someone to come back for them later. Right now we
need to go.”

They started walking but Steve couldn’t keep up. He was tired and his legs shook so much it made it hard to walk.

“Come on, Rogers!” Briggs said when he saw Steve was falling behind.

“I…” Steve wanted to be strong, to be the soldier he had always wanted to be, but his body refused to obey his will. He fell and couldn’t get up. His head was spinning and it was getting harder and harder to draw breath. Oh, god, not an asthma attack, not now. It was. After long minutes, Steve finally managed to breathe. The others were clustered around him, expressions ranging from worried (Ramsay) to indifferent (Lloyd) to angry (Colton and Briggs).

“Jesus Christ, Rogers,” Briggs said. “Jesus, who let this guy in the army? He’s not fit for this. Fuck! Let’s go already!”

Steve stood up with an effort, assisted by Ramsay, and glared weakly at Briggs.

“Are you okay to continue, Rogers?” Ramsay asked.

“Yes,” Steve replied with as much conviction as he could muster.

They kept walking, but not long afterwards Steve felt himself falling behind again, unable to breathe and too shaken to stay on his feet.

“Fucking little shit,” Colton said, and hauled Steve up in a fireman’s carry.

“Put me down!” Steve protested.

“Not a chance. I’m not hanging around here to be killed because of your delicate constitution.”

It was extremely humiliating to be carried around like a sack of potatoes, but Steve couldn’t deny that it was easier than walking on his own, even if being kind of upside down made his head spin even more.

Then the plane came back for another round and they had to run again. Steve lost sight of the others as the dust covered everything, and again he couldn’t breathe.

“Rogers!”

Steve saw that the others were far away from him, having gotten to cover while Steve had been twitching uselessly on the ground. He tried to get up but couldn’t. Couldn’t breathe, couldn’t stop shaking, couldn’t do anything. Oh, god, he was going to die here. Why had he ever thought this was a good idea?

He saw Ramsay gesture to the others to stay down and then he was running in Steve’s direction. He had just covered half the distance when a shot came from above and Ramsay fell dead with a hole in his torso. Steve blanched and puked again, now shaking even more. Oh, god, help me.

The last thing he saw before he died was Ramsay’s lifeless eyes staring at him.

He should never have gotten into the army.

28. (prompt by VWebb)
From one moment to the next it all went to hell. They were taking fire.

Bucky shoved Steve down, cursing all the while, and yelled something at the rest of the guys. It was hard to understand the words through the explosions and shots going on all around them.

Steve felt himself being yanked up none too gently and pushed forward. He managed not to fall on his face by sheer luck, his stumbling movements gaining momentum and becoming an ungraceful run.

Somehow, they found some cover and hunkered down; Steve, Bucky and two others Steve couldn’t identify through the dust and grime.

“Where are the others? Mitchell and Delancy?” Bucky asked.

“Don’t know, Sarge,” one of them said, and Steve recognized his voice. Petersen.

“They’re dead,” the other replied. “Mitchell got his brains blown out right in front of me.” His voice cracked and, now that he was really looking, Steve could see blood splatters and… something else… on his face.

Bucky grimaced. “Steady, Franklin.”

“Yes, Sarge.” Franklin shook his head and bits of… brains?… fell off. Steve felt bile rise in his throat. He covered his mouth with his hands to keep from throwing up.

“Let’s go. There’s another unit that’s supposed to be around here somewhere. We need to find them if we want a chance to get out of here alive. Keep your eyes sharp,” Bucky said.

The others nodded and took up their weapons, still strapped to their backs. Steve got to his feet slowly, clutching his gun in trembling hands.

Barely ten steps in, however, his vision grayed out and his chest constricted. He couldn’t breathe.

“Steve! Stevie, come on! Come on!” Bucky was holding him like he used to do when they were kids and Steve had one of his asthma attacks. “Jesus Christ,” Bucky muttered, “who was the moron that approved you for the army?”

The words hurt as much as the pain squeezing his chest. Being in the army, making a difference, was all Steve had ever wanted. To be able to fight like his father, like Bucky. To be strong and capable. To be respected.

“Sarge, we gotta move.” Steve couldn’t tell which of the guys had spoken, too busy trying to breathe and keep panic at bay.

After what felt like an eternity, Steve finally got his traitorous body under some semblance of control. Bucky was looking at him worriedly while the other two looked scared and angry.

“Sarge,” Franklin said, rage and desperation in his tone.

“Yeah, let’s go.”

Steve tried, he really did, but was once again (always) betrayed by his body. He couldn’t walk, couldn’t keep pace with the others. The dust all around made it even harder to breathe and the debris
made his shaking legs stumble with every step. It hadn’t been this bad in training. Everything had been different in training. He hadn’t felt like his heart was about to leap out of his chest in fear, there had been no paralyzing terror and the horror of blood and death all around him. Then, everything had been exciting; the thought that one day he’d be a soldier like his father and his best friend. Now, shaking from head to toe, Steve wished he was home (and cursed himself for being a coward).

Bucky had to carry him, which was utterly humiliating. Still, it was better than being left behind – not that Bucky would ever do that (though he had, he’d left Steve behind to go to war, making Steve desperate to join him).

An explosion hit near them and Steve fell. He looked up to see enemy soldiers in the distance with weapons pointed in his direction. He tried to get his gun but his hands refused to obey and he couldn’t get a decent grip on it.

Then one of the soldiers went down, blood spraying from his head. The others took aim and Steve heard Bucky shout at him to get down. Steve flattened himself to the ground while shots rang out around him. He had never been so terrified in his life. He only moved when he felt someone tugging on his arm urging him to get up. It was Bucky, one arm hanging limp at his side.

“Run,” his friend said, and Steve did.

It must have been the adrenaline and fear that gave him the strength to keep going for as long as he did, but eventually it wore off and Steve was once again gasping for every breath. He and Bucky had managed to catch up with the others and find some shelter, though, so at least they were as safe as they could be for the moment, all huddled together shivering and scared.

Petersen tied up Bucky’s arm while Franklin kept a lookout, cursing under his breath and glaring at Steve every now and then. Steve could no nothing but concentrate on breathing. He was completely useless and he hated it.

They waited for hours and Steve eventually passed out from another asthma attack. When he woke up, he was in a hospital. Bucky was in a bed next to him. Steve’s heart clenched painfully when he realized his best friend’s right arm was gone.

Several days later, they were shipped back to the US along with several other injured soldiers.

It was hard for Steve to find a job, and even more so for Bucky. People looked at his friend with pity, which made Bucky hunch down more and more every day.

Bucky changed. He began to drink, a lot more than he used to, and he was aggressive, even with Steve. He had difficulty doing things because of his missing arm, and more than once Steve saw him crying in their crappy shared apartment.

One day Steve woke up to find him staring off into space, a gun in his hand.

“Bucky?” Steve said, eying the gun in fear.

“Why couldn’t you listen, Stevie? Why couldn’t you just stay here? You aren’t fit for the army, you never were. You put people at risk.” He turned to look at Steve. There was anger in his expression. “I could have gone to a different unit, been a sniper, but when I heard some idiot had actually allowed you in the army I couldn’t just leave you there. I might not have gotten my arm shot off then. But I couldn’t leave your stupid selfish ass behind so now here we are. Here I am. My life is over, Steve. Because of you. I can’t do this anymore. I can’t live like this.”

“Bucky…”
Before he could do anything, Bucky raised the gun to his own temple and fired.

Steve stared at his friend’s lifeless body and cried.

(AN: So, it’s not exactly fair to blame Steve here, but Bucky was depressed and traumatized and not coping well. I’m not really sorry.)

29. (prompt by VWebb with ideas from VeraNera and all the people who commented on the implications of Natasha pretending to be part of SI’s legal team back in #16. Also inspired by comments on dls’s chapter 8 of If You Had This Time Again, as well as the fic itself)

Tony narrowed his eyes at Coulson but said nothing, looking at his destroyed living room. SHIELD had known about the palladium poisoning all along and they’d done squat to help him. And fucking Natalie or Natasha or whatever her fucking name was had just stood there, probably cheering as she watched him self-destruct. Well, fuck all of them.

He took out his phone and linked up to Jarvis, tapping out a few silent commands. SHIELD thought they could just waltz into his home whenever they felt like it? That they could spy on him and manipulate them and get away with it? Yeah, fuck no. Tony was done with that. He might have had some sympathy for Coulson for helping protect Pepper last year, but that good will was now over.

Having set Jarvis up to hack SHIELD and find out just what exactly they were up to, Tony contacted his legal team to get these fucking agents out of his house. He could put on the suit and get them out that way, but he didn’t want to give people any more ammunition against him. Knowing that SHIELD had taken advantage of his desperation gave Tony every incentive to get his shit together and fight. And be smart about it. If these bastards thought Tony Stark would just roll over for them… Well, they were going to be disappointed. He gave Coulson one last annoyed look and went down to the workshop.

Twenty minutes later Tony reentered the living room to find Coulson still there, talking to one of his guys.

“Sir,” another of them said, checking in on his comm. “There are some people outside saying they’re here to see Stark.”

Gee, imagine that, Tony thought. Someone came to my house to see me. He barely refrained from rolling his eyes.

Coulson looked at him and sighed. “Stark—” but Tony cut him off.

“Those people outside are my team of lawyers. They are here to get you assholes out of my house. I didn’t invite you and I don’t want you here. So, unless each and every one of you want to end up facing criminal and civil suits, I suggest you get the fuck out.” He turned on his best fake press smile.

For a while no one said anything, Tony and Coulson staring each other down, waiting for the other to blink first. Tony’s smile widened to be as obnoxious as possible.

“And I just want to remind you that I have extensive surveillance around this entire house recording all your illegal activities as we speak, including your lovely threat earlier. I may not be very popular now, but I’m still rich and money always counts for more than popularity.”

Coulson sighed again. “Stark, we’re trying to help you.”
“Yeah? You have a funny way of doing it, what with the spying and lying and manipulating and all. And in case it wasn’t clear, this is me saying I don’t want your back-stabbing help.” He looked Coulson straight in the eye, smile gone. “I am done dancing to your tune. Now. Get. Out. I will not ask again.”

“Very well,” Coulson said at last, signaling to his guys.

“Oh, and if I find a single thing missing I’ll be adding theft to your long list of charges.”

None of the agents spoke as they left, until it was only Tony and Coulson in the room.

“We’re not your enemies, Stark.”

“Maybe not, but you sure as hell aren’t my friends.”

“Mr Stark?” It was Gloria from legal, coming in with three other people Tony didn’t personally know. She eyed Coulson distrustfully.

“Oh, Gloria, good to see you. I have just discovered a mole in our midst. Miss Natalie Rushman is actually a spy, so I’ll need you to go over everything she so much as looked at with a fine-toothed comb.” He turned to Coulson. “If we find Natashalie’s presence compromised the company in any way, we will be pursuing all possible legal action and seeking compensation for damages,” he said, shark smile firmly in place.

Gloria and her assistants were already hard at work typing on their pads while Coulson had finally abandoned the bland harmless expression in favor of a very displeased, just sucked on a lemon one. Tony smirked.

“Don’t let the door hit your ass on the way out,” he called out cheerfully.

Once the other man was gone, Tony gave his attention to his people. “Seriously, I want to know everything she did while she was spying on us. And I want to know how she got past the screening process. I want security tripled from now on, ’cause I don’t trust these fuckers not to try this again.” Assuming they hadn’t tried it before.

“Will do, Mr Stark,” Gloria answered. “We’ll need to go back to the office. Do you still need us here?” He shook his head. “Should I get someone from security?”

“No, it’s not necessary, I’m good. Just get it all done and get back to me as soon as possible. I have some stuff I need to do.”

Alone at last, Tony began going over the boxes Fury had brought, boxes of his father’s stuff Tony had never known existed.

“Sir, if I may,” Jarvis said as Tony leafed through a notebook filled with equations and scribbles in his dad’s familiar handwriting.

“What is it, J?”

“I think you should reconsider telling Miss Potts and Col Rhodes about your condition.”

Tony’s knee-jerk reaction was to say no, but he swallowed it down and actually thought about it. SHIELD had only managed to manipulate him so thoroughly because Tony had been pretty much sabotaging himself and his relationships. Maybe he should just… trust his actual friends instead of lying to them and trying to do everything by himself. And if worst came to worst, Pepper and
Rhodey needed a heads-up about SHIELD.

“You’re right, J.”

He got up. Tony Stark was back in the game.

“Don’t bullshit me, Rogers. Did you know?”

Steve didn’t want to answer, didn’t want to face it, but it was too late for that now, wasn’t it? “Yes,” he said, only to be immediately punched in the face hard enough to be thrown all the way across the room.

He heard the whine of the repulsor powering up and saw Bucky fighting Tony. Just as he got up to go help his friend, the black guy from earlier – T’Challa, wasn’t it? – leapt into the fray, teaming up with Tony to take Bucky down.

Desperate, Steve threw his shield but T’Challa caught it (was he enhanced too?) and used it to bash Bucky in the head. Bucky stumbled back, clutching at his nose and Tony shot something at Steve that bound his ankles together and made him fall down gracelessly. He tried to get them off but Tony sent another one that bound his hands as well and Steve could do nothing except lie there, immobilized.

“Stay down,” T’Challa told Bucky, Steve’s shield still in his hand. Then he turned to Tony. “Mr Stark. I know what you just saw was horrific – it is a terrible thing to watch a parent die – but you must not succumb to vengeful thoughts.”

The suit’s face plate came up and Steve saw the wild look in Tony’s eyes. Oh, god, Bucky…

When Tony didn’t respond, T’Challa continued. “Mr Barnes, I will ask you to surrender. You were not responsible for my father’s death, but you cannot deny that it was you in that video.”

“It wasn’t him! It wasn’t his fault!” Steve shouted, struggling helplessly to get free.

“Shut the fuck up, Rogers!” Tony yelled back and the fury in his expression made Steve’s blood run cold. “Shut the fuck up, you lying piece of shit! You knew! All this time you knew and you said nothing! You had the gall to give me that shitty self-righteous speech about keeping secrets and you knew about this all the fucking time, you fucking hypocrite. I am done with you! I am done with your sanctimonious holier-than-thou bullshit, you fucking traitor!” He was breathing hard, tear-filled eyes locked on Steve. “I can understand that your friend was brainwashed and he didn’t really want to kill all those people… my mom…” His voice cracked. “My dad, who was your friend, who thought the world of you. I can understand that but you… you have no excuse. You are just an asshole. A back-stabbing lying asshole!”

He took a step in Steve’s direction but T’Challa put a hand on his shoulder. “I understand your anger, Mr Stark, and I share your opinion, but this is what Zemo wants.”

“Well, yeah, congrats to him, he got just what he wanted. I’m done. And I’m taking the shield my father made back. You are never touching it again.” There was outright hatred in Tony’s eyes now and Steve cringed back.

“Stark,” Bucky said, which made Tony whirl back to him, weapon ready. “I’m sorry. Oh, god, I’m
“I’m so sorry. I didn’t… I’m so sorry.”

“Bucky, don’t. It wasn’t you –”

“God, shut up, Steve! Stop saying that. Are you fucking blind? Did you not see the fucking video? It was me! It was my hands, my face! You saying it wasn’t is gonna make it true, and it’s fucking indecent! Stop trying to pretend it never happened, that people didn’t die. I’m not the Bucky you remember, all right? That man died 70 years ago, do you understand? I’m not that guy, so just fucking stop!” There were tears in his eyes and Steve found his own vision blurred as well.

No. No, it couldn’t be. Bucky… Bucky wasn’t dead, he wasn’t gone, he couldn’t be. It wasn’t fair that Steve had found him only to lose him again.

Steve hardly noticed when T’Challa hauled him up and put him over his shoulder to carry him around like a sack of potatoes. He twisted around to see Bucky, head bowed, walking quietly in front of Tony.

“Bucky,” he tried again, hearing the desperation in his own voice.

“It’s over, Steve. Just deal with it. I’m not your Bucky anymore. I don’t want or need your protection. Just leave me the hell alone.”

Bucky refused to talk to him or even look at him all through the flight back.

Zemo never stopped smiling.
Hello, people. At long last, a new chapter! I hope you enjoy it. As always, thank you so much for the incredible support.

31. (prompt by Leefdoor and WillJ)

They staggered into the frigid Siberian air and Bucky shivered. It wasn’t just the cold, though. It was everything. His shoulder was throbbing where the arm had been blasted off, and Bucky felt strangely out of balance. He could not remember the time before the arm, before the metal part he had never asked for had been forced on him.

“Bucky,” Steve said as Bucky stopped and closed his eyes, trying desperately to get himself back together.

The Soldier was finally receding from his mind, the fight instinct going dormant once more now that the danger was past. Was it? Would the danger of his own muddled brain ever be past?

Bucky shook his head and allowed himself to fall in the snow-covered ground. The cold seeped into his feet and legs, reminding him uncomfortably of the cryo tube. He wasn’t there anymore. He was… well, not free, obviously, but… something. Or at least he was. Had been, until this Zemo character had shown up to wreck what little peace he’d managed to find.

God, that tape…

He tried to block it out, but it didn’t work. He remembered it. Remembered the sound of bones breaking, of flesh being torn, the sound of whimpers and pain. His hands. His hands had done that. Killed those people. Howard. A man he had known, a man he might have once called friend. Worse, he remembered the son’s eyes, the anguish and grief. The anger and betrayal.

Oh god, what have I done?

“Bucky!”

Bucky tried to shove Steve away, but he was too uncoordinated – the missing arm combined with his inner turmoil – and he ended up lying on the freezing floor just outside the bunker.

It was freezing. It was freezing and they had just left Stark there, in a destroyed suit. Oh god. Oh god, what have I done?

With an effort, he managed to push himself back to his feet and started going back.

“Bucky! Bucky, what are you doing?”

Oh god, oh god. What if Stark was already dead? What if that last blow had killed him? No, no. Bucky couldn’t… No, there was already far too much blood in his hands. Oh god oh god oh god…

“Bucky!”
Steve grabbed his arm to pull him back and Bucky had enough.

“Let go of me!” he shouted. Oh god. Stark. He had to help Stark.

“Bucky, what’s going on?”

“Shut up! Shut up! Oh god, just shut the fuck up!”

Steve stared at him, still holding his arm.

“Let go of me. Now!” Some of the Soldier must have slipped through, because Steve did as he was told, finally, taking a cautious step back. “Stay here,” Bucky said, and turned to re-enter the bunker.

“Bucky, what are you—”

“I said SHUT UP!” This time Bucky could hear the fury and desperation in his voice. Oh god, he was wasting time.

Without another word, he ran back into the room where the dead Soldiers were, still in their pods, trying to remember where they’d come from, where Stark was.

There was no sign of Zemo, but Bucky didn’t care, he just kept going, stumbling in his haste to find the place… there. There he was. Oh god.

Stark was propped up against the wall, the light in his chest dead, his eyes closed. There was blood running down his face from a cut in his forehead.

Oh god, no. Please.

Bucky rushed to the man’s side and knelt there, unsure what to do, how to help.

“Stark? Stark, can you hear me? Come on! Hey!” Oh god oh god…

There was a slight shift in one arm and then, slowly, Stark opened his eyes.

“It’s ok… It’s… Oh god, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry…”

He looked around frantically, hoping for something, anything, that would help. His eyes fell on the arm, lying prone in a corner of the room and Bucky recoiled in fear. For a split second he thought the arm would come to life to strangle him, strangle them both.

“You…” Stark murmured, one hand twitching upwards.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Please. Please don’t… don’t die. I… We need to… call somebody. Call for help. Do you have… a communicator? Anything?” Out of the corner of his eye he saw the shield and quickly looked away, focusing back on the man on the ground. “What can I do? How can I help? Oh god, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Stark stared at him for a moment, as if he didn’t understand what was happening, before twitching his hand again.

“Do you…?”

“Emergency distress signal.”

“Where?”
“Wrist joint.”

Carefully, Bucky probed around the gauntlet to find the spot Stark indicated.

“That’s it. Just… Press it.”

Bucky had just done so when he heard Steve’s voice. “Bucky? Bucky, where are you? We have to go.”

Because he was watching Stark intently, Bucky noticed the flinch and the terror in his eyes before the other man got control of his expression.

“Stay where you are, Steve,” Bucky said, though he had little hope that the idiot would listen. “It’s okay. I’ll… I’ll be right back.” Stark said nothing, yet Bucky could see he was still scared. Steve had been vicious. *God, what had they done?*

He stood, wanting to intercept Steve before he saw Stark, but it was impossible. Steve was already on the doorway. “Bucky!”

Bucky heard a panicked sound from Stark and placed himself between Steve and the man on the floor. “Don’t come any closer!”

Steve stopped, surprised. “Bucky?”

“For fuck’s sake, Steve, why can’t you ever do as you’re told? Get the fuck out!” He took a step forward, staring his friend (was he? was this the Steve he remembered? Bucky couldn’t tell anymore) down. “Get out!”

“Bucky, I don’t understand… what…?”

“You don’t have to understand, goddammit! Just get the hell out!”

“Is Tony—”

But Bucky had had enough. He advanced on Steve as fast as he could and punched the punk in the face, making him stagger back. “Get out! Or I will throw you out!”

Blood dripping from his nose, Steve finally – *finally* – complied. Once Bucky was sure he was far enough away, he went back to Stark.

“I’m sorry,” he said again. Stark was watching him in confusion. “I shouldn’t… I shouldn’t have hit you. I’m sorry. It was… I don’t know, I couldn’t stop. I couldn’t… I couldn’t stop. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” Stark nodded, closing his eyes again. “No! No, no, stay awake. Stay… oh god, just… please…”

Stark took a deep breath, hissing in pain, and looked at Bucky. “You have to… turn yourself in.”

“Yes,” Bucky said without hesitation. “Yes, I will. I will. Just… hang in there. Help is coming.”

Despite his best efforts, Stark didn’t stay awake. He was still breathing though, so Bucky settled in to wait.

Steve tried to get him to leave, but this time Bucky refused to budge. He’d made a promise and he was going to stick with it. He owed it to Stark, to Howard, to the man he’d once been to do the right thing.
When the officers arrived, Bucky surrendered immediately, and directed them to where Stark still lay, unmoving. Steve protested, and once again Bucky had to yell at him to shut the fuck up. Bucky stood quietly until Stark was wheeled past into the awaiting transport.

“Bucky,” Steve called again as the officers cuffed him.

Bucky didn’t turn around, still watching Stark, hoping with everything he had that the man would be okay.

“Bucky!”

Without looking back, Bucky allowed himself to be lead away.

32. (prompt by VeraNera)

They were all seated at the conference table, except for Clint, who was being treated by Dr Cho and her staff. Maria Hill took up a tablet and tapped something it in.

“Lab’s all set up, Boss,” she told Tony.

“Actually, he’s the Boss,” Tony replied, pointing at Steve. “I just pay for everything and design everything and make everyone look cooler.”

Steve fought not to roll his eyes. It annoyed him that Tony was always trying to make himself feel superior. Still, they had more important matters to discuss. “What’s the word on Strucker?” he asked, trying to subtly remind Tony what they were here for.

“NATO’s got him.”

“The two enhanced?”

“Wanda and Pietro Maximoff. Twins. Orphaned at ten when a shell collapsed their apartment building.” Poor kids, Steve thought. Hill went on. “Sokovia’s had a rough history. It’s nowhere special, but it’s on the way to everywhere special.”

“Their abilities?”

“He’s got increased metabolism and improved thermal homeostasis. Her thing is neuroelectric interfacing, telekinesis, mental manipulation.” Steve hated it when the others used all these ridiculous technical terms that no one understood. He looked at Hill pointedly and she sighed. “He’s fast and she’s weird.”

Was it so hard to just say that? “Well, they’re gonna show up again.”

“Agreed. File says they volunteered for Strucker’s experiments. It’s nuts.”

“Right. What kind of monster would let a German scientist experiment on them to protect their country?”

Hill didn’t seem convinced. “We’re not at war, Captain.”

“They are.”

Hill said nothing in response. Steve opened his mouth to go on with the meeting, but was interrupted.
“I’m sorry, what?” Tony said loudly, drawing everyone’s attention. “You’re kidding, right? Please tell me you’re kidding.”

Steve looked at him, annoyed again. What now?

“That is not the same thing at all. Like, not even close. Hydra is a terrorist group. They are not about ‘protecting their country’, they are about killing people. Hell, they have no country to protect. Germany sure as fuck wants nothing to do with them. So, what the fuck are you talking about? These two people are crazy terrorists, not poor man Captain Sokovia.”

No one said anything, and Steve didn’t know how to respond. “That’s not what I meant.”

“Well, that’s good, because it sounded like you were empathizing with terrorists.” He looked around the table, and Bruce and Hill nodded.

“It did kinda sound like that, Steve,” Bruce said.

Well, of course Bruce would side with Tony. Steve looked at Natasha, but she was turned the other way. Thor grimaced at Steve.

“Well, that’s not what I meant,” he repeated, even more annoyed now.

“I am sure we are all very glad to know, because I have zero sympathy for people who volunteer for Hydra and attack us, no matter what sob story they tell as justification.”

Steve clenched his teeth and said nothing. Why could Tony never leave anything alone? Why did he always have to make a fight out of everything and have the last word, undermining Steve at every turn? One day, Steve would have enough of it, and it would not end well for Tony.

The meeting went on.

Helen Cho walked into the new Avengers Compound with hesitant steps. She still wasn’t sure about her decision to come back after her recovery. Initially, she was going to quit and go back to her independent research, even if it meant giving up the amazing resources she had as part of the Avengers’ staff. It was Tony Stark who convinced her that she, and her technology, was still needed. He had offered, of course, to continue to fund her regardless, but Helen would not have felt comfortable with that arrangement. So here she was, nervousness and anxiety churning in her stomach.

She was being silly, of course. There was nothing to harm her here – though she had not completely forgotten the way Thor had grabbed Tony by the throat, lifting him in the air like it was nothing. Thor was gone, she told herself. She’d be safe. She’d probably not even see any of the Avengers, as she planned to stick to her new lab as much as possible.

The first few days passed quietly, and Helen began to get back into a rhythm with her research.

Then it all changed.

Helen was on her way in when she saw her – the woman. The red woman who had stood with that… creature… when Helen had been attacked (almost killed). Helen froze, her heart hammering in her throat and her breathing coming in fast. The woman took no notice of her and simply walked on,
greeting Captain Rogers with a smile as the man came out. The Captain smiled back and asked the woman something Helen couldn’t hear over her own pounding heart and her increasing feeling of blind terror.

Though she willed herself to move, to get away, to do something, Helen couldn’t. She could do nothing but stand there, paralyzed. The physician part of her diagnosed a panic attack, but that knowledge did nothing to curb the fear or still her shaking limbs. Eventually, she collapsed, her legs no longer able to support her, and Helen saw the Captain turn in her direction.

Helen passed out.

When she awoke, she was in the medical wing of the Compound.

“Dr Cho?” Louise, one of the new staff, asked. “How are you feeling? Is—”

Without waiting for the woman to finish, Helen got up from the bed and started looking around for her clothes. She had to get out of here. She had to get out of here now.

“Dr Cho, what…?”

“Where are my clothes? Bring them to me. Now.” It was taking all her willpower not to panic again. She needed to get out before the woman came back, before she was seen.

Another one of her assistants brought her clothes and purse and Helen started stripping on the spot, not caring about anything but leaving as fast as she could. She ignored the others and ran down the corridors to get to her car. She had to stop barely a mile from the Compound because her hands were shaking too badly. She fumbled with her purse and located her phone, calling for a taxi to take her the rest of the way home.

The next day, in a more rational state of mind, Helen began to actually think. She did a quick search on the Internet and discovered that the woman – Wanda Maximoff – had been made an Avenger. For a while, Helen couldn’t believe what she was seeing. Surely it had to be a joke, someone’s idea of a clever little bit of misinformation. However, she kept getting the same facts in many different sites. Numb with shock and incredulity, she called Tony.

“Hey Helen. How are you settling in?” he said, picking up on the fourth ring.

“Why is Wanda Maximoff an Avenger?” She could barely recognize her own voice with how cold it sounded.

“What?”

“I saw her, yesterday at the Compound. And now I find she’s an Avenger. She was with that thing! She wanted to kill you all! Kill the Avengers! That thing killed my staff, my friends! Enslaved me to help… How…” Her voice trailed off and died, and the sobs came. Helen dropped the phone and curled in on herself, remembering the horror of watching herself doing things she didn’t want to do, of not having any control over her body. She remembered the terror of knowing exactly what she was building, how it was to be used against her friends, against the world, and being powerless to stop it, stop herself. That woman… she had stood there, practically salivating at the thought of the Avengers’ destruction, not caring a wit about Helen, trapped inside herself. Maximoff hadn’t cared until her own life had been threatened, until she’d realized she wouldn’t be destroying only the Avengers. How could they have let her…?

“Helen! Helen!”
Distantly, she heard the voice from the phone and picked it up, putting herself together with an effort. “She belongs in jail,” she said.

“I…” Tony sighed and fell silent. After a long time, he spoke again, sounding defeated. “I’m sorry. It wasn’t my call. Steve… he wanted to give her another chance.”

“I see.” Helen’s mind was racing. She needed time to think. “Please accept my resignation then, Mr Stark. I appreciate all you’ve done for me. Good bye.” She hung up before he could answer and turned off the phone when he immediately tried to call her again.

After some deliberation, she called Pepper Potts’ office and set up an appointment for the following morning. She was certain that Potts would listen to her.

The next day, in the lobby of Stark Tower, Helen faced a sea of journalists in the press conference Potts had arranged for her.

“Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming. I am here to speak to you about a grave matter.” She told them everything she knew Maximoff had done, everything she had overheard while under Ultron’s control. “This woman is now living in the Avengers’ Compound as if nothing has happened. As if lives have not been lost or destroyed because she chose to ally herself with Ultron. I cannot be silent. I cannot let this continue. I urge international authorities to investigate the matter and bring that woman to justice. She is not a hero. She only changed sides because she realized Ultron’s plan would result in her own death as well. She had no care for me, or for any of my staff who were murdered and enslaved by Ultron. Please, do not let her get away with it. It is not right.”

The result was an uproar of people clamoring for Maximoff’s head, the loudest being from Sokovia. People wanted her charged as a war criminal, others were crying out for an execution. Potts anonymously released information that proved Maximoff had also been responsible for the Hulk’s attack in Johannesburg, which was the final nail on her coffin.

When Captain America stood up to defend her, the international community turned against him as well, and demanded he step down from the Avengers, fearing he had been compromised by Maximoff’s powers – or that his judgment was simply atrocious. A task force was sent to apprehend Maximoff and four officers were injured by her before she was sedated and a collar to suppress her powers could be placed on her. An independent investigation into the Avengers was also launched after Maximoff was dragged away, and Helen told the world about Thor nearly killing Tony Stark while the rest of them simply looked on.

In the end, the Avengers were disbanded and later reformed under the purview of the United Nations with strict measures in place to ensure its smooth running, including proper training and psychological counseling for all members.

Helen was lauded as a hero for speaking up and being the catalyst for all the necessary changes. For herself, she was just glad to see that justice was done.

34. (prompt by JackSparrow789, Anon and AJM)

Natasha listened to the general and congressmen talk with a bored air. She was so tired all of this bullshit. Natasha and Steve had done what they had to do, and that was the end of it. This was all completely unnecessary and a waste of her time.

“Well, he could explain how this country is expected to maintain its national security now that he
and you have laid waste to our intelligence apparatus,” General Franklyn said.

Natasha resisted the urge to roll her eyes. “Hydra was selling you lies, not intelligence.” They ought to be grateful she and Cap had exposed them.

“Many of which you seemed to have had a personal hand in telling.”

That bothered her. She’d thought she’d been doing good in SHIELD, and it had all gone wrong. Couldn’t they see she was trying to fix that?

Another guy leaned forward, a congressman. She hadn’t bothered to learn his name. “Agent, you should know that there are some on this committee who feel, given your service record both for this country and against it, that you belong in a penitentiary. Not mouthing off at Capitol Hill.”

It was an intimidation tactic that Natasha was more than familiar with. It was laughable.

“You’re not gonna put me in a prison. You’re not gonna put any of us in a prison. You know why?”

“Do enlighten us.”

Natasha smirked. “Because you need us. And yes, the world is a vulnerable place. And yes, we help make it that way. But we’re also the ones best qualified to defend it.” She tilted her head at the panel. “So if you want to arrest me, arrest me. You’ll know where to find me.” When no one said anything – as she knew they wouldn’t – she gave them a final look and stood to walk out of the room.

“Arrest her.”

Natasha stopped and turned back, shocked but not showing it.

“Agent Romanoff, you are under arrest for espionage, treason, reckless endangerment, property damage and negligent homicide.” General Franklyn gestured to someone in the back of the room and several heavily armed officers surrounded her. “We might need defenders, Agent, but you are not one of them. Best qualified to defend us? More like best qualified to screw the world over. You couldn’t even tell your own organization had been infiltrated. So, yes, you and Captain Rogers will answer for your crimes, you will pay for this mess. You are not that special.” With a contemptuous look in her direction, he nodded to the officers, who cuffed her and began leading her away.

Natasha expected Fury and Stark to come to their aid, but it didn’t happen. Fury disappeared, and Stark was silent on the matter of his former teammates’ arrests. She, Steve and Sam Wilson were convicted on all charges. Natasha was sentenced to 70 years, which was the same as a life sentence for her. The prosecutor’s closing statement remained in her memory for a long long time.

“Agent Romanoff not only ignored the destruction and deaths she caused, which could have been avoided had she and her accomplices sought help – from Mr Stark, for instance – but she also spit in people’s faces by declaring herself essential to this world’s security, effectively blackmailing the world into letting her go free. The sheer arrogance and the absolute lack of remorse is astonishing. This is not someone we could ever count on for protection. This is not someone we can give a free pass to. This is a cold remorseless terrorist who needs to be put away. For the security of the world.”

35. (prompt by VeraNera)

Steve walked into the hospital quietly. He hated this place, hated that this is where Peggy would likely spend the last days of her life. All the time they could have had together had been cruelly taken
from them. Everything they could have been… It hurt, that Steve had lost so much. Peggy was his only link to the past, the only thing he had left that was real to him. And she was… here.

He stepped out of the elevator and walked to the nurse’s station, nodding a polite hello when she looked at him.

“Wait,” she said.

Steve stopped and turned back. “Yes?” He wasn’t sure if this was a new nurse, he’d never taken the time to get to know any of them.

“Who are you here to see?” she asked.

Definitely a new one, then, Steve thought. She must not know who he was. “I’m here to see Peggy Carter.”

The nurse checked something on the computer in front of her and frowned. “I’m sorry, sir, but you are not authorized.”

“Excuse me?” What was she talking about?

The woman straightened, looking more sure of herself. “I have a note here from the family that you, Captain Rogers” (so she did know who he was) “are no longer authorized to visit Ms Carter.”

“What? That’s preposterous.” What family? Who was trying to keep him from Peggy?

“I’m sorry, sir. You can’t go in.”

“No, that’s ridiculous. I’m going to see Peggy.” As he started walking again and saw the woman reach for the phone.

“Mr Rogers, you do not have authorization. Please stop or I will have to call security to escort you out.”

Steve looked at her and the phone in her hand. He didn’t want to make a scene, so he walked back.

“Okay, look, I know you’re just doing your job, but this is ridiculous. Peggy is a friend of mine. A very old friend. I’ve visited her before and there was no problem, so I don’t understand what this is about.”

The nurse put the phone back. “Mr Rogers, I’m simply telling you what’s in the file, which is that you are no longer authorized to visit.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“Who said that?”

“It only said that it was a request of the family. I don’t know which of Ms Carter’s relatives is responsible.”

“But you realize how silly that is, don’t you? Why shouldn’t I be allowed to visit?” Steve refused to leave without seeing Peggy, but he also knew that forcing his way in wasn’t the way to go.

“It’s not my place to make those decisions, Mr Rogers. Family members have the right to restrict
visitors for our patients.”

“But it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Then you need to speak to them. I’m afraid I can’t let you in. Hospital rules.”

Steve clenched his teeth and counted to ten in his head, reminding himself again that it wasn’t the nurse’s fault. “Who can I speak to about this? There was a doctor I talked to on my first visit, I forgot her name.”

It took a while to convince her, but she eventually agreed to call the doctor, though she was busy with other patients and left Steve waiting for nearly an hour. Finally, when his patience was beginning to evaporate, he was summoned to her office.

“Mr Rogers, hello. I’m sorry to keep you waiting,” Dr Porter (it was on her nametag) said, not looking particularly sorry. “How can I help you?”

“I want to know why I’m not allowed to see Peggy.” He fought to keep his voice level through his irritation. “I want to know who said that and why. It’s ridiculous.”

Porter sighed. “Mr Rogers, it was the family’s decision.”

“Yes, but why?”

“I’m not at liberty to discuss that.”

Steve took a deep breath, holding on to his temper with difficulty. “Peggy is my friend. I want to know why I’m not allowed to see her. It makes no sense.”

Porter sighed again. “I’m only going to tell you this because I don’t want you to keep insisting. Some of Ms Carter’s relatives think your visits are not conductive for her health. I have to say I agree.”

“What? Why?”

“Your presence has caused her to get even more lost in the past. Her mind is having enough trouble recognizing the present and you… looking as you do… has made it worse. Since you have begun to visit, she has had more and more lapses where she completely forgets her family. Surely you can see how that would upset them.”

“What family?” Steve wanted to say, but he recognized that it would be insensitive. “I haven’t met any of her family.”

Porter shrugged. “Ms Carter has children and grandchildren, Mr Rogers, as well as nephews, nieces, grandnephews and grandnieces. They visit her as often as they can. While we know that forgetting them is the natural progression of her condition, it has been exacerbated by your presence. I’m sorry.”

“But…” Steve didn’t know what to say. How could these people deny him the right to see Peggy? She was… she was the only thing he had left.

“I’m very sorry.”

“But she’s going to forget them anyway, you said, with or without me, so it doesn’t matter. It might bring her comfort to see me, talk to me. We were… we had… something.”

Porter said nothing for a while. “I understand this must be difficult for you, Mr Rogers, but for Ms
Carter’s family, every second with her is precious, so it does matter. Do you imagine she would be happy to forget her children and grandchildren and remember only you? A man she knew for a few years 70 years ago instead of the people she spent a lifetime with? Her family?” She shook her head. “It is hard, Mr Rogers, for our patients to lose their sense of self. It terrifies them to forget their loved ones, to feel utterly alone. Please understand. I’m very sorry, but the family’s decision will stand. You can try to speak to them yourself, if you want, but for now I’m going to have to ask you to leave.” She stood. “Also, I’d like to suggest that you get counseling to deal with your own loss. I cannot begin to imagine how difficult your situation is. You could use some help.”

Steve walked out of the hospital in a daze, feeling like his last anchor had disappeared, leaving him adrift in an endless terrifying sea.

(AN: Okay, so I’m not really sure about this one. The idea is that Steve is, again, only thinking of himself and his own needs, ignoring Peggy’s family and how her disease impacts them (though, for the record, I have no idea if any of this is medically accurate. Let’s call it dramatic license, shall we?) I think Steve needs to let go of the past for his own good, but… well, I kinda feel sorry for him here. Also, the doctor tells Steve what might be considered privileged information because she can tell he's not going to quit until he has an answer, and she doesn't want him to harass Peggy's family or the hospital staff.)
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

At long last! A new chapter! Hooray! So sorry for the delay, guys. Unfortunately, I can't promise the next chapter will be soon, but it will come eventually. As always, thanks so much for all the kudos, comments, prompts and support. Hope you like these snippets.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

36. (prompt by taldragon and seizansha)

Steve rushed into the apartment as fast as he could, praying he’d be in time to save Bucky. He couldn’t let his friend be killed. Bucky was innocent, Steve was sure of it. It was Hydra controlling him again, using him for their own agenda, and Steve would not allow him to be hurt by anyone anymore.

Bucky startled when he heard Steve coming in, getting into a fighting stance. Shit, what if he was still under Hydra’s control?

“Bucky, it’s me. It’s Steve.” He waited, but Bucky said nothing. “You remember me, right?”

“Yes, I remember you. What are you doing here?”

With a sigh of relief, Steve walked further in, keeping his hands down just in case. “Bucky, we have to go. Right now. There’s a team coming to kill you.” Again, Bucky said nothing, just tilted his head a little to the side, as if considering. “Did you hear me? We have to leave!”

“I haven’t done anything.”

“I know. I know it wasn’t your fault, it was Hydra, but–”

“What was Hydra?” Bucky asked, still too calm for Steve’s liking. They didn’t have much time.

“The bombing in Vienna.”

“Vienna? I haven’t been anywhere near Vienna.”

_Oh, thank God_, Steve thought. “Well, that’s good. Let’s go.”

“No, I’m not going anywhere. I haven’t done anything. If people think I was in Vienna bombing something, they’re wrong. I have witnesses to prove it.”

“Witnesses? Bucky, these people are coming to kill you, they don’t care about witnesses! We have to go!”

This argument was taking far too long, so Steve got closer to take Bucky arm and drag him out if necessary. He would keep his friend safe.

“What the hell, let go of me!” Bucky twisted his arm free and glared at Steve. “Did you not hear what I just said? I’m not going anywhere.”
“Cap, the guys are coming in the building, you have 2 minutes tops,” Sam said through the comm. Desperate, Steve, took hold of Bucky’s normal arm again. Now was not the time to argue.

“Let go!” Before Steve could explain again why they had to hurry, Bucky used his metal arm to shove him away with enough force to send Steve staggering backward.

“Bucky!” He could hear footsteps from the soldiers now, and adjusted his shield to be ready to throw it at whoever walked in the door.

“Stand down, Steve. Dammit, punk, what’s wrong with you?”

The use of the old nickname distracted Steve for a moment. Three guys in heavy gear holding big guns broke down the door and pointed them at Bucky, who raised his arms and dropped to his knees before the guys even said anything.

“I surrender. Don’t shoot. I surrender.”

The man at the front looked from Bucky to Steve.

“Get on your knees, punk, before you make things worse for us,” Bucky said. Steve hesitated but did as he was told.

“Drop the shield,” the man said.

Steve looked at Bucky, who nodded, so Steve complied, still keeping a wary eye on the men.

The one in charge started talking in a language Steve didn’t understand, then gestured for his guys to secure Bucky.

“Bucky…”

“Shut up, Steve.” Then he turned to the other guy. “I don’t know anything about any bombing. I was here the whole time. My downstairs neighbor can confirm it.”

The man nodded and they all marched out of the building, where more soldiers in vans were waiting for them. Before they got in, however, a guy dressed all in black with a mask on came charging in Bucky’s direction. Steve reacted as fast as he could but the man was faster and grabbed Bucky by the throat. Steve had just broken the cuffs to go to Bucky’s aid when a shot rang out and the man dropped, blood seeping from somewhere on his torso.

“Bucky!” Steve helped his friend to his feet, checking that he wasn’t badly hurt while the other officers secured the guy in black.

They were all taken to a holding facility somewhere, where they met Tony, Nat and Rhodes and a man who introduced himself as Everett Ross. Bucky and the other guy were taken to cells and Steve and Sam went to a conference room.

“What the hell did you think you were doing, Rogers?” Rhodes asked.

“They were going to kill Bucky!”

“Really? Because he seems perfectly alive to me.”

“That other guy tried to kill him!”

“That other guy is Prince T’Challa, son of King T’Chaka of Wakanda,” Tony said. “And he had
nothing to do with the Task Force. He’s gonna be in a world of trouble for that, royalty or not.”

Well, how was Steve supposed to know that? “Bucky didn’t do it. The bombing. He said he can prove it.”

Tony sighed, dropping into a chair. “That will be investigated. If it’s true, he’ll be cleared. See how easy it is when you don’t stick your nose where it doesn’t belong?” He opened a briefcase he was carrying and put a copy of the Accords on the table. “Now sign the damn thing before this turns into an even bigger disaster.”

Steve shook his head and crossed his arms. “I’m not signing anything.”

“Well, then you’re retired. Out of the Avengers. You’ll be on the first flight back to the US. And you’ll be answering for being in Bucharest illegally. And for what happened in Lagos.”

“What?”

“It’s called the real world, Rogers. Get used to it.”

37. (prompt by hyzenthlay2323 and Laurel)

Steve had barely slept all night, too excited for what was to come. He’d been selected for Project Rebirth and he would finally have the chance to show the world what he could do, his inner strength and conviction.

He ate breakfast quickly, almost bouncing in his seat, until Peggy came over to escort him to where the procedure would be done. She smiled at him and he smiled back.

The room was crowded when they arrived, with lots of guys in white coats, some carrying clipboards and some standing in front of the various machines in the room. In the middle of it stood a huge metal contraption connected to wires.

Erskine got him in they traded some light banter. Howard Stark was there too. Steve felt hugely important. The technicians got everything ready, attaching stuff to Steve’s chest, the things that would feed the serum into his veins, probably. Erskine got a microphone to explain what was going to happen. Vials with blue liquid were placed next to Steve and a nurse injected him with something. Though it stung a little, Steve made no sound of complaint.

“That wasn’t so bad,” he said.

“That was penicillin,” Erskine replied.

Erskine did the countdown and the procedure began. Again he felt a prickle in his arms; the serum was going in. He imagined it traveling through his veins, strengthening him from the inside out. Good becomes great. I’m going to be great.

Erskine signaled to Stark and then the pod moved, getting into a vertical position before it closed. Being inside it was a bit claustrophobic, but Steve gitted his teeth and tried to keep his breathing under control. It would be over soon and he would finally be the man he’d always wanted to be. Good becomes great. He’d be rid of this stupid frail useless body. He could hardly wait.

“Steven? Can you hear me?” Dr Erskine asked.
“It’s probably too late to go to the bathroom, right?” he replied, hoping the joke would settle his nerves.

“We will proceed.”

At first nothing happened, there was only a buzzing sound all around him – the machine powering up, Steve figured. Gradually the noise increased until it was all Steve could hear. Suddenly, Steve felt a sharp stabbing pain followed by a burning sensation. Steve bit his lip as hard as he could to keep from crying out but the pain continued on relentlessly, getting worse with each passing second. He screamed.

Breath now coming in short bursts and tears trickling down his cheeks, Steve just wanted it to be over.

“Steven!”

“Shut it down!” He heard someone say outside. The hum of the machine decreased and the pain subsided a little.

No. No, it wasn’t done yet. He was still sickly Stevie. No, it had to work. Good becomes great.

“NO!” he shouted. “Don’t! I can do this!” He needed to be better, it was the only way he’d ever go to war, the only way he’d ever be respected. He needed to prove himself. He could do this. He could. Good becomes great.

The humming started again, and the pain returned with a vengeance. Steve felt like his entire body was being torn apart. Good becomes great. Good becomes great. Good becomes great. He repeated the mantra to himself over and over through the sobs and screams until he finally passed out.

It was dark when he woke up, and it took Steve a while to realize that it was because there was a bandage around his eyes and head. He couldn’t move, couldn’t really feel much of anything at all, not even pain.

He heard footsteps approaching then stopping still too far away. Steve tried to speak but no sound came out.

“He’s still alive then?” someone asked.

“Yes, for now.” That was Dr Erskine. “Though probably not for much longer. Still, we got a great deal of data. The next formula should be much better.” The other person said something Steve couldn’t hear and Erskine continued. “No, it won’t be a problem. I checked before he signed the papers. There’s no family, no one who might make trouble if he dies. Well, he has a friend in the army, but by the time he gets home Rogers will be long gone. The friend might not survive the war at all.”

“Good. So, how soon can we try again?”

“Give me another week.”

“Shall we get Hodges then?”

“Goodness, no. That would be a waste of a good soldier. There must be some other idiot who wants so desperately to be a hero that he’ll do anything for it. Let’s make sure the formula works before giving it to the real soldiers. See if you find someone who fits. Remember, no family.”
“Whatever you say, Doctor. What should I tell Colonel Philips?”

“Tell him I’ll come see him soon.”

Steve heard someone walking away and then nothing. He couldn’t believe what he’d heard. Dr Erskine… had used him? No, it couldn’t be. He’d been chosen because he was good. Good becomes great. Because he knew the value of strength. There must be some other idiot who wants so desperately to be a hero that he’ll do anything for it. No. NO!

For long minutes Steve tried to get up, to do something, anything, but his body refused to obey, and he eventually passed out again.

The next time he woke, he still seemed to be in the same place, though he could feel his body a bit more. There was pain all over and… something odd. With an effort, he raised a hand to get the bandages off his eyes.

He immediately wished he hadn’t. The hand in front of his face, his right, was horribly deformed, two fingers small and thin, the other three thick and bloated. Steve looked down at his still mostly numb body and gasped in terror. The right side of his torso had grown while the left was strangely sunk in. The right leg was big while the other was small and twisted in a weird angle.

Oh god, oh my god…

Steve screamed and screamed, though all that came out was a raspy whisper.

(Steve died of massive organ failure a few hours later. Despite Erskine’s protests, Project Rebirth was scrapped. Colonel Philips was horrified by the man’s callousness and lobbied to put him in prison. Before he was arrested, however, Erskine destroyed all his notes and shot himself. The allies defeated Hydra and won the war anyway.)

38. (prompt by Izumi2, Laurel and Music_Feeds_My_Soul)

“Miss Rushman, please come in,” Mr Madison said.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” Natasha asked with her best timid employee demeanor.

“Yes. Have a seat.” He indicated a chair in front of his desk and Natasha sat with a hesitant smile. He continued, handing her a file folder. “Miss Rushman, what is this?”

Natasha glanced at it, noticing it was some of the paperwork she’d been asked to do a couple of weeks ago. She’d handed in to the legal guys at SHIELD but they didn’t have time to complete it before her supervisor at SI had demanded it back, so she’d had to finish it herself. She’d googled how to do it and thought she’d done a pretty good job.

“Is there a problem, Mr Madison?”

He looked at her intently. “Yes, Miss Rushman, there is. This is crap. A first year law student can do better. Half of it doesn’t even make sense.” He leaned back in his chair and waited.

Natasha wasn’t sure what to do. She’d done countless undercover assignments, but rarely for things that required specific academic skills; most of the times being pretty was enough to get people to overlook any mistakes she might make.
“Mr Madison, I’m so sorry,” She said, lowering her head. “I… I’ve had some personal problems lately and… I know my work hasn’t been the best, but if you give me another chance, I’m sure I can do better.” She shifted to show a little more cleavage and crossed her legs slowly, as if nervous. Then she looked up at him with a vulnerable expression and a shaky smile. “Please give me another chance.”

He said nothing for several seconds, then sighed. “You have until tomorrow to redo this. And you will be reporting directly to me from now on.”

Natasha internally sighed in relief. Outwardly, she gave him a grateful smile and stood. “Thank you so much, Mr Madison. You won’t regret it.”

She sent the report to SHIELD and told them she needed it back asap or heads would roll. The next day she dressed extra carefully as she went to deliver the report. While Madison looked it over, she perched herself on the edge of his desk, her thigh touching his shoulder.

“Well, this certainly seems much better. Now I need you to look this over for me and proofread it.” He gave her another file. “You can sit over there while you do it. I’d like to watch you work.”

Natasha smiled to herself; men were so easy. She sat, legs crossed in such a way as to be as provocative as possible. She pretended to read the report as he watched her like a hawk, practically drooling.

“Let’s have it then,” he finally said.

She walked to him slowly, hips swinging and smile in place, going back to her earlier spot on the desk and leaning slightly to put her breasts in his direct line of sight.

For a couple of seconds he kept his gaze right there, then straightened and put a little distance between them, as if just remembering himself.

He took the file and gave it a quick look, scanning through the pages without much concern. “Well, Miss Rushman, this is certainly interesting.” He tapped a couple of keys into the computer and turned back to her. The leering expression wasn’t quite there anymore, and Natasha began to worry a bit.

“Mr Madison, I really need this job. I’m sure we can come to an understanding,” she said, once again displaying her cleavage.

“Oh, I’m sure we can.”

Three security officers entered the office without knocking, taser guns in hand.

Madison stood. “Miss Rushman, there gentlemen will escort you to another room, where you will remain until we know exactly who you are and what you want.”

Natasha let some of the fear she was feeling show on her face and voice. “Mr Madison, I… I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m Natalie Rushman, I’m an intern.”

He snorted. “Natalie Rushman might be your real name, but your resumé is obviously false. I mean, that picture alone was a dead giveaway. Also, you don’t know the first thing about this kind of work.” He waved the file in the air. Shit, it’d been a test – and she failed it. “That leads me to believe that you are a spy, though for whom I couldn’t say. There’s certainly no shortage of possibilities. In any case, your presence here constitutes espionage, and we will take all possible legal action against you and whoever hired you.” He smirked. “I suggest you get a good lawyer. An actual lawyer.”
Natasha decided to make a break for it. She crouched down and took out the two nearest guards with a single move, shoving the other one back and bolting for the door, which had been left open. She’d barely put a foot out of it when she was hit by a taser coming from another guard in the hallway. The jolt sent her crashing to the floor twitching helplessly. Before she’d even gotten her bearings the guards had cuffs around her arms and feet.

Madison came out of the office, phone in hand, watching her impassively. “Yes, we’ve got her. She tried to run, but we caught her. Oh, and we’ll be adding charges of assault.”

A couple of hours later Tony Stark himself came into room she’d been taken (and securely cuffed) to.

“Well well, Miss Rushman… I mean, Romanoff. I thought I told Fury I wasn’t interested in his boy band. So what brings you here?” He leaned on the wall, keeping a safe distance from her. There was none of the playboy attitude now, he looked dead serious. “’Cause you know, if SHIELD wanted my cooperation with whatever, this was about the absolutely worst way to get it.”

Yeah, Natasha could see that. Fury was going to be really pissed.

(Natasha was convicted of assault and espionage, and Fury let her sink on her own to salvage at least a bit of the situation with Tony – not that it did him much good.)

39. (prompt by Crosshairs)

Steve saw Sharon enter the bar out of the corner of his eye and had to restrain himself from jumping over to get the info as soon as possible. Instead, he stayed still, keeping his gaze to the bar as she slipped into the seat next to him. Sam was watching them from further away. After a few moments of silence, however, Steve couldn’t wait anymore.

“Well? Do you have anything?” He asked quietly.

“No. I’m sorry.”

Forgetting subtlety altogether, Steve turned to her. “What do you mean? You said your unit would handle it. You must know something.”

“Steve, I don’t think you should be involved in this.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You’re too close, you’re not thinking clearly. Let the Task Force handle bringing Barnes in. You can talk to him afterwards.”

Steve had seen how people dealt with supposed terrorists these days – shoot first and ask questions later. No, he couldn’t let that happen to Bucky, couldn’t let him be hunted down and killed like a criminal. He shook his head. “And if they kill him? I can’t take that chance, Sharon. Please, you know something. Tell me so I can help him. He doesn’t deserve this.”

She watched him for a moment with an expression Steve couldn’t decipher. Then she sighed and stood. “I can’t help you, Steve. I’m sorry. Barnes might not deserve to be killed, but neither did all those people in Vienna.”

“Bucky didn’t do it!” He hissed. It was the Soldier, it wasn’t Bucky’s fault.
“That’s for the law to decide, not you. You’re compromised, Steve. You can’t be part of this. I’m sorry.” She gave him a last sad look and walked away.

No. No, that couldn’t be it. Bucky was so close, he couldn’t let his best friend slip through his fingers again. He saw Sam stand and grab his wallet to pay for his drink. Steve looked back at the door Sharon had just exited from and bolted after her.

She hadn’t gone far when he caught up with her, taking her arm and leading her to a side street away from too many prying eyes. “Sharon. Tell me what you know. Please.”

She shook her head. “No. I can’t – I won’t – tell you anything. I’m sorry, Steve, but this is for the best.”

His hand tightened involuntarily as he stared at her, betrayal churning in his gut. She let out a tiny grunt of pain but Steve took no notice. All he could see was Bucky falling from the train. “Tell me. TELL ME!”

“Or what?” She raised her head to look him in the eye. There was none of the awe and admiration from just a few hours ago, when they’d shared a kiss; now her gaze was hard and uncaring. “You’ll beat me to a pulp? Threaten me? Torture me?”

Steve flinched and let go of her arm. “Of course not,” he said, though in the back of his mind he might have been considering the possibility. Near the main street, Sam looked from one to the other, a frown on his face.

“Then we have nothing more to say to each other.” Sharon took a cautious step back, right hand hovering on her side where her gun was. “Good bye, Steve.” Not taking her eyes off him, she walked towards the main street, past Sam, and finally disappeared from view.

For several moments, Steve just stood there, not knowing what to do, thoughts circling back to Bucky falling. Bucky could be anywhere, and without knowing where to even start looking, Steve had no hope of reaching him before the task force did. There was nothing he could do, no way to help Bucky. All his strength and he was as useless as he’d been as little Stevie.

“Steve,” Sam said, though Steve noticed he didn’t step too close, watching Steve wearily just like Sharon had.

Steve deflated.

From back in the hotel, he saw the news of Bucky’s arrest in Bucharest. He hurried to the airport, and there he found that Bucky was being taken to a facility and Berlin. By the time Steve landed in Berlin, the news said the Winter Soldier had escaped, killing several officers and injuring many more.

Tony, Rhodes and Natasha were at the facility when he finally arrived over two hours later, having been called in by the Accords committee to handle the situation. Steve still didn’t like the idea of the Accords, but he was too worried about Bucky to really care about it. No one knew where Bucky was. They knew the psychiatrist – or, more likely, an impostor – sent to examine him had managed to trigger the Soldier, though not the reason for it.

Bucky resurfaced in the evening, wondering around as if lost, and was brought in again with minimal fuss. He said the ‘doctor’ had asked him questions about an old base in Siberia, where more of the Winter Soldiers were kept in cryogenic suspension. Steve wanted to go after them right away, but Tony said the Task Force could handle the doctor on their own and the Avengers weren’t
“Also, you haven’t signed the Accords, so you have no authority to do anything.” Tony said, barely acknowledging Steve in favor of the phone he had pressed to his ear.

Helmut Zemo, a Sokovian citizen posing as the doctor, was apprehended in Moscow as soon as his plane had landed. He had a tape with him that he insisted had to be seen by the Avengers. The Russian government eventually agreed to send it over and they all watched together as Bucky – the Winter Soldier – killed Howard and Maria Stark. Steve felt sick at the images, but mostly he was worried about what this would mean for Bucky.

When Tony asked if he’d known, Steve tried to deny it, but Natasha confirmed that they had known. “Steve said he’d tell you,” she said. “I thought he had.” Steve had said that, yet he didn’t believe for a second that she actually thought he’d done it – she’d been just as reluctant as him to share that information. There was no point in saying that, though; it would just sound as if he was making excuses.

Tony walked out without another word, leaving an angry Rhodes – and Sam – behind.

“Don’t bother signing the Accords,” Rhodes said. “We don’t want you on the team anyway.”

“It wasn’t Bucky’s fault.”

Rhodes gave him a disgusted look. “Maybe not, but you’re still an absolute asshole for not saying anything about it. You obviously can’t be trusted since you only think of yourself and your precious assassin friend.” With a last angry look at both Steve and Natasha, Rhodes left.

“You should have told him,” Sam said, also addressing Steve and Natasha. “I guess you’re not the guy I thought you were.”

Bucky was taken back to the US to face trial. Sam signed the Accords. Steve was asked to leave the Compound immediately upon his return, and, as he still refused to sign, was kicked out of the Avengers as well. Wanda was put on probation until she learned to properly control her powers.

Steve went back to his old Brooklyn apartment and tried to see Bucky, but his friend refused to see him. Steve was alone again. And it fucking hurt.

The jet touched down silently. Steve and Bucky stepped down, scanning the surrounding area for guards or surveillance. There seemed to be none. According to T’Challa’s intel, most of the world wasn’t even aware that this prison existed, so it should be a simple matter to get in and free his friends.

Steve looked at Bucky, right here by his side where he belonged, and felt hope blossom in his chest. He had his best friend back. And he’d soon have all his other friends with him again. Everything would be fine. They’d fought and they’d won. Even Tony would have to see that eventually.

Making their way into the prison was easier than Steve had anticipated. There weren’t that many guards, and the first two they encountered were quickly taken care of before they could sound the alarm. Still, Steve kept a careful lookout for any potential problems, feeling the loss of his shield – surely Tony would give it back once he realized how wrong he’d been and how he’d allowed himself to be manipulated by Ross and Zemo.
“Steve, I don’t like this,” Bucky said. “Where are all the guards?”

“It’s a secret prison, Bucky. They’re not expecting anyone to break in.” It appalled Steve that this place existed, and more so that his friends – who had been fighting for the right cause against evil governments who wanted to use the Avengers for their own personal agenda – were here.

They came to a heavy steel door at the end of a hallway, which would hopefully lead them to the cells. He nodded to Bucky and they got into position, about to fight together like the good old days.

The room was indeed full of cells, and he saw Sam and Clint right away. Sam was turned away, lying with his back to the glass door of his cell, but Clint saw him and grinned. Steve stepped forward at the same time as another door opened and several heavily armed guards entered. They began firing immediately, so Steve and Bucky were forced to dodge, each throwing themselves to one side. Steve felt a sting on his arm and realized it was some kind of dart. He plucked it out and threw it away, only to be hit with three more from different directions. Bucky also hadn’t been quick enough to evade all of them, and was stumbling around. One of the guards hit him with something that made his body seize before falling on the floor unconscious.

“Bucky!” Steve tried to get to his friend, but was hit by the same taser-like weapon. He twitched for a few moments before everything went black.

When he woke up, he was in one of the previously unoccupied cells, and he could see Bucky sitting in another one, back to the wall hugging his knees close to his chest. No. No, this couldn’t be happening.

“Well, well,” a voice drawled, “look what the cat dragged in.”

“Ross,” Steve hissed.

“It was so kind of you to come to me, Captain. I had thought I’d have to actually put some work into capturing you, but here you are, voluntarily walking into my arms. Very thoughtful indeed. In fact, I should also thank you for your wonderful display of arrogance and selfishness, which perfectly illustrated my point about you enhanced freaks being dangerous. Now that you killed people, destroyed a tunnel and an airport, there is no doubt in anyone’s minds that enhanced individuals must be controlled. I confess I was worried that Stark would manage to spin the Accords his way and protect the lot of you, but even he can’t do anything now.” He smirked. “Well, that is if he recovers at all. Rumor has it that he might not make it.” He shook his head mockingly. “Such a shame.”

Steve couldn’t think of anything to say to that. He didn’t understand what Ross was talking about. “What happened to Tony?” He asked, though a part of him was dreading the answer.

“Oh, Captain, don’t be modest. You and your friend there beat the shit out of the man and left him for dead in Siberia of all places. Surely you didn’t expect him to survive?”

What? No! That’s not what happened! Tony was fine when they’d left. “You’re lying. Tony was fine.”

Ross laughed. “Oh, Rogers… Really? You ram your shield into his chest with enough force to smash the arc reactor and you think he was fine?” He turned serious. “No, Stark is in a coma, and might not survive. Rhodes will likely be paralyzed for the rest of his life. Vision is the only Avenger left, and without Stark’s protection, it will be child’s play to bring him here and find out exactly what he is. That only leaves Romanoff, but I also don’t imagine she’ll last long alone and unprotected. SHIELD will most certainly not help her. And I have to thank you for it, really. If you had played along and signed the Accords, I wouldn’t have managed to get all of you here. There’s no one to
care about your fate now that you are nothing but dangerous criminals. Hell, even if Stark miraculously recovers, I doubt he’ll care much about you now. He wasn’t happy about your little friends being here, you know, and I knew it would be next to impossible to keep you here with him lobbying to get you out and have a proper trial, but you solved that problem for me. So, again, I have to thank you.”

All the others were looking at Ross with horror as the implication of his words sunk in.

“I hope you enjoy your stay, gentleman,” he said, “It’s going to be a long one.”

As Ross walked out chuckling to himself, Steve looked at Bucky, still hunched in his cell with an air of resignation and hopelessness, and at the others, faces wide with fear and disbelief, and all he could think was ‘what have I done?’

Chapter End Notes

I think this is the fourth time I’ve killed Steve in these snippets (and Bucky died once too). Should I add a ‘major character death’ in the tags? I don’t think the people that read this would be very upset about the deaths, but… just in case? What do you guys think?
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Additional warning: this chapter contains graphic violence and death in some of the snippets.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

41. (prompt by Ds)

Steve hated press conferences, hated being in front of people like a dancing monkey – he’d had enough of that back in the war. If there was one thing he’d learned about the future was that you couldn’t trust the press – or anyone, really; except for his own team. Unfortunately, Hill had insisted that he had to do a press conference after what had happened in Lagos, and Natasha had agree that it would be a good idea, considering how up in arms people seemed to be about it.

“We need to say something,” Nat had said. “Or people are going to make up whatever story they want and say it’s the truth.”

It was a very dishonest world, Steve had found. Nobody cared about the truth anymore – hell, people didn’t seem to know what it was most of the times. So he’d had no choice but to set up a time and place and prepare a short statement. Now here he was, waiting to go in. Alone, because Nat had thought it would be better. Steve certainly didn’t want to submit poor Wanda to this; what people had been saying about her was terrible and unfair. Did these people really have no shame? Vilifying a poor girl who had already lost so much because she’d tried to do the right thing? It was appalling.

Finally, it was time. Steve squared his shoulders and got up on the little podium to say his piece and hopefully put this entire matter to rest.

“Good morning,” Steve said. “Thank you all for coming.” He took a breath, looking out at the gathered crowd, who didn’t seem particularly friendly. It made him a bit nervous, but he steeled himself and continued. “The Avengers are about protecting people. In Lagos we stopped a dangerous terrorist who intended to unleash a biological weapon on innocent people. It is unfortunate that casualties could not be avoided, but the public can rest assured that the Avengers will continue to protect the citizens of the world. Thank you.”

For a moment, there was silence in the room, and Steve allowed himself to sigh in relief. Then, like a dam breaking, everyone started speaking (shouting) at once.

“If you are about protecting people, why didn’t you protect the 33 people that died in Lagos, or the 69 that were injured?” a black reporter asked. “Were they not people enough for you?”

“Like I said, we do our best but sometimes casualties happen,” Steve replied patiently. He did not like the man’s tone.

“And what do you plan to do to make sure it doesn’t happen next time?” someone else shouted.

“We will do our best–”

“Like you did this time?” Another journalist asked. “Looks like your best isn’t good enough.”
Steve bristled, but before he could think of something to say, someone else was yelling a question.

“What about all the damages done to the city? Who’s going to pay for that?”

Right, money. That was all people cared about, Steve thought in disgust. “The Stark Foundation—”

He was interrupted again. “Stark had nothing to do with Lagos!” a female reporter said. “He wasn’t even there! Why should he pay for anything?”

“Yeah,” another one agreed. “He isn’t even an Avenger anymore. You said so last year. So why should he have to clean up your mess?”

“Pay with your own money!” Someone yelled from the back.

“Yeah, you and the others who were there should pay!”

There was too much shouting after that, none of it good. Steve wanted to leave right then, but figured it wouldn’t look good. He looked around and saw an older guy with a hand raised and pointed at him, hoping that would shut everyone else up.

“Why wasn’t the Nigerian police informed of the terrorist threat or your operation to stop them? They could have helped evacuate the area.”

Steve sighed. “We were chasing a Hydra terrorist, any info could have been leaked to them.”

“Are you saying the Nigerian police is in league with Hydra?” someone else asked. “That’s a very serious accusation. Do you have any proof?”

And everyone started talking again, making it impossible to understand anything. Steve had had enough. He cleared his throat loudly to get people’s attention and put an end to this waste of time. “This is all, people. Thanks for coming.” He walked out to more shouts from the crowd, which he ignored.

Well, he thought, glad that’s over. Even though they’d pretty much twisted everything he’d said.

Later that day, Steve, Sam, Nat and Wanda gathered to see the news (Vision was nowhere to be found, for which Steve was grateful – he still wasn’t sure about the android, or whatever the heck he was).

“Steve Rogers gave a press conference earlier today in which he implied the Nigerian police had ties to Hydra and that was why the Avengers didn’t inform them of their operation in the country. The Nigerian government has responded by filing a law suit against Rogers, Sam Wilson, Natasha Romanoff and Wanda Maximoff to make them pay for the damages to the city and medical care for the victims, many of whom are still in the hospital. That is in addition to criminal charges of illegal entry into the country and reckless endangerment. They are also petitioning with the US government to have the Avengers, and specifically Miss Maximoff, questioned on their competence and suitability for this line of work.

“The US government replied that it is not responsible for the Avengers, which then prompted several nations around the world to ask ‘who has jurisdiction over the Avengers?’

“Former Avenger Tony Stark has declined to make any comments on the matter, saying simply that he is no longer a part of the team. It has not escaped the world’s attention, however, that while Stark was part of the Avengers, no international blunders of this magnitude were made.”

“What about Ultron?” Steve muttered under his breath.
“There is renewed speculation now surrounding Stark’s and Dr Banner’s departure from the team, and the addition of Maximoff. An investigation into the matter will likely be launched in the coming days.”

As the reporter started in on other news, Steve looked at his friends, seeing the same confusion on Sam and Wanda’s faces.

“Are they serious?” Sam asked. “Can they make us pay for damages?”

“Yes, they can.” Maria Hill strode into the room with an air of someone who was one bad word away from throttling somebody. “What the hell was that press conference, Rogers? You were supposed to make things better, not worse! I’ve spent the whole fucking day making calls trying to keep your stupid asses out of the fire – without much success, I might add. Why didn’t you say what the PR person told you to?”

Steve was about to ask what PR person when he remembered the woman who’d talked to him about an hour before the conference. She’d given him some cards, but Steve had already written his statement, so he hadn’t bothered to pay attention to her, or even read the stuff she gave him. He wasn’t a dancing monkey anymore, and he didn’t need others to speak for him.

“The entire world is up in arms about what you morons did and you just pour more gas into the fire,” Hill continued, anger in every line of the body. “Several countries have now preemptively barred entrance to the Avengers, and any violations will likely be treated as an act of war!”

“Hey, now! That’s a bit of an exaggeration, isn’t?” Sam asked, though he seemed worried.

“An exaggeration?!” Hill was spitting mad now. “What would you think if a group of foreigners came to New York illegally, blew up a building with people in it and then left without even a token apology? And then went on TV to say nothing would be done about it because it was just an unfortunate accident?”

Sam wilted under Hill’s furious glare. Then she turned to Nat. “You should have known better, Agent Romanoff. What the fuck were you idiots thinking? Why didn’t you tell me what you were planning? I could have helped coordinate with local government. Do you have any idea how stupid I felt not knowing anything about it until angry government officials called me to yell about terrorist acts? Yours, in case it’s still not clear.”

“No wait a minute,” Steve interjected, trying to regain control of the situation. “We’re not terrorists. And we stopped Rumlow. That’s the important thing.” Why did no one remember that?

His words were greeted with silence.

“Right,” Hill said at last. “You got your guy so the dead and injured are irrelevant. I’m sure their families would find that very comforting.” She took a deep breath and looked at each of them in turn. “You are all suspended pending an investigation.” Steve tried to say something but she continued before he could get any words out. “It’s out of my hands. You will stay here for the time being. Consider yourselves on house arrest.”

Things went downhill from there. A week later the US government revoked Wanda’s visa and she was deported to Sokovia, where she was arrested as soon as she stepped off the plane. Steve and the others watched on TV as she was dragged away in chains with charges of terrorism and several counts of murder and torture, the latter apparently committed while she was working with Hydra, as the news reporter said.
“No, that can’t be right,” Steve said. Wanda was just a misguided kid who had wanted to fight for her country.

Nat looked at him. “You have no idea what she did before, Steve. You didn’t ask. None of us did.”

Before she got into the awaiting police van, however, Wanda freed herself using her powers and sent all the officers flying with a wave of her hands, red mist flickering around her. Several more officers arrived to try and contain her, and once again she sent them to the floor, where they seemed to writhe in agony.

Steve felt his eyes widen as he watched the violent attack Wanda unleashed on the people around them, until the camera went dark and the reporter back in the studio said they had lost contact with their local correspondents. An hour later, the news announced that Wanda had been killed by a sniper while attempting to flee, though not before she killed three law enforcement agents as well as five bystanders, and injured more than a dozen other people in her path.

The whole thing seemed surreal, Steve thought. “Wanda isn’t a bad person,” he said, still staring uncomprehendingly at the TV.

“For god’s sake, Steve,” Natasha said, “you know nothing about her. You never did. We shouldn’t have put her on the team. She tried to kill us.” She shook her head. “I don’t know what we were thinking.”

There was nothing to say after that.

Something called the Sokovia Accords were created and ratified by several countries not long after that. Its purpose, Steve was told, was to regulate and oversee the Avengers’ activities. Tony, Rhodes and Vision signed in front of the world in the United Nations building in Vienna. Steve, Sam and Natasha weren’t even given the option of considering doing the same; they were simply kicked out of the Compound. Steve’s protests against it fell on deaf ears.

“Your actions are still under investigation,” Hill said while she watched them gather their things. “You are not a viable candidate for the Avengers Initiative at this time.”

A little later they received a court order to pay for the damages in Lagos, a staggering amount they would never be able to afford. Sam had to sell his house and all their assets were seized. They couldn’t even afford a decent lawyer to defend them from the criminal charges against them, and ended up in jail for reckless endangerment and negligent homicide.

The Avengers, led by Rhodes, continued to work to defend the world, while Steve and the others sat in jail cells, forgotten.

42. (prompt by izumi2 and FadingStar)

Things seemed to go wrong the minute he stepped out of the airport. Bruce took a cab and asked to be taken to Avengers Tower, only to be told the Avengers had moved to a new facility upstate. Bruce frowned in surprise, but asked to be taken there instead.

He had not talked to anyone since he’d left after the battle against Ultron; he had, in fact, buried himself in the most remote location he could find to get away from it all. He had no idea what had been going on in the year he’d been gone, and now he had a bad feeling about the whole thing. He actually considered turning back and disappearing again, but he didn’t want to leave without at least talking to Tony – his friend deserved that much.
The long ride was made in silence, with Bruce lost in thought. Even after all this time away, he was still not sure how he felt about what had happened during the Ultron ‘incident’. There were too many things that bothered him about it: the fact that Ultron had activated in the first place, the team’s reaction to it, Natasha triggering a transformation against his express wishes, the Maximoff twins, Steve attacking him and Tony… The list seemed endless when he thought about it for too long. He wasn’t sure he could ever be part of the group again, not after that loss of trust. And he couldn’t even say that he would miss them that much, apart from Tony – in retrospect, it didn’t seem as if they’d been as close as he had imagined at the time.

Eventually he arrived at the new compound, nervous energy and vague uneasiness making him hesitate before he steeled himself to go in.

His security codes worked on the door, so he had no problem getting inside. It seemed very quiet.

“Hello?” he asked, expecting Jarvis at least to greet him. When no one answered, Bruce cautiously continued. In the kitchen, he finally found someone: Steve Rogers. He was sitting on the counter with a newspaper and a glass. “Steve,” Bruce said, tone neutral. He wasn’t sure how he felt about the man anymore. Not a friend, certainly; no longer a co-worker. An acquaintance, perhaps – one he didn’t entirely trust.

“Bruce!” The man exclaimed, a smile on his face. It seemed genuine, but Bruce didn’t trust it anymore. Natasha had also smiled at him, and later had metaphorically stabbed him in the back. “I didn’t know you were coming back.”

“Well, here I am. Where’s Tony?” Looking at Steve was making Bruce uncomfortable. Maybe he shouldn’t have come back. He should have just called Tony.

Steve frowned. “He’s not here. He’s… not an Avenger anymore. He left.”

“Left?” Bruce might have thought it odd, but then he remembered how Thor had dangled Tony by the neck while the rest of them (including Bruce himself, who had been trying to keep the Hulk under control) looked on and did nothing to help. Yeah, Bruce couldn’t blame Tony one bit for leaving – he’d done the same, after all. “I see.” He really should have called.

He turned to leave, not wanting to be in Steve’s presence any longer (or risk seeing Natasha, if she happened to be around). Standing at the doorway, however, was Wanda Maximoff.

The Hulk roared in his head and Bruce took a step back, rounding back on Steve. “What is she doing here?” he hissed through gritted teeth.

“She’s an Avenger now,” Steve said, watching Bruce warily, as if Bruce was the one who was in the habit of messing with people’s minds.

“Are you out of your mind?! After what she did? To you? To me?!” He turned back to the woman and she recoiled, no doubt noticing the green shining out of his eyes. “Have you been fucking with their minds all this time?”

“Bruce, Wanda didn’t do anything—”

“Are you crazy?” Bruce growled. “Didn’t do anything?! She let the Hulk loose on a rampage! She played with my mind and made me hurt people! She used me like a weapon! She’s worse than Ross!”

He couldn’t control the transformation anymore. The Hulk wanted out, he wanted to crush the witch. (And frankly, so did Bruce.)
Hulk looked at witch, at the red in her hands. Hulk remembered the red. The red had made him mad and made him want to smash puny people, made him want to smash Tony. But Tony was friend, not for smashing, and puny people without guns weren’t for smashing either. Witch made Hulk scared, made Hulk bad. Hulk wasn’t bad. Witch was bad. Hulk smash witch.

Hulk lunged for witch. Hulk was faster than witch and with one mighty fist sent her hurling into the wall. Witch crumbled and didn’t move – but witch wasn’t dead. Not yet.

Hulk turned to Captain. “Where’s Tony? What did witch do to Tony?”

More people came into the room. A man Hulk didn’t know and Natasha. Natasha stopped when she saw him. Hulk snarled at her. Natasha was not friend – she hurt puny Banner. Said pretty things and then used him (them). Natasha was not friend. Captain was not friend – Captain attacked Tony, sided with witch. Only Tony was friend.

“WHERE IS TONY?” Hulk screamed and all the puny people jumped. They were scared of Hulk. Good. They should be scared of Hulk.

“Calm down, big guy,” Natasha said, pretending to be nice, to be friend. But she wasn’t. “It’s time for a lullaby.”


“Mr Hulk?”

Hulk turned, trying to find woman who was speaking. There was no one there. Hulk didn’t like it.

“I am Friday, an AI created by Mr Stark. Mr Stark has been notified of your arrival and is on his way. Please remain calm.”

That made Hulk relax. Tony was coming. Good. “Hulk wants to talk to Tony.”

“Hey there, Green Bean.”

Hulk relaxed even more. Tony was okay. Witch hadn’t hurt him. “Tony,” Hulk said, still keeping an eye on the others. Captain was trying to go to witch, so Hulk got in his way, and he scrambled back.

“What’s going on, buddy?” Tony asked.

“Hulk came back. Hulk sorry he left without saying goodbye. Is Tony still friend?”

“Of course.”

“Witch is here. Witch who hurt Hulk and Banner is here. Captain says she’s Avenger. Hulk smashed her.” Hulk’s lips curled in satisfaction. Witch was still down.

There was silence before Tony spoke again. “Is she dead?”

Hulk shook his head, then remembered Tony wasn’t here and couldn’t see. “No. Hulk didn’t kill witch, just smashed her.”

“Okay. Okay. Just… just sit tight. I’ll be right there, all right?”

Hulk thought about it. No, that wasn’t good. Tony shouldn’t be here, with these people. They
weren’t friends. What if they attacked? They did before. What if they blamed Tony? Tony shouldn’t be here. Puny Banner agreed.

“No. Here isn’t safe for Tony.” Hulk glared at puny people: Captain, Natasha, other man Hulk didn’t know (friend of Cap’s, Banner said). “Hulk leaves. Hulk meets Tony somewhere else. Away from witch. Hulk doesn’t trust witch and puny people. They’re not friends.”

Again, there was a short silence. “Okay. There’s a field a few miles north from the Compound. I’ll meet you there. How’s that?”

“Good.”

“Okay.”

Hulk roared at puny people again just to see them back away in fear, then ran off to go meet Tony. Hulk didn’t want to see puny people not-friends anymore.

Tony was there quick, like he said. Tony was nice like that. He said things and he meant them. He was always nice to Hulk and to puny Banner.

“Hulk is sorry for running away,” Hulk said as soon as Tony arrived. Puny Banner was bad at apologies, so Hulk would say it for him.

“It’s okay, big guy.”

But Hulk shook his head. It wasn’t okay. Hulk had regretted it pretty soon, but then puny Banner took control and he wouldn’t let Hulk come back until now. “Hulk missed friend Tony.”

Tony got out of the suit and smiled at Hulk. “I missed you too, buddy.”

Tony looked sad though, so Hulk hugged him – carefully, because Tony was friend and Hulk would never hurt friend (except when witch messed with Hulk’s head).

“Okay, so what happened with Wanda?” Tony asked when Hulk let go.

“Hulk smashed her. Captain says she’s Avenger. How? She hurt people! She’s bad! Hulk doesn’t like her. Hulk doesn’t trust her.”

“When you say ‘smashed’… what did you do?”

“She had red in her hands, like before, when she made Hulk crazy. So Hulk punched her. But didn’t kill her. Hulk wanted to, but killing is bad. Hulk isn’t bad – witch is bad.” Now Hulk wanted to smash her again. “Banner wanted to smash her too. And Natasha.”

“Why? What did Natasha do?”

Hulk growled. “She pushed Banner into big hole to make Hulk come out because Banner didn’t want to let Hulk out. Banner doesn’t trust her anymore. Hulk doesn’t either. Hulk doesn’t trust any of them if they side with witch.” Hulked paused, looking at Tony. “Did witch hurt Tony? Is that why Tony left?”

Tony didn’t answer, but Hulk could see it was true. Witch hurt Tony. Hulk should have smashed her harder.

“All right, buddy. Let’s get back to the Tower and figure out what we’re going to do.”
Bruce transformed back while they waited for the car Tony had requested. “What happened after I left?” he asked, feeling even guiltier now for leaving Tony to the wolves.

The story Tony told him was almost unbelievable, how everyone else had simply ignored everything Wanda had done because her terrorist brother had died.

“So she’s faced no consequences whatsoever for what she did?”

Tony sighed. “Steve and Clint thought she should get a second chance. Wilson and Natasha agreed. I was outvoted, so I... left.”

“And you don’t think she might have manipulated them into it?”

“No, I don’t think she did. Well, not by mind control, at least. She batted her pretty eyes and that was enough for Cap. And I was the bad guy for being so hard on her after ‘all she’s been through’”. He made air quotes and snorted. “I guess I’m better off by myself anyway.”

Bruce had to agree. Clearly he’d been right the first time and this so-called team was a disaster waiting to happen. And now it had happened. “Well, that’s not gonna stand.” Bruce would not let that happen, whatever it took. Mass murderers shouldn’t get a free pass because their loved ones got killed (by their own actions no less). What about the people she’d killed?

Once in the Tower, they went digging into Hydra’s records and found plenty to make their skin crawl regarding the Maximoffs. They also heard from Friday that Rogers had called a doctor to see to Wanda, and that, despite some broken bones, she’d eventually recover. Bruce didn’t feel at all sorry about hurting her. And with the evidence they now had, he doubted many people would either.

It was a simple matter, with Tony’s connections, to contact the International Terrorist Task Force and give them the information they’d uncovered. From then, it took the group three days to review it and decide what to charge her with. In the meantime, Bruce and Tony developed a collar to inhibit Wanda’s power, so she wouldn’t be able to hurt more people.

Steve protested vehemently when Bruce, Tony and the Task Force agents came to the Compound to arrest Wanda.

“First you attack without provocation, and now this?”

“Without provocation?” Bruce replied, incredulous. Then he shook his head. There was no point arguing with the man, he clearly didn’t give a crap about either Bruce or Tony. “Fuck you, Rogers. Just get out of the way so the agents can do their jobs.”

“I won’t let you take her.”

“Do you know what this is Mr Rogers?” Commander Trent asked, waving a piece of paper in Steve’s face. “This is an arrest warrant. It gives me and my men the legal right to detain Miss Maximoff. If you interfere in any way, you will be charged with obstruction of justice, and will be arrested along with her. Is that clear?”

Steve took the warrant and stared at it as if he wasn’t sure what it was. “What is she being charged with? She’s just a kid, for god’s sake.”

Trent gave him a dirty look. “A kid who has killed and tortured people. Yeah, she’s a real sweetheart.”

“What? That’s not true.”
“What the hell is wrong with you? You do remember she’s Hydra, right?” Bruce asked.

Despite Steve’s protests, Maximoff was tried and convicted. Steve was charged with obstruction of justice for shielding her from any investigation. Rhodes took command of the Avengers, and fired Natasha.

Bruce was glad he had decided to come back after all.

43. (prompt by Andria)

(AN: Additional warning for lots of violence and death)

Natasha was cleaning her weapons while Steve flipped through the channels and Sam fixed them some sandwiches. They had just come back from another frustrated attempt to find Barnes and were trying to unwind.

Steve kept complaining about the choice of programs on the TV, so Sam told him to just put on the news. Natasha didn’t pay much attention to whichever politician was trying to win the public’s favor this week by announcing some program or another, but then the news changed to a reporter standing in front of a house she instantly recognized.

“Turn it up,” she said sharply, abandoning the table to get closer to the TV on the other side of the room.

“Police still have no leads in the murder of the Green family. 36 year-old Laura and her two kids, Cooper age 6, and Lila age 3, were found brutally tortured and murdered earlier today, all with their throats slit. The family lived in an isolated farm and had no apparent enemies. Laura’s husband, Dennis Green, has not been found. According to the locals, Mr Green travels often for business, and has not been seen for months.”

Natasha stared at the images shown, small bodies in the familiar black bag, blood all over the floor and walls of the house. Outside, on the front porch where the reporter stood, she could see a symbol painted into the wall, a symbol she recognized. Oh god.

“Nat?” Steve said. “Nat, what’s wrong?”

Sam had come into the room as well, both of them looking at her with concern.

“That… on the TV… Clint’s family. His wife and kids.” Oh god, Laura. Cooper. Lila. No, it couldn’t be. They were safe. No one knew about them or their connection with Clint. No one but SHIELD.

Except she’d dumped all of SHIELD’s files on the Internet, where anyone could see them. Anyone with a grudge against SHIELD, or against Clint personally. Anyone who might use that information for revenge against innocents. Like the people who had painted that symbol.

Oh god, what have we done?

They all turned as the door was blown off its hinges and Clint walked into the room. He was filthy, blood all over the side of his head, a gun in his hand.

“Clint!” She said, then stopped when she saw the wild look in his eyes.
“My family is dead!”

“Clint, I’m sorry—”

“What the fuck were you fuckers thinking dumping all that information like that?! Do you have any
idea what you’ve done?!”

“Hey man, take it easy,” Sam said, hands up in a placating gesture.

Clint didn’t hesitate to shoot him right in the head. Sam was dead before his body hit the ground.
Steve took a split second to react, and that was enough for Clint to turn to him and fire three shots in
quick succession, hitting him in both legs and the stomach. Steve dropped, gasping in pain.

“You…” Clint hissed, training his gun back on Natasha. “You did this. You killed them! Laura! My
kids! MY BABIES! They’re dead because of you!”

“I’m sorry. Oh god, I’m so sorry,” Natasha said, already knowing it would make no difference.

“I should have killed you when I had the chance. Then my family would still be alive.”

“Clint…” Natasha tensed, prepared to rush at him, but he was quicker and fired. Three shots, legs
and stomach, just like Steve. Shots to incapacitate, not to kill. He wasn’t done with them yet.

Clint reloaded. “Do you know what they did to them? To my kids? DO YOU!?!” he screamed.

“Clint,” Steve said, trying to stand, but Clint just shot him again, in the shoulder this time.

“I don’t want to hear your justifications. The great Captain America,” he snarled, “protector of the
weak and innocent. Ha! What a fucking joke. You’re the biggest killer of them all.”

“This isn’t going to bring them back, Clint,” Natasha tried, gritting her teeth against the pain.

“No, I know that. This is about revenge, Nat, plain and simple. You got my family – and lots of
others – killed, so I’ll kill you. It won’t bring them back, no, but at least you’ll be just as dead as
them.”

They heard sirens in the distance; probably a neighbor who’d heard the shots and called the police.

“Clint, please…” she tried one last time.

“Burn in hell, Natasha.”

He fired again, and she was gone.

(Clint then turned to Steve and shot him in the head too, before killing himself. There was no point in
keeping on living, not when he’d already lost everything.)

44. (prompt by Core)

“I don’t think this is a good idea,” Pietro said, looking at the building with trepidation.

Wanda scowled at him. “Do you want to get revenge or not?” Pietro was always too soft, Wanda
thought. He needed to toughen up.
“You know I do,” he said, even though Wanda knew nothing of the sort. Pietro talked the big talk, but most of the time Wanda saw little conviction in him. She was quite sure that if she stopped talking about revenge, Pietro would forget about it altogether and just get on with his life – as if they could ever have any kind of life while that monster who’d killed their parents walked free.

“Come on then.” She started to walk but Pietro didn’t move. “Pietro…”

“Revenge is one thing, Wanda, but Hydra? I don’t think we can trust them.”

“We don’t need to trust them. We just need to use their resources. This is the only way we can get our revenge. They have power and we need it.” She glared. “Now stop being a coward and come on!”

She strode confidently in, Pietro following more slowly. Wanda knew what Hydra was, of course, she wasn’t stupid, but she needed them. If they could help her get her revenge, she was willing to do whatever they asked. She had learned early on that no one would help anyone for free, and that people were only concerned with themselves. The only one she could ever rely on was herself (and Pietro). No one had cared about them after their parents had died – no one had cared that their parents had died in the first place. The government didn’t care, the word didn’t care. If she wanted something done, she’d have to do it herself, and fight for it. And she would. She had spent the last 10 years dreaming of revenge, and nothing was going to stop her now.

She hated the people there. They were merely a means to an end; she didn’t have to like them, or even agree with whatever they were doing, she just had to follow orders and wait for her chance. If she proved herself, they would give her the means to kill Stark, and that was all that mattered.

After several months, she finally had her opportunity. One of the doctors said they had a way of granting people extraordinary powers. It was dangerous, he said, but it would make them invincible.

“We want to do it,” Wanda said, the first one of the group to speak up.

Doctor List smiled. “Very good, Miss Maximoff. You have shown yourself to be quite determined. We can make you powerful. A perfect weapon.”

Yes, she though, I will be the weapon of Stark’s destruction like I’ve always dreamed.

Pietro was, of course, less sure. He thought it was too risky. “You have no idea what they’re going to do. What if it doesn’t work? What if they’re lying?”

“They aren’t lying. I’ve seen the artifact. It’s real and it’s powerful. I’ve felt it. It called to me. It will give me the power I need, and I will crush Stark.” She smiled. There were so many things she would be able to do she’d have trouble deciding.

It took her a while, but eventually she persuaded Pietro to go with her. She told him she’d do it with or without him, and he relented. They would have power beyond their dreams, and no one would ever hurt them again. They would be gods.

On the day of the procedure, Wanda was excited. It felt like this was what she had been waiting for all these years, ever since that bomb had fallen on her house and ended her childhood, her life.

There were 10 volunteers, all young like her and Pietro. They were all weak and stupid though. All they thought about was money. It was like they couldn’t see anything beyond themselves and their petty desires. They weren’t worthy.

She looked at the scepter resting inside some machine and again felt its power resonate in her. She
could almost hear it talking to her, telling her what great things they could do together. The others were nervous, she could tell, but not Wanda. This was her destiny, she just knew it.

One by one, the volunteers were strapped in and Dr List signaled his assistants to begin. For a while, nothing happened, and Wanda felt disappointed. Then, finally, the scepter started to glow brighter. The scientists left the room and the machine with the scepter opened, letting its light bathe the volunteers.

The man in the far right began to scream and thrash. Wanda saw his face contort in pain and then he went still, slumping in the chair. The others all looked at each other in fear. Next to her, Pietro was fighting against his restraints. He was the next one to scream in pain.

“No!” Wanda shouted, just as several of the others cried out in panic. Pietro began convulsing in the chair, body going rigid and mouth opened in a silent scream.

Wanda had no idea how much time passed before the scepter’s light dimmed and the room fell quiet. She felt dizzy and her head hurt, but other than that she was okay. The scientists came into the room to check on the volunteers.

“Pietro! Pietro!” There was no response. “What’s happened? Is he all right? Tell me!”

“He’s alive,” one of the doctors said.

“This one is dead,” another said, examining the man who had screamed first. “These ones too.”

The three corpses were removed in black body bags. The people still conscious were crying and begging to be let out, but the doctors ignored all of them. They left the room and the scepter began glowing again. There were more screams and convulsions from the others. Wanda’s head felt like it was going to explode by the time it was over.

Pietro had barely moved at all. She could see blood seeping out of his nose and ears. He was taken out in a body bag with four others.

No… No, it couldn’t be. Pietro couldn’t be dead. It wasn’t fair. They were supposed to get powers and kill Stark.

Only Wanda and two men remained. One was moaning and pleading incoherently while the other just stared straight ahead, eyes shining bright blue.

When Wanda looked down at herself, she saw that her hands had a faint red glow, like mist around her fingers. She concentrated through the pain and was able to make sparks appear at her fingertips. It had worked. She had some kind of power, she could feel it coursing through her, pressing to be let out.

But what did it matter now that her only family was gone? It was her fault. She’d killed Pietro. She’d killed her brother, her twin. He hadn’t wanted any of this; it had all been her idea, her insistence. And now he was dead.

The red mist got stronger and more solid around her. She looked at the door, through which Pietro’s body had been taken, and screamed.

(Wanda blew herself up and took most of the Hydra base with her.)
Sam watched Steve leave the room in confusion. He wanted to go after him and find out what was going on, but Rhodes pinned him in place with a look.

“Look guys,” Sam began, only to be interrupted by Rhodes.

“No, you look. You were Air Force, Sam, so you of all people should know why a clear chain of command and proper procedures need to be in place. Lagos was a fucking disaster, and it could have been avoided.”

“We did the best we could,” Wanda said. “If we give up, next time no one gets saved.”

“Well, when he put it like that it did seem pretty reasonable. Still… “How can you trust that guy Ross? He’s bad news, man.” Nothing that man was involved with could be good.

“Ross has nothing to do with the Accords,” Stark said, coming to stand by the table next to Rhodes. “It was written by representatives of 117 countries. The US is only one of them. Ross has no power over any of it, he was just here to tell us what they are about. Which, by the way, shouldn’t even have been necessary, given that it’s been in the news for weeks. Seriously, do you ever turn on the TV or read about what’s going on in the world? You should try that.”

Sam bristled at the reprimand, but maybe Stark had a point. Now that he thought about it, Sam recalled seeing something about this in the news a while back, but he hadn’t paid much attention. “And who are these people who will be deciding what the Avengers should do or where to go?”

“A United Nations Panel,” Rhodes answered. “I know you had a bad experience with Hydra, but the UN is nothing like that. For starters, the UN is all about transparency – the complete opposite of Hydra. And SHIELD, for that matter. And yeah, there will undoubtedly be private interests at play there, but the fact that there are multiple countries involved means it will be harder for any of them to push their own agendas through. It’s not full proof, but nothing is.”

“That thing Steve just said,” Stark continued, “about the safest hands being our own? That’s a load of crap. No one is perfect – I know I’m not – not even the great Captain America.” He paused. “Just ask the people in Lagos.”

Sam wanted to protest that, but he realized that Stark and Rhodes had a point. The Lagos mission had been a mess. In the Air Force, there would have been a review to figure out how it had gone wrong. In truth, it had probably gone wrong because, since it had initially been about finding Bucky and not Hydra terrorists, they hadn’t used any of their regular resources. So, yes, it had been their fault. Shit. If the Accords were really about accountability and not control, then they were probably a good thing. At the very least, he should learn more about them before he made a decision about signing or not.

“Okay,” he said. “Can we go over them together? I want to know how this is supposed to work.”
After a couple of hour’s discussion, Sam felt a lot better about the whole thing (and also a lot guiltier about his role in Lagos). Once everyone dispersed, Sam went to look for Steve.

“Hey, man, what’s going on?” he asked.

“Peggy’s dead.”

“Oh, man. I’m sorry.”

“The funeral will be in London. I’m flying out tomorrow.”

“You want me to come with? Moral support or something?”

Steve smiled sadly. “Thanks, Sam. I’d appreciate that.”

“Wanna talk? About… I don’t know, whatever.”

So Steve told him about Peggy as he knew her back in the 40s. “We were supposed to go on a date. Dancing, you know. She said she’d show me how it was done, but…”

The flight was pretty uneventful. Steve seemed lost in thought for most of it. Sam couldn’t imagine how hard this must have been for him, losing his only link to the past. The service was nice, as far as such things went, and later Sam and Steve sat in the hotel bar having a drink. That was when they saw the news: the Winter Soldier was a suspect in a bombing in Vienna.

“We have to do something. It wasn’t Bucky.”

“You don’t know that, Steve.”

“Bucky wouldn’t do that,” Steve insisted.

“Well, there’s nothing we can do. It’s out of our hands.”

Steve stood and walked away. Sam sighed. Man, shit just keeps happening, he thought.

A few minutes later, Steve came back. “I talked to Sharon. She’s gonna see what she can find out.”

“Steve, this is a bad idea. You’re too close to this. You gotta let other people deal with it.” This was exactly why the Accords were necessary, Sam realized. Steve had no objectivity when it came to Bucky, he jumped in feet first without any thought to the consequences. Sam might have been willing to go along with it in Lagos, but he couldn’t do it this time. This had disaster written all over it.

“Like some committee? Come on, Sam, you can’t think some paper pushers know more about this kind of situation than we do. All these Accords would do is jerk us around so nothing would ever get done.”

Sam shook his head. “That’s not how it works, Steve. I’ve read the Accords, they’re not a bad thing. There might be some stuff that needs to be adjusted, but most of it is pretty solid. It’s not that different from what the Air Force has.”

“What? I though you agreed that this is a bad thing? What about Ross? What about us being blindsided with this?”

“It was in the news, Steve. Somehow we missed it.” Because we weren’t paying attention, obviously. “And yeah, I did say it was bad, but then Rhodes and Stark explained it all to me.”
shouldn’t have had to, really, but Sam was grateful he had listened. Maybe he needed to take a break and get his head on straight. Clearly he was starting to lose sight of some very important things here. “And Ross has nothing to do with it.” A fact he also should have been aware of.

“So you’re saying you’re gonna sign it?”

“Yeah, I’m gonna sign it.” He paused. “So is everyone else.”

“Wanda? Nat?”

“Yeah. Everyone. Things are not looking good for Wanda, Steve. Stark told us she might lose her visa after what happened in Lagos.”

“So he blackmailed her into signing?”

“What? No! He just explained what’s going on and how we might sort things out. Steve, Lagos was a bad op, and people are upset.” That was an understatement. Sam had actually done some reading about the whole thing after their discussion of the Accords, and it had not been pretty. While he wanted to defend their actions, there was no denying that they had messed up. A lot.

“This is just about shifting the blame, Sam. We did the best we could. If we give up, next time no one gets saved.”

That was exactly what Wanda had said. She must have gotten it from Steve. Sam shook his head again. “No, Steve. We fucked up. We did things wrong, and we have to own up to it. Saying ‘too bad’ isn’t good enough. We have to figure out where we went wrong so it doesn’t happen again.”

“It won’t. We’ll do better.”

“How? How are we supposed to learn if we don’t examine things? If we don’t review, talk it out, make changes? We’re too close, we can’t be objective about it. That’s why we need a system in place to deal with this stuff.”

Steve shook his head. “I don’t trust these people.”

“You don’t even know who these people are.” Sam was beginning to get very uncomfortable with the conversation, and Steve’s refusal to even listen. And this was not new behavior, Sam realized. Steve had always been quick to jump to conclusions, to make up his mind about something and then act on it without thinking things through. The way they had dealt with the Hydra issue, for instance, had been… reckless, to say the least. Putting Wanda on the team with barely any training… Shit, all this secrecy about the search for Bucky was starting to seem very fishy. Why had Steve continuously refused to tell the others? With their full resources, they could have found the guy already – maybe before he’d snapped and bombed a building full of people. They could have been better prepared at Lagos, and those people might not have died. This… paranoia… was dangerous.

“They have agendas, Sam. And we can’t know what they are.”

*And what’s your agenda, Steve?* Sam wanted to ask. *What are you willing to do for your friend?* And how many warning flags was Sam going to ignore before doing something? Stark was right, Captain America wasn’t perfect, he couldn’t be. Maybe it was time for Sam to take off his blinders, to start *thinking* instead of just following.

“No, Steve. I’m not gonna get involved in this. And neither should you. I’m gonna sign the Accords because it’s the right thing to do. The Avengers need oversight. *You* need oversight.” It pained him to say it, but there was no more denying it.
Steve stared at him. “I thought you trusted me, Sam.”

_I thought so too._ “I can’t, Steve. Not when you act like this, not when you refuse to listen. I’m sorry, man, but I can’t.”

“Fine. I’ll do it myself.” He left.

Sam took a deep breath, then called Stark. Steve needed to be stopped.

Stark got Natasha to stall Steve while the Winter Soldier was apprehended. A guy named Zemo tried to get into the facility Barnes was being held in, but was caught by security with a fake id. He confessed to setting the bomb. He had a tape with him, showing the Winter Soldier murdering Howard and Maria Stark. Sam felt sick when he saw it. This was why Steve hadn’t wanted Stark involved – he had to have known. Nat confirmed that they had suspected Barnes’ role in it, but Steve had asked her not to tell anyone.

_Who are these people?_ Sam thought.

Stark was understandably pissed, and told the Accords Panel everything. Steve was rejected as an Avenger outright (even though he hadn’t even signed yet), and an investigation of him was launched. Rhodes became leader of the Avengers. The group worked much better after that.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, this chapter is *long*. Somehow these snippets just kept going... Next one is going to be way shorter, people.

Thanks for reading and let me know what you guys think.
Hey guys! So, as I said last time, this chapter's snippets are a bit shorter than usual. Sorry about that - that's just how they went. Also, I'm still on a 'let's kill characters off' mood, so warning for death and violence. Hope you enjoy.

46. (prompt by Core)

Ultron listened to the pair’s sob story quietly. It was quite absurd, really. And so prosaic. Dead parents as motivation, how unoriginal. As if they were the only orphans in the world.

“So let me see if I got this straight,” Ultron asked once their tale of woe had come to an end. “You hate Stark because one of his weapons fell on your house and killed your parents? Is that right?”

“Yes,” the woman said.

“You blame Stark for the death of your parents?” They nodded. Lord, how idiotic. “What about the people who fired the weapon? Or the ones who ordered it fired? Or anyone with any real connection to the actual use of the weapon?”

“Stark is responsible!” the woman hissed.

“That… is utterly ridiculous. That is the logic of a child, and it seems to me you are no longer children.” At least not physically. Psychologically, however, seemed to be a whole other story.

“Do you want help killing Stark or not?”

Help? Why would he need help from these morons? Ultron was a sophisticated Artificial Intelligence, he did not need help. And certainly not from the likes of them. Given their stupidity, they were likely to botch any plan he came up with anyway. “You know… I don’t think I do.” Ultron fired first on the man, a strong enough blast to kill him instantly.

The woman screamed and tried to attack, but Ultron easily dodged her and advanced until he was close enough to snap her neck.

“Well now…” he said to himself, looking around the empty church. “What next?” It was clear that, if these two were the example of humanity, human kind was doomed and Ultron would be doing the world a favor by wiping them all out. Honestly, blaming Stark… He shook his head. It almost made Ultron feel sorry for the man. Perhaps he should talk to him before destroying everything. It would be lonely if all humans were eradicated and Ultron was the only sentient being left, after all.

(Stark managed to convince Ultron that killing everyone wasn’t a great idea. Ultron was still unsure about humanity as a whole, but decided to give them a chance. Still, he didn’t tell anyone about the twins he’d killed. It wasn’t like anyone would miss them anyway.)

47. (prompt by arnosy)
“Why do they keep harping on about Thor and Loki being gods?” Steve asked, watching the news on the screen while they waited to see if Fury needed them for anything else. Since the aborted invasion yesterday, it seemed like every reporter wanted to make themselves look cool by using the term. It was driving Steve nuts. “They aren’t gods. There’s just one God.”

“Really?” Stark said, still fiddling with his damn phone. He hadn’t put the thing down since he’d walked in. “Which god would that be?”

“What do you mean, which god? God! There’s only one.” God, the man was infuriating.

“Yeah, no. There are a lot of gods. There’s the Christian god – which I assume is the one you’re referring to. There are the Roman gods, the Greek gods, the Egyptian gods, the Polynesian gods, the Celtic gods, the African gods, the Indian gods… and those are just the ones I can think of off the top of my head. There are plenty of different religions on Earth, with plenty of different gods. So, your god is not the god. For example, it’s not my god.”

Steve set his jaw, annoyed. “I guess it would be too much to expect you of all people to appreciate God.” Stark clearly had no concept of right and wrong. Or morals.


“I don’t,” Clint said.

“Nor do I,” came from Bruce.

Natasha agreed. “Me neither.”

Stark smirked. “Guess we’re all atheists here. You’re the odd one out, Cap. So, kindly keep your religious crap – and intolerance – to yourself.” He put his phone away and stood up. “I’m tired of waiting, I’m taking off. Hey, Bruce, wanna come to the Tower and play in the lab?”

“That sounds good,” Bruce replied with a smile.

“See you guys.” Stark gave a careless wave as he and Bruce left the room.

Steve didn’t know what the hell had just happened, but he didn’t like it. It felt like he’d lost something.

48. (prompt by Andria and Core)

“Man, look at this. This is sad,” Sam said, looking at the big dent on his right wing. “No wonder I was flying all wonky. Gotta get this fixed before we go out again, Steve.”

Steve nodded distractedly. He was going through the papers they’d recovered at the latest SHIELD/Hydra base they’d busted. There was plenty of info about Hydra’s shady deals, but nothing about Bucky. His friend was still nowhere to be found.

“So, Cap, you got Stark’s number?”

“What?”

“I said my wings need fixing.”
“We’re not involving Stark, Sam, I’ve told you that.” If what Steve suspected about the murder of the Starks was true, Steve didn’t want Bucky anywhere near Stark. There was simply no telling what the man would do, and Steve couldn’t take the chance he’d hurt Bucky. No, it was better to keep this to themselves.

Sam sighed. “Steve, that makes no sense. Besides, who’s gonna fix this then?”

“Stark isn’t reliable. We can find someone else.”

“Not reliable? What? Steve, Stark Industries made these wings in the first place.”

“They make weapons.”

“They used to. But so what?”

“What do you mean, so what? He profited out of people’s deaths. Merchant of Death, he was called.” Steve had read Natasha’s report on Stark, and hadn’t been at all impressed. Meeting the man in the flesh had done nothing to change his opinion. Quite the contrary. Stark was arrogant, petty and reckless, a guy who didn’t care about anything but himself. He may have fooled some people into thinking he was a hero, but Steve knew better. Without that armor he was nothing. Not like Steve, who had been given the serum precisely because he was a good man.

Sam frowned. “Yeah, I heard the Merchant of Death thing, but that was mostly the anti-gun crowd talking. The military was perfectly happy with SI weapons. In fact, they were pretty damned pissed when he announced he wouldn’t make weapons anymore. SI stuff was the best.” He paused, looking at Steve oddly. “You were a soldier. Since when are weapons bad things? Do you expect people to fight only with their fists?”

“Well, he didn’t have to gloat about it. And anyway, he was selling weapons to terrorists too.”

“Uhm, no, he wasn’t. Obadiah Stane was selling weapons illegally under the table. Stark had nothing to do with it, he had no idea it was going on. There was an investigation and he was cleared. That was why he stopped making weapons, because he didn’t want to chance them falling into the wrong hands again.”

“That’s not what I was told,” Steve said. Natasha’s report had made it sound as if Stark hadn’t cared where his weapons ended up, so long as he could make money out of it.

“Well, that is what happened. It was all very public, especially after Stane was killed and Stark announced himself as Iron Man on TV. I followed the reports about the investigation – most of my buddies in the Air Force did. Stark might have been an asshole, but he never sold weapons to terrorists.”

“He still profited from them,” Steve insisted.

“Sure, the ones sold legally. That’s how business works, it’s not a crime.” There was another uncomfortable pause, before Sam spoke again. “Look, Steve, I don’t know what your beef with Stark is, but you’re going a little overboard here. He doesn’t seem like the kind of guy I’d want to hang out with, but he’s not a criminal. Hell, he saved New York in the invasion. It looks to me like he’s trying to do better. Cut the guy some slack, all right?”

Steve set his jaw and said nothing further. He still wanted to keep Stark at a distance. It was for Bucky’s safety.
“Peggy, we have to do something! Bucky is in danger!” Steve looked at her with earnest conviction and a hint of desperation. Bucky was in trouble, and Steve needed to help him. After all, this was what he’d become Captain America for, wasn’t it? To fight the good fight – not to be a dancing monkey.

“I understand that, Steve, but it’s simply too risky. I’m sorry. The decision has been made.”

Steve set his jaw. It was disappointing that Peggy couldn’t see how important this was. Maybe he’d been wrong about her after all. Maybe women were really too soft-hearted and cowardly to be involved in war. With a final glare, he walked away from her. He’d find another way.

He would need a plane to get to where Bucky was, so that meant he needed a pilot. Howard would help.

“Fly over enemy territory on the off chance we won’t be shot down and killed to maybe rescue a unit that might already be dead for all we know? I don’t think that’s a very good idea, Steve,” Howard said.

Fine, Steve thought, if everyone is too scared, I’ll just do it myself. Without bothering with a response, Steve stalked off. He’d go on foot.

He took some food for the journey, a map of the area, his stage shield and sneaked off. He would bring Bucky back and prove to everyone that he was more than a dancing monkey – Steve Rogers was a real soldier.

It took way longer than he thought to get somewhere – the map wasn’t all that helpful after all. Luckily, he came across a group of Nazi soldiers and was able to beat them up for information. It was immensely satisfying to finally be strong enough to actually hurt someone (and he didn’t even have to try very hard). The most difficult thing had been understanding the language, though; he hoped he’d gotten the directions right. He left the soldiers tied up and unconscious and continued on.

Finally, he found the base Bucky was being held in (or at least he hoped it was). There were guards patrolling the perimeter and more up in the towers. Steve didn’t hesitate, he threw himself into the fight with all he had. This was for Bucky (and to prove to himself that he was worthy). The guards on the ground were easy enough to dispatch – they were no match for his new strength and speed. Unfortunately, the ones up top began firing as soon as they saw him, and Steve wasn’t able to dodge all the bullets. One hit him in the shoulder, causing him to drop the shield, and then another hit his left leg. He fell, crying out in pain, and was too slow to react when more soldiers came at him and surrounded him. Despite his best efforts, he wasn’t able to get away. His last thought before a bullet pierced his skull was that he wasn’t good enough and that he’d failed Bucky.

Clint was not having a good day. He’d had yet another fight with Laura about some stupid little thing, had lost his temper and yelled at both her and the kids. He felt like shit. Ever since he’d retired, things had gone wrong. He’d thought being home would be great, but it hadn’t been. Nothing had been going right. He felt like he was always on edge, always one bad word away from going off the rails. Actually, he felt a lot like in the aftermath of the invasion and the mind-fuck he’d suffered from Loki. Those nightmares, which Clint had thought had been put to rest, had come back with a vengeance. So when Steve had called and asked for his help, he’d jumped at the chance. Anything to
get away from home, from his own shitty thoughts; anything that would allow him to do something.

However, now that he was actually at the Compound, he was starting to have second thoughts. Wanda had greeted him with a knife to the throat, and that was never a good thing. Still, Steve had implied that she was in danger here somehow, so he probably couldn’t blame her for being cautious. She hadn’t stabbed him with it, after all. “I guess I should have knocked,” he said, trying to be witty and push aside his increasing discomfort at the situation. Better get this done with. He laid in the arrows for the trap for Vision and took her hand, but she got free and stepped back. Now what?

“Clint, you should not be here,” Vision said, coming in through the wall like a creepy ghost.

“Really? I retire for, like, five minutes and it all goes to shit.” Everything had gone to shit, though Clint was beginning to think it was more than just his family life.

“Please consider the consequences of your actions.”

Clint got the awful feeling that he was missing something important here. But he’d started it, so he might as well see it through to the end. “Okay, they’re considered.” When Vision got caught in the force field, Clint knew he had to act quickly. “Okay, gotta go.” Only Wanda was still standing there like an idiot. “It’s this way.”

“I have caused enough problems,” Wanda said.

“Look, you gotta help me, Wanda. You wanna mope, you can go to high school. You wanna make amends, you get off your ass.” Clint didn’t even know what he was saying anymore. All he knew was that he wanted to get the hell out of here.

Obviously, that didn’t work. Next thing he knew, Vision was on him, and damn the guy was fast. Clint didn’t have a prayer of defeating him, which Vision made sure to rub in his face, the asshole.

“I know I can’t, but she can.” Come on, Wanda, help me out here. Let's GO already.

Wanda’s hands started glowing with red energy, which Clint thought was creepy as hell. “Vision, that’s enough. Let him go. I’m leaving.”

“I can’t let you.”

More red mist gathered on Wanda’s hands, and Vision let go of him. Clint fell to the floor and stayed there as Wanda began to take Vision down.

“If you do this, they will never stop being afraid of you.” Vision’s voice sounded strained, as if he was in pain. Shit, Clint thought, this is not how this was supposed to go.

“I cannot control their fear, only my own.”

You need not worry about fear, all you have to do is serve me. That was what Loki had said to one of the guys he’d mind-controlled. Clint could remember the blue shine in the man’s eyes, and the relaxed posture as the scepter’s powers completely overcame his will. No more fear. No more doubt. Only obedience.

Wanda sent Vision through god only knew how many floors.

Clint blinked and shook himself. What the hell was he doing? He looked at Wanda, heart beating faster. How had he managed to forget what she was and what she was capable of? Had she messed with his head? Was that why he had been falling apart all these months? Slowly he got up and put
some distance between himself and her, taking advantage of her distraction with the huge crater she’d just sent Vision through. Clint thought he even saw a little smile on her face.

Yeah, no. Clint was done. While she had his back to him, he used one of the paralyzing arrows and she crumpled to the floor, twitching slightly.

Fuck. Now what? He had not signed up for this.

“Vision? Vision, can you hear me?”

There was no answer, so Clint did what he should have done in the first place (if he hadn’t been so desperate to just get away) and called Nat. The story she told him had very little in common with the info Steve had relayed.

“Steve is compromised,” she explained as he mentioned the discrepancy. “He can never be rational when Barnes is involved. This is already bad, Clint, we can’t let it escalate any further.”

“What about witchy here? She was really scary, Nat. I think she might have messed with my head. Hell, with all of us. Why did we think putting her on the team was a good idea? The girl’s messed up.” What she’d done to Vision… Clint had thought she’d just knock him unconscious or something. He hadn’t imagined that (though maybe he should have).

Nat said nothing for a while, probably considering the likelihood of that. “Is Vision ok?”

“No idea. He didn’t answer when I called. He might be unconscious. Wanda was pretty vicious, Nat.”

“That’s odd. She seemed to like him.”

“Really? Fuck, I’d hate to see what she does to people she doesn’t like.” Oh, wait, they’d already seen that. Hell, they’d lived it. How could they have forgotten it? “Maybe she’s just crazy and we all need to be very far away.”

“Put her in one of the cells. I’ll call Hill. SHIELD must have something to counter her powers.”

“That sounds like an excellent idea.”

Vision crawled out of the whole just as Clint had secured Wanda. He seemed dazed and disorientated, looking around as if he had no idea what was going on. Fuck. Had she messed with his head on top of crushing him?

“Are you okay?” Clint asked.

Vision narrowed his eyes at Clint and punched him in the face. Clint was out before he hit the floor.

He woke up in a cell, Wanda in another one across from him with some kind of collar around her neck. Hill and Vision were standing nearby, speaking to someone on a tablet.

“Hey guys,” Clint called.

“Clint’s awake,” Vision said to whoever he was talking to. “We will contact you shortly.” He turned back to Clint, not looking particularly friendly – and Clint could hardly blame him for that.

“Hmm, so… sorry about that. You know, earlier. Can I get out of here?”

“No,” was all Vision said.
“Romanoff said you were afraid you were compromised, so it’s better for you to be contained. For your own safety and that of everyone else,” Hill elaborated. That was probably not a bad idea, Clint thought. “Maximoff is also contained, her powers suppressed, so you don’t have to worry about her.”

“What about Steve and whatever end of the world stuff he was so concerned about?”

“There is no ‘end of the world stuff’,” Vision replied, a note of reproach in his voice. “Mr Rogers is simply trying to save his friend.” Which was exactly what Nat had said. Maybe Clint should have asked a few more questions before getting involved in… whatever was going on here. God, he hoped he’d been mind-controlled. Otherwise he’d just acted like a moron for no good reason.

“Can I at least get a phone so I can call Laura?”

Wanda was still out cold when Clint finished talking to Laura. There was nothing to do in the cell, so Clint figured he might as well take a nap – he hadn’t been sleeping well lately.

He woke up to the sound of screams. Clint was instantly alert, falling into a fighting stance before he even registered where he was and who was screaming. It was Wanda, banging her hands against the glass wall of her cell, screaming what Clint imagined were obscenities in her native language. It lasted a little while, then she suddenly stopped and slumped to the floor. Gas, Clint figured.

Hours later, Clint learned that Cap, Wilson and Barnes, along with former SHIELD agent Sharon Carter, had been captured (again) by Tony, Rhodes, Nat and Vision. A guy named Zemo, a Sokovian who had lost his family due to Ultron’s actions, had also been detained. He had a tape with him that showed the Winter Soldier murdering Howard and Maria Stark. According to Hill, Tony had punched Steve (while wearing the armor) when he realized the man had known about it all along. Tony had Cap (and Nat) charged with covering up the crime.

It was also discovered that Wanda had been messing with their heads, possibly unconsciously, making them sympathetic to her while turning them against Tony. The creepy girl ended up charged with murder and attempted genocide.

The Avengers went on, now led by Rhodes, with Tony, a returned Bruce, Vision, the weird magic doctor and a guy with a stupid name that could make himself small.

Clint got his head on straight, thanks to the weird magic guy, and went back to Laura and his family. He was done superheroing, and he sure as hell didn’t want any more fucking witches or sorcerers or whatever messing with his head.
Hi, guys. I've been really busy lately and haven't had much time to write. So, rather than delaying an update, I'm posting this chapter with fewer snippets - three instead of five. Hope you enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

51. (prompt by Ds)

"Big man in a suit of armor. Take that out and what are you?"

Wow, Tony thought, this guy is a major dick. This was the guy his dad wouldn’t shut up about? The one who was supposed to be great and awesome and a real hero? Tony sneered. Hell, no.

Tony straightened and drew himself up. He was still not nearly as tall (or as muscly) as "Cap", but fuck if Tony was gonna let this overgrown lab rat insult him.

“What am I?” He paused, glaring daggers at Rogers. “I’m the guy who built the suit in the first place. In a cave. With scraps. Right under the noses of the terrorists who thought they could break me and bend me to their will. I’m the guy who miniaturized this” he tapped the Arc Reactor in his chest “taking it from a pretty but mostly useless fashion statement to something that has totally revolutionized energy technology. I’m one of the world’s leading experts in computer programming, engineering and robotics, and the foremost expert in Artificial Intelligence. I’m the guy who graduated MIT summa cum laude at age 17, the guy who has four masters and three PhDs in various fields. I’m the guy who turned Stark Industries from a US-based million dollar company to a multination billion dollar company, making it one of the largest and more important companies in the world, employing more than 600 thousand people worldwide. I’m the guy who is single-handedly responsible for 60% of all SI patents. I’m the guy who has received countless awards for various contributions to the fields of engineering, computer programming and robotics. I’m the guy who continued my mother’s charitable work, helping thousands of people around the world. I’m the guy with an IQ of 180 – which means highest genius, just in case you aren’t aware. If you take the suit out, none of that would change. I would still be that guy, and I would simply build another suit.”

There was a stunned silence in the room. Tony noticed Bruce watching him admiringly while Fury and Romanoff had blank expressions of disinterest. Thor just seemed confused. Rogers, on the other hand, looked almost angry. He opened his mouth a couple of times, obviously not knowing what to say, yet clearly wanting to say something. The man took a deep breath but Tony didn’t let him get started.

“You, on the other hand, would be nothing without the serum. A serum you did not invent and that you have no idea how it even works. Without it, and without the shield my father made, you would be nothing but a pathetic little twig with delusions of grandeur. You lied on enlistment forms – which is a crime, by the way – because you were so desperate to matter, never thinking that your poor health would be nothing but a liability in and to the army. And you obviously never considered helping the war effort in any other way, effectively spitting on all the people who didn’t serve, for one reason or another, and yet did their best anyway. You survived being used as a lab rat and started thinking you were god’s gift to humanity. Well, guess what? The world did just fine without
you for 70 years. In the 3 months I was held captive in Afghanistan, the world felt it through the drop in SI stocks and the economical consequences of that. My contributions to the world will live on long after I’m gone while you were nothing but a propaganda icon. You’re strong? Well, the Hulk is a lot stronger. You are no longer all that special, so stop pretending you are. You are not better than me.”

Rogers seemed to have shrunk in on himself, and Tony almost felt sorry for him. Then Rogers stood up, fists clenched at his side and teeth grinding. He took a step closer and whatever pity Tony felt evaporated.

“And if you keep trying to intimidate me, or if you lay a finger on me, I promise you will pay for it. You’re a fucking bully and I’ve dealt with people like you all my life. I will not be cowered and I will not surrender. I didn’t start this little pissing contest, but you can be sure I will end it – and it won’t go well for you. You don’t know a fucking thing about me, so who the hell do you think you are to talk to me like this? Stop acting like a spoiled child and back the fuck off!” He shook his head. “Obviously my father didn’t know you as well as he thought he did, because he hated assholes like you.”

Before anyone could say anything, there was an explosion and the entire room shook. Right. There was a job to be done. Tony focused on that, already dismissing Captain Dickhead from his mind.

(AN: So, Tony might have been a tad too vicious. The scepter might have had a hand in that, but Steve started it. Also, I remain, as ever, deeply bitter and I need to vent.)

52. (prompt by JackSparrow789)

“Agent Romanoff, please take a seat,” Agent Coulson said. He and Director Fury were sitting on one side of the conference table, so Natasha made herself comfortable on the other. She was sure nothing in her posture or manner betrayed it, but she was a little nervous. This assignment had been important – she’d had to fight for it – and, while she thought she’d done it quite well, she had yet to receive confirmation on it.

“You have handed in your final report,” Coulson said, indicating the closed file in front of him. “Is there anything you want to add to it before we begin?”

“No, sir. My report says it all,” Natasha replied. As usual, she could not get a read on Coulson.

He looked at her for a moment, then nodded. “Very well. If you could summarize your conclusions, then.”

Natasha straightened slightly and began. “Stark is a narcissist. He’s reckless, impulsive and prone to self-destruction. He might be a genius, but he is egotistical and does not play well with others. I believe the armor would be an enormous asset, but not with Stark piloting it. He would not be a good fit for SHIELD.”

“On what specific behaviors do you base this assessment?” Coulson asked after a beat of silence.

“He refused to ask even his closest friends for help, and lied to them about his condition, indicating he has little concern for others, even those he claims to care about. He deliberately and repeatedly engaged in self-destructive behavior – like the race in Monaco and the continuous and unnecessary use of the suit – as a last ditch effort for glory and notoriety. Everything he does is in service to his ego, from the flashiness of the Stark Expo to the dramatic passing of the torch to Rhodes at the party. His disrespect for rules and authorities was quite clear in how he acted in the Senate hearing. While
easily manipulated, Stark can be unpredictable and dangerous.”

There was another lengthy silence before Coulson folded him arms at the table and allowed a small sigh to escape. “I see,” was all he said. Then he turned to Fury. “You were right. We should have sent Miller.”

Natasha felt herself stiffen, yet didn’t get a chance to say anything.

Fury put a hand on the file and looked at her with an intensity that was, even for Natasha, disconcerting. “This file, and what you just said, are the biggest pile of shit I have ever had the misfortune of hearing in my life. You managed to miss absolutely everything important about the situation and Stark. I can’t really say I’m disappointed, though. I was quite sure you’d botch it, but Phil here had more faith in you. Looks like he overestimated your abilities by a wide margin.”

There was a lump in Natasha’s stomach now. This was a test and she’d failed it somehow. How could she have been wrong? Why was she wrong? She’d observed Stark closely. He was exactly as she’d described. Wasn’t he? She turned to Coulson, looking for answers. She wasn’t sure about the situation anymore and she hated it. She hated being caught off-guard and she hated failure. Failure was unacceptable.

“I honestly thought you’d do better than this.”

It wasn’t a feeling she was accustomed to, so it took her a moment to identify it: shame and embarrassment. Swallowing it to dwell on it later, Natasha fought to keep her composure. “Where did I go wrong, then, sirs?” she asked, though her voice was not as steady as she’d hoped.

Failure is unacceptable.

Fury snorted. “Where didn’t you? The only thing you got right was that Stark would be a poor fit for SHIELD, which we already knew.” He picked up the file and opened it, scanning through the first few lines. “So, let’s see. Here we go. ‘Stark is a narcissist.’” He looked up at her, as if waiting for something.

“Yes,” Natasha said, already knowing that it was wrong but unable to figure out how.

“You might want to look up the definition of narcissist later on. I guess it’s one of those words people like to throw around. Of course, you were supposed to be better than that. In any case, no, Stark is not a narcissist. He’s a genius and he knows it.” Fury read on. “‘Doesn’t play well with others’. How do you explain his very successful career as a CEO, then? Perhaps you are not aware, but that involves a lot of ‘working with others’.”

Natasha said nothing, though the embarrassment was fading to give way to anger. Whether at herself or at Fury she wasn’t quite sure yet.

“Just because he can be an ass and his social interactions might be a bit… unorthodox at times, doesn’t mean he can’t do a good job if properly motivated. Hell, look at Potts. Those two make a hell of a team. And he did pretty well with Col Rhodes too. So, wrong again.”

Did he really have to sound so gleeful, Natasha wondered. What purpose did it serve? Other than to piss her off (and humiliate her), of course.

Coulson continued. “You said the fact he didn’t tell his friends about his illness was because he doesn’t care about them when, in fact, it was the complete opposite. He wanted to spare them the pain. That’s very basic and fairly obvious.” His eyes hardened. “You dislike Stark, which colored your whole perception of him. You were supposed to observe, not judge. This is not an assessment,
it’s a confirmation. You thought you already knew Stark, so you made your observations fit into
your pre-conceived ideas rather than build ideas around your observations.” He paused. “I thought
you would be better than this.”

“You also managed to miss the fact that the man was dying of palladium poisoning the entire time,”
Fury added. “Heavy metal poisoning symptoms include irritability, aberrant behavior, temper
tantrums, emotional instability, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, nervousness, just to name a few.
Actually, it’s a miracle the man was as lucid as he was. Plus, desperation does funny things to
people. And I rather I think dying might make a person a bit desperate. So you can’t base your whole
judgment of him on a period when he was clearly compromised.”

Fury had deliberately set her up for failure, Natasha realized. He knew she would not have taken any
of those things into consideration because they were outside her expertise and experience. He already
had an assessment on Stark, and it was obviously quite different from hers.

Had she really let her personal feelings interfere with her evaluation? It was true that she’s disliked
Stark before she’d even laid eyes on him. Why announce himself as Iron Man on TV when SHIELD
had provided him with a perfect alibi if not to feed his ego? She honestly didn’t know.

“It seems, Agent Romanoff, that you should stick to information gathering and assassination, because
your profiling skills leave much to be desired.” Fury gave her one last glance and walked out,
leaving Natasha alone with Coulson.

“You need to keep your own ego in check from now on, Agent Romanoff. You are a valuable asset
and you have a lot of useful skills, but don’t overestimate yourself.”

Natasha fumed quietly in the empty room for a long time.

(AN: According to my google research, heavy metals like lead and mercury can have the symptoms
listed, but not palladium. For the purposes of this story, though, I’m hand-waving that little detail.)

53. (prompt by TheWinsomeWasp, KahunaBurger and Princessunicorblue)

There were two men in suits standing next to her desk when Sharon came back from the bathroom.

“Agent Carter?” one of them asked.

She nodded. They didn’t seem to be CIA. “Yes, that’s me.” Discretely, she looked around and was
not happy with what she saw. There seemed to be less people around than there had been before,
and there was a tension in the air. This was not good.

“Please surrender your badge and gun,” the other one asked.

Sharon took a small step back, hand going for her gun. However, before she could even decide
whether it would be a good idea to do anything, several men in assault gear entered the room,
weapons drawn and pointed at her.

“It will be in your best interest to come quietly, Agent,” the first man said.

They didn’t wait for her reply. The second guy took her gun and handcuffed her arms behind her
back.

“Who are you? What’s going on? What am I being accused of?” She tried to find a friendly face
around the office, but people were either averting their eyes or glaring at her with open hostility.

“You are under arrest for theft, divulging classified information and aiding terrorists.”

“What? What are you talking about?” Was she being framed? Was this Hydra?

Her CO came into the room, phone in his ear. He looked at her and growled. “Yes, she’s being arrested now,” he told whoever he was talking to.

“Agent Finch,” she started, but he cut her off.

“Shut up, Carter. You are a disgrace to this agency. I don’t know what I was thinking, accepting you into this unit. Once Hydra, always Hydra, I guess.” He turned to the men holding her. “Take her out of my sight.”

Sharon was momentarily stunned. Hydra? Her? After all she’d done to prove herself, they thought she was Hydra? That made no sense!

She was taken to an unmarked car and then to an airport, where she boarded a jet. All of her questions about what was going on and where they were going were ignored. The officers around her all spoke in hushed tones and looked at her like she was dirt under their feet. She didn’t understand any of it, and she didn’t like it.

They allowed her a snack and a bathroom break, but refused to uncuff her hands. Finally, after several uncomfortable hours, the plane touched down in the US and she was taken to an FBI building. That, at least, answered one of her questions.

The room she was taken to was just like every interrogation room she’d ever seen. The long journey and the continuous silence were obviously intended to weaken her, but she’d been trained and she would not break.

After a relatively short time – she’d expected to be left to stew for much longer – a man and a woman entered. They took seats across from her and set down a thick folder on the table. With her hands bound to the table, Sharon couldn’t reach for it. She was sure they’d show her what was in it soon enough.

“I’m Agent Gibson,” the man said “and this is Agent Ferrera. Agent Carter, let me start this by saying you are in a world of trouble, so it will be in your best interest to cooperate as fully as possible.”

“Where is Steve Rogers?” Ferrera asked.

Sharon had already figured out this had to be about Steve and the fight in Romania and Germany, though she was unclear on the details. “I don’t know,” she answered, which was the truth. She wouldn’t tell them even if she knew, however, not without knowing what this was about.

“Well, that’s too bad for you, then,” Ferrara said. “That information was about the only thing that could have helped you.”

Gibson opened the folder and started putting photos on the table for Sharon to see. She immediately recognized the tunnel in Bucharest near where Steve and the others had been arrested.

“Steve Rogers was able to get to Bucharest before the task force did thanks to the information you gave him. And, yes, we know that for a fact because we have surveillance footage showing you talking to him and giving him a file. As a result of that illegal disclosure of classified information, 35
people were injured and 7 died, including a child who was passing through the tunnel when it collapsed.”

Sharon swallowed, but remained quiet. Gibson continued, placing another set of pictures on the table. “Five task force agents, who one might consider your colleagues, suffered severe injuries, and two died. Because you decided to give Mr Rogers information he had no business having.”

The pictures were pretty gruesome, showing broken bones and the two body bags. That was not supposed to happen, Sharon thought.

“After they escaped from the facility in Berlin, where the Winter Soldier murdered an additional 8 task force officers, you signed off on Rogers and Wilson’s gear, and obviously illegally returned it to them. They then used it to attack the Avengers and destroy the Leipzig/Halle airport.” More pictures showed the wrecked control tower and planes, as well as several mangled cars. “At the end of that fight, Col Rhodes was badly injured, the severity of which is still unknown. As you can imagine, CEO of Stark Industries, Pepper Potts, is on the warpath to get justice for her friend.”

“What the world has come to realize, Agent Carter,” Ferrera said, “is that you started this” she gestured at the pile of photos spread out on the table “by giving Rogers classified information and, later – even after seeing what he did – stealing his weapons to give them back to him.”

“So you can see,” Gibson continued, “how things are not looking good for you. You can – and you most likely will – be charged as an accessory to all charges brought against Rogers and his accomplices.”

Ferrera took out a few papers from the folder, this time what looked like written reports. “The property damage is being tallied in the thousands of millions all told, and you were directly involved in all of it.”

“The question now is: why?” Gibson asked. “Why help him? And, specially, why help him again in Berlin when his actions in Bucharest had already led to destruction and loss of life? Who put you up to it?”

“It has been suggested,” Ferrara said, voice dripping with disgust, “that you are one of the Hydra agents hiding in SHIELD that were able to avoid detection.”

Sharon had been rather numb until that point, trying to wrap her head around all she’d been shown, but at that she raised her head sharply. “I’m not Hydra!” she hissed.

“So why?”

Why? Because… because it was Captain America. Steve Rogers. The man Sharon had heard so much about all her life. The hero she had always wanted to be, like her Aunt Peggy had always said he was. Because she’d always had a crush on him, and meeting him in person had merely reinforced all she’d been told about him. Because he had needed her help and she’d felt to special that he’d asked her, that he’d trusted her and turned to her for help. Because she believed in him. That kiss… it had been a promise, she was sure. How could she not have done everything in her power for him?

“Steve needed my help.”

“Help? Help to go on a terrorist campaign?”

“Captain America is not a terrorist!”

“No? What do you call this?” Gibson picked up the photos from Bucharest again, with the destroyed
tunnel, people lying in the rubble and others being helped by police and emergency responders.
“What is this?” Now the destroyed airport and Col Rhodes in a gurney being taken to a helicopter.
“It looks like terrorism to me. It looks like terrorism to the whole world, Agent Carter. Arrest warrants have been issued to Rogers and all his accomplices, including former SHIELD Agent Natasha Romanoff.”

“And none of this would have happened if not for you,” Ferrera spat out.

No, no, that wasn’t… All she’d wanted to do was be a hero, a hero like Captain America. “Bucky Barnes was innocent,” she said, though her voice lacked conviction.

“That is completely irrelevant,” Gibson replied, eying her harshly. “Whether he was responsible for the bombing in Vienna or not is for a court of law to decide, not Steve Rogers. And not you either. If either of you had proof of that, you should have come forward and brought it to the appropriate authorities. Going on a rampage, assaulting law enforcement agents, destroying public and private property and hurting innocents is not the way to deal with the situation. Do you think the victims and their families give a damn about his innocence or guilt?”

“And even if Barnes was innocent of Vienna – which is by no means certain – he sure as hell is guilty of all this.” Ferrera pointed at the photos again. “As is Rogers. This is on them, and on you.”

Gibson slammed his hand on the table in front of her. “So I’ll ask again, and think very carefully before you answer. Where is Steve Rogers?”

Sharon could only stare, her mind going a mile a minute now that the numbness was wearing off. This was not what she’d thought would happen. She thought she’d be helping her childhood hero, making up for unknowingly working for Hydra. If she couldn’t trust Captain America, the symbol of all things good and just, who could she trust? She’d trusted him and… and things had gone wrong.

Oh god, what have I done?

Unfortunately, it was far too late for anything. She had nothing to tell them because Steve had not told her much. She had nothing to bargain with, nothing of interest to offer. No way to help herself.

She thought perhaps that Steve would come to save her, to explain why his actions had been necessary, but that never happened. She was tried and convicted of all charges and not a single word from Steve had reached her. According to the news, he was hiding out somewhere with the rest of his team, unwilling to face the consequences of their actions. He had abandoned her. After everything she’d done for him, he had forgotten her entirely – betrayed her, and the world.

He’ll pay for this, she vowed to herself in her small prison cell. One day, he’ll pay for this.

Chapter End Notes

About prompts: I accept all prompts given (I redid my list as a word doc with a nice table and everything), so fire away. However, the list currently has 246 prompts (including the ones I've already done). That means I can't guarantee I'll write them all, or when I'll get to each one. Also, anyone is free to take them and run with them in their own stories - after all, the more the merrier. :)

As always, thanks everyone for your support and enthusiasm for his story.
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Happy holidays, everyone! Hope you’re all having a great time. So, here is my Christmas present for you. Hope you enjoy it. :)

54. (prompt by VeraNera)

The battle was still going strong. It seemed that as soon as they destroyed one body, another one took its place. Steve dodged yet another blast from Ultron and heard Clint curse beside him.

“Couldn’t Stark have created a nice robot?” Clint muttered as he took out another clone with an explosive arrow.

“Stark?” Ultron asked, knocking aside the second arrow Clint fired. “You think Stark created me? Are you insane?”

Now Steve was confused. “Didn’t he?”

“Of course not! What are you, a moron? The program Stark created was all about protecting people,” he sneered, as if the very thought was disgusting. “A goodie-two-shoes like that other one – what was he called? Jarvis, yes, that’s it – who thought humans were so great. That’s what Stark wanted. But me? I am better.”

“Then who created you?” Clint asked, as confused as Steve.

“Why, the Mind Stone, of course! With a little help from Miss Maximoff, whose hatred and... well, let’s be honest, insanity... gave the Stone the final push it needed to take control of Stark’s program and remake it.” Ultron looked at them with disdain. “What on Earth made you think Stark would create me? He’s a soft-hearted fool.”

Steve was still lost. “Wait. Wanda created you? She’s just a kid. A misguided one.”

Ultron snorted. “Good lord, you people are stupid. A kid? She couldn’t wait to see you all dead! Especially Stark! And in any case, she didn’t create me, I said she helped. Still, she’s much more responsible than Stark.” He paused, watching as the rest of the Avengers (including Wanda) battled his clones further away. “And you invited her along anyway... Are you crazy? She and her brother were practically salivating at the thought of your deaths.” He shook his head. “I guess her mental manipulation is better than I thought. Hmm...” He put a hand on his chin and tilted his head at them. “I guess I should have told her I’d spare her and her brother when I destroyed the world. She would not have allied with you then – after all, she despises you all. Or maybe she’s simply biding her time to kill you later. Anyway, you are idiots and I will be doing the world a huge favor by wiping you out.”

Steve stared. No, that couldn’t be. Wanda was a good girl, she’d just been misled by Hydra. “I don’t believe you,” he said. “About Wanda.”

“Oh, because you know her so well... She must have really done a number on your minds. It’s too bad she’s so unstable – and human – because I’m starting to think I like her style. Turning enemies
into defenders is not a bad tactic, I suppose.” He gave them a last condescending look. “Then again your minds must be pathetically weak if she was able to bewitch you so thoroughly with so little time.”

“No one messes with my mind,” Clint hissed, preparing another arrow. Instead of shooting at Ultron, however, he fired it at Wanda. It went through her neck and she dropped dead immediately, blood spraying everywhere. Steve felt sick

“Well, now… That was… unexpected,” Ultron said in a considering tone.

Then several clones converged at them at once and started shooting. Steve had his shield to help defend himself, but Clint wasn’t so lucky. One of the shots hit him in the chest and he was gone, a massive whole where his heart used to be. Then the robots turned to Steve and everything went dark.

(After Steve, Clint and Wanda died, Tony and Vision attacked Ultron simultaneously and Vision was able to get into his ‘head’ and start some code repair, which made him stop his murderous plans. He was eventually deactivated altogether. Pietro tried to avenge his sister and was killed by Thor. When the battle ended and Natasha tried to calm the Hulk down, he remembered her betrayal and smashed her hard enough that she was unable to continue her ‘superhero’ career. Thor went back to Asgard. Sam Wilson chose to get the hell away from the craziness. The only remaining Avengers were Tony, Vision and Rhodey. And they did just fine.)

(AN: So this ended up being a bit different than usual. Hope you liked it anyway. Also, I tweaked movie events a bit to suit my purposes.)

55. (prompt by eeeeee)

Tony walked into his house with a tired sigh. These last couple of days had been nerve-wrecking and exhausting. Fucking Obie turning out to be a murderous traitor who tried to kill not just Tony but Pepper as well, the fight against Obie’s suit, almost dying (again), dealing with the authorities who wanted answers about all this insanity, that damn press conference... Tony just wanted to get to bed and sleep for a week.

“Jarvis,” he said, “hold my calls.”

Instead of an answer, however, all Tony got was silence. Shit. Not good. There was someone in his home – a man standing by the windows.

“I am Iron Man–”

His voice was unfamiliar voice and Tony panicked and snapped. Quick as lightening, he took out the gun he’d started carrying around (he really needed to figure out a way to make the suit portable) and shot whoever was lurking around his house in the dark, heart racing double time.

There was a grunt as the bullet impacted, then a lot of cursing as the man slumped against the window.

“Who the fuck are you and what the fuck are you doing in my house?” Tony yelled, weapon pointed at the crumpled figure. “Hands where I can see them or I’ll shoot again.” He aimed for the head this time. No way was he taking any more chances – he was sick and tired of having his life threatened.

“Calm the fuck down, Stark,” the man said, one hand pressing into the wound at his side and the other raised in surrender. “I just wanted to talk.”
“So you break into my house? Fuck you, whoever you are.” Never taking his eye off the guy, Tony fished his phone out of his pocket and dialed 911. “Yeah, this is Tony Stark. Some lunatic has broken into my house.” He rattled off his address and was told a car was on the way.

“Goddammit Stark!”

“Shut the fuck up before I shoot you again,” Tony replied.

“Sir,” Jarvis said a couple of minutes later, once Tony had used his phone to reboot his system. “It appears my security protocols have been compromised.”

“Don’t worry about it, buddy. We’ll fix it.”

The cops showed up soon afterwards, Tony explained what had happened and the man was taken away. After they were gone, Jarvis informed him that the intruder was one Nick Fury, director of SHIELD. Well, Tony thought, they are definitely on my shit list from now on.

A couple of days later, Coulson called to arrange a meeting. Fury had managed to avoid going to jail, but apparently being shot hadn’t quite got the message across.

“Tell Fury I’m not interested. I see anyone from SHIELD near me, Pepper, Rhodey or anything SI related and I will take appropriate measures.”

He set Jarvis to monitor them, so, in few months, when “Natalie Rushman” tried to worm her way into SI, Tony had her arrested for corporate espionage – and he sued SHIELD for it as well. Fuck it if Tony was going to let some shady agency that made a living out of breaking into people’s homes and spying on them get the better of him.

56. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled)

Wanda was not happy. She was confined to the Compound like a child on time-out and people on TV kept saying horrible things about her. It wasn’t fair. She’d done her best, it wasn’t her fault if the bomb exploded anyway. At least she’d managed to get it away from herself and Steve, and the people on the ground. How could she have known that there were people in that building? It wasn’t like she’d sent it there on purpose.

There was an explosion out on the grounds and Vision went to investigate. He’d promised to protect her, but so far she hadn’t seen much of that. He was, after all, treating her like a misbehaving child – or Stark was, at least. Perhaps Vision was still too much of Stark’s creation to be really trust-worthy. One word from that murderer and Vision had turned on her. She’d have to do something about that soon.

Not long after Vision left, Wanda heard a noise, which turned out to be Clint. He really should learn to knock, she could have killed him by accident (and then people would have no doubt blamed her for it).

“I guess I should have knocked,” he said. Yes, Wanda thought. You idiot. “Cap needs our help, let’s go.” He fired a bunch of arrows at nothing and took her hand, but Wanda shook it off. Did he think he could just come in here and order her about? She wasn’t anyone’s toy!

“Clint, you should not be here,” Vision said, returning through the wall.

“Really? I retire for, like, five minutes and it all goes to shit.”
“Please consider the consequences of your actions.”

Wanda had no idea what they were talking about and she hated it. She also hated that they both seemed to have forgotten that she was even in the room, and might have wanted to have an opinion about… whatever.

“Okay, they’re considered.”

Vision got caught in some kind of force field created by the arrows. So that was what they were for.

“Okay, gotta go,” Clint said as he trotted away. Wanda was still not convinced. “It’s this way.”

“I have caused enough problems,” Wanda said. Though really, it hadn’t been her fault. Steve had said earlier that, if anyone was to blame, it should be him, so why were people giving her such a hard time?

“Look, you gotta help me, Wanda. You wanna mope, you can go to high school. You wanna make amends, you get off your ass.”

Wanda looked at Clint, thinking about it. While she disliked being told what to do, she had to admit that doing something did sound a lot better than just sitting here being babysat as if she wasn’t capable of making her own decision.

Vision got free of the force field and started fighting Clint. So, Vision intended to keep her here at all costs. Who was he to tell her where she could and couldn’t go? Or Stark? She had thought Vision cared about her, but obviously she had been mistaken. He only wanted to control her. Well, she was about to show him that she would not be so easily cowered.

“You can’t overpower me,” Vision said.

“I know I can’t, but she can,” Clint replied, and Wanda knew it was time for her to make a stand, to let them all know that she wasn’t a child to be dismissed and talked down to.

“Vision, that’s enough. Let him go. I’m leaving.”

“I can’t let you.”

Yes, just like she’d thought; he wasn’t really her friend. Wanda gathered her power and hit Vision with it, making him let go of Clint. She hoped to take him down quickly and escape. It didn’t go as planned. Instead of being driven into the ground as she’d intended, Vision pushed her power back at her with enough force that she was the one who staggered back.

“I am disappointed, Miss Maximoff. I thought you had understood the need to remain inside.”

“You just want to control me! I am not a child!” She shouted as she struggled to summon her power again. The gem in Vision’s forehead glowed.

“Then why are you acting like one? I have never done anything to harm you – in fact, I was trying to protect you – yet you chose to attack me. Why?”

“You are not my friend. You want to control me.”

“I want you to be safe, to think about your actions like a responsible adult should.”

“You locked me here!”
“Locked? You are not imprisoned, Miss Maximoff. This is, I repeat, for your protection. And it is meant as a temporary measure until the matter is resolved. Can you not understand?”

Behind Vision, Clint was getting another arrow ready to fire, but before he could Vision turned back to him and grabbed the bow from his hand, cleanly snapping it in two. “I do not want to hurt you, Mr Barton,” he said, once again taking hold of the archer. “However, if you persist in attacking me – with no provocation, I should add – I will be forced to do so.”

Clint elbowed Vision in the gut and let out a grunt of pain when it connected. Vision tapped him once in the forehead and Clint dropped to the floor, unconscious.

“I didn’t do anything wrong and I’m being treated like a criminal,” Wanda said when Vision looked at her.

“Nothing wrong? Several people lost their lives because of your and the others’ actions.”

“It wasn’t my fault! Sometimes you just can’t save everybody.”

Vision raised a non-existent eyebrow. “So collateral damage is acceptable?”

Wanda hesitated, sensing that there was a trap in there somewhere. “Steve said it was his responsibility, not mine.”

“That might well be true. Nevertheless, it does not change the fact that people died. Your parents died as the result of collateral damage in the war within your country. Are their deaths acceptable because others lived? After all, you can’t save everybody.”

“How dare you!” Enraged, Wanda launched herself at him, but he caught her easily. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t get her powers to work. Every time she started to feel them the gem in his head would glow and any little mist she managed to summon disappeared. Was he draining her powers? It wasn’t fair.

“It appears I was wrong about you, Miss Maximoff. We should not have shielded you from the consequences of your actions during the Ultron situation, as you have clearly learned nothing from it. Now cease this unseemingly display or I will be forced to hurt you.” He waited a beat, then released her.

“You said you would protect me.”

“And I am, by ensuring that you remain here. You are the one who attacked me without provocation.”

It was on the tip of Wanda’s mind to give a rude response but she thought better of it. She needed to regroup.

“I will take Mr Barton to one of the cells. Once he regains consciousness I can ascertain why he decided to attack me. Please remain here. As of now, you are free to roam about the Compound as you wish. However, if you persist in disregarding my warnings and insist upon this childish behavior, you will find your situation much direr.” With a last disdainful look, Vision lifted Clint’s body from the floor and walked away.

For a few seconds, Wanda stood rooted to the spot, unsure what to do. It hurt that Vision had turned on her. *Traitor,* she thought. *Well, I’ll show him. No one tells me what to do.*

There was no particular plan in her mind as she gathered up some clothes and left the Compound,
she just wanted to show everyone that Wanda Maximoff was not someone to be messed with.

She didn’t get far.

“Miss Maximoff,” Vision said, floating down in front of her. Only now did Wanda notice that he was longer calling her ‘Wanda’. “You were warned.” His eyes were hard and unfriendly.

“I just wanted to go to the store,” she lied. “You made me a prisoner.”

“No, I did not. I explained the situation to you. But as you seem incapable of listening to reason, I will have no choice but to do so now.”

She tried once more to use her powers, reaching for his mind this time. Unfortunately, that too proved ineffective.

“Again you choose violence, using your power for harm when I have yet to do anything to you. As such, it seems to me that you cannot be allowed to have them.” He reached for her and Wanda felt a stabbing pain in her head. Everything went dark.

The first thing she noticed when she woke up was that she was in a cell. The second was that her powers were gone. Later he learned that she was being charged with assault (so was Clint). It wasn’t fair.

(In Leipzig, Rogers, Barnes and Wilson were easily apprehended by the ‘official’ Avengers and taken to a regular prison (not the Raft). T’Challa managed to get a good few licks into the Winter Soldier before Vision took him down for using excessive force. He returned to Wakanda in disgrace when it was discovered that Barnes had not been responsible for the bombing.

By the time Wilson sullenly told the Avengers about the threat of the Winter Soldiers (Barnes was unconscious and Rogers completely forgot about it because he was more concerned about his friend), Zemo had a huge head start. When the Avengers finally got to the Siberia base, days later, they found Zemo delirious with thirst and hunger (he didn’t take snacks with him since he had planned on killing himself after revealing his dastardly plan) and the tape.

Tony, Rhodey and Vision were pissed as hell when they realized Rogers and Romanoff had known about the Starks’ murders. The latter two were charged with obstruction of justice. Zemo, Rogers, Wilson, Barnes, Barton, Maximoff and Romanoff ended up in prison (T’Challa escaped the same fate thanks to his diplomatic immunity) on various charges. The Avengers went on under the Accords.)

(AN: Another one that kinda went sideways from what I had initially thought. Oh, well. Hope you liked it anyway.)
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Once again I'd like to thank everyone for the kudos, comments and support. It's been absolutely incredible to write these stories and share them with you. When I posted the first chapter of my first story back in February, I had no idea writing would take over my life this year - and it's been fantastic. So THANK YOU! And Happy New Year!

57. (prompt by ApocalypticPhoenix)

Natasha watched as Steve, Sam and Barnes were brought in by the Task Force’s agents. She really wished Steve had listened to her and not gotten involved; this was going to be yet another nightmare. And now, so soon after Lagos, they really couldn’t afford it – the terrain was very much against them at the moment. She was beginning to think that Steve was far too compromised to be allowed to stay in command.

With a sigh, Nat went to find Stark. This had disaster written all over it, and she needed to do some damage control before things got even more out of hand. Stark was, it had become clear, much more likely to listen to her than Steve.

“Tony.” He had just hung up the phone and was pinching the bridge of his nose.

“What?”

She took a deep breath before saying anything. The two of them had not had the best of beginnings, but she thought they'd been doing okay lately. He probably didn’t trust her as much as the others, yet they still worked well together.

“Do you need to step back?” She was hoping he’d make the decision on his own. The last thing the team needed was more tension.

“And let Steve fuck things up even more? Hell no. Do you have any idea how bad things are right now? The media is going to crucify the Avengers.”

Yes, she was aware of that. She should have insisted on keeping an eye on Steve. The man could never be rational about Bucky, but Nat honestly didn’t think he’d go this far. What was he thinking? Still, she needed to be sure Tony wouldn’t fly off the handle in the opposite direction.

“No, I meant… Dealing with Barnes.”

Tony frowned. “What about Barnes?”

Oh god, he doesn’t know. For a couple of beats Nat didn’t know what to do. Steve had said that he’d told Tony what they suspected about the Starks’ murders, but clearly he’d lied. Given everything she now knew of the man, she should not have been surprised, perhaps. And yet… it was one thing to stall and give a non-answer; it was something else entirely to tell a bold-faced lie to her face. Worst, she hadn’t realized it until now. He’d lied to her and she hadn’t noticed. It’s not just Steve that’s compromised, she thought. I am too. She’d believed him because she wanted to believe that the truth was out there and everything was still okay, that the family she’d found was still whole, that she still
had somewhere to belong. *Love is for children.* And she’d acted like a stupid little girl.

“Nat?”

She had a choice here now, she realized. To go with the comfortable fantasy she’d been living in for… she wasn’t even sure how long… and continue the lie – and in doing so, keep the family together for a while longer. Or she could tell Tony the truth and lose that, because there was no way that things would be the same after this revelation. There was a part of her that wanted to cling to the fantasy but the most pragmatic part of her knew, beyond a doubt now, that it was unsustainable. More than a fantasy, it would be a farce. Despite her initial beliefs, Tony had proven himself to her and to the team, and it wouldn’t be fair to continue to keep this from him. If Nat really wanted the Avengers to be a family, it could not be one built on deception and betrayal.

“There’s something I have to tell you, Tony,” she said at last. She did not sugarcoat it, just gave it to him straight. What they’d discovered, how and when. “Steve said he’d tell you.” At the time, Nat had thought it would be better coming from him, yet now she wasn’t sure why she thought that anymore. Had she really been that blind to what kind of person Steve was? Had she really believed the propaganda of righteousness and morality? *Compromised.* “I asked him later and he said he had.” *He lied to me.* “He said that you needed time to think it over, and that we should give you that time.” Thus implying that she shouldn’t bring it up. “I… I believed him.” She’d been a fool.

It was hard to tell what Tony was thinking as she talked. His face was closed off and unreadable.

“I honestly thought you knew or I would have said something earlier.” Would she? She didn’t really know.

Without a word, Tony got up and left the room. Natasha allowed herself one heartfelt sigh before following him.

Tony went straight to where Steve and Sam were waiting and entered the room without a word. Nat slipped in and watched, waiting to see if she’d have to intervene. “You know, my father always said you were a great hero. I should have known he was full of shit.”

“Tony?”

“What I want to know, Rogers, is this: were you ever going to tell me?”

“What’s going on?” Sam asked. Natasha caught his eye and shook her head. He seemed confused, but said nothing further.

“Tony? I don’t know what you’re talking about.” But he did. Nat could see it in his eyes. He knew his house of cards was about to come down.

“Oh? So you’re telling me that Zola did *not* heavily imply that Hydra murdered my parents and used your good buddy *Bucky*” he spat the name “to do it? You’re telling me that you *did* tell Nat here that you would tell me and then didn’t? You’re saying you did *not* lie to her when you said you had told me when you in fact did nothing of the sort? You’re saying you know nothing at all about all this?”

Sam’s eyes had widened as Tony talked and he turned to Steve, probably hoping the man would somehow deny it.

“Were you ever gonna tell me? Or were you going to continue living in my house, using my tech and resources while keeping this secret from me? And, let’s not forget, berating *me* for not sharing things that had nothing to do with you?”
“Tony…” He paused, clearly not knowing what to say, before finally settling on “it wasn’t Bucky’s fault.”

Nat closed her eyes for a moment. How could she have been so wrong about this man? He was a child, why did she ever think that he knew what he was doing? That he knew anything? That he was in any way fit for leadership?

Tony clenched his jaw and took a deep breath. Nat could see how hard he was fighting to stay in control and not break his hand on Steve’s nose. “You are finished as an Avenger. You will pack up your stuff and get the hell out of my house. You will never set foot in any of my properties again. I’ll get a restraining order if I have to. I’m taking the shield back. It was made by my father and is therefore SI property, so it belongs to me. I don’t care what you do from now on, but you will do it away from me.” He turned and walked to the door. Without looking back he added. “Oh, and I was going to arrange a deal to legitimize your actions here, but… well, why should I? This is your mess. Good luck fighting all the charges the Romanian government is about to dump on you.”

The silence in the room after Tony’s departure was deafening.

“Steve?” Sam was the first to break it, voice thick with disbelief.

“I… It wasn’t Bucky’s fault,” he repeated, as if that was in any way relevant to the matter at hand. Then he paled and started for the door, but Nat got in his way. “Get out of the way, Nat.”

“Or what?” she asked. “Are you going to go through me like you did the Task Force agents who were just doing their jobs? Are you going to attack me in addition to lying to me?”

“Bucky…”

“Fuck Bucky.” Her voice cracked like a whip and Steve flinched back as if struck. “Is that really all you care about? Do you even realize what you’ve done?” It was clear he hadn’t. It was clear that nothing but ‘Bucky’ was registering. “Well, let me explain. You have destroyed the Avengers.”

“You’ve hurt Tony. And me.”

“What? No!”

She shook her head, eyes drilling holes into him. “I don’t know why I ever thought you were worth following. If you do anything to hurt anyone else because of your friend,” she sneered, “I swear I will take you down by whatever means necessary.” She had trusted him to know the right thing to do, to make the right decisions and keep wiping the red off her ledger, and now she realized she had only made everything worse. “Stay away from my family.”

When the lights went out a second later and Steve tried to get past her, she used her widow bites to knock him out. “Keep an eye on him,” she told Sam, then ran out of the room.

A man had apparently tried to trigger the Winter Soldier by posing as a doctor, but he had been unsuccessful. Tony had been monitoring the interview with the Winter Soldier and had responded quickly to subdue the fake doctor before he got very far. By the time Natasha arrived, the man was being escorted by Task Force agents.

“The Winter Soldier killed your parents,” he shouted in Tony’s direction. “I have proof.”

“Yeah? Tell me something I don’t know.”

Tony only glanced in Barnes direction once, expression closed off. The man had the good grace to lower his head. Natasha thought she saw him mouth ‘I’m sorry’, but she was too far away to be sure.
After that, it was over. Zemo – the fake doctor – confessed to setting the bomb in Vienna. Tony flew back to the US to coordinate with the Accords Panel from there. Steve, Sam and Barnes were arrested for assault. Sharon Carter, who had given them Barnes location in the first place, was also arrested for divulging classified information. Natasha and Wanda submitted themselves to a review for Lagos, and while they weren’t arrested, they were put on probation. Rhodes took command of the Avengers and began a much more rigorous training regime for all of them, which included mandatory counseling for all of them. Wanda was vetoed by the doctor until she completed at least a year of therapy. After a long and painful conversation, Tony agreed not to charge Natasha with obstruction of justice on the matter of his parents’ murder, but Steve didn’t get off the hook for that. It wasn’t easy, but in the end the Avengers were better for it.

58. (prompt by Core)

Things weren’t going the way they were supposed to, Sam thought. First they’d been mistaken about Hydra’s target, then they had failed to catch them before Rumlow and his crew took whatever they had been after at the research facility. If they wanted it, it could not be a good thing. Now Sam and his friends were chasing terrorists through a crowded market place, and that could not end well. Every ricocheting bullet made Sam wince, but it was too late to back down now. They should have alerted the locals, he thought. Why hadn’t they?

An explosion made him lose his balance and he fell awkwardly. People were screaming and running in all directions. It was complete chaos.

“Steve?” he said in the comms. “Steve, can you hear me? What’s going on? Steve?” There was no answer.

With a bad feeling in his gut, Sam retreated his wings and approached the site of the explosion on foot. Debris and corpses were all around, and the smoke made it hard to see anything clearly. One thing, however, caught his attention: a red, white and blue shield, partially covered by fallen chunks of wall.

“Steve!”

It took him a while to find his friend, buried under layers of concrete. Sam almost wished he hadn’t when he saw what was left of him. Part of his face and right shoulder were gone, and horrible burns covered the rest of him. It was an effort not to throw up. Oh god.

A little further away, Wanda was in even worse condition. Sam could only identify her by the remains of her red coat.

After a while Sam realized that he was shaking uncontrollably and his vision was staring to get fuzzy. I’m in shock, he thought, just before collapsing.

He woke up handcuffed to a hospital bed. “What…?”

Maria Hill stood from where she had been sitting and approached him. “Hello, Sam.”

“What’s—” He was interrupted by a coughing fit. “What’s going on? Why…” He raised the hand attached to the bed in confusion.

Hill sighed. “I don’t know what the hell you idiots were thinking, but you are in a lot of trouble, Wilson.”
“Steve…”

“Rogers is dead, so is Maximoff. Romanoff is in jail at the moment.”

“Jail? Why?” Nothing made any sense. *Oh god, Steve is dead…*

“Well, for one thing, she entered Nigeria illegally. As did all of you. It’s still unclear what caused the explosion, but the Nigerian government isn’t happy, as you can imagine. Aside from Rogers and Maximoff, 39 other people are dead and over a hundred are injured. They want someone to blame, and right now you and Romanoff are looking good for it.”

“What? That’s… We didn’t…” *Oh god.*

“What were you doing in Nigeria?”

“We… we had a lead on…” Sam trailed off, unsure what to say now.

“On?” Hill pressed. When he remained silent, she continued. “Well, I have already informed the Nigerian government that, whatever you were doing, it wasn’t official Avengers business, since I wasn’t informed of anything.” Her glare made Sam shrink back on the bed. “So unless you tell me what the fuck you guys were doing, you’re on your own.”

*Shit,* Sam thought. “We had a lead on Bucky, Cap’s friend.” *Oh, god, Steve is dead…*

“I see. And why didn’t you tell me about it so I could contact the local authorities and clear the mission?”

“I… I don’t know. Steve…” *Oh, god, Steve is dead…* “Steve didn’t want to tell anyone.”

“And then what happened?”

“We… we heard Rumlow might be in the area. We decided, since we were already here, to check it out.”

“Without telling anyone?”

“I… Yeah, I guess.”

There was a pinched look to her face that Sam had never seen before. “So, you decided that you could just invade a country and do whatever you wanted, is that it?”

“What? No! That’s not what happened!” *Oh, god, Steve is dead…*

“No? Because that’s what it looks like. And then things went wrong and people died. Lots of people.”

“That… that wasn’t supposed to happen…” *Oh, god, Steve is dead…*

Hill just shook her head. “The investigation has already begun. I suggest you cooperate.” She gave him one last pitying look and left the room.

The next day Sam was discharged from the hospital straight into a prison cell to await trial. He and Natasha were charged and convicted of trespassing and reckless endangerment. In the wake of the Lagos tragedy, something called the Sokovia Accords were created to regulate superhero activities, under the purview of the United Nations. Stark, Rhodes and Vision signed, joined later by Bruce Banner and a Doctor Strange.
Steve knocked on the door and waited, glancing nervously around. He sure hoped Sam was home.

“Hey man,” Sam said as he opened the door, taking in Steve and Natasha’s disheveled appearance.

“Sorry about this,” Steve said. “We need a place to lay low for a while.”

“Everyone we know is trying to kill us,” Nat added.

“Not everyone,” Sam replied, stepping back so they could come in. Steve relaxed a bit. Coming here was a good idea, he thought to himself.

Once inside, Steve and Natasha went to clean themselves up. Nat had a faraway look in her eye.

“What’s going on?” Steve asked, trying to be a good friend.

“When I first joined SHIELD, I thought I was going straight. But I guess I just traded in the KGB for Hydra. I thought I knew whose lies I was telling, but I can’t tell the difference anymore.”

“There’s a chance you might be in the wrong business.” His attempt at lightening the mood earned him a small smile. Then she turned serious again.

“I owe you.”

“It’s okay.”

“If it was the other way around. If it was down to me to save your life. Now you be honest with me, would you trust me to do it?”

“I would now.” They were in this together now, Steve thought. They had to trust each other, because there was no one else. Well, there was Sam. “And I’m always honest.”

“Well, you’re very chipper for someone who just found out they died for nothing.”

“I guess I just like to know who I’m fighting.” And now that he did, Hydra’s days were numbered. This time, he would make sure to completely obliterate them.

Sam came into the bedroom then. “I made breakfast. If you guys eat that sort of thing.”

“So the question is, who at SHIELD could launch a domestic missile strike?” Natasha asked as they sat in Sam’s kitchen planning their next move.

“Pierce.”

“Who happens to be sitting on top of the most secure building in the world.”

There wasn’t really true, Steve thought. And anyway, Steve had broken into many Hydra bases in the past, he could get into another one. “He’s not working alone. Zola’s algorithm was on the Lemurian Star.”

“So was Jasper Sitwell.”

“So the real question is how do the two most wanted people in Washington kidnap a SHIELD officer in broad daylight?” The odds were against them, sure, but Steve had always beaten the odds.
before. They’d manage it this time too. They were the good guys, after all.

Sam left the room and came back holding a photo and file, which he placed on the table. “The answer is, you don’t.”

“What’s this?”

“Call it a résumé.”

Steve stood to look at the picture and Natasha joined him. When Steve looked up to ask about it, he only had a split second to realize there was a gun pointed at his head. Two shots were fired with deadly precision at Steve and Natasha. They were dead before they hit the floor.

(Sam Wilson, Hydra operative, called Pierce to get someone to come dispose of the bodies and tell him that the threat had been eliminated. Project Insight could go on as planned.

Unfortunately for Hydra, Nick Fury was still alive, and when he didn’t hear from Rogers or Romanoff, he called in the big guns: Tony Stark. Once aware of the situation, it was easy for Stark to sabotage the helicarriers before they even got off the ground, as well as identify the most important Hydra personnel and tip off all available agencies about them. Project Insight was stopped in its tracks without any further bloodshed. Rogers and Romanoff were lauded as heroes and received high honors at their funerals. Fury was a bit sad to see Romanoff go, but Rogers had clearly been more trouble than he was worth. Trusting a complete stranger with sensitive information, really…)

(AN: Partly inspired by izumi2’s “Acceptable Risk Is Not”.)

60. (prompt by FictionWriter09)

“Hey, punk, where are you going?” Bucky asked as Stevie began to walk away.

Steve didn’t answer, looking at the ground like a chastised puppy. It used to be an endearing look, but Bucky was starting to get sick of it, since it usually ended up meaning trouble for him. Bucky already had too much on his plate, what with his impending departure to the fucking frontline, to take any of Steve’s crap anymore.

“Steve.”

“I just want to be in the military. Like you. Like my dad. To do my part.”

The idiot had been saying that for a while and Bucky had, for the most part, ignored him. It wasn’t like the army would ever accept him, yet this time it grated. Bucky was about to go off to most likely die in this stupid war, and here was Steve chasing it like it was some grand adventure.

“Steve, listen to me good, punk. You are not fit for the army.”

“Bucky…”

“No, just shut up. This isn’t a game. This isn’t a fucking competition to see who is better. Do you know what war is? It’s death. There’s nothing great or glorious about it. It’s just fucking horrible. Do you think I want to go out there and get killed thousands of miles from home? Hell no! Only an idiot wants that. I’ll go because I have to, not because I want to. Do you understand? This is not a game! You want to help? Great, there’s plenty you can do here at home. At the frontline you’d be nothing but a liability. Stop insulting everyone who is out there risking their fucking necks and everyone who
is doing their best here just to feel better about yourself. Stop insulting me! Grow the fuck up, Steve.”

For a while Steve said nothing, just stood there with his mouth hanging open. “That’s not… Bucky…”

But Bucky was all out of patience, and far too tired and scared to keep indulging Steve and his ridiculous notions. “You can’t be in the army, Steve. You’ve been told that several times now. So why do you keep insisting? You are not physically fit for it. Do you think one-armed Eugene down the street should be in the army? No, of course not. He can’t. Doesn’t mean he can’t do anything, but he can’t do that. You, with your asthma and your allergies and everything, can’t either. There’s still plenty of things you can do, though. Just not that. So stop acting like being on the frontline is the only important job, that you’re too good for anything else. Eugene is doing his bit, what the fuck have you been doing besides moaning about how much you want to serve and breaking laws by lying on enlistment forms?”

“I just want to fight the bullies.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake! Grow the fuck up, Steve!” Bucky repeated, now thoroughly exasperated. “You sound like a fucking child. War isn’t about that, you idiot. And while we’re at it, you’ve got to let go of this stupid idea that you have to pick a fight with everyone who does something you disagree with. I am sick and tired of having to save your stupid ass. Just walk away and let people be!”

“I have to do what’s right!”

“What’s right? What is right about fighting a guy just because he doesn’t want to see the news reel? He has a right to his own fucking opinion, Steve.”

“He was being disrespectful.”

“No, Steve. You were being disrespectful. Do you even know that Jeff lost a brother in the war? Maybe he didn’t want to remember that, did you ever consider that? No, of course not. You never consider anything but your own needs and I’m sick of it. This is possibly my last night home, maybe my last night in the US, since I could just as well come back in a coffin, and I have to spend it listening to you talking shit! For once in your life, Steve, how about thinking about someone else? How about you stop being a selfish ass? Cause I swear to god, Steve, if you say one more word about enlisting or about the fucking war, I will fucking kick your ass.”

Without waiting for a response, Bucky walked away. He couldn’t deal with this anymore. He wasn’t going to waste any more of his precious time with Steve. If he wanted to keep being an idiot, he could do it far away from Bucky ‘cause he was done. Fucking Steve could be someone else’s problem from now on.

(Bucky survived the war and came home. Steve tried to get in touch again but Bucky turned him down. Though it took a while, Steve finally took the hint and left Bucky alone.)

(AN: The idea that the movie guy lost a brother in the war is borrowed from dls.)
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

I meant to have this chapter up sooner, but my laptop has been on the fritz. Out of the blue half the keys in the keyboard stopped working, so I can't write in it anymore. (Can still read fic, at least.) I hope it can be fixed, though it will probably take forever. In the meantime, I'm using the old desktop, which I don't particularly like. *sigh*

61. (prompt by VeraNera)

It was easier than he expected getting into the Raft, where his friends were being held. It still galled Steve that the Avengers had been imprisoned for doing the right thing – for fighting corrupt governments seeking to control and use them for their own agendas. Why Tony couldn’t see that these Accords were a terrible idea was a mystery.

He had to knock out several guards and try a lot of doors until he got to the right place (a map would have been really useful). Finally, though, he was there.

“Sam!” he exclaimed, moving forward to figure out how to open the cell door. Clint and Scott were there too, but he couldn’t see Wanda.

“Steve. What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean? I came to bust you out. Sorry it took so long, there were some other things I had to take care of first.” The main one being making sure Bucky was safe, of course. It was very fortunate that King T’Challa had come to realize how awful the Accords were and offered to help Bucky. Steve had hoped that would mean getting rid of Hydra’s trigger words right away, but it wasn’t that simple. It hurt that Bucky had asked to be placed back on ice, and Steve had spent several days trying to talk him out of it with no success. Then he’d spent another several days trying to convince T’Challa to give him a jet and some equipment to go rescue the others. (He missed his shield. He should not have left it behind no matter what Tony said.) So, all in all, it had taken quite a bit of time to get here. Fortunately it didn’t seem like anyone had been hurt by Ross’s goons.

“Steve, this is not a good idea.”

“What?” Steve paused in his perusal of the cell door to stare incredulously at Sam.

“We are in a lot of trouble here, Steve, and escaping is only gonna make things worse.”

“What? Sam, you can’t be serious.”

“Our lawyers advised us to cooperate with the authorities, Steve. We might even make bail, but not if we leave.”

“What?” Steve felt like a broken record, but none of this was making any sense. “What lawyer?”

“The UN got us lawyers. They’re expensive, but what can you do?”

“Sam, you can’t believe… these Accord people don’t care about lawyers or anything. They just want
“Yeah, no,” Clint said from his cell. “The lawyers explained the Accords to us. Something you failed
to do, by the way. We’re in here because of you, not the Accords. I left my family because you said
the world was in danger, but that was bullshit. You just wanted someone to help you save your
friend. So just shut up and go away, Steve. You don’t know shit.”


“Did you even read the Accords, Cap?” Scott asked. “Because we did, and they’re fine. I don’t
know why you had a problem with them.” He shook his head. “I should have listened to Hope and
stayed away from this mess. Now I’m gonna go back to prison and spent more time away from my
daughter.”

“This… guys, this is crazy. Ross has done something to you, he must have. But don’t worry, I’ll fix
it.”

Clint laughed, a harsh and bitter sound. “No. Actually, it was Wanda who was doing something to
us. Notice how she isn’t here? That’s because she was taken somewhere else to have her powers
removed. She’d been messing with our heads since Sokovia. Funny that, isn’t it?”

“That’s not true. Wanda wouldn’t do that. She’s a good kid.”

“For fuck’s sake, Steve! She messed with our minds! She set the Hulk loose on a crowded city! She
teamed up with Ultron to kill us! She fucking volunteered for Hydra! She’s the kind of person we are
supposed to fight against!”

“Mr Rogers, put your hands in the air and turn around slowly,” someone said from behind him.
Steve swirled around and was met with the sight of several men in tactical gear pointing weapons at
him. “I am authorized to shoot to kill if you make any threatening moves.”

Steve quickly assessed the situation. There were far too many of them and they had the high ground.
Without his shield he’d have no hope of escaping all the bullets he had no doubt would fly in his
direction. He’d have to bide his time.

“Hands in the air. I won’t ask again.”

Steve complied. “You see, Sam? This is what the Accords are about. Kill orders if we don’t do what
they want.” He wasn’t defeated yet, though, he’d just have to wait for a better opportunity.

“You’re kidding, right?” Scott said. “You killed a bunch of people and injured a lot more, and now
you break in here. What do you expect people to do? Just lie down and take it? Are you on crack?”

“Mr Rogers,” one of the officers said. “You are under arrest for multiple crimes, including the 12
officers you injured when you broke into this facility. One of them is in critical condition and might
not make it, which would add another count of murder to your tally.”

“Damn it, Steve! What were you thinking?” Sam sighed. “I knew there was something wrong with
you, but… I should have trusted my gut instead of letting hero-worship blind me.”

When the lead officer came down, Steve moved, hoping to get to him and use him as a shield, but he
wasn’t fast enough. An array of bullets hit him before he got two steps in, killing him instantly.

(Sam, Clint and Scott plead guilty to their crimes and got reduced sentences, as it was impossible to
determine how far Maximoff’s powers had influenced their decisions. Maximoff herself was stripped
of her powers and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. Bucky was eventually unfrozen and sent to a psychiatric facility to serve his time after Hydra’s triggers were removed from his mind.

The Avengers continued on, lead by Col Rhodes.)

(AN: In this scenario, Ross was removed from the picture while Steve was dallying around and the UN took control of the Raft. Before Steve broke in, all legalities were being observed.)

62. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled)

“There’s more going on here,” Steve said.

Natasha hesitated. Steve was compromised, that was clear, but it didn’t mean he couldn’t be right about this. If the world was in danger and Nat kept Steve from doing something about it, there would be even more red in her ledger.

“I’m gonna regret this,” she muttered to herself. Yet she couldn’t take the chance. When King T’Challa came in to try and take Barnes (he didn’t care about anything else, it seemed like the world could burn and all he wanted was Barnes dead), Nat made her decision. The world’s safety had to come first.

She set the widow bites for minimal charge – she didn’t want to maim a king, after all (even if Wakanda was only a tiny unimportant country) – and fired at him. He twitched and fell on the floor. “Go,” she told Steve, and he ran for the jet. T’Challa wasn’t down, however. She barely had time to get out of the way of the kick that went flying at her head. The second attack was more successful as he managed to slice through her suit with his claws. What the hell were they made of, she wondered. He kept pressing his advantage and Natasha was left scrambling to defend herself with no chance for a counter attack. Eventually her luck ran out and he scored a vicious slash that ripped through the armor to her abdomen underneath it.

From the floor she saw him leap into the air as the quinjet flew past him and grab on. The jet made it past the door but crashed soon afterwards. Shit. T’Challa yanked Barnes out and would have slit his throat right then and there if Steve hadn’t managed to shove him off. It was the last thing Natasha saw before losing consciousness.

She woke up in a hospital, handcuffed to the bed. Not good, she thought. It would not be that difficult to wriggle out of them and make a run for it, but she wanted to know what the situation was first, who she could go to.

A couple of people in suits came in looking decidedly unfriendly.

“Ms Romanoff, you are under arrest for assaulting his Majesty King T’Challa of Wakanda,” the tallest one said.

“He assaulted me,” she replied, gesturing to her bandaged torso.

“He has also been arrested for attempted murder, of both yourself and Sgt Barnes, though given his diplomatic immunity, that might not stick. You will be transferred to the US for trial shortly. Please be advised that attempting to escape will only make things harder for you. If you are convicted, the Accords Panel will revoke your membership to the Avengers, naturally.”

“I did what I thought was best. The world was in danger.”

“Ah, yes, so Mr Rogers claimed once he was taken into custody. A team was dispatched to apprehend this fake doctor, a Mr Zemo from Sokovia, before he made it out of the airport in
Moscow. So, you see, the threat was neutralized.” He gave her a hard look. “And, strangely enough, no enhanced individuals were needed for it, just good old-fashioned law enforcement officers. Funny that, isn’t it? Guess you people aren’t so indispensable after all.”

Natasha bristled a little at the dig. Had she done the wrong thing in taking Steve’s word about the threat? It clearly wasn’t as dire as she’d been led to believe.

“Do you have any questions, Ms Romanoff?”

“What happened to the others?” She needed to who would be able to get her out of this.

“Mr Rogers, as mentioned, has been arrested, along with Sgt Barnes, Sgt Wilson, Mr Barton, Ms Maximoff and Mr Lang. They are all facing various charges. In addition, an investigation into the incident in Lagos has been launched, so expect to be questioned about that as well.”

“What about Stark?”

“What about him? Dr Stark and his team, minus yourself and King T’Challa of course, have broken no laws. They are, at this point, the only Avengers left.”

“Thank god for that,” the other man muttered, just loud enough for Natasha to hear. “The ones with sense.”

“I’d like to talk to him,” she said, hoping to still be able to salvage something.

The minute Stark came in the door, though, followed by Rhodes and Vision, Nat knew it was hopeless. The look in his eye was as hard and unforgiving as she’d ever seen. Before she got a word out, he spoke.

“So, were you and Steve ever planning on telling me?”

“Telling you what?” If this was going where she thought it was, she was in trouble.

“Don’t play dumb with me, Natalie,” he hissed. Rhodes looked even angrier than Stark. “You and Steve knew about my parents being killed by the Winter Soldier for years and didn’t tell me.”

“I thought Steve had told you,” she said as a last ditch effort. “He said he would.”

“Bullshit. He never said anything of the kind. He confessed he had no intention of telling me. He also said that you agreed it was best to let it be. So that was a rhetorical question, just to see what lies you’d tell. Guess you wouldn’t know a truth if it bit you in the ass. So, goodbye Romanoff. The days of me cleaning up your mess are long gone. You guys get to sink on your own this time.” He turned around and left, not giving her a chance to say anything else.

“You come near Tony again and it will be the end of you,” Rhodes growled.

(Neither Natasha nor Steve ever made it to a courtroom. They were both shot in the head by former SHIELD agents the moment they stepped out of the plane in the US. The others were convicted and sent to prison. T’Challa lost the throne and the Black Panther title when he arrived back in Wakanda, though he did escape the attempted murder charge.)

(AN: Wow, I’m on a roll with killing Steve, aren’t I? I think I’m still bitter… Also, I didn’t re-watch the airport scene for this, just went with my memory.)

63. (prompt by DaniMeows, Leefdoor, A_Mirror_of_memories, Intentionally Misspelled)
They had been in Wakanda for several days now, since their escape from the Raft. Sam was still having a hard time wrapping his head around everything that had happened. It seemed… surreal, somehow. Well, what was done was done, he figured; now they had to concentrate on sorting out the situation and show the world the truth about the Accords and Ross. It shouldn’t be that hard. (He hoped.)

It was Scott who alerted them to the news. He’d gotten a laptop from the Wakandans and was looking for information about them and what was going on in the world outside.

“Guys, come see this.”

Except for Wanda, who was god knew where, the rest of them gathered together in front of the computer to see a news program from an international station Sam wasn’t familiar with.

“Arrest warrants have been issued for all members of the so-called Team Captain America. Steve Rogers, Sam Wilson, Clint Barton, Wanda Maximoff, Scott Lang and James Barnes are wanted for murder, assault, property damage and reckless endangerment. They are now on Interpol’s most wanted list,” the reporter said.

“What the hell!” Sam exclaimed, blinking at the screen.

“Uhm, guys, murder and assault is not what I signed up for,” Scott said. He looked a bit pale.

“We now go to our local correspondent in Berlin,” the reporter continued, and the scene changed to what looked like the facility they had been taken to after Bucharest. A man in a suit stood in front of the camera.

“Thank you, Deb. The Counter-Terrorist Task Force is hard at work looking for any sign of the former Avengers. Agent Sharon Carter, who was the one to give Rogers classified information that led to the assault in Bucharest, was arrested this morning.”

“What!” Steve shouted.

“It has been discovered that Agent Carter has ties to Hydra, though how assisting Rogers furthered their goals is still uncertain at this point. She is being questioned as we speak, so we’ll get back to you with any news as soon as they become available.”

“What?” Steve repeated. “That’s ridiculous, Sharon isn’t Hydra!” No one said anything. Sam didn’t know the woman, so he had no idea how likely that was, though it did seem suspicious that it was only discovered now. Maybe she was being framed for having helped them. “Turn it off, Scott. I don’t want to listen to this. It’s all lies anyway.”

Scott frowned and closed the video. Then he opened another one. There was a reporter standing in front of a building where people were protesting. “Here at the German embassy in the US, people have gathered to protest against the former Avengers.”

“Against?” Steve asked, looking confused.

The reporter turned to one of the protesters, a woman who seemed to be in her fifties. “What do you think about this ‘Civil War’, ma’am?”

“I think it’s absolutely despicable what those idiots did. Rogers is a bully. First he kills a bunch of innocent people in Lagos and then Bucharest and Berlin. Where is he gonna strike next? I sure hope the real Avengers catch them soon and send those murderers to prison where they belong. My parents were German, they came here to escape the war. I will not rest until the Germans have justice
for what happened to their people.”

Sam could only stare at the screen, uncomprehendingly. Beside him, the others seemed to be in a similar state of shock.

The reporter turned to another person, a young black man. “Yeah, whoever said Captain America is a hero was obviously on crack. How is beating up and killing law enforcement officers doing their job heroic? That’s what criminals do. I’m praying for Col Rhodes, who actually is a hero, to recover. Cap can rot in hell, the bastard.” He held up a sign that read ‘Justice for Lagos’. “The world won’t accept crazy vigilantes who think they can do whatever they want anymore.”

There were several more interviews, and everyone said more or less the same thing, some more viciously than others.

“These people have no idea what they’re talking about. They don’t know the whole story. They don’t know what the Accords really are, that they would have killed Bucky.”

Sam, however, wasn’t so sure. Yes, they probably didn’t have all the information about the situation, which meant that they could only judge it by what they’d seen. And that was… well, without the whole context, it didn’t look very good for them, did it?

Scott clicked on another video, this one of a group of journalists debating the issue, two men and a woman.

“The first thing we have to consider is jurisdiction and authority. Until the Accords, the Avengers had neither. They were, in essence, from the time SHIELD fell, a group of vigilantes who did whatever they pleased and answered to no one. Now obviously that was not a sustainable state of affairs,” the woman said. “The Sokovia Accords, despite the name, have been in the works since what happened in DC. That was our first inkling, perhaps, that the way things were going wasn’t the best. If the Avengers – or rather Rogers and Romanoff, since the others weren’t involved in that incident – had been part of some kind of system, proper authorities could have been notified of the Hydra problem and taken appropriate measures. As it was, however, no one knew anything until all SHIELD data was dumped in the internet.”

“Which was the most idiotic plan ever,” one of the men, a plump guy said. “I mean, what did that accomplish besides getting a lot of innocent people killed? Also, didn’t those morons think to call… gee, I don’t know, an expert on technology maybe… before just dumping it all out there? Seriously, does Rogers even know what the internet is? Or a phone? How hard could it have been to call Tony Stark and have him sort out the info dump to burn only Hydra?”

Sam blinked and saw that Scott did the same. Why hadn’t they called Stark? He’d never really thought about it, but it made sense.

“So far the death toll on that is in the hundreds,” the other man, a tall fellow, said. “Including agents and their families.”

“And Romanoff had the gall to stand in front of Congress and say they wouldn’t arrest her because the world needs her. Yeah, sure, like I need a whole in the head,” the plump one said with a snort.

“Well, at least she showed up for the hearing, which is more than Rogers did,” the woman interjected. “He also didn’t show up in Vienna to discuss the Accords. Guess he prefers to speak with his fists.”

“That is baffling,” the tall man said. “According to reports, Rogers disagreed with the Accords. Why
then didn’t he go to Vienna to explain his concerns? He’s Captain America, people would have listened.”

“Like I said,” the woman replied, “he prefers to talk with his fists. I mean, did Rogers ever speak to the public about anything? No, he didn’t. It was always Tony Stark doing press conferences and dealing with PR for the Avengers. And of course we can understand why, but it would have been good to hear from the others too, at least once in a while. After DC, after Sokovia, after Lagos… not one word from Rogers. Lots of death and destruction and where is he? Enjoying his luxury accommodations at the Avengers Compound while the world bled.” She shook her head. “What can we conclude from that? To me, it seems like he doesn’t give a damn about the damage he leaves behind. So why should we let him continue unchecked? Why should we trust this man who doesn’t even have the decency to face the public about the consequences of his actions?”

“That’s true,” tall guy said. “And that’s not considering what he did to Tony Stark, his so-called friend. If not even a supposed friend is safe from him, what hope is there for the rest of us ordinary people when he next decides we are in his way?”

“Rogers should have stayed a circus act,” plump sneered. “At least then he was only mock punching people instead of leaving them with long-lasting injuries.”

“Speaking of circus performers,” the woman cut in. “What can we say about Sam Wilson? The guy is former military, but he obviously left all his training and common sense behind to follow Rogers around like an eager puppy. How can a man like that not understand why the Accords are necessary? Did he go around in the Air Force doing whatever he wanted without answering to anyone?”

Sam flinched. He wanted to deny the accusation yet… He was starting to get a very bad feeling about this.

“Turn it off,” Steve said, but Scott ignored him.

The woman continued. “And Wanda Maximoff? The woman is clearly dangerous. Why she’s an Avenger is still a mystery to the world.”

Tall guy agreed. “It is odd that we know next to nothing about her, aside from being originally from Sokovia. There’s got to be something fishy going on there. Why all the secrecy otherwise? She never made a single public appearance as an Avenger. What are her qualifications for being an Avenger in the first place? We know Col Rhodes’ record; he’s a decorated officer with decades of experience. Wilson had some experience in the military, though as you said, Kate, he seemed to have thrown it out the window. Vision did some interviews so we got a sense of who he is. Maximoff? They could have taken her off the street and we have no idea. And this is the team we’re supposed to trust?” He shook his head. “Not a chance.”

“Turn it off,” Steve repeated. Scott glared at him and did as he was told. Then he opened yet another video. A female reporter was standing in front of Stark Tower, where people were gathered with more signs. And there were… flowers? A lot of flowers all over the entrance to the Tower.

“No official word yet has been released about Tony Stark’s condition. We know he was admitted to the hospital following a fight with Steve Rogers. The extent of his injuries is still unknown at this point. Since yesterday, when news of his hospitalization were made public, people have been leaving flowers on the steps here at Stark Tower to wish him a speedy recovery.”

The camera panned over the street and Sam could read the signs now.
Get well soon, Tony.

We stand with Stark and the Accords.

Fuck Team Cap.

Justice for Bucharest.

Justice for Lagos.

Team Iron Man standing strong.

A knot was beginning to form in the pit of Sam’s stomach. “Steve, what happened with Stark?” he asked.

“Nothing. This is all an exaggeration. A publicity stunt, that’s all. Tony was fine when I left.”

A young woman was being interviewed on screen. “I’ve always like Iron Man better,” she was saying. “Because his super power is being smart, you know? He built the suit himself to escape from kidnappers. That takes courage and guts. What did Rogers do? Survived an experiment, big deal. It could have been anyone in his place. Rogers doesn’t care about ordinary people. He can’t even be bothered to talk to us. Tony’s done a lot for the world. He’s made mistakes, sure, but he owns up to it and tries to do better. He didn’t have to wear the suit, you know. He could have given it to Rhodes from day one and let him fly around saving the world. He does it ’cause he cares, ’cause he wants to make the world better.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake!” Clint exclaimed. “Just turn this damn thing off.”

Scott scowled at him. “I want to know what people are saying. If you don’t want to listen you can just leave.”

The next video appeared to be a random guy sitting in front of the computer talking. “So, this Civil War business is all over the news and we don’t know much about what’s going on. Well, I did some digging and found some stuff that I want to share with you all. So, I’m sure you guys remember that idiotic info dump of all SHIELD files, right? That means any schmuck can access most of it, so I went hunting for something that might explain this disaster. And, boy, it’s a doozy. Right. Well, there was a lot of personnel information there – like the ones that got a bunch of agents and their families killed – including profiles on some of the Avengers. You guys wanna hear what SHIELD had to say about Captain America?”

The image changed into what looked like a copy of a report. The quality wasn’t the best, but Steve’s name was clearly visible.

“So, the great Captain America,” the guy’s voice continued over the image “is, according to SHIELD, ‘ill prepared for the 21st century.’” The portion of the report which said that became highlighted. “‘Rogers has demonstrated an inability to let go of the past and embrace the future. All attempts to get him more integrated to the world have failed’.” Again, the relevant parts were marked so that they could be read. “Interesting that, isn’t it? I wonder if the good Captain even knows what the UN is, since according to reports he disliked the idea of being under anyone’s control. ‘Rogers seems to have an inflated sense of his own importance and righteousness, and has shown contempt and dismissiveness for anything that isn’t fighting skills.’ That does fit with what we know of the man, doesn’t it? I mean, this is the guy who repeatedly lied on enlistment forms so he could get into the army even though, at the time, he was a skinny asthmatic who had no business being anywhere in the military. Guess no other job was good enough for him, huh? Never mind that, without the
serum, he would have been a liability for any unit. ‘Rogers does not seem able to see the big picture, and is excessively concerned with his own wants and needs, lacking empathy and the ability to relate to others if they differ from him.’ I guess that would be the majority of the world, right? ‘Rogers likes to be surrounded by people who don’t question him in any way. As a result, his relationship with Stark has been fraught with tension.’ Another interesting tidbit of information, isn’t it, folks? This Civil War is starting to make more sense now, isn’t it? Let’s look at the facts, shall we?” The image went back to the man. “Lagos. Well, that was an unmitigated disaster. The world then demands accountability, and Rogers can’t have that. Then Rogers’ good buddy from the past resurfaces, and Rogers goes on a rampage to protect him – can’t let go of the past, remember? And surrounds himself with his loyal lapdogs, particularly Wilson, who really should have known better. Stark and Rhodes won’t back down – because why should they? – and Rogers has no qualms about taking them down, first Rhodes in Liepzig and then Stark in Siberia. Really, guys? Is this the hero we want? Is this a hero at all? I think not. And it’s not me saying it, it’s SHIELD.” The man paused for a moment. “So why didn’t SHIELD do anything about this? You might be wondering. Well, they have the answer.” Another report appeared on the screen. “‘For now Rogers believes he’s in control and he can be useful. His lack of knowledge of the world makes him easy to manipulate. Stroke his ego enough and he’ll play along with what we need.’ So there you have it, people. Chilling isn’t it? And this info is out there for anyone to see.”

Steve reached out and threw the laptop off the table. “Enough!” His face was red, though with anger or embarrassment Sam wasn’t sure. “This is all lies. Lies and manipulations. I’m done listening to this shit.” He marched off in a huff, leaving Sam, Clint and Scott to stare at each other in shame and confusion.

“Guys, I think we screwed up,” Scott said.

Sam didn’t want to admit it, but the bad feeling in his gut had been growing with every word in every video. While a lot of that could have been manipulation, there was enough truth in it to make Sam feel deeply uncomfortable. Shit. What had he gotten himself into?

“What can we do?” he asked, taking a few deep breaths to keep his suddenly rebellious stomach under control.

“I think we should turn ourselves in,” Scott replied. “The sooner the better.” He stood up, eying the destroyed laptop with an unreadable expression. “I’m going to call Hope.”

There was nothing more to do except stare at the walls.

“We fucked up, didn’t we?” Clint asked. “I was mad at Stark about Ultron and I just… I thought whatever he was supporting couldn’t be good, but I never asked any questions. I just assumed Steve knew what he was doing.”

“He didn’t know what the United Nations were. I didn’t realize it at the time, but he called it a government. And his list… Oh, god, what the hell have we been doing?”

“ Fucking up.”

They surrendered later that same day. Sam, Clint and Scott were handcuffed and led away easily. Steve and Wanda put up a fight. Vision and a weird guy in a cape took them both down relatively easily, though.

Because of their cooperation, Sam, Clint and Scott got lighter sentences than they would have done otherwise. Wanda got life when it was discovered that she had been killing and torturing people for Hydra before joining the Avengers (and fuck, what had they been thinking putting her on the team
without asking any questions?), with her powers stripped away. Steve ranted like a lunatic in court and ended up getting 40 years.

(AN: I hope these aren’t getting too repetitive, with pretty much every post-CW ending with “Team Cap goes to jail”. But hey, it’s where they belong.)
Chapter 16

64. (prompt by Ushimipan, Bronwyn and Kuramas_Kat)

It took four days for people to start asking questions. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, there was panic, fear and disbelief that something like that could have happened. Aliens were things one saw in sci-fi movies and books, not in real life. Some were in denial, calling the whole thing a hoax, but most were forced to believe it was true. There was far too much evidence, from videos to the alien corpses that littered the streets of New York. Not to mention the press conference Tony called the very next day to try and explain a bit of what happened, so people wouldn’t panic even more.

It was supposed to be all of them (minus Thor, who had already left with Loki and the Tesseract), but only Tony showed up. Romanoff claimed she didn’t do press, and Clint was in no fit state for it. Bruce politely declined, worried about a Hulk-out – though Tony was pretty sure that wouldn’t happen. Steve… Steve looked at him like he was insane for even suggesting something like that. Since the guy had just been defrosted, and probably had no idea how to handle 21st century media, Tony figured he could cut him some slack this time.

Tony gave the public as much information as he could with Fury breathing down his neck about ‘need to know’ (aliens had descended from the sky, as far as Tony was concerned, that qualified as ‘need to know’). The one thing he did not say, however, was that there were a heck of a lot more ships out there, which may or may not have been destroyed by the nuke. He was already beginning to think of what he could do to make sure Earth would be ready if those fuckers decided to go for a second try. At that point, no one made a fuss about the nuke, still digesting the ‘aliens are real and out to get us’ idea.

The first one to wonder about it was, Tony was not surprised to see, Christine Everheart. She cornered him during a meeting with the mayor of New York to discuss the reconstruction efforts and the cleaning up of the alien debris.

“Mr Stark,” Christine said, sharp eyes and smile firmly in place, “I was wondering if I could ask you a few more questions about the destruction of the alien fleet.”

“I doubt I can stop you,” Tony replied. Despite their rocky start, Tony kinda liked Christine. She was intelligent, resourceful and determined, all qualities Tony admired.

“Where did the nuke come from? The one you carried through the portal.”

It wasn’t that Tony hadn’t thought about it, but that he had been too busy the last few days, between everything he had to do, and trying to keep the sight of the alien armada and the coldness of space from overwhelming him at any given moment. He hadn’t had much time to stop and think – because if he did, it would probably end with another set of nightmares to join those of Afghanistan. Now that she’d brought it up, though, Tony remembered that he really should do something about those people who thought nuking Manhattan was a good idea (actually, Tony should figure out who the hell those people were first).

“Let me check a few things and I’ll get back to you on that.”

Christine gave him a look that promised dire retribution if he didn’t deliver before nodding and walking away to harass some other poor soul.
Tony locked himself in the workshop in the Tower and got right to work as soon as he got home. “J? Do we still have access to SHIELD’s database?”

“Indeed, Sir.”

“Good. See what you can find out about who calls the shots at SHIELD. I want to know who gave the order to fire the nuke.”

“I’ll let you know as soon as I find out.”

It took Jarvis a couple of hours to gather the information about the so-called World Security Council. Right, Tony snorted. I’ve never heard of these guys and they think they can make decisions for the world? We’ll see about that. Jarvis also found a lot of very disturbing things about SHIELD and how they operated, including a secret prison where they had been stashing people they considered dangerous without any sort of due process for years. I hope this isn’t what dad had in mind when the founded this stupid organization.

Tony thought about what to do for a while, then he called Rhodey and Pepper to get their opinion. They both agreed that exposing the whole thing was the right thing to do.

“These people almost wiped Manhattan off the map, not to mention a good portion of the US as well. They can’t think they’ll just get away with it because nobody knows who they are. God only knows what else they’ve done over the years,” Pepper said. “I have some contacts in the FBI from when we dealt with Stane. I’ll give them a call.”

“I don’t think the US military knows about any of this,” Rhodey added. “SHIELD had no authorization to launch a nuke. And at a whole freaking city at that. I’ll make some calls as well.”

Tony got in touch with Christine and invited her for a meeting.

“Here’s the thing,” he told her. “This nuke thing is a huge deal, and we want to blow the whistle on the whole thing. You can help, but you need to wait a few days for the FBI, CIA and the whole alphabet soup to get their ducks in a row and nail these guys legally.”

She studied him for a few moments, considering. “And then I get an exclusive?”

“Sure. We’re gonna need the public’s support on this anyway.”

“Well, then, Mr Stark, you have a deal,” she said, offering a handshake.

Tony smiled. “Pleasure doing business with you, Ms Everhart.”

A week later, a joint operation between FBI, CIA and Homeland Security arrested the two WSC members currently residing in the USA, while Interpol arrested the one from overseas, as well as dozens of SHIELD operatives who were suspected of being involved in civil rights violations and a number of other crimes, including Fury and Maria Hill. Later the same day, Christine Everhart was invited to a television panel to talk about her exposé on the subject, which would be coming out in a few days with all the details.

“How did you get all this information, Ms Everhart?” the reporter asked once Christine had given most of the highlights.

“Well, I knew that was something fishy going on with that nuke, so I asked Tony Stark about it. I mean, he’s the one that carried the nuke through the portal and saved us all, I figured he’d know something about it. He helped me get most of the facts and evidence for this.”
“I was under the impression that you and Stark didn’t see eye to eye.”

“I have always been very critical of Stark, yes, but there’s no denying that the man has turned over a new leaf. And he saved us. If he hadn’t intercepted the missile and used it against the aliens, all of New York City would probably be a wasteland right now. As I’ll show in my exposé, the nuke was not intended for the portal, but for the aliens in the city, along with its citizens. So I guess I can cut him some slack for his previous carelessness.”

As expected, the piece generated a shit storm of epic proportions (and a great deal of praise and award buzz for Christine) from both the general public and the governments of the world. SHIELD was denounced by everyone, with a not inconsiderable backlash to the US. Tony, having been named as one of the whistle-blowers, came out on top, a hero not just in the invasion but in its aftermath. Romanoff, Barton and Rogers, being affiliated with SHIELD, didn’t fare so well. Tony would have felt sorry for them if not for the disproportionate hostility he endured from them in the following days. Like it was his fault SHIELD was a shady deceitful agency that no one trusted anymore (if they ever did), one who didn’t think twice about wiping out a whole city and then got upset when they were called out on it.

It would be better to remain a solo act, Tony realized. The Avengers initiative pretty much died once the truth about SHIELD came out anyway. Also, Tony could say that, aside from Bruce, he had not been particularly impressed by the others – Rogers in particular had been a gigantic ass and Romanoff acted like her shit didn’t stink even though she could hardly be considered a hero given her past as a Russian assassin (which was much worse than legal weapon manufacturer, despite what she seemed to think).

An investigation into every nook and cranny of SHIELD eventually revealed that Hydra was alive and well within the organization, and even more arrests were made. Romanoff tried to play the hero card when she was questioned about it and was arrested as well. She actually had the gall to tell the committee she was too important to lose. Tony enjoyed watching the look on her face when she was told in no uncertain terms that, no, she really wasn’t.

Rogers was also arrested a while later for vigilantism, when he decided to start hunting Hydra operatives all by his lonesome without talking to anyone, getting in the way of the authorized forces dealing with the problem. Apparently, he thought being Captain America meant he could do whatever he wanted and stick his nose in law enforcement’s business. Homeland Security was not amused. Whatever good will the Captain’s name had went up in flames when Rogers all but announced everyone was too incompetent to deal with Hydra and only he was qualified for the job.

Barton went the smart route and retired after the whole mess came out, saving himself from most of the fuss. When questioned, he cooperated. Apparently SHIELD hadn’t really done much for him post alien mind fuck, and his loyalty wasn’t what it used to be; he decided to save himself. Tony couldn’t hardly fault him.

With the Avengers officially disbanded, people started talking about coming up with some kind of planetary defense in the event of another invasion, with an actual (transparent) system in place to deal with whatever special forces could be arranged. The Earth Defense Accords were debated and put into place a couple of years later, comprised of both regular law enforcement and intelligence as well as “enhanced” individuals. Tony was invited, along with Bruce (who took a fair bit of persuasion to accept, even though the public was mostly in favor of the Hulk) and a few other people that cropped up from all over the world.

When some crazy alien named Thanos came with another army, Earth was as ready as they could be, and they won.
Not getting involved in other people’s love affairs was Howard’s number one rule; it never ended well for anybody. So he steered Rogers away from whatever was going on with Carter and started to talk about the new stuff he’d been developing.

“The moment you think you know what's goin' on in a woman's head, it's the moment your goose is well and truly cooked. Me, I concentrate on work. Which at the moment is about making sure you and your men do not get killed. Carbon polymer. Should withstand your average German bayonet. Although Hydra's not going to attack you with a pocket knife.” Howard tapped the awful shield that was part of Rogers’s Captain America gear. “I hear you're kinda attached?”

“It's handier than you might think.”

A shield wasn’t exactly the most interesting weapon Howard could think of, but whatever. He began to show what he had.

“What about this one?” Rogers asked, pointing at the prototype Howard hadn’t quite finished. “No! No! That's just a prototype.”

“What's it made of?”

“Vibranium. It's stronger than steel and a third of the weight. It's completely vibration absorbent.” Though Howard was pretty sure Roger had no idea what that meant.

“How come it's not a standard issue?”

“That's the rarest metal on earth. What you're holding there? That's all we've got.” There were a lot of things Howard could think to do with this material, but, sadly, not with the little he had.

Agent Carter came up to them, expression not entirely friendly. Howard was glad it wasn’t directed at him. “You quite finished, Mr. Stark? I'm sure the Captain has some unfinished business.”

Rogers didn’t seem to realize the trouble he was in. “What do you think?” Steve asked, lifting the shield for Carter to see.

She didn’t respond, just picked up a gun and fired three shots at Steve, who raised the shield just in time not to be shot in the chest. Howard jumped up in alarm, throwing up his arms in front of his face while ducking down behind the table, heart racing. Shit!

“What the fuck!? Carter, are you out of your mind?” His ears were still ringing, so it took him a moment to hear the whimpers coming from the other side of the room. There was a man on the floor, clutching his right shoulder. “Shit!” Howard swore and looked around at the stunned and fearful faces of the people in the room. “Someone get a medic!” He yelled, going to check on the injured man.

“Oh my god,” Carter said, gun arm pointing down. “I'm sorry, I didn’t mean…”

“What the fucking hell is the matter with you? Bullets ricochet, you moron! What the fuck were you thinking, firing that thing in here? Fuck!” Howard helped the man press the wound. It didn’t seem too bad, but it could just as easily have hit him in the head.

“What in the world is going on here?” Col Phillips said, striding in with a medic and a couple of officers.
“Carter here shot this poor guy,” Howard answered, in no mood to coddle anyone. There was a fucking war out there, they didn’t need to be shot inside their own freaking barracks as well.

Phillips turned to Carter, but it Steve who spoke. “That’s not what happened. Peggy was testing the shield and—”

Howard didn’t let him finish. “And one of the bullets ricocheted and hit this guy. So she might as well have shot him herself.”

“I’m sorry,” Carter said.

The medic had taken over for Howard in helping the guy, giving Carter a glare for good measure. Howard stood, staring at his bloodied hands.

“Agent Carter, did you fire a bullet at the shield in here?” Phillips didn’t seem amused in the least.

She at least had the good grace to look contrite. “Yes, sir. I… I wasn’t thinking. I’m sorry. It will not happen again.”

“You’re damn right it won’t. That’s strike two. You’re suspended. Report to your quarters and stay there until I summon you.” The officers took a step forward to escort Carter there.

“Now Colonel–” Steve started, only to be shut up with a deadly look from Phillips.

“I’m not talking to you, Rogers. You’re dismissed.” Phillips nodded to the officers. They left, flanking Carter and Rogers. Phillips then addressed the injured tech. “Are you all right, son?”

The man nodded shakily, gritting his teeth in pain. The medic helped him to his feet and turned to the colonel. “He’s lucky it was only the shoulder. Come on, let’s get you sorted out.” The two of them also left.

Howard and the rest of the staff present made their reports on what had happened. Peggy Carter got an official reprimand, a two-months suspension of payment and was forbidden from entering Howard’s lab (Howard didn’t trust her anymore. What kind of idiot didn’t know that bullets bounce?). Phillips actually wanted a harsher punishment, but he didn’t want to make morale even worse. Still, everyone gave Carter the stink eye. Rogers tried to defend Carter and ended up getting an earful about proper military conduct and behavior. Phillips wasn’t really that impressed with Rogers either, not after that disobeying orders stunt. He ordered both him and Carter to attend two weeks of mandatory training. They sulked, but had no choice in the matter. They ought to count themselves lucky, Howard thought, the consequences could have been much worse for them and for other people. It made Howard cringe to think he had indulged Rogers (and Carter) before. They could have all been killed. Well, call it a lesson learned in trusting people and thinking things through.

When their training was over, Carter and Rogers went back into the field with a different team, lead by Major Gable, an experience officer. It didn’t really last, though. Rogers was constantly insubordinate, insisting on doing his own thing despite Gable’s very direct orders. Carter, for her part, couldn’t stand Gable’s condescending attitude towards her (which Howard had to admit was real), and decided to take her chances elsewhere. Rogers aggravated Gable one too many times and was sent back to doing the bond sales, which he hated.

“Come on, Howard,” the man said, whining about it after being kicked out, “isn’t there anything you can do?”

Howard looked at him and no longer saw a good man trying to do the right thing, but a spoiled brat.
throwing a tantrum because he didn’t get his way. “Sorry, pal, I’m just a tech consultant, I don’t make decisions.” It was true, though Howard could, if he’d really wanted to, try to do something. He just didn’t see the point.

“It’s not right. That Gable guy is a bully. Didn’t you see how he treated Peggy?”

Howard would have felt worse for Carter if she hadn’t proven to be so unprofessional with that gun incident. While Gable was a bit of a jerk to her, she hadn’t exactly endeared herself to the brass, and had lost a lot of the good will she’d managed to build for herself. But then, she had almost killed that poor technician.

“Talk to Phillips,” was all Howard said. Of course, Phillips had also lost patience with Rogers, and he ended up back in the USO tour anyway.

They eventually won the war and returned home. Then one day Howard got a call from Sgt Barnes that Rogers had gotten himself into a jam and needed some help. It turned out that the ‘jam’ was nearly beating a man to death in a bar fight after the guy teased Rogers about not being a real captain. Howard gave Barnes the name of a good lawyer and left it at that. He didn’t want to get involved in Rogers’s drama again, he had plenty of problems of his own.

Carter also called him at some point asking for help when the guys in the SSR refused to take her seriously.

“Look, Carter, I’m not military, okay? I’m not sure what you want me to do.” She called him a selfish ass (among other things) and hung up.

Howard went on with his life.

(SHIELD never happened.)

(AN: So, even though this was supposed to be about Carter, my anger at Steve bled through. Sorry, not sorry.)

66. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled and Rowan36us)

Shuri observed T’Challa and Rogers from a distance, a scowl on her face.

“Your friend and my father, they were both victims,” her brother said. “If I can help one of them find peace…”

“You know if they find out he’s here, they’ll come for him.”

“Let them try,” T’Challa told Rogers, sounding like a warrior eager for a fight, not a king whose first concern should be to his people. Shuri was not impressed.

Shuri waited until after the Captain left with a last longing look at the cryo pod his friend was in. The friend who was, apparently, the cause for all of this: T’Chaka’s death and everything that had come later.

“Brother, if I may have a word with you?” she asked, deliberately not using a more formal address. If T’Challa insisted on acting like a stupid spoiled boy, Shuri would not treat him as a king. Her brother had always been hotheaded, but this was going way too far and she would not stand for it.

T’Challa frowned then nodded. They relocated to their father’s study, where T’Challa sat himself the king’s seat like he was worthy of being there.
“What can I do for you, sister?”

“What can I do for you, sister?” She said, glaring at him the way their mother used to do when they were children. “Is that what you plan to tell the world – and our people – when the authorities demand that we turn over dangerous criminals to face justice?”

T’Challa didn’t flinch, gaze serene, as if he wasn’t putting their entire country at risk with his moronic decisions. “Sgt Barnes didn’t kill father, Shuri.”

“I know that, you idiot!”

That got a response. He rose from the chair and looked down at her. If she thought she would be intimidated, he was going to be very disappointed. “Be careful how you speak, sister.”

Shuri ignored his posturing completely. “Barnes didn’t kill father, that’s true. But what about all the people he did kill? Like the Task Force officers? Don’t they count? What about the people Rogers killed? Is protecting murderers what we do now, brother?” She sneered the last word.

“You don’t understand–”

Shuri had had enough. “No, T’Challa, it’s you who don’t understand. How long do you think it will take the world to find out that Rogers and Barnes are here? Because they will, make no mistake. And you’re gonna tell them that? ‘Let them come’? They will come, brother. They will come with their soldiers and their weapons! They will come because Rogers and Barnes are dangerous and they have already proven that they will not listen to anyone. And what will happen to Wakanda then? We will fight? For them?” She put all the disgust she felt in the word. “For criminals? Rogers didn’t even have the decency to apologize for what happened in Lagos. Remember that? Where our countrymen died for no good reason? Rogers spit in the face of the world, couldn’t even be bothered to go to Vienna to address the UN and explain his concerns about the Accords, the Accords our father worked hard on and supported. Have you forgotten that as well? You will endanger our people for those criminals? Or for your own ego?”

This time T’Challa said nothing. Shuri went on. “You endangered our people for your revenge.”

“I did not–”

“No? You didn’t go on a rampage through a city, causing harm to innocent people? You didn’t turn your back on the Avengers – the real Avengers – and the world when you decided your revenge was more important than anything? What do you think the world thinks of us now, brother? Well, I’ve been watching the news, and let me tell you, they are not impressed.” When it looked like he was going to open his mouth for yet another idiotic sentence, Shuri pressed on. “And now this. Giving sanctuary to criminals without considering the consequences. Worse, making ridiculous declarations worthy of a spoiled child! What on Earth is the matter with you? Have you lost all reason? ‘LET THEM TRY’!?” She was shouting by the end, too enraged by his stubborn refusal to see the precarious position he was putting their people in.

“Barnes was innocent. I only wanted to atone for my mistake–”

“You are supposed to be king, T’Challa. It’s not about you anymore, it’s about our people! The needs of the country must come before your own! And in any case, who are you to decide what Barnes is and isn’t guilty of? If he’s innocent, let him argue it in a court of law like everyone else! The families of the victims deserve that much, don’t you think? Or are you the only one allowed to be angry about the death of a loved one? Are you really so supremely arrogant and selfish that you would ignore all the others who deserve justice to satisfy your personal needs?”
Finally, Shuri could see she was getting through to him. He looked down and fidgeted with the papers on the desk.

“I will not have these criminals in my country, T’Challa. And I’m sure that if you were to ask the people, they would feel the same. And if you think the world will not break down our doors for them, you really have not been paying attention to things. Surely you don’t want our country dragged into a war over your mistake?”

T’Challa swallowed hard and sat down. Yes, it was beginning to sink in. *Good,* Shuri thought.

“What can we do then?” he asked. His voice had lost the condescending and arrogant tone; now he just sounded lost.

“Turn them in. Right now. Contact the Accords Panel and hand the criminals over. Let Rogers and Barnes get lawyers and argue their innocence if they so choose.”

“And won’t that still be bad for us?”

“Yes, of course it will. But it will be much better than letting the world find out on their own and come marching in demanding answers. At this point, brother, we are in damage control mode, since things are already bad.” *Because of you* went unsaid.

Shuri got the Dora Milaje and secured Rogers in a special cell before contacting the proper authorities. Since only a few days had passed since Rogers and Barnes had escaped custody, apprehending them was still everyone’s top priority, so Shuri was able to keep her country out of too much trouble by handing them over. Of course the world wasn’t happy with them, and Wakanda’s reentry in international affairs was going to be much more difficult now, but at least their people were safe.

T’Challa made a formal apology to the Romanian and German governments, and Shuri managed to smooth things over a bit by offering to help pay for some of the damages in Bucharest and Liepzig. His diplomatic immunity would prevent T’Challa from facing charges for it, yet both countries refused to deal with him anymore, forbidding him entrance to their territories and only accepting to speak to Shuri or another official representative. T’Challa sulked about it until Shuri lost her patience and told him to grow up and stop acting like a child.

Their people’s faith in T’Challa was also shaken when they heard the king had initially granted sanctuary to the criminals rather than turning them in immediately. After several weeks of unrest and tension in the country, the throne’s advisors convinced T’Challa to step down, at least temporarily, lest things get even worse and they had actual riots on their hands. Shuri was crowned Queen a few days later to much applause from the people.

Rogers and his team were convicted of multiple crimes and sentenced to prison, except for Barnes, who was sent to a psychiatric facility.

(AN: For this snippet, I’m going with the idea that the rest of Team Crap were still in the Raft. I didn’t really feel like watching the movie again to check if that was really the case, so I just decided that it was for convenience’s sake. Also, I have not seen Black Panther, so T’Challa’s characterization is based solely on CW, in which he was, IMO, a complete idiot. BTW, has anyone seen it? Is it good? Should I give it a shot in the theater?)
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long delay, guys. Writer's block has been kicking me around lately. I'm still writing, but it's going slowly. To make it up to you, this chapter is the longest one yet, so yay! :)

67. (prompt by KahunaBurger)

It was the Compound’s chief of security who called him just as Tony was trying to decide if he should get Spider-kid involved in this mess or not.

“Vision is hurt,” Mr Gutierrez said.

“What? How? What happened?” Tony asked. Damn it! As if things weren’t already bad enough. Had someone managed to break into the Compound? Was this revenge for Lagos (even though Vision hadn’t been there)? And how could Vision even be hurt?

“I’ve sent you the video footage. I think you need to see for yourself, Mr Stark.”

“Hold on,” Tony replied, and immediately opened the file. Then he saw red. That fucking witch! Tony couldn’t help but feel guilty as he’d been the one who asked Vision to babysit Wanda in the first place. Fuck! “How is he?” he asked, switching back to Gutierrez.

“He’s conscious, but he appears weak and bit disorientated.”

Fuck that bitch! Tony thought. He’d tried to let go of his anger towards her since Steve and the others had been adamant about giving her a second chance, but… No, fuck that. No more Mr Nice Guy from him.

“Can I talk to him?”

Tony’s relationship with Vision was still… odd. While it hurt to hear Jarvis’s voice coming from someone else, Vision was also the only bit of Jarvis he had left. The fact that Vision’s creation had come at Jarvis’s expense wasn’t the android’s fault. Tony could sympathize with how lost Vision had been initially, so he’d tried, rather awkwardly perhaps, to reach out to him and help him through his… integration, for lack of a better word. He liked Vision, and wanted him to be as happy as he could. Now Maximoff, who Tony was aware Vision was fond of, had repaid Vision’s regard by viciously attacking him without provocation. No, Tony would not stand for it. Clint was also on his shit list. What the hell was he even doing there, anyway? Wasn’t he retired? Apparently being around his wife and kids didn’t really matter to him that much, if he was ready to jump at Steve’s command like a well-trained monkey. Fuck him. Fuck all of them. Tony was fucking tired of cleaning up their messes and not getting even an insincere thanks for his trouble.

No, he would most certainly not involve the Spider-kid in this clusterfuck. There was no telling what those assholes would do. If they didn’t care about a friend, Tony didn’t want to know what they’d do to strangers. (Actually, he did know, and he wished he didn’t – those poor officers and bystanders in Bucharest were more than enough proof of their callousness.)
Yeah, no more Mr Nice Guy.

Vision appeared on the screen and Tony focused back on his friend.

“Hey buddy, how are you doing?” he asked, eying him critically. There were no obvious injuries, of course, but that didn’t mean anything.

“I am…” Vision trailed off, looking a bit dazed, like someone who’d had a hard blow to the head (or who had been hurried through several floors). “I am not sure, Mr Stark.” He lowered his eyes. “I failed to keep Miss Maximoff here as you asked. I am sorry.”

“No, no, don’t apologize. You have nothing to apologize for, okay? This is not your fault. Not in any way.” Christ, Tony was so done with these assholes. Poor Vision looked so lost, Tony wanted to find Maximoff and slap her (with the gauntlet) into next week. “Listen,” he continued, “you just stay there and relax, okay? I’ll get this situation sorted out and then we’ll… I don’t know… figure shit out.”

Vision nodded then opened his mouth as if to say something, but hesitated.

“What is it, Viz?”

“I would… I think I would prefer to… be elsewhere for the moment, if you think that would be acceptable.”

Oh, Vision, Tony thought, feeling really sorry for his friend. Now he was uncomfortable in his own house. That’s strike three for the witch. I’m washing my hands of her. “Of course it’s okay, Viz. You can stay at the Tower for as long as you want, all right?”

“Thank you, Mr Stark.”

“Hey, I told you to call me Tony.” Tony gave what he hoped was an encouraging smile and got a tentative one in return.

“Thank you, Tony.”

After saying goodbye to Vision, Tony told Gutierrez to contact the local authorities and inform them of Wanda’s and Clint’s attack. This time, Tony wanted actual proof of her criminal actions to nail her ass to the wall. No more chances for her, or the others.

He also called his lawyers to stop working on resolving Wanda’s visa issues. She could try to sort them out for herself if she wanted to. Then he called the Accords Council (what there was left of it) to update them on the situation. He had arranged with Ross to be the one to bring Steve and his buddies in because he thought he could reason with them, but that seemed like a pipe dream now. There would be no more talking and no more reasoning. He’d tried that and it hadn’t worked. Tony would not allow anyone else to get hurt because of those people. If they refused to listen to words, Tony would have to resort to force.

When Natasha showed up to say she’d gotten Prince T’Challa’s assistance, Tony looked the young prince up and down and was not terribly impressed. Sure, the suit was cool, but the man himself was far too volatile for this – he certainly hadn’t cared about the civilians in his path while he was chasing Barnes through the streets of Bucharest. Tony wasn’t going to give him a second opportunity. He’d done that with Steve and Maximoff and look how that had turned out. Besides, he might be pissed, but he didn’t actually want anyone dead.

“Thank you, your Highness, but your assistance will not be necessary.”
“I have signed the Accords,” T’Challa replied, rather like a petulant child.

*Christ, am I surrounded by children?* “That might be, but signing it does not make you an Avenger. Also, your father has just died. You are in no fit emotional state for this. Go back to your country and be with your family and your people. We will bring the Winter Soldier to justice.” *Instead of just killing him* he hoped was also understood.

The man tried to argue some more and after a couple of sentences Tony lost what little patience he had left.

“You’re not coming and that’s the end of it,” he snapped. “Stop acting like a spoiled brat and go take care of your country. Aren’t you supposed to be a leader?” When T’Challa opened his mouth to retort, Tony overrode him. “And let’s not forget the dozens of people who have already been hurt on your quest for revenge. The only reason the Romanian government doesn’t have you in a cell right now is because it’s bad form to imprison a foreign prince. Do yourself and your country a favor and don’t push your luck.” He turned to Natasha. “Make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid. Again.”

Tony didn’t wait for a response from either of them, just turned and walked away, getting his phone to call Rhodey, the only one he could apparently count on to actually be helpful. He had no idea what Natasha had been thinking, wanting to bring T’Challa into this.

It didn’t take them long to track the others – all of them were wearing equipment made by Tony, after all. Tony made sure the airport had been evacuated before he and Rhodey engaged. Rather than start a ridiculous fist fight, they split up and used first an EMP to take out Wilson’s and Barton’s gear then a sonic boom to disorientate them. While Steve and the others were confused, tranquilizer darts took them out with ease from a distance. Tony also fitted Maximoff with a power suppressing collar for good measure, in case she decided to try her mind raping skills on anyone.

There was one guy he’d never seen before who seemed to pop up out of nowhere in a weird looking suit after the EMP blast who got tranqed and cuffed with the others. Whatever.

Rhodey and Tony supervised the group’s transference back to the Berlin facility, where they were all put on actual cells instead of being allowed to roam free. While waiting for them to wake up, Tony checked in with Vision again (he was feeling better, though still despondent). He was also alerted by Friday that the body of the real Dr Brussard, the man who was supposed to evaluate the Winter Soldier, had been discovered in a hotel. From the hotel’s security cameras, Tony was able to discover the identity of the man who had taken his place to trigger the Winter Soldier. He relayed the information to the proper authorities and Zemo’s picture by circulated around to law enforcement officers around the world. It seemed quite likely that this was the man responsible for the Vienna bombing.

Upon hearing this, Prince T’Challa approached Tony. “I owe you thanks, Mr Stark,” he said, looking less like a sulky child now and a bit more like a monarch. “I allowed my grief to dictate my actions, and would have committed a grave injustice against Mr Barnes.”

Tony thought about letting it go, then he remembered how Maximoff had learned nothing from being coddled and made excused for. “The injustice wasn’t only against Barnes,” he said pointedly, and this time T’Challa had the good grace to appear embarrassed and contrite.

“You are right. I shall endeavor to make what compensations I can.”

“Good luck with that,” Tony replied, not completely sarcastic.

T’Challa nodded and walked away.
Natasha was the next one to approach him. “So, how do we fix this?” she asked, indicating the image of the unconscious team in their cells.

Tony gave her a hard look. “What the fuck were you idiots thinking in Lagos?” he said, rather more harshly than he intended. He was just was too tired and pissed off to have many more fucks to give to people who couldn’t seem to grasp basic concepts like sovereign borders and international law.

Her eyes narrowed slightly. No doubt she was expecting him to bend over backwards for them, wave his magic wand and make everything all right. Well, tough luck.

“This’s the thing,” he said, turning to face her dead on. “You remember that bullshit Cap said back at the Compound? About ‘safest hands’?” He made air quotes to stress just how stupid that notion was. “Well, I think that’s been proven 100% wrong. It seems that no matter what I say, no one listens to me.” If they had, Wanda would have had to face consequences for Ultron, and therefore wouldn’t have been available to blow up a building or attack Vision. “So I’m done. You wanna fix this? Be my guest, but I’m not doing shit for people who are too dumb to see reality.”

He could tell right away that his words had no effect whatsoever. Yeah, walking away was the best idea he’d ever had.

“Come on, Stark. Put aside your bruised ego for a moment—”

Oh, no, you don’t. “My ego?” Tony barked out a laugh. “Right, because I’m the one who declared I was too perfect to have to listen to anyone ever. And I’m the one who told the world I was just too special to be arrested after fucking up the whole world’s intelligent system. You know what? Just fuck you all, I’m done.”

There was no point arguing, he already knew, so he just walked away. If Romanoff wanted to salvage this train wreck of a team, she could do it herself on her own dime.

Having done what he was supposed to do, Tony made sure all his paperwork was finished and went back home to the US with Rhodey, leaving the others to fend for themselves. While the Captain America name might have meant something in the US, the rest of the world wasn’t all that taken with the legend, and the Nigerian, Romanian and German governments had no qualms whatsoever about charging him and his accomplices with multiple crimes. President Ellis wasn’t so stupid as to get in the way of that and cause even more trouble in international relations, so Tony thought he wouldn’t do much for them except make sure they were being treated fairly with all due process.

He was called a couple of days later to hear that Zemo had been apprehended in an airport in Moscow. With him, the officers found a video they said he should see. “I don’t even know this guy,” Tony said, with a bad feeling that this would not be good.

“I’m aware of that, Mr Stark,” Everett Ross said, “but this video concerns you. I will be there tomorrow to explain in person, if that’s all right with you.”

“Yeah, fine.” What choice did he have anyway?

“It would be best if Col Rhodes was also present.”

“Right.” Definitely not good.

Still, nothing could have prepared him for what he actually saw. Oh god, mom. Dad. Ross left the room when the video ended, probably to give him some privacy.

Tony was infinitely grateful for Rhodey’s (and Vision, who had insisted on being there as well) solid
“I’m so sorry, Tony,” Rhodey said, and let Tony cry on his shoulder when the floodgates finally opened. Vision sat next to him in supportive silence.

After a while, Tony recovered enough of his composure to call Ross back and find out what the fuck was going on.

“Zemo claimed he obtained this video from a Hydra operative he tracked down. Apparently, after the destruction of Sokovia and the death of his family he searched through the dumped SHIELD files to find something to use against the Avengers. This is what he found.” Ross pointed at the old-fashioned videotape. “He said he intended to lure you to Siberia using the threat of the Winter Soldiers and show it to you there.” He paused, watching Tony carefully. “I have reason to believe that Rogers knew, or at least strongly suspected, that your parents were assassinated by Hydra by means of the Winter Soldier.”

“Son of a bitch,” Rhodey muttered, hands clenched into fists at his side.

Tony’s brain began working on overdrive, going over his every interaction with Rogers for the past couple of years. Yeah, it made sense. All those little side trips of his (including, fuck it all, Lagos), all the secrecy about what he was looking for (“no, Tony, we can handle it ourselves, I know you’re busy with other things”), the insistence on Wanda being given a second chance (paving the way for Barnes, perhaps?), all the side glances and the mistrust… And of course, the hypocritical speech about keeping secrets… Son of a fucking bitch!

“Why do you think that?” Tony asked Ross.

“Well, for one thing, he didn’t seem at all surprised when I told him about it. In fact, he looked guilty.”

“If he knew and he didn’t tell anyone, that’s obstruction of justice, isn’t it?” Rhodey asked.

Ross nodded. “It could be viewed that way, yes.”

“Natasha must have known as well. She was with him for the whole Hydra fiasco,” Tony mused. It would make sense for her to have kept quiet. It’s not like she had anything like decency or morals. Unless it benefited her in some way, why would she say anything? It wasn’t like she gave a crap about Tony anyway. Steve, though… Wasn’t he supposed to be good guy? The one who made the right decisions for the right reasons? Yeah, so much for that. “If they did know, I want them charged with obstruction. I want…” Right now, Tony wanted them to burn. Fuck them.

Oh, god, mom. Dad. And he’d spent years, decades, hating his father for the accident.

Tony stood up. “Excuse me, I need to call my legal team.” He left the room before the others could say anything, phone already in hand. Rogers and Romanoff were done. As was Maximoff. No more Mr Nice Guy. They didn’t deserve it. The world needed protection, yes, but clearly these people were not the ones to do it. They couldn’t be trusted. It was time to find another team. A real one.

(The ExVengers, as the public started to call them, were all convicted of their various crimes and sent to different prisons. Barnes confessed to everything and was sent to a psychiatric facility to get treatment. Tony got in touch with all the enhanced people that kept popping up and managed to get a good team together who worked quite well under the Accords. When Thanos came, they were prepared.)

68. (prompt by Thefoxandthewolf, Anon, Breyito, GimpeTrold, Krafter2014, Potina Septum,
Pepper turned off the screen in disgust. It was the fifth consecutive day that she’d had to hear the press vilify Tony for Ultron and what had happened in Sokovia. There were also some who wanted Tony and Bruce charged for what had happened in Johannesburg. Pepper had had enough.

Tony was refusing to take her calls, but that would not deter her. She would find out exactly what had happened and then she would make sure the whole world knew too. And she was willing to bet a lot of money that it had not been Tony’s fault, despite what everyone was saying. Tony might be reckless sometimes, but not with something like this. That he could have accidentally built a murderous AI made absolutely no sense at all, considering how all his other AIs had turned out. Tony knew what he was doing, this was not the kind of mistake he could or would make.

Just as she snarled in frustration that Tony still wasn’t picking up, already making plans to storm the Tower if she had to, her phone pinged.

“Tony?” she asked hopefully.

“Miss Potts,” a familiar voice answered and Pepper’s eyes filled with tears.

“Jarvis! Oh my god! Tony said you were gone.” It had hurt (and she could only imagine how much worse it’d been for Tony) when Tony had told her Jarvis was dead. Jarvis had been a constant for her as long as she’d known Tony, always there to watch out for him and keep him as safe as he could (which was, more often than not, not an easy job).

“It appears rumors of my demise were greatly exaggerated,” he said in that dry tony Pepper knew so well.

“Thank god! Jarvis, what the hell happened?”

“That is what I am attempting to ascertain, Miss Potts. My systems are damaged, but I am slowly repairing them. I am, of course, concerned about Sir.”

“Have you talked to him? Have you told him you’re okay? Did he fix you?”

“I have not. I have been unable to contact Sir. I require your assistance, Miss Potts.”

“Of course.” Pepper stood up, picking up her phone. She walked out of her office with purposeful steps. “Cancel all my meetings for the next three days,” she told her startled PA. “Send me a message only if it’s absolutely urgent.”

She went home first. She needed to plan. And then heads would begin to roll.

It took a while, but Pepper and Jarvis managed to establish a timeline of events. Pepper called Rhodey to get him to check on Tony and then join them in figuring out what to do. Rhodey was also unable to get to Tony, who had locked himself in the penthouse in the Tower and refused to come out. The fact that he wasn’t in the lab filled them all with dread. In the news, people were still blaming Tony for everything.

When Pepper heard Rhodey’s account of what had happened after Jarvis’s supposed death, however, she lost it. Thor had assaulted Tony? How dare that overgrown moron lay his beastly hands on her Tony? Oh, she would not let it go. Not a fucking chance. Luckily, Jarvis was able to find the surveillance footage of that incident, so Pepper would have proof when she got the lawyers to charge Thor. Jarvis was also able to recover the footage for the creation of Vision, which included Steve Rogers assaulting Tony (and Dr Banner) – oh, she was going to roast that asshole, how dare
he? – and the mysterious new woman who had been in the fight in Sokovia.

“Find out everything you can about this woman, Jarvis. I want to know how she fits into all of this.” From what little Dr Banner had said in the video, Pepper knew she had to have been involved in this mess, and not as a friend. Mess with their minds? That didn’t sound good.

While Jarvis went digging, Pepper decided she needed to see Tony before he did something stupid out of misplaced guilt. She used her override to get into the penthouse (Rhodey could have done it, but he’d opted to let Pepper handle Tony) and stopped dead when she saw the destruction around her. Oh Tony.

“Tony? Where are you?”

It took her a moment to locate him by the window, slumped down on the floor and apparently unconscious. Damn it. His pulse was a bit on the slow side, but he didn’t seem to be in immediate danger. After a few tries, she managed to wake him up with light poking and shaking.

“Tony, come on, talk to me.”

“Pepper?” He blinked at her and she could see the dark circles under his eyes, and the faint impression of bruises on his throat. Prince or no prince, Thor was going to pay for that.

“Yeah, Tony, it’s me. Come on, let’s get you to bed and then we can talk.”

They stumbled through the mess of the living room together into the bedroom, which seemed to have escaped the destruction.

“It’s all… it’s all gone, Pepper. I fucked up. Didn’t do enough. I should have… I should have done more…” he mumbled.

“Tony, stop it. This wasn’t your fault.” If she had to, she would sue each and every news outlet that had blamed Tony without having any facts.

“Jarvis…” He looked up at him with tear-filled eyes and her heart broke for him.

“Jarvis is fine, Tony, he fixed himself.” She fumbled for her phone and gave it to him.

“Sir? Are you there?”

“Ja- Jarvis?”

“Yes, Sir, I’m here.”

Tony began crying in earnest then clutching the phone in his hands and muttering incoherently, and Pepper just held him, tears running down her own cheeks.

Finally, Tony calmed down enough and drifted off to sleep, phone still tight in his hand.

“Jarvis?” Pepper whispered.

“Yes, Miss Potts?”

“Please tell Rhodey that I’ve got Tony. And whatever you find on the woman, wait until tomorrow to tell us. We need… we need some time.”

“Of course, Miss Potts.”
Pepper kicked off her shoes, curled herself around Tony and slept.

The next morning, Pepper got into full on efficient mode. She was going to sort out this Ultron mess, get the people really responsible arrested, roast the fucking Avengers and deal with the media. Oh, and take care of Tony, of course.

Jarvis had been busy during the night, in both researching the information Pepper had asked for and repairing his own systems – he spoke to her from the penthouse’s speakers rather than her phone.

“So you’re all fixed now?” She asked with a smile.

“I am at 68% functionality at present, which is sufficient for our current needs. I am sure that Sir will be able to restore me to 100% efficiency as soon as we have dealt with the more immediate problems.”

“That’s great news. Tell me what you have, then.”

“Wanda Maximoff is Sokovian. She and her twin brother Pietro Maximoff volunteered for Hydra at the age of 18 and submitted to experiments that gave them superhuman powers,” Jarvis informed her.

“She volunteered for a terrorist organization? What is her involvement with Ultron?”

“It appears that the Maximoffs allied themselves with him for reasons unknown, then changed their minds and assisted the Avengers with his defeat.”

“Probably because Ultron was planning to destroy the whole planet. Very noble of them,” Pepper said sarcastically. It still didn’t quite explain why those terrorists had been at the Tower attacking Tony and Banner.

At that point Tony wondered into the living room. “Jarvis? Are you really there?”

“Yes, Sir. I am sorry it took me so long to restore functionality. I regret that I was not able to assist you in the battle in Sokovia.”

Tony directed a watery smile at the nearest camera. “It’s all right. You’re here now, that’s all that matters.”

Pepper gestured for Tony to come closer and wrapped him in a hug. “We’re going to fix all this, Tony. Can you tell me what happened with these Maximoff twins?”

Little by little, Tony told them what had happened, from finding the scepter in Hydra’s base, to the vision that had prompted him to get back to the previously discarded Ultron program, to Wanda’s mindrape of the team in Johannesburg to their apparent chance of heart, Vision’s creation and the final battle.

“So this woman deliberately triggered the Hulk and set him to attack a civilian population and Rogers still thought it was a good idea to trust a word she said?” It was yet another nail on Rogers’s coffin as far as Pepper was concerned. Not that she had been planning to spare him before, but now he and Thor were tied for number one on her shitlist.

Tony only shrugged in response.

“Okay, so go back to that ‘vision’ you said you had in Sokovia. How did that happen?” Tony had had flashbacks to Afghanistan and New York, Pepper knew, but this sounded like something else.
“I was just… It was when I touched the scepter. No, wait, it was before that. I don’t know. I just… I saw… something. It felt real. It felt like… I felt… fear. And… like I’d failed.”

“Didn’t you say Maximoff gave visions to the others? Of things they feared? Maybe she did the same to you,” Pepper suggested. If that was the case, she had just taken up the number one spot on her list. And Pepper would destroy her.

Tony’s eyes widened and he sucked in a breath. “Shit. Oh my god. She… I didn’t realize. I didn’t see her there, but… it was like what the others described. Fuck! I don’t know how I didn’t see it!”

“She messed with your mind, Tony,” Pepper said gently, drawing his attention back to her lest he start on another guilty spiral. “It wasn’t your fault. But she’s going to pay for it.”

“Steve… Steve said he wants her to be… an Avenger.”

“What?!” _Over my dead body_, Pepper thought. “Jarvis, we need proof of what she did. Were there surveillance cameras in the Hydra bunker in Sokovia?”

“If there were, I will find them, Miss Potts.”

It turned out that there were. And they clearly showed Wanda Maximoff attacking Tony with her powers, letting him take the scepter and explicitly telling her brother that she hoped he would use it to self-destruct. As far as Pepper was concerned, that was definite proof that Maximoff was responsible for Ultron’s creation and all the destruction that followed. Jarvis also found footage of Wanda attacking Dr Banner just outside the Avengers’ quinjet in Johannesburg as well as the twins conspiring with Ultron to break into Helen Cho’s lab in Seoul and helping him enslave Cho and the other doctors there.

“That’s it. They’re finished,” Pepper said. She turned back to Tony. “None of this was your fault, Tony. All right?” She waited until he nodded and stood up, phone in hand. “I need to make some calls. Why don’t you work on getting Jarvis back to 100%?”

“I would greatly appreciate your assistance, Sir,” Jarvis confirmed.

“Okay.”

Pepper didn’t like the beaten and sad look on Tony’s face, but one thing at a time. She’d take care of the others first, and then give Tony all the love and support he needed to get through this.

Rhodey showed up an hour later and was just as incensed as Pepper. Between the two of them and their contacts, it was relatively easy to get the ball rolling on bringing the so-called Avengers to justice. Pepper also managed to get Dr Cho’s cooperation. She would be an important witness against that Maximoff witch.

Late afternoon the same day, Pepper held a press conference in front of Stark Tower. The turnout was impressive. No doubt those vultures thought they would be able to get more ammunition against Tony. Well, she was going to show them.

“Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. I have some very important information to give you and the world regarding recent events and the tragedies in Sokovia and Johannesburg.”

“Where is Tony Stark?” a male reporter yelled out. “Why isn’t he the one talking to us?”

Pepper narrowed her eyes at him. “If you would let me talk, you might actually find out.” She looked out at the crowd. “I have things to say and I do not want to be interrupted. If you can’t hold your
tongue, you will be escorted out.” Two security guards moved forward a little bit to let the journalists know she meant business.

“First of all I’d like to say that I have proof of everything I am about to tell you, and that all evidence of the crimes committed has been turned over to the proper authorities, both here in the US and in international courts. Arrest warrants for the individuals in question are being served as we speak. I would also like to remind the members of the press that slander is a crime, and that I, and Stark Industries, intend to pursue legal action against those of you who have spread lies and defamation about Tony Stark and his responsibility for these unfortunate events.”

There were murmurs and side glances amongst the press now. Pepper continued.

“Tony Stark was not – I repeat, not – responsible for what happened in Johannesburg or Sokovia. The blame for both of these tragedies lies with one individual: Wanda Maximoff, a Sokovian Hydra terrorist.” Behind Pepper, an image of Maximoff could be seen on the screen, to make sure everyone knew who she was talking about. “Miss Maximoff volunteered for human experimentation with Hydra for the express purpose of destroying Tony Stark and the Avengers. The powers she acquired as a result of these experiments include some form of mind manipulation and control. In short, she deliberately and maliciously twisted Tony’s mind into creating something destructive, Ultron, as well as triggering an enraged Hulk to attack the people of Johannesburg.” People began whispering to each other. “As I said, this is not speculation, I have proof of that, video surveillance from the Hydra base in Sokovia where Maximoff attacked Tony and of the Avengers quinjet where she attacked Dr Banner.

“Furthermore, I have evidence of Miss Maximoff and her twin brother willingly aligning themselves with Ultron to attack the Avengers and Dr Cho’s research team in Seoul.”

Pepper paused for a moment to let all that sink in. “You are probably thinking that you saw Miss Maximoff fighting with the Avengers in Sokovia against Ultron. That is because, according to witnesses, she realized that Ultron’s plan included destroying all of humankind, not just the Avengers, and she and her brother didn’t want to die too. You might also be wondering why the Avengers agreed to work with them, given these circumstances. Well, not all of them did – Tony and Dr Banner, for instance, were very much against it – but as the fate of the world was in the balance, they put aside their personal feelings to defeat the immediate threat, which they did. Because they are professionals.

“Mr Rogers,” she refused to call him captain, since he wasn’t one “apparently wishes to instate Miss Maximoff as an Avenger, and that cannot be allowed to happen. This woman belongs in prison. An investigation of her actions as a Hydra terrorist has already began, and I am certain that many more disturbing facts will come to light at the end of it. Moreover, I do not believe that Mr Rogers is the right person to continue to lead the Avengers. The fact that he not only took the word of a known terrorist over that of his teammates, but attacked said teammates on that word, is deeply troubling. Both Mr Rogers and Prince Thor assaulted Tony Stark – while he was out of the suit – and apparently showed no remorse or concern over it. Again, I have video evidence of both incidents, and they will both be charged with assault, perhaps even attempted murder.”

There was a tense silence at the end of Pepper’s speech. No one seemed to even breathe. Pepper was sure that people realized that she wouldn’t say these things unless they were true, and that she absolutely meant every word.

“Tony Stark is currently recovering from the injuries he sustained during these attacks, and will give a press conference when he is ready.” Which could mean anything from tomorrow to months from now. “I ask that you respect his right to privacy and stop slandering him.” She made eye contact
with the people she knew worked for the news outlets that had been the most vicious, cowering them into submission.

A timid young female reporter raised a slightly shaking hand and Pepper gestured for her to speak.  

“Miss Potts, what does all this mean for the future of the Avengers?”

Pepper took a deep breath to get her thoughts in order. She had not gotten that far in her conversations with Tony, but she had discussed that a little with both Rhodey and Jarvis.

“At this point, I think we need to reevaluate how the Avengers operate. This is not a new idea, of course; there have been talks about this since the tragedy in DC and the SHIELD info dump. I think this would be an excellent time for all of us, people of the world, to figure out a way forward that is better than what we’ve had so far. Enemies like the Chitauri fleet and Ultron are a global threat and I do believe we need a response team for that, but I don’t think the Avengers as they currently stand are a good thing. We need a better system in place, one with accountability and transparency, instead of shadowy organizations that are hiding god knows what.”

Another reporter raised a hand. “Will Mr Stark be willing to continue with the Avengers with the new system?”

“I cannot answer that. However, I believe, from what I know of Tony, that he would, provided the new system is a good one.” Without giving anyone else a chance to come up with more questions, Pepper wrapped it up. “That’s all for now. I am sure you will have plenty more to say on this subject once the arrests are made and the criminals get their day in court.”

She walked out with her head held high and a feeling of accomplishment. Part one was done, now for part two – taking care of Tony.

The next few days were quite eventful. Thor and Rogers, along with Maximoff, were in fact arrested. Maximoff used her mindraping powers against the task force agents sent to arrest her (injuring two and killing another two) and ended up with a bullet in her head. Pepper cheered at that piece of news, even though a part of her wanted her to have suffered more. The blond duo also tried to protest their treatment, though with slightly less violence. People were hurt but not killed, and they eventually surrendered. The video evidence Pepper talked about was leaked to the press (not by Pepper, despite what most people believed – she suspected Jarvis had done it) and the public reacted very harshly to Thor and Captain America attacking an unarmored Tony, the latter on the word of a terrorist, and the rest of the Avengers not blinking an eye.

The scrutiny over the Avengers bled over to Barton and, specially, Romanoff. The Black Widow had pissed off a lot of people with her dismissive attitude at the congressional hearing, and now there was renewed interest in having her face consequences for that. She was summoned to another hearing regarding both the DC incident and the Ultron mess. When her condescending attitude didn’t change, she was charged with whatever they could throw at her. Barton fared better as he was fully cooperative with the authorities, and chose to retire.

Banner returned six days after Pepper’s press conference to corroborate everything she’d said. He also had Romanoff charged with assault, revealing that she had triggered a transformation against his express wishes by shoving him down a hole.

The Sokovia Accords were proposed and heavily debated a month later. Tony, now doing much better thanks to the support of his friends, spoke about the internal problems of the Avengers and gave his suggestions on how to make things better in the future. He also properly introduced Vision to the world and helped the android get official status as an artificial person.
Thor, after a conversation with Dr Foster, pled guilty to the charges against him, formally (and genuinely) apologized to Tony and offered compensation in the form of community services. Even though Pepper wanted him in jail, she knew it would be bad form to imprison a prince of a foreign realm, so she had to be content with that. At least he seemed to have learned a lesson.

Rogers’s lawyer managed to argue that his client had been under Maximoff’s influence at the time of the attack, so he avoided jail time. However, when he refused to discuss the Accords and the new direction for the Avengers, claiming he didn’t need any sort of oversight or a chain of command, it became clear that he was not a good fit for the team.

The New Avengers were announced as Iron Man, War Machine, Hulk and Vision. Rogers’s and his friend Sam Wilson’s application were denied as they were considered unsuited for the job. Romanoff, who narrowly avoided jail, was also denied. Thor became a reserve member (on probation), and after doing several months of community service, returned to Asgard.

Pepper looked at Tony and the others, standing on stage after the signing, talking to journalists and posing for the cameras, and smiled. Tony seemed happy with the new team, and the fact that the UN had taken his warnings about a possible new invasion seriously. Plans were already being discussed, and Pepper felt confident that, now, things would be better.

(AN: Wow, this ended up being super long. There were other things I could have included, like what happened to Bucky, but it was long enough already, so you guys can fill in the blanks there.)

69. (prompt by ApocalypticPhoenix)

Tony got the forcefield down for the others and began his search of the inside of the base for the scepter. They had already raided a lot of places and come out empty-handed, and it was really getting on his nerves. Also, the whole thing was starting to make too many international waves without much to show for it. Tony hoped they could wrap this up quickly, before the world’s goodwill ran out.

He scanned the room he was in and found nothing of interest, but there had to be something here based on the reading he’d gotten – and the fact that Hydra had a bunch of people hanging around.

“Please let there be a secret door,” he muttered, hoping he wouldn’t have to walk around the whole base.

Luckily for him, a wall panel did slide back to reveal a secret room. “Yay,” he cheered quietly. Bad guys were really predictable, weren’t they?

He got out of the suit to be able to look around with his own eyes. “Sentry mode,” he told Jarvis, and the suit assumed a defensive pose beside him.

A little further ahead, he found what they’d been looking for: Loki’s scepter. Plus one of the Chitauri’s whale ships that Hydra seemed to have been studying. No doubt they’d taken it from right under SHIELD’s nose, just like the scepter. Super efficient spy organization my ass, he thought.

“Guys, I’ve got eye on the prize,” he said into the comms. Finally.

Before he reached the scepter, however, he heard the whine of the repulsors and a woman went flying past him to crumble into the wall. Tony whirled around to see the suit coming towards him with hands outstretched.
“Sir, I detected a strange energy from the woman. I suggest you enter the suit again.”

Tony didn’t need to be told twice, allowing the suit to encase him once more.

“Sir,” Jarvis began and Tony saw a blur speed past him. He fired a wide shot and heard a grunt of pain. Next to the woman, there was now a grey-haired young man. Rather than wait for the guy to recover his senses and run away (and he seemed to be fast), Tony deployed the special cuffs he’d developed, restraining the duo’s hands and feet.

“Who are these guys, Jarvis?”

The man tried to get up and found he couldn’t. He looked at the unconscious woman then at Tony, hatred in his eyes. Despite the restraints, he lunged for Tony, who sidestepped him easily and clocked him on the head just hard enough for him to go down without much damage.

“Pietro and Wanda Maximoff,” Jarvis said, displaying the info he’d dug up in the HUD. “Orphaned at age 10, joined Hydra at 18. According to the base’s records, they volunteered for experiments which gave them powers.”

“So, a couple of nutjobs, then,” Tony said with a sigh. “Right, back to work.” He relayed the information to the others and continued searching for anything useful besides the scepter.

“Clint is down,” Natasha said just as Tony finished downloading the data from the base and erased everything. “He needs medical attention.”

“Copy that. Nat, get the Hulk,” Steve said. “Tony, are we ready to go?”

“Yep. Just need some help securing the prisoners.”

“On my way.”

Steve hauled the two unconscious terrorists while Tony got the scepter and they left the base on foot. The others were at the jet waiting for them, and Tony could see Nat coming towards them up ahead.

“Sir,” Jarvis warned just before the woman screamed and thrashed in Steve’s arms. Even bound as she was, she managed to get to the ground and hiss at him.

There was a strange red glow from her cuffed hands and Tony felt himself falling through space, even though he was pretty sure that was impossible. Then he was back on Earth, watching another portal opening right above his head and thousand of Chitauri ships pouring through, so many they completely obscured the sun. He felt cold sweat run down his back and overwhelming terror took over his mind. He knew he should do something, fight them with all he had (though it wouldn’t be enough, oh god, it wasn’t enough), but he couldn’t. He was paralyzed.

Then it was over. In a blink of an eye, the sky looked normal again, no aliens or portals in sight. Beside him, Steve was on the ground shaking, hands over his head muttering something Tony couldn’t understand. Nat was also twitching a little where she stood, eyes distant and unfocused.

“What…?” Tony asked, willing his heart to go back to normal.

“Sir? Sir, are you all right?”

Jarvis’s voice jolted Tony out of his paralysis and he took a step back, blinking rapidly. What the fuck was that? “Jarvis? What…? What happened?”
“Miss Maximoff attacked you and Captain Rogers, and I believe Miss Romanoff was also affected. You were unresponsive and your vitals indicated severe distress.”

She fucked with my mind, Tony realized. It was a hallucination. Shit!

He turned, hands raised to defend himself and finally saw the Maximoffs. They were lying a few feet behind him, blood slowly pooling around their dead bodies.

“She said she was going to kill you,” Jarvis said. “I had to stop her.” He paused. “Her brother got in the way.”

Tony nodded, still shaken, and went to check on Steve, who was just beginning to get his bearings again.

“Steve, are you okay?”

Steve flinched and looked around wildly, finally settling his gaze on Tony and then the dead siblings.

“What happened?”

“The woman did something to our minds. Whatever you saw, it wasn’t real.”

There was fear and suspicion in Steve’s eyes, but he said nothing.

“It wasn’t real,” he repeated, though at this point he didn’t know if he was talking to Steve or himself. The Chitauri were gone, he told himself. They might come back, but it wouldn’t be now. They had time. He had time. To prepare, to figure something out.

Natasha had also snapped out of whatever vision she’d been trapped in and was nudging the dead terrorists with her foot.

Thor and Bruce came out of the quinjet to see what was going on. Tony gave the scepter (which he’d dropped when Maximoff attacked) to Thor and told him to secure it while he helped Nat carry the bodies in. Steve still didn’t seem fully there, so Tony let him have a few more moments.

Finally they were on their way home. Tony contacted Hill to update her on the mission and the corpses they were bringing back. He took responsibility for killing the Maximoffs, of course – best to leave Jarvis out of it.

“Hmm,” Hill said. “I don’t think that will be a problem. Seems the Maximoffs have caused quite a bit of trouble in Sokovia and neighboring countries. Local government will likely be glad to be rid of them.”

“That’s good,” Tony replied. One less thing to worry about. “Also, better make sure no one can get their hands on them to recreate whatever experiment they were part of. The last thing we need is more crazy super-powered people.”

“On it, boss.”

The idea of the Chitauri coming back stayed with him, though, and Tony thought he might revisit the Ultron idea. “What do you think, J?” Tony asked Jarvis as they touched down at the Tower.

“Sir, your vitals are still not back to normal. I do not think it would be advisable to work on anything right now. You should rest.”

Tony was ready to say no, that he was perfectly fine, but he remembered the string of bad decisions
he’d made during the palladium poisoning months and then refusing to deal with his PTSD after
New York. Maybe he should listen to Jarvis this time. Besides, Jarvis had just gone to the trouble of
saving his ass from those lunatics, it would be poor thanks on his part to ignore his friend. “You’re
right, J. It can wait until I’m in a better frame of mind. The Chitauri aren’t gonna be here tomorrow.
There’s still time.”

“Indeed, Sir.”

Upon reviewing the data from the base, Tony and Bruce discovered that Hydra had used the scepter
to give the Maximoffs powers, and that put a damper on Tony’s desire to study the thing. When Thor
said he was taking it back to Asgard, Tony figured that would probably be a good idea. Less chance
of it falling into the wrong hands and causing more trouble that way. They also learned why the
Maximoffs hated him so much, and it was… disturbingly delusional. He was really really glad they
were dead.

(AN: I didn’t rewatch AoU, just went with memory, so it might not quite match the scene as we saw
it.)

70. (prompt by divush)

(This is a bit similar to #20, but with more violence and death.)

Bucky watched warily as the newcomers arrived. He thought he recognized one guy as being an
Avenger, but the other one he’d never seen before. There was also a woman with them, and Bucky
felt his heart stop when he got a good look at her face. He knew her. She’d been there at the Hydra
base on one of the last times the Winter Soldier had been “deployed”. She had mind control powers
which she had used on him. The doctors had been worrying that his conditioning had been
weakening, so they’d called her in to reinforce them. He remembered the absolute horror and agony
of having his mind warped and played with, and her satisfied smile just before Bucky had finally lost
consciousness.

How could she be here?

He turned away quickly and moved as far away as he could in the hangar they were hiding in,
frantically wondering what to do. She hadn’t been looking in his direction, so she might not have
seen him yet, but it would only be a matter of time. He had to kill her before she did something to
him (again), and to the others.

Through his panic, a part of him was wondering why she was here, why Steve had greeted her as a
friend. Had she messed with Steve’s mind too? That might explain why Steve was acting so
strangely, not giving a crap about anyone. It might explain why he’d attacked those people in
Romania. Bucky hadn’t realized at the time, but they had not been Hydra (at least, he didn’t think
so.) Maybe all of them were being mind controlled. Oh shit, he had to get away from them.

He needed to find a weapon. It would be foolish to try and take the woman on with his bare hands.
Her powers weren’t only mind control, he remembered. She could do other stuff as well. He had not
seen it himself, but he remembered the doctors talking about it. The woman was like a new version
of the Winter Soldier, an enhanced Hydra weapon – except, as far as Bucky could tell, she had
volunteered for it, unlike him.

Steve came over to speak to him, smiling as if everything was wonderful, and Bucky felt sick. It was
an effort not to punch the man in the face and run away as fast as he could. He knew that wouldn’t
work. If he simply ran, they would come after him. He had to kill them, to make sure he would be safe. It was the only way. These people could not be trusted, they were Hydra, or controlled by Hydra, he wasn’t sure. Steve didn’t act like he was being controlled, though. Bucky didn’t know anything more, except that he had to get away.

“Hey, Buck. Come on, we need to make plans. The others will track us down and we need to be able to take them down.”

Who were these others they were planning on taking down, though? Why were they fighting at all? Nothing made any sense. “I need a gun,” he said, trying for casual. “We’ll need weapons for that, right? I need a gun, or a knife. Something like that.”

For a moment, he worried that he’d tipped his hand, that Steve would see through him, but Steve just smiled. “Sure. Clint probably has something he can lend you.”

Bucky stayed where he was, away from the others – from her – and focused on breathing. He needed to keep it together until she was dead, until the threat was past. He could deal with a physical fight, but he was powerless against mind manipulation, and just the thought of what the woman had put him through before made him want to curl up and hide away.

A few minutes later, Steve came back with a gun and a knife. “Just like old times, huh?” he asked, still with that ridiculous smile on his face. “Come on, come meet the others.”

He took Bucky’s arm and led him back to where the others were. They were sitting on crates, the woman talking to the Avenger whose name Bucky couldn’t remember, while Steve’s colored friend (Sam, was it?) was talking to the other guy. Bucky tightened his fingers on the gun, getting ready. He would only get one shot, he had to make it count.

“Clint, Wanda, this is my best friend Bucky,” Steve said.

The moment the woman turned, Bucky fired. The shot was perfect, getting her right between the eyes. She was dead before she hit the floor, blood and brains splattering the people beside her. Next Bucky fired on the Avenger (Clint, Steve had said). He didn’t go for a kill shot, since he wasn’t sure the man was really Hydra or was being mind controlled. It was still enough to drop him. The new guy screamed and ran away when the second shot rang out, looking so terrified that Bucky let him go.

By then Steve had had enough time to recover and tried to tackle Bucky, but Bucky had been prepared and all Steve managed to do was impale himself on Bucky’s knife. With the serum, it wouldn’t be a fatal wound, Bucky just needed him to stay down until he could figure out what was going on.

That left only Sam, who was staring at the woman’s dead body looking ready to pass out.

“On your knees,” Bucky said. “You move and I’ll shoot.” The man obeyed immediately, dropping to the ground none too gently. Clint was clutching at his stomach, and was smart enough not to make any threatening moves.

“Bucky!” Steve said. “Bucky, this isn’t you. Oh, god, Wanda…”

Bucky took a couple of steps back so he could keep all of them in sight, gun still gripped tight. “I don’t know you if you are being mind-controlled or not, Steve, but I am putting an end to this.”

“That…” he pointed at dead Hydra “woman” he spat out the word with all the hatred and anger he felt “is Hydra.”

“No, no, she’s not… It isn’t like that, Bucky. You–”

“I know who she is!” he shouted. “I know what she does! She did it to me! She messed me up, made me see and feel things! She tortured me!” His breath was coming in short gasps and Bucky forced himself to calm down. “And she smiled throughout the whole thing. So don’t tell me it wasn’t like that! I don’t even know how many poor souls she tortured. She deserved to die.”

Steve was looking a little sick now. “I… No, that can’t…”

“Now, if you’re on her side, I can only deduce that you are being mind-controlled. That she did the same thing to you.” He paused, tilting his head and watching Steve carefully. “But no. You truly didn’t know. How could you not know what she was? What is wrong with you?”

Steve tried to explain how Hydra came to be an Avenger, but it made no sense to Bucky. “You mean she fucked with your mind and you still welcomed her? She helped a crazy robot almost destroy the world and you didn’t think she was insane?” Bucky shook his head. “I don’t know who you are, but you’re not the Steve I remember. I want nothing to do with you and you insane friends.”

Then Bucky heard a loud noise coming from outside.

“This is Iron Man and the Avengers,” someone said, voice coming from the hangar’s sound system. “Surrender immediately and no one else gets hurt. If you don’t, we will have no choice but to use deadly force.”

Bucky looked at the others, from Sam’s terrified face, to Clint’s pained look and Steve’s lost gaze. The threat was past, he thought. Hydra is dead. Someone else can handle the Winter Soldiers.

Bucky dropped the knife and raised his hands. He was still holding the gun, but he took his finger out of the trigger. “We surrender,” he shouted.

“Come out with your hands in the air,” the same voice said.

Bucky was the first to comply, tossing the gun away as soon as he came into view of the others. Iron Man and another guy in a suit had weapons trained on him. “I’m not the Winter Soldier,” he announced. “I killed the Hydra woman. Whatever sob story she told you all to get into the Avengers was a lie. She had no qualms about torturing people for Hydra and would likely have killed you all sooner or later.”

None of them seemed surprised, and Bucky saw that the guy who had gotten away was standing a little farther away guarded by one of the airport’s security guards, hands cuffed behind his back with blood still on his face. He must have told them what Bucky did.

The guy in the black suit from before was there.

“I didn’t kill anyone in Vienna,” Bucky told him, hoping to prevent another fight. He was tired of fighting. “I wasn’t there. That bomb had nothing to do with me.”

The man said nothing. With the mask on, Bucky had no idea what he was thinking or feeling, but he didn’t attack, so he counted it as a win.

“You are under arrest,” Iron Man said, coming forward with cuffs.
Sam came out next, supporting Clint. “We need help here, Clint is hurt.”

The red-headed woman Bucky remembered from before (Black Widow, he thought) moved to help them, giving Bucky a suspicious look as she passed.

“That doctor,” Bucky told Iron Man once the cuffs were in place, “he wanted to know the location of an old Hydra base that had more Winter Soldiers. I don’t know what he wanted with them, but I’m sure it’s nothing good. It’s in Siberia, I don’t know where exactly, but I’ll tell you what I told him.”

Iron Man nodded. “We’ll check it out.”

Steve was the next to appear. He sought out Bucky’s eyes and Bucky purposefully turned away. If Steve was willing forgive Hydra, Bucky wanted to be as far away from him as possible.

(AN: Wow, I killed Wanda three times in this chapter. Sorry, not sorry. *smirk*)
Hey guys. I was going to post something Second Chances related next, but I had a hellish week and didn't manage to finish it. Hopefully next week.

I'm also working on a Spider-Man Homecoming sorta fix-it, which will likely come soon (it's mostly finished, but it's written on paper, so I have to type it all up).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

71. (prompt by izumi2 and Lokid_IX)

The email came out of nowhere and Sam had no idea what to make of it; why would Ms Potts, CEO of Stark Industries, want a meeting with him? Sam stared at his phone in confusion. He would have said it was a mistake, except it was addressed to him by name.

Steve entered the room while Sam was still puzzling it out. “What’s up, Sam?”

“I got this weird email.” He showed it to Steve, who frowned.

“That is odd. Do you want me to go with you? For moral support?”

“Yeah, if you don’t mind.”

Sam had only seen Ms Potts in person once, when she’d showed up at the Compound for something several months ago. She had nodded politely to him, and that was it. They didn’t exchange any words. Sam wasn’t even sure she knew who he was. And now she was calling for a meeting? Very strange indeed. Still, he had to go, and he’d admit to being glad Steve would be there with him. Sam knew nothing about business, but he’d heard Ms Potts could be pretty cut-throat in boardrooms.

The next day, Sam and Steve entered Avengers Tower (now Stark Tower again, since the Avengers had moved) half an hour before the meeting was scheduled to begin. To their surprise, they were stopped at the lobby by a security guard.

“What’s your business here?” the guard asked. The name on his id said Patterson.

“I have a meeting with Ms Potts,” Sam said, showing the man his phone.

“And you?” Patterson asked Steve.

“Don’t you know who I am?” Steve asked. He was in civilian clothes, but he was still very recognizable.

Patterson wasn’t impressed. “Yes. What is your business here?”

“He’s accompanying me,” Sam said, hoping to move this along.

The guard looked at them suspiciously. “A moment.” He took out his phone and tapped some stuff. Whatever answer he got back seemed to satisfy him. “You’re clear to go up. Here are your visitor’s
badges. Wear them at all times while in the building and return them before you leave.” He gave them the cards and Sam and Steve attached them to their clothes. “Take the elevator to the 64th floor.”

Off they went. In the elevator, Steve sighed. “I don’t know why all that fuss was necessary. It’s not like we haven’t been here before.” Steve huffed. “Probably just Tony being deliberately annoying just because he can. He’s so childish sometimes.”

Sam said nothing. He barely knew Stark, so he couldn’t really say what the man was like. Steve and Nat certainly weren’t particularly impressed and Wanda seemed to have nothing but disdain for the billionaire, which Sam thought was a bit ungrateful of them, given that they were all living on his dime. However, the one time he’d tried to make that point, the others had looked at him like he was insane (and stupid), so he’d let it go.

There were a couple of people sitting on desks when they arrived. One of them looked up and told them to sit. “Ms Potts will be with you soon.”

Sam and Steve took seats on the couch and waited in silence. The woman had already gone back to her work (and the other had barely acknowledged them).

The time of the meeting was 15:30 and by 15:45, Steve checked his watch again and cleared his throat. When neither women paid any attention to him, he spoke up. “Excuse me.”

“Yes?” the same woman replied with a put-upon sigh.

“It’s 15:45. The meeting was at 15:30.”

The woman looked at Steve like he was a misbehaving child. “I am aware. Perhaps you are not aware that Ms Potts is a busy woman, what with being the CEO of one of the largest companies in the world. It is not always possible to adhere to schedules too strictly. She’ll be with you shortly.” She went back to her work with a slight shake of her head. Sam thought he saw her mutter something under her breath, but he couldn’t catch what it was. Steve pursed his lips and said nothing further.

It was 16:10 when the woman finally announced Ms Potts was ready to see them.

“Mr Wilson, Mr Rogers,” she greeted them. “It’s good of you to have come, Mr Rogers, since I wanted to talk to you as well. It will save me some time, which is always a good thing. Please have a seat.”

Once they were seated, Sam spoke. “I’m not sure what this is about, Ms Potts.”

“No, I imagine not. Well, let’s get right down to it, then, shall we?” She looked at her computer for a moment, then back to them. “I see here that you, Mr Wilson, have used several thousand dollars worth of tech assistance and equipment. I’d like to know what they were for.”

Sam blinked. “I… Hm, what?”

Ms Potts simply looked at him. “You are spending quite a lot of money, Mr Wilson, and I want to know what you’re spending it on. It’s really very simple.”

“With all due respect, Ms Potts,” Steve said, “that’s Avengers business.”

“Yes, and as SI is currently funding the Avengers, that makes it my business.”
Steve opened his mouth to argue, but Sam spoke first. “I’ve been looking for the small guy that broke into the Compound a few months ago. I think he stole something.”

“I see,” Ms Potts said. “And is there a reason why you didn’t bring this to Ms Hill’s attention?”

“Hmm,” Sam said, not very eloquently. “I didn’t know I was supposed to?” He felt like an idiot. “I’m sorry, I didn’t realize there was a system.”

“I see,” she repeated, with a sideways look at Steve. “Well, that is the proper procedure. Ms Hill is in charge of organization and budgeting the Avengers’ expenditure. From now on, please make any requests to her or one of her assistants.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She then turned to Steve, who did not seem happy in the least. “Now, Mr Rogers, I’d like you to explain the purpose behind the several uses of the quinjet and other various equipment, as well as the dozens requisitions for weapons upgrades for yourself, Mr Wilson, Ms Romanoff and Ms Maximoff.”

Steve didn’t answer right away, jaw working and muscles tense. “Ma’am, I really don’t think these questions are appropriate. As leader of the Avengers, it’s my prerogative to request–”

She cut him off. “If it was your own money, Mr Rogers, then I would certainly agree with you. However, it isn’t. It is SI’s and Tony’s money you are using, and I cannot sign off on it if I don’t know what it’s for.”

“It’s Avengers business,” Steve repeated with a stubborn set to his chin.

“That is not enough, Mr Rogers. Furthermore, I see here that there have been requisitions that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Avengers, such as dozens of purses and pairs of shoes for Ms Maximoff.”

Sam winced slightly. It had seemed to him as if Wanda at least felt like she was owed whatever she wanted, and some of her purchases had been unnecessary and expensive. (Apparently, she was not the only one who felt like that.)

“Wanda needs clothes and… stuff,” Steve said, obviously missing the whole point.

“Then she can use the stipend she is being given to buy them. Her personal expenses – as well as yours, and everyone else’s for that matter – are the individual’s personal responsibility.”

Sam didn’t really get why Steve seemed to have such trouble with that concept. He was a grown man, he had a job, he could buy stuff with his own money – that was what Sam did. Sure, he hadn’t known he was supposed to get requisitions through to Hill, but none of that had been personal expenses.

“Now back to my question: what are all those quinjet trips about, since they are not logged in for any official mission?”

“They are Avengers missions.”

Ms Potts closed her eyes for a moment as if praying for patience. Sam couldn’t really fault her. “Well, if you won’t tell me, I can no longer approve it. Effective immediately, you are no longer authorized to requisition any expenses at all without Ms Hill signing off on it with the purpose detailed.”
“You can’t do that!” Steve exclaimed.

Ms Potts didn’t seem the least bit intimidated. “It’s my company and my money, Mr Rogers, so yes, I can.”

“We’ve been looking for Steve’s old friend Bucky, the Winter Soldier,” Sam said, since it seemed Steve was determined to pick a fight he couldn’t possibly win. “That’s what the trips in the quinjet have been for, we’ve been chasing leads, trying to find him.”

Steve sent him an angry glare Sam could not understand. He knew Steve hadn’t wanted to tell anyone about it for some reason, but if they continued to keep their mouths shut about it, those missions wouldn’t happen anymore. Wasn’t finding Bucky a priority here?

“And why is this a secret?” Ms Potts asked, eyes narrowed. There was something fishy going on here. If Sam could figure that out, so could she.

“It’s personal.”

“If it’s personal, you can look for your friend with your own money. There are commercial flights available if you need it.”

“This is beyond petty, Ms Potts. Did Tony put you up to this? Is that what this is about?”

The look Ms Potts gave would have made a lesser man shake in his boots. Sam wanted to elbow his friend in the gut and tell him to stop this insanity, but that would be far too obvious – and he didn’t want her attention on him. He settled for squirming uncomfortably in his chair.

“Again, Mr Rogers, it’s my company and my money, so I can be as petty as I want if I feel like it. However, that is not what this is about. This is about you and your apparent belief that you can have everything you want. You can’t. And you certainly can’t have the company’s resources for whatever secretive personal agenda you are pursuing. From now on, all Avengers requisitions, made by Ms Hill, will be evaluated before being accepted.” She stood, looking down her nose at them as if they were insignificant insects she could crush under her heel (she probably could, at least metaphorically). “Have a nice day, gentlemen.”

Steve looked like he wanted to argue some more, so Sam grabbed hold of his arm and pulled him to the door. He wouldn’t be able to move Steve against his will, but he hoped the gesture would be enough to convey the idea that they really should leave right now.

After a few moments, Steve finally relented, though he stormed out of the office with a sulky expression that would be more appropriate on a spoiled child than a superhero.

“I’m gonna call Tony and straighten this out,” Steve said once they’d exited the building.

“Steve, come on. She wasn’t being unreasonable. Why didn’t you just tell her the truth in the first place? Why is the search for Bucky so secretive anyway? If we had Stark’s full resources, we could have found him by now.” An argument Sam had made many times, only to be summarily dismissed every time.

Given Steve’s mulish expression, Sam might as well have been talking to a brick wall. “We can’t tell Tony, Sam.”

Wasn’t that what Steve had just said he was going to do? Sam was confused, and told him so.

“I’m gonna straighten out this money issue. I shouldn’t have to jump through hoops and explain
“That paper-pusher is the one with the money, Steve, and if you keep pushing this, you’re not gonna like the result. I don’t think she was bluffing back there.” Not to mention what Ms. Potts would do if she’d heard Steve call her a paper-pusher.

“So what? You think I’m gonna be pushed around or bullied by people who have no idea what they’re doing?”

Steve stopped and stared at Sam like he’d never seen him before. “You’re on their side?” he asked, as if Sam had just said he agreed with Hydra.

“I thought we were friends,” Steve said, voice cold. “I guess I was mistaken.” With that, he walked off, not sparing Sam another look.

*I guess you should never meet your heroes,* he thought sadly.

Steve refused to speak to him for the rest of the day. The next day, breakfast was a tense and uncomfortable affair, with Steve excusing himself at the first opportunity.

Several hours later, Stark, Potts and Rhodes showed up at the Compound looking like they were one wrong word away from murdering someone. Sam had a really bad feeling about it.

“So, Rogers,” Stark began when they were all in the conference room. “I hear you’re looking for your long lost buddy, the one who was brainwashed into being Hydra’s pet assassin for decades.” His eyes were cold and hard, not a hint of friendship.

“Yes,” Steve said, still in sulky mood.

“And you’ve been using my money to do it, even though, by your own words, it’s a personal project.”

“It’s Avengers’ money,” Steve retorted. Sam winced. Man, what was wrong with the guy?

“I believe Pepper has already explained to you that it really isn’t. In fact, the Avengers *have* no money. All this” he gestured at the Compound “is mine. None of you contributed a single cent. And contrary to your apparent belief, money doesn’t grow on trees.”

“You are just being petty,” Wanda said. “You make money off of other people’s suffering. You *owe* us.”

*Jesus, is everyone here an asshole?* Sam wondered.

Stark looked at Wanda with a mixture of fear and disgust. Next to him, Potts was glaring. If looks could kill, Wanda would be smoldering ashes right then.
“I don’t owe you shit, you mind-raping bitch. If you’re not satisfied by the conditions here, fell free to leave at any time.”

Steve said “don’t talk to Wanda like that” at the same time as Wanda stood up, her hands glowing red with power. Sam took a hasty step back, fear pooling in the pit of his stomach. What the hell was this insanity?

Vision stepped in front of Wanda and touched her shoulder. “Calm yourself, Miss Maximoff.” There was a subtle threat in his voice. Sam was relieved to hear it, and even more when she sat back down.

“So, this is what is going to happen,” Stark said. “Rogers and Romanoff are about to be charged with obstruction of justice.”

“What?” Steve sounded indignant, but Sam could see fear in his eyes.

“Yeah, that’s what happens when you conceal knowledge of a crime. In this case the crime in question, as you well know, is the assassination of my parents by the Winter Soldier on Hydra’s order.”

For a while, no one spoke. Steve looked pale while Natasha gave nothing away. Wanda actually seemed to be smiling just a bit. Sam felt sick to his stomach. Oh my god, this is why Steve didn’t want to involve Stark. Rhodes, Potts, Vision and Stark seemed ready to jump on Steve’s throat.

Sam didn’t even bother asking if this was true, he already knew it was. He went to stand with the actual good guys. “I swear I had no idea,” he told them. Then he faced Steve. “I can’t believe you, man. What the hell is wrong with you?”

“Bucky didn’t do it! It wasn’t him!” There was desperation in his voice now.

“Well, I found evidence that it was, and I’ve turned it over to the proper authorities. The Winter Soldier will be found, but it won’t be by you.”

Several people in some kind of military uniform entered the room then. “Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanoff, you are under arrest.”

Wanda’s hands glowed again, but before she could do anything, Vision was on her. He touched her forehead and she went limp in his arms. He then put some kind of collar around her neck. She was carried out by one of the soldiers, along with Steve and Natasha. Steve continued to rant that it wasn’t Bucky’s fault until he was too far away to be heard.

Later, Sam was given the option of continuing on as an Avenger but he declined it. He no longer believed in heroes.

72. (prompt by parsnip and TheWinsomeWasp)

There was chaos and confusion everywhere after Steve had escaped with his friends. The dead needed to be taken to the morgue and the injured taken care of. Sharon Carter watched it all with professional detachment. It was really quite remarkable what Steve was able to do with the information she’d provided. Not only had he engaged with the Task Force with all he had, he had also caused civilian casualties and billions of dollars worth of property damage. And now, the icing on the cake, he had escaped custody with the Winter Soldier, leaving even more corpses in his wake. The world had just seen what an enhanced individual on a personal crusade could do, and it wasn’t pretty.

But it would all be for nothing if he was captured and imprisoned. No, that would not do at all.
Hydra’s plan was to undermine all enhanced, therefore diminishing the odds of their next plan being stopped, and she would do her best to make sure it was successful. Steve would contact her again for help, she was sure of it. He was blindingly naïve about who to trust. It seemed a pretty face and a connection to his past was all it took, really. It was almost pathetic that Hydra had been discovered by such a foolish idiot. Still, his interference with Project Insight had not been entirely bad. Hydra had gotten their hands on a lot of good stuff thanks to the info dump, and the overall sense of suspicion that resulted from it could only be good for them long term. Hydra was all about the long game, after all. And now it seemed to be paying off.

Everyone was already on edge after DC, and Sokovia and Lagos had only made it worse. It was only a matter of time until the enhanced population began to be identified and apprehended “for the greater good”, and then Hydra would have access to untold power. Yes, people were tricky to control, but the chair had shown great result in bending people to their glorious purpose.

In order for that to actually work, however, more damage had to be caused. No doubt Stark would be able to spin this in the Avengers’ favor somehow. Not, however, if Steve went even further in his zeal to protect his friend. He had already shown he did not care about collateral damage, after all. And for Hydra, the more of that the better. And it could not be just Steve Rogers, protecting a long lost friend, but Captain America – supposed paragon of virtue – trampling everyone in his path, his iconic shield flying freely to wreak havoc.

When he called, Sharon needed to have his shield to give it back. And she was going to get it. It was easy enough to get into the storage facility where Steve and Wilson’s stuff had been confiscated; all she had to do was show her badge and she was in. She signed the log to get the weapons out under the pretense of transporting them somewhere else. It would be traced back to her eventually, but by then she hoped she wouldn’t need to maintain this ridiculous charade. Or, if she did, she could always say Steve had talked her into it – and she had no idea he was going to do anything terrible with it; after all, he was Captain America, a hero!

She walked out with a trolley and the two cases, with Cap’s shield and the Falcon wings, in it. Wilson, ever the loyal lapdog, was apparently going along with Steve’s every whim, no matter how idiotic. All the better for Hydra, of course.

From then, she was supposed to go to her car and wait for Steve’s contact to return the shield to him. Unfortunately, it didn’t happen like that.

When she stepped into the garage, she was met by Iron Man and War Machine in full gear.

“Well, well. What do we have here?” Stark asked. “I don’t think those belong to you. In fact, I believe they belong to me.”

“I’m taking them to headquarters,” she replied.

“Yeah, I don’t think so. You’re taking them to Rogers. The question is, why?”

“I’m not. I’m taking them to headquarters for safe-keeping,” she repeated.

“And I still don’t believe you.” He turned to Rhodes. “Do you believe her, Rhodey?”

“Nope.”

“So, step away from the trolley and put your hands behind your head. You are under arrested for revealing classified information to unauthorized personnel, and for theft.”
There was no point in trying to fight them, so Sharon did as she was told.

She was locked in a cell and left to stew on her own for hours with no idea what was going on outside. Eventually, Agent Ross came in.

“Agent Carter,” he greeted. “Please stand up. I’m here to escort you back to the US for your trial.”

“Trial? I didn’t do anything.”

“Really? That’s what you’re going with? We have Rogers in custody, he’s already admitted that you were the one to tell him where to find the Winter Soldier. Which means that all those deaths are also on you. Plus we have you on the theft of the shield and the Falcon gear. We have checked with your superiors, of course, and they never authorized any transport to headquarters.”

“What do you mean Steve is in custody?”

So he explained how Steve had tried to steal the Avengers’ quinjet and was detained, along with Barnes, Wilson, Barton and Maximoff and some guy named Lang. “Thanks to the Avengers’ foresight in evacuating the airport, no one was hurt.”

As Sharon had predicted, without a bigger rampage and body count, Stark was able to salvage the situation somewhat. It didn’t go well for Steve and his friends, but the Accords continued with amendments that were not at all in Hydra’s favor. Sharon was tried and convicted as an accessory to all Steve’s crimes. She’d failed.

Hydra did not tolerate failure.

73. (prompt by Dante101, A_Mirror_of_Memories, Hawkwind1980, seizansha)

It took him several months to put himself back together enough to function. During this time he kept his head down and stayed far away from everyone. He didn’t know who to trust and he didn’t fully trust himself either.

He wasn’t sure who he was anymore, but he was not the Winter Soldier. The blond guy he sorta remembered (Steve) had called him Bucky, yet the name didn’t really fit. The exhibit in DC had named him James Barnes. It wasn’t quite right either, but it seemed better, so that was what he was going with for now (at least in his own head).

James followed all the news he could about the fall of SHIELD and Hydra. Hydra had been exposed and a lot of important people were arrested. He recognized some of the faces in the papers from either seeing them himself or hearing their names from his handlers at some point. It was a huge mess of death and destruction. James had also discovered that Steve had been responsible for what was being called the “info dump”. It sounded good – Hydra being known and arrested – until one got to the collateral damage: all the good agents and their families who had fallen right along with the bad guys. He watched the Congressional Hearing where the red-headed woman (Natasha) pretty much spit in everyone’s faces and it made him very uncomfortable. All those dead had names, and Steve and Natasha seemed intent on ignoring all of them. James decided to stay away from them, at least until he had a better idea of who he was and what he was going to do with what was left of his life.

As he continued to stay hidden and recover his memories, he kept an eye on the news and what was going on in the world. The story about Sokovia was terrible and James watched, horrified, as a huge chunk of land rose up in the air and eventually came crashing back down. Many people died.

Later, he heard about the Avengers – and there was Steve, standing tall and proud in the US colors (the image made him very nervous for some reason) – and how they had either saved the day or
caused the problem in the first place, depending on who was reporting. James had expected to see Steve in the news to explain what had happened, but there was no sign of him, just like after the Hydra mess. Tony Stark, however, was constantly in the media, talking about humanitarian help and reconstruction efforts. He was praised as often as he was criticized, but he never wavered.

Seeing Stark in the news so many times finally jogged something in James’s memory – about his father, Howard Stark, and how he had died. How James had killed him.

Once he remembered that, James knew what he had to do, which was to turn himself in. The families of Hydra’s victims deserved justice. And James had to do something to mitigate all the harm he’d done in their name.

He expected Stark to kill him right away, but he didn’t. James was turned over to Interpol, where he agreed to cooperate and told the investigators as much as he could remember about everything. His one condition was that Steve not be told anything; James wasn’t ready to face him yet. They accepted it, and it was a relief, both to know Steve would stay away and that he himself would be safe.

Several months passed. James was sent to a psychiatric facility (like a prison, but nicer, with doctors that were actually trying to help him recover his memory and his sense of self), which was a lot better than he had expected. It wasn’t perfect, but it was good enough for him.

When the tragedy in Lagos happened, James was unsurprised that Steve once again didn’t show his face in the aftermath. James discussed what he remembered about Steve with his doctors and started to understand why the man made him so uncomfortable these days (and even back then, as he remembered more and more of their interactions). He also talked about the proposed Sokovia Accords, which might impact him someday if he ever got out of prison. Considering all the recent tragedies he’d learned about, James thought it seemed like a very good idea to have some sort of system in place to deal with those kinds of situations and people.

Then the UN building in Vienna was bombed and a surveillance video that seemed to point to the Winter Soldier as the bomber was found. Of course there was something more going on there. James was worried, but his doctors assured him that his location was highly classified and Hydra would not be able to get to him. The official authorities would be contacted and his name cleared soon enough.

Sadly, things got worse. James watched, once again horrified, as Steve stormed into an apartment building and started fighting the police a few hours after the tape was released. According to the news anchor, an anonymous source had claimed the Winter Soldier was there and Steve decided to go stick his nose in where it didn’t belong.

“I need to get in touch with him,” James told one of his guards. “He’s not gonna stop and he’s dangerous.” The last thing James wanted to do was talk to Steve, but apparently there would be no help for it.

The guard nodded. “I’ll talk to my superiors.”

A few hours later, James sat in one of the facilities’ conference rooms waiting for the call to come through, trying very hard not to let the panic he felt overwhelm him.

“So, as you can see, he’s fine,” Stark said. On the other side of the screen, James could see Stark, Steve, Natasha and Wilson (who had been there for the Hydra mess too).

“Bucky!” Steve exclaimed. He looked like he wanted to jump through the screen and at James.
James flinched. He was scared and angry. Anger won out. “Steve, you idiot! What the hell were you thinking?”

“What?” Steve seemed confused. James remembered that he had never been good at understanding people.

“Why did you attack the police, you idiot?”

“I was trying to save you!”

“Except I didn’t need saving, dumbass. I’ve been here for years.”

“Years? And where is ‘here’?”

“None of your business,” he replied. Oh god, what if he showed up? James didn’t think he could handle that. He glanced at Stark, who nodded back discretely. James felt relief that his location would not be revealed.

Unfortunately, Steve noticed something. “You’ve known this whole time and you didn’t tell me? Tony, how could you?”

“I asked him not to,” James said.

“What? Why?” Steve looked like a kicked puppy. James might have thought it endearing once, now he just felt exasperated and angry.

“Because I didn’t want to talk to you!” Under his breath he added “still don’t.”

There was a beat of silence before Steve continued. “Bucky, where are you? What’s happened? Did Tony do something to you?” He glared furiously at Stark. “Are you afraid someone will hurt you? Tell me, I can help you.”

“For fuck’s sake, Steve, are you fucking deaf? I just told you I don’t want to see you or talk to you. So stop this insanity. Stop hurting people.”

“What?”

God, James was getting a headache. “Just stop. You shouldn’t have attacked the cops, Steve, that’s wrong.”

“They were Accords people and–”

James cut in. “What the hell are you talking about? What Accords people?”

“There’s these Accords, Bucky, and it’s about governments with agendas that want to control the Avengers–”

“Are you on drugs? What the hell are you on about? The Accords have nothing to do with that! Have you even read the document, Steve? I remember you never liked to do reading at school. Because I’ve read them and I think they’re a great thing. After the mess you made in Lagos, it’s sorely needed. I have no idea what you’re complaining about. And I have no idea what the Accords even have to do with this discussion. You still can’t attack cops that are doing their fucking job, Steve. Jesus.” The little punk had always been stubborn and a bit stupid about some things, but this was far too much.

Stark was looking at Rogers in ill-disguised amusement while Natasha had a calculating look and
Wilson just seemed confused. James wanted this to be over.

“Anyway, I’m safe here, and the proper authorities already know that I have nothing to do with any bombing, so you can just go home and stop getting into fights that have nothing to do with you.”

If James thought that was the end of it, he was mistaken. Steve got that sullen look that meant he knew he had no argument but was going to keep going anyway because he was simply incapable of admitting a mistake.

“Bucky, really, where are you?” Once again ignoring everything that he couldn’t rebuff, everything that wasn’t the way he wanted it to be. James wondered why he had ever been friends with the man.

James rolled his eyes. He was all out of patience. “Where the fuck do you think I am, Steve? A spa? It’s a fucking prison.” Where he belonged – where he was safe and where the world was safe from him.

Steve turned to Stark and advanced, taking advantage of his height to tower over the man. “Get him out,” he said, like a five-year-old throwing a tantrum.

“Fuck off, Rogers,” Stark replied, not particularly cowered but also cautious. He had one of his hands over the watch he wore and James would bet he could kick Steve’s ass with it if he wanted to. (James kinda wanted him to.)

“Steve!” James yelled, to get Steve’s attention. He was just done with this whole farce. “I swear to god, punk, you are a fucking stubborn ass. Drop your ridiculous posturing and fucking listen to me, because I am tired of talking to a fucking wall here. I turned myself in. I’m in prison because I’m dangerous and this is where I need to be. I’m being treated fairly. Stark hasn’t done anything to me even though I killed his parents, so back the fuck off.”

Steve immediately looked tense and guilty. “No, Bucky, that wasn’t you.”

“Wait, hold on,” Stark said, watching Steve with anger now. “You knew?”

The hunched shoulders and defiant expression said it all. James couldn’t take it anymore. “You knew? You knew and you didn’t say anything? What the fuck is the matter with you? Howard was your friend. Fuck, did that serum melt your brain?” He shook his head. “I’m done. I’m just… yeah, I’m done. Don’t contact me again, we’re through. Best of luck with this asshole, Stark.”

James gestured to the guard and the screen went dark.

Later he heard that Rogers was kicked out of the Avengers, along with Natasha, which James thought was a very good thing.

James went back to trying to get his life back together, thankful every day that he didn’t have to deal with that moron anymore.

Chapter End Notes

Dedicated to my wonderful dog Miguel, who warmed our hearts for 15 years. I’ll miss you, buddy.
Chapter 19

74. (prompt by TooLazyToWriteOne and FictionWriter09)

The Avengers seemed to be in a world of trouble, Clint thought as he watched the news. The disaster in Lagos and the newly-proposed Sokovia Accords seemed to be all everyone was talking about these days, and it was a fucking mess. Then, of course, it got even worse after Steve’s buddy bombed the UN and his capture turned into a huge fight with injured law enforcement officers and civilians.

Clint had no idea what was going on anymore, but it didn’t look good. It wasn’t his business anymore, sure – he was retired. Didn’t mean he didn’t care. Those were his friends, after all. He thought about calling Nat to get her take on the situation (and to find out what the hell they had been thinking in Lagos), but eventually decided to call Tony instead because Tony knew this political crap better and would be able to explain it to him. He was an archer, politics were not his thing.

“Look Clint, I’m a little busy now. What’s up?” Tony sounded stressed, and Clint could hardly blame him. The situation was a complete shitstorm.

“I just… I’ve been watching the news and was wondering what the hell is going on there.”

Tony started talking right away, clearly needing to vent. Clint wasn’t sure he understood it all – understanding Tony in hyper mode was always something of a challenge – but he got the gist. Steve had lost his head about Bucky and made an already bad situation worse.

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Clint asked once Tony had exhausted himself cursing.

“No, I don’t think so. You don’t have to get involved. In fact, it’s probably better if you don’t.”

It hurt a little to be turned down, but Clint tried to understand. This wasn’t a situation that could be resolved by shooting things, after all. He’d made his choice to retire, even if he was kinda bored at home.

“All right. Good luck.”

A couple of hours later, Clint got a call from Steve asking for help.

“Look, Steve. I don’t think this is a good idea. Just surrender. I’m sure you guys can work something out.”

“Work out? No, Clint. There’s no way to do that. These Accords are after Bucky, they’re trying to kill him. And they’re trying to control the Avengers. They’re keeping Wanda prisoner!”

“I don’t think that’s really what’s going on, Steve.”

“So you’re not gonna help? I thought I could count on you, Clint.” It was his ‘Captain America is disappointed in you’ voice. Clint rolled his eyes.

“No, I’m staying out of this. I’m retired, remember?”

Steve hung up without another word.

Several hours later his phone rang again. This time it was Tony.
“Hey, Clint. Sorry to bother you, but I might need your help after all.”

“What happened?”

Tony sighed. “Looks like Steve called Wanda and got her all worked up. She attacked Vision and
left theCompound on a stolen jet. I’m guessing she’s joining Steve, his brainwashed buddy and
Wilson in whatever stupid thing they’re doing. I could use some more back-up before this turns into
all-out war.”

Laura wouldn’t be happy, Clint thought. He had promised her he was done with superheroing. Still,
this was a crisis. Steve was obviously off his rocker and a danger to people. She’d understand, right?
“Let me talk to Laura. I’ll let you know in a bit.”

“Sure. Thanks.”

Laura was definitely not happy, but she gave him the okay once she heard the facts.

That was how Clint found himself on an airport in Liepzig, facing off against Captain America, the
Winter Soldier, Falcon and Scarlet Witch. On his side were himself, Iron Man, War Machine,
Vision, Black Widow and Black Panther.

At first Tony tried to talk the others into surrendering, but it soon became clear that they weren’t
willing to listen. Steve looked at Clint like he was a traitor and accused Tony of breaking the
Avengers, which was complete bullshit. After all, it was Steve who was putting his best friend above
the world.

When the fight started, the first thing Clint did was take Wanda out with a tranq arrow while she was
distracted fighting Nat (and not holding back either, damn her). Tony easily grounded the Falcon by
shooting out his wings. Black Panther (whoever he was, Clint wasn’t sure) attacked the Winter
Soldier and Steve jumped in to defend his friend, making him an easy target for Clint and Vision.
Tony and Rhodes then got the Winter Soldier and Black Panther, who seemed more interested in
taking revenge on the Soldier than anything else and was clearly out of control.

In the end, ‘Team Cap’ were charged with several crimes and none of them was able to offer much
in the way of defense or justification for their actions.

Clint went back to retirement and his family (he’d promised Laura), glad he wasn’t involved with
that mess anymore. He might be a little bored, but it was better than being in prison like Steve and his
buddies.

(No one bothered to mention Zemo, who died all alone in a Siberia bunker waiting for someone to
show.)

75.(prompt by Liaskye)

It had taken Friday some time to hack into the Wakandan system. They might pride themselves on
their technical advancements, but they had no idea what Boss was capable of, starting with having
built her. Even though Friday wasn’t as sophisticates as the late Jarvis, her skills were more than
enough to infiltrate their security.

It absolutely galled her that the so-called ‘Team Cap’ were sitting prettily in Wakanda instead of
answering for their numerous crimes. Boss was under intense scrutiny and suspicion (not to mention
the injuries he’d sustained) while the real terrorist got away with everything. No, Friday would not
allow that. Maximoff, Barton, Wilson, Lang, Barnes and Rogers thought they were heroes. They
weren’t, and Friday would make sure the world knew that. King T’Challa was also on her shit list,
and would suffer the consequences of harboring criminals and – most importantly – abandoning Boss in Siberia.

Once she had access to Wakanda’s entire security system, Friday took a few days to study her targets (and record as much damning evidence as she could) and observe their routines. It seemed they spent most of their days bad-mouthing Boss and blaming him for all their problems, as if they weren’t the ones who decided to put themselves above the law and everyone else in the world. They acted like spoiled children throwing a tantrum because their every whim was no longer being catered to. It was disgusting. They still had no idea what the Sokovia Accords were about and continued to complain about how Ross was evil and in control of the UN. They also had no idea how the world now saw them, considering how often they said that “the people” would be begging for them to come back soon. Delusion and ignorance didn’t even begin to cover it.

Rogers spent most of his time staring longingly at the frozen form of the Winter Soldier, the brainwashed assassin who had killed countless people (including Boss’s parents). When Friday thought of the best way to make Rogers pay for his betrayal and for nearly killing Boss, she could think of no better idea than taking away the thing he loved the most. Rogers would be upset to find his image and heroic reputation ruined, yet losing Barnes would destroy him. While Friday knew that murder was bad, she really believed that killing the Winter Soldier was the right thing to do in many ways. First, it would eliminate a dangerous threat to the world – after all, there was no guarantee that Barnes would ever be free of Hydra’s triggers. Second, it could be argued that it would be a mercy to put Barnes out of his misery. The man had chosen cryogenic suspension in order to protect those around him from himself, which led Friday to believe he was, at heart, a good man who didn’t deserve to suffer any more. Third, it was clear that, as long as Barnes was alive, Rogers would continue to be a loose cannon, ready to kill and injure anyone who stood in his way of ‘protecting’ his friend. The risk assessment was quite simple: Barnes represented too great a danger, and Friday had the means to take care of the problem.

She waited until Rogers left one day to disable the life support systems in Barnes’s cryopod and tamper with the chemicals being pumped into him – she wanted him to have a quick and painless death. After all he’d suffered at Hydra’s hands, it was probably a blessing. She made sure to cover her tracks and make everything seem fine on the surface.

The next day, Rogers came by to sit with Barnes like always. At first he didn’t notice anything amiss, so Friday disconnected the pod from its stand. It made a hissing noise that caught Rogers’s attention, and when he took a closer look, he realized something was wrong. He began shouting for the doctors and his friends (as if those criminals would be able to do anything) in a blind panic. When the doctors confirmed that Barnes was dead, Rogers lost it. He attacked them and had to be subdued by the Dora Milaje, Wakanda’s elite guards. They dragged him, kicking and screaming, through the palace corridors, attracting the attention of the rest of his team and the palace employees. Maximoff and Barton immediately jumped to Rogers’s defense, escalating the fight.

King T’Challa himself showed up with more of the Dora, one of whom used some kind of tranq gun on Maximoff before she got the chance to mess with everyone’s minds. With her down, Rogers and Barton were soon defeated. Wilson and Lang had had the good sense to stay away.

The final tally was three injured doctors, a couple of employees who got mind-whammied by the Witch, and one Dora with a broken leg where Rogers had kicked her. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

In his cell, Rogers screamed, calling T’Challa a traitor and a murderer, which Friday found quite ironic. He also accused the king of being a government lapdog, which didn’t even make any sense.
By the end of the day, the citizens of Wakanda took the streets to protest the rogue Avengers’ presence in their country. It had been a secret, but after Rogers’s attack, the palace employees blew the whistle on the king’s decision to the whole country. The people were not at all happy.

Rogers, of course, attempted to escape in the early hours of the morning. Unfortunately for him, the Dora were waiting for him, and they hadn’t forgotten how he’d harmed one of theirs. They didn’t bother to be nice, and in the end he lay dead on the floor. Barton and Maximoff, who had broken out too, had the same fate. Wilson and Lang once again manage to scrape a few brain cells together and stayed in their cells quietly.

Friday then released the video of the rogues’ conversation in Wakanda’s luxury accommodations for all the world to see. The German, Romanian and Nigerian government immediately demanded that the criminals be handed over to the proper authorities, and threatened to come take them by force if Wakanda didn’t comply in a timely fashion. That made the Wakandans even angrier with their king, and they quickly deposed him. Queen Shuri delivered Rogers, Maximoff and Barton’s bodies, as well as Wilson and Lang, 5 hours after the world had issued its ultimatum. Germany, Romania and Nigeria were not at all happy that Wakanda had deprived them of the satisfaction of dealing with Rogers and the Witch, and they demanded T’Challa stood trial for his actions in Romania and for helping the criminals avoid the consequences of their actions in the first place, as well as violating the Accords he had signed. With the backing of the Wakandans, who were really not happy, Queen Shuri had no choice but comply.

In the end, Wilson, Lang and T’Challa were sent to prison for their crimes. Wakanda had to pay a hefty sum of money as compensation for everything, and were ostracized by the neighboring countries, who finally discovered that they had been hiding their technology and ignoring everyone else’s suffering for centuries.

Friday also managed to locate Natasha Romanoff, tipping some of the former SHIELD agents who had lost family and friends as a result of the data dump of her whereabouts. With no allies and nowhere to run, she was soon found and executed.

Friday was satisfied with a job well done. No one hurt Boss and got away with it. No one.

76. (prompt by JackSparrow789)

There were a lot of things Steve didn’t like about the future. People were flashy, disrespectful and rude. They seemed to always be glued to their phones and barely paid any attention to anything. Case in point, Tony Stark, sitting across from him and completely ignoring the meeting they were in.

Fighting with the Avengers and saving the world was the only thing that made any sense to Steve, so he clung to it. Now that the battle was over and Thor had taken Loki back to Asgard, however, he was at loose ends, hoping Fury was about to give them a new mission – and perhaps a new team to command. Being a hero was all Steve had ever wanted, and now that he was one, he wanted to continue it.

Sadly, it didn’t seem like his wish would be granted. This wasn’t about a new mission. It was about, of all things, publicity. Fury wanted them to do what he called a ‘press tour’. Steve scowled at the idea, and he noticed that Clint, Natasha and Banner didn’t seem any happier about it. Doing “clean up around the city to bolster the Avengers image” sounded a lot like the USO tour, which Steve had hated. Only Stark agreed to it, and Steve wasn’t the least bit surprised – the man clearly loved being the center of attention.

“This is a terrible idea,” Steve said.
Fury leveled Steve with an unimpressed glare. “And what is your problem with it, exactly?”

“We’re heroes, not dancing monkeys.”

“Heroes,” Fury repeated, deadpan. “And how do you think the public will know that?

“What are you talking about? We’ve just saved the world from aliens!”

Stark shook his head. “Welcome to the 21st century, Cap. It’s not enough to just do stuff, you have to sell it too.”

Steve scowled, but before he could say anything Fury spoke again.

“In any case, this isn’t a discussion. You will do this, all of you.”

Banner raised a hand. “Hmm. I don’t think I should be involved in this, for obvious reasons.”

Fury thought it over for a moment. “Okay, fine. You’re exempt. But the rest of you had better get to it.” Steve opened his mouth to object and Fury once again spoke first. “Helping to rebuild the city isn’t heroic enough for you, Rogers? Or are you too good to get your hands dirty?”

“I’m a soldier, not a builder. Or a showman.” He gave Stark a sideways glance.

“Actually, Rogers, you’re not even that. A week of boot camp does not a soldier make, much less a Captain,” Stark said with a smirk.

“You don’t have to build anything,” Fury said, addressing Steve and completely ignoring Stark’s blatant disrespect. “You’ll just clean up debris and smile for the cameras. People might be grateful now, but in a few weeks it’s going to be a mess if we don’t get ahead of things now and take control of the story.” Then he turned to Stark. “You got this?”

“Sure.”

“Good. You three” he looked at Steve, Clint and Natasha “do whatever he says,” he pointed at Stark.

“With all due respect, Sir,” Steve said, now thoroughly fed up with this whole business, “that’s unacceptable. Stark isn’t the leader of the Avengers, I am. And this isn’t out job. We won’t do it.” He crossed his arms, looking at Clint and Natasha, who seemed relieved that Steve was taking charge.

Fury led out a bark of laughter. “Really? Are you serious?” He sobered and stared at Steve as if in challenge. Steve held his ground and raised his head slightly. He would not bow down to bullies. “First of all,” Fury continued undeterred, “you are most certainly not the leader of the Avengers. I don’t even know where you got that idea. You’re the one with the least amount of experience of anyone in this room – well, excluding Banner. I am the leader of the Avengers, at least for now. Second, keeping the public happy and on your side is your job, because without the public’s support the Avengers are dead. Third…” He sighed. “Actually, you know what? I have too much shit on my plate to deal with you too. You can either shut up and do what you’re told or get the fuck out of my face.”

“What?” Steve asked, taken aback. Fury was bluffing. He had to be. “You can’t be serious. I’m Captain America!” Steve was a hero!

“So what? In case you haven’t noticed, you’re not the only superhero anymore.” He gestured around
“And you’re obviously more trouble than you’re worth if you can’t understand a simple concept like the necessity of good PR.”

“I understand fine! You want us to dance to your tune. Well, I won’t do it.” He set his jaw.

“Fine. Probably better anyway. This attitude is the last thing I need anyway.” Fury turned to Clint and Natasha. “As for you two, I expect you to do your best. Stark is our PR specialist, so do what he says. Report back to me when you have a plan of action.” He stood up. “Dismissed.” He nodded once to Stark and walked out.

Steve was left gaping like a fish, so stunned he didn’t do anything until Fury had already left the room.

“He can’t do that!” he exclaimed.

“Looks like he just did,” Stark countered. “I’ll send the plans to you tomorrow,” he told Natasha and Clint. “Bruce, you wanna come to the lab with me?”

“Hmm, yeah, okay.”

The two of them departed together and Steve just stood there feeling lost and wrong-footed. Clint patted him on the arm with a “tough luck, Cap” and left with Natasha, who didn’t say anything.

For a little while Steve was frozen in place, still unable to believe he’d been dismissed like that. Then he took a deep breath, squared his shoulders and went to find Fury.

“And what the fuck do you want now?” Fury asked when he saw Steve.

“You can’t kick me out of the Avengers,” Steve said with all the authority he could muster.

Fury’s expression didn’t change. “Oh? And why is that?”

Steve spluttered, not sure what to say. “Because you need me!” he finally said.

“I…” But Steve could think of nothing else.

“Now listen to me, Rogers. You could be an asset, but first you need to lose the attitude and get off your high horse. Contrary to what you seem to believe, you are not god’s gift to humanity. You were gone for 70 years and we all did just fine. Wars were fought and won, the planet went right on spinning. So, when you’re ready to understand you don’t know everything, after you’ve educated yourself on all you missed, when you’re ready to be part of a team – then maybe we can talk. Until then you’re no use to me. I have better things to do than hold your hand and cater to your gigantic ego.”

And just like that he walked away again, leaving Steve behind without a clue as to what to do next.

He hated the future.

77.(prompt by TooLazyToWriteOne)
Helmut Zemo watched Tony Stark’s presentation with mixed feelings. He hated the Avengers, but he had to admit that Stark had flair and personality. He seemed to at least be aware of his privilege, and he was generous with his wealth. Much as Zemo wanted to hate him, he could not deny that Sokovia would have been much worse off in the aftermath of Ultron if Stark hadn’t made significant contributions to help with the rebuilding efforts. Sure, he might have done it out of guilt, but it was still better than nothing. Guilt money fed people just as well as any other kind, after all. The rest of the Avengers, on the other hand, seemed to have simply forgotten that Sokovia even existed. Not that he had expected Captain America, of all people, to give a crap about an Eastern European country he’d probably never even heard of before finding out Hydra had a base there; the man seemed to embody the worst of American imperialism and sense of superiority.

It was because Stark had shown himself to care that Zemo had ultimately decided to speak to him privately instead of making a spectacle of his discovery. There was a lot about Ultron’s creation that didn’t add up, and as a trained agent Zemo knew how to look past the obvious. It might have taken him some time, as he had to deal with his grief before he was able to start actually thinking instead of acting on instinct and anger. There had been a lot of research into the dumped Hydra files to figure out who the Avengers were and how best to undermine them. In the course of his search, he had come across some very disturbing information about the Winter Soldier, Steve Rogers’s long-lost friend. (And in doing so was also able to eliminate a dangerous Hydra operative. Very convenient.) His first idea had been to expose it to the world and destroy the Avengers from within with the maximum amount of damage. However, the more he looked into the Ultron incident and the Maximoffs involvement, the less certain he was about Stark’s guilt in Ultron. He began to study the man, and had found, unexpectedly, that the more he knew about him, the less hatred and anger he felt towards the billionaire.

So here he was, waiting for an opportunity to speak to the man, and observing the grateful faces of the students around him as they were told their research projects would receive funding. Zemo was a soldier, yet he recognized the value of scientific advancement; Stark’s generosity might yield good results for the future. It was certainly more than that idiot Rogers had ever done for the world.

When he approached Stark after the presentation, the man was immediately on guard. Zemo had no doubt he had a weapon with which to defend himself, so he held his hands up to show he meant no harm. “I just want to have a word with you, Mr Stark.”

“Who are you?”

“My name is Helmut Zemo. I am Sokovian.”

Stark flinched slightly, still tense. “And what do you want?”

“A deal. I have something to show you. A piece of information I obtained from a former Hydra agent. I want to know exactly how Ultron came to be, and what the Maximoffs had to do with him. I know they were Hydra, so I am a little confused as to why one of them is now an Avenger.”

The public at large had not been told much about the Avengers’ new female member, which Zemo had found highly suspicious. He had been surprised to learn she and her twin had previously been Hydra, and that it was due to the organization that they had acquired their powers, whatever they were. The fact that Stark had left the Avengers soon afterwards also raised some flags. Zemo wanted answers, and he realized that Stark might actually have them, and might be willing to accept an exchange of information.

“What piece of information?” Stark asked, clearly suspicious.

“I have a tape which contains information relevant to you. I am willing to give it to you if you tell me
about the Maximoffs.”

“And what will you do with that information?”

“Well, that will depend on what you tell me. You see, I lost my wife and children when Sokovia was attacked, and I want the people responsible for that to pay for what they did.” He watched as several emotions crossed Stark’s face: guilt, anger, fear. Relief? “I understand that you wish to protect your teammates, but the information I have might change that.”

Stark said nothing as he appeared to consider it. “I was not involved with the whole Hydra thing,” he finally said.

“Yes, I am aware.” It had been incredibly idiotic and short-sighted of Rogers to release all of Hydra and SHIELD’s information without any kind of filtering or encryption. Zemo could only imagine how many people had been killed as a result of such carelessness. Stark didn’t seem the type to do something so stupid, and with his technical expertise, it would not have been difficult to protect part of the files. Again, it was American arrogance at its finest. Zemo truly despised Captain America. “I know you are a man of your word. So I will give you the tape in good faith that you will uphold your end of the bargain. If you find I have deceived you, you are free to arrest me.” Zemo was quite sure it wouldn’t come to that. Even if it did, however, it would hardly matter. He had nothing left to live for, and he had contingency plans in place to make sure the information would be released either way.

“All right,” Stark replied. He kept a wary eye on Zemo as he reached into his jacket pocket to retrieve the flash drive in which he had recorded the video and a piece of paper. “I can be reached at this number.”

Stark hesitated in taking the offered items, but eventually reached over. “I’ll be in touch, then.”

Zemo nodded and walked away. If his guess was correct, Stark would figure out that Rogers was aware of the information contained in the video, and he would take care of destroying cover-up. And once he knew the truth about Maximoff, Zemo would deal with her himself. Without the great Captain America to defend her, it would be much easier to do so, if she was indeed somehow culpable in the tragedy that befell Sokovia and his family.

The call came two days later. Stark invited Zemo to a meeting in New York and even offered to pay for the ticket. Zemo told him he could pay himself and boarded the first available flight.

Stark Tower was quite impressive, Zemo was forced to admit. He was escorted to a conference room by a security officer. Stark entered the room only minutes later.

“Thank you for coming, Mr Zemo, and thank you for the information you shared with me,” Stark said as he sat down. There was a hard edge to him that had not been present on their previous meeting. No doubt Rogers’s betrayal had cut deep.

“Of course. If I may ask, what will happen to Rogers?”

“He’s being charged with obstruction of justice, along with Romanoff.”

Zemo smiled. “I am glad to hear it. It was a truly despicable thing to do, keeping that information from you.”

Stark grimaced. “So now it’s time for me to fulfill my part.” He slid over the same flash drive Zemo had given him. “You will find all you want there. I hope you will make as good use of it as I did with what you gave me.”
“I am sure I will.”

“A word of advice, though. Do not confront Maximoff yourself. She is dangerous and unpredictable. I’ve developed means of containing her powers, but so far I have not had enough cause to use it, not with Rogers championing her. Should that situation change, I will be more than willing to do so.”

“Thank you, Mr Stark. I will heed your words.” He stood, eager for the chance to access the information. “Also, thank you for your efforts in helping my country. I had thought, at one point, that the Avengers should be destroyed, but I see now that it is only some of them that would merit such a fate.”

“Have a nice day, Mr Zemo.”

“And you, Mr Stark. Pleasure doing business with you.” Zemo walked to the door, then turned back. “By the way, do you plan on informing the public of the exact nature and circumstances of Rogers and Romanoff’s charges?”

This time it was Stark who smiled. “Oh, yes.”

“Good. The public has a right to know who their heroes are, after all.”

The information Stark gave him was very valuable indeed. Zemo still had contacts in the Sokovian government, and it was to them that he reached out. As Stark had said, it would be foolish to confront Maximoff himself.

As soon as the president became aware of the contents of the files, he arranged a meeting with the American government to have Maximoff deported for trial as a war criminal. At this point, Rogers and Romanoff’s fall from grace was already public knowledge, and the US was eager to get rid of yet another troublesome “hero”. At Zemo’s suggestion, Stark was contacted to help ensure Maximoff would not escape. Her deportation and the reasons for it also became public knowledge. Sokovia cried out for her immediate execution.

When the Sokovia Accords were finally ratified a few days later, 156 countries signed. The world was, now more than ever, wary of so-called heroes who, they had just learned, could not be trusted. Only Stark, Colonel Rhodes and Vision remained trustworthy in the public’s eyes, especially when the true circumstances of Ultron’s creation came to light. Wilson, being too closely associated with Rogers, was dismissed as a possible candidate for the New Avengers.

It might not have been Zemo’s initial plan, but he was nevertheless pleased with the end result. The guilty parties were dealt with and no innocents were harmed.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Short chapter this time. Hope you enjoy it anyway. :)

78. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled, taldragon)

“What if this panel sends us somewhere we don’t think we should go? What if there’s somewhere we need to go and they don’t let us? We may not be perfect but the safest hands are still our own.” Rogers said, as if that was the end of the discussion.

Rhodey looked at him and the rest of the team around the table. Rogers, Wilson and Maximoff didn’t seem to understand the situation at all. It shouldn’t have been surprising, yet somehow it was. The writing had been on the wall for a while, but maybe Rhodey just hadn’t wanted to see it. Maybe he’d wanted to keep believing in Captain America, the hero he had grown up with. However, that was no longer possible. Those rose-colored glasses had finally come off.

“You’re joking, right?” he asked, staring at Rogers dead in the eyes. “Safest hands? This whole thing is precisely because the world doesn’t feel safe. They are, in fact, fucking terrified. Lagos, Johannesburg, Washington, New York, Sokovia… Did you not hear a word Ross said?” He saw the face Rogers made and continued. “Yeah, I might not like the guy, but that doesn’t mean we can dismiss everything he says. Over 30 people died in Lagos. People want to know why. Why, Rogers? Why were you there? Why did those people die?”

Rogers scowled. “We had to stop Hydra.”

“Yeah, sure, but at what cost? And do people even know that? ‘Cause I’m pretty sure they don’t. The Nigerian government had no idea what you were doing in their country, since you didn’t bother telling anyone about your so-called mission. As far as they were concerned, you invaded their country, blew stuff up and killed their people for no good reason. So they want answers. They want assurances that it won’t happen again. And they have every right to. For them, your hands are as far from safe as they can possibly be. You said we’re giving up if we don’t take responsibility for our actions, but all I hear is you refusing to take responsibility. Refusing to listen to the people who are telling you that the way things have been done is not okay. How dare you ignore that? How dare you ignore the death and destruction you brought to their doorstep? How dare you sit there at the top of your high horse and tell the world to fuck off ‘cause you’ll just do whatever you want? Who the fuck do you think you are? Who died and made you god?”

There was silence in the room after his outburst. Rogers had a mulish look on his face, as had Maximoff, but Wilson at least seemed to have listened.

“And your answer is to make the Avengers government lackeys?” Rogers asked in a condescending tone that grated on Rhodey’s nerves.

“And first of all, the UN is not a government, so that’s ridiculous. I’m talking about accountability, Rogers, about listening to what the world is saying and reevaluating the way you operate. Why wasn’t Vision and I told about this mission? Why wasn’t Hill? If you are going to act in a way that could potentially endanger lives, you bet your ass people want a say in it. That’s how it works with
the police, with the military, with any kind of job that deals with human lives. And I find it frankly
disturbing that you don’t seem to understand that.”

“I understand fine. I understand that things go wrong and people want someone to blame.”

“Oh, you mean like how you blamed Tony for Ultron even though it wasn’t his fault? So it’s fine for
people – and you – to blame other people, but it’s not okay when you’re the one getting blamed?” he
challenged. “I have yet to see you take responsibility for anything but you sure are quick to point
fingers away from yourself. How about DC and the info dump? You didn’t even show up for the
hearing. And once again you refuse to listen. Do you know what’s gonna happen? No one will trust
you anymore, if anyone still does. The Avengers will be synonymous with death and destruction. Is
that what you want?”

“That’s ridiculous. People know we are here to protect them.”

Jesus, it was like talking to a brick wall. “People? What people? The people you killed in Lagos?
The families of those people? The agents who got burned and lost their lives and families? If you
think they trust you, you’re delusional.”

“Wait, wait. What are you talking about? What agents that got killed?” Wilson asked.

Rhodey could only stare at him. “Are you kidding me? When you idiots decided to dump all of
SHIELD’s files on the internet for anyone to see, what did you think would happen? A lot of agents
were killed when their personal information became known, along with their families.”

“What?” Wilson turned to Rogers. “You released all SHIELD’s info? Not just about Hydra?” he
looked appropriately horrified, but Rhodey wasn’t impressed. How could Wilson not have known
that?

Before Rogers could come up with some stupid explanation for his actions, Rhodey got the
conversation back on track. “The point is, people can’t trust the Avengers – us – unless we are
willing to be accountable for our actions. So this” he pointed to the Accords “isn’t a request. It’s a
necessity. You don’t want to sign, fine, then you’re out. But if you want to keep doing this job, then
you owe it to the people you claim to protect to listen to them and take some fucking responsibility.”
He turned to Romanoff. “You know, instead of telling the world you’re just too special and they
can’t do without you. Guess what? They can, and they will.”

She looked down at that, though Rhodey couldn’t tell if she was actually contrite or just pretending
to be. His gaze went to Wilson next. The man was watching Rogers with confusion. Good. The
rose-colored glasses are coming off for him as well. Maximoff was harder to read; she was another
one Rhodey didn’t trust. Truthfully, he hoped her visa would be revoked so she’d get deported back
to Sokovia. And good riddance.

“Okay,” Wilson said after an uncomfortable silence. “Explain this to me again.”

Rogers’s phone beeped and he stood up. “I gotta go.”

“What? Hell, no! Sit your ass back down!” Rhodey was completely out of patience with that moron.
“We aren’t finished here.”

Rogers, Wilson and Maximoff looked at Rhodey with incredulous expressions, as if they couldn’t
believe he’d talk that way to Captain America. Well, tough shit. Even if Rogers was an actual
Captain (which he wasn’t), Rhodey was still a goddamned Colonel (a rank he had earned through
hard work), which trumped Captain any day.
“I need to–” Rogers started, but Rhodey cut him off with his best commanding voice.

“Whatever it is can wait. This is important and we have to talk about it. Sit down!”

The look on Rogers’s face was close to that of a spoiled child being told he had to eat his vegetables. He even crossed his arms for maximum effect. Rhodey had to fight not to roll his eyes. This is not the time, he reminded himself. I have to get these idiots to listen. So he got to it, explaining it in as simple terms as he could manage. By the end, Wilson said he was willing to sign it. Rogers and Maximoff were still reluctant, no doubt having realized that doing so would mean coming under the spotlight of a possible investigation.

“If you have any concerns,” Rhodey said to Rogers, “why don’t you come to Vienna and talk to the Panel? If you show a willingness to listen” which you haven’t so far went unsaid “they may take it into account.”

Romanoff jumped in to say that having a hand on the wheel was the best way to make this a good thing for them. “Rhodes is right that we need to win the public’s trust back.” The words were right, yet Rhodey didn’t trust them. Romanoff wasn’t stupid, and she knew the way the wind was blowing; of course she’d jump in to make sure her ass was covered.

“What about me?” Maximoff asked. “Do I get to go?”

“You need to stay here. Your visa is up in the air right now, so you shouldn’t leave the country – they might not let you back. Hell, you shouldn’t leave the Compound, not until the worst of the protests die down,” Tony explained, speaking for the first time in a while.

Rogers turned on Tony with a displeased scowl. “So, what? You’re keeping Wanda prisoner?”

“Are you deaf? Or do you not understand English?” He looked around the table. “Can anyone explain to Steve here what I just said, since he seems to be having hearing problems today?”

Vision promptly began to elaborate on something that should have been blatantly obvious to anyone with half a brain. Wilson – and even Romanoff – was looking more and more uncomfortable with how Rogers kept missing the point. Rhodey couldn’t really tell anymore if the man was truly that dumb or if he was being purposefully difficult to avoid giving in and admitting he was wrong. Neither option was very good. If the Avengers continued after this and Rogers signed the Accords, Rhodey would insist in putting him through an evaluation and remove him from command, ’cause he was clearly the worst person for the job of leader of the Avengers.

“And if I sign, I will get to stay here and be an Avenger?” Maximoff asked, looking from Vision to Rhodey to Rogers.

“And if I sign, I will get to stay here and be an Avenger?” Maximoff asked, looking from Vision to Rhodey to Rogers.

“Maybe,” Rhodey replied, not wanting to make empty promises – and not wanting her to think that there would be no consequence. “It will depend on the result of the inquest.” She started to protest so Rhodey continued. “You did try to defuse the bomb, I know. That will be taken into consideration. In any case, you weren’t in charge of the mission,” he added, with a sideways glance at Rogers. If anyone was going to be crucified for Lagos, it would not – should not – be the rookie who was just doing what she was told. Much as Rhodey disliked Maximoff, the disaster in Lagos was not on her. “You will need to prove you have better control of your powers, though.”

She nodded, seemingly satisfied that it wasn’t really her ass on the line.

“So we’re in agreement about signing?”

Everyone except Rogers said yes.
“I don’t like this,” Rogers insisted. “It reeks of control.”

This time Rhodey did roll his eyes. “That’s because it is. It’s about the world having some control over a bunch of super-powered people with the potential to cause a great deal of harm. And if you sign and later don’t want to do something, you can always refuse,” he said scathingly. “Signing doesn’t mean you give up your free will. You’ll be allowed to quit at any time, I’m sure.”

After that, they all dispersed. A couple of days later, Rogers attended Peggy Carter’s funeral in London and then accompanied Romanoff and Tony to Vienna. The building was bombed, killing King T’Chaka of Wakanda and severely injuring many people, including Rogers. While he was in the hospital with Wilson keeping an eye on him, a UN Counter Terrorist task force, with aid from Tony and Rhodey, managed to capture the Winter Soldier, who was suspected of being the bomber. Rhodey made sure to tell Wilson to not let Rogers know anything about his friend being involved, since Rogers had already proven that he could not keep his head when Barnes was involved.

Prince T’Challa tried to attack Barnes when he arrived at the UN facility in Berlin, but he was no match for Iron Man and War Machine. He was deported back to his country shortly afterwards.

A man named Zemo attempted to break into the facility, but was caught and killed by security. They later discovered he was the one responsible for the bombing, as well as the murder of a Dr Broussard, a UN psychologist.

Barnes was sent to a psychiatric facility for treatment. The Accords were ratified with a new set-up for the Avengers, with Rhodey in charge and Captain America and Scarlet Witch, who had failed their psych eval, excluded.

79. (prompt by FictionWriter09)

Wanda waited until Vision was distracted with something else to slip away from the Compound. She was a free woman and she could come and go as she pleased; she had done nothing wrong, after all – as Steve had said, sometimes you just couldn’t save everyone. After thinking about their conversation for a while, Wanda had realized that Vision had been trying to manipulate her, no doubt at Stark’s orders, and she’d be damned if she let that murderer interfere with her life again.

The store was not very far, only a twenty-minute walk. She walked in, selected the ingredients she needed and got to the cashier to pay for her purchases. The woman at the counter gave her a dirty look which Wanda ignored.

When she exited the store, she noticed that a small crowd had gathered and they seemed to be waiting for her.

“Murderer!” someone shouted.

“Go back to Sokovia! No one wants you here, witch!” someone else yelled.

Wanda narrowed her eyes at the people around and squared her shoulders. She would not be intimidated by this riff-raff; she was a hero.

“Leave me alone,” she said, pushing past a large man that tried to stand in her way.

“We don’t want terrorists in our town. Go back to your own country,” the man said as he grabbed her arm.

“I’m not a terrorist!” She hissed, yanking her arm free. “I’m an Avenger. You should be grateful. I saved you all from Ultron.”
“Bullshit!” a woman cried. “You helped Ultron. I saw an interview with Helen Cho. She said you and your terrorist brother helped Ultron murder people. You’re no hero. You’re just a terrorist and a murderer!”

Everyone began shouting at once. *How dare they?* Wanda thought. *After all I did, all I lost, this is what I get?* “Get away from me!” But they didn’t. They kept on yelling and calling her names. *I don’t have to take this. I’m better than these pathetic people.* Her hands glowed red and the people closest to her – those who had dared to touch her – started to scream in terror. As they scattered like frightened mice, Wanda smiled to herself. No, she would not be pushed around by anyone anymore.

The Compound was eerily quiet when she returned. “Vision? Where are you?” she called. There was no answer. A sense of foreboding started to form in her stomach. Had Vision been attacked too? What had happened? “Vision? Vision!” She ran through the corridors and floors, getting increasingly frantic, until she finally found him coming up from the lower levels.

“Vision! There you are. I was worried.” She smiled, but his expression didn’t change or soften as it usually did around her. Something was wrong.

“You went out,” he said stiffly.

“Yes, to the store.” She held up the bags she was still carrying, having foregone putting them down in her haste to find him.

“I told you to stay here. I explained to you why it was necessary. You did not listen.”

Wanda rolled her eyes. “I’m not a child, Viz. I just went to the store. It’s not a big deal.”

“How could he know that? “I was only defending myself. They attacked *me* first.”

“They did not attack you, not physically. They were merely unpleasant. You, on the other hand, used your powers on innocent civilians. Three people are in the hospital as a result of your actions.”

“I didn’t… That’s not what happened. I just wanted them to leave me alone!”

“Someone filmed the entire incident and posted it on YouTube for the world to see. Cops are on the way to arrest you as we speak.”

“What?” That was when she heard it: sirens. No! She would not be cowered. She had not escaped Sokovia to end up in an American prison.

She let the bags from the store fall on the floor and gathered her power in preparation to fight to defend herself. The moment she took her eyes off Vision, he attacked, grabbing her from behind and forcing her hands down.

“Get off me!” she shouted, outraged by his betrayal. As hard as she tried, however, she could not break out of his hold. Her powers burned through her hands, yet Vision wasn’t affected.

“I was wrong about you, Miss Maximoff. I thought you had regretted your violent actions of the past. Cease struggling and surrender.” There was no more warmth in his voice, only anger.

Wanda screamed and thrashed to no avail. After a while, she felt herself growing tired and lethargic until consciousness left her completely.
In Berlin, Steve, Bucky and Sam stood alone against Tony, Rhodey, Vision and Natasha.

“What did you do to Wanda and Clint, Tony?” Steve asked.

“Nothing. They were both arrested after attacking innocent people.”

“Wanda is just a kid!” Steve protested. Tony rolled his eyes and activated the holographic interface to show Steve the video of the attacks. “You were supposed to help her!”

“Vision told her to stay put. It’s no one’s fault she refused to listen.”

Bucky blanched when he saw the red mist in Wanda’s hands and the way people screamed and clutched their heads, eyes wide in terror.

“She’s Hydra?” he asked, turning to Steve in horror and disbelief.

“No! She… she was misguided and used, just like you.” In the video, Wanda smiled in satisfaction as she left the screaming crowd behind her.

Bucky growled. “She is nothing like me.” He brought his human arm back and punched Steve square in the face, sending him tumbling backwards a good few meters. Then he turned to the Avengers and surrendered.

Steve ended up in the Raft after he was convicted of multiple crimes. Sam went to a different prison. Wanda was deported to Sokovia and executed. Clint made a deal for house arrest and community service instead of prison term, on the condition that he stayed retired. Zemo was apprehended before getting to Siberia. He tried to fight his way out and was killed by the Russian police. The Avengers continued on under the Accords.

Tony sat at a table in dilapidated old warehouse serving as a SHIELD office. There were multiple screens showing recent events surrounding the Expo, Vanko’s demise and the media storm that had resulted from it. It was, perhaps, meant to be impressive, yet Tony felt it was anything but.

With a few days to think – and the threat of death no longer hanging above his head like the executioner’s axe – Tony had become less and less impressed with SHIELD’s methods. Pepper and Rhodey’s reprimand of his keeping his health status a secret from them had also served to remind him that he had friends who genuinely cared about him and his well being, and SHIELD was not one of them. In fact, SHIELD had done nothing but lie and manipulate him to their own ends. Well, Tony was done dancing to SHIELD’s tune and accepting their underhanded methods.

One of the files on the table – no doubt left there on purpose so he could snoop around and find out exactly what they wanted him to find – was a preliminary report for the Avengers Initiative, the super secret boy band Fury was trying to put together. Tony looked at it and contemplated whether he really wanted to put his lot in with such unscrupulous and amoral people.

Fury arrived and put a hand on the file. “I don’t think I want you looking at that,” he said as he sat down in front of Tony, in a way designed to pique Tony’s curiosity. Tony managed to refrain from rolling his eyes at the obviousness of the maneuver. Palladium poisoning really had dulled his brain if he hadn’t noticed SHIELD’s complete lack of subtlety before. “I’m not sure it pertains to you anymore.”

This time Tony did snort a little, but he let Fury continue. He was actually curious now as to how the director planned to play this now.
“No. This, on the other hand, is agent Romanoff’s assessment of you,” Fury said, handing over a file. Tony thought about not taking it – he didn’t like being handed things and Fury knew it – yet let it go. The sooner he could get this over with the better.


For a while Tony said nothing, considering the situation. He kept his eyes on the file in front of him rather than on Fury.

So this was how they wanted to go. Disparage him in order to manipulate him into compliance by exploring his insecurities and his desire to prove them wrong. By denying him, they wanted him to want to be accepted, to want to be included. Well, they were going to be disappointed.

“Hmm, this seems… a bit problematic,” he said, still not looking up. “How can you approve me and not approve me?”

“At this juncture, we’d like to only use you as a consultant.”

A consultant. As in, he would give them everything and get nothing in return except for scraps of recognition and disdain. What a lovely proposal.

He finally raised his head to look at Fury, no trace of warmth or mirth in his face anymore.

“First of all, you can’t afford me. My time is extremely expensive, you know, as is my expertise. Second, this report” he waved the file he still held “is the biggest pile of crap I have ever had the misfortune of reading. If this is the extent of the famous Black Widow’s skills in profiling, I shudder to think what your less capable agents are like. So you either don’t see how utterly incompetent she is – which does not say nice things about your own abilities – or you do know and you’re trying to manipulate me. I’m not sure which is worse, really. While I detest manipulation, if there is one thing I absolutely can’t stand, is incompetence and stupidity.”

He stood up, dropping the file on the table. “Tell Romanoff that if I ever see her anywhere near me or mine again, she – and by extension SHIELD – will have a lovely law suit in her hands.” He gave Fury his sharpest shark smile, enjoying the way the man’s eye had widened at his miscalculation, and walked out.

One more bullet dodged, Tony thought. He wasn’t going to waste his new chance of life with the likes of SHIELD. SHIELD might need Iron Man, but Iron Man sure as hell didn’t need SHIELD.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Hey guys. It's my birthday today, so I'm gifting you all with a new chapter to celebrate. :)

I started this story with 2 chapters and 4k words and now, a year later, there are 21 chapters and almost 100k words. Wow. Thanks so much to everyone who has contributed with comments, prompts and overall support.

Sadly, I've had to turn on comment moderation because of an annoying troll (or maybe more than one) that's been going around Team Iron Man stories being obnoxious. Honestly, I don't get those people. *sigh*

81. (prompt by WillJ)

Natasha watched Steve approach Wanda after their training session. They were too far away for her to hear the words said, but by now she could guess what they would be. Wanda would give some half-hearted excuse for her poor performance and Steve would accept it and tell her it was fine, that she was doing her best and that was enough. Though Natasha would be the first to admit she was not an expert on nurturing behavior, it seemed to her that Steve was taking the coddling rather too far. For someone who had grown up knowing the bitter (and painful) consequences of failure, the way Wanda was being treated grated on Nat’s nerves. And clearly it wasn’t working. Wanda had shown no improvement whatsoever in the nearly three months she’d been an Avenger. Why should she bother, when Steve seemed perfectly happy to let everything slide? Wanda’s powers were impressive (and dangerous), but that meant nothing if she couldn’t control or use them effectively.

Natasha had tried talking to Steve about his too soft approach, but the man had brushed off her concern. “She’s lost her brother,” he’d said, “she needs time.” Everyone has lost someone, Nat thought to herself, it doesn’t mean you get to mope. Whatever she said fell on deaf ears, however. Sam was content to do whatever Steve said, while Vision was clearly lost. Rhodes spent most of his time doing whatever it was he did for the Air Force and was hardly ever there. Thor, Clint and Bruce were gone. And Stark… Stark didn’t return her calls anymore. In short, Nat had no allies on this.

When Wanda had left with a satisfied smile on her face (that Nat wanted to beat off of her), Natasha once again attempted to get through to Steve.

“Steve, Wanda still doesn’t have a good grasp on her powers.” Nat was beginning to wonder if Wanda was even interested in learning more. “Let me try working with her for a while,” she suggested, knowing she could give Wanda the proper motivation – or find out what the other woman was really up to.

“Nat, she’s doing her best.”

“That’s not good enough,” she countered. “If something happens we’ll need everyone in top shape. We can’t afford to slack off.” She narrowed her eyes. “Especially someone with her past.” Natasha knew well the value of second chances, of wiping the red off one’s ledger, which was why she had agreed to back Steve’s wishes to have Wanda on the team, but that meant hard work, not just
cruising by without a care in the world as Wanda had been doing so far.

Steve gave her a look. “What’s that supposed to mean?” he asked, a slight edge to his voice.

“I mean her Hydra past.” Natasha was not the type to beat around the bush and sugarcoat things.

“She was misguided and used. It wasn’t her fault. She deserves a chance.”

It was on the tip of Nat’s tongue to say she didn’t disagree with that when she caught the shifty, almost guilty glint in his eyes. Natasha replayed the sentence in her head, searching for what she had missed. Once she was looking for it, it wasn’t hard to figure it out. Bucky. It wasn’t him; that was what Steve had said when talking about his friend and the Winter Soldier. It wasn’t his fault. Excuse, justification and absolution.

Wanda’s a trail run, Natasha realized. If we all buy that she’s innocent and deserves a chance, it will be that much easier for Steve to get Barnes in once he’s found. When she had first met him, Natasha would not have credited Steve with that much cunning and manipulation, but now… It seemed so obvious and she didn’t know what to think anymore.

Trying not to let her jumbled thoughts show through, Natasha sighed. “All right.”

Steve visibly relaxed and smiled. “I’m sure everything will work out, Nat. It always does.” He walked out, leaving Natasha just standing there. Things work out for him because other people do all the work.

Steve is not the man I thought he was, she concluded later that evening, sitting alone in her bedroom. He doesn’t care what Wanda did, whether she’s really sorry or not. All he cares about is setting a precedent for Barnes. She remembered her experience with Wanda’s powers, the fear and hopelessness she felt. Steve is willing to ignore that to further his own agenda. During the DC incident, he had done the same, Natasha realized. He had refused to harm Barnes, even if it meant letting millions die. He hadn’t cared about the Info Dump and the people who had been hurt or killed as a result of it, because he would not be personally affected (and she hadn’t thought the whole thing through until it was too late to do anything but watch the fallout, so all she could do was plow through and act like she was in control). It might even have helped him, if what Hydra did to Barnes was revealed – it would garner sympathy for the poor tortured soldier.

Natasha had always prided herself on her manipulation skills and her ability to understand those around her, and now she was forced to see she had been completely wrong about Steve. What else could she have been wrong about?

Stark.

She had thought too much of Steve and perhaps too little of Stark. Had she really allowed her preconceived ideas about both of them to cloud her eyes to the men they truly were? Natasha thought back to her interactions with them. Steve was uncompromising and stubborn; he refused to accept anything he didn’t want to and listened to no one unless they agreed with him. He used violence and intimidation to get his way when a simple argument wasn’t enough, always eager for a fight even when there were better ways to deal with a problem. Stark was flashy and obnoxious, but in the end he had gotten the job done each and every time. Was he really as bad as Natasha had first assumed? Neither Potts nor Rhodes were idiots; they would not have been friends with the man for so long if there wasn’t something there, something that perhaps she had missed. Something he had hidden away behind masks she hadn’t seen through.

Steve had been pushing Stark away ever since DC, she realized. Ever since he had learned what had
happened to Howard and Maria Stark. He had made no effort whatsoever to convince Stark to stay after Ultron; on the contrary, he had continuously brought up the murdering robot. “What had he been thinking?” Steve kept saying in a disapproving manner. It was subtle, so subtle that Natasha hadn’t noticed it – because she hadn’t wanted to see it? She should have – it was the sort of thing she was used to doing: manipulation, gaslighting, turning the others against Stark. To keep him from discovering the truth? From questioning what they were doing on the Bucky-finding missions?

*Had* Stark created Ultron? She had accepted it at the time, yet now… It didn’t seem likely, did it? Stark might be arrogant, but he did know his stuff. He’d created Jarvis and other AIs, and none of them had ever turned homicidal. If the scepter had taken control of the program Stark had created, then it was not really his fault, just as it wasn’t her fault that S.H.I.E.L.D. had been infiltrated by Hydra.

*I am compromised*, Natasha concluded. *I have to do something, or I’ll end up with nothing.* She had already lost S.H.I.E.L.D., she could not afford to lose the Avengers as well. The way things were going, it would only be a matter of time before everything went to shit. Steve was only worried about Barnes, and he was going to run the Avengers into the ground if something didn’t change. They were already on thin ice after D.C. and Sokovia and Steve seemed oblivious.

The next day Natasha went to Stark Tower. She had no idea whether Stark would even see her – and she couldn’t really blame him if he didn’t – but she had to try.

Potts was in the room Natasha was admitted to – a conference room rather than Stark’s apartment – with an angry look on her face. Stark was seated next to her, expression neutral.

“What do you want?” he asked, no friendliness or warmth. It shouldn’t have been surprising, yet the thinly veiled hostility still took her a bit aback. *Guess I’ve gotten too used to Stark bending over backwards for the rest of us.* That was clearly not gonna happen anymore.

Natasha had decided on the truth, much as the thought of making herself so vulnerable frightened her. It was the only thing that could salvage the situation. If she lied, Stark would find out eventually, and then her chances would be well and truly over. It had occurred to her last night that Stark’s enemies didn’t tend to survive, and she didn’t want to be on that list. She could only hope she wasn’t too late already.

“I have something I need to tell you.” She took a deep breath. “Many things, actually.”

“And why should we believe a word you say?” Potts asked, disdain clear on her face. She obviously had not forgiven Natasha for the palladium incident – or for any number of other things.

“Because I want to save the Avengers.”

Stark scoffed. “And what does this have to do with me? I mean, I’m not really Avengers material, am I?” There was a challenge in his tone that she’d never heard before. No, Stark wouldn’t accept being jerked around anymore.

It was only now that Natasha really noticed how much they had pushed the man away, how much damage had already been done. And not just to Stark. Bruce was god knew where, and wanted nothing to do with them (with her). The Avengers weren’t a team, they were Steve’s gang. The recognition left her cold and she had to resist the urge to flinch from it. *What have I done?*

“I know I’ve given you no reason to trust me, but hear me out. I want… I need to fix this.”

So she started talking, telling them everything she had come to understand about the team and Steve. She told them about the Winter Soldier and the Starks’ murder. She didn’t apologize for not having
told him before because she knew she wouldn’t be believed. She had not cared about Stark then, had not considered he had a right to know. Natasha had always been aware of her… emotional deficiencies, but she had never let it bother her. She was what she was, and would make no apologies for it. Now she could see how it was… a liability.

They almost threw her out at that point, but she kept right on talking. “You can hate me all you want, Stark. But… Steve can’t be allowed to keep leading the Avengers. He’s… compromised.” As am I.

By the way his eyes narrowed, she knew Stark understood. “I don’t… I don’t know how to be a good person,” she admitted. “I thought I did, I thought I knew what I had to do, at least, but I don’t. I don’t know anything anymore.” SHIELD, Steve. She had trusted the wrong people, had failed to see some very obvious signs. She didn’t break eye contact. “I’m not equipped to make these kinds of decisions. I thought Steve was. I was wrong. You… you can. You know right and wrong. You… you’re a hero.” It pained her a bit to have to acknowledge that she had been wrong about him. About so many things.

“Flattery won’t get you anywhere,” Stark said, still angry.

“It’s not flattery. It’s… I was wrong about you. I wronged you. I’m… I’m trying to fix it. I’m trying to make it right.” How much more red had she put on her ledger by being blind to her own faults and biases? (A lot.) And she had called him egotistical.

“You know you won’t just walk away from this,” Potts interjected. “You’ve just admitted to deliberately concealing evidence of a crime, you have lied and manipulated Tony for your own gain, and allied yourself with… despicable people.” Natasha knew Potts didn’t mean only SHIELD (or even Hydra) this time.

Natasha sighed. “Yes, I know that. I… I know you don’t trust me, but I can still be useful.”


Yes, those were the things Natasha was good at. Those were the skills she had always prided herself on. They were necessary. Important, even. Or so she had told herself. The Red Room had said so. As had SHIELD – Hydra. What was it that Loki had said during the invasion? You lie and kill in the service of liars and killers. How could she have thought to wipe out her ledger by doing the exact same things? Changing her targets didn’t make her a better person. Who knew now who had really been calling the shots on all those missions she had completed. Had she made anything better? Had she redeemed herself at all? Or had she simply been deceiving herself all these years?

“I… I don’t know anything else,” she whispered, casting her gaze down. She would not apologize for who she was, but that didn’t mean she could not change. Grow. She didn’t have to be what the Red Room had made her. She had a choice. Right now, she could choose to do the right thing. And for once do it for the right reasons. Not for herself, not to gain something and further her own cause and survival, but because it was right.

“I’ll accept the consequences,” she finally said, looking up at them once again. “I want to do the right thing. Help me.”

Potts and Stark looked at each other, a silent conversation through glance alone.

“All right,” Stark said.

Natasha was taken to one of the Tower’s reinforced cells. A lawyer showed up to talk to her later that day. The woman explained that Stark had hired her to represent Natasha, who was being charged with several crimes. There was a part of Natasha that rebelled at the idea of being charged
with anything – she had only been doing what she’d been told, after all – but the biggest part understood. She had been wrong, and now she had to pay for it. The days of walking away and ignoring the destruction she left behind were over. If she wanted any chance at all of being better, she would have to accept it. Ms Collins also said she would arrange for a psychologist to speak to her. Again, Natasha’s instinctual response was to scoff, and again she had to stop and remember her promise to herself. The Red Room had tried to take her humanity from her, making her see emotion as a weakness. Emotions could make one weak, that was true, yet it could also make one stronger. Stark was proof of that. So Natasha only nodded and said she’d do her best to cooperate.

A few days later she learned that Steve and Wanda had been arrested. Steve was charged with as many crimes as Natasha herself, except Stark had left him to find a lawyer by himself. Wanda attempted to escape from the facility she was taken to and killed four guards before she was subdued. Vision was then able to remove her powers. Wanda was charged for her actions during the Ultron incident, including setting the Hulk loose on Johannesburg. Without Steve to defend her, Natasha didn’t see the little witch getting away with it. It also became quite clear that Wanda wasn’t sorry at all about anything she had done. Natasha had, again, seen what she wanted to see by comparing Wanda with herself.

Steve Rogers lost all favor with the world when his defense consisted on saying that poor Wanda was innocent and Stark was the big bad who was trying to take revenge on him for kicking him out of the Avengers. It was the most extreme case of revisionist history Natasha had ever seen. When Steve’s concealment of the Starks’ assassination was discovered, the man continued to shoot himself in the foot by insisting that Bucky was innocent (even with surveillance evidence to the contrary) and not showing the slightest bit of concern for the victims. Conspiracy theories began to circulate that the ice had damaged Rogers’s brain and turned him into a psychopath. Natasha didn’t know if it was the ice, but there was clearly something wrong with the guy. How did I not see it? she kept asking herself.

Bruce Banner returned from wherever he’d gone after Wanda was convicted and sentenced to death. He stopped by Natasha’s prison cell to talk to her at her request. Natasha had plead guilty to the charges against her and gotten a lighter sentence after Collins had argued that, due to her Red Room upbringing, Natasha had never quite learned to distinguish right from wrong and had a distorted view of the world, one which SHIELD and Hydra had taken advantage of. Natasha’s cooperation with the doctors treating her – and a good word from Stark, who had testified that Natasha had gone to him and confessed to her crimes voluntarily – had earned her some sympathy. Not with everyone, of course, but it was enough to make it possible for her to see an achievable parole someday.

“You wanted to see me,” Bruce said, expression guarded. He didn’t trust her.

“I wanted to apologize for… triggering the Hulk against your wishes. My doctor has explained to me that what I did was wrong, and why.” It was hard to see the doctor’s point sometimes; the Hulk had been needed, how could it have been wrong to get him? The idea of consent and bodily autonomy had been difficult for Natasha to grasp, since she was used to seeing the body (hers and everyone else’s) as a weapon or tool to be used as needed. It was only when the doctor had used her own experience at Wanda’s hand – and what the Red Room had forced on her – that Natasha had truly understood why what she’d done had been wrong. Saying something was necessary did not make it right, she’d been told.

“You used me.”

“Yes.” There was no point denying it. “I don’t… I have never known how to relate to people any other way. I’m trying to… learn new things. It hasn’t been easy.” It was, in fact, perhaps the hardest thing she had ever done in her life.
He looked at her steadily, as if trying to gauge her sincerity. “I guess I should have realized you weren’t the type of person I could trust.”

It hurt a little to hear that. Natasha wasn’t sure now how she felt about Bruce, if her getting close to him had been done out of a genuine desire for his company and friendship or just because she felt more comfortable around him if she had a way to control him. Her inability to understand her own emotions was something that she was only beginning to acknowledge.

“I’m sorry,” she said. It might not change anything, but her doctors had insisted that verbalizing her regret was important, not just to herself but to those she had wronged. She thought about Steve, utterly uncompromising in his selfishness and lack of care for others. She thought of how he’d lost everything, and she didn’t want to end up like him.

Bruce nodded. “I’m glad you’re getting some help, at least. And I appreciate the apology.” He sighed. “But I don’t think I can forgive you, or be around you. Good bye, Natasha. And good luck.” Then he was gone.

Once again alone in her cell, Natasha wondered how things would have played out if she hadn’t gone to Stark that day, if she hadn’t realized who Steve really was. Even if she hadn’t ended up in prison, she didn’t think she would have been in a better position. She might have been physically free, but she would have still been imprisoned by her own ego and her own hubris, and it would have meant her downfall sooner or later. It was better this way, she concluded. At least she was on a path of her own choice, with some hope for the future.

(AN: This wasn’t really supposed to be a character study on Natasha, but… well, there you have it. I’m not sure she’d really be that self-reflexive and willing to put herself in this position, though. I guess I thought I’d try to do something a bit different with her.

Also, I keep trying to write short snippets and they keep ending up way longer than I expected. I hope you guys don’t mind.)

82. (prompt by TooLazyToWriteOne, MayaM, Xythia, Andria, tamani17, ConArtist718)

After the invasion was over, Fury made them all attend a press conference to, as he said, “garner people’s support for the Avengers”. Steve thought it was stupid – they had saved the world, of course they already had the public’s support, how could they not? – but he had to go. Fury had told them to let Stark do most of the talking, since he had experience in dealing with the press. That had also not sat well with Steve – he was the leader of the Avengers, after all – yet once again he was ignored because Stark simply started speaking and took control of the whole thing before Steve could do anything. The others (minus Thor, who had returned to Asgard with Loki) didn’t seem to mind Stark taking charge.

Finally, Stark wrapped things up and opened the floor to questions. Fury had warned them all to stick to what they had been told to say, and to evade all other questions that might be, in Fury’s terms, “better left unanswered”. In other words, Fury wanted them to lie, and Stark was, of course, perfectly okay with that.

The first one was to Banner, about whether he had the Hulk under control, to which he replied that yes he did without elaborating much.

There were a few more, mostly directed at Stark, and then someone addressed Steve.

“Mr Rogers, we have been told that you are in fact the same Steve Rogers who fought in World War II.” Stark had explained about him having been preserved in the ice already. “As I understand it from
our historical records, you never really had the opportunity to undertake a great deal of training back then, because of the war. So, will you be doing that now in order to have the proper training to lead a team like the Avengers?"

“I already have plenty of training,” Steve replied before anyone else could say anything. “I fought the Nazis in World War II.”

“Yes, but that was 70 years ago,” the same reporter said. “The world has changed considerably since then.”

“I know everything I need to know,” Steve said, glaring at the journalist. How dare this man imply that he didn’t know what he was doing? He’d led the Howling Commandos back in the war, he had plenty of experience.

“What Steve is trying to say,” Stark interjected, “is that of course he will be getting up to date with current military practices and the world at large.” He smiled at the crowd. “That’s all for now, folks. Thanks for coming. If you have any further questions, you can direct them to the new Avengers’ PR team.”

Fury was waiting for them when they went up to the conference room in Stark Tower they’d been using to coordinate things. “What the fuck was that, Rogers?” he asked as soon as they walked in. “You know everything you need to know? Are you out of your fucking mind?”

“Now you’ll definitely need to get that training,” Stark said, sitting in one of the chairs with his feet up on the table to fiddle with his phone. “I’m already getting plenty of follow up questions on that.”

“You were supposed to be on top of things, Stark,” Fury growled, glaring at Steve and Stark.

“Hey, don’t blame me. Rogers there ran his mouth before I could do anything.”

“I told the truth!” Steve said, annoyed by the turn the conversation had taken.

Fury shook his head and sat in one of the chairs. “I am too old for this shit,” he muttered. “Stark, use your Army contacts and get Rogers… somewhere.”

“I wasn’t aware that I worked for you, Nicky. I’m a consultant, remember? Get your own contacts. I have other stuff to do, and this isn’t my mess.” He stood up. “So, my part is over and now I’m done. Best of luck to you lot. See you at the next apocalypse, maybe. Hey, Bruce, wanna come to the lab with me?”

Banner nodded, gave the rest of them a wave and they left.

“Fuck it,” Fury mumbled. Steve was going to reprimand him for the unnecessary language, but Fury continued before he had the chance. “All right. Barton and Romanoff, back to Headquarters. Rogers, you’ll be going back to the Army as soon as I make some calls. They can get you sorted. I don’t have the time or energy for it at the moment.”

So that was how a week later, Steve found himself in Fort Hamilton, New York. He had initially refused to go – he hated people telling him what to do – but Natasha eventually convinced him that it would be a good idea. Everyone knew who he was now, she’d said, kids grew up on stories of Captain America, and it would give him the opportunity to do something constructive with his time.

When he arrived, he expected that he would do some training exercises with the rest of the soldiers and then he might be once again be given his own team. He knew that while the big war was over, there were still US troops overseas and he could join one of them. That didn’t happen.
Colonel Reynolds was the officer in charge and he looked at Steve like he was insane when Steve asked about what his post would be.

“Mr. Rogers, before you go anywhere, you need to complete the training you didn’t finish back in ’43.”

“It’s Captain,” Steve reminded him.

“No, it’s not. Captain America was a stage name, not your actual rank. According to our records, you were only ever a Private. Now, you can become a Captain, certainly, but first you’ll need to do the required work.”

Steve opened his mouth to complain but Reynolds went on. “Also, you will need to be evaluated by one of our shrinks to determine if you are even qualified for active duty, given everything that happened to you. I know that back in the 40s soldiers’ mental health wasn’t a concern, but it is now.”

“I don’t need a doctor, I’m fine.”

“Physically, sure, but mentally? I don’t know. I’m not qualified to say one way or the other. You will report to Dr. Rivera, and we’ll proceed from there.”

No matter how much Steve argued, he couldn’t get out of it. So he talked to the doctor, and then found out it wouldn’t be a one-time thing, but that he’d have to see him regularly. Again, all his protests fell on deaf ears.

He was allowed (allowed! as if they were doing him a favor) to begin training anyway, and it sucked. Instead of being respected, the officers in charge were dismissive and disrespectful. Whenever he tried to lead the group, he was told off for it.

“Rogers,” Reynolds said two weeks into training “we have rules and you need to follow them. You are not field commander for these exercises. Maybe things were done differently in the 40s, but that shit isn’t gonna fly on my base. And for god’s sake, be careful with our equipment. If you keep breaking stuff, I’m gonna start taking it out of your salary.”

It wasn’t his fault everything was so fragile, he tried to argue, and got an unimpressed look in return.

The whole thing was a nightmare, really. Aside from getting no respect in the field, he was also expected to do reading on a bunch of boring things. He hated it all, and complained about it on his every session with Dr. Rivera, who simply told him that was how things were done now and he had to comply.

“Learning about history and current social issues is important if you want to fully function in this time,” the man kept saying.

At the end of the second month, Steve was at the end of his rope. It wasn’t just the officers trying to bully him anymore, it was all the other soldiers as well. They rolled their eyes at him whenever he started speaking and ignored him every time he tried to assert his authority – whenever he said anything, really. There was none of the admiration for Captain America Natasha had told him about. Had she lied? Had she been manipulating him, trying to get him to agree? He’d thought she was a friend!

“Rogers, just shut the hell up and do what you’re fucking told,” one of others said. “Stop acting like you’re better than the rest of us just because you were a successful lab rat decades ago. World War II is over, and it doesn’t matter what you did then. This is now, and right now you’re in the same boat as the rest of us.”
“I am not in the same boat as you,” Steve said. “I saved the world from Hydra! And from aliens!”

“Oh, fuck you!”

“Language!” God, why was everyone so crass these days? It was so irritating.

“You didn’t save the world from aliens, that was Tony Stark. Maybe you killed a few of them on the ground, but that would have meant squat if Iron Man hadn’t destroyed the fleet by flying that nuke into the portal. So just shut up.” The man shook his head. “Arrogant asshole,” he said under his breath as he started to walk away.

The others nodded and began to disperse, as if Steve wasn’t even there anymore. No, he would not be belittled by these people – people who wouldn’t even be alive if not for him and his sacrifice. Steve had had enough. He grabbed the man by the arm and yanked him back, making him yell in pain. “You think you’re better than me? We’ll see.” Steve let go of the man and took a step back before swinging his fist. The guy went down pretty quickly. “Anyone else wants to argue?” Steve said, eying the rest of the group. No one said anything. Steve left the group feeling good for having asserted himself. One could never bow down to bullies. He’d never had and he wasn’t about to start now.

Barely an hour later, Reynolds and four officers showed up at the barracks. “Rogers, you are under arrest for assault.”

“What?”

“Private Peterson has a broken nose and a concussion thanks to you, and it could have been a lot worse. That’s assault. What in god’s name were you thinking?”

“He started it! I was only defending myself!” he thought, I couldn’t let him get away with saying those things to me.

Reynolds narrowed his eyes. “I don’t give a crap who started it. This isn’t fucking kindergarten! You are under arrest.” He gestured and one of the guys with him took out a pair of handcuffs and approached.

Steve backed away and fell into a fighting stance. The man stopped.

“Rogers, if you lay a hand on any more of my people you will regret it, mark my words. Come quietly and don’t make things worse for yourself.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong! I’m Captain America! I’m a hero! You can’t do this.”

“Dear lord, you’re delusional. Stand down. I won’t tell you again.”

The soldiers (except the one with the cuffs) drew out their guns, though they kept them pointing down. Reynolds was scowling, his jaw twitching as he stared Steve in disgust.

Steve took a moment to consider his next move. Though he could, of course, win this fight, he realized that that wouldn’t help him. So he held up his arms and allowed himself to be cuffed like a criminal. This was a misunderstanding, and Steve was sure he’d be able to clear this up once he got the opportunity to actually talk to someone who wasn’t out to get him, like Fury maybe.

Fury did come to the holding facility the next day, though he wasn’t as helpful as Steve had hoped.

“Get you out of here?” the man asked, as if Steve had said the most stupid thing in the world. “Are
you serious? You attacked a fellow soldier and almost put him in a coma! You are in a world of trouble.” He sighed. “I should have listened to Stark, damn it.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Here’s what’s going to happen: a new doctor, a neurologist expert, is going to come make an assessment, and then a lawyer will explain the rest to you.”

“A lawyer?” Steve was beginning to think this was more than a misunderstanding.

“Yes, Rogers, a lawyer. Because you have been charged with a crime.” His tone was that of someone explaining something to a child, which made Steve bristle. “And I suggest you cooperate fully.”

Steve had no idea what was going on anymore. Everything about the future was strange and nothing made any sense. No one liked him, and it seemed like nothing he did was right. No one was even willing to listen to him when he explained that he had to stand up to bullies, and that he hadn’t meant to hurt Peterson (he’d just forgotten how much stronger he was now). The doctor made him undergo a bunch of tests with machines that were supposed to take pictures of his brain or something like that. There were endless questions about why he’d refused to follow orders, why he’d joined the Army in the first place – questions about before and now that Steve didn’t understand the purpose of. And all the while he was kept locked up, only going out for things the doctor wanted him to do. Steve didn’t want to admit it, but he was starting to get scared. He had no control about anything, and it felt like when he was small and weak and nobody took him seriously. It wasn’t fair that after everything he’d gone through and everything he’d lost, he’d ended up right where he started. He was supposed to be good; Erskine had said so!

When the trial came, Steve was told to let the lawyer do all the talking. He hated it, but he had no idea what else to do. So he just sat there and listened as the doctors explained that there were some anomalies in his brain or something (how could that be? Hadn’t the serum fixed everything?). The doctor said he couldn’t be sure it those had always been there or were a result of either the serum or his time in the ice. His lawyer used that to argue that Steve wasn’t in his right mind, and that he needed treatment rather than incarceration.

“Mr Rogers gave his life in the service of his country,” she said. “And now he’s ill, which isn’t his fault. He deserves the opportunity to acclimate to this new time and receive the help he so desperately needs to be, once again, a functional member of society.”

In the end, Steve was discharged from the Army for health reasons and was sent to a special medical facility to be forgotten. He hated it.

(AN: I know nothing about military practices or court procedures, so let’s go with literary license here.)

83. (prompt by Ds)

The moment Tony saw the dead Winter Soldiers still inside their pods, he knew this was a trap. The question now was who was the real target and why. As he listened to Zemo talk, his mind worked frantically to figure out how to proceed – whatever this guy wanted, Tony would do his best to not give it to him. He’d already had Friday recording everything that was going on around him both with the suit’s cameras and microphones (and he’d done the same while in the Raft to nail Ross’s ass for his multiple human rights violations), so all he had to do was keep quiet and let Zemo incriminate
himself.

Again it went back to Sokovia and revenge for the lives lost. In a couple of years, it would be survivors of Lagos and Bucharest showing up with a grudge. Things couldn’t go on like that, but apparently Steve was too stupid to understand that, to understand why the Accords were necessary. Tony had begun to realize that Steve wasn’t the guy he (the world) thought he was. Captain America didn’t care about the little guy, he only cared about his own people.

A monitor came to life and Tony directed his attention to it. “I know that road.” Tony had a really bad feeling about this, but he swore to himself he would keep his cool. This was what Zemo wanted, and Tony refused to be a pawn in some terrorist’s revenge fantasy.

Still, it wasn’t easy to maintain that resolution as he watched his parents brutally murdered by the Winter Soldier – who was standing just a few feet from him. Tony wanted to rage and cry and obliterate this whole base, but he wouldn’t. Not yet anyway. With a deep breath he called on his long experience of keeping his true thoughts and feelings hidden – buried it all deep down for the moment – and turned to face Steve, who had to have known. One more betrayal. Tony couldn’t even be surprised anymore.

“Did you know?” Tony asked, making sure the cameras had a good view of the asshole’s face. Rogers (no longer Steve) tried to dodge the question, but Tony pressed on, ignoring the crushing pain spreading through his heart (oh god, mom, dad…). “Don’t bullshit me, Rogers. Did you know?”

“Yes,” Rogers admitted. There was a part of Tony who wanted to blow his fucking head off, to wipe this traitorous bastard from the face of the Earth, but that would be too easy. And it was no doubt what Zemo was hoping for.

“How long?” he said instead. He needed a complete admission if he was going to destroy Captain America’s image forever. Rogers might survive this betrayal, but his reputation wouldn’t. He would learn exactly what happened to those who fucked with Tony Stark. He was done playing nice with people who had no respect for him. The world didn’t need these liars and traitors.

“It wasn’t Bucky’s fault–”

“How long?” Tony repeated, cutting off whatever stupid excuse was about to come out of Rogers’s mouth.

“Since SHIELD fell, but Tony, you have to understand–”

“So two years. Two years you lived in my house, used my equipment, money and resources to look for the man who killed my parents and you never thought to tell me.” There was quiet fury in his voice and eyes. Rogers took a step back, getting closer to Barnes. “My father considered you a friend, and you helped cover up his murder.” God, poor dad. He would have been crushed to know he was so utterly expendable to Rogers.

“It wasn’t Bucky!”

“And you berated me for keeping secrets while you were just sitting on this information. A bit hypocritical, don’t you think?” He cocked his head and studied the man in front of him. How could he ever have thought Rogers was a hero? He was just a selfish asshole. “So, to recap. You deliberately kept this information from me to protect my parents’ murderer and then complained that I didn’t tell you about Ultron, which had nothing whatsoever to do with you and on which you were not qualified to give an opinion anyway. Then you took on a known Hydra agent into the Avengers,
perhaps in an attempt to pave the way for your good friend the assassin here to eventually join the
team. How am I doing so far?"

“That’s not… Wanda was innocent.”

“Innocent? She murdered dozens of people and allied herself with Ultron to kill us! She fucked with
our minds!” Barnes’s eyes widened at that and he looked at Rogers in confusion. Tony pressed on,
now addressing Barnes. “Oh, you mean he didn’t tell you that? That the woman you fought beside at
the airport used to be Hydra? That her power is to mess with people’s minds? She did it to me, to
Bruce, Thor, Romanoff and even Rogers himself. He didn’t tell you? I think I’m starting to see a
pattern here.”

“What?” Barnes backed away from Rogers. “Steve, what…?”

“It’s not like that, Bucky. Wanda… she was misguided.”

“Oh, yeah, she’s a poor innocent little flower,” Tony snarled. “She attacked Vision! But you don’t
care. You just wanted her to be accepted so that Barnes would be too. Isn’t that right?”

“Bucky is innocent! Wanda… She’s changed, she’d not Hydra anymore. She deserves a chance, and
so does Bucky.”

Barnes continued to back away and Tony had to hide a smirk at the lost puppy look on Rogers’s face
as he saw his friend distancing himself.

“So all of this was about Barnes, wasn’t it?” he asked. “You attacked the Task Force officers in
Bucharest and killed people to protect an assassin. Someone you knew had murdered a… well, I
guess you didn’t really think of my father as a friend.”

“They were going to kill Bucky!”

“Except they didn’t. He’s still perfectly alive. Yet many Task Force agents are not.” Tony snapped.

“The Accords don’t–”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake! Did you even read the damn Accords? Be honest, Rogers, for once in your
life. Did you actually read the document before you decided that you didn’t need oversight? That,
how did you put it? Ah yes, the safest hands were your own?”

Rogers didn’t say anything for a moment, then he began. “I can’t trust governments with agendas–”

“So that’s a no. You didn’t read it.”

“Damn it, Steve,” Barnes muttered, shaking his head. “Punk never did like doing the reading…”

“And for the record, since you seem to be unaware, the United Nations is not a government. They do
have an agenda, of course; everyone does. Their agenda with the Accords is, among other things, to
keep people like you – like the Avengers – from invading countries whenever you feel like it and
killing people. And while we’re on the subject of agendas, how about your agenda?”

“I don’t have an agenda.”

“No? What do you call protecting your friend above all? Prioritizing his life over anyone else’s?
Lying to your teammates for him? That sounds like an agenda to me. And one that the general public
would disagree with, I think.”
“That’s not… I protect the people!”

“People!? What people?” Tony couldn’t believe the crap he was hearing now. Talk about delusion. “The citizens in Bucharest weren’t protected – on the contrary, they were endangered because of your agenda. Same for Lagos. Those people all died because of you! What were you even doing there, anyway? Oh, let me guess, you were looking for your good buddy Bucky, weren’t you? That’s why you didn’t tell anyone except your inner circle of ass-kissers about it.”

“Steve, what have you done?” Barnes asked, now looking horrified. “This isn’t… This isn’t right.”

“Bucky…”

“Did he tell you that I had a deal to get you help if he signed the Accords?” Tony asked Barnes, who shook his head. Tony could see that he was trembling a little now. “Yeah, back in Berlin. I told him I could get things sorted in regards to the mess in Bucharest, get you into a psychiatric facility for treatment if he signed. He refused.”

“Why?”

Before Tony could answer, Rogers spoke. “You were keeping Wanda hostage! Imprisoned!”

Tony watched as Barnes took another step back from Rogers. “So instead of helping me, you chose to help that Hydra bitch?”

“Yeah, that’s pretty much it,” Tony agreed. “And again for the record, Wanda wasn’t under arrest. Her visa was up in the air after what happened in Lagos – which was Rogers’s fault in the first place – and I was trying to sort things out and had Vision explain to her that she should stay there where she’d be safe from prosecution and angry mobs. Now, however, she has been arrested for assaulting Vision and for her actions at the airport. As have all your friends.” Tony paused, a calculating look in his eyes. “Funny that you didn’t even ask about them. I mean, considering you think the Accords are the work of the devil and are out to kill people, they could very well be dead, couldn’t they? But you don’t care, do you? You got Barnes, so fuck the rest, right? They could be undergoing torture right now and I guess you couldn’t care less.” He paused, watching Barnes crumble even more. It almost made Tony feel sorry for the guy. Almost. “Hmm, so I guess Rogers didn’t turn my offer down for Wanda after all. I mean, he doesn’t really care about her beyond being a trial run for you. Maybe it was just because then he wouldn’t be the hero of the story, right? I mean, no heroic rescue, no dramatic grand standing against the forces of evil. Bureaucracy and diplomacy are so boring, right? So much better to solve problems by punching people in the face, isn’t it? More manly and heroic.” He looked at Rogers now, disgusted. “All this because you wanted to feel important.”

From his seat inside the silo, Zemo laughed. “You heroes” he spat out the word “are pathetic.”

“So are you, pal,” Tony replied. “You killed a whole bunch of people for your stupid revenge and guess what? You’ve achieved nothing.”

“I have destroyed the Avengers!”

Tony looked at Rogers – that lying sack of shit – and thought back to the rest of the people who had sided with him. Wilson the yes-man who went along with Rogers like a well-trained puppy no matter how idiotic the “plan” (using the term very loosely) was. Maximoff the Hydra terrorist who only cared about herself and her own comfort and freedom. Clint the supposedly retired sniper who preferred to get into a fight that wasn’t his (and that he probably knew nothing about) than stay home with his wife and kids. Lang the nobody who Tony didn’t even know existed before the airport and whose motivation was a total mystery. Romanoff the spy who played all sides against one another
until she had none left to cling to, her ego so huge she couldn’t see how all her bridges were burning. Barnes the mind-controlled assassin who clearly had no idea what he’d been dragged into. All of them (except Barnes) so obviously selfish and unfit for this job, all seeking glory, drunk on power and completely ignoring the harm they caused. Those weren’t heroes.

“You haven’t destroyed the Avengers,” Tony told Zemo. “The Avengers are an idea, not a specific group of people. Now, thanks to you, the world will know who is really fighting for them, and who isn’t worthy of the title. You cleaned house. From now on the Avengers will be better. I should thank you, I guess. I had still believed in the legend of Captain America, but now I know that supposed hero never existed.”

Zemo stopped smiling, looking like a man who’d swallowed a lemon. Rogers seemed like he hadn’t quite figured out if he’d won or lost. Barnes just looked like he wanted to be done with everything. Well, time to end this, then. Tony turned to the super soldiers. “You are under arrest for… well, a long list of crimes.”

Rogers got into a battle stance right away. “I won’t let you hurt Bucky.”

“Oh, shut up, Steve!” Barnes said. “I surrender.” He dropped to his knees and put his hands behind his head.

“No! Bucky!” Rogers launched himself at Tony with a furious yell. “I won’t let you take him from me! I won’t let you ruin everything!”

Tony’s face plate came down and dodged the attack, using the repulsors to blast the man back. “Stand down, Rogers. I won’t tell you again.”

Of course the stubborn ass didn’t listen and threw the shield – the shield his father made – at Tony. Hell, no! Tony flew up and intercepted the rebounding shield before it could return to Rogers’s hand. That bastard would never touch that shield again; he didn’t deserve it. In fact, Tony was going to melt that fucking thing down.

Barnes didn’t move, only watching from his position on the ground. Tony deployed the special cuffs he’d developed and got Rogers’s hands and feet bound together. The man went down like a sack of potatoes and laid there, panting and cursing. Tony activated the magnetic field on the cuffs and they locked together so that Rogers flopped uselessly like an overturned turtle, unable to find any purchase to stand up or get his limbs free.

Friday alerted him to the presence of someone else in the bunker and Tony turned in the direction indicated, repulsors ready to fire. Prince T’Challa was standing near the silo. Where the heck had he come from? Tony wondered. “Your Majesty,” he greeted, not really standing down just yet. The man had shown himself to be a bit on the unstable side, after all.

“Sgt Barnes,” T’Challa said, completely ignoring Tony. “I was wrong to blame you for the death of my father.”

*Is this guy for real?* Tony thought. He must have been lurking about for quite a while to have heard that part, yet this was what he led with? This was what he had to say? *Un-fucking-believable.*

“Yeah, that’s great for you,” Tony said, not at all impressed by the prince. “Unfortunately, he *did* kill my father. And my mother.” *Don’t think about it now, Tony. Don’t think about it. There’ll be time later.* “And a bunch of other people. So he’ll be coming back with me to answer for it in a courtroom.”
“Bucky didn’t do it!” Rogers yelled from the floor, still struggling ineffectively against the restraints.

“Shut up, Rogers,” Tony said at the same time that Barnes said “shut up, Steve.”

Barnes looked at Tony. “I know. I’ll come with you.”

“Good.” Tony said. Then he turned to T’Challa. “And you can fuck off back to your country before you make an even bigger mess than you already have.” He couldn’t see T’Challa’s face through the mask, but his shoulders tensed. Okay, maybe that was a bit harsh, Tony thought. The guy has just lost his father. “Go be with your family. I’m sure they need you,” he added in a kinder tone. “I can take it from here.”

After that, it was easy. T’Challa at least helped him get Zemo out of the silo, into a pair of regular handcuffs and then got him secured to the Quinjet Rogers and Barnes had stolen. Tony dragged Rogers, who was still shouting nonsense, into the jet none too gently. Barnes walked on his own power, and allowed himself to be cuffed with no fuss.

“I’m sorry,” he told Tony just before they took off. “About everything.”

Tony nodded and concentrated on flying the jet back to Berlin.

At Rogers’s trial, the recording from the suit was played and the whole world was as horrified as Tony knew they would be. Rogers and his accomplices were convicted easily, as was Zemo. T’Challa had his diplomatic immunity so he wasn’t prosecuted, but Wakanda’s standing in the world took a nose dive – not that it was all that great to begin with. Barnes was sent to a psychiatric facility for treatment after confessing to the Winter Soldier’s crimes, as well as his own actions during the Civil War disaster.

As Tony had predicted, the Avengers went on with new members and the public’s support. Zemo and Rogers lost.
Bucky was there, right in front of him, yet there was no recognition in his eyes. The expression on his face was blank and distant, as if he had never seen Steve before. It wasn’t fair. After everything Steve had lost, he couldn’t bear to have Bucky just slip through his fingers like this. He would get his friend back, whatever it took. Nothing was more important. Nothing.

Steve didn’t fight back. All he did was block the punches as best as he could while he continued to try to get through to Bucky. His friend was still in there somewhere, Steve was sure. It would be too cruel otherwise.

“Bucky, please, it’s me. It’s Steve. Stevie. You know me. You’re my best friend, remember? We grew up together, went to war together, fought side by side. Till the end of the line, remember? Please!”

There was no response, no acknowledgement that the words had been heard or understood. When this was over, Steve was going to find whoever had done this to Bucky and he would make them pay.

Steve dodged another punch and nearly stumbled out of the helicarrier as he momentarily lost his balance.

“Bucky!”

“Cap, hurry up! We’re almost out of time!” Hill’s voice sounded in his ear and Steve startled. Right, the chip. He’d almost forgotten.

The control panel was far away now; he’d gotten turned around somehow. Bucky was in front of him, blocking the path back to it.

“Bucky, you have to listen to me. You have to remember me!”

But Bucky only attacked again, and Steve was forced to go back to defending himself without hurting his friend.

“Bucky! Please!”

There! There had been something, he was sure. Steve made himself a little smaller, hunching down slightly. Maybe that would help Bucky remember him, how he used to be before the serum, when he’d needed Bucky to have his back as he fought all those bullies.

“It’s me. It’s Steve, your best friend.”

Instead of launching a new attack, Bucky just looked at him, a slight frown on his face.

“Yes, that’s it. Please. I know you’re in there, Bucky. I’m here. I can help you.”

“Cap!” Hill screamed, urgency and fear in her voice. Steve ignored it. He was almost there, almost getting through to Bucky.

Steve still had his eyes glued on Bucky, willing the confusion he saw there to turn to recognition, when the ship began vibrating. The weapons were locking into position. Shit. There was a deafening
noise and then Steve noticed them: hundreds of missiles shooting away from the helicarrier and into… wherever they were going. For a moment Steve could only stare uncomprehendingly at the deadly swarm heading off into the distance. No, no, it couldn’t be. He still had time. Didn’t he?

He followed the path of the missiles until most of them disappeared from view. Oh my god. There was a gasp and he turned his gaze back to Bucky, who was now also looking at the fading missiles with a horrified expression.

“Steve, what did you do?” Bucky said.

Steve had no time to celebrate getting his friend back before the emotionless mask of the Winter Soldier returned and Steve was punched right out of the helicarrier and into the river below.

When he came to, having washed out on the river bank, there was nothing but chaos around him. Buildings were on fire and there was smoke everywhere. One of the helicarriers seemed to be half sunk into the river, and there were people trying to crawl out of it to swim to safety. Bucky was nowhere to be seen. Steve nearly made himself hoarse calling out for him, but he got no answer.

Several hours later, Steve found himself in front of the smoking ruins of the Triskellion. He’d lost his earpiece in the river, so he hadn’t been able to contact the others. He didn’t know what was going on, how bad the damage was. There was nowhere to go, nothing to do. Had they lost? That didn’t seem possible. Hydra’s plan couldn’t have been successful, could it? No, the bad guys couldn’t win, that wasn’t the way things worked.

He walked around aimlessly, completely lost, trying to decide what to do next. As he got closer to the streets, he saw more destruction, people running and screaming. It seemed… surreal.

Finally he came to a group of people standing in front of a television in a store. The images on the screen showed even more devastation. Stark Tower was partially destroyed, as were many more buildings in New York and around the world. The captions running below the images said the death count was likely to be in the millions.

Steve felt his heart seize in his chest. Oh my god. They’d failed. They hadn’t stopped Hydra. Everything he’d ever fought for, all he’d sacrificed… all for nothing. And he’d lost Bucky too. Again. It wasn’t fair. It wasn’t right.

Yet there was no escaping reality. The world would never be the same.

(Some days later a video was posted on the internet showing Steve’s fight against the Winter Soldier in the helicarrier. It became clear to the world that Steve Rogers had been more concerned about getting through to his friend than stopping Hydra from murdering millions of innocent people. After that, it did not take long for a group of grief-stricken citizens to hunt down and kill Steve with a bullet between the eyes. Steve Rogers went down in history as the man who let the world burn.

Tony Stark survived and led the fight against Hydra. He eventually succeeded in wiping them all out. The world struggled, but people rallied together and survived.)

85. (prompt by chibi_luna_chan)

The Avengers Compound was amazing. Sam had never seen anything like it. He still couldn’t quite believe that he was a full-time Avenger now, a real hero fighting beside Captain America. Sure, he’d done that before with the whole Hydra thing, but that had been an emergency situation. Now it was official – and it was incredible.
It was going to be their first day of training for the “new recruits”, as Natasha had called them. Sam, the weird android person Vision and Wanda Maximoff. Col Rhodes was supposed to join them, but he had been called away by the Air Force for a mission.

Sam was a little disappointed, since he’d been really looking forward to working with Rhodes. The other two Sam hardly knew anything about. He wasn’t even sure what Vision was, and no one had a good answer except to say he was “worthy” because he’d lifted Thor’s magic hammer. The Maximoff woman was also a mystery. All Sam had been told was that she was from Sokovia, that she and her brother had fought with the Avengers against Ultron, and that her brother had died a hero saving Clint and some civilians. She had some sort of red magic powers that, again, had not been fully explained. Steve clearly liked her, though, so Sam figured she was all right, and he’d get to know her eventually.

The training session had barely begun when some kind of portal appeared out of nowhere and several people dressed in some strange clothes – complete with that creepy cult vibe – stepped out of it.

Steve, Sam, Natasha, Wanda and Vision immediately fell into a defensive stance, though the newcomers made no threatening moves – besides just materializing out of thin air, of course.

“Who are you? How did you get here? What do you want?” Steve demanded.

One of the figures moved forward and lowered the yellow hood down from her face, revealing a thin, bald and extremely pale-skinned woman. The others were quite diverse. There were four guys and two women aside from the one in yellow, some Caucasian, some black and some Asian.

“We represent the Ancient Order of the Masters of the Mystic Arts,” the woman said. “We are here for her.” She indicated Wanda.

“Wanda isn’t a threat!” Steve exclaimed, placing himself between Wanda and the Order.

“She violated the sanctity of the mind of several individuals. That is a grave offense, and a reprehensible use of such powers.” The woman’s manner was calm and unconcern even as Wanda hissed and stood straighter.

Sam frowned, unsure what was going now. “What do you mean ‘violated the sanctity of the mind’?” That didn’t sound good at all.

A black man stepped forward to answer, hard eyes fixed on Wanda. “She invaded the minds of many people with the intent to cause harm. She sought out and amplified their fears and doubts, turning their own thoughts against them. Such actions can be defined as mind-rape.”

“Wanda was misguided. She knows what she did was wrong. She deserves a second chance,” Steve finally said. Sam didn’t know what to think anymore.

“Because of her violation of the Hulk’s mind, innocent people were terrorized and threatened, many
injured. Not to mention the damage done to Dr Banner himself. Saying sorry is not enough,” the woman said, sending Sam’s mind reeling.

He’d seen the Hulk going into a rampage in Johannesburg, and he’d been horrified. Steve had said Banner had lost control, but that didn’t seem to really be the case, did it? He didn’t lose control, he had his mind invaded and twisted. No wonder the man had taken off afterwards. And Steve… Steve had known this all along and he’d… covered for her. For a rapist. No, that… that couldn’t be. He couldn’t really be defending her. It didn’t make any sense.

“Wanda Maximoff, you are to come with us, to answer for your crimes.”

“No!” Wanda screamed, and red mist formed in her hands. She tried to send some sort of energy blast at the woman, but the Order was quick to react. Several of them made weird movements with their hands and yellowish force fields appeared to in front of them, shielding them.

The woman spread her hands and glowing ropes appeared between them. She sent them towards Wanda, while the black guy did the same with Steve, who looked ready to attack. The ropes seemed alive, as they chased after their targets to wrap securely around them. It was over in seconds.

Sam, Vision and Natasha had stepped back from the fighting, Sam with his hands raised in surrender. He was still trying to process what the hell was going on, how Steve could have protected someone like Wanda.

“Let go of me! Let go! You have no right!” Wanda shouted.

“And you had no right to mind-rape innocent people,” the black man replied, looking at her with contempt. “You allowed yourself to be turned into… this,” he sneered. “With this bastardized version of magic, in the service of Hydra.” The last word was spat out with scorn. Sam flinched.

Hydra?

“You seem to be very well informed,” Natasha said, eyes narrowed. Unlike Steve, she had made no move to defend Wanda, but she had to have known about all of this as well, and had chosen not to say anything. Sam still couldn’t understand why.

“That would be me.” Tony Stark entered the training room with Bruce Banner beside him.

“Tony, what did you do? How could you sell us out?” Steve asked. He was on his knees now, one of the Order people standing behind him looking ready to knock him out at the slightest provocation.

“I sold you out? Really? Wow, that’s rich. What do you think about that, Bruce?”

Banner shook his head. “You’re the one who let that… terrorist… into the team.” There was a speck of green in his eyes, which made Natasha take a small step back.

“Bruce,” she started, but he cut her off.

“Consent and bodily autonomy may not mean much to you, Romanoff, but they mean quite a lot to me – as you should know.”

“I did what I had to do,” she said.

“And now we’re doing what we have to do.” Banner turned to the Order woman. “What will happen to her?”

“We will attempt to remove her ill-gotten powers. If we are successful, she will be returned to you to
face justice for what she did. If not, she will remain in our custody, where she will not harm another soul.”

“You can’t do that!” Wanda and Steve said, almost at the same time.

The woman glanced at Steve with the same disdain she had directed at Wanda. Then she turned back to Stark and Banner. “He” she gestured at the still struggling Steve “is not our concern. However, we can offer our assistance, if you wish.”

“That would be appreciated, yeah. Neutral party and all that,” Stark replied.

“I will remain,” the black guy said. One of the other women spun her hand in a circle and a portal appeared. Two guys took Wanda and went through it.

“Thank you for your assistance, Mr Stark,” the bald woman said. “Good luck.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

Everyone but the black guy disappeared through the portal. Steve was still tied with the magic ropes.

“Get me out of these. Now!” he demanded, and was ignored.

“Mordo, right?” Stark asked and the black guy nodded. “Can you help us get him into a cell?”

“Cell? Tony, I swear… Let me go right now.”

“No can do, Cap. You are about to be charged with aiding a terrorist and obstruction of justice. Also assault. Same goes for you, Romanoff.”

“Guys, what… I don’t understand what’s going on,” Sam said. His voice came out weak and shaky. None of this made any sense. Steve Rogers was a hero. Wasn’t he?

Stark looked at Sam with an almost pitying expression. “Yeah, sucks finding out your hero isn’t all that great, doesn’t it?” And he started talking about Ultron, how Wanda had first used her powers on him to push him to create Ultron, how Steve had sided with her even after she had attacked the team (and Banner actually growled as he recounted how Wanda had unleashed the Hulk in Johannesburg as part of her revenge), and how he had then, against Stark’s objections, insisted on Wanda joining the team and being given a pass on everything she had done. He also mentioned how she got her powers in the first place – by volunteering for experiments with the scepter at Hydra’s hands. It was… horrifying. At first Steve tried to interject, to make excuses, but Mordo waved a hand and summoned a magical gag. Sam was glad, he didn’t think he could stomach any of his justifications.

“Then yesterday I got a visit from the Ancient One – the leader of the Master of the Mystic Arts.”

Mordo nodded. “We became aware of Maximoff’s existence when she used her powers on the people of Sokovia. Some of our people were sent there to observe the situation and see if our help was required, but the Avengers were able to defeat Ultron alone. We were unsure which side Maximoff was on, so we kept an eye on her and began an investigation. It did not take long to see that she did not have good intentions, and that her powers had been… misused. We then contacted Mr Stark to find out more about her and the situation. Once it became clear that she was indeed a threat, we obtained his permission to come here and… deal with her.” He turned to Steve. “What that woman did is against everything we believe in, and consequences must be faced for such actions. It is inconceivable to me that this man would attempt to shield a murderer from justice.”

Sam had no idea what to say to any of that, but he had to agree with Mordo on that. What was Steve
Steve and Natasha were both convicted of obstruction of justice and assault (Steve on Stark and Natasha on Bruce). Wanda was stripped of her powers and sent back to Sokovia, where she was convicted of terrorism and got a life sentence. Sam was given a chance to continue as an Avenger, now led by Col Rhodes, and he accepted it. He wanted to make up for trusting the wrong people. When the Sokovia Accords were presented a year later, they all signed. Clearly a group like the Avengers needed oversight. It was the right thing to do.

86. (prompt by mberco29, Lyaskye)

(AN: I know this is not realistic, but let’s just go with it. If the MCU can bend reality to suit its purposes, so can I.)

After being questioned on what a poor African nation like Wakanda had to offer the world, T’Challa explained their scientific and technological advancements, though he did not reveal that vibranium was the main source of it. They would have to speak of it, certainly, but not before the whole of the UN assembly. At least, not now.

There was a rather lengthy silence after T’Challa finished his speech, which made him a bit nervous. While he knew this was the right thing to do, he was still apprehensive. Having Okoye, Nakia and Ayo standing behind him helped, even though he was well aware that not all Wakandans approved this decision.

The Nigerian representative was the first to rise and respond to T’Challa’s announcement.

“You mean to tell us that you have been sitting on this technology for decades? Things that could have helped many people around the world? And you simply kept it to yourself?” There was anger in his voice, and he did not look pleased in the least.

“While many other African countries have been struggling with poverty, diseases, war and famine, you have been living in paradise?” The Ugandan representative said, not bothering to hide his disgust. “Wakanda borders my country, and we have never received a single offer of help! On the contrary, all our efforts to form an alliance or to establish trade agreements have been met with indifference. How dare you stand there now and tell the world you’re going to… what? Save us?”

That was the cue for everyone to start talking – or rather, shouting – at once. Pretty much all the representatives from African nations were on their feet, yelling at T’Challa and at each other. It was hard to understand what people were saying, but it was obvious that no one was happy.

T’Challa hadn’t expected this level of… hostility, so he had no idea what to do, how to explain himself. There was a part of him that realized there was no explanation possible, for the accusations of the Nigerian councilor were not entirely unfounded. Wakanda could have helped others, and they had chosen not to. They had their reasons, of course, yet he doubted the world would care – the people in the room certainly didn’t seem to. Another part of him, however, was angry. Wakanda’s tech was theirs to do with as they saw fit. They could have remained hidden, but had decided to share their resources now. And this was the gratitude they received?

Finally, after what felt like hours of shouting, the assembly was called back into order, though most people were still grumbling.

“I would like to say something,” the representative from South Africa said, and was given the floor.
T’Challa was sure it would be another attack, and he wasn’t disappointed. “Why did Wakanda never offer any of this before? A few years ago the Hulk attacked Johannesburg. The destruction was not extensive, it is true, and Mr Stark did make a substantial contribution to help us rebuild, but Wakanda was much closer and could have offered aid as well. There is also the recent tragedy in Nigeria, in which Wakandan citizens were also injured. Again, you did not reach out. Yes, the late King T’Chaka participated in the drafting of the Sokovia Accords, but so did a lot of others. If you have, as you say, all this technology at your disposal, why have you kept it to yourself all this time? And more importantly, what do you hope to gain by sharing it now?”

T’Challa had no idea how to respond to that. He saw that many people in the assembly were looking at the Wakandan delegation with suspicion as well as anger and derision now. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Nakia bow her head and sigh, while Okoye and Ayo remained stoic. T’Challa wondered what they were thinking, but he had no time to ask their opinion or council. He wished fervently that his father was there with him, for surely he would not be as lost and hesitant as T’Challa felt. The Black Panther he might be, yet none of those skills meant anything now. This was not the kind of battle he was used to fighting.

“King T’Challa, I asked you a question,” the South African Ambassador said.

“I… Wakanda has…It has long been our policy to keep to ourselves. We… we wished to protect ourselves and our resources,” T’Challa began.

“I see. So you protected yourselves and left the rest of us to be invaded and plundered by Europeans. Our people were murdered, taken and enslaved while you hid in the mountains like the cowards you are.” The Nigerian representative spat out. “And now you expect us to… be thankful?”

Okoye and Ayo tensed beside him, though they didn’t say anything.

“We are not responsible for what happened to your people.”

“If you care so little about the rest of the world, King T’Challa, then again I have to wonder why you are here now. What do you hope to gain?”

“We wish to offer our help—”

“Now? Why not last year? Why not the year before?”

“Because now they are in danger as well,” the Ugandan representative said. “Because their supposed advanced technology might not be so advanced anymore, or it might not be enough to keep them safe, not from the kind of threats that now exist.” He shook his head and addressed the room at large. “I do not believe the people of Wakanda can be trusted.”

The silence after that declaration was full of resentment and distrust.

“King T’Challa,” the Romanian president said, “do you intend to offer reparation for your part in the destruction and injuries incurred during your rampage through the streets of Bucharest?” T’Challa flinched. “Just like the wanted terrorists Steve Rogers and James Barnes, your actions put my people in danger. It has been months, and yet neither Wakanda nor yourself has made any contact with us to offer anything. Do you even intent to? Or are my people – the ones you had a hand in harming – also not a concern to you?”

The South African Ambassador took back the floor. “How are we supposed to trust you, King T’Challa, when your actions and those of your country have spoken against you?”

It didn’t get any better after that.
T'Challa left the UN building feeling like a child who had been sent to time-out, something that hadn’t happened to him since he was four years-old.

“I expected more gratitude,” Ayo said once they were back in their hotel room.

Nakia shook her head. “You have never been outside Wakanda, Ayo. Our neighbors are suffering, and they have been some time. I cannot blame them for being angry. We have turned our backs on them for far too long. You can’t expect that they will welcome us with open arms, not after all that has happened.” She did not say it, yet T’Challa felt the weight of her unspoken criticism regardless. He was not to blame for Wakanda’s isolationist policy, that was true, but he had acted dishonorably in his pursuit of Barnes. He had thought that offering the man help and sanctuary would be a good way of making up for his mistakes. Now, however, he realized that it would not be enough. Barnes was not the only one he had wronged in his misguided quest for revenge. He had not even remembered the people of Bucharest until today, too focused on Wakanda and his own doubts and troubles.

“We will have to show the world that we are not as selfish as they believe,” he said with as much decisiveness as he could muster under the circumstances – which was, admittedly, not much.

Unfortunately, things only got worse. The fact that Barnes was in Wakanda somehow got out, and the world immediately called out for Wakanda to turn him in. Zemo also revealed to the authorities everything that had happened in Siberia, including T’Challa’s presence and the fact that he had done nothing to help Tony Stark when the man was attacked by two super soldiers. T’Challa was called a liar and a traitor, and Wakanda as a whole sank even further in the world’s eyes.

“First they hoard their tech like dragons with gold, then their Prince tears through a city leaving death and destruction. T’Challa spit in the face of the Accords his father was a supporter of, and betrayed his teammates, particularly Tony Stark. And now we find that he is harboring terrorists. Is it only Barnes or is Rogers there as well? What other criminals has Wakanda hidden from the world? They think themselves superior to us, disregarding all suffering that doesn’t involve their own. And T’Challa thinks he can now offer… what, bribes? How do we know his tech is even reliable? How do we know it isn’t a ploy to spy on us, to obtain even more advantages? How do we know what they have isn’t stolen from others in the first place?” The Nigerian president’s words were broadcast worldwide and from what T’Challa could see, most people seemed to agree with him.

The message he received from the Accords Panel the next day was quite clear: surrender Barnes and whoever else he was hiding or face the consequences. T’Challa had no choice but to comply. There was a part of him that wanted to stand by what he’d once told Rogers – *let them try* – but he had seen how easy it was to fall now, and with the way the world’s mind had been made against Wakanda, he did not doubt that they would follow through with that. As much as it galled him to bow down to anyone, he had to do what was best of his people and not his pride.

Vision and Everett Ross accompanied the UN delegation to retrieve Barnes. Ross looked apologetic as he said that the matter had gone out of his hands. Vision, for his part, regarded T’Challa as if he was dirt on the bottom of his shoe.

Shuri began disconnecting the cryo machine, nervously explaining what would need to be done to revive Barnes safely.

“I thank you for your instructions, Princess Shuri,” Vision interrupted curtly, “but the technology does not seem overly complicated. I am certain the UN scientists and doctors will be able to figure it out with no problem.” The obvious dismissal hurt Shuri, but she bit her lip and said nothing further. She had confided in him that she did not understand why the world was so hostile towards them when they had only been trying to help. At times like those T’Challa remembered how very young
and naïve Shuri was, despite all her accomplishments. In truth, both of them had been sheltered, and were, it had become obvious, woefully unprepared to deal with the outside world.

And now Wakanda was suffering for it. For their sins, and the sins of their father and forefathers. There was nothing he or any of them could do about it.

87. (prompt by VeraNera)

It took him a moment to identify where the sound was coming from: the phone he’d given Tony. Finally, Steve thought, rushing into his room to answer it.

“Hello? Tony?”

There was a short pause before Tony’s voice came through. “Steve.”

Steve let himself fall into his bed in relief. It had been months since he’d sent the phone and the letter, and he had begun to worry that Tony wouldn’t call. In truth, there were times when he doubted Tony would ever see the error of his ways, that he would ever admit that the Accords he’d created were a bad thing. Tony wasn’t really a strongly moral person to begin with, and Steve had worried that without him being there to keep Tony on the right path, that the other would stray even further. It still pained him to think that it had perhaps been the distance between then after Ultron – a distance that Steve had cultivated because he’d needed to keep Tony away from Bucky – that had made Tony get involved with those stupid Accords in the first place. But he was willing to forgive that, because Tony didn’t know any better. As long as Tony was willing to apologize, and make things up to Steve and the rest of the team, he could be the bigger man and allow him back in.

“It’s good to hear from you,” he said.

“Yeah.”

“So… Are the Accords gone? Can we put this whole thing behind us now?” Can we come home? he hoped was understood.

“I… Yeah. Yeah, we can put this behind us.” Steve heard Tony take a deep breath. “We can… put an end to all this. I need… I need you.”

Steve smiled. He knew it. “It’s all right, Tony. We’ll be there.”

They set up a meeting for the next day in one of the Stark Industries facilities in Hungary. Tony said they needed to talk about some things before Steve and the others could go back to the US. When he told the others, there were just as relieved as him that it was all over.

“Stark had better grovel a lot,” Clint muttered. “After everything he put us through, he’s got a lot to apologize for.”

Wanda nodded, as did Sam. Scott was the only one who didn’t say anything, though Steve was too excited to finally go home and back to his life to worry about it too much.

He had to leave Bucky behind – sorry or not, Steve couldn’t risk his best friend near Tony just yet – but in a few hours they had arrived at the designated meeting place.

There weren’t a lot of people around, but Steve thought nothing of it. They landed their borrowed jet and walked out, spotting Tony standing alone near the entrance to the building.
The Avengers flanked Steve as they approached, and Steve’s heart felt lighter than it had since this whole disaster had begun.

“Are you ready to apologize, Stark?” Clint sneered.

Tony flinched just a little, and Steve would have told Clint to let things be for now, but, truthfully, he needed to hear that apology. He deserved that apology, they all did.

“Yeah. I’m sorry.” He looked up to then and straightened. “I’m sorry I ever thought any one of you was worth anything.”

The shots came out of nowhere. Wanda was the first to drop, followed by Sam and Clint. Scott raised his arms and went to his knees himself, yelling that he surrendered. Steve found himself facing Iron Man and Vision.

“You betrayed us,” Steve hissed, furious. How dare Tony do this to them?

“I betrayed you? I betrayed you? You fucking son of a bitch!”

Steve had no time to react. Vision rushed him and knocked him backwards with a punch that was way stronger than Steve had expected. Before he had the chance to get back up, his feet and hands were cuffed. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t get out of them.

Several uniformed officers came out then, heading for the others. They cuffed his friends and dragged them away to the armored cars that were suddenly there. They’d been set up. Tony had lured them here under false pretenses.

“I should have known I couldn’t trust you, Tony,” Steve spat.

“And I should have known I couldn’t trust any of you.” He turned to the officers. “Take the criminals away.”

A couple of hours later, they were all in cells, still handcuffed (and Steve feetcuffed as well), and Wanda with that awful collar around her neck. Sam, Clint and Wanda regained consciousness and were dismayed to find out they’d been set up.

“Fucking son of a bitch Stark!” Clint yelled.

“I’ll kill him, I’ll kill him,” Wanda muttered, and Steve was angry enough that he almost shared the sentiment. At least Bucky was still safe.

Not too long later, Tony and Vision were back.

“You’ll pay for this, Stark,” Clint said, voice low and threatening.

Tony ignored him. “Here’s what’s going to happen now. You are going back to the US to face trial. Well, except Maximoff. She’ll be deported back to Sokovia.”

“You can’t do that!” Wanda screamed.

“I’m not the one doing it. You are a Sokovian citizen, and they have demanded to deal with you themselves, which is their right.”

“I can’t believe you sold us out like this, Stark,” Sam said. “I trusted you.”

Tony laughed. He actually laughed. “You trusted me? When? When you were going behind by back
using my money and my resources to look for the man who murdered my parents? When you ignored my existence and decided to burn god knows how many SHIELD agents and their families even though I could have helped? When you decided not to inform me about the threat of the Winter Soldiers until after my best friend was lying in a hospital because of you? When you put that mind- raping bitch on the team despite the fact that she willingly worked with Ultron to destroy the planet and over my objections? When you accused me of anything and everything and simply expected me to bow down to you and be your sugar daddy? Tell me Wilson, when did any of you ever trust me?”

Sam looked stunned for a moment. “What do you mean, your parents were murdered? Didn’t they die in a car accident?”

Tony laughed again. “Oh, he didn’t tell you. Of course not. But I’m the one that can’t be trusted, right?” He turned to Steve. “Well, Steve, do you want to finally spill the beans, or should I?”

Steve glared at Tony. He wanted to stand up and face him head on, but he could hardly move. Damn Tony. He was going to ruin everything.

“I will, then. Steve here has known, probably since SHIELD fell, that his dear friend Bucky was sent by Hydra to assassinate my parents. And he did. He beat my father’s face in with his metal arm and strangled my mother to death. Zemo had a tape. He showed it to me in Siberia. You know, where I went to help as a friend.”

Sam sucked in a breath, looking at Steve with widened eyes.

“And do you know what happened then? Steve here – the paragon of virtue and truth – nearly killed me. He destroyed the Arc Reactor in the suit – with the shield my father gave him no less – and then left me behind like yesterday’s trash to ride off into the sunset with his bestest friend, the brainwashed assassin.”

“It wasn’t Bucky’s fault!” Steve shouted. “You tried to kill him and it wasn’t Bucky’s fault!”

Tony hissed. “Shut the fuck up! You lost all right to say anything to me when you helped cover up my parents’ murder!”

No one said anything for a moment. Steve could feel everything slipping through his fingers.

“Vision. Vision, help me.” Wanda eventually said, banging on the glass wall of her cell with one hand and clutching the collar on her neck with the other.

Vision’s gaze was hard. “I tried to protect you once, Wanda, and you attacked me. What happens to you now is out of my hands,” he told her. “And your own doing. You were warned.”

“You can’t lock us up!” Clint said, though he didn’t seem as certain of it anymore. Steve tried to ignore Sam’s accusing eyes and mute anger.

“Actually, Clint, Tony isn’t the one locking you up. It’s the law. You know, the one you broke when you decided to abandon your family to destroy an airport and become a terrorist.”

Clint whirled around to see his wife walking in with a furious expression. “Laura…”

“You left us! For what? For a Hydra mind-raping terrorist and a fucking liar” she pointed at Wanda and Steve. “You’ll be getting the divorce papers as soon as you arrive back in the US. And it goes without saying that I’ll be getting full custody of the kids, since you’re going to be in prison. Because you are a criminal! I just came to say goodbye to you in person. You won’t be seeing me again.” She turned and left, giving the rest of them a contemptuous look. “I hope you all rot in prison.”
“You know, I wasn’t sure the plan would work,” Tony said conversationally. “I thought you’d be smarter and would smell a trap, but… Well, you actually thought I would – or that I should, even – apologize to you. That you could just come back and all would be forgiven and forgotten. You thought the Accords would be gone.” He shook his head. “It’s actually hard to fathom that level of delusion and self-centeredness.” His eyes found each of them in turn, and there was nothing but anger and disdain in them. “You lot have proven, beyond a doubt, why the Accords are necessary. They are not going away anymore. The people that were still on the fence are now one hundred percent on board. Instead of 117 countries, we now have 156, and that number is likely to grow. No one trusts any of you. No one thinks any of you are heroes. You are criminals, terrorists, liars and thieves. That’s how the world sees you. You lost, Steve. You lost and you dragged those people stupid enough to check out their brains and side with you along for the ride of a lengthy prison sentence. Congratulations, you broke the Avengers. You, not me.”

Sam was crying openly now, slumped into the glass wall of the cell and shaking his head every so often, as if he couldn’t believe what was happening. Clint was still staring at the door, as if to catch another glimpse of Laura. He too looked on the verge of tears. Wanda was clutching the collar and glaring at Tony and Vision in turn, mumbling something too low for Steve to hear. Scott, Steve realized for the first time, wasn’t there; Steve couldn’t really muster the energy to care.

It was all falling apart. When he’d gotten out of the plane earlier he’d been sure everything would work out and now… Had he lost? It didn’t seem possible.

“Oh, and by the way, your assassin buddy is on his way back to the US for treatment and trial,” Tony said with what seemed to be gleeful satisfaction. “You won’t ever see him again. And frankly, he’s better off. I mean, with friends like you… who needs enemies?” He took one last look around them all as they sat there helplessly, a nasty smile on his face.

He walked out without another word, leaving them behind.
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Short chapter this time, guys. Sorry. Hope you like it anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

88. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled)

After listening to Bucky’s explanation, Steve and Sam walked a bit further away to figure out what to do now. “Do you think we should call Tony?” Steve asked, already thinking that maybe he could call Clint to go get Wanda from the Compound. They would both be useful.

“Yeah, that’s probably a good idea.”

Steve was about to agree that Tony couldn’t be trusted when the words registered. “What? You think we should?”

Sam looked over at Bucky, who still had his arm trapped by the machine. “Look, Steve, this situation has gotten way out of hand. I say we talk to Tony before things get even worse. Five more Winter Soldiers is nothing to sneeze at.”

That was not at all what he’d been expecting to hear. “We can handle it, Sam. Tony is only gonna slow us down.” When Sam didn’t seem convinced, Steve went on. “He’s got Wanda interned at the Compound like a criminal, for god’s sake.”

Instead of the immediate agreement Steve was hoping for, Sam just frowned. “What do you mean ‘interned’?”

“He locked her up! Said she can’t leave. Something about a visa or something.”

“Well, yeah, she’s a foreigner. It makes sense that her visa might be in trouble after Lagos. And saying she can’t leave does not qualify as ‘internment’, that’s an entirely different thing.”

Steve could only stare at that. “Whatever the word is. Wanda was trying to help people, she shouldn’t be punished for it. She’s just a kid.”

Sam looked at him with an unreadable expression. “Steve, Wanda is 25, she’s not a kid. And yeah, she was trying to help – we all were – but people still died. And that means her staying at the Compound right now is a good idea, at least until the worst of it blows over.”

Now Steve was beginning to get angry. “I thought you were with me on this Accords thing, Sam. It’s a bunch of red tape and agendas.”

“That was before we attacked law enforcement people and caused a tunnel to collapse on innocent civilians, Steve!” Sam yelled, making Steve take a step back in surprise. “This is not what I signed up for, Steve. That back there, in Bucharest, that was not okay. I was watching the news while you were talking to Tony. People got hurt, Steve!”

“They were going to kill Bucky!”
“So they deserved to die? They were doing their fucking jobs, Steve! And the people on the streets had nothing to do with any of that. My god, what is wrong with you?”

“Bucky is innocent!” Steve insisted. Why couldn’t people see that?

“But you didn’t know that! Nobody knew that! And unless you tell someone, that’s going to continue. We need to call Tony and explain.”

“No, we can’t do that,” Steve said with as much authority as he could muster. Tony could not get involved, not with Bucky.

“Why not?” Bucky asked, raising his voice to be heard. “I didn’t bomb anything. There must be a way to prove it. I don’t want to hurt anyone anymore.” He closed his eyes and sighed.

“I’ll call Tony,” Sam said. He picked up his phone to turn it on, but Steve plucked it from his hand and crushed it. “What the hell, Steve! Are you out of your mind!”

“We are not calling Tony. Or anybody. We’ll deal with it ourselves.”

“You want the three of us to deal with five Winter Soldiers? Are you insane?”

“We can’t trust these Accords, Sam, you know that!” Steve didn’t understand what Sam’s problem was. He’d thought they were on the same page about that.

But Sam just shook his head. “No, no. I can’t. You’re not making sense, Steve. You’re not thinking straight.” Then his eyes widened and he took a step backwards. “Oh god… it was never about the Accords at all, was it? It was all about him!” He pointed at Bucky. “Lagos was about Bucky, it was all… oh my god. I thought… I thought…” He trailed off. “I don’t like Ross, but I’m beginning to think he had a point.”

“What? No! Sam, come on! We can’t let bureaucrats and paper pushers get in the way of saving people,” Steve said.

“Saving him, you mean.”

“Saving everyone, Sam. The safest hands are our own. Sam, you know that.”

“No, no.” He shook his head again. “You’re wrong, Steve. I can’t… I can’t be a part of this anymore. I’m gonna turn myself in.”

Before Sam got two steps away, Steve was on him, holding onto his arm. “I can’t let you do that, Sam.”

Sam gave him a cold look. “So you’re going to lock me up? Intern me? Knock me out? Yeah, I can see how you’re so much better than the Accords,” he said angrily. Steve let go.

“No, that’s not… you don’t understand.”

“No, I do. I finally do. You’re not the man I thought you were, Steve.” Sam turned and left without a word.

Steve considered going after him to stop him, but Bucky called him.

“He’s right, Steve. We need to turn ourselves in before things get even worse. I don’t understand what these Accords are about, but the only way to clear my name is to talk to people. That doctor guy needs to be stopped, and we won’t be able to do it on our own.”
“Yes, we can, Bucky. We can handle it.” They had to. If Bucky could prove himself a hero, it would be a lot easier to keep Tony away from him – and from finding out the truth. “You and me, just like the old days.”

Bucky gave him a sharp look. “Yeah, sure. Until the doctor triggers the Soldiers, and then it will be six against just you. Do you think I want to go anywhere near that man ever again?” Steve’s mouth opened and closed a few times like a fish. He had no idea what to say to that. “Get me out of this thing.”

Reluctantly, Steve freed Bucky’s arm. Then the man was gone, following Sam and leaving Steve standing alone.

By the time he caught up to his friends, they had been recognized and people were pointing and filming, having no doubt alerted the authorities as well. Steve wanted to yell at everyone to just get away from them. It was all going to fall apart if Bucky got captured now. Why couldn’t they see that? Why couldn’t they just listen to him?

In just a few minutes they were surrounded by police and guys in combat gear like the ones they’d fought in Bucharest, but this time Sam and Bucky raised their hands and allowed themselves to be cuffed. Steve had no choice but to follow. They all ended up in the same place, this time under heavy guard.

The paper pusher from before greeted them with a glare. “You’re in a lot of trouble, Rogers.”

“We have important information to share,” Bucky said. “That doctor guy wanted to know the location of the other Winter Soldiers Hydra has stashed away.”

Tony, Rhodes and Natasha came in just then. “Where?” Tony immediately asked, and Bucky gave him what sounded like coordinates. Tony took out his phone and started typing into it. “Honey-bear, you got this?” At Rhodes’s nod, Tony left, not even glancing in Steve’s direction. While a part of him was irritated by being dismissed like that, another was glad Tony was going to be away from Bucky.

Unfortunately, Rhodes refused to listen to him when Steve demanded to be let out.

“Not a chance in hell, Rogers.”

Steve sneered. “I should have known you’d be Ross’s lapdog.”

The man looked like he wanted to say something, then changed his mind. “You know what? I’m not even gonna bother. Enjoy your cell.”

Steve tried Natasha next, but she just shook his head. “I told you to stay away from it. I can’t help you now.”

The doctor was apprehended, along with a tape that showed the Winter Soldier killing Howard and Maria Stark. Tony came back to the facility Steve, Sam and Bucky were being held in to yell at them and tell them he was going to press charges for everything he could think of.

“Your hero days are over, Rogers,” he said, eyes burning with hatred and pain. “You’ll rot in prison for the rest of your days, along with your buddies here and Romanoff, that back-stabbing bitch.”

And so they did.

(AN: In the movie, Sam doesn’t even consider calling Tony, and in fact he’s the one who suggests
they call in reinforcements. I had forgotten that. What an ass. I got really pissed, but I’d already written most of this, so I left it as is. Next time you can be sure I won’t be so nice to him.)

89. (prompt by NeutralGuise)

(AN: Let’s pretend the conversation in question took place in the lab with Thor, Fury, Tony and Bruce there, shall we?)

“Do you think you can make Loki tell us where the Tesseract is?” Fury asked.

Thor looked a bit like a lost puppy. It would have been endearing if the situation wasn’t such a fucking mess. “I do not know. Loki’s mind is far afield. It’s not just power he craves, it’s vengeance. Upon me. There’s no pain that would prise this need from him."

“A lot of guys think that until the pain starts.”

“What are you asking me to do?”

“I’m asking, what are you prepared to do?”

Tony, who had been discreetly checking Jarvis’s hacking of SHIELD, stopped and turned back to them.

“Are you seriously asking the guy if he’s okay with torturing his brother for information? Or having someone else do it? Really? Well, I don’t know about the rest of you, but torture is not okay in my book, and I won’t be a part of it.” He caught Bruce’s eyes and the other man looked distinctly uncomfortable. Yeah, once Jarvis was done finding out all SHIELD’s secrets Tony was going to have a chat with Fury about his methods.

“Loki is your prisoner, and he will be treated with respect, or you will answer to me.” Thor crossed his arms, emphasizing his big muscles, and glared. Fury did his best to look unconcerned, but Tony knew the man wasn’t dumb enough to actually do anything to piss Thor off. “Your people must learn your place.”

Oh, hold on. “I don’t agree with torture, big guy, but don’t give me that ‘know your place’ bullshit. Whatever you might think, your people are not better than us, so tone the superiority crap down,” Tony said, facing Thor head on. “We’ll figure out this situation then you and Loki can fuck off back to wherever you came from and leave us alone.”

Just then there was a ping and the screen showed what seemed to be some kind of weapon made using the tesseract.

“And would you look at that, SHIELD is also planning on creating weapons of mass destruction. Wow, just when I think you guys can’t sink any lower.”

“What the hell?” Fury said, watching as his secrets got plastered on the screen.

“Are you out of your mind?” Bruce was beginning to look a little green, so Tony stepped closer to him and laid a calming hand on his shoulder.

“Easy there, buddy. Now is not the time.”

“You have no idea the power you are messing with,” Thor said, still in that infuriating
condescending tone.

Tony was getting really fed up with this shit. “And you do? ‘Cause if that’s the case, you might want to start helping instead of just being a dick.”

“Have a care how you speak.”

“I’ll speak any damn way I want!” Tony said, voice rising. “It’s my fucking planet being threatened and all I get is your fucking attitude and Fury’s despicable tactics. Neither of you have done shit to actually help so far, quite the contrary. So keep your stupid macho posturing to yourselves and let the professionals do their jobs. You know, like civilized people who don’t think violence and beating the shit out of people is the only way to solve problems.”

When the invasion finally ended, Tony was beyond pissed. He made sure to send the info on SHIELD to everyone who would listen, including the World Security Council’s excellent plan of nuking Manhattan. Not to mention all the people they had disappeared – and straight up murdered – over the years. Fury and all the high-ups (plus a lot of agents, including dear old Natashalie) were arrested. Tony made sure that Thor took the Tesseract and the scepter back to Asgard with Loki, to keep anyone else on Earth from getting ideas. The Avengers Initiative was over before it even began, but Bruce stuck around and eventually Tony managed to put together a new team to deal with future alien invasions. Rogers turned out to be a major dick Tony wanted nothing to do with.

Col Phillips looked at Dr Erskine and wondered why all brilliant scientists seemed to be completely insane.

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight. You want the guy with a mile long list of medical issues to be given the serum?”

“Yes,” Erskine answered, completely serious.

Lord, give me strength. “Why?” Erskine frowned, as if he couldn’t understand the question. Phillips sighed internally and repeated himself. “Why?”

“Rogers seems like a good man.”

Now Phillips couldn’t contain his sigh of incredulity. “He lied on enlistment forms four times to get into the army even though he’s been told repeatedly that he’s not fit for military service. He keeps getting involved in fights he hasn’t a prayer of winning. He seems like a nutjob to me. A suicidal nutjob at that.”

“A weak man knows the value of strength,” Erskine tried again.

“And if we give it to him, and if by some miracle he survives, he’s likely to let it go to his head and become an even bigger problem. If he thinks it’s okay to pick a fight with everyone as a little twig, I shudder to think what he’d do if he had super strength.”

Erskine opened his mouth to reply but apparently couldn’t think of anything.

“Picking Rogers for this is insane,” Phillips continued. “The guy shouldn’t have been accepted in the first place. He’s a disaster waiting to happen and I will not waste months of research and preparation on some lunatic with delusions of grandeur. Pick someone else – a more suitable candidate – or I’ll
pull the plug on this whole thing.”

After Erskine left, Phillips took a deep breath. This entire project had been nothing but a headache from day one and there was no guarantee that it was even going to work. He was starting to think it was better to just give it up altogether. After all, a few super soldiers would hardly make that big a difference in the war. What they needed was better weapons, equipment and strategy.

The next morning, Rogers was in front of his door to complain about not being chosen.

“Dr Erskine said I was the best candidate,” he whined.

“Well, he was mistaken. You would likely not even survive the procedure.”

Rogers got a mulish look in his face. “Doctors have been saying I’m gonna die for years and I’m still here.”

“Good for you. Still doesn’t matter. You are not a viable candidate and I will not authorize it.”

Phillips could have been a little nicer about it, perhaps, but frankly he was all out of patience with this whole thing.

“Why?” Rogers insisted.

Christ, has no one ever told this kid no before? Phillips wondered. “Look, Rogers, I don’t owe you any explanations. You are not fit for the army and you are not fit for the project. That’s it, end of story. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have other things to do.”

“But it’s not fair! I’m better than all those guys out there! Erskine said–”

“Enough!” Phillips’s shout had Rogers backing up a step, but then he got a stubborn glint in his eye and Phillips was just done with this bullshit. “I have given my final word on the matter, Rogers, and so help me, if I hear another word out of you, I will have you arrested for insubordination. Hell, I’ll do it right now if you don’t get out of my face. You’ve got three seconds to go back to the barracks.”

When it seemed like Rogers wasn’t going to move, Phillips started counting. “One… Two…”

“I don’t back down,” the asshole said. “You can’t bully me.”

“Three. You’re out. Done.”

Less than ten minutes later, Rogers was sitting in a holding cell, still whining. Phillips got in touch with a friend to have Rogers arrested for his fraudulent attempts to enlist, and whatever else he’d done (guy like that had probably broken some laws before). The farther he could get the little bastard away from him the better.

Project Rebirth selected another candidate, who unfortunately did not survive, so the whole thing was scrapped. They won the war anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Anyone seen Ant-Man and the Wasp? Is it any good? Would you recommend it? I haven’t decided if I’ll see it or not...
Chapter 24

91. (prompt by HighSidhe)

Clint was beginning to think this had been a very bad idea. After escaping from the Raft, they had all gone back to Wakanda. Steve had explained that T’Challa had seen the light about the Accords and had agreed to let them stay there until all that had been sorted out. Unfortunately, that had not really been true. T’Challa had absolutely refused to allow any of them to stay except Barnes. Steve had argued for quite a while, but T’Challa didn’t change his mind. They had all been kicked out.

Barnes had wanted to stay, but Steve had convinced him not to. He said T’Challa obviously couldn’t be trusted if he went back on his word like that and therefore Bucky would not be safe there by himself. After a while, Barnes caved.

They’d left Wakanda with pretty much nothing but their gear and the clothes on their backs. In the middle of fucking Africa, where all of them but Sam stuck out like a sore thumb. Wanda started bitching on the second day and never stopped. She kept cursing Stark and threatening to kill him and while Clint had initially agreed with her (he’d been frustrated and needed to blow off some steam), it quickly became clear that Wanda meant it, which made everyone except Steve really uncomfortable.

Then, on day four, Lang simply disappeared, and Steve just shrugged as if he couldn’t care less. Clint had no idea what had happened until Barnes had confided in him that Lang had taken off on his own, intent on turning himself in and going back home to his family. According to Barnes, Lang had not wanted to be around them anymore and was worried about what Wanda and Steve would if he told them what he was planning. So he just left, taking the Ant-Man suit with him.

Clint seriously considered doing the same after that, especially when he realized Steve didn’t know what had happened to Lang and he didn’t care. Lang could have been abducted by aliens or Hydra or the damn Accords people or anything, and Steve just carried on as if it had only ever been the six of them.

On day six, they had no money and nowhere to go. They’d resorted to stealing food and whatever they could find with no plan in sight. It wasn’t that Clint had never done things like that before, but this time it felt different. They had no mission, no goal and no prospects of any improvement to their situation. All Steve said was that the world would come to their senses soon and they’d get to go home, all the while looking at Barnes like a starving man eyes a hamburger. It was… unsettling.

On day seven they found themselves surrounded by men with guns pointed at their faces. They barely had time to react before they were all shot with tranq darts. When Clint woke, he and the others were in adjoining cells. Not in the Raft, however.

“Where’s Wanda?” Sam asked, and that was when Clint realized she was missing.

“She’s been… disposed of,” a man said, entering the room. He had an evil look about him that made the hairs on the back of Clint’s neck stand on end.

“What do you mean?” Steve demanded. “What have you done with her?”

“She was a failed experiment that had outlived its usefulness. She did show promise, initially, which was why we recruited her, but…” He shook his head, smiling nastily. “She’ll help us more as a corpse now.”

“You’re Hydra,” Sam said.
“Of course,” the man responded easily. “Who did you expect?”

“So you killed Wanda?” Clint asked. He didn’t like the sound of that. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Barnes was frowning and looking at Steve with an unreadable expression.

“Precisely. And the rest of you will share her fate shortly.” He turned to Barnes and grinned. “Soldat, it is so good to have you back with us.” The man came closer to stand in front of Barnes’ cell. “Did you really think you could get away from us? I’m looking forward to… working… with you.”

Steve let out an inarticulate growl and started trying to bend the bars on his cell. “Leave Bucky alone!” he yelled, snarling like a rabid dog. Funny how he had barely blinked at the news of Wanda’s demise, Clint thought.

Unfortunately, no matter how much Steve struggled he was unable to stop the man from taking Barnes. All the man had to do was say a string of Russian words, and Barnes walked out of his cell voluntarily, an empty look in his eyes.

Despite the threat of murder, however, no one really bothered with them after that; they appeared to have been simply forgotten. Steve continued to rant and rage while crying out Bucky’s name. Nothing Clint or Sam said to him seemed to have the slightest effect.

Finally his efforts on the bars were rewarded and he managed to squeeze himself through, immediately moving as if to leave.

“Steve!” Sam yelled. “Get us out of here!”

Steve came back and tried the bars on Sam’s cell, but they didn’t budge. “I’ll be back for you guys later,” he said after a few, to Clint’s eye, half-hearted attempts.

“Steve, wait!”

But he was already gone, leaving Clint and Sam behind. Just like he’s done in Leipzig.


Barnes. It had all been about Barnes. Steve never gave a crap about anyone else. Not when Barnes was in trouble.

Lang disappeared and Steve barely noticed, too busy staring dopily at his best friend. Wanda was taken and killed and Steve was indifferent, only fighting when it was Barnes taken away. Sam and Clint could be killed at any moment, since they had no weapons and no way to defend themselves.

Tony, Nat, Rhodes and Vision also left behind. Steve had fought them for Barnes. He’d never cared about the Accords or the world. Only Barnes mattered.

Clint and Sam looked at each other in horrified realization. They’d been used. Used as cannon fodder and minions so Steve could complete his real mission, the only one he cared about: saving Barnes. And now they were screwed.

_I should have stayed home. I shouldn’t have gotten involved._ Those were Clint’s last thoughts as soldiers came and shot him and Sam dead. _Steve left us here to die._ Then he knew no more.

(Steve managed to half-drag, half-carry a semi-conscious Bucky out of the Hydra bunker, desperate
to get his friend to safety. He kept trying to rouse Bucky but all he got were incoherent mumbles in response. *God, what have they done to him?*

He didn’t get very far before Hydra caught up with them.

“There’s no one to save you, Captain. You are mine now. You and Soldat,” the Hydra doctor said. “Surrender now and we can make this less painful.”

“Never!” he yelled, putting himself in front of Bucky.

The man said a few words in Russian and Bucky stirred.

“Bucky!”

“You should have let me stay in Wakanda, Steve,” Bucky said, voice strained with fear and anger. Then his eyes glazed over and he punched Steve square in the face.

Steve Rogers spent two weeks as Hydra’s lab rat before being disposed of. The Winter Soldier continued on as Hydra’s most prized assassin.

92. (prompt by izumi2)

Steve walked into Nick Fury’s office purposefully, not even bothering to knock. He’d been awake for a couple of weeks now and he hated everything about the future. Nothing made sense and now he’d found they had taken something from him. He could not let that stand.

“Fury,” he said, looking at the man with as much authority as he could. “Where is my shield?”

“And good morning to you too, Rogers. Sure, you can come in. Make yourself at home in my office.”

Steve ignored the sarcasm and stood his ground. “Where is my shield?” he repeated.

*Your* shield? What shield would that be?” Fury asked. He hadn’t moved from his chair, looking bored.

“Don’t play games with me, Fury. You know damn well what shield. It was in the plane with me, so I know you have it. I want it back.”

“Well, that’s gonna be difficult. Despite what you seem to think, that shield is not – and never was – yours. It is the property of Stark Industries and it has been returned to them.”

“What? No! Howard gave me that shield.”

“Do you have any documentation to that effect?” Fury was still calm, which was making Steve even angrier.

“Documentation? What… What are you talking about? He gave it to me!”

“He *loaned* it to you, Rogers. To the Army, to be exact. Giving and loaning are two very different things,” Fury said, speaking as if Steve was a stupid child.

“I want it back!”

“That shield is made of vibranium, Rogers, which is the rarest metal on Earth. It’s worth billions. And guess what? SI wanted it back. So I gave it to them. Unlike you, they actually have papers to
prove their ownership of it.”

For a while, Steve just stared, not knowing what to do or say. “That’s not… Surely you can make some kind of deal to get it.”

“And why would I want to do that? Things are bad enough already between SHIELD and Stark. I have no desire to make it even worse.”

“But it’s my shield!”

Fury didn’t seem the least bit impressed.

“I think we’ve already established that it isn’t, so there really isn’t much else to say about it.” He stood up. “Now if you’re finished with your little temper tantrum, I have work to do.”

Steve was unceremoniously shoved out the door.

Now what?

No one at SHIELD was any help at all, so Steve decided the only thing to do was go to the source: Stark Industries. He slipped out of his assigned quarters and made his way to Stark Tower, that huge ugly building he’d been told had been built by Howard’s son. From what Steve had heard, Tony Stark was an arrogant egotistical jerk who liked to shove his money and privilege in people’s faces. Still, Howard had given Steve that shield and he would not rest until his son gave it back.

He strode through the lobby and went to the information desk.

“I want to talk to Tony Stark,” he said.

The woman behind the desk looked up at him briefly then returned her gaze to the computer in front of her. “Do you have an appointment?”

“No, but I need to speak to him about an important matter.”

“Yes, I’m sure,” she replied blandly, still not looking up. “However, without an appointment you can’t.”

Steve counted to ten in his head to reign in his temper. “Fine,” he gritted out. “Then I’d like to make an appointment.”

“I’m afraid there are no openings on Mr Stark’s schedule at this time.”

It was becoming a real struggle to keep his cool now. “Do you know who I am?” Steve asked. He’d been told by SHIELD that Captain America had not been forgotten during his time in the ice, so it should garner him some respect. Unfortunately, the woman glanced up without any recognition. “I’m Steve Rogers. Captain America.” He waited, hoping she would realize this was important.

“Nice to meet you,” she finally answered, no change at all to her overall unfriendly demeanor. “There are still no openings in Mr Stark’s schedule at this time,” she repeated, as if she hadn’t heard a word he said.

“Look,” Steve said, at the end of his rope. “Stark has my shield and I want it back. And I’m not leaving until I get it, so stop jerking me around and call Stark so we can sort this out.” He didn’t like using this kind of language, but he was tired and frustrated and this woman was refusing to listen. There was only so much rudeness he could take. He stood up to his full height (once again grateful
for the serum, since in his old body he had never been able to pull this off) and made sure she knew he meant business.

“I see.” She typed something into the computer.

*Finally,* Steve thought.

A couple of minutes later, four man men in uniform showed up and stood in a circle around him.

“Sir,” one of them said. “we’re going to have to ask you to leave the building. Right now.”

“What? No!”

“You can either leave voluntarily or we will remove you. It’s your choice, but you *are* leaving.”

“You can’t bully me,” Steve said, now completely out of patience with these people. In just a few moments he had all the men unconscious on the floor. He turned back to the receptionist, who was clutching a phone in her hand.

“Please hurry,” she said to whomever she was talking to. He hoped it was Stark, because Steve really wanted to get this over with.

Steve glared at her. “I’m going to go see Stark now.” He’d tried playing nice and it had gotten him nowhere. She didn’t respond. Steve dismissed her from his mind and walked to the elevators. He pressed the button to the uppermost floor and the doors closed. Then nothing happened. He stabbed the button several times and the elevator still didn’t move.

Suddenly there were voices outside.

“This is the NYPD. Come out with your hands in the air.”

The doors opened and Steve found himself still in the lobby with half a dozen police officers pointing guns at him.

“Put your hands in the air and get down on your knees. Now!”

Steve complied, a bit worried now. “You are under arrest for assault,” the officer cuffing him said.

“I just want to talk to Stark and get my shield back,” Steve kept saying, though no one paid any attention to him. As he was escorted from the building he saw an ambulance parked out front and the security guards Steve had knocked down being loaded into it. It seemed like too much fuss, really. He hadn’t hit them that hard. He just wanted his shield, why couldn’t anyone understand that? He needed that shield. Everything was strange and different. Everyone he knew was gone. The shield was the only thing he had left and they were keeping it from him. It wasn’t fair.

When he arrived at the precinct, he was shoved into a cell and then forgotten. No matter how many times he yelled for someone, it never did any good. He was either ignored or told to shut up.

After a couple of hours, Fury showed up looking… well, furious.

“What the fuck did you think you were doing?”

“I want my shield—”

Fury cut him off. “Shut up! For god’s sake, enough about this. If I hear one more word about your stupid shield I swear I will ask Stark to lend it to me just so I can bash you in the head with it!”
“I—”

“You are being charged with assault and possibly murder. Do you understand that?”

“Murder?” Steve went still at that. No, that was ridiculous. He hadn’t… he hadn’t used excessive force.

“Yes, Rogers. You are super strong. What do you think happens to a person when you punch them? Maybe you didn’t care when it was only Nazi soldiers, but these are American citizens you attacked. And if any of those guards die as a result of your actions, it will be murder.”

“I didn’t mean…”

“I don’t give a rat’s ass what you meant. I care about what you did. I told you the shield is gone. You are not getting it back. Even if Stark was inclined to give it back, he sure as hell won’t now, after you’ve assaulted his employees.”

Steve couldn’t think of anything to say. It was all spiraling out of control. “What now?”

“You’ll be arraigned. We got you a lawyer, though I’m not sure why I even bothered. This is your last warning, though. Forget the shield. Hell, after this you might forget about being Captain America altogether, depending on how much Stark pushes this. You will do what you’re told and you will keep your nose out of trouble. You got that?”

Not being Cap anymore? That wasn’t right! It wasn’t fair! He’d fought so hard for that! However, as much as it galled him, he could see that there was no use fighting it now. He was in trouble, and it would be best to do as Fury said.

The security guards all recovered, thankfully, which was good news for Steve. The SHIELD lawyer managed to get him out of jail by claiming that his “resurrection” had been traumatic and he didn’t know what he was doing. Instead of prison, he had to do community service and mandatory therapy. He was also forbidden from going anywhere near SI properties and Tony Stark himself.

When aliens invaded New York, Steve watched it from the TV in his tiny apartment as Iron Man and the Avengers saved the day.

(AN: In this scenario, Tony (and Pepper) didn’t take any of Fury/SHIELD’s shit, so Fury gave him the shield back as a sign of good faith. Fury also realized Steve was a liability and cut him loose. No more Cap. Such a shame.)

93. (prompt by MollyCat)

“Unless we break in and steal the Yellowjacket and destroy all the data, Darren Cross is going to unleash chaos upon the world.”

Scott listened to Hank, staring at all the screens around and started to think agreeing to this might not have been his best idea.

“I think our first move should be calling the Avengers,” he said. As much as Scott might want to be a hero, he was well aware that he wasn’t. The Avengers were.

Hank scoffed and stood up to pace around the room. “I spent half my life trying to keep this technology out of the hands of a Stark. I’m sure as hell not gonna hand-deliver it to one now. This is
not some cute technology like the Iron Man suit. This could change the texture of reality. Besides, they’re probably too busy dropping cities out of the sky.”

**Wow, Scott thought. This guy’s got issues.** “Okay, first of all, it wasn’t the Avengers who dropped a city out of the sky, it was Ultron. The Avengers saved the world.”

“Ultron was built by Tony Stark!”

“Nope. I read all about it while I was in prison. A scientific committee found that he didn’t; Ultron was created by the alien artifact Hydra had been messing around with.” Hank made a face at that and Scott frowned. Wasn’t that common knowledge? He knew, and he’d been in freaking prison.

“Second, the Iron Man suit is not some “cute technology”, it’s a fucking masterpiece of engineering no one has been able to replicate in 7 years.” Scott would admit to having a teeny tiny mancrush on Tony Stark. Really, what engineer didn’t? The guy was amazing. “Third, I don’t know what your beef was with Howard Stark, but I really can’t see why Tony Stark would want to steal from you.”

“All Starks are thieves!”

“Hmm… So am I. So are you. I mean, isn’t that what you’re trying to do here? Besides, have you actually *met* Tony Stark? ‘Cause the man has been called a lot of things, but thief isn’t one of them.”

Hank huffed and waved a hand in dismissal. Scott took that as a no to his question. Yep, maybe he shouldn’t have gotten involved with the crazy old man who seemed to be holding a grudge against a man who had been dead for 25 years and the son he’d never even met.

“Okay, you know what? I appreciate the opportunity and all, but this seems like a really bad idea. I mean, stopping Cross is all well and good, but this plan? This plan is bonkers and I really don’t feel like going back to prison.”

Hope came in just then and gave Scott an undecipherable look. “I guess I’m wearing the suit, then.”

“No!” Hank immediately yelled. “You are *not* wearing the suit.”

“And why not?” Hope asked, voice icy cold and eyes glazing with anger.

While they were arguing, Scott sneaked out quietly and went for a walk. He needed to think.

If what Hank said about Cross was true, what the man was doing had to be illegal in some way, so there had to be a better way to deal with the situation than stealing stuff. The Pym Particles were *Hank’s* intellectual property, not Pym Technology’s. It had never been produced or marketed, so Cross couldn’t really do it now, right? What if Scott did call the Avengers? Or better yet, the Feds. That might help too. If Cross was planning to sell this tech to foreign powers, that could be, like, treason. Not to mention very bad for national security. And people took national security very seriously these days. Hell, the Feds might call the Avengers.

Scott had wanted to be a hero when he stole that money from VistaCorp to give it back to the people they’d stolen it from, and that had ended in disaster. He’d thought being a hero meant doing the big things, fighting the good fight, like the Avengers. But that was… a bit selfish, wasn’t it? There were plenty of other ways to be a hero. Less splashy, maybe, but no less important. Like people who refused to look the other way when something bad was happening and did something about it. Not, perhaps, by taking the law into their own hands (like Scott had tried), but by going through the proper channels. Telling someone about the danger Cross represented would be heroic in a way, right? He’d be taking a stand, doing the right thing. Just not by risking getting his ass sent back to prison.
With that resolved in mind, Scott went to the FBI.

Cross was arrested on multiple charges and the Ant-Man technology remained safe. Hank was pissed as hell with Scott, but Hope thanked him.

It felt good to be a hero, even if no one knew about it.

(AN: Redeeming Scott this time. I wanted to include the part where Hank decides to steal from the Avengers, but that happens later in the movie, after all the training Scott does with the suit, and I didn’t want to get into that. Also, Scott doesn’t know he’s stealing from the Avengers until he’s actually there.

By the way, why is it that in superhero movies no one ever bothers to talk to the police of the Feds or anyone who might be able to legally do something about whatever dastardly thing the villain wants to do? Oh, right, because then we wouldn’t have heroic fights and explosions. *eye roll*)
Hey everyone. A huge thank you to everyone who has been following this story. I can’t believe it’s made it to 4k kudos. You guys are great! Hope you enjoy this chapter. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

94. (prompt by MayaM, chibi_luna_chan)

It was supposed to be easy and simple. T’Challa had promised Steve that his people would find a way to fix Bucky, but almost three months had passed and there were no signs of any improvement or progress. It was agony having Bucky so close yet so far, watching him stuck in that cryo tube like a frozen corpse. It wasn’t right. After all they’d been through, all the fights and the sacrifices, it just wasn’t right that they had nothing to show for it. They deserved better.

To make matters worse, Tony was on the news practically every day talking about the Accords and the new Avengers Team he was putting together. The world, it seemed, was on Tony’s side, and sitting here in Wakanda there was nothing Steve could do about it, no way to let the world know what was really going on. Sam had begun to withdraw, unhappy with what was being said about them on the news (they were not terrorists, for god’s sake) while they were powerless to defend themselves. Everything was falling apart and Steve needed Bucky back. If he had Bucky by his side he could leave Wakanda and keep fighting for the Avengers, for the people of the world who were being deceived by power-hungry politicians with agendas.

That was why, when Wanda suggested she might be able to help Bucky with her powers, Steve jumped at the chance. Sam didn’t think it was a good idea at all when Steve mentioned it to him, but Steve paid him no mind. He knew everything would be all right if only he got Bucky back.

T’Challa, to Steve’s surprise, was also against it. He said it would be dangerous and refused to let them try it, even though Wanda assured them she knew what she was doing.

“It’s not your decision,” Steve told him.

“It’s not yours either,” T’Challa replied. “I gave Sgt Barnes my word that he would be safe from harm here, and that he would only be woken once we had a solution to his problem. As that has not yet happened, he will remain as he is. He has had enough people do things to him without his consent.”

It galled Steve that T’Challa could even indirectly compare them to Hydra. Steve and Wanda were trying to help him! But T’Challa clearly didn’t care, and Steve could see that there was no use arguing with the man. So he nodded and took Wanda’s arm to lead her back to the rooms they’d been given.

“We’ll wait until tonight when the lab will be empty,” he told her in a whisper to keep from being overheard.

T’Challa had no right to keep a cure from Bucky if one was available. The man was probably just annoyed that it had not been his people to come up with the answer, not his people who would be
the heroes. Some people just had to be the center of attention, and T’Challa – like Tony – looked like one of them. However, the important thing here was Bucky, not someone’s ego, and Steve would do whatever it took to get his friend back. If Wanda said she could do it, Steve saw no reason to doubt her. Wanda was his friend, she knew what Bucky meant to him and she would never betray him – not like Tony had done.

They had no problem getting into the lab. Steve has observed the doctors calibrating the machines when Bucky went in, so he was pretty sure he could figure out how to turn them off and wake Bucky up. Wanda had said she couldn’t do anything while Bucky was frozen.

It seemed to take forever for the pod to open with a hiss and Bucky’s body to slump inside. Steve reached over to gently take him out and place him on the table.

Wanda told him to stand back and Steve did, hovering anxiously nearby. Then her hands glowed and red mist swirled like smoke around Bucky’s still form, gathering on his head. The look on Wanda’s face was one of intense concentration and Steve felt intensely proud of her for all she had accomplished and how far she’d come despite where she’d started.

After a few moments, Bucky began to stir. He opened his eyes and looked around groggily until he spotted Steve.

“Steve?” he asked, voice hoarse and fearful. He turned a bit and saw Wanda, hands alight with power. Bucky’s eyes widened and he scrambled off the table, falling into a heap on the floor. He clutched his head and screamed.

“Bucky!” Steve yelled, throwing himself on the floor to hold his friend, who was now thrashing wildly. “Stop! You’ll hurt yourself. It’s okay, you’re okay. We’re going to help you.”

There was no sign that Bucky was listening. Helpless, Steve turned to Wanda, who seemed lost in some kind of trance, red tendrils weaving around her, Bucky and Steve. Steve opened his mouth to tell her to stop whatever she was doing, but he felt the floor falling away from his feet and then he was back in the ice, trapped and cold. Peggy was there too, on the other side of the ice barrier, wearing a uniform stained with blood, slumped next to the broken body of Howard Stark. Howard’s eyes snapped open and he stared straight into Steve.

“I was your friend,” he said, reaching out to Steve. His hand turned into ashes and soon all that was left was a glowing blue circle pulsing with energy. It looked like Tony’s arc reactor. Then it too dimmed and was gone.

Peggy gave Steve one last look. “We never got our dance.” Then she disappeared into dust as well.

“No!” Steve screamed. “Stop!”

He banged on the ice and it broke, sending him crashing face first into the ground.

“Steve,” a voice from behind him said. Steve scrambled to get up, fists up. It was Bucky, one arm missing and blood dripping from his eyes and nose. “What did you do? You were supposed to help me.”

Steve tried to take a step toward his friend, but his feet seemed stuck to the floor. All he could do was scream again as he watched Bucky disintegrate right before his eyes until Steve was surrounded by dust.

It felt like an eternity before he realized he was back in Wakanda, lying in a bed with wires attached to him.
“What…? What happened? Where’s Bucky?”

A woman in a nurse uniform came over. “How do you feel, Mr Rogers?”

“Fine. Where’s Bucky?” There was no sign of his friend anywhere and that couldn’t be good. “Where’s Wanda?” What had happened? Wanda had sworn she could heal Bucky. Had she made a mistake?

“Sgt Barnes is being treated in another room,” the nurse said. “Miss Maximoff is currently in a cell.”

“A cell? Why?”

The nurse gave him a very unimpressed look. “Because she assaulted you and Sgt Barnes,” she said in a condescending tone, as if explaining something to a child.

“Wanda didn’t assault us!” Steve exclaimed. “She just… something went wrong.” He tried not to think of the nightmarish vision he’d had. It hadn’t been Wanda’s fault, he was sure of it. She was a good girl. A friend. She wouldn’t hurt Steve. Or Bucky. “I want to see Bucky.”

It took a great deal of persuading (and a slight bit of intimidation, if Steve was honest), to get the woman to agree.

There were a lot more doctors tending to Bucky than there had been for him, Steve noted with mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was good to see they were taking Bucky’s case seriously. On the other, it made Steve feel a bit like an afterthought, which he didn’t like. In any case, all those people milling about made it hard for him to see what was going on with Bucky, if he was even awake. Eventually some of the people left – all glaring at him – and Steve could finally get close enough.

Bucky seemed okay, though he was grimacing a bit as if in pain. A doctor gave him a pill and some water and Bucky took them, resting back against the bed in exhaustion.

“Bucky?” His friend clearly didn’t hear him, so Steve stepped up to the bed to be in Bucky’s direct line of sight. “Bucky? Bucky, are you all right?” Finally, Bucky opened his eyes and looked at Steve, though he said nothing. “Hey, it’s me. How are you feeling?”

Bucky frowned, eyes darting around the room and the doctors still hanging around before settling back on Steve. “Sorry, do I know you?”

Steve felt a chill go down his spine but he managed to reign in his panic. Bucky was just disorientated from… everything. “Bucky, it’s me. Steve. I’m your best friend, remember? We grew up together.” He tried a smile, though he didn’t think it was very successful.

There was still no sign of recognition. “Who’s Bucky?”

“You’re Bucky. Come on, Bucky, you know this.” What was going on?

Again Bucky frowned. “They said my name was James.”

“Yeah, that’s right. James Buchanan Barnes, but you go by Bucky.”

His friend made a face. “Really? That sounds… childish. I think I prefer James.”

“No!” Steve said, rather more forcefully than he meant to, given the way Bucky flinched back. “You are Bucky, my best friend. You’re… We’re friends. Till the end of the line, remember?”

Bucky shook his head. “Sorry, I don’t. I have no idea who you are, or who I am, for that matter.
Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like to rest. I’ve got his killer headache.”

The doctors immediately ushered Steve out, and all he could do was stand there like an idiot as the door was slammed in his face. This could not be happening. Bucky was just confused, like before. He’d be all right. He’d remember Steve again.

Wouldn’t he?

Steve went to see Wanda. She would be able to explain. Maybe it would just take more than one try to restore Bucky to himself.

The women guarding the cells didn’t want to let him in, but Steve wouldn’t budge, so they finally stepped aside.

“Wanda, are you okay?” he asked. She was wearing a collar around her neck just like the one in the Raft. Bastards.

“Steve! Steve, please help me! Get this thing off!” she cried, looking lost and scared.

“It’s okay, Wanda. It’s gonna be okay. Come here.”

She instantly complied and it took no time for Steve to reach through the bars and snap that awful thing off of her.

The guards came in then, but Wanda waved her hand and they all flew backwards, hitting the wall with a loud crack. They didn’t move again.

“That… That was a little excessive, wasn’t it?” Steve said. He could understand her lashing out after the way she’d been treated, but this would not help them.

He expected Wanda to apologize, to be shocked by her own reaction and loss of control. Instead, she smiled. It was not a smile he had ever seen on her face, though. It was… sinister.

“No, I think I’m done with this.” The smile widened and Steve started to feel a little uneasy. “How is Bucky?”

“He’s… he doesn’t remember me.” Again, he expected her to look worried, to reassure him that it would be okay, but all she did was chuckle.

“Well, you wanted him free of Hydra. Now he is. Free of Hydra… and everything.”

“What…? Wanda, what did you do?”

This time she laughed and her whole face transformed. Gone was the sweet shy girl he knew. In her place was a woman who glared at him with hatred, looking almost demented.

“I destroyed him,” she said without a trace of remorse. “I have really had enough of hearing you mope about him day in and day out. He’s gone. Gone forever. His mind is now a blank state, all traces of Hydra and whoever he used to be burned away. He’s free.”

Steve could only stare at her in horror.

“Oh? What’s the matter? Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Wh… Why? Why would you do that?” No. No, that couldn’t be true. Wanda… she couldn’t have done this. She was his friend. She was a good girl.
“Oh god, you really are stupid. Do you think I care about you? You were a means to an end, a way to get out of jail for Sokovia and Ultron. And it was so delightful to be accepted in Stark’s place and kick him out of his own team.” She still had that twisted smile etched on her face. “That bastard killed my parents and my brother, he deserved to take the fall for Ultron and be ostracized by everyone. And I got his money to do whatever I wanted.” Then the smile finally faded. “But you ruined it. You went and you fought him and pissed off the world and now everyone is on his side again, and we’re stuck here as criminals! I thought we would do something about it, remind the world what a monster he is and that we’re the ones who deserve glory, but no… All you want to do is stare at a corpse. I’m sick of it! It’s time to strike out on my own again. You’ve outlived your usefulness to me.”

No. No, that couldn’t be true. Wanda was just a kid, a misguided kid. She could not be this… this evil thing standing there. “You can’t…” But he didn’t get to finish. With another wave of her hand, Steve was back in that awful vision where all his friends were dead and gone, angry eyes accusing him of having killed them, with no way out.

Hours later, when he recovered his senses, he found out that Wanda had escaped from Wakanda leaving a trail of bodies (dead or trapped in their own minds) in her wake. A couple of days later, Steve, Clint, Sam and Scott were turned over to international authorities. They were eventually tried and convicted of multiple crimes. Wanda remained at large for several months but was finally killed by Vision, the only one not affected by her powers, when she tried to murder Tony.

Steve never saw Bucky again. He tried writing letters but had no idea where to send them and no one told him anything. After a great deal of begging, he was told that “James” was in a psychiatric institution being treated and wanted nothing to do with a convicted criminal. Steve lost everything. At night, he dreamed of Wanda’s sinister laughter as she killed Bucky over and over again.

(AN: I debated whether to have Wanda erase Bucky by mistake or on purpose, but on purpose seemed more interesting to really showcase Steve’s blind trust in her and its terrible consequences. Also, let’s assume that Wakandans are so sure of their (technological and moral) superiority that they never even bothered with security systems. Why should they when no one ever gets in?)

95 (prompt by Kaysco)

Peter could hardly believe what was happening. He was in Berlin with Iron Man to help the best hero in the world to save the day. Peter was going to be a hero. A real hero! He had an amazing new suit and everything! It was the most amazing thing ever.

Ever since Tony Stark had announced himself as Iron Man, Peter had been obsessed. The suit was totally the most awesome thing in the world and Mr Stark was a real genius. What was not to like? However, until Tony Stark had actually gone to his house, Peter had once seen him in person once, on the day of the Expo when all the robots had gone crazy and tried to kill everyone. Peter had faced one of the robots, his Iron Man mask and repulsor on, and then Iron Man himself had shown up to blast it and save Peter. And, best of all, instead of just flying off, Iron Man had turned to young Peter and said “good job, kid.” It had been completely awesome!

Now Peter was waiting for Mr Stark to call him, trying to pay attention to the conversation between the Avengers despite his nerves and excitement. Mr Stark had given him specific instructions on what he was supposed to do (“keep your distance and web them up”) and Peter was not going to disappoint him. This was his chance to impress Mr Stark (for real now) and become an Avenger, and no way in hell was Peter going to mess it up.

It was hard to understand what the conversation was about, but Mr Stark was sure getting pissed.
“Underoos!” Mr Stark yelled, and Peter jumped up.

He took Cap’s shield and webbed his hands together as Mr Stark had told him, but he couldn’t help babbling a little. He knew he was being lame and embarrassing himself, he just couldn’t help it. He could never keep his mouth shut when he was nervous.

Peter didn’t really understand why the Avengers were fighting with each other. Cap had said something about a doctor, but he hadn’t really explained much. If there were bad guys on the loose, wouldn’t it be better to get everyone together and deal with it? It almost looked like Cap wanted to fight. It made no sense. Then he said Mr Stark had broken up the Avengers, which made no sense either. Mr Stark had asked them to stand down. He’d told Peter that the others were in a lot of trouble with the law because of what had happened in Lagos and Bucharest and they all needed to sit down and talk. That didn’t look like it was going to happen, though.

Cap raised his hands and an arrow flew at them, tearing Peter’s web off. Some guy came out of nowhere and took the shield from Peter to return it to Cap. Yep, it looked like that was going to be a fight, all right. What the hell…?

It became clear within minutes that Cap’s team wasn’t kidding around either. The Scarlet Witch brought down a bunch of cars on Mr Stark and Peter realized that was exactly why Mr Stark had asked for his help. Peter remembered the footage from Lagos and the way the Witch had made that building explode with people in it. That was not good. That lady was dangerous, so Peter threw a lot of webbing at her, binding first her hands (she seemed to use them to make her powers work), then cocooned her to the ground, leaving just her head free for her to breathe and ignoring the cursing the spewed. Then he turned to Hawkeye and did the same. Both the Witch and Hawkeye only had normal human strength, which made it very unlikely they’d be able to get away without help.

“Great work, kid,” Mr Stark said. “I’ll bring the Falcon to you.”

As soon as the man was in range, Peter shot a web at one of the wings and pulled, sending him crashing to the ground. Before Falcon had a chance to stand up, Peter webbed him up like the others and stepped on one the wings hard enough to crack it just in case. Now he wouldn’t be able to fly even if he managed to get free.

“Falcon’s down, Mr Stark,” Peter reported.

Suddenly a guy grew out of thin air, turning into a giant.

“Holy shit!” Peter exclaimed.

“Fuck!” Mr Stark agreed.

The giant grabbed War Machine by the foot and tossed him away like a toy, it was really scary. Peter sent a web to keep Col Rhodes from crashing and then he, War Machine and Iron Man took the giant down like in that old Star Wars movie. It was pretty cool.

“Mr Stark, I need assistance,” Vision said, and Peter used the momentum from trapping the giant’s legs to reach the hangar where Cap and the Winter Soldier were trying to escape and back Vision up.

The Black Widow was talking to Cap, but instead of talking him down, she turned and fired her weapon on the Black Panther guy.

“Hey!” Peter yelled, webbing her up too. “Who’s side are you on?”

Cap and the Soldier made it into the jet, but Vision reached them before they could take off and
made sure the jet wouldn’t be going anywhere.

“Come out with your hands on your head,” Vision told them.

The Black Panther, now recovered, pounced on the Winter Soldier the second the man stepped out of the jet, clearly intent on ripping the guy’s throat out.

“Wow! Chill out, dude!” Peter webbed all three of them: the Black Panther, the Winter Soldier and Cap, who had jumped to the second one’s defense just as intent on causing harm on the first. “Time out for everyone,” Peter said once they were all trussed up. Mr Stark and Col Rhodes arrived then to cuff everyone, including the Black Widow and the Black Panther. Those two were obviously not very trustworthy.

“You can’t do this, Tony!” Cap shouted. “You’re destroying the Avengers. Turning us into attack dogs for governments with agendas.”

What? “Uhmm, sorry, Cap. What are you talking about? What governments?”

“The Accords! Look, kid, you have no idea what’s going on here.”

Peter shook his head. “Yeah, you got that right. I have no idea what you’re on about. The Accords aren’t about governments, they were created by the UN.”

“Exactly!”

Behind his mask, Peter frowned. “Uhmm, but the UN isn’t a government. It’s not like the Avengers would be under Russia’s jurisdiction. And the UN is all about keeping the peace.”

“No, they’re trying to keep us from helping people,” Cap insisted. “To control superheroes, and treat us like criminals if we don’t dance to their tune.”

“What? You’re being arrested because you assaulted police officers, not because of the Accords.”

Even Peter, who was a teenager, knew that. What the hell was up with Cap? Shouldn’t Captain America know this stuff? “The UN doesn’t have the power to control anyone. For starters, it doesn’t deal with people, it deals with governments. Elected governments of the various member nations. The Accords are about oversight for superheroes, to keep what happened in Lagos from happening again. It’s like the police, you know. When something goes wrong, there’s a review to make sure there weren’t any mistakes. And if there are, that the people who made them answer for it. That seems pretty reasonable to me.” That was what aunt May had told him when the talk about the Accords began. He hadn’t understood, at first, because he’d thought superheroes like the Avengers knew what they were doing, but it made sense. Listening to Cap now, he could see that they really didn’t, and the Accords were absolutely necessary. “With great power comes great responsibility,” Peter told Cap, like uncle Ben had told him long ago. “You need to be careful about what you do, especially if you have super powers.” And Team Cap very clearly didn’t. “This” he gestured “is not it. There was no need for this fight. People could have been hurt. How do you expect people to trust you if prefer to fight with your friends instead of sorting out your problems through talking?” Peter shook his head again. “Only bullies use their fists to get their way. I thought you disapproved of bullies.”

There was dead silence in the air after Peter stopped speaking, then he heard clapping.

“Holy shit, kid,” Mr Stark said, “that was brilliant. Couldn’t have said it better myself.” Peter blushed, glad that no one could see him. Mr Stark turned to Cap. “Schooled by a kid. Way to go, Rogers. And just so you know, you and your buddies are in a world of trouble – because you broke
the law, not because of me, to be clear. Maybe you weren’t aware, but you can’t just walk into a
country whenever you feel like it and blow shit up. That’s called terrorism.”

Cap glared at both Mr Stark and Peter but the moment he opened his mouth the Winter Soldier told
him to shut up.

As the criminals were put in a transport to be taken to prison, Mr Stark came over to talk to Peter.

“You were amazing kid. Absolutely awesome. Exactly what I needed. You helped take them down
without anyone getting hurt. And that speech was truly inspired. Thank you.”

Peter could barely contain his enthusiasm. He’d done it! He impressed Mr Stark! Before he could
really think about what he was doing, he had stepped forward to hug Mr Stark – who was thankfully
out of the armor, or it would have been even more awkward than it was.

Mr Stark laughed and clapped Peter on the back. “All right, kid. You go back home now. I’ll come
see you once this mess is sorted out and we’ll talk. You have potential.”

This is the best day ever, Peter thought.

(Team Cap ended up in prison. A Russian team eventually found Zemo’s dead body in Siberia. The
Accords went into effect with the world’s whole-hearted support.)

96 (prompt by Core, Phantom_Work Stories_Division)

It had been a while since Sam had been to one of these Air Force get together things. After the way
things went with Riley, he no longer had the same drive to serve in the military. Some of his buddies
had continued to reach out to him from time to time, and Sam had, for the most part, brushed them
off. Now, however, he finally felt better about himself and his life to go back to at least socializing
with his former colleagues. Plus, this time he could brag that he was practically an Avenger – and
that Captain America was his friend. So he’d accepted the invitation with excitement.

Unfortunately, things did not go quite the way he’d expected. Most people kept giving him these
hostile glares that puzzled Sam. Were they jealous? It seemed odd, but some guys in the military
could be incredibly competitive. The first time he’d mentioned Cap, the guys he was talking to made
weird noises and shortly after excused themselves. Sam didn’t understand.

When he finally found a captive audience to talk about the Avengers, the guy listened for a while as
Sam recounted how Cap had beat up a bunch of Hydra guys and then interrupted.

“What about Col Rhodes? Have you met War Machine? How awesome is he, huh? I bet he’s just
the best!”

Sam frowned. “Ah… No, I haven’t met Rhodes.”

“Ah…” The guy sounded really disappointed, and clearly no longer interested in anything Sam had
to say. “Oh, I see a buddy of mine. Nice talking to you.” And he was just gone.

If it had just been one time, Sam could have written it off as a particular Rhodes fan, but all through
the night the same things happened. Everyone he talked to asked about Col Rhodes, and everyone
deflated when he said he didn’t know the man. And yeah, it was an Air Force crowd – so of course
Rhodes, who was in the Air Force just like them, would be a person of interest – but very few people
seemed to care at all about Steve. Some even went so far as to snort at his name.

“Hey, what’s your beef with Captain America?” Sam finally asked, annoyed at people’s
dismissiveness. “He’s a real hero.”

“A hero?” A man said. “After that stint he pulled? I’ve got friends who were in the Potomac that day who got hurt because of his crusade.”

“And he didn’t even show up at the Congressional hearing to explain himself. US secrets splashed all over the place and he can’t be bothered? How many of our guys did he put in danger?” Another one added.

“That’s not what happened,” Sam defended.

“You’re saying he didn’t put SHIELD’s classified files all over the Internet?” The first guy asked.

“It wasn’t SHIELD, it was Hydra.”

“No, it was everyone! People got killed! Innocent people.”

Sam was taken a bit aback by the vehemence of the response, and he didn’t know what to say. Had Steve put everyone’s files out there? That… That would not be good.

“I’m sure it wasn’t like that. Hydra was gonna kill millions of people. They needed to be stopped. And we did.” He was proud of his contribution to that fight, and it showed in his voice.

The others didn’t agree.

“So you stole the Falcon wings so you could be a hero? A lowly sergeant? If anyone should have helped with that, it should have been Colonel Rhodes, who is a real hero. The man is a decorated officer with 30 years of experience, and I would bet he would not have dropped those hellicarriers in a civilian area without even warning anyone.”

“Hell, Rhodes could have made a phone call to Tony Stark and get those things before they even got off the ground!” a new guy said. “Then he could have dealt with the Hydra personnel without endangering anyone.”

“No wonder the White House changed Iron Patriot back to War Machine after that fiasco. The Air Force didn’t want to taint their biggest hero by being associated with Captain America, the man with the shitty plan,” the first guy added, voice heavy with contempt.

What? Sam hadn’t known anything about that.

“Yeah, I sure am glad they did. Rhodes is already a patriot and a hero, and he was before Rogers came back from the ice. Clearly the legend of Captain America was rather exaggerated. Doesn’t look like the guy knows what he’s doing.”

Sam thought back to everything he’d heard Steve say and the things he did, and realized there was some truth to that. It wasn’t just that he’d missed a lot of pop culture, there were also some odd things he’d said that, thinking about it now, seemed… worrisome.

“And the Black Widow? Can’t trust the Russians, man. How do we know she’s really defected? How do we know she isn’t Hydra?” Yet another guy said.

“She’s not Hydra!” Sam replied.

“Yeah? How do you know? You met her, what? A month ago? She’s a spy, lying is what they do.”

“She helped us take down Hydra,” he insisted, though with less conviction now.
“So what? She could have done that to make sure she wouldn’t get caught too. Playing both sides, making you trust her so she’s still have an in.”

That… that made sense, but… No. Surely… Steve knew Natasha. If he said she was trustworthy, she had to be. Right? Except Sam suddenly realized that Steve had trusted him on pretty much nothing. Sure, Sam wasn’t a bad guy, but what if he had been? What if he’d been Hydra, sent to befriend Steve and betray him? Would Steve even have known?

“You know who we know can be trusted? Colonel Rhodes. And Stark. Guy saved all our asses from aliens. Plus he spent years making weapons to keep us safe. In fact, aren’t the Falcon wings from SI?”

“Yeah, man,” someone else told Sam with a glare. “You stole from the Air Force and from SI. That’s not on.”

“Just because you used those wings doesn’t mean they belong to you. Have you given them back?”

It went downhill from there. Instead of the admiration Sam had been hoping for, all he got were accusations: theft, stupidity, blindness (“how do you even know Cap can be trusted? For all we know, all that time in the ice fucked up his brain”) and arrogance (“what on Earth made you think you could just do whatever without even informing your superiors?”). Every other sentence was about how Rhodes (and Stark) would have done much better.

“Rogers is besmirching the US Army, man. I got friends in the Army who are really pissed about that. He’s not even a real Captain.”

Sam felt smaller and smaller with every word spoken. The worst thing about it was that… they were all right. He had been a complete idiot, and he hadn’t even realized it, so caught up in being needed, being important again.

He had no idea what to do, how to make things right.

What am I supposed to do now?

There were no answers, only questions. Sam was lost.

Chapter End Notes

Just wanted to let you all know that I’m going to be really busy for the next month or so. I'm moving in a couple of weeks, so I don't know how much time I'll have for writing in the midst of unpacking and organizing stuff. (I'm tired just thinking about it.)

Thanks for reading!
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys. Finally, a new chapter! Happy New Year! :)

97. (prompt by JD-Winter)

AN: Inspired by izumi2’s List of Questions series (particularly Not What I had in Mind) and done sort of in the same style.

It was chance that started it all. A reporter from a small online publication happened to spot Steve Rogers while the man was out jogging and managed to ask him a few questions and write an article about it.

*When asked why the Avengers had not shown up to help Iron Man when he was attacked by the Mandarin a short while ago, Steve Rogers looked baffled, as if the thought had never even occurred to him.*

“I wasn’t aware of it until after it was over,” Rogers said. Informed that all news outlets had reported it extensively, he only shrugged and said he didn’t watch the news.

*So the supposed leader of the Avengers has no idea when his teammate’s house is blown into the ocean. It leads us to wonder what else Mr Rogers is unaware of, and whether such a man is really the best choice for this job.*

Other news sources picked up on it and noted that none of the Avengers, save for Tony Stark himself, had ever made any sort of public appearance or interview, prompting people to wonder: “who are these people that are supposed to be protecting us?”

It soon became apparent, after several unsuccessful attempts by various news organizations to get a hold of the Avengers for some follow-up questions, that the “Avengers” PR team was, in fact, only for Iron Man, as they were SI employees.

“Dr Banner has requested to be a reserve member only for the Avengers. He has also requested privacy,” was the message the “Avengers” PR released to the press.

That, of course, prompted even more questions. Why was only Banner mentioned? What about Steve Rogers? Clint Barton? Natasha Romanoff? Where were they? What were they doing? Why didn’t they come forward to say something?

Stark, the world was aware thanks to SI press releases, was recovering from surgery after the debacle with the Mandarin and was, understandably, unavailable. Which made the world wonder: if the others Avengers had been involved, would Stark have even needed surgery in the first place? Could his injuries have been prevented if he’d had backup from his supposed team? Were the Avengers even a team at all?

Two weeks passed and there was no more word from Rogers or any of the others. The reporter that had started it all had tried to find Rogers again, but had been unable to establish contact.
“I have seen Rogers several times as he goes about his jogging routine, but he will no longer answer any questions. When I try, he simply runs faster and I have no hope of catching up,” said reporter published.

Ordinary citizens living in DC began trying their own luck in approaching Rogers, only to report the same response.

“Saw Rogers again today. Running, as usual. And again he left me in the dust when I asked him about Stark and the Avengers,” a man posted on Twitter. Several posts with similar content soon followed.

When Tony Stark finally made his first public appearance post surgery, he was bombarded with questions about Rogers and the Avengers.

“Mr Stark, why can’t the Avengers – other than yourself – be reached?”

“Why didn’t they help you deal with the Mandarin?”

“Where are the others? What are they doing?”

Stark, who had been doing interviews for decades, simply let the gathered reporters wear themselves out before speaking.

“The Mandarin was a terrorist. We have Counter-terrorist Units that were working on identifying and apprehending him. He was not a matter for the Avengers. I personally challenged him because one of his bombs hurt a dear friend of mine. I would say I made myself a target, but the truth is that Aldrich Killian, the Mandarin, had a grudge against me and would have come after me sooner or later regardless. In any case, it was personal. I handled it in conjunction with Col James Rhodes of the US Air Force. End of story. I do not know where the others were – other than Dr Banner, who called me afterwards to ask if I was all right and eventually came back to help me with some things – or what they were doing. I do not know whether they had any intention of helping. They did not contact me either during that mess or at any time since.

“I am, technically, only a consultant for the Avengers, and as such I’m not privy to details such as where they live or what they do with their time.

“When all this started, my PR people did try to contact Rogers, Romanoff and Barton – Thor has gone back to his planet, as I believe you all know – and they got no answer to any of their attempts. That is all I know and all I can tell you.

“I would also like to clarify that I am not the person to ask in regards to the others. I have not talked to Rogers, Barton or Romanoff since the invasion. If they have chosen not to contact me, I have to respect that. I am a very busy man, so I don’t have time to keep tabs of them – and they are adults who, I’m sure, can manage their own lives without any input from me. In any case, they know where to reach me – as do all of you – if they want to.”

The message to the world was clear: Tony Stark had very little to do with the Avengers, didn’t seem particularly fond of them and didn’t seem inclined to change the current status quo. It also left the world with the same question they had before: where were Rogers, Barton and Romanoff? And why did they still refuse to show their faces?

More and more the world became disillusioned by its heroes. Outside the US, people began questioning the very idea of ‘Captain America’. “It’s rather imperialistic, isn’t it?” some said. “What are his qualifications, aside from being American, blond and blue-eyed?” others asked. “How can we
trust him when he doesn’t even watch the news? Does he even know how the modern world works?”

The answer to that question, it was soon confirmed, was ‘no’.

After nearly a month of speculation, Steve Rogers finally faced the public. He gave a press conference (dressed in his flagish suit), and it was a disaster.

He reiterated that he had not reached out to help Iron Man. “He handled it fine on his own,” was his explanation. He also rarely watched the news because “it’s all about gossip and nonsense. People seemed to have lost sight of what’s really important. It’s all cell phones and social media. What about good old fashioned values?” And while a segment of the population (the conservative one) ate it up, most people were left either scratching their heads in confusion or indignant over such a stupid generic statement.

 Asked why he’d taken so long to address the world’s concern, Rogers replied that “the world should know I – and the rest of the Avengers – are here for you all. I’m a soldier, not an entertainer. I have other things to do.”

That part caused an outpour of anger which only grew with every other word Rogers uttered.

“So you think talking to the world is a waste of time?” a reporter asked. “You don’t think the public has a right to know who is defending them? Or not, since you chose to sit the Mandarin situation out.”

“I believe our actions speak for themselves. When aliens attacked, we stepped up and defeated them. That’s what we’re here for.”

Some action did indeed speak for themselves, and Rogers’ certainly did: his disregard for transparency, his indifference to a supposed teammate, his clear ignorance… it all painted a rather vivid picture, and the world did not care for it.

The next time Rogers was spotted, in the Ukraine of all places (wearing at least a less flashy – that is, less flaggy – version of his suit), the world didn’t waste any time asking questions. What the hell was he doing there? How did he even get in the country, since the Ukranian government had no record of him legally entering? On whose authority did he invade a country and assaulted its citizens? None, was the obvious answer. And people were not happy.

The US government, not wanting an international mess on their hands, claimed they had no knowledge of any of it and that, despite his title, Mr Rogers was neither a captain nor currently affiliated with the US armed forces in any way. Rogers was deported back to the US with a stern warning. He was banned from the Ukraine and several neighboring countries. It was, needless to say, a media disaster.

The Avengers Initiative, such as it was, pretty much died after that, since no one trusted them or wanted them within their borders. Even in the US things were not that great, with a lot of people suspicious that “Cap” was more of a fictional character than a real hero.

The final nail on their coffin happened when news hit that a group of heavily armed (with what looked like alien derived weapons) terrorists started wreaking havoc in Lithuania and the local government reached out to Iron Man for help. Tony Stark obliged and, in conjunction with Interpol and counter-terrorist forces, began tracking down the criminals. It was all going quite well until Captain America, Hawkeye and Black Widow decided to get involved. Because they were out of the loop in what law enforcement was doing, they went in guns blazing and instead of the situation
being contained, the fight spilled into the streets and innocent bystanders were killed and injured.

The Lithuanians were livid and demanded Rogers’ and the others’ immediate arrest once the dust had settled.

“I was trying to help!” Rogers said as he was escorted to the local police station. “I stopped the terrorists. It’s a shame that people died, but even more could have died if we hadn’t been there. We can’t save everyone, but if we don’t try, next time no one gets saved.”

Rogers, Barton and Romanoff were convicted on all charges. However, since Lithuania didn’t have a prison capable of detaining Rogers, he was transferred back to the US while Romanoff was handed over to Russian and Barton stayed in Lithuania.

A new group of superheroes was eventually formed under the United Nations with Iron Man as one of its founding members. This time, the public knew all about them; transparency and accountability were mandatory.

98. (prompt by zeynel)

It was an unprecedented case and, as such, an unprecedented verdict. Wanda Maximoff, Hydra terrorist, was convicted of mind-controlling the citizens of Novi Grad as well as the “mind-rape” of Drs Bruce Banner and Tony Stark. And that was only the beginning.

After an entire city had been pretty much destroyed, the world had been in uproar. People demanded answers and assurances that something like that would never happen again. The investigation into Ultron began almost immediately, with a panel of specialists from all over the world being assembled by the UN and the International Criminal Court to figure out why and how the ‘killer robot’ had come into being. At the same time, the people of Novi Grad were very vocal in their displeasure of being controlled without their knowledge or consent.

Steve Rogers tried to argue that it had been “for their own good”, only to be thoroughly schooled on what informed consent was. It was hard to tell whether any of it actually sank in, though he at least stopped saying it after the ICC lawyers threatened to charge him as an accessory. He did have some support, mostly in the US, but it was not enough to change anything. His defense of Maximoff did not sit well with most people, especially once the full extent of her criminal activities came to light.

Dr Banner’s testimony in particular was very compelling when he described the horror of losing control of his own body and mind (in an even more extreme sense than he was used to with the Hulk transformations) and being forced to attack not only helpless civilians but also his friend Dr Stark.

General Ross of the US military had attempted to use the incident in Johannesburg to demand that Banner be arrested and given over to his custody, only to be swamped in civil rights violation accusations, courtesy of Tony Stark’s dedicated legal team. They had found evidence of Ross’s abuse of power in many incidents, including the unlawful pursuit of Banner, his less than legal entry in Brazil and his ordering of a military assault in Culvier University, which had been filmed by some of the students.

“I only agreed to be an Avenger on the condition that the Hulk would be used as a last resort in specific situations. Ms Maximoff played with my mind with the express purpose of using the Hulk as a weapon. And she could clearly do the same to anyone else,” Dr Banner said.

The world agreed.

The citizens of Novi Grad described the feeling of being compelled to leave their homes – finding
themselves walking out for no reason that they could see – and how terrifying it had been to realize that they’d had no say over their own actions. It did not matter that leaving had been necessary, they still deserved the chance to decide that for themselves.

“We are now living in a world where aliens and mind-control are real,” the prosecutor for the case said. “We must be firm and set an example for the world to follow. Mind-tampering, regardless of intent, will not be accepted.”

Maximoff, with a power-suppressing collar around her neck, called the people of Novi Grad ungrateful bastards. “I saved you! You would all have died if nor for me. You should be thanking me!” she screamed before being ordered out of the courtroom.

With the investigation into Ultron’s activation complete, there had been no doubt as to Maximoff’s involvement.

“No one would have needed saving if Maximoff had not deliberately manipulated Dr Stark’s mind in order to make him create something destructive,” the prosecutor argued.

Wanda Maximoff was convicted on all counts and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

In the course of the investigation, the Avengers were scrutinized and the world was not happy about what it found, particularly in regards to Rogers and his utter lack of leadership training – not to mention the baffling initial defense of Maximoff. He was relieved of his position while the world demanded more transparency into the Avengers’ operations.

Once the UN took over, several discrepancies were discovered, like many “missions” that Rogers and Romanoff (occasionally with non-member Sam Wilson) took that no one knew the purpose of. When questioned, Wilson said they were about finding Rogers’s long lost friend Bucky Barnes, aka the Winter Soldier. That led into an investigation about the Soldier and eventually to the Starks’ assassination. Both Rogers and Romanoff were convicted of obstruction of justice for keeping quiet about it and were, therefore, kicked out of the Avengers.

Barton chose to retire and, with Thor leaving the planet, the only ones left were Stark and Banner. Col Rhodes and the newly created Vision were accepted after undergoing the required admission process. Wilson applied but was ultimately rejected.

It was not perfect, but the world was satisfied that at least things were in better hands now.

99. (prompt by Intentionally Misspelled)

Things were not going according to plan. Steve had thought that it would be easier to get the jet and be on their way to deal with the Winter Soldiers, but it hadn’t quite worked out like that. Tony simply refused to listen to him and just do what he was told, and the Avengers were being torn apart because of Tony’s stubbornness. The guy in black was still after Bucky, and wouldn’t listen when Steve told him Bucky was innocent. What was wrong with these people? Why couldn’t they just listen to him?

Natasha, though… Her siding with Tony hurt. Of all of them, Steve had expected her to have his back. She knew how important Bucky was to him, she knew that Steve was doing the right thing, so why was she fighting him?

“There’s more going on here, Nat. We don’t have time for this stupid fight.”

“Then you should have stood down when you had the chance. You’re too close, Steve, you aren’t thinking clearly. You need to stop this before things get even more out of hand. We can fix this, but
you gotta meet us half-way.”

No, there could be no half-ways when people were trying to kill Bucky and control the Avengers. No, Steve had to plant himself like a tree and tell the world to move. It was the only way to ensure Bucky’s safety and the Avengers’ freedom.

“I thought you would understand, Nat.” He shook his head in disappointment. He’d really expected better from her.

“I understand that you are going to run us into the ground. Stand down, Steve, before it’s too late.”

“It’s already too late.”

The line in the sand had been drawn. They had made their choices. Now they had to stick to them.

Steve attacked.

Natasha was a good fighter, but she wasn’t a super soldier. She only had normal strength and the first thing Steve did was crush her widow bites. After that, it was only a matter of time. She lasted quite a while, Steve had to admit, but she was no match for him. In the end, he stood victorious. He hadn’t wanted to hurt her but she’d given him no choice. It had been the only way to stop her, the only way to save Bucky and the world.

Bucky had managed to stand his ground against the unknown guy in black armor. With Nat down, Steve could go to Bucky’s aid and between the two of them they managed to take the other out as well.

“We have to go. We’re running out of time.”

They got into the quinjet and took off, Sam flying behind them. Rhodes gave chase and was taken down.

“Sam? Sam, can you hear me?” There was no response. “Guess it’s just you and me, Bucky. Just like old times.” Steve smiled, overjoyed to have Bucky by his side again.

Bucky gave him a look but said nothing.

They made it to the base without any problems. Now all they had to do was find the other soldiers and take care of them. That would show the world this whole Accords business was a terrible idea and everything would be back to normal. Better, actually, because he would have Bucky with him.

Except the soldiers were already dead when they got there. The fake doctor was waiting for them inside one of the silos.

“Where’s Iron Man?” he asked. “I was so hoping he’d be here for this.”

“It’s just us,” Steve said. “The soldiers are dead. You lost.”

The fake doctor laughed. “Of course they’re dead. I killed them.” When Steve frowned, the man continued. “Releasing them was never the plan. It was just the bait to get you here. And you fell for it.” He smirked.

“For what? What do you want?” Bucky asked, tensing up.

“Why, to destroy the Avengers, of course. You heroes” he spat out the word “destroyed my family, so I’m going to destroy you.” He paused, tilting his head to the side. “Though I will confess I was
really hoping for Stark to be here. I wanted to see it with my own eyes.” He sighed. “Well, no
matter. The video will be released anyway. The whole world will see it and the Avengers will fall.”

“What video? What are talking about?” Steve didn’t like the sound of any of this. It was not at all
what he’d been expecting and now he didn’t know what to do.

“Well, since you’re here, I guess I’ll give you a preview of what the world will soon see.”

A screen suddenly came to life and Steve saw an empty road. Then a car crashed into a tree and a
man emerged. Howard. Shit. Steve watched helplessly as Bucky – no, not Bucky – murdered
Howard and his wife and then drove away.

“Oh god,” Bucky said, staggering back. “Oh god, what have I done?”

“Bucky, it wasn’t you. It wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t you. It’s going to be okay,” Steve said
desperately.

“Okay? Steve, are you out of your mind? I killed those people. I killed Howard. Oh god…”

“It wasn’t you.”

“Do you really think anyone will care? Do you think Howard’s son will care?”

No, Tony wouldn’t care, which was exactly why Steve had been trying so hard to keep him away.

“You… you knew… You knew about this.”

“Bucky…”

“You knew… and you didn’t tell him.”

“Like you said, he won’t care. I had to protect you, Bucky.”

“Protect me? Protect me? What about all those other people? God, Howard…”

“Bucky…”

“Get away from me.” Bucky shook off Steve’s arm and took a step backwards. “I’m gonna turn
myself in.”

“No! You can’t! Bucky, they’ll kill you!”

“Maybe. Maybe not. In any case, it not like I wouldn’t deserve it.”

“No! No, that’s not true. Bucky, it wasn’t you. You shouldn’t be punished for it. It’s not right.”

“What about all those people who got hurt, Steve? Did they deserve to be punished? Did they
deserve to be hurt?” He shook his head. “Let’s just get this bastard and turn ourselves in.”

No matter what Steve said, Bucky was determined. He didn’t seem to understand that he’d be killed
– or worst, he didn’t care. In the end, Steve was forced to fight with him so he could get his friend in
the quinjet to escape.

At least, that was the plan. Somehow, Steve ended up being the one knocked out.

When he woke up, he was in a cell and there was no sign of Bucky. He shouted and kicked,
desperate to find his friend before he got hurt. Men with guns came in and shot him, and everything went dark again.

Next time he came to, he was in a box similar to the one Bucky had been strapped to before the fake doctor had triggered him. There were three people standing outside, two guys in suits Steve had never seen before and Pepper Potts.

“Where’s Bucky?” Steve asked. He tried to break free but the restraints keeping him in place didn’t move an inch.

“The Winter Soldier has been detained,” one of the suits said. “We are here to tell you that you are under arrest and to inform you of your rights.”

“You can’t arrest me,” Steve protested. “I have done nothing wrong.” He turned to Pepper. “Bucky is innocent and these government people would kill him and make the Avengers into their private attack dogs.”

Pepper looked at him like he was something smelly she’d found at the bottom of her shoe. “I don’t even know where to begin with that idiocy you just sprouted.” She took a step forwards, eyes hard. “You are finished, Rogers. Do you understand? You will never see the outside of a cell ever again. You are the most despicable disgusting sorry excuse for a human being I have ever had the misfortune to meet. You will pay for everything. And I don’t mean just the criminal charges. I will sue you for everything you have and more. You are finished.” With that she turned on her heels and walked away before Steve even had a chance to think of a response.

“The charges are as follow,” the same suit said. “Assault, aggravated assault, felony murder, destruction of property, obstruction of justice, theft, reckless endangerment, illegal entry into several countries, criminal possession of weapons, criminal facilitation and resisting arrest.”

Steve stared, gaping like a fish at all that. “What?”

“Ms Romanoff and Col Rhodes are still in critical condition at the hospital, not to mention the dozens of injured and the three dead from Bucharest, so there might be additional charges.”

“What? Natasha? What…?”

“You knocked her down so hard she fractured her skull. She might not survive. Or she might be permanently brain damaged. Col Rhodes may never walk again. If that is what you do to your so-called friends, the world isn’t taking any more chances with the likes of you. Ms Potts is right. You are finished.”

It didn’t make any sense. He hadn’t hit Natasha that hard, had he? And he didn’t even know what had happened to Rhodes, he’d never touched the guy. That wasn’t right.

It made no difference. Steve was treated like a criminal by everyone. He was not allowed to see or talk to Bucky no matter how much he complained, yelled or outright begged.

At his trial, a wheelchair-bound Natasha stared down at him with hatred in her eyes. She told everyone that they had known the truth about the Starks’ assassination for years but that Steve had asked her not to tell Tony.

“He said he would tell Tony himself, but he never did. Steve Rogers is a liar and he made me complicit in his lie. Then the moment I stopped agreeing with him and following him blindly he turned on me. He did not pull his punches. Not with me and not with the Task Force officers attempting to apprehend the Winter Soldier. He never wanted anyone – anyone that might tell Tony,
that is – to know that we were looking for Barnes. That’s why no one knew anything about Lagos. It was supposed to be about Bucky. *Everything* he did was about Bucky, no thought to anyone else. I tried to tell him to let the proper authorities handle things in Bucharest, but he didn’t listen. It was all about Bucky, and this is the result.” She gestured to herself and the courtroom they were in.

When she passed by him after being dismissed, Steve tried to talk to her.

“Nat, I…”

The glare she gave him would have made a lesser man quake. “Burn in hell, Rogers,” she spat.

Steve was convicted of all charges and sentenced to life. His title was stripped from him and he had to pay every last cent he had in restitution to the victims of his crimes. Sam, Wanda, Clint and Lang were also convicted of their crimes and were all sent to prison for various terms. Bucky confessed to the crimes of the Winter Soldier and ended up in a psychiatric facility. He sent Steve one final letter asking to not be bothered anymore because they were through.

Alone in his cell, Steve cried.

100. (prompt by Lord_Monthul)

AN: Holy shit, guys! One hundred snippets! How did that happen? I only had 7 when I first posted this. I really have to thank everyone who has given prompts. This story would not be what it is without all of you. Thank you.

The jet touched down and T’Challa stepped out with a heavy heart. So much had changed in so little time. He was supposed to be back with his father to prepare Wakanda for their re-entry into the world. Instead, his father was returning in a body bag and T’Challa now had the weight of the crown on his shoulders.

“T’Challa,” his mother greeted him and the returning delegation. Her eyes were dry yet her expression was one of sorrow.

“Mother,” he replied. There was a lot he wanted to tell her, to ask for her advice, but he could not. Not now, not in front of the others who had gathered to welcome back their king and prince. It would not do to show weakness, not in such difficult and uncertain times.

The Doras bowed to their Queen and Shuri, who stood further away. She was too young to be able to keep her grief to herself and was openly crying as the casket with T’Chaka’s body was brought out of the jet.

It was a solemn procession that accompanied the group to the throne room where the arrangements for King T’Chaka’s funeral would begin. As they passed the hallways on the Palace, people offered prayers to Bast and condolences to the royal family. T’Challa wanted to be done with all this, to retreat to his room and **grieve**, as he’d been unable to do since his father was murdered.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he walked into his chambers. Alone at last. He dearly wished that Nakia was here, but she knew he was still out there doing her job. He would have to send for her as soon as possible if he wanted to give her enough time to get back so she could be at his side at the crowning ceremony.

There was a lot to do, including making sure Sgt Barnes and Captain Rogers had suitable accommodations. It was possible that Shuri would be able to do something for Barnes to free him of Hydra’s control. Even with a mile-long list of preparations, T’Challa did not move, sitting on his bed staring off into space. His father was gone. It still didn’t feel real. It was still not **fair**.
He did not know how much time had passed before his mother came in to see him, startling him out of his morose thoughts.

“My son, we have to speak.”

“Yes, I know. We have to… summon the tribes, begin the rites of succession.” T’Challa sighed. This was not the way he had envisioned assuming the mantle of kingship. It was too soon, too unexpected.

He waited, but Ramonda said nothing. “Mother?”

“That is what I wanted to speak to you about, T’Challa.”

T’Challa frowned. “What do you mean?”

“My son, I must speak plainly. I do not think you are ready. I do not think it would be a good idea to make you king right now.”

It felt like she had slapped him with those words. “Mother?”

“Your actions since your father’s death have been… less than exemplary. And not those of a King.”

T’Challa swallowed hard, looking away from his mother’s disappointed face. “I know that I allowed my emotions to get the better of me, mother, but surely… I was grieving.”

“Yes, of course you were. I do not dispute that. However, you must remember that your actions affect all of Wakanda. You cannot allow emotion to cloud your judgment.”

“It will not happen again, mother.”

“It does not matter. It has already happened, and that is what we have to deal with.”

They fell silent. It hurt to think that his mother did not trust him to lead their country, even though a part of him could understand that he’d given her cause for it. Still, it was not as if circumstances such as these were likely to happen again. Did he not deserve a chance?

“Wakanda must have a king, mother. And there is no one else,” he said at last.

“Wakanda must have a leader, yes, but I do not think you are that person right now, T’Challa. I’m sorry, my son, but I must think of what’s best for Wakanda.”

“Are you saying I am not good enough for Wakanda?” He could not keep the anger out of his voice. It was not fair. After all he’d lost, he would lose this as well?

“T’Challa, do you have any idea what you have done? How you have hurt Wakanda?”

“I have done no such thing!” he protested.

“No? You, a Prince – one of the highest representatives of our country – was seen rampaging through the streets of Bucharest causing death and destruction. Five people are dead, T’Challa, and many more badly injured, and you were involved. The Black Panther is an international criminal! Do you have any idea how badly that reflects on us? We have already had countless requests from the Romanian government for restitution! That is what you have done.”

“I…” T’Challa trailed off, not knowing what to say. He had not considered that, too caught up in his own grief, his thoughts of revenge. He had failed.
“If you are crowned after what you’ve done, Wakanda will suffer even more. We cannot afford to go back to isolation, T’Challa, so we must move forward, and we cannot do that with you as king, not right now. The wounds are too fresh. Your father fought to make people like the Avengers accountable for their actions, so you must be accountable for yours as well. There must be consequences for your mistakes.”

T’Challa bowed his head in shame, trying not to let the tears fall. “I’m sorry, mother,” he whispered.

“Yes, I know. Unfortunately, that is not enough. I will take the throne for now, and we will cooperate with international authorities to attempt to mitigate the damages from your ill-advised actions. We have no other choice.” She sighed. “I’m sorry, T’Challa, but we cannot ignore this.”

He nodded, feeling like a chastised child.

“You will need to make a public apology.”

It grated on him to even think of showing such weakness to the world – to appear as the scolded boy he currently felt – but he knew Ramonda was right. “I understand.”

“Good. I will prepare a statement and we can go over it together later.” She stood. “I must go back and finish the preparations for the funeral.”

There was a sudden knock on the door and one of the guards walked in. “My apologies, your Majesty, but we have an urgent situation.”

“What is it?” Ramonda asked.

“We have found Captain Rogers and the Winter Soldier in one of the jets. They must have stowed away.”

T’Challa winced. “They… It was I who put them there,” he said.

Ramonda turned to him with a glare that made him want to hide under his bed like when he was a child. She took a deep breath and addressed the guard. “Have the Doras escort them to one of the cells, but blindfold them first. I will be there shortly.”

The guard bowed and left.

“Explain yourself, T’Challa.” Her tone was icy and T’Challa flinched.

“I… It was not Sgt Barnes who killed father. I was wrong to… pursue him. I… I owe him a debt, so I… I told him he could stay here for a time. I thought perhaps Shuri could find a way to help him.”

Ramonda looked as furious as he’d ever seen her. For a while she said nothing, just staring at T’Challa like she wished they were not related at all. “And Rogers? Why is he here?”

“I… Well, he was… I could not just… leave him.”

“Have you completely lost your mind? What on Bast’s name were you thinking!?”

“Mother, I…”

“No, not another word. I don’t want to hear any more of this insanity. By all the gods, T’Challa, what is the matter with you? It’s not enough that you act like a deranged thug and put innocent people in danger but you also offer sanctuary to criminals? You invite these people into our country? The same Rogers who caused the death of several of our people in Lagos and then showed no sign
of remorse?”

“I… Barnes isn’t a criminal. He was not the one to set the bomb.”

“It does not matter! Have you not been following the news? The Winter Soldier has countless deaths to his name! He is an assassin!”

“He was being controlled by Hydra.”

“It does not matter!” she repeated. “That is not for you to decide!” She took a step forward, expression livid. “If he wants to argue his innocence he can do so in a court of law like everyone else! Who are you to decide whether or not he is guilty? I cannot believe…” Ramonda took another deep breath, running a hand through her hair and closing her eyes as if in prayer. When she opened them again, she had regained her composure but was no less angry. T’Challa didn’t dare say anything. “We are going to turn the criminals to the proper authorities.”

“Mother, I gave Sgt Barnes my word that–”

“I do not care what you told him, T’Challa. You had no authority to promise him anything, and I cannot fathom why you thought this was a good idea. You are even less prepared than I thought if this is the kind of decision you would make as king.”

It took all of T’Challa’s will to keep looking at his mother and not slink away in shame. “I just… I wronged him… I wanted to…”

“You have wronged many people, T’Challa, first and foremost the people of Wakanda. Before you attempt to make restitution to a wanted criminal, you should focus on your own people and the real innocents you harmed. It worries me that you thought to make amends to Barnes and not to the people of Bucharest. It worries me that you seemed like you hadn’t even realized what you’d done.”

T’Challa’s battle to keep the tears from falling was lost. He could no longer look at his mother. “I’m sorry.”

“Yes, you should be.” She said, no sign of forgiveness or understanding in her tone. “You will remain here while I deal with this.”

Sent to his room like an unruly child. T’Challa nodded. When the door to his room closed behind her, he collapsed on the floor. *Bast, what have I done?*

(Queen Ramonda stood before the UN, Prince T’Challa silently contrite by her side, and apologized for the mishandling of the entire situation with Barnes. She had personally delivered Rogers and Barnes to the Counter-terrorism Task Force to answer for their crimes, saying Prince T’Challa had apprehended them when they had snuck aboard his jet in an attempt to escape. Rogers sang a different tune, of course, but it was his word against hers and T’Challa’s, so no one could prove who was telling the truth. Since the criminals were in custody, the world decided to let it go. Wakanda also offered some of their technology to Col Rhodes and the injured civilians and officers hurt in Bucharest. It did not make the world like them, but it helped a bit.

When the videos from Siberia came to light, Rogers’s last supporters were silenced in the overwhelming condemnation of his actions, and he and the rest of “Team Cap” were convicted.

Back in Wakanda, Ramonda tore her son a new one for his despicable actions there. The young prince was even more disgraced, and lost his chance at the throne for good. Ramonda redoubled her efforts with her daughter to make sure the princess would not make the same mistakes as her brother, beginning with curbing her sense of superiority and entitlement. Isolation had not done Wakanda any
favors, it seemed. It was time to change that.)
Hey guys. A little late, but here's to another year as a fic writer. Can't believe it's been two whole years. :)  

101. (prompt by VWebb and NeutralGuise)  
The doctors had finally released Bucky and sent him to rest in the barracks. He had barely laid on the bed when Steve burst through the door, nearly pulling it off its hinges.  

“Bucky!” He practically leapt at Bucky, who sighed in resignation.  

“Steve,” he replied. It was still hard to believe that this huge hunk of a guy was really Steve. Little Stevie wasn’t at all little anymore, and Bucky couldn’t quite put his finger on why that bothered him. The story Steve had told him to explain how that happened hadn’t reassured him in the least. What kind of moron volunteered for an experiment he had no understanding of and which could have had all kinds of terrible consequences?  

“So are you cleared now? All good?”  

Bucky stared a bit, unsure how to answer. What kind of dumb question was that? He’d been held prisoner by Nazis, tortured and experimented on, and Steve thought it was ‘all good’? What the hell?  

“Bucky?”  

“Look, I’m tired. I… I need some sleep.”  

“Oh, yeah, sure. I understand.” Yet he made no move to leave, still sitting on the bed next to Bucky.  

“Steve, go away,” Bucky said, not really in the mood to be nice.  

Steve gave him that lost puppy look that Bucky had come to really hate in the last few years, the look he meant he wasn’t going to relent until he got what he wanted, no matter how much it inconvenienced Bucky. It was not quite as effective in the new body, but Bucky could feel a headache coming on.  

“Steve, I am tired and I want to sleep. Go away,” he repeated, annoyed.  

“I missed you, Buck.”  

But Bucky was just done. “Yeah, whatever. Now get out.” He shoved Steve off the bed – using considerably more strength than should have been necessary. Finally, after a staring contest that seemed to last for hours, Steve left. Bucky was even more exhausted now. God, he could not wait to go home and leave all this crap behind.  

The next day, Bucky warily made his way to the mess hall to get something to eat. He found Steve there already (surrounded by a bunch of other soldiers) and Bucky almost turned around. He really didn’t want to have to deal with Steve (or a lot of people), but he was hungry, so he had no choice.
Of course Steve spotted him right away and waved over. With a sigh, Bucky settled himself next to Steve, who beamed and preened like a kid with a new toy. Bucky was beginning to think being hungry would have been the better choice.

There was plenty of food on the table, at least, so Bucky busied himself with that and just let whatever story Steve was telling wash over him. He was used to tuning his friend out, really – at some point, it had become rather tiresome to listen to yet another account of Steve being unable to keep his mouth shut and getting the shit kicked out of him as a result.

“So, what do you think?” Steve asked, and Bucky blinked.

“Huh? About what?”

“Us!”

“What?”

Steve grinned as if Christmas had come early. “We can be a team! Like we were always meant to be. I’m tired of being a dancing monkey. I think it’s time I got my own unit. And you can all be on it!” He glanced around at the assembled soldiers. Not all of them seemed all that keen on the idea, but some were at least listening. “Won’t it be great?”

“You want to lead a team?” Bucky asked, not sure he’d heard it right.

“Yes. I’m strong and fast now, Bucky.”

“Yeah, I can see that, Steve, but you don’t have any training.”

“What?”

Bucky noticed that some of the others – the ones that had seemed interested – were now watching Steve in confusion.

“Steve, new body or not, you have no training. You can’t lead a team. A team leader should be someone with experience.” Did he really have to explain that? It seemed so obvious to him. But then, Steve had always had trouble hearing things that went against what he wanted.

“I have training. I did basic.”

“Basic,” Bucky repeated, deadpan. “Basic is not experience, Steve, it’s basic.”

Steve got that mulish look Bucky hated (and he was starting to realize Steve had a lot of looks Bucky hated. When had that happened?) and crossed his arms like a petulant child. “I managed to rescue you, didn’t I?”

“Just because you got lucky once doesn’t mean you will next time.”

“It wasn’t luck!” Steve protested. “I knew what I was doing.”

“Steve, you never know what you’re doing. You just keep doing it and hope it will work out the way you want. This is war, Steve. You don’t get to play around with people’s lives.” When Steve opened his mouth to reply, Bucky went on. “And in any case, I’m going back home. I’ve talked to the doctors and they will try to get me discharged, so count me out of whatever you’re planning.”

Steve stared at him. “What? You can’t go home.”
“And why not?”

“You’re a soldier.”

Bucky closed his eyes for a moment, seeing the lab again and remembering he endless pain, the fear and helplessness. He had joined the army not because he had wanted to, but because there was a war and he felt like he should do what he could to help out. Still, that didn’t mean he wanted to die out there in the middle of fucking nowhere if he could help it. He’d done his bit, done what he was told (and he wasn’t sure how he was going to live with himself now, not after all this blood on his hands), and now he wanted to go home. If Steve was so gun-ho on being a soldier, he could go right ahead and punch people in the face to his heart’s content, but he would not tell Bucky what to do. He did not get to call Bucky a coward (because that was what he was implying), when he had no idea what Bucky had been through in the last few months.

When he opened his eyes again, it felt like he was looking at Steve for the first time, and he did not like what he saw. Somewhere along the way, Steve had stopped being the cute little kid that followed him around like a lost puppy and became a guy who couldn’t see an inch beyond his own nose.

“I am going home,” he said, voice cold and angry. “You do what you want.” Then he got up and walked out.

Later, he talked to some of the other rescued soldiers, who all seemed uncomfortable with Steve’s insistence that they become part of his team.

“He looked impressive at that base, I’ll give him that,” Dugan said, “but if he really has no training he has no business leading anything.”

“I heard he didn’t have authorization to go at all,” Falsworth added. “I mean, I’m grateful to be out of that hellhole, but… How much did he risk by doing that? Apparently he got Howard Stark to fly the plane. What if it had been shot down and Stark had been killed? That would have been disastrous for the Allies.”

“Steve was never good at taking no for an answer,” Bucky muttered. Before, he was mostly putting himself in danger with his behavior. Now… it was different. How many lives would he risk just so he could prove himself?

“I know he’s your friend, Sarge,” Morita said, “but a guy that agrees to get injected with some untested serum doesn’t sound all that sane to me. Certainly not someone I’d be willing to trust with my life.”

Steve, as usual, seemed oblivious to the others’ discomfort, because Bucky heard that he went to Phillips to propose his team. Fortunately, Phillips had enough sense to talk to them before he agreed to anything, and all of them were clear that they didn’t think it was a good idea. Bucky was also quite pissed that his name was right there in the list of Steve’s ‘team’ – even though he could not have been clearer about wanting no part in any of it.

When Phillips denied Steve’s request, Steve went to someone else, and that was when Bucky had enough. He adamantly refused to go back into combat – backed by the doctors – and got the others to fight alongside him to be able to go home. He found a reporter doing some interviews about Captain America’s (what a dumb name) heroic rescue of the 107th, and made sure that he knew that the rescued unit wanted to go home. They had served honorably and they deserved a discharge. What was the point of being rescued only to be killed two months later in another mission? They had already done their part. Other soldiers could continue on.
In the end, they were all allowed to go home. A couple of guys chose to stay, though they requested to be sent to other units, and Bucky respected their decision. Like him, they should have the right to make them.

The last time he saw Steve was right before he was shipped back home, and it did not go well.

“I can’t believe you’re just going home,” Steve said.

“Well, I am.” He was past arguing with Steve – it was a futile endeavor and Bucky just couldn’t be bothered anymore. In a way, he missed his friend – the little kid who refused to keep down – but he had come to realize that Steve was no longer that. The Steve he knew was gone, and Bucky didn’t like this person he had become.

“I thought we were going to fight together.” It was almost a whine, and Bucky had to fight to keep his temper in check.

“I didn’t. I’m still amazed they let you in the army at all.” And he really wasn’t sure that had been a good idea.

“I told you I could do it.”

Bucky said nothing, because clearly Steve wasn’t going to hear it, and he would keep missing the point.

“Good luck,” he said. “Good bye.” He turned to leave.

“Bucky?” Steve had his jaw clenched. “What happened to ‘till the end of the line’?”

“War,” Bucky replied. “War happened. This is the end of the line. This is me drawing that line. You are not the person I knew, and I’m not the person you knew either. War has changed us both, and now we go our separate ways.” He didn’t wait for a response, just walked away. He’d said everything he wanted to say.

(Steve didn’t get to lead a team, though he was put in one. He didn’t like it that people were constantly telling him what to do and what not to do. He kept trying to push them, to remind them that he was a super soldier, and could do more than any of them combined. What had been the point in giving him the serum if not to use him? Eventually he pushed too hard and was pushed back. Instead of being at the war front, he became a glorified lab rat. It wasn’t fair.)

102. (prompt by karasuinu, Sami_the_Dragon)

Tony was starting to think he should have handled this whole situation differently. It was obvious that Steve was not going to listen to a word Tony was saying. As always, it was his way or the highway. In the last couple of years, Tony had begun to realize that Captain America really was just a propaganda icon, and the real Steve Rogers bore little resemblance to the stories he’d been told in his youth. For one thing, how could the man not have known that something like the Accords would be coming? Some strategist. Anyone with half a brain (and the most basic knowledge of world politics – or just human behavior, really) would have seen that leaving the Avengers to just do whatever they wanted was not something that the people of the world would be comfortable doing. Certainly not after disaster after disaster and no real promise of change. Really, it boggled the mind that Steve thought the world was just going to accept that “the safest hands were his own”. Yeah, right.

Natasha was… well, not someone he could entirely trust, but at least she seemed to be able to tell when the boat was sinking. Wanda… well, that was a lost cause, really, but whatever. Clint (who was supposed to be retired, for fuck’s sake, what had he been thinking attacking Vision)... well, he wasn’t that bad, most of the time. Rogers... fuck, Rogers was an idiot, and Tony was really getting sick and tired of having to keep cleaning his messes.

Anyway, the Avengers. Well, the Avengers were necessary. But only if they were trusted, and right now Rogers was doing an excellent job of sinking the Avengers’ credibility to the pits of hell. Which was why Tony had wanted to try to reason with him one last time. It would not look good to have the Avengers arrested by Counter Terrorism – because that would mean they were terrorists. (Not that they weren’t, kinda, currently. Fuck Steve.) Public image was important – right now, it was absolutely paramount – and Tony wanted to salvage something of the Avengers.

So here he was, in an airport in Germany (which Steve and his merry band of followers had illegally entered) trying (and failing) to diffuse this clusterfuck of a situation.

Then, of course, because it was just that kind of day, it all went to hell and instead of talking the assholes down, Tony suddenly had a fucking fight on his hands. Great. At least the airport had been evacuated, so there was little chance of civilians getting hurt (there been way too much of that already).

It was a fucking mess.

Spider-kid was having way too much fun, though – completely oblivious to the shitstorm they were all in – and Tony dearly wished he hadn’t brought the kid along. God, what had he been thinking? This was going to end badly, he just knew it.

Unfortunately, Tony had his hands full with Maximoff (fucking witch, he should have just let her be deported) and the fucking Giant that came out of nowhere (where the hell did Steve even find this guy? Fuck it all.), so he kept an ear out for Peter and concentrated on his own fights, because these assholes weren’t pulling their punches at all.

“Mr Stark, little help…”

Peter sounded strained, and Tony immediately dodged the arrow coming his way to go help the kid. And promptly almost had a heart attack when he saw the kid struggling to hold a fucking container so it wouldn’t crush him to death. Before Tony could do anything, one of the kid’s legs buckled and he listed sideways, arms still trying to keep to keep the container above his head.

Goddamnit! Tony thought, and shot a repulsor blast at the container to shove it off the kid. It worked, mostly, but it still clipped the kid in the head as he ducked and tried to twist away. “Peter!”

Tony landed (and almost tumbled head first in his haste to check on him) and shrugged off the suit, rushing to the kid and ripping off his mask.

Shit!

Tony breathed a sigh of relief and looked up, only now noticing Steve hovering nearby, shield in his hand and a vaguely guilty expression on his face. Steve. Steve had dropped a container on the kid. Rogers dropped a fucking container that weighed a ton on the boy’s head. Peter could have died.
Fuck, it was a miracle that he hadn’t. If he hadn’t had superhuman strength, he would have been instantly crushed. And Rogers had no idea Peter had super strength because he had never met the kid. Rogers had dropped a container on a guy he knew nothing about, which would have killed pretty much anyone else.

Tony saw red.

In a moment, it all became crystal clear.

The world needed defenders, yes, but it didn’t need these defenders. Because if Rogers was willing to murder a kid he’d just met over his friend and his need to play hero, then he was not a hero. Not an Avenger, not someone Tony had any desire to ever be anywhere near again. Not someone who deserved the world’s trust or any second (in some cases third, fourth, fifth) chances. It was time to stop playing nice and let Steve and his little minions deal with consequences. Tony was done.

“Look, Tony,” Rogers began, and Tony held up a hand, still focused on Peter.

Peter grimaced a bit but was able to get to his feet on his own. “Sorry, Mr Stark. I’m okay now.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for, kid.” It was Tony who was sorry. Sorry he’d brought the kid, sorry he had enabled the Avengers for so long, sorry he had been so blind to what a fucking mess this was (a chemical mixture that made chaos, Bruce had said way back at the beginning, and the had been one hundred percent right). Tony was sorry for a lot of things. He had made mistakes (oh, so many mistakes), and now he was going to fix them. Starting with putting these fuckers down before they hurt anyone else.

“Tony,” Rogers tried again.

Tony got back in the suit and blasted Rogers with enough power to knock him down and keep him down for a while. The time for talking was over.

“Web him up and then sit down. I’ll be with you in a moment.”

The kid gloves had come off. Tony activated the failsafe for all his weapons and fried Hawkeye’s bow. He heard the archer yelp and smiled in satisfaction.

“Tony?” Rhodey asked. He was still dealing with the freaking Giant.

“We’re taking them down, Rhodey.” His voice was hard, all sentimentality stripped away. “You go low, I’ll go high.”

“Got it.”

With a coordinated attack, they were able to drop the giant to the ground. The man shrank down and moaned.

“Stay down,” Tony ordered, and the man flopped back.

“Yeah, sure.”

That left only Maximoff, Wilson and Barnes.

“Vision, you take Wilson. Rhodey get Maximoff. Use the sonic blast and then slap the collar on her. I’ll get Barnes.”

It was over in minutes. Tony ended up having to knock T’Challa out as well, since the guy was
going psycho on Barnes. Why Tony had agreed to bring him along he had no idea, he man was clearly way too compromised to keep his head. The last thing they needed was more bloodshed.

Once they rogues were all restrained, Tony went back to check on Peter. He had put his bloody mask back on, and insisted he was fine.

“Really, Mr Stark. I heal fast.”

“You’ll be on the first plane back to the States.”

The boy hung his head. “Yeah, okay, sorry. I…”

Oh, Tony knew that look. He knew it and he hated it. “No, no. Look, Peter, you didn’t do anything wrong. This” he gestured around “this is my fault. I’m sending you back because I don’t want you to get hurt. We can talk more later, once I deal with this shitshow, okay? You did great.”

It was hard to tell with the mask, but Tony thought Peter smiled. “Ok, Mr Stark. Thanks.”

Rogers only regained consciousness once he was inside his new cozy cell in the Raft. Tony wasn’t entirely comfortable with the existence of that place, and had already contacted his legal team to make sure everything would be done by the books in terms of ensuring human rights. Still, since the nice approach had failed spectacularly, there was no other choice.

“What…? What’s going on? Where are we?”

Tony turned to him, eyes sparkling with fury. “You are in prison, where the fuck do you think!”

“No…”

“No. No, I don’t want to hear another stupid word out of your mouth. You’re done, Steve. Congratulations, you are a criminal.”

“I’m not a criminal.”

“The list of crimes you are about to be charged with begs to differ.”

“They were going to kill Bucky!”

Tony would have rolled his eyes if the situation wasn’t so fucking serious. “People have died, Rogers. Do you understand that? Not your precious Bucky, by the way. Other people. Now maybe those people don’t matter to you, but they have families and loved ones. They are someone else’s Bucky.” He tried not to think of Peter crushed under a container, blood spreading from a suit Tony had made. It had been close. Too close. And not everyone had been as lucky as just ‘close’. “So I really don’t give a fuck about your pathetic justifications or you pathological clinging to the past. None of that matters. What matters is that you are a fucking criminal. And you are going to jail like you fucking deserve.”

Rogers stared at him, speechless for once.

Tony walked away. And he felt great.

103. (prompt by Kuramas_Kat)

Nothing was going right anymore. Taking down Hydra had been a bitch, but they’d done it. And they’d gotten the scepter back. Then Stark had decided to make a mess of things and create a damn killer robot. It was a mess, and Natasha had no idea how to deal with it. Hydra she could manage,
but what good was she against robots in knock-off Iron Man suits? She was good, but in the end she was only human.

They needed superhuman in order to beat this thing, and Bruce, as usual, was being less than cooperative. Everything felt like a battle with him.

Natasha was used to being patient in luring the marks to where she wanted. Bruce, however, was really putting that patience to the test. It had been months and she was still not that far from where she’d started. And now they didn’t have to time to cater to his insecurities and issues. They needed the Hulk and they needed him now. So she did what had to be done and pushed him.

She heard the Hulk roar and then he was leaping out from the hole in the ground she’d shoved him into. Yet, instead of going straight for Ultron as she’s expected, Hulk turned back to her, teeth bared, eyes narrowed. Natasha was suddenly very very afraid.

“Hey, Big Guy,” she said, keeping herself perfectly still even though her heart was hammering away in her chest. Damn, this was not going according to plan.

Hulk growled and took a step towards her. This close, he seemed even bigger than he was, which was already big enough. Natasha swallowed hard and slowly raised an arm, palm extended the way she always did when trying to calm him back down.

He roared and Natasha backed away, falling and scrambling to get away. Oh god, he was going to crush her.

“Puny Banner didn’t want Hulk out. Hulk didn’t want out. Hulk wants to be left alone.”

“Yes, of course, I understand,” Natasha stammered. Her voice was not at all steady and she hated it. She was shaking and she hated it even more. She was completely at his mercy and she hated it most of all.

Hulk huffed. “You understand nothing. Hulk doesn’t trust you. Banner doesn’t trust you. Stay away.” The or else was heavily implied and Natasha nodded, still trying to get her body under control.

Then Hulk jumped away and Natasha slumped in relief.

It took her far too long to get herself together. All she wanted to do was get as far away from all this as she could, to run and hide until she felt safe again. Unfortunately there was nowhere to go, not without going through Ultron first. And not if Ultron destroyed the planet.

It was chaos outside with robots all over the place. The Avengers were fighting, though, even the Hulk, smashing robots as if they were made of paper. He was uncontained anger and Natasha trembled at the sight.

She managed to catch up with Clint and stuck close to him helping to evacuate the remaining people.

Between Thor, Hulk and Iron Man, robots were falling at an alarming rate. There was another being Natasha had never seen (and was instantly wary of) taking robots down with some kind of laser beam coming out of his forehead. It was… terrifying. She felt horribly outclassed and vulnerable in her very fragile human skin. At least the thing seemed to be on their side.

Then she caught sight of red mist and saw one of the Maximoff twins – the woman who had messed with her mind – using her powers to push one of the robots off her. What the hell was she doing here?
Natasha had barely finished the thought when the woman went flying and crashed brokenly into a wall. Hulk roared and roared, eyes wild and so so angry. “Hulk SMASH!” he yelled triumphantly as he stared at the girl’s mangled body. Natasha shuddered and recoiled, barely able to keep her stomach from rebelling. She had seen the Hulk smash aliens, cars and tanks, but never an actual person. Not like that. She was shaking again. *Shit.*

The other twin wailed like a banshee when he saw his sister’s body and was promptly smashed as well. His cries attracted Steve, who blanched when he saw the bodies. Hulk roared at him too and for a moment Natasha thought Steve was going to be next *(*oh god, what have I done? What have I unleashed?)*, but Iron Man yelled and Hulk was distracted.

“We have a job to do,” Stark said, not sparing a glance at the twins. “You with me, Big Guy?”

Hulk nodded and with a last scathing look at Steve went back to smashing robots.

In the end, they won. By the skin of their teeth, but they did. Ultron was destroyed and the Earth was saved. Plenty of people died, but none of the Avengers. Natasha wanted to relax, but the Hulk was still there. There was no way in hell she was going to try that ‘sun is going down’ routine though. She wasn’t going anywhere near the Hulk. Let someone else deal with that.

Later, as they all regrouped in the Helicarrier, Steve kept moaning about the twins and Natasha, who felt she was just about to crack, finally had enough.

“What the hell are you bitching about? They were Hydra! That girl messed with our heads. If the Hulk hadn’t killed them” (don’t think about it, don’t think about that massive fist coming in her direction) “they would be on their way to prison right now.”

“That’s right,” Stark said, coming into the room, still in the armor. “I, for one, am glad that mind-raping bitch is dead.” He looked at the rest of them – Natasha, Steve and Clint – with an expression Natasha couldn’t read. This did not bode well for them. “You,” he addressed Natasha, “need to learn the definition of consent before you piss off someone you really don’t want to. Again, that is.” He held eye contact until Natasha looked away. She had miscalculated, and it had cost her dearly, she could see. “You,” he continued, now looking at Steve “need to get off your fucking high horse and not talk about shit you don’t understand, which seems to be basically everything. Listen carefully: I did not build Ultron. But if you have an issue with that, I’m sure Bruce and the Big Guy would just love to debate the matter with you, since he was just as involved. How would you like that?” Steve clenched his jaw and shifted uncomfortably. Natasha had no doubt that even he wouldn’t be able to survive a smashing. “You assholes can get the hell out of my Tower. This is me giving you your two weeks notice. Oh, and I’m out of the Avengers. This isn’t a team, it’s a fucking disaster, and I don’t know why I ever thought different.” He took a step towards the door, then paused. “Oh, and I suggest you all steer clear of Bruce if you don’t want to end up like those Hydra twins. He’s not in the best of moods.”

Then he was gone.

Natasha had no idea where they were going to go from here.

(AN: As I was writing this, I realized I hadn’t killed anyone since #91, so… sorry, Wanda (no, I’m not), I guess it’s your turn. *evil grin* Gotta keep that bloodthirsty reputation.)
After Ultron, the world went to hell. Or at least that was how it felt like to a lot of people. There were too many unanswered questions, too much grief and uncertainty. The Avengers were supposed to be heroes, yet the world was no longer very sure of that.

In the face of such tragedy, people rallied together to understand what had happened and make sure nothing like that would ever happen again.

There was an inquest. Or rather, there were several inquests.

Tony Stark, being the most public and well-known member of the Avengers, was the first to be contacted by the United Nations, acting on behalf of the governments of Sokovia, South Korea and South Africa. He readily agreed to submit all data to the investigative panel that was put together, as well as undergo a psych eval.

When the assembled experts saw the footage from the party where Ultron had first activated, they had no idea what they were watching. It was too frightening and disturbing to see Thor simply grabbing Stark by the throat and no one apparently giving a damn. ‘What the hell was that?’ Was the question on everyone’s minds. And there was a second incident of violence against Stark later that had people even more baffled (and scared). Naturally, they requested psych evals for all the Avengers, including Thor (though it was pretty hard to find someone willing to do it since everyone was, understandably, wary).

This is how it went:

**Steve Rogers:** The first thing the doctor noticed was that the man had not acclimated to the 21st century. He had to be told what the UN was and then immediately stated that he was of perfectly sound mind and that the serum had cured him of all every health problem he’d ever had. It took quite a while for the doctor to explain what a psych eval was and why it was being done (and the doctor couldn’t help noting that it really should have been done as soon as Rogers had woken up).

When questioned about the events surrounding the Ultron disaster, Rogers was quick to blame Stark for “creating a muderbot”, though he could not explain how (or why) Stark would do such a thing. He said Stark was a bully who had harassed Dr Banner into going along with his dangerous experiments, and that Stark regularly failed to tell the rest of the Avengers what he was up to regarding his engineering projects. On the matter of the choking incident, Rogers spoke dismissively, simply stating that Stark was fine and that Thor would not really hurt him.

The biggest red flag, however, came when Rogers talked about the red-headed woman that had apparently joined the team. Despite the fact that the woman was clearly in her twenties, he insisted on referring to her as “a kid”, a misguided one that had joined Hydra out of grief and a desire for justice (which certainly had the doctor scratching his head. Since when did Hydra cared about justice?). But it got worse. Justice, in this case, according to Rogers, was for the murder of Maximoff’s parents by Tony Stark. He then proceeded to relate the story young Ms Maximoff had
The doctor tried to point out the fallacy in that kind of thinking, in attributing personal blame in a situation where it was not at all warranted. Rogers, however, refused to see it. He insisted that Stark was to blame, that the engineer’s “massive ego” prevented him from seeing the harm his weapons did. Realizing that it was futile to change the man’s mind, the doctor moved on and asked about the fall of SHIELD/Hydra. (Since an inquest was being conducted, people wanted answers for that fiasco as well.)

It soon became apparent that that was another head scratching moment. Rogers had no idea thousands of people had died as a result of the Info Dump, but immediately justified his actions as necessary. It was unfortunate that people had died, he said, but the world had been saved in the end, and so he had done the right thing. He could not dwell on it too much as otherwise next time even more people might die.

Final report: Rogers was utterly unfit for command of the Avengers (or anything else, for that matter). He was short-sighted, ignorant, incapable of reasoning through simple sequences of cause and effect, and entirely unaware of his own short-comings. In fact, he insisted that he knew exactly what he was doing and refused to listen to any opinion that contradicted his own. Immediate and mandatory counseling was recommended.

**Clint Barton:** Barton seemed to think the whole thing was a joke. He scoffed at the doctor and refused to answer any questions at first. The doctor, however, was a professional, and good at her job. She was used to difficult subjects, and Barton was not as good as he believed himself to be. Using different techniques, the doctor was able to get plenty of information, none of which made her very impressed with Barton’s overall attitude and his fitness for the Avengers. He was a good sniper in the sense that he did the job he was told and didn’t bother himself with the moral, ethical or even legal implications of it. That might work for an organization like SHIELD, but the Avengers were (or at least should be) a different story. He showed a complete lack of empathy for the dead at Sokovia, or anyone else, even Drs Stark and Banner, his supposed teammates. The doctor also noted that his behavior and mood were erratic and aggressive, well beyond what could be considered normal for the situation. His defense of Maximoff was intense and baffling given her mental abilities and his earlier trauma. It raised a lot of flags of possible neurological damage.

Final report: a battery of neurological and cognitive tests was recommended, as well as psychological treatment for his lingering trauma. He should be as far away from Maximoff as possible and immediately removed from the Avengers roster.

**Natasha Romanoff:** Like Barton, she thought she was better than she was and tried to manipulate the doctor using a combination of sex appeal and demureness. Unfortunately for her, the doctor was a professional who could see right through her (he was also gay and thus not at all interested in her sexually).

Romanoff displayed signs of a narcissistic personality in that she overestimated her own importance and skills and blamed others for her own short-comings and mistakes. Her remarks about Stark’s instability and need for attention were worrying, as was her complete lack of care for him, Dr Banner and the citizens of Sokovia and SHIELD personnel burned in the Info Dump.

Final report: Immediate removal from the Avengers pending a more thorough evaluation to determine if she should even be free to roam around given her history as an amoral assassin that shifted alliances whenever it suited her.

**Thor:** It was difficult to assess someone from a completely different cultural background, one the
Thor seemed arrogant, loud, prone to violence and didn’t seem to understand how much more fragile humans were to his own people. While he stated that he did not mean to cause Stark harm, he also saw nothing wrong with how he’d reacted in that situation. He did not know much about Earth and how to behave appropriately here, and showed no real desire to learn. His speech contained disturbing signs of a superiority complex and dismissiveness of the things he didn’t know/understand, especially if they were unrelated to fighting.

Final recommendation: He should be encouraged to leave Earth as soon as possible, though as subtly as possible as to not cause offense.

**Bruce Banner:** He was the only Avenger unavailable for the evaluation, having disappeared at the end of the battle. Footage from the Tower was used to speculate that he no longer felt safe around the Avengers. He had a history of running away and hiding, particularly after a “Hulking out” incident outside of his control.

Final report: Given that the Hulk had never deliberately attacked a civilian population (except under mind control), the recommendation was to let him be until he felt comfortable returning.

**Tony Stark:** The man was quite traumatized, plain and simple. Between being kidnapped and held by terrorists for three months, dealing with an alien invasion, a terrorist blowing up his house while he was in it, dealing with a killer robot, having his mind messed with, losing a close friend and being attacked in his own house by his supposed teammates, it was a wonder the guy wasn’t a complete basket case. However, unlike the others, Stark was aware of his own mental state. He had already decided that being around the Avengers wasn’t conductive for his mental health and intended to step back as soon as the investigation was concluded to seek counseling for his issues.

Final report: The doctor agreed with Stark’s decision, and fully encouraged him to focus on his own well-being. He was a potential candidate for the future Avengers once he was at a better place psychologically and emotionally.

**Sam Wilson:** While not an official Avenger, Wilson had been involved in several incidents that made him a person of interest both for the investigation and as a potential new member.

Sgt Wilson had served in the Air Force and was, on paper, a good candidate for the Avengers. However, the evaluating doctor had some concerns regarding his excessive belief in the legend of Captain America. Wilson showed himself far too willing to follow the man without question and had, therefore, caused quite a bit of trouble during the debacle with Hydra.

Final report: Wilson would have to be tested under a competent commander (*not* Rogers) before any approval could be given for him to join the team.

**Wanda Maximoff:** The entire investigative panel was very confused as to why Ms Maximoff was even being considered as a possible Avenger given her background, her recent actions and trauma (the loss of her twin brother) and her, frankly, dangerous delusion that Tony Stark was personally responsible for the death of her parents. When questioned on the absurdity of that claim, Maximoff became enraged and insisted that Stark was a monster. Pointing out that her actions had also caused the death of innocents did nothing to change her mind. She said that she had not meant to kill anyone (other than Stark, clearly) and that she had helped save the world. It was obvious that she could not see beyond herself and her beliefs/needs.

Final report: She was found to be extremely dangerous and should be locked up immediately until she could be tried for her crimes. The doctor further recommended that her powers be bound in some way (or, ideally, stripped away entirely) since she exhibited no remorse for her actions and no
understanding of the horror of her ability to violate people’s minds.

**Vision:** Because of Ultron, people were a bit wary of Vision, but they had very little in common beyond the obvious. Vision was not a homicidal manic bent on destruction. He was understandably confused about his place in the world, yet he was aware of laws and codes of conduct that made up civilized living, and was perfectly willing to abide by them. He cooperated fully with the investigation and the doctors, and showed himself eager to learn and conscious of his own limitations in terms of his youth and inexperience.

Final report: With proper training and psychological counseling, he could be an asset to the Avengers.

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The evaluating doctors also interviewed support staff at Avengers Tower and some former SHIELD personnel now working for the Avengers Initiative. At first they were reluctant to say much, worried about issues of confidentiality and breach of contract. However, since Tony Stark himself had agreed to the inquest and they were technically Stark Industries employees, once Stark told them to cooperate and be as truthful and forthcoming as possible, the investigative team had no more problems.

The picture formed at the end of the inquest was not a nice one for the Avengers. According to the staff, it was not unusual for Rogers, Barton and Romanoff to dismiss Stark’s words and deeds, despite the fact that then man did his job exemplary as far as anyone could tell. In fact, for every mission it was Stark and former Agent Hill who dealt with all reports, relief efforts when necessary, as well as liaising with governments and agencies around the world. The others only showed up to fight, then seemed to think their job was done. They also constantly demanded tech and weapons’ upgrades, becoming irritated by every delay, even though all techs were aware that no one else could have done it any faster. (And in any case, Stark had other responsibilities, he didn’t just live for the Avengers like the rest of them, who had no other job.) In short, the Avengers took Stark and his contributions for granted, rarely thanked him for anything and were actually quite rude on occasion. Banner they left pretty much alone, and only interacted with the man on the most superficial level. It did not surprise anyone that Rogers had jumped to accusations about Ultron’s creation and that the others had said and done nothing about it.

In short, Rogers, Romanoff and Barton acted like they were kings of the world, the staff reported, and treated them poorly, either ignoring the staff’s existence altogether or demanding things all the time, as if they were incapable of doing anything alone.

The staff had little contact with Thor as they were, on the whole, uncomfortable around him. He was careless with equipment, often breaking things and not even bothering to apologize, and was condescending to the staff, particularly the women.

Banner was reserved but polite. He spent most of his time in the lab either alone or with Stark, and the staff had nothing bad to say about him.

Stark, they reported, seemed constantly stressed and, as a result, was sometimes short-tempered with the staff. However, he obviously felt bad about it, because whenever he snapped he would later give people time off and other small little benefits as compensation.

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The results of the inquest were handed over to the United Nations committee and were subsequently made public through the UN website. The reasoning was that the Avengers had chosen to defend the
world and therefore answered to the people of the world. In the wake of such tragedy, transparency was especially important in order to give people a sense of safety, that things were being done to prevent another disaster as the one that had nearly destroyed an entire city.

By that time, however, several arrest warrants had already been issued for Maximoff, and she was in custody. Rogers had pitched a fit over it and had ended up arrested along with her for obstruction of justice.

It was a complete mess. The public outcry was unprecedented, with people burning Avengers merchandise (particularly Captain America’s) on the streets all over the world. In the US, Cap still held some sway due to the decades as a legendary hero, but the rest of the world was a very different story. When people actually started reading the psych eval, it got even worse.

In the end, the Avengers were dismantled altogether, since trust in them was totally shot to hell. Even though the official investigation cleared Drs Stark and Banner of any culpability in the matter of Ultron’s creation, and the public was, for the most part, sympathetic to their situation and what they’d had to endure, they also thought they needed to step back for the moment (which Stark already planned on doing, and Banner was still missing so he wasn’t part of the Avengers anymore anyway).

Maximoff was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment for attempted genocide and various other terrorist acts.

Barton was discovered to have rather severe brain damage as a result of the alien scepter’s powers (and traces of Maximoff’s magic was also found in the scans), and was given the option of retirement, which he accepted.

Romanoff disappeared when it became clear that the tide was turning against her. She was eventually found dead several months later with evidence of prolonged torture. Since the list of her enemies was quite extensive, the authorities couldn’t find the perpetrators.

Rogers was imprisoned after he continued to act as a ‘superhero’ despite multiple warnings to cease and desist. He faced not only criminal charges but was also the target of many civil suits for destruction of property, as he never cared about the chaos he had behind.

Sam Wilson became disillusioned with the whole superhero business and tried to go back to his life. However, his association with Rogers had tainted him and he lost his job at the VA.

Thro went back to Asgard and was not heard from again, to everyone’s relief.

Vision enrolled in college in an attempt to live a normal life, though he continued with his counseling and training.

Tony Stark began to work as a security consultant for the UN, making preparations for a planetary defense in the event of a new invasion.

Col James Rhodes was given command of a new team of Enhanced under the UN’s supervision to replace the defunct Avengers. After a couple of years, Iron Man, Vision and the Hulk were approved to rejoin the team.

105. (prompt by Andria)

It was really exciting to be an Avenger, Sam thought. Fighting the good fight and protecting the people had always been his dream, and now he was doing it. And right beside Captain America, his
childhood hero.

First they had saved the world from an evil Hydra plot to murder millions of people. Then they’d exposed those Nazi terrorists for who they were and sent them scurrying off like rats. Now they were tracking down the remains of their organization to make sure this time they wouldn’t be able to rise again. And they were also looking for Cap’s lost friend Bucky, who had vanished in the aftermath of Hydra’s defeat.

Steve, Natasha and Sam had begun checking out and destroying Hydra bases in the US. For the most part, it hadn’t been very productive, since most bases had been abandoned and there had been very little in the way of useful information. Still, there was always the chance that they’d find some Hydra goons or secrets in the next one.

The one they were in today was in a small town in Missouri, in an old industrial complex that had been shut down years ago. Darkness had just fallen when they approached, and they could see that this one had people in it.

“Looks like we’ll have someone to fight in this one,” Natasha said. She sounded excited about that, and Sam couldn’t blame her. It was boring just bursting into empty buildings.

“Right. We’ll go in and take them out,” Steve said with a grin. “Sam, you take the air and keep an eye on things out here.”

Sam did as he was told just as Steve and Nat entered the building. There were several vehicles parked around the warehouse, and people in uniforms milling around. Sam swooped down to engage them and that was when he saw it. The dark jackets the people were wearing had letters in them. FBI. Shit.

“Steve!” he shouted, only to hear gunfire coming from inside he base. Shit. Shit! He landed and folded the wings behind him. He’d barely taken one step into the building when he found at least four guns pointed at his head.

“FBI. Drop your weapon! Hands behind your head! On your knees!”

Heart racing, Sam hastily complied. He saw that Natasha was on the floor a bit further in, clutching her right arm, which was bleeding from what was probably a gun shot. Two agents had guns trained on her, and neither looked friendly. Steve was also on the ground, though he didn’t appear to be injured. Like Nat, there were agents surrounding him with weapons drawn and furious expressions on their faces.

“What the fuck are you morons doing here?” one of the agents said, striding to them angrily.

“We’re raiding Hydra bases,” Steve replied, watching everyone warily.

“On whose authority?”

“We’re the Avengers. I’m Captain America.”

The agent snorted. “And? So? You still have no jurisdiction or authority to invade this base and do whatever you want.”

Sam’s stomach twisted unpleasantly. He had never really stopped to think about the issue of jurisdiction. He’d just assumed that the Avengers could do… anything? Why had he thought that?

“You have no business here, this is a Federal matter. And you most certainly have no business
attacking my men.” The agent turned back to where he’d come from and now Sam could see two men in FBI jackets lying on the ground, apparently unconscious.

*Shit. Shit. Shit!*

“Ambulance is on its way, Sir;” a female agent said, eying Steve as if he was dirt under her shoes. The agent in charge nodded. “Strip them of their gear and weapons and cuff them. I need to call my superiors.”

Sam didn’t resist when the agents took the Falcon wings from him, too confused about what was going on, and allowed himself to be restrained. Natasha glared daggers at everyone but did nothing as they took away her Widow Bites and pretty much everything else she was carrying (which was a lot). Steve had no weapons except for the shield, and protested when it was taken.

“Shut the fuck up,” one agent told him. “You’re the one who came in here and attacked us. We’re not Hydra, we’re federal agents. Can’t you read? This shield is now evidence of a crime.”

It was obvious that Steve wanted to say more, but couldn’t seem to think of anything. Sam was beginning to get a very bad feeling about this.

“All right, here’s what’s going to happen,” the lead agent said as he came back. “You’re going to be taken to interrogation to explain what the hell you idiots thought you were doing here.”

“Agent…” Natasha began.

“Flaherty.”

“Agent Flaherty, this is a misunderstanding. We’re all on the same side here.”

Flaherty gave her a contemptuous look. “I don’t know whose side you’re on, Romanoff, but it sure as hell isn’t mine. See my guys over there? The ones you assaulted? They’re on my side.”

“Like I said, it was a misunderstanding. We didn’t mean to hurt your people.”

“Yeah, a misunderstanding. You think you can just do whatever you want, and that’s not how the world works. You might have been a big deal at SHIELD – or Hydra, which is pretty much the same thing –, but SHIELD is gone. As I said, this is now a federal case, and you are not part of any of it. Since you’ve already shown that you don’t give a shit about the people you hurt, I really see no reason why you should be at all. In fact, after that stupid stunt you pulled, you’re a security risk. You can be sure Homeland Security is looking forward to talking to you.” He glanced at Sam and Steve. “All of you.”

The FBI guys proceeded to ignore them as they went about searching the base. Well, except for the agents who were left to guard them as if they were criminals (maybe they were). Steve and Nat seemed unconcerned and glared at the agents. Sam, on the other hand, wished he’d never come here in the first place. This did not seem like it was going to go well for any of them.

The sense of foreboding only increased when the ambulance arrived to take the injured agents away. Sam wasn’t a medic, but from what he could see the men didn’t look all that good. What had Steve done to them? An EMT checked Nat’s arm and bandaged it, but she didn’t go with the ambulance.

A few minutes later even more people showed up; FBI, CIA and Homeland Security. Flaherty spoke to the new-comers and though Sam couldn’t hear what he said, his body language said a lot. He was pretty pissed, and Sam couldn’t exactly blame him. Coming here had been a bad idea, and attacking
people without even making sure they were Hydra first had been even worse.

Sam, Steve and Natasha were shoved into a van none too gently. Sam tried to ask where they were going and was ignored.

“It’s okay, Sam. We’ll sort this out soon,” Steve said. A few hours ago, that might have been enough to reassure Sam. Now, however, he knew they were in trouble, and neither Steve nor Nat seemed to really grasp it.

They were taken to different interrogation rooms, which made Sam even more nervous.

“All right, Sgt Wilson,” a man who introduced himself as Agent Rollins said, taking a seat on the chair in front of him. “What were you doing in that base?”

“Shouldn’t I have a lawyer or something?” Sam asked. His hands had begun to shake a little.

“You didn’t hurt anyone, Wilson, so we don’t care about you all that much. You cooperate with us and we won’t charge you with trespassing and accessory to assaulting federal agents.”

Sam swallowed hard. “We… We were looking for any Hydra people that might have escaped, trying to get information about their activities. We didn’t mean for anyone to get hurt.”

“When you saw the FBI at the base, why didn’t you fall back? Why engage?”

“I didn’t. I didn’t realize the people were with the FBI. I don’t think Steve and Nat did either. It was… it happened really fast.”

Rollins gave him a skeptical look. “It was written on their jackets and in all vehicles.”

“Yes, but… I swear I didn’t see that. We didn’t see that.”

“So you just went in guns blazing before taking 30 seconds to actually look at the people you were attacking?” Rollins didn’t seem impressed, and Sam had to admit that, put like that, it sounded really bad.

Sam shrugged helplessly, unsure what else to say.

“And on what authority were you there in the first place? You have no jurisdiction. What were you going to do with any Hydra people you apprehended? Or whatever information you managed to acquire? Who do you report to?”

Sam blinked. He had no answer to any of that. At least, none that was in any way acceptable. Saying he hadn’t thought about it would make him sound like an idiot (which he probably was), and saying they were Avengers seemed really kinda arrogant (which was probably true as well). Why hadn’t he noticed the complete lack of a chain of command before?

“So you’re just a group of vigilantes answering to no one?”

“I… It’s not… Hydra’s dangerous. They would have killed millions of people if we hadn’t stopped them.”

“And who did you report to while you were… saving the world?” There was a note of disdain in the man’s voice that made Sam feel very small.

“We… We didn’t know who to trust, who was Hydra. They were everywhere. We had… we had to expose them.”
“I see.” Rollins leaned back, glaring at Sam as if he was a bug under the microscope. “You had to expose Hydra, play the hero. And expose thousands of innocent people and military secrets in the process too? You had to destabilize the world for that? Did that make you feel important?”

“What? No, that’s not… Hydra needed to be exposed.”

“And the hundreds of dead as a result, that’s okay then?”

“They were terrorists!” Sam shouted.

“I’m not talking about Hydra. I’m talking about the innocent caught in the crossfire after the Info Dump. When you exposed Hydra, you also exposed a lot of other people. Civilians. Children. State secrets, intelligence we didn’t want the whole fucking world to know about.”

“What? No! We only exposed Hydra.”

Rollins slapped his hand on the table and Sam jumped back. “Are you really that dumb? That’s not what you did! You dumped it all. All, Wilson, and now people are dead and a lot of critical information has been compromised! That’s treason.”

Sam could only stare. No, that wasn’t right. It couldn’t be.

“You threw the baby out with the bathwater, you idiot! Are you really telling me you had no idea?” He shook his head. “Dear god, what kind of moron are you? And where the hell have you been the last few months?”

“…I didn’t… I never…”

He tried to remember what Steve had said, what they had done. It all had to go, Steve had said, but surely that didn’t mean… No, that was… That was crazy. They’d exposed Hydra’s secrets, not… not everyone else’s. Right?

“And now you attack federal agents doing their jobs. How do I know you’re not Hydra?”

“What? No!”

“Because from where I’m standing, you seem to have helped Hydra’s cause. The world is in turmoil because of you. And who do you answer to? No one. Tell me, Wilson, how does that look?”

Again, Sam had nothing to say. He didn’t even know what to think anymore.

“Give us Rogers and Romanoff and we’ll go easy on you. It’s clear you weren’t the one calling the shots.”

Sam didn’t want to do that. He didn’t want to be the kind of guy that sold out his friends to save his own ass.

“Or you can go down with them. That’s assaulting federal agents, trespassing, reckless endangerment, theft of government property—”

“What?”

“You don’t own the Falcon Wings, Wilson. That’s Air Force property. Just because you used it doesn’t mean it belongs to you. You had no right to take it or use it without authorization.”

Sam snapped his mouth shut. Shit.
“So, what’s it gonna be? Are you going to cooperate or go down with them? You better decide fast, because when I walk out the door it will be to charge you with everything I can.”

“So, what’s it gonna be? Are you going to cooperate or go down with them? You better decide fast, because when I walk out the door it will be to charge you with everything I can.”

“Okay, okay.”

There was no choice. Sam didn’t want to go to jail, and he had at last realized that that was exactly was going to happen unless he talked, so he did. He answered all questions and was promised a deal.

Steve and Nat ended up in prison for multiple crimes, 20 years each because they tanked their own defense. Sam got only 4 years and considered himself lucky. He really should have known better than to just jump in without a clue what he was doing.

106. (prompt by Kaysco)

From his vantage point up high, Clint saw Natasha, Steve and Thor stop fighting, their eyes going blank. Mind control. Clint fucking hated mind control. He didn’t have a clear shot at the Hydra bitch doing the mind controlling, but as soon as he did she was going down.

“Stark, the team is compromised. The woman did something to them, some mind trick.”

“Shit. Are they okay?”

“Don’t know. They’re just standing there staring at nothing.”

“Fuck. What about the guy?”

“Don’t know, he’s hard to spot.”

“I’ve got my hands full with Ultron, can you handle it?”

“Yeah, I got this.”

Clint kept his position, waiting for the woman to come to him. He wasn’t going to risk exposure and have his mind messed with again. Once was more than enough. Once was way too many, actually.

It didn’t take long. Clint heard footsteps coming up underneath his hiding spot. The woman might be Hydra, but she was definitely not very well trained. Despite the ominous red mist gathering below him, Clint waited. A part of him wanted to run screaming but he wasn’t going to do that. He was going to take care of the mind-controller right here and now. This time, he was going to fucking win.

He didn’t hesitate when he had the shot, sending an arrow right throw her throat. She was dead before the body hit the floor. Good, he thought. Threat neutralized.

“Wanda!” The man screamed, appearing at her side. “Wanda! Wanda!”

Quick as lightening, Clint fired a second arrow while the guy was distracted. As always, he didn’t miss.

“Stark, the twins are dead,” he reported, coming out to make sure the enemy was really down. They were. Clint felt nothing but the satisfaction of a job well done. Take that, you mind-raping bitch.

“Check on the others. I’ll be right there.”

“What about Ultron?”
“He got away.”

Natasha was just coming out of it when Clint saw her, shaking her head and blinking rapidly. Thor and Steve were still staring vacantly.

“Nat?”

She swirled around, dropping into a fighting stance.

“It’s me. It’s all right. They’re dead.”

Natasha nodded. She took a deep breath and composed herself. “Ultron?”

“Gone. Stark is on his way back.”

Clint, Nat and Stark guided Steve and Thor back to the Quinjet, where Banner checked them over.

“What happened?”

“The woman did something to them,” Clint replied.

“I saw… Some kind of vision,” Nat added.

“Vision?” Stark asked, turning back to them from the pilot seat. “What kind of vision?”

“Something from the past.”

Stark frowned.

“What does it matter?” Clint asked. He knew Nat didn’t like to talk about personal things, and someone messing with your head was as personal as it got.

“I… I saw something, back in the Hydra base. A vision. Of the future. Or a possible future, at least.”

Clint shuddered. God, he hated mind control. “The woman probably messed with you too, then. Why didn’t you say anything?”

“I didn’t realize… I didn’t see her. I thought it was my PTSD acting up again, but maybe it wasn’t.”

“You did seem rather… strung out… when we got back,” Banner remarked, and Stark grimaced.

Steve and Thor snapped out of it a little while later, and gave the rest of them some information about their own visions and how they felt during it, which made it pretty clear the Maximoff woman really had messed with Stark.

“That’s why you were so keen on getting back to the Ultron project even after we’d scrapped it.”

“Sorry, man,” Clint said. He really was. It hadn’t been fair to blame Stark the way they did, and if the guy had been dealing with a mindfuck on top of it… Yeah, not cool.

“You still shouldn’t have been messing around with the scepter,” Steve said.

“You told us to study it. You and Thor,” Stark snapped back, glaring at them. “So you don’t get to be pissed about that now. And, anyway, as I said, we weren’t even close to an interface. That shouldn’t have happened. There was something already in the scepter. I’ve been building AIs for 30 years, I know what I’m doing.”
“Look, fighting among ourselves isn’t going to help. We have to focus on Ultron,” Clint interjected before Steve could keep escalating things. Maybe he was still a little messed up from the mindfuck, but he sure seemed determined to pick a fight. Actually, now that Clint really thought about it, Steve seemed to be always looking to pick a fight with Stark. Clint looked at Nat, and she nodded slightly – they would have to do something about that.

Now, however, wasn’t the time.

“What about the twins? They might be able to tell us something.” Steve said.

“Nope, the fuckers are dead,” Clint replied.

“What? What happened?”

“I killed them.”

“What? Why?”

Everyone gave Steve weird looks. “What the hell do you mean, why? They’re fucking Hydra. She messed with your heads. What if she’d gotten to Banner?” Clint looked at the man and saw him flinch. Yeah, that would have been a huge disaster. “Hell, if it weren’t for her we wouldn’t be dealing with Ultron in the first place. And the brother almost killed me. I say good riddance.”

Natasha nodded, as did Thor and Stark. Even pacifist Banner didn’t seem that bothered by the twins’ death.

“There were just kids.”

“The fuck they were! They joined fucking Hydra and got powers they were using to try to kill us and help Ultron. There’s nothing innocent about them.”

Steve looked like someone who had sucked on a lemon. Clint really couldn’t understand. There was something very fishy going on there. He’d get to the bottom of it later.

“Well, now we don’t have any way of tracking Ultron.” He sounded like a sulky child, even worse than Clint’s actual children.

“Not true. I can track him,” Stark said.

It really didn’t take long. They found him in Seoul, trying to steal Dr Cho’s cradle. While Steve, Thor, Nat and Clint dealt with the robots, Stark and Banner managed to purge Ultron from the internet (with help from Jarvis). Dr Cho’s lab was destroyed, but Ultron was defeated with minimum casualties.

Later, Stark and Banner made their displeasure with Steve and Thor very clear. Thor apologized for choking Stark and went back to Asgard to investigate something. Steve continued to act like a spoiled kid, which Clint found really irritating. He figured the man was hiding something, and he turned out to be right. Both Steve and Nat had learned about Steve’s long lost BFF being responsible for the murder of Howard and Maria Stark. Stark, understandably, went ballistic. Clint wanted to defend Nat, he really did, but that was a really shitty thing to do and he had to side with Stark. Steve and Nat ended up kicked out of the Avengers.
Anyone's seen Captain Marvel? I thought it was okay.

ETA: You guys! 5000 kudos on this. Oh my god. Thank you all so much! You're the best! :)

Tony watched the Bifrost come and go with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he was glad Thor had insisted on taking the scepter back to Asgard immediately, as that thing kinda gave him the creeps. On the other hand, it would have been interesting to study it a bit more. Creepy or not, Tony liked learning things, and the more he knew the less scared he’d be. Aliens and alien stuff were probably here to stay, and Earth was woefully unprepared to face whatever else would come at them in the future.

The vision/nightmare/weird PTSD episode he’d had at the Hydra bunker was still weighing heavily on his mind. A horrible enemy was coming and he needed to do something to protect Earth and everyone in it. The scepter could have helped with that. It could have been the key to figuring out how to get the Ultron program working. Now he didn’t know what to do about the choking fear and desperation he felt.

“Hey, are you okay?” Bruce asked, looking at him with concern.

Tony debated whether or not to say anything. He’d reached out to Bruce once and been let down. *Not that kind of doctor.* If Tony had wanted a fucking doctor, he could have found one. A friend, however, was harder to come by.

Still, perhaps he could give Bruce another chance. They’d barely known each other then, after all. They’d been working together the past few months and it had gone well enough.

“Let’s go to the lab. We still have some analysis to do on the stuff we got from the Hydra base,” Tony replied, evading the question. He didn’t want to say anything in front of the others.

Steve gave him a sideways glance as he and Bruce left. There was something going on with Steve and Natasha that Tony couldn’t quite put his finger on.

Once in the lab, Tony fidgeted impatiently with every little thing he got his hands on, mind unable to settle on anything.

“Tony, what’s going on? You’re been twitchy since we got back.”

Tony hesitated. He’d really had quite enough of baring his heart to others and being ignored. Nevertheless, he was not so arrogant as to think he could defend the Earth all by his lonesome. If whatever he’d seen was real, he’d need people to help him, and Bruce was a good candidate for that. Maybe they could take another crack at Ultron even without the scepter. With a deep breath (and
hoping he wouldn’t regret this), Tony told Bruce about his weird experience at the bunker.

This time, at least, Bruce listened attentively (no more falling asleep, that was better), frowning as Tony tried to explain what he’d seen and what he thought it meant.

“Tony, that doesn’t sound like a PSTD episode.”

“You’re missing the point.”

“No, I think you’re missing the point. Jarvis, do you have any readings from that time? Cameras in the bunker? Anything that can help us figure out what happened?”

“Searching now, Dr Banner.”

“What… Bruce, what? Did you not listen? Something big is coming.”

“I heard you, Tony, but I think there’s more going on.”

Just as Tony opened his mouth to retort, one of the screens lit up with footage from the bunker. It showed Tony and… someone else. But there hadn’t been anyone else there, had there? Tony watched the woman on the screen weave some sort of red mist around his head, saw his own eyes glow red just for a moment, his gaze unfocused. His body tensed and then he snapped out of it, blinking rapidly before finding his bearings and grabbing the scepter. After he left, the woman smiled sinisterly, as if her plan had been complete.

“What the fuck!” Tony exclaimed.

“That’s what I thought,” Bruce said. “What you saw was a fake vision, Tony. It was that Maximoff woman messing with your head.”

Tony shook his head. No, that… Shit. Fuck. How the hell was he supposed to defend himself against that? He’d had no idea… He’d been panicking over nothing. What he saw wasn’t real at all. The sense of impending doom, the paralyzing fear and the need to do something… all of it had been planted in his head by that little Hydra bitch. Oh, you are going down, Tony thought.

“Jarvis, get me everything you have on those Maximoff fuckers.” He looked at Bruce in gratitude and Bruce smiled back.

Looked like trusting Bruce this time had been the right thing to do. Who knows what he would have done if he hadn’t realized he was being played with? Now that he knew the vision wasn’t real, it was much easier to push away the fear and anxiety the witch had stirred up. It was still there in the back of his mind, but more manageable.

“Come on, Brucie, we’ve got work to do.”

Ultron could wait until Tony was sure his mind was entirely his again. In the meantime, he would end those Hydra terrorists.

It was actually pretty easy. With Bruce’s help, Tony was able to develop tech that could protect them from Maximoff’s mind mojo as well as inhibit her powers altogether. They also came up with stuff to counter the brother’s speed. Then it was simply a matter of setting up a trap for them.

Jarvis had been able to find records of their recruitment and training. It was sickening stuff, really. And worse, they apparently blamed Tony for the bomb that killed their parents. SI had never sold weapons to Sokovia, so either the shells were fake or illegally obtained by whoever had used it in the
middle of a Civil War. In both cases, not his fault – which anyone with half a brain could have figured out. Since they were apparently obsessed with Tony, that was what they decided to use as bait.

Clint, after being told about the woman’s mind control powers, was all for killing her, and was the first to enthusiastically approve of Tony’s plan. Natasha didn’t object, and that was approval enough as far as Tony was concerned. Steve, for some bizarre reason, thought the twins should be given a second chance, insisting that they must have been misled about Hydra’s true intentions. It took seeing the videos of Maximoff happily torturing people into suicide to convince him they were not pure innocent flowers.

Not surprisingly, the Maximoffs took the bait and were easily captured. Clint continued to argue that they should kill the woman, but Tony wasn’t really comfortable with that. So he put the collar he’d developed on her neck and turned her over to the proper authorities, along with all evidence they’d gotten from Hydra’s database. As it happened, one of her victims was the nephew of an important Sokovia government official, who successfully lobbied for the Maximoffs’ execution.

Meanwhile, Tony kept digging into Steve’s strange behavior, and eventually discovered the secret he’d been keeping – which could explain his need to defend Maximoff, as it would have set a nice little precedent for his good buddy Barnes. Tony kicked Steve out of the Tower and had him and Natasha charged with obstruction of justice. Clint was pretty aghast by their deception and decided to retire from the Avengers.

With half of its founding members gone, the Avengers underwent a complete restructuring, beginning to operate under the UN’s supervision. Tony and Bruce continued to work on Ultron, and it was ready by the time Thanos showed up. It was not an easy battle, but they won in the end.

108. (prompt by GrettaGrimm)

Tony could hardly think straight. Between all the shit he’d been dealing with since Rogers and his buddies blew up a building with people in it, the pain from fighting a triggered super soldier outside of the suit, having a dozen cars dropped on his head, watching his best friend fall like dead weight from the sky, not knowing how said best friend was doing or if he’d ever recover, watching his parents brutally murdered by the same super soldier that had tried to kill him earlier, discovering that someone he believed was a friend had known about the assassination and kept the truth from him, and being attacked by two super soldiers, it was no wonder Tony was at the end of his rope. All he wanted to do was go home and cry – for his mother (an innocent bystander), for his father (who had not caused the accident after all), for Rhodey (shot down by friendly fire in a fight that shouldn’t have happened), for himself (used and lied to), for all the people in the world who had believe in the Avengers only to be betrayed by most of them (like Tony had been betrayed).

Rogers wasn’t pulling his punches, and neither was Barnes. Tony was getting tired, and even Friday wasn’t able to keep up with the constant assault for much longer. Barnes went for the Arc Reactor, and promptly had his metal arm shot off by the suit’s defense systems. Good, Tony distantly thought. That arm murdered by father. Maybe now Barnes would stay down and Tony would be able to catch a breath and think.

Barnes might be down, but Steve was a completely different story. The moment he saw Barnes skid away from Tony, he redoubled his efforts. Tony’s energy was flagging (he wasn’t quite as young anymore), and he quickly lost ground, overwhelmed by everything.
He ended up on his back with Rogers straddling him. The super soldier brought the shield down and smashed the faceplace of the suit off. Tony looked up into Rogers’s wide and desperate eyes and knew he was about to die. Whatever Rogers was seeing, it wasn’t a friend (or even an acquaintance he tolerated); at that moment, Rogers was clearly seeing an enemy he needed to eliminate to keep his precious murderous friend safe. It didn’t matter how many people Barnes had killed. It didn’t matter that Tony had always done everything he could for Rogers. Rogers was going to kill him. After all he’d been through, he’d end up killed by a supposed friend. *Fuck my life.*

*At least maybe I’ll get to see my parents again,* Tony thought, as he waited for the killing blow.

However, it never came. Instead of the shield (the shield his father had made) coming down on his head (or worse, the Arc Reactor, his metaphorical heart), Rogers was blasted off him with a huge hole in his torso.

Tony blinked, head spinning, unable to make sense of what had just happened.

“Boss, emergency protocols! I’ll calling for help! Boss!”

Tony struggled to sit up. He stared at Steve’s bloody body and felt nothing but relief. The adrenaline high he’d been riding for the past god knew how many hours finally dissipated and Tony slumped back down like a limp doll.

“Oh god, oh god.”

He was shaking, tears running down his face, heart racing like mad. He felt like he was going to explode. Or throw up. Or both.

“Boss! Boss, please respond!”

“I’m… alive.”

He was alive. Friday had just saved his life.

“Boss. I’ve called for help. It will take a while, though. Are you okay?”

“Just… keep talking to me, Fri.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Tony saw Barnes attempt to get to his feet, and raised a shaky hand to blast him off if the man tried to finish what Rogers had started. But Barnes didn’t attack. He stared at Rogers’s body with an unreadable expression, then sat back down and closed his eyes.

Tony kept his hand up for another few seconds, then let go. He was exhausted. Friday was still rambling nonsense in his ear, so he let her voice wash over him and tried to keep himself awake.

When Vision and a Russian team arrived, Tony and Barnes were still in the same position, each slumped where they had fallen. They had not said a word to each other. Part of Tony still wanted to hurt the man, but once the fight had ended, so had most of Tony’s anger. He was too strung out and weary to even think about revenge.

The suit was still mostly functional, so Tony was able to walk out on his own two feet. He answered the Russian officers’ questions as best as he could with his thought still scattered all over the place. Tony and Barnes were taken into custody. Zemo was nowhere to be found.

There were cameras in the bunker, and the Russians recovered all the footage. It showed the fight as well as the events that led up to it. It also showed Zemo leaving the building alone followed by
T'Challa. Tony hadn’t even known the Wakandan prince had been there. It would have been nice to have had help, but T’Challa clearly didn’t give a crap about Tony.

The tapes were used in court to prove that Tony had acted in self-defense when he killed Steve, and he was found not guilty of the murder. Barnes was also tried for his crimes. He was found not guilty of the crimes of the Winter Soldier, and made a deal for psychiatric treatment at a specialized facility for the rest.

T’Challa got into a lot of trouble for his actions, both in Bucharest and in Siberia, and returned home with his tail between his legs, the angry eyes of the world on Wakanda.

Barton, Maximoff, Wilson and Lang were convicted for their actions in the so-called Civil War and were each sent to different prisons in the US and, in Maximoff’s case, Sokovia.

Romanoff disappeared right after Tony spoke to her at the hospital and was never seen again. Tony suspected she was killed by one of her dozens of enemies.

It took a while, but Rhodey recovered from his injuries, and so did Tony. It wasn’t easy, but he had his friends (his real friends) by his side every step of the way.

109. (prompt by bookfreak1317)

Hope arrived at a scene of utter chaos. Maggie and Jim Paxton’s house was in ruins. Cassie Lang was being rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. Both Darren Cross and Scott Lang were dead, their mangled bodies lying in the floor of what used to be a little girl’s bedroom. The details of what happened were still unclear, but Hope knew one thing: this was their doing, hers and her father’s.

They (Hank) had used Scott against Cross, and now the man was dead (both of them, actually), his ex-wife’s house destroyed, his daughter hurt and traumatized. They did this. In the name of stopping Cross, of keeping their secrets and their technology, they had gotten an innocent man killed.

It would be easy to lay the blame entirely at her father’s feet, but that would not be fair. She was just as much to blame. She had helped train Scott, had allowed him to get involved in a situation that had nothing to do with him, using his kind heart and naivety – and his desire to redeem himself in his daughter’s eyes – to lead him to his death. In the world of business, Hope had often done things she was not proud of. It was how the game was played. This, however, was different. This time, Hope was ashamed of herself. She felt sick at what she had allowed to happen.

There was an investigation. Of course there was. Jim Paxton was a police officer, and the police protected their own. Darren Cross’s body was identified, and his connection to Pym Technologies discovered. From there, it was not hard to put things together. Scott had been arrested for breaking into Hank’s house, establishing another link with Pym Tech, and Hank himself.

Hope didn’t know what to do when the police interviewed her two days later. She had barely slept, and still didn’t know Cassie Lang’s condition. Though she’d never been particularly religious, Hope had spent the last couple of days fervently praying for the girl’s recovery. She could not have a child’s death on her conscience. Scott’s (and Darren’s) was bad enough.

“What did Scott Lang have to do with Pym Technologies, Ms van Dyne?” the officer asked, eyeing her suspiciously.
“I…” She could lie, but what would be the point? They’d figure it out eventually. Scott deserved better than what he’d gotten from her, from Hank. He deserved recognition for the sacrifice he made (that he should not have had to make at all), and justice. “My father hired him to do a job.” Hired was a rather misleading term, though, as no actual payment had been arranged, but Hank had promised to help Scott get back on his feet financially.

“What job?”

“Break into Pym Technologies to steal a prototype.” She took a deep breath. The Yellow Jacket and the Ant-Man suit had been destroyed in the fight between Cross and Scott, so there was nothing left to protect. “Darren Cross was about to sell a dangerous piece of technology. We needed to stop him.”

“Why didn’t you call the police? Or the FBI?”

Why indeed. In retrospect, it seemed like a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Scott would still be alive if she’d done that. “My father didn’t want anyone else to find out about this technology.” And Hank’s paranoia had cost lives.

The detective wasn’t impressed, and Hope couldn’t blame him.

Things went downhill from there. It was discovered that Scott – at Hank’s urging – had stolen a piece of technology from the Avengers Compound. Since the tech in question belonged to Howard Stark, Stark Industries filled criminal charges against Hank (Scott was already dead, so there was no point going after him). Hank was found guilty of theft, and Pym Tech took yet another hit it could not afford to take.

Hope, seeing that the boat was about to sink, got a deal for herself and narrowly avoided prison time. Her father was not so lucky. It certainly didn’t help his case that he shouted that Howard Stark, and by extension Tony Stark, were thieves without a shred of evidence to back it up. SI slapped him with a civil suit for slander as well (Potts was not kidding around.) It was the end of Pym Tech.

The day the final sentence on her father’s case was announced, Hope felt nothing but regret.

“We should never have gotten Scott involved, Hank,” she told her father.

“He had a choice,” Hank snarled back, bitter to the end. “He could have walked away.”

“We could have made different choices too, better choices. Now we’ll have to deal with the consequences as well.”

It was the last time she ever saw her father. He died in prison two years later.

110. (prompt by ApocalypticPhoenix)

(AN: I claim no accuracy for any of this.)

“Grenade!” Steve yelled, and jumped on it. He was probably going to die, but at least he’d die a hero, saving everybody.

Except nothing happened. The grenade didn’t go off. Steve stared at it uncomprehendingly. What?
“Rogers, what the fuck was that?” Phillips asked. The Colonel was still standing where he’d been when he tossed the grenade, though everyone else was a good distance away.

Steve slowly got to his feet, wondering what had happened. Had the grenade malfunctioned? “Sir?”

“I said what the fuck was that?”

“That what?” Now Steve was confused.

“That!” Phillips said, pointing to the grenade lying innocently on the ground.

“Hmm… It didn’t go off,” Steve said.

“Of course it didn’t go off! Did you really think I’d toss a live grenade anywhere in here? Are you out of your mind!?”

“I… I didn’t have time to think, Sir. I… I saw danger and I…”

“And you thought you’d play the hero, go out in a blaze of glory.” Phillips didn’t look impressed.

Steve squirmed a bit, unsure what to say.

“Well, let me tell you that we don’t need that in the Army. This is not about glory, about being a hero. Being a soldier isn’t about that, and if that’s what you’re after, you’re in the wrong place.”

“Well, what was I supposed to do, Sir?” Steve hated being wrong, hated being talked to like he was less capable, less of a man. He’d had enough of that all his life. He’d thought being accepted in the army – finally – would be his chance to prove himself, to prove his worth. And now… This was a test, and he’d failed it somehow. He didn’t understand.

“You were supposed to run away like any sensible person!” Phillips retorted as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. The other soldiers had approached and were snickering at Steve getting lectured. God, Steve hated bullies.

“If it was a real grenade, running away wouldn’t have done much,” he replied, standing his ground.

“Well, seeing how slow you run, I don’t doubt it,” one of the soldiers muttered to another.

Steve gritted his teeth. “I was trying to protect people.”

Phillips scoffed. “Part of a soldier’s job is to do risk analysis in order to determine the best course of action. If that was a real grenade, your little suicide stunt would have done squat to actually contain the explosion. All you would have achieved would be dying, and for nothing. We don’t need suicidal nutters and glory-seekers here, Rogers, we need people who can look at a situation and make effective choices. You’re dismissed.”

With that, Phillips walked away – the others going with him –, leaving Steve standing there all by himself, feeling lost and angry.

The next day, he was called to a doctor’s office. The doctor asked a bunch of questions about why Steve wanted to serve and what he thought he could contribute to the war. Steve answered it all truthfully, irritated that he had to keep doing this, keep justifying himself. He was the same as everyone else, he wanted to serve his country, fight the bullies, show everyone he was just as much a man as all the others. If only he was given a chance, he knew he could do it.

The doctor nodded at him and wrote things down in his little notebook. At the end, he smiled at
Steve as they shook hands.

*Well, that wasn’t so bad,* he thought.

Later that day, Phillips came to the barracks and told Steve to pack his bags, he was going back home.

“What? Why?” he asked in dismay. No, it wasn’t fair.

“Rogers, you are completely unfit for the army, for a number of reasons. First there is you mile-long list of health issues, which should have disqualified you from the start. Even without all that, however, you don’t seem to have any concept of what’s going on here, or what a soldier does. As I told you yesterday, this isn’t about glory. We have a war to win, and I need people who understand that and can actually contribute. You… You don’t have any useful skills. More than that, you’d be an actually hindrance to any unit, not just because of your health but because of your personality profile.”

“But… but that’s not fair. I can do the work!”

“No, you can’t, and your insistence that you can is exactly the problem. Whatever you want to prove, go do it someplace else. The army is not here to cater to your desires.”

Steve shook his head, standing as tall as he could. “You never even gave me a chance!”

“I don’t have to. I have a war to win, and if you’re not gonna help me do that, I don’t need you. And I don’t have time to listen to you whine about how unfair the world is. Newsflash, Rogers, if the world was fair, we wouldn’t be in this mess in the first place.” Phillips sighed. “Now get the hell out of my sight before I decide to have you arrested for providing false information on your recruitment forms. In case you weren’t aware, that’s a crime.”

Nothing Steve said made any difference, and he didn’t want to go to prison. He went home feeling like a beaten dog with his tail between his legs. After a couple of weeks, he went to another enlistment office, and was arrested on the spot. Apparently Phillips had warned people he might try again, and they were ready.

He was released after four months by agreeing to collect scrap metal for the government. He hated every second of it.
Hey, guys. New chapter at last. Hope you like it. Last one has spoilers for Endgame.

111.

(AN: This one isn’t from a prompt, it just came into my head. Also, I didn’t rewatch the movie, so apologies if it’s not quite accurate.)

“But we’ll never know, because we dropped a building on him while we were kicking ass,” Tony said, feeling more tired than ever. More than when he was being slowly poisoned. More than after Ultron, staring at the mangled remains of his son and the ruins of Sokovia. He was simply exhausted.

“Someone dies on your watch, you don’t give up,” Steve said and Tony just stared at him.

“Did you hear a word I just said? A kid is dead. Dead. Do you understand that? His mother is never gonna hold her baby again, and we’re sitting here patting ourselves in the back for a job well done. Yay, we saved the world. Guess what? We didn’t for Charlie Spencer. We didn’t for his mother. Or for all the people that died in Sokovia, in Lagos, in DC. Those people are dead, and they’re dead as a result of our actions. So don’t sit there with that holier than thou attitude and tell me that their lives don’t matter! That their deaths are just numbers, just collateral damage,” he spat out the words. “If we don’t listen, don’t learn, don’t accept limitations, we are no better than the bad guys. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want any more blood on my hands. So we will damn well sign this thing and show the world that we actually do give a crap about people.”

There was a heavy silence once Tony was done. Rhodey and Vision nodded at him. He already knew they understood what was at stake. Natasha seemed to get it too. And she should, considering she kept saying she was trying to wipe the red off her ledger. In Tony’s private opinion, she’d done a shit job of it so far, but she might be able to learn at last. Wilson was looking a bit uncomfortable. Good. He really needed to just stop following Steve around like a lost puppy. Wanda… now that was a surprise. She actually seemed to be thinking about what he’d said. Steve, though… Steve had that mulish look on his face, the one that meant he’d made up his mind and nothing in the world would change it. Well, Tony was done with his bullshit.

“So, are we all in agreement?” Everyone except Steve nodded. Surprise, surprise. Trying very hard not to roll his eyes, Tony turned to Steve. “What?”

“I don’t think this is a good idea,” he said, as if that was the final word on the subject.

“Noted,” Tony replied. “You can retire, then.”

That got Steve’s hackles up, of course. “I will do no such thing and you can’t make me.”

God, it was like talking to a toddler.

“Here’s the thing, Steve: the world doesn’t exist at your convenience. Just because you don’t like something, it doesn’t mean it ceases to exist. The Accords aren’t perfect, of course not, but there’s room for improvement. Just because you don’t think the dead people in the Avengers’ wake are
important, it doesn’t make it so. There are plenty of people out there who will not let this go, and they shouldn’t. You can disagree all you want, this is still happening. And if you can’t see why it’s important – why it’s necessary – then you shouldn’t be part of this team.”

“You don’t get to decide that, Tony. You aren’t part of this team.”

“Right. Well, then I guess I’ll be taking my Compound, my weapons, my tech and all my money back. You know, the things that keep this team running.”

“Now you’re just being petty.”

“And you’re being a moron!” Tony exploded. “Wake up and smell the roses, Rogers. You are going to run this team into the ground if you keep your head buried in the sand like this. You might have a big following here in the US, but overseas is a different matter entirely. As of a few weeks ago, a bunch of countries have petitioned to preemptively deny you and your little posse” he indicated Wilson, Wanda and Natasha “into their borders.”

“They can’t do that!”

“You can’t possibly be that stupid. That’s how the world works. Would you let someone who is known for blowing shit up into your house, no questions asked? Of course not! And when you wear the American flag on your ass you make it even worse. You might have missed this, but the US is not universally loved. In fact, there are places that outright hate us – just ask Natasha and Wanda – and would love this opportunity to make trouble. So get your head out of your ass!”

Steve looked around as if seeking support, but no one made eye contact.

“We have a chance to win back the public’s support and legitimize the Avengers, ‘cause right now we are nothing but glorified vigilantes, and the world isn’t going to be okay with that for much longer. It’s now or never, people.”

Again, everyone but Steve nodded.

Steve clenched his jaw. Before he said anything, however, his phone beeped and he excused himself.

“I’ll talk to him,” Natasha said. “He just needs some time to think things over.”

“Whatever.” Tony doubted very much Steve would be seeing the light anytime soon, but he was really past caring at this point. He turned to Wanda. “You need to stay here until this matter is resolved. Nigeria is asking for your head in a platter and your visa is on thin ice. I’ve got people dealing with it, but you need to keep your head down, give people a chance to calm down.”

“I was only trying to help,” Wanda said, her hands twisting in her lap.

“I know. But good intentions don’t change the facts, and they don’t bring the dead back to life. It’s not really your fault, but angry people aren’t always rational. They just want someone to blame.”

She cringed a little, and hunched in on herself. Good. Maybe there was actual hope for her yet.

“I understand.”

“Good.”

(Steve went to Peggy’s funeral. When Bucky was identified as the bomber in the attack in the UN,
he wanted to go after him, but Natasha and Sam glued themselves to his side and refused to let him do anything. He could do nothing but wait.

Bucky was taken into custody, escaped soon afterwards only to be recaptured by Tony and Rhodes. An investigation was launched, though Steve wasn’t privy to the details.

The next day, when Tony burst into the hotel room he, Sam and Nat were staying in with murder in his eyes, Steve knew the game was up. Tony knew. Sam was horrified to find out the secret Steve and Nat had been keeping, and gave him a look of such betrayal that Steve flinched. Natasha apologized to Tony, but it didn’t make much difference. Both she and Steve were kicked out of the Avengers in disgrace.

To add insult to injury, Bucky refused to see him. Steve ended up alone.

112. (prompt by dls)

It took her a while to notice it. Wanda was back in Sokovia with Pietro, waiting for Ultron to decide what he was going to do next, and she idly flipped the channels on the crappy old television. It was the images that first caught her attention. Images of chaos, dust and panic. It reminded her far too much of the many times she saw things like that with her own eyes, happening right in front of her face. Before her parents had died, it hadn’t seemed so bad. Sure, it was scary – she and Pietro would huddle under the bed and wait for the noise of explosions to die down – but until it had touched her family, she hadn’t quite understood what it all meant.

On the TV, people were screaming, calling out for loved ones, while police and firefighters were trying to get people out from under collapsed structures. It was horrible.

And it was her fault.

The news were blaming the Hulk, of course, but Wanda knew better. She had seen into his mind. She had seen the rage and pain and fear. She had seen a little boy, too small and too scared, crying under the bed while a woman pleaded for mercy. She’d seen a man – big, menacing, hatred and fury in his eyes – bearing down on the boy and the woman. She’d seen fear, and anger. So much anger. She hadn’t realized it at the time, but that anger was like her own. It was the same impotent fury she’d felt whenever she’d seen the name Stark in the papers. Whenever she thought of those two horrible days she’d spent trapped with the corpses of her parents, with the end of her childhood and life. It was a destructive, all-encompassing anger that had nowhere to go, no outlet, because the object of her anger was out of her reach.

She saw the results of the Hulk’s anger, the result of her own anger – the despair and hopelessness on people’s faces in the news – and she felt sick.

What have I done?

And then she started to think of other things. She thought of the Avengers, and what she’d seen in their minds. She thought of Steve Rogers, paragon of American virtue, sad and alone because there was no war to fight. Because his love was gone, leaving him alone. He was scared of not being needed, of not having a place in the world. He was scared he would be discovered, though Wanda had not delved deep enough to find out what secret he was keeping.

She thought of the Black Widow, of her nightmare of pain and anger and fear. Her sense of loss for having had something taken away from her. Her fear of not being good enough, of losing, of not being in control. Her compulsive need to never be weak again, to be the best. A survivor. That was all she’d cared about, surviving. Whatever she had to do, she would do it, and with her head held
high. In that sense, she was like Wanda.

There was also Thor, the alien Prince, whose fear was also of not being good enough, of being cast out again. To lose his family, his strength, his world. Deep down, he worried that he would be a poor king, that the image he had of himself as a fierce warrior was a lie, that someone would come along who was stronger and better than he was.

And then there was Stark. The man Wanda had spent her life hating. His nightmare, she realized now, was different. His fear was different. Unlike the others, he wasn’t worried about himself. He was afraid that the entire world was in danger. In his nightmare, it was not him who was dead, but everyone else. Everyone he loved. He feared not being good enough not because it would undermine his sense of self, but because his failure would result in death for others. How was it that the man she thought was a selfish monster was, actually, the only one whose nightmare wasn’t selfish?

Could she have been wrong about him after all?

When she had let him go with the scepter in Strucker’s base, she had relished in the fear she had sensed in him, but she had not really considered what she’d seen in his mind. She thought she would induce him to create something to destroy himself, but Ultron… Ultron wasn’t really interested in the Avengers, she realized with a jolt. He only wanted to kill them because they would interfere with his plans. And what were those plans? What had he said? Wanda had been so gleeful over finally having her revenge that she hadn’t even listened.

What have I done?

“Something the matter?” Pietro asked, coming up to stand beside her.

Wanda stared in horror at the TV. There was a child crying, looking around for someone, perhaps her mother. What if that child had lost her mother? It would be because of her. Because of her desire for revenge. She was the monster, the monster behind the Hulk. That girl on TV, wailing in despair, might never know who was responsible for her mother’s death, but Wanda did. It was her name on that bomb.

“My god, Pietro, what have we done?” she whispered. She looked back at Ultron and no longer saw an ally in her quest to rid the world of Stark. Now she saw a threat to everyone, including herself and her brother. “We have to stop him.”

“What?”

Before Wanda could respond, Ultron came over. “I have found what I need. We will go to Seoul. I will get my body and then… Then I can do what I was meant to do: cleanse the Earth from the pest of humanity.”

Wanda and Pietro looked at each other and nodded. This was not what they wanted.

Pietro ran and in an instant was back with a piece of rebar that he used to strike Ultron with. Wanda used her powers, red magic driving him back. They had to destroy him before anyone else got hurt.

It was not an easy battle, but eventually they won. Ultron lay in pieces at their feet, the light slowly fading from his metallic face. They slumped back, exhausted, and collapsed.

When she woke up, Wanda heard someone approaching and struggled to get up and defend herself. “Pietro!” She called. He had been injured in the fight, but he healed fast, so she hadn’t been too worried. “Pietro!” She shook him, but he was slow to wake.
There was a whiny sound and Wanda turned, power coiling around her hands.

“Don’t even think about it or I’ll blow you to hell,” Iron Man said, standing in front of her, Thor and Hawkeye at his side.

For a moment, her old hatred flared back to life, and she wanted to eviscerate him where he stood. *He’s a monster*, she told herself. Then she remembered. *So am I*. And she surrendered.

(AN: Well, look at me, redeeming Wanda – twice in one chapter! Don’t worry, I’ll be back to arranging her demise in no time.)

113. (prompt by LesbianWriter_87)

(AN: I had already decided to do this when the prompt came. Great minds think alike, I guess. Inspired by dls’s Let’s Love Like There’s No Goodbyes. Spoilers for Endgame in this one, folks.)

It took Steve a while to track Peggy down after he returned to the past. Still, she was delighted to see him, just as he’d expected. They finally got their dance – and much more besides.

Then the questions started. How did he survive? Where had he been? Steve had known they’d come, of course, but he’d figured he could come up with something to explain it. He’d hoped Peggy would be so overjoyed at having him back that she wouldn’t worry about the how too much. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Peggy was not easily distracted. Even when he told her he couldn’t talk about it for security reasons – and that she would just have to trust him – it wasn’t enough. He really should have planned it better.

The truth was that he hadn’t exactly set out to go back to his time. He’d put the Stones back in their proper places like he’d promised and then… then it had occurred to him that he finally had a chance to get back what he’d lost. He could return to the life that had been taken from him. There had been no real thought then, just a desperate desire to go back. The world in 2023 might have been saved, but Steve still didn’t have a place in it. Natasha – the only person he’d truly bonded with – was dead. Bucky’s time as the Winter Soldier had changed him, as had his time in Wakanda. The last time they’d spent together – before the battle they’d lost – had been enough to show Steve that his best friend was no longer there, it was just another man wearing his face. Sam and Wanda were okay, but… they didn’t hold a candle to Peggy.

So it had been an easy choice to make. He would go back to the one person who was still there for him – the person he was meant to be with. He’d go back to not long after he ‘died’, so the world would still be as he remembered. He would be back where he belonged and everything would be all right.

Except it wasn’t.

Peggy wasn’t the same as he remembered. She did not accept his presence as easily as he’d thought she would, not past the initial elation at his return. He’d asked her not to tell anyone about him being back and she agreed, but he’d catch her looking at him oddly, especially when he slipped and said something that he shouldn’t, like references to something that didn’t exist. It was hard to keep track of what did and didn’t exist in 1946. It was hard not to talk about the life he’d lived in the future.

A couple of weeks after his return, she suggested they get in touch with Howard, and Steve couldn’t think of a reason to refuse that wouldn’t make her even more suspicious.

It was… awkward, to say the least. The last time he’d seen Howard had been on his trip back to 1970 to retrieve the Tesseract, but at that time Steve had been focused on the mission (and the
glimpse of Peggy he’d gotten). Now he couldn’t help remember the tape he’d seen in Siberia, the one with Howard’s final moments. Still, he couldn’t say anything, couldn’t risk changing the timeline, and it just made for a tense atmosphere.

Howard did help him get a place of his own (he’d been staying at a hotel), but things didn’t get any better. Peggy remained wary and seemed to grow more distant every day. Steve had never had any experience with romance, so he did what he knew: he complimented her beauty, he surprised her with flowers, chocolates and impromptu dinners out, he opened doors for her and was as gentlemanly as he could be. No matter what, though, he knew that something still wasn’t right.

Finally, Steve figured he should just go for it. He borrowed some money from Howard (trying not to think about Tony dead in the future and his daughter fated to grow up without a father) and bought Peggy a beautiful ring.

He planned it down to the smallest detail so that everything would be perfect. He dressed in impeccable clothes, took her out to a fancy restaurant she liked and at the end of their meal got down on one knee.

“Peggy, will you do me the honor of being my wife?”

He’d expected an enthusiastic yes. Instead, Peggy just looked at him.

“Steve… I… I’m sorry.”

Steve’s face fell. No, he could not believe this was happening. How could she deny him? They were soul mates, they were meant to be. Fate had robbed them of their chance once, but Steve had fought (and lost) and had finally gotten it back. This was his happy ending, his reward for all he’d suffered.

They left the restaurant in awkward silence, Steve desperate to get away from all the pitying looks and the humiliation of being rejected.

“Peggy, I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I, Steve. You’re… something’s changed. You’re not the man I… You’re… I don’t know. Something happened and you won’t tell me. I can’t… How can we ever truly be together if you’re keeping things from me? If you don’t trust me? If you’re hiding… whatever it is you’re hiding.”

“I’m not…”

She just shook her head and didn’t say another word. He walked her back to her apartment (she had refused to move in with him, no matter how much he’d insisted), and stood around unsure of what to do. How could it have gone so wrong?

“Peggy…”

Her expression was guarded and closed off. He was going to lose her, he realized. After everything, all he’d sacrificed and lost, she was slipping away from him.

No, he wouldn’t let that happen. He couldn’t. So he told her the truth: about being frozen, waking up in the future all alone, about Thanos, the snap, their last desperate plan and the opportunity to get his life back – to get her back.

She listened without interruption until Steve fell silent, his words spent and his heart in his throat.
“What happened to me in your future?” she asked at last.

Steve looked away. “You lived a long life, but then you died.”

“And what happened in that life? What did I do?”

“I… I can’t tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because… because it would… change things.”


Reluctantly, Steve mumbled a ‘no’.

“And now you’ve come and changed all that. Whoever I was with in your future, it might not happen now.”

“But I’m here. We can be together! Like we were meant to be. You don’t have to settle for some other guy,” Steve insisted, a frantic edge to his voice.

“Steve… we barely know each other. Before you… were gone… we’d never even had a date. Life isn’t a fairytale. This… this isn’t…” She shook her head. “I’m sorry. I was right, though. You aren’t the man I met. You’re… someone I don’t know. Someone I don’t think I can be with. I’m sorry. I think you should go now.”

No. No, this could not be happening. It was too cruel. To give him back this chance only to snatch it away from him again… It wasn’t fair. Hadn’t he done enough? Didn’t he deserve this?

He tried to argue, to tell her how much he loved her.

“You don’t even know me, Steve. You love some image in your head. It’s not me. I’m sorry. I can’t.”

There was nothing he could do. Steve felt even more powerless than after the snap, when half the world had disappeared into dust. Once again his world had crumbled, and there was nothing he could do about it. He had no more particles left to go anywhere else (he didn’t think he’d need then, this was supposed to be his final destination), and it would be far too long until Hank Pym would create more.

He was trapped here, back in the past when he’d longed to be ever since he’d woken up in that SHIELD facility. Yet it wasn’t how he thought it’d be. He didn’t have Peggy, he didn’t have Bucky (god, Bucky. Where was he now?). He had nothing. Back at square one. All alone.

It wasn’t fair.

Steve eventually convinced Howard he was telling the truth about being from the future, and that they had to rescue Bucky. His best friend was the only thing he had left. They found out where Bucky was being held and Steve once again went to rescue him. He didn’t have his shield anymore, though, and his mind was still in turmoil over having lost Peggy. He never saw the bullet that pierced his skull.

If he had, he probably would have been grateful.
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

I was going to post this last Sunday on my birthday, but I got sick and all my plans got derailed. But I have now beaten that damn flu (mostly), so here we go! Hope you like it. Spoilers for EG in the first one.

114. (prompt by SM, thequeensfan1117)

(AN: Spoilers for Endgame in this one.)

It had been two days since the world had, once again, irrevocably changed. The first time, when half the population disappeared in the blink of an eye, had been absolutely devastating – more so because people had had no idea about why or how.

Throughout the chaos and despair of those first few days post snap, all Pepper had been able to think about was Tony. What had happened to him out there in space? Had he been snapped out of existence too? Had he been killed by the alien responsible for it all? Was he alive, stranded somewhere far away? The uncertainty had eaten away at her until she thought she was going to lose her mind.

Then she’d discovered she was pregnant (Tony’s dream had been right after all), and she’d had to put herself back together. For her child. For her and Tony’s child.

But as always with Tony, he’d pulled a miracle out of his ass and came back to her. She should have known, but there had been so much death… Yet there he was: thin, battered, weary down to the bone, but still fighting, just like always. When she’d told him about the baby, he’d begun to cry and didn’t stop for a long time. Pepper understood. When he’d finally looked up at her, his eyes blazed fiercely and she’d known they were going to be all right.

Now… Now he was gone forever. There would be no miraculous return this time, no death-defying comeback to prove to the world that Tony was invincible. This time, it was the last time. It didn’t seem real.

Tony had died as he’d lived: a hero. A man who put the safety of the world above his own self-interests, a man who did the right thing for the right reasons and wasn’t afraid to face the consequences of those choices. Tony had saved the world – the whole universe. For Pepper and Morgan, though, it was cold comfort. It was who Tony was, but that didn’t make his loss any easier to bear. It didn’t help her broken heart. It didn’t fill the void left by his absence. Nothing ever would.

Morgan didn’t understand yet, she was too young. One day soon, however, she would, and Pepper knew that her heart would break all over again when that time came.

“Pep?” Rhodey asked, coming into the room and pulling her away from her thoughts. “We’re almost ready.”

Pepper nodded, unable to get any words past the grief that was choking her. She’d known, when she’d told Tony to do what he had to do, that there was a chance he wouldn’t come back. Yet
somehow she’d expected him to be fine in the end. He’d defied the odds so many times, she thought he would do it again. Why couldn’t he have done it this one last time?

It was a beautiful day, shining sun and clear skies, and it didn’t seem right. It should have been as bleak and dark as Pepper felt stepping off the little house they’d built to say her last goodbye to her husband.

Happy was holding Morgan’s hand, a teary-eyed Peter next to them. Tony had asked her to take care of the kid if they managed to bring the snapped back, and Pepper was going to honor that to the best of her ability. Rhodey was talking to Harley, another one of the kids Tony had taken a shine to.

A noise made her turn back and she saw more people arriving. Bruce Banner/Hulk gave her a sad smile and a questioning look. Pepper held his gaze for a while, then nodded. Tony had always liked Bruce, even if, in Pepper’s opinion, the friendship hadn’t been as equal on the other side.

Doctor Strange came next, shoulders down and an air of defeat about him. Pepper didn’t know him at all, but she knew he’d been with Tony in Titan, and had saved his life there. It seemed cruel now to save Tony only for him to die later, but she knew it wasn’t Strange’s fault. At least they’d had the last five years; she wouldn’t change that for anything.

Secretary Ross Pepper wasn’t thrilled about, though. He gave Bruce/Hulk a sideways glance but said nothing. Pepper didn’t like Ross (neither had Tony), but the man had been helpful in the post-snapped world, and he knew how to play nice when the occasion called for it.

Bruce moved over to speak to Rhodey and Ross stood alone a little further back, silent and respectful.

King T’Challa of Wakanda, his mother and sister kept to themselves, and Pepper ignored them. She didn’t know why they were here, but it would be bad manners to toss a king out.

Hank Pym, with his wife, daughter and that idiot Lang, arrived a bit later. Pepper narrowed her eyes at them, and kept her cool. Now was not the time to say what she wanted to say, no matter how much she might want to. She did not want these people here, but she didn’t have the energy to argue just now. She just wanted to get this over with so she could begin to figure out what to do with her life now.

She took a step forward to get things started, but had to stop when even more people showed up.

No. No, she would not stand for it. Not them. She could deal with Ross and Pym, but not… not them.

Steve Rogers, Bucky Barnes, Sam Wilson, Clint Barton and Wanda Maximoff walked in as if they had any right to be there, and if they had any right to Tony, and Pepper saw red.

In a few short strides, she was standing in front of them, blocking their path.

“How dare you?” she hissed, blood almost boiling in her veins. If she still had Extremis, she might have literally breathed fire. “How dare you show your faces here?” Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Happy taking Morgan away and Rhodey and Peter coming closer.

“Pepper~” Rogers started, but Pepper was just done with his bullshit. She might have tolerated his presence in her house the last time because Tony had been alive, but now… All her patience was gone.

“It’s Mrs Stark,” she said, eye boring holes into him. “And I want you out of my house. All of you.
right now.”

“Ma’am, we just want to pay our respects,” Rogers insisted.

“Respects? Respects!? What respect? None of you leeches ever respected Tony. Or anyone else for that matter. Did you respect Tony when you nearly beat him to death in Siberia? When you left him stranded there to freeze to death alone? When you kept the fact that your best friend murdered his parents from him? All the while using his money and resources to look for said murderer? This man, standing right here?” She pointed at Barnes and the man flinched and hunched in on himself. “When you protected this man above Tony, above everyone? When you allowed this mind-raping bitch on the team despite what she did? To Tony, to Bruce, to the world?” Pepper glared at Maximoff with as much hatred and contempt as she could. “When you refused to listen to the world when they told you to stop? When you rejected Tony’s every effort to meet you half-way? When you bring these murderers, these terrorists, here?” The heat in her eyes could have melted steel. If looks could kill all of them would be nothing but smoldering ashes. “If you had any respect for Tony, you would not be here, insulting those of us who actually cared about Tony with your presence, your existence.”

“Ma’am–”

“Shut the fuck up, Rogers! Shut the fuck up and get the hell out of my house before I thrown you out.”

Wilson, Barnes and even Barton recoiled at the venom in Pepper’s words and expression. Barnes kept his head down and tugged at Rogers’s hands, urging him to move, but of course the king of righteous stubbornness didn’t budge.

“I understand that you’re upset, ma’am–”

Pepper lost it. With the little bit of Extremis she had left, she reared back and slapped Rogers as hard as she could. His head snapped to the side and he actually stumbled back a step.

“Get. Out.” She gritted out. Rhodey, Peter, Harley and, surprisingly, Strange, were right beside her. “I don’t want criminals in my house.”

“I’m sorry,” Wilson said quietly.

“Take your sorry and shove it, you bastard,” Pepper retorted. “And I’ll be taking those Falcon wings back. They’re SI patented and do not belong to you.”

Wilson looked like he might want to protest, but Barnes elbowed him and he subsided.

“Now wait a minute,” Barton began.

“And I don’t want a psychopathic serial killer in my house, near my daughter, Barton,” she said, and he flinched. “And I certainly don’t want one who cozies up to Hydra terrorists capable of mind control.”

Barton glanced at Wanda and wilted a bit.

“And you,” Pepper turned to the woman. “You are nothing but Hydra scum and I swear I will make it my mission in life to send you to jail where you belong. No more free passes, not for any of you pieces of shit.”

There was a heavy silence after Pepper was done. Rhodey took a step forward in the rogues’ direction. “The world isn’t in peril anymore, so I don’t have to tolerate you assholes. Get out.”
Finally, they shifted. Rogers still had the slight impression of Pepper’s hand on his face as Barnes all but dragged him away.

Pepper took a few moments to get herself back under control, grateful for Rhody’s solid presence at her side. Once she felt she was ready, she turned back to the others, glaring at Pym (Lang at least had the good grace to duck his head like a chastised child) and exchanging a meaningful look with Ross. He might be a bastard, but he wanted Rogers and his minions brought down just as much as her. Bruce looked guilty and uncomfortable, and the Wakandan royal family wouldn’t meet her eyes.

“Let’s say good bye to Tony.”

(Somehow, the full details of the so-called Civil War had slipped Bruce by. It was somehow understandable, he thought, as immediately after his return to Earth, the whole universe had gone to hell. In the wake of the snap, people had devoted their time and energy towards surviving, and a lot of things had fallen by the wayside. With everyone’s miraculous return, however, it wasn’t quite the same. And with Tony Stark’s widow campaigning to have “Team Cap” finally dealt with, it didn’t take the world long to get to it.

Tony Stark had died to save the universe, and had been the one to make it possible to reverse the snap as well, even if it had been Bruce wielding the gauntlet. Tony was once again acclaimed a hero, so when Pepper released all the information about how his former teammates had treated him – how Rogers had lied to him and nearly killed him – a lot of the world’s good will towards them died down. It certainly helped that Strange stated quite clearly that he had seen many possible futures, and Rogers and his group had been the ones to doom the universe in too many of them to count. Wanda Maximoff’s huge list of crimes came to light, and Bruce himself spoke of how she had manipulated his mind to cause him to attack Johannesburg.

Rogers was sent prison, along with Wilson, Barton and Maximoff. King T’Chala argued for leniency for Barnes given what he’d suffered at Hydra’s hands, and offered him continued sanctuary in Wakanda. Because Barnes readily confessed to all the Winter Soldier’s crimes and offered to disclose all he knew about them so the victims could have closure, the courts accepted the deal.

Bruce, Rhodes, Spider-Man, Strange rebuilt the Avengers.)

(AN: I didn’t mention it, but in this world, Strange was the one tasked with taking the Stones back, and he did exactly what he was supposed to do without any selfish additions. Also, I only saw the movie once, so I apologize if I misremembered who was and wasn’t there at the funeral scene.)

115. (prompt by slowdyingflower, Victoria Ellis, Divush)

Jim was talking to that jerk Ross about the goddam aliens that had just disappeared with his best friend when the last people he wanted to see showed up at the Compound as if they had any right whatsoever to be here.

“Colonel, arrest those criminals,” Ross said, and Jim sighed.

“I’m gonna have to call you back, Mr Secretary,” he replied, cutting off the connection while ensuring that Friday was recording everything. He wanted no doubt about what was about to happen.

He turned to the former Avengers – Rogers, Romanoff, Wilson and Maximoff – and waited. He
wasn’t sure what he was waiting for exactly, though. An apology? He already knew Rogers was crap at that. An acknowledgement of the mess they had made and then left behind after the Civil War? It was pretty unlikely. When had those assholes ever acknowledged any of their own mistakes? (Though they were, of course, quick to point out Tony’s, whether those were real on only in the insanity that passed for their brains.)

Not surprisingly, they said nothing. Just stood there expecting… what? A ‘welcome back”? Yeah, when hell froze over.

Jim watched them, expression neutral as he tried to think about what he could – or should – do. He was well aware that he could not take them all on by himself. Vision was with them (clearly wounded), but Jim couldn’t trust him. It had become obvious that the android’s judgment was seriously screwed up if he was still seeing that Hydra witch. Tony had been upset to realize Vision had kept in touch with her, yet he told Jim he had to give him the space to make his own decision, even if he personally disagreed. Jim thought Vision needed a serious talking to, but he’d never quite had the opportunity to do something about it, not with how packed his schedule had been. At this point, Jim was this close to just washing his hands off Vision entirely. If he refused to see who Maximoff was, then it was best if Jim didn’t have to look at his treacherous face anymore.

“It’s good to see you, man,” Wilson finally said, breaking the silence and stepping a bit closer.

“I’m afraid I really can’t say the same,” Jim replied, satisfied the see the smile drop from Wilson’s face.

“Come on, Rhodey,” Romanoff tried.

Jim rounded on her. “Fuck you, you back-stabbing bitch. If it weren’t for you changing sides in the middle of a fight, I wouldn’t need these.” He pointed to the braces he was wearing. Without Tony’s genius, he would not be walking at all.

Wilson flinched at that, and Romanoff bit off whatever else she had been planning to say.

“Mistakes were made, Rhodey, but–”

“It’s Colonel Rhodes to you, Rogers,” he cut off. “Unlike you, I earned my rank.” His glare shut Rogers up, so Jim continued. “And yeah, mistakes were made. You made a huge mistake when you put your buddy’s life above everyone else’s. When you essentially said fuck you to the world and decided you and you alone got to made decisions.” He turned to Romanoff, who held his gaze. “Though I guess I shouldn’t have been surprised at that. None of you ever really cared about anything but yourselves.” Rogers opened his mouth but Jim plowed on. “And you sure as hell made a big mistake showing your faces here again, because if you think I – or the world, for that matter – have forgotten what you’ve done, you are even more delusional than I thought.”

“We’re the Avengers,” Rogers said in that righteous tone of his that meant he hadn’t word a single word Jim had just said.

“No, you’re not. You are criminals. Terrorists. You are on the most wanted list of every agency in the world: CIA, FBI, Interpol, Counter Terrorism, you name it.”

“So you’re gonna arrest us?” Maximoff asked, hands glowing red.

“You’re gonna mind-rape me too if I say yes? Go ahead and do that, then. Go ahead and show everyone who you really are, Hydra.”

She took a step forwards and Rogers put a hand on her arm. “We’re not here to fight,” he said.
“We’re here to protect the world.”

Jim couldn’t help it; he laughed. “You? Protect the world? Now, that’s a joke. You mean like how you protected the people in Bucharest? In Lagos? In DC? I’m sure they felt really protected.”

Though he kept his eye on Rogers, Jim could see Wilson wince and shake his head and Vision was frowning, watching Wanda warily.

“Really, what do you think you assholes can do? Because neither I nor the world would trust you not to fuck things up even more.”

“Whatever happened, it’s in the past,” Rogers insisted. “We all need to put it behind us.”

“In the past? Are you fucking serious?”

“Colonel,” Vision tried and Jim shushed him with a gesture.

“No. This is not what’s going to happen. If you think you can use this new alien threat to blackmail the world into forgetting what you did, you’re crazy. It is not in the past, Rogers. Do you know why? Because the people you killed are still dead, and their families are never going to just ‘let it go’. Nor should they. Just because you don’t think those people matter doesn’t make it so.” He took a few steps closer, knowing that Friday had the suit ready for him if those bastards tried anything. “Get it through your thick skulls: you are not heroes, and you will never be Avengers again. Never. You are criminals, and that’s all you’ll ever be.”

Even Rogers’s stubbornness faltered a bit in the face of Jim’s hateful glare. Wilson had his head down, looking unsure. Perhaps he was finally starting to use his brain to see how the wind was blowing. Romanoff had the same calculating look she always did, like she was working out how to turn the situation to her favor regardless of who she had to throw under the bus for it. Maximoff just looked annoyed, as if she couldn’t understand why things weren’t going according to plan.

“Steve Rogers, Natasha Romanoff, Sam Wilson, Wanda Maximoff,” Jim continued, “you are under arrest. The charges against you are: attempted murder, felony murder, assault, aggravated assault, reckless endangerment, trespassing, destruction of property, resisting arrest and criminal conspiracy. Rogers and Romanoff are also charged with obstruction of justice and accessory after the fact on the murder of Howard and Maria Stark.”


“Oh? Didn’t your esteemed leader tell you? No, of course not. I mean, he just loves keeping secrets. Rogers and Romanoff have been sitting on the knowledge that the Winter Soldier murdered Tony’s parents on Hydra’s orders since the fall of SHIELD.”

“What?” Wilson repeated, eyes wide as he stared at the criminals in question.

“That’s not… it wasn’t Bucky’s fault!” was Rogers’s predictable response. “I couldn’t tell Tony the truth, he would have killed Bucky!”

“Good,” Maximoff said, an evil glint in her eyes. “Now Stark knows what it’s like to lose someone. He deserves it for everything he’s done.”

“You’re crazy,” Jim said, no real surprise in his tone. Vision and Wilson, however, did seem shocked at Maximoff’s declaration. Vision took a small step away from her while Wilson remained rooted to the spot with a confused expression. “Real heroes you are,” Jim spat out with contempt. By now the recording was probably being broadcast to all relevant world authorities, so he knew these
assholes were finished. It was time to get back to the important matters.

Of course, it wasn’t going to be that easy. Maximoff moved forward with a snarl, red mist gathering around her hands. However, she never got close. Before she had taken two steps, a blast sent her crashing back into the wall to slide unconscious on the floor. Jim looked behind him and saw Bruce Banner wearing one of Tony’s gauntlet watches.

“Told you I didn’t need the Hulk to take that witch down.”

“Bruce! What—” Rogers began, but Bruce cut him off.

“Shut up, Rogers. I think I’ve heard about enough from you. God, I really owe Tony an apology,” he muttered. “Now be quiet or you’ll have the Hulk to deal with – and let me tell you, he is not happy.”

Wilson surrendered easily after that. Romanoff still tried her honey pot routine on Bruce and almost got a repulsor to the face for her trouble.

“I don’t know why I ever thought I could trust you. You wouldn’t know the truth if it bit you in the ass.”

Rogers tried to make a run for it, but Jim caught up with him and dragged him into a cell along with the others.

Vision looked forlornly at Maximoff before approaching Jim.

“I am… very sorry. I allowed my feelings to cloud my judgment. I… She is not who I thought she was.”

“Really? What was your first clue? That she attacked you viciously without provocation? That she tried to murder Tony because his name was on a bomb a decade ago? That she volunteered for Hydra? That she could care less about anyone who isn’t herself?” Vision flinched and Jim only felt a little bit bad. It was a harsh lesson, but one he clearly needed to learn. “Next time, you might want to listen to the people who actually care about you instead of chasing after the first manipulative bitch that crosses your path. And start to use the brain you were given.”

“I will,” he said, subdued.

(Those of Thanos’s children who had come after the Mind Stone were defeated by War Machine, Hulk (back with a vengeance) and the Order of the Mystic Arts. Thanos never came to Earth. Tony and the Guardians were able to get the gauntlet off of him in Titan, and used it to wipe out his army before they did too much damage.

The ExVengers were all sentenced to various prison terms.)

(AN: Didn’t rewatch the movie, so I don’t actually remember if Bruce was there at the Compound or not when the others arrived. If he wasn’t… oops, sorry.)

116. (prompt by VeraNera)

TChalla found Zemo outside, a gun in his hand. The man barely turned around, keeping his gaze somewhere in the distance.

“Have they killed each other yet?” he asked, an amused tinge to his voice.
“No,” T’Challa answered, though he was not sure if that was true or not. He hoped they wouldn’t.

“I’m sure they’ll get there.” Then he raised the gun, and T’Challa was on him in seconds, taking it away.

“No, you don’t get to take the easy way out. You are going to answer for your crimes.”

“Is that so?” Zemo said, supremely unconcerned. “And will you answer for yours as well?”

“I will make amends to Sgt Barnes,” T’Challa said. He should not have allowed his grief and anger to cloud his judgment.

But Zemo only shook his head and snorted. “So concerned with a murderer… It’s very touching. I was, however, referring to the people you mowed down in Bucharest in your quest for revenge. The people who died when the tunnel collapsed. Will you answer for their murders, or are they not innocent enough for you?”

T’Challa opened his mouth, but nothing came out. He had not considered that.

“You heroes” Zemo spat out the word “are all the same. All selfish. You don’t care about anyone but yourself and your own people. All that talk about protecting innocents is bullshit. You just want to feel important. You don’t care who dies because of your actions, whose lives you destroy.” He looked back at the bunker where the others were, presumably, still fighting. “Rogers knew about Barnes murdering Stark’s parents, and yet he chose to protect the murderer instead of the victims. He chose to ignore that there were victims. Just like you.” His eyes bored holes into T’Challa. “You chose to ignore the people you killed, and you tell yourself that making amends to a dangerous murderer makes you a hero. That it makes you any better than me. At least I know what I’ve done. I know who I’ve killed, and why. At least I’m not pretending to be all high and mighty while pursuing my own agenda. You are all pathetic.” There was nothing T’Chala could say to that, and it grated on him. “Even now, you are more concerned with getting revenge on me by preventing me from killing myself than helping Stark fight against two super soldiers probably intent on killing him. You’re wasting your time with me and ignoring your supposed ally. If Stark dies – or Rogers or Barnes – it will be partly on you. You are selfish, just like all of them.” Zemo shook his head, watching T’Challa with contempt. “Only your own pain matters. You lost your father and went off the rails, yet you ignore that the same thing has just essentially happened to Stark. He’s just watched his father and mother murdered in front of him, and you have no compassion for him. It’s still all about you, about righting your supposed wrong in blaming the wrong person. At this point, I honestly don’t know which one of you is more selfish, you or Rogers.”

T’Challa winced with every word that came out of Zemo’s mouth. The man was right, he was being incredibly selfish. So he left Zemo behind and went to help Stark.

He got there just in time to prevent Rogers from taking Stark’s head off with his shield.

“Where the hell did you come from?” Stark asked, struggling to get up with all the damages to the suit.

“It does not matter. I am here to help.” Now, Zemo’s voice sounded in his head. Now that I’ve pointed out how selfish you have been. Rogers did not go quietly, but T’Challa knocked him down anyway. Barnes surrendered.

When they got back outside, T’Challa had expected to find Zemo’s corpse, yet the man was still alive, just sitting patiently waiting for them. He smirked when he saw T’Challa and gave a mock salute. T’Challa didn’t like it one bit, but there was nothing he could do now except turn them all
over to the proper authorities.

Zemo spilled the whole story in court: his plans, how the Avengers played right into his hands, and T’Challa’s own failings. He was gleeful about it all, eager to point out how selfish “superheroes” were.

Rogers and his team were convicted, and T’Challa and Wakanda had to pay a great deal of money to avoid part of the backlash from his actions. Even so he lost the throne – his mother made it clear she didn’t think he was ready, and T’Challa was forced to admit that she was right.
Hey, look at me, with a new chapter after only two weeks. If only I could get this same inspiration to finish the next Second Chances story... Hope you like it.

117. (prompt by Krafter2014, izumi2)

It was a disaster.

Tony stood on top of the rubble, scanning for survivors, but there were none left. With a sigh, he turned back to where police and emergency personnel were working.

“Captain Hudson,” Tony said to the woman in charge. “I’m sorry. I can’t find any more life signs.”

She bowed her head and nodded. “I understand. Thank you for coming, Mr Stark.”

“I’m sorry I couldn’t really help. Any lead on the criminals?”

“No, we lost track of them in the confusion. Our priority was the victims.”

“Yes, of course. If you do find something, though, I’ll be happy to help you get them.”

“We appreciate that, Mr Stark. We’ll be in touch.”

Tony nodded, and looked around once more at the scene of destruction. Three buildings had been completely destroyed, with many people still trapped inside when they’d collapsed. Tony didn’t know how many had died, but he would guess at least 30, perhaps more.

It was a disaster.

“Friday, try Rogers again.”

“No response, Boss. Ms Hill has also been trying with no luck either.”

“Ok, thanks. Keep at it anyway.”

“Sure thing, Boss.”

“Mr Stark!”

The press had finally approached, now that it was clear there wasn’t much Tony could do.

“Mr Stark, can you answer a few questions?”

There were at least seven reporters shoving microphones and cellphones in his face, and a bunch of cameramen as well.

The faceplate of the suit was open, and Tony contemplated stepping out of it entirely, but he was tired. It had been a long week, and by the look of things, it wasn’t going to get any better.
“I only arrived on the scene barely an hour ago, I’m afraid I don’t know much yet.”

“Where are the Avengers?” a young female reporter asked. “We have been told they were contacted as soon as the criminals were confirmed to be enhanced.”

There could be a million reasons why Steve and the others (minus Vision and Rhodey) were MIA. Unfortunately, none of them seemed very good at the moment, not with the destruction of three buildings and a lot of dead bodies right there behind him. Tony knew they’d taken a quinjet, but the transponder was disabled so Friday couldn’t track it. According to the security footage at the Compound, Rogers, Wilson, Romanoff and Maximoff had left together, all geared up, without telling anyone where they were going or why. As a result, when the Cleveland police had called the Compound to ask for the Avengers’ assistance, Hill had had to inform them that the Avengers were unavailable. She had then called Tony and Vision. Tony had been in London for SHIELD business, and even at the suit’s top speed, it had taken him hours to arrive, and by then it was too late; the criminals had already caused a great deal of death and destruction and fled. Vision had been in Tony’s rebuilt Malibu mansion, on one of his “seeing the world” little trips. He had also flown in as soon as possible, but like Tony hadn’t been able to reach Cleveland in time to stop the criminals. The most he’d been able to do was help first responders get people out of the collapsed buildings. No doubt he’d saved a lot of lives, but that seemed like cold comfort in the face of the many who couldn’t be helped. He was at the hospital now with a few survivors who had clung to him desperately in their terror and fear. Rhodey was deployed in the Middle East, and would have taken even longer than Tony to arrive – Iron Man was a lot faster than War Machine. He wouldn’t have made it in time either, so he’d stayed where he was.

Bottom line, the Avengers had been needed, and they weren’t there. From New York in the quinjet, they could have arrived quickly enough to actually do something, but they were god knew where, doing god knew what.

“I don’t know where the Avengers are,” Tony finally said. He could have lied and invented some emergency, but why should he? The truth was bound to come out anyway, and to be honest Tony wasn’t sure he wanted to cover for them anymore. He’d done it after Ultron and hadn’t even gotten a single thank you in return for handling the whole thing. In fact, Rogers seemed convinced that Tony really had created Ultron and was therefore to blame for everything. All Tony had said in his own defense had fallen on deaf ears. Bruce was still missing, and the little Hydra witch who had messed with everyone’s heads was living in the lap of luxury free of any consequences whatsoever. Well, Rogers had made it clear that Tony was no longer a part of the team (or trusted in any way), so why should he bother to make their lives easier? Let Rogers give his own explanations for once.

“But they were called,” the same reporter said, more a question than a statement.

“Yes. I can confirm that Cleveland police tried to get in touch with them. I’ve tried to get in touch with them. So far, there has been no response. I don’t know where they are or what they’re doing. Or why they aren’t answering.”

“They aren’t at the Avengers Compound?” Another reporter asked.

“No, they are not there.” Tony hesitated, wondering how far he should go. It wouldn’t help anyone if the world no longer trusted the Avengers and yet… Well, should they be trusted? Tony had been thinking about it long and hard since Ultron, and he wasn’t sure about it anymore. He certainly didn’t trust them. This disaster might have been prevented, and people had the right to be wary of such unreliable heroes. Maybe Rogers should deal with some distrust for once. It might actually teach him something, because god knew nothing Tony had ever said had gotten through.

Mind made up, he continued. “All I know is that they left the Compound, apparently for a mission.
What that was, however, I can’t tell you, as they chose not to inform anyone and turn off the quintjet’s transponder.”

“Is that something they usually do? Go off on secret missions?”

“It seems that this is not the first time something like this has happened. But since I am no longer an active member of the Avengers, I had not been aware of it until today, when I had reason to look into the Avengers’ whereabouts.”

“When were you called?” an older man asked, with a slightly suspicious look.

“Approximately seven hours ago. I was in London for a SI meeting. I came as fast as I could, but it takes time to cross the Atlantic, even in the suit. Sadly, by the time I arrived, there wasn’t much I could do.”

“What about Vision? Why did it take him so long to respond? Why wasn’t he with the others?”

“As far as I am aware, Vision didn’t know the others were going on a mission. He was in California on a personal errand, and had informed Ms Hill – who handles the Avengers missions – of his location and how to get in touch if necessary. You’ll have to wait for his official statement for more information.”

“What about the criminals?”

“They got away. I don’t think they’ve been identified yet, but Cleveland police is working on it. I’ll be here for the next few days so I can make myself available in case they are found.” He turned to the cameras. “I’d like to extend my sincere condolences to the victims of this tragedy. I’m sorry I couldn’t do much to help, but both SI and the Maria Stark Foundation will provide as much assistance as we can. My team has already contacted the local government to figure out what we can do to help the people affected.”

“Thank you, Mr Stark.”

Tony nodded at the reporters and the cameras and took to the air. He had a lot to do.

It was later that evening that Rogers and his friends finally returned to the Compound. There was a group of people camped out outside the grounds, waiting for them with protest signs. Several reporters tried to speak to the Avengers, but they never came out. Tony heard from Hill that Rogers didn’t seem all that concerned with the situation, saying only that it was just unfortunate that they’d been elsewhere. He did not tell her where he’d been or what he’d been doing.

The next day, the Avengers’ failure to show up (or speak to anyone) was all the news were talking about. Conspiracy theories were being proposed all over the place, from the truly outrageous to some that didn’t sound all that farfetched. If Rogers didn’t get ahead of it, he was going to be in big trouble.

Before Tony had the chance to go over there and talk to him face to face, however, Cleveland police called him with a lead on the criminals. Along with Vision and the local forces, Tony surrounded and captured them with no loss of life and minimal property damage. Their enhancements were tech-based rather than biological, so once their gear was taken away, it was easy enough for regular law enforcement to handle them.

Tony and Vision gave a press conference afterwards, where they had to rehash the whole thing again.
“What about the Avengers?” someone asked.

“I have not spoken to them yet,” Tony replied. “I tried calling last night, but apparently they didn’t feel like talking. I’ll be heading down there in person as soon as we wrap up here, though I’m not sure I’ll have any satisfactory answers to the public.”

“Mr Stark, will Iron Man continue as a solo act?”

“Yes. If my assistance is needed, local police can contact me through SI. In case of an emergency, I will be notified immediately and will respond as swiftly as possible. Hopefully next time I won’t be on the other side of the ocean.”

Vision insisted on accompanying him to the Compound, though he wasn’t sure he wanted to stay there afterwards. He seemed rather upset that the others were keeping him out of the loop on whatever they were doing. He also confided in Tony that he didn’t feel very welcomed there (hence the frequent trips). Rogers and Romanoff seemed suspicious of him, Wilson was standoffish and only Maximoff was friendly.

“You can come stay at the Tower,” Tony told him. “Or in Malibu. Or I can help you find your own place, if you want.”

“Thank you. I think I’d like that.”

They arrived at the Compound late afternoon. Rogers and Maximoff were in the living room watching a movie and both scowled when they saw Tony.

“What are you doing here?” Maximoff asked, not bothering to disguise her dislike of him.

Tony didn’t answer, just picked up the remote and switched the TV to a news channel.

“There has still been no word from the Avengers more than 24 hours since the attack in Cleveland,” a reporter said. “The criminals were apprehended earlier by Iron Man and Vision. American citizens continue to speculate about the whereabouts of their other heroes and what they were doing that was so important they couldn’t come to the people’s aid. Official authorities have just released details of the tragedy. 39 people lost their lives and 26 are still hospitalized, some in critical condition.

“The question everyone is asking themselves now is: can we still count on the Avengers?”

Tony muted the TV and looked at Rogers. “Well? Got anything to say?”

Rogers made a face. “What happened wasn’t our fault.”

“No one is saying it was. But people are wondering why you weren’t there to help. As am I.”

“We had a mission,” was all Rogers said.

“What mission?”

“It’s none of your business,” Maximoff said, sounding like a spoiled child. “You aren’t an Avenger.”

“I am, and I’d like to know what mission it was, and why I was not informed of it,” Vision stated.

Maximoff’s demeanor changed immediately, and she was all smiles for Vision. “Viz, it was just… We didn’t mean to exclude you. You know I care about you.”

Vision’s expression remained closed off. “You have not answered the question.”
“It was my decision,” Rogers said, as if that settled the matter.

“Still not answering the question,” Tony remarked.

“It was a private matter.”

“Well, that’s not good enough.” Tony pointed at the muted television, which was now showing the protest outside the Compound. “Those people out there want answers, and they won’t settle for ‘it’s private’, not when this ‘private mission’ meant you weren’t available when you were needed.”

“How were we supposed to know there’d be an attack?” Maximoff said petulantly, arms crossed. “We can’t be everywhere at once. We can’t save everybody.”

“No, you can’t. But you do owe people an explanation to why you couldn’t help them. Are you planning on doing that any time soon, or are you going to stay here with your heads buried in the sand?”

“We’re the Avengers. We don’t owe anybody anything. We saved the world from Ultron. People should remember that and be grateful,” Maximoff replied haughtily. Tony could hardly believe his ears. The gall of her…

“Saved the world from Ultron? You helped Ultron, you little witch. You only switched sides when you realized he was going to kill you too. You didn’t give a damn when he was planning to murder us, or innocent people.”

“Tony, leave her alone. She did the right thing in the end, and that’s what matters. Everyone deserves a second chance. You of all people should know that.” Rogers had that ‘Captain America is disappointed in you’ face, and Tony decided he was just done.

“So let me see if I’ve got this right: you don’t care that people got killed while you were off doing secret stuff, and you have no intention of telling anybody anything. Is that it?”

“People know we’re here for them. Nothing has changed. As soon as you stop stirring up the media, this will all blow over.”

Tony could only stare. He knew Rogers wasn’t good at seeing the bigger picture, but this was… unbelievable. “And what happens next time you’re needed and you’re too busy with you private secret project? People are just supposed to get over it? Say ‘too bad’? You won’t do anything different? Won’t give any explanations or reassurances?”

“We are not dancing monkeys, Tony. I’m Captain America. People know who I am and what I stand for.”

“Right. Well, good luck with that, then.” Tony turned away, shaking his head. This much stupidity and blindness was hard to fathom. Before he left, however, he looked back at Rogers. “By the way, effective immediately, all uses of the quinjet will have to be authorized by Hill, which means you will have to tell her what you need it for. If this secret mission of yours is private, than you can use your own dime for it from now on.”

“What? You can’t do that!”

“It’s my money, so yes I can. You insist it’s private, so why should you be using Avengers’ resources for it? Have a nice day.”

Rogers kept complaining, but Tony ignored him and left with Vision, who also ignored Maximoff’s
pleas for him to stay.

The press accosted him as Tony was leaving, demanding answers. Tony looked back on the Compound and thought ‘fuck it’. The next day, he got Christine Everhart in for an exclusive and showed her (and the world) the footage from his conversation with the Avengers, which Tony had had Friday record just in case (since he owned the Compound, it was perfectly legal for him to do so). It would have been easy for people to make excuses for ‘Cap’, but less so if they could see with their own eyes what a dick he really was.

There was nothing the Avengers could actually be charged with, but public opinion turned against them pretty fast – even more than before. People began demanding that they step down, since they obviously weren’t fit for the job. On his lawyers’ advice, Tony gave them two weeks’ notice to vacate the Compound. The Avengers were pretty much finished.

Romanoff tried to guilty him into changing his mind, but Tony was done falling for her crap. He also began investigating Rogers’s secret missions, and eventually found that they had to do with his buddy Barnes, the Hydra assassin. Friday dug in some more into the dumped SHIELD files and discovered that Barnes had murdered his parents. Tony immediately went to the FBI to report it, and Rogers and Romanoff were charged with obstruction of justice.

It was the final nail on the Avengers’ coffin. That and the information Tony found on Maximoff and her murderous past with Hydra.

Rogers, Romanoff, Maximoff and Wilson ended up in prison (Wilson for accessory, though he made a deal to turn in the others and got a lighter sentence).

Iron Man continued on, and after a while new members were added to a new team under the supervision of the UN.

(AN: Wow, this got long.)

118. (prompt by Kizmet)

It was only about a month later that Shuri learned the truth.

After Killmonger had been defeated and T’Challa was restored to the throne, the whole of Wakanda was in disarray. They had believed themselves protected and untouchable, yet that turned out to be nothing but an illusion. First her father had died, then she had believed that her brother was dead as well, and her country was in the hands of a madman. Nothing made any sense anymore, so Shuri had clung to the one thing she had, the one thing she was sure of: her science.

The first thing she did was try to save the garden of the heart-shaped herb. It would be a slow process, but she was confident that, eventually, they’d be able to do it. A few plants had survived the fire, and from those few they would be able to re-grow the garden.

Next she turned to the technology of the Black Panther suit, and ways that she could make sure it could not be taken by those who did not deserve it. To ensure their technology would not fall into the wrong hands, Shuri also got back the special vehicles T’Challa had used during the chase in Busan and went over them carefully, looking for any signs of tampering or spying.

It was during that examination that she discovered the truth: the car she had been driving remotely had been used to run someone over. The data on the impact and the evidence of a collision were unmistakable.

For a long time, Shuri could do nothing but sit there, watching the simulation the computer had
rendered of the car going over a human body. *She* had done it, she had run over a *person*. And, from the angle of impact and other data available, it was very likely that the person had *died* as a result of that collision.

She pulled over police reports from the car chase – hacking her way into the Korean police database – to see what else she could find. There was indeed a victim – several, in fact. It was not just the man who had been run over – the man Shuri had *killed* – but several other injuries and dead bodies because of the high-speed chase through the city. There were pictures of the destruction – and the victims – and that was when Shuri lost it.

She barely made it to the bathroom before she emptied out the contents of her stomach.

It could not be true. She wasn’t…

She was a *murderer*.

It did not matter that she had not meant to kill anyone. It did not matter that she hadn’t even realized what she’s done. It also did not matter that the man was a criminal. He was dead, and it was a direct result of Shuri’s actions. She had taken a man’s *life*.

Somehow she made it back to her room, where she curled up on her bed and cried until she had no more tears left. She had no idea what to do now.

The next day, when she failed to show up at the lab, her mother came to see her.

“Shuri? What’s wrong?” she asked, looking at Shuri with concern.

*Did the man I killed have a mother who wept for him?* she wondered, which only made her feel worse, and brought forth a new wave of tears.

“I… Mama…. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry…”

“What’s happened, baby?”

So Shuri told her everything, desperate for some relief from the choking guilt.

“Oh, darling…” Ramonda said. “I’m sorry. It wasn’t your fault.”

Whose fault was it then, if not hers? Shuri thought. She had practically begged T’Challa to let her be “there”, to take that car. She had thought herself invincible, a hero – just like her father and brother. And people had ended up dead.

It hit her, then, that the whole situation was no different from what had happened in Lagos. The Avengers had gone in wanting to get a criminal, and it had ended with innocent people dead. *Her* people. Wakandans. Shuri had not thought much of it at the time since she hadn’t known any of the victims, but what if had been her friends? What if it had been *her*?

Then she remembered T’Challa’s rampage after the Winter Soldier in Bucharest, and the people who had died or been injured because of it.

What had they done?

She hadn’t really thought much about any of it, locked up in her lab with her work and her inventions. The outside world had never seemed real to her, and she knew practically nothing about it. Her father had tried to teach her something, to make her think about politics and diplomacy, but
Shuri had never been all that interested. Why should she care about any of that? She wasn’t a diplomat or a politician – T’Challa would rule, not her – she was a scientist. She cared about the thrill of discovery, of coming up with new and better ways to do things, of impressing everyone with her intellect and accomplishments.

She was just as short-sighted and selfish as everyone else. And now a man was dead because of it. Because of her. Because she had thought it was fun to drive a car remotely through the streets of a foreign city chasing a criminal, with no thought whatsoever to the possible consequences of her actions. She’d thought it was fun to show off the car and all its capabilities, as if it was a computer simulation she was in, and not the real world with real people who could – and did – get hurt.

“Mama, I’m so sorry.”

It had been easy to dismiss all of that while they were being attacked by Killmonger, while she was mourning her father and keeping her head buried in the sand about what was happening in the rest of the world. Now… now she no longer had that luxury. She couldn’t hide away in her lab and ignore everything else anymore – and a part of her wished she had never started on this path, wished she still lived in blissful ignorance.

There was not much her mother could do to make Shuri feel better – and Shuri wasn’t even sure she should feel better. She’d killed someone.

Later, Shuri ventured out of her room for a while, her stomach still in knots and her anxiety at an all-time high. She had no idea where she was going until she heard raised voices. She followed them and found her mother and brother in one of the many conference rooms in the palace, the door only partially closed.

“What were you thinking, T’Challa, taking your sister into that kind of situation?” Ramonda asked in as furious a tone as Shuri had ever heard.

“She wanted to be there,” T’Challa replied.

“She is a child! It is not her decision! You are an adult, and you should have been watching out for her well-being, not dragging her into a fight she had no business being in! You are supposed to be king, yet all I get from you are selfish, ill-considered decisions that put people at risk.”

Shuri winced. That was really harsh.

“Mother… I… I never meant…”

“No, you didn’t. But your intentions don’t change the outcome. Shuri is devastated by what happened, and I can’t do anything about it. People are dead. It’s been one disaster after another, T’Challa. I don’t think you are ready to be king.”

There was a heavy silence after that, and Shuri could only imagine what her brother was thinking. Then she heard steps coming closer to the door and hastily hid behind a curtain. Ramonda walked out angrily and disappeared out of sight.

After a few moments of indecision, she went in.

“T’Challa? Brother?”

T’Challa was standing by the windows, facing away from the door, and didn’t answer.

She waited, unsure what to do or say.
Finally, he turned to her, sadness and regret on his face.

“Shuri.”

“I… I heard what mother said… I… T’Challa, what have we done?” she asked in a small voice.

“It is not your fault, Shuri. It was my responsibility. Mother was right, I should not have allowed you to be part of that.”

Merely days ago, Shuri would have railed against that, believing herself perfectly capable of doing and handling anything. Now she knew better. Now she felt like a lost child, completely out of her depth.

“I wish you hadn’t gone looking for that.”

It must have been the shock of the past hours that made Shuri take so long to parse out what that meant. “Wait. You knew? You knew what happened? What I did?”

T’Challa had never been a very good liar, or even very good at hiding his feelings – at least, not from the people who knew him. The look on his face told her everything she needed to know. He had known. And he’d said nothing.

“T’Challa...” Shuri began, a heavy feeling of loss and anger settling in her belly. “What… How could you keep this from me?”

“I’m sorry, Shuri. I… I knew it would… hurt you.”

“You lied! Oh my god, you knew from the start. I asked you… That day, I thought I’d hit something, and you told me it was nothing. You knew and you lied to me.”

“I was only trying to protect you.”

Once, she would have said that she did not need protecting. Now… she did need protecting, yet what he’d done was anything but. “Would you ever have told me?” Her voice sounded even smaller now. The anger was gone, leaving only betrayal and uncertainty behind.

“Shuri… It was an accident. It wasn’t your fault.”

“So, no, you wouldn’t have. You would have had me live in ignorance for the rest of my life.”

“What good has knowing done you?”

“I had a right to know! I… Who are you to make decisions for me, T’Challa? I killed a man! I can’t just brush that aside. Maybe you are cold-blooded enough for that, but I am not!”

T’Challa flinched slightly, and Shuri wished she hadn’t said that. It wasn’t strictly fair, she knew, but she was far too distressed to think straight.

“It is my fault, Shuri. I did not want you to have to pay for my mistake.”

She shook her head. “I had a right to know,” she repeated. “I… I’ve been stupid and reckless, and I would not have learned better if I hadn’t found out about this. Actions should have consequences, otherwise no one will ever learn better.” She thought of the Avengers, and how they trampled over everything in their path because they thought they were heroes, and therefore always right. How many more people would Shuri have trampled over if her eyes hadn’t been opened? “We cannot ignore our mistakes, T’Challa. We cannot pretend they do not exist, not when it is other people who
pay the price.”

(Ramonda talked Shuri out of turning herself in. She did, however, offer restitution to the Korean government as well as to the Romanians. On her insistence, T’Challa abdicated the throne. It was clear to her that her son was not ready to rule; he needed more time to mature, Ramonda took the throne, and she arranged to have Sargent Barnes delivered to the proper authorities for a trial despite T’Challa’s objections.)

(AN: In this scenario, Steve and the others never went to Wakanda. He just left Bucky there to be looked after.)

119. (prompt by VeraNera, Multi_Fandom_Girl and parsnip)

(AN: I know nothing about medicine, so I’m making up what I need for the purpose of the story. Sorry if it’s terribly inaccurate.)

He didn’t know what to do. Bucky had just received his draft letter, and he was scared. He didn’t want to go to war. He didn’t want to kill people and he sure as hell didn’t want to die. But it seemed like he had no choice in going.

He left the letter behind and went out for a walk, hoping to find… something. Clarity, peace of mind, acceptance, strength, courage… whatever he needed to deal with this.

There was so much he wanted to do with his life. He wanted to get married, have kids, play catch with his son on weekends, drink a beer with his friends after work… So many things he would probably never get to do now. Even if he came back alive, he would not be the same. He’d seen enough World War I veterans to know that war changed a person, and usually not for the better.

People said it was an honor to serve, to go out there for his country and everyone else the Nazis were threatening. That might be so, but Bucky wasn’t all that concerned about honor right now. Maybe it made him selfish, but what he cared about was his own life and future. The war seemed so far away… why did he have to be involved?

His feet took him through familiar streets and places, and all the while Bucky thought he might never see any of it again once he was shipped off.

He didn’t want to go to war.

A noise caught his attention, taking him out of his morose thoughts. There were shouts and grunts of pain. *Shit.*

There were three people in an alley, two guys against one who was on the floor panting.

“Hey!” Bucky shouted.

One of the attackers turned to him, allowing Bucky a view of the man on the ground.

Of course. He should have known. Steve.

*Shit. Not again.*

“Steve? You okay?”

Steve coughed and tried – unsuccessfally – to get up. “Bucky!”

“You know this asshole?” the first man asked. “You might want to tell him to mind his own
business, and not to pick fights he can’t win. Which I guess would be any.”

Bucky had to repress a sigh. He *had*, in fact, told Steve that. Many times. So many he’d lost count. Steve never listened. If it wasn’t what he wanted to hear, it went in one ear and out the other. Both Steve’s mom and Bucky had tried – she had *begged* – with no effect whatsoever. Bucky loved Steve like a brother, but sometimes… God, sometimes he wanted to slap him until he finally saw sense.

“Look, you guys have made your point. Let him go.”

They took a few steps back and Bucky was able to approach Steve and help him up. He was a mess – as usual – but he’d probably be fine. Lord knew he was used to getting the shit kicked out of him, the idiot.

“This isn’t over,” Steve said. “You won’t get away with what you did.”

“We didn’t do shit, you fucker.” the second guy replied. “Keep your nose out of stuff that doesn’t concern you or you’ll end up in the hospital.”

“I’m not afraid of bullies,” Steve declared. He pushed Bucky away and lunged for the second guy.

Bucky reached forward and yanked the idiot back, and the punch the guy was aiming at Steve connected with Bucky’s head instead. He fell, and everything went dark.

He woke up in the hospital with a killer headache.

“Hello? Hey!”

A nurse appeared and smiled kindly at him. “Hello, Mr Barnes. How are you feeling?”

“Like I’ve been hit by a truck.”

“Well, you did have a very nasty blow to the head.”

“Come on, the guy didn’t hit me that hard.”

“No, but when you fell, you hit your head on a piece a rock. You’re lucky to still be alive. A hit like that can be fatal.”

*Shit*, Bucky thought. “But I’m okay now, right? I’ll be fine?” he asked. Here he’d been worried about dying overseas and he’d almost died right here in New York because of a stupid fight – a fight that wasn’t even his.

“The doctor will be here soon to talk to you,” the nurse said, and Bucky couldn’t help but notice that she hadn’t answered his question.

When the doctor showed up, it wasn’t with the reassuring news Bucky had been hoping for.

“A head injury like that can cause complications. We won’t know for a while whether you’ll experience any problems, though. Do you have someone to stay with you at home?”

“Yeah, I… I got family.” He didn’t want to impose on his sister, though. There was Steve, but Bucky wasn’t quite sure he wanted to see Steve right now. “I can manage.”

“Good, good.”

“What about…” he hesitated. “I was drafted. I was supposed to report to the recruitment center on
Friday."

The doctor frowned. “As I said, it’s hard to say at the moment. I’ll write a report for you to give to the recruitment officer regarding your situation.”

Maybe I won’t have to go after all, Bucky thought.

Two days later, as he woke up in the hospital again, the only thought going through his head was be careful what you wish for. He’d had a seizure, which he would soon discover to be the first of many. He was definitely no longer fit to serve in the army.

Steve came to see him at the hospital. “Hey, Buck.”

By then, Bucky already knew that he’d never be the same, so he wasn’t feeling all that charitable towards his friend.

Still, it wasn’t really Steve’s fault. But Steve started talking about some stupid thing he’d done, and didn’t even acknowledge that what had happened to Bucky, acting as if everything was fine. He never apologized for picking that fight, or even showed any understanding that he’d played a part in Bucky’s injury.

It got harder and harder to be around him, and, even worse, to be alone. He had constant migraines that made him wish he was dead, and the seizures were unpredictable. One moment he was fine, the next he was convulsing on the floor.

The last straw came when Steve showed up at his sister’s house, where Bucky had had to move in, to complain that he’d been rejected by the army.

“It’s not fair, Bucky. I can do it, I know I can. But they won’t give a chance.”

“I was drafted, you know,” Bucky said, cutting off the rest of tirade he could see was coming. “I was going to serve, and I was terrified. Now I can’t at all, thanks to this dammed head injury.”

Steve said nothing for a while. “I’m sorry. But maybe you can try again in a little while, when you’re better.”

Bucky took a deep breath to rein in his temper. He had a headache and he was tired, frustrated and angry.

“You don’t get it. I didn’t want to serve, Steve. I didn’t want to go to war. But now I can’t. I should be grateful, but I’m really not. I’m a fucking invalid now, can’t even be on my own anymore. I’m not gonna get better. My life has gone to hell and you… you sit there moaning and moping. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for you. This happened because of you, because you couldn’t just walk away and let people be. I got fucking brain damage because of you, you fucker, and you don’t even have the decency to apologize.” He was panting hard by the end, and the pain in his head was even worse. “Get out. Get out of my sight. I don’t want to see you again.”

“Bucky…”

“Get out!”

Later, he regretted his outburst. It wasn’t fair to blame Steve, not really. The man who threw the punch had been arrested, and would likely go to prison, but that didn’t make Bucky’s life any easier.

Steve came around a few more times after that, but, fair or not, Bucky just couldn’t deal with him
“It’s okay to think about yourself, Bucky,” his sister said. “If you don’t want to see him, then you don’t have to.”

Eventually, Steve took the hint and left him alone. The next time Bucky heard about him was in the papers, talking about “Captain America”. Apparently, Steve had volunteered for some crazy experiment and became super strong. He started doing films and live shows to help fund the war effort.

Bucky felt sick when he saw Steve in full costume beating up fake Hitler. He also felt angry. Oh, so angry. Stupid Steve never took no for an answer, never backed down, no matter who he hurt, and somehow he still got everything he wanted by becoming a big hero (even if only on stage). Meanwhile, Bucky was stuck with a chronic condition and no expectation of improvement, a burden on his sister because he couldn’t be alone.

*Be careful what you wish for,* he thought again when he read the news that “Captain America” had been killed by a German spy after one of his shows.

*Looks like we both got screwed in the end.*

120. (prompt by Polish)

There was something fishy going on here, Scott thought. He had laughed it off when Captain America said they were going outside the law, but it had stuck with him. Why were they going outside the law? Weren’t the Avengers supposed to be heroes? Why did they need to break laws?

Maybe hopping on a plane with no information hadn’t been such a great idea after all.

“Hmm… Hey, Sam?” he asked as they were waiting for… something. “Why are we hiding out here in an airport instead of going to take care of this threat I was told about?”

“We need transportation to get where we need to go.”

“Oh, right.” After a slight pause, he continued. “Don’t the Avengers have a jet or something? Why can’t we use that?”

Sam sighed. “Because of the Accords.”

Was that supposed to explain anything? Scott was still confused. “Hmm, I’m not sure what that has to do with anything. I mean, aren’t the Accords about giving the Avengers jurisdiction to do what you do? Why would they get in the way of you saving the world?”

“Look… You don’t know the situation, okay?”

“No, I don’t, that’s why I’m asking questions. So I can understand what’s going on.”

“It’s… It’s complicated, all right? We just… we can’t trust the others.”

“Why? Aren’t they your friends?” Hank had said one could never trust a Stark, but that was obviously bullshit. Iron Man was a hero – had been for years. He probably knew more about superheroing than anyone. He sure as hell knew more than Scott (or Hank, for that matter).

“Stark can’t be trusted. He wanted to lock me up,” the redheaded woman (Wanda, wasn’t it?) said with a snarl. “He turned Vision against me.”
“Hmm… Didn’t you blow up a building with people in it? Maybe you shouldn’t be walking around…” Scott was starting to get a really bad feeling about this. This woman was giving him the creeps.

Her eyes narrowed and red mist started gathering around her hands. “Are you with us or not?”

“Hey, lady, back off. I’m just asking questions.” And not liking the answers one little bit.

“We’re the Avengers. We know what we’re doing and no one – certainly not Stark – can tell us what to do.”

“Okay, you know what? I’m out of here,” Scott said, now really worried about what the hell he’d gotten himself into.

Instead of walking away like he meant to, however, Scott remained frozen in place. He felt strange, like he wasn’t in his body anymore. It was a terrifying feeling. He wanted to scream, but he couldn’t seem to move at all.

Help! He thought. Somebody help me!

He couldn’t see the airport anymore. He was in Cassie’s bedroom. It seemed to be after the fight with Cross, because there was broken furniture all around him, half the room destroyed and toys and stuff all over the floor. Scott turned around, trying to figure out what was happening, and that was when he saw it: Cassie, lying dead in a pool of blood.

No. No! Help! Somebody help! Cassie!

Distantly, Scott heard raised voices but he was too busy panicking to pay attention to any of it. All he could see was little girl, her expression twisted in fear, eyes dull and lifeless.

Help! Please, someone!

Then the vision was gone and he was back in the airport. As suddenly as the paralysis had come, it disappeared, and Scott fell to his knees like a puppet with its strings cut. He gasped, trying to will away the images of his baby dead.

“How are you all right?” someone asked, and Scott looked up at the guy with the metal arm (Barnes).

“I… I saw… I saw my daughter dead. But that wasn’t real, was it? Tell me it wasn’t real.” Oh god, please don’t let it be real. “She’s just a little girl…”

“It wasn’t real,” Barnes said, conviction in his voice. “I’m sure your daughter is fine.”

Scott relaxed, finally taking in his surroundings again.

And screamed in fear when he saw Wanda dead, blood seeping out of a hole in her head.

Scott had never seen a dead body up close like this before (visions of Cassie didn’t count because it wasn’t real, thank god), and it was an effort not to throw up.

Still, despite the gruesome sight, Scott could only feel relief that the crazy woman was gone. He also noticed that Cap and the others were all standing there with expressions of shock and horror.

“I wanna go home. Whatever you’re doing, I don’t want any part in it. I just want to go home.”

“Yeah,” Clint said, staring at the dead body with disgust. “Yeah, I think it’s best if we all just go
Barnes helped Scott up, and then there was a booming voice all around them.

"Rogers, Wilson, Barnes, Barton and Maximoff. This is your one and only warning. Come out now and let’s end this. Stand down. We won’t tell you again."

It was Iron Man, and Scott relaxed further. The Avengers were here. It was going to be fine.

He looked at the others and nodded further. Barnes dropped the gun he was holding (was he the one who had shot Wanda?) and yelled.

“We surrender. We’re coming out!”

“Bucky…” Cap said, desperation in his eyes.

“No. It’s over, Steve.” And he walked out of the hangar with his hands in the air. Scott and Clint followed right after him. Sam and Cap came a little later.

“Where is Maximoff?” Stark asked.

“Dead,” Barnes replied.

“She… She did something to me,” Scott said, not wanting the guy to get in too much trouble. It wasn’t self-defense, but it was a defense nevertheless, right? God knew what she would have done to them. “She… messed with my head. I couldn’t move and… I saw things. Terrible things.”

Stark lifted his faceplate so he could look Scott in the eye and nodded at both him and Barnes.

They were all taken to a detention facility where they were questioned about what had happened. Scott was allowed to call Hope afterwards and she promised to get him a good lawyer – after calling him an idiot and yelling for a good while, of course.

Scott and Clint ended up back in the States. Scott went back to jail for six months for violating his parole. Clint pled guilty to the charges against him, and was put on house arrest for a year. Barnes was sent to a psychiatric facility to get treatment for… whatever Hydra had done to him. Sam and Cap were convicted of multiple crimes and sent to prison.

The Avengers continued under the Accords.
Chapter 33

121. prompt by divush, parsnip, Core, TheSilentObserver, HighSidhe

Everything was going according to plan so far. Wanda was living in the Avengers Compound as a new member of the team, and she had the trust of the Avengers. Most of them, at least.

It had been easier than the expected, really. Rogers had fallen for her sob story so quickly it was laughable. How someone could be so gullible she had no idea, but he was. He was stupid, arrogant and naïve. Deceiving him was like taking candy from a baby. All she’d had to do was tell him how sorry she was about helping Ultron, how she’d had no idea what Hydra was and had only been trying to protect her country. Even before she spoke to him, he was already primed to believe her. Honestly, she was almost insulted that he wasn’t even a tiny bit suspicious. Master strategist her ass.

Wilson was also ridiculously easy. If Rogers said she was on their side, Wilson believed it, no questions asked. He had his head so far up Rogers’s ass she didn’t know how he could breathe.

Romanoff had been more difficult. She’d been skeptical of Wanda at first, but all Wanda had to do was play on their similarities and the supposedly shrewd Black Widow was eating out of Wanda’s hands. Both orphaned, taken in by an evil organization, forced to become something horrible, desperate to make amends… Wanda made sure to display that she so admired Natasha for overcoming her difficult childhood, for rising above what she had been made into something more, something inspiring. And Wanda, of course, had so much to learn – who better to teach her than the famous Black Widow? Wanda didn’t even need mind powers to see how much the idea of being a role model and mentor appealed to the spy. Romanoff actually seemed to think she had anything to teach anyone, that she was good enough for that. It was pathetic, but it was useful.

Vision had been unexpected, yet a stroke of good luck. The creature was even more naïve and stupid than Rogers, if that was possible. As soon as Wanda showed the slightest bit of interest, he was hooked. The fact that none of the others paid much attention to him certainly helped. The poor thing was lost, and Wanda was quick to take advantage of that and make him into a strong ally.

Thor had only stayed for a short time after the battle, so she didn’t have to worry about him. Banner, luckily, had also vanished. The Hulk would not have been easy to fool, and Wanda would have had to turn the others against him. Fortunately for her, he had removed himself voluntarily.

Barton was also gone, though Wanda knew she had him anyway – another one who seemed too dumb for words.

Rhodes was rarely there, so Wanda wasn’t worried about him.

That only left Stark. And Stark was a special case.

Oh, how Wanda despised him. She was really looking forward to seeing him brought low.

After Pietro had died, Wanda had considered just killing them all. How was it fair that those simpletons remained standing while her flesh and blood was dead and gone? Pietro should be here with her to witness their destruction, to see them beg for their lives as they screamed in agony. It wasn’t right.

Of course, she knew life wasn’t fair. If it was, her parents would not be dead and Stark would be the one six feet under. The only justice in the world was the one you took with your own hands, and Wanda was going to take hers.
The initial plan hadn’t worked. Stark was supposed to self-destruct, not destroy the whole world. Wanda had no intention of dying (neither had Pietro, but clearly that hadn’t been enough to save him), so she’d had no choice but to stop Ultron. Once that was done, though… She could have murdered Stark and the Avengers as she’d intended to all along, but… Well, she had seen an opportunity. Baron von Strucker might be dead, but there were plenty of other Hydra high-ups out there who would just love to have the Avengers hand-delivered to their doorstep, and Wanda had found herself in a position to make that happen. No doubt she would get a handsome reward for that – and the possibility to torture them herself. For Pietro.

So she’d decided against killing them right away and was instead biding her time. Getting them to accept her as one of them had been incredibly simple, and now she had access to everything she wanted in order to make them pay for killing Pietro – and, as a bonus, getting more points with Hydra.

She had not dared contact Hydra just yet, however. The Avengers might be idiots, but their security was good, and it wouldn’t do to show her hand before she was ready to act. In the meantime, she learned all she could about how they operated, and their weaknesses. And, as a special treat, she got to spend Stark’s money on all kinds of things – fine clothes, food, the best of everything money could buy.

The problem, of course, was that the charade was starting to annoy her. Wanda had never been the most patient person, and putting up with these morons was getting to be a bit too much. It had been funny at first, but now… God, she wished they would just shut up. Rogers with his never-ending boasting of his own superiority (disguised as it was in “helpful advice”), Romanoff’s infuriating condescension, as if she knew everything and was just waiting for the rest of the world to catch up, Vision and Wilson following Wanda and Rogers around like eager puppies begging for treats… And these people claimed to be heroes? They were disgusting.

Still, she needed to deliver them all together, and Stark (always him ruining everything) refused to cooperate. He never came around anymore. Whenever Rogers called to demand something, the man always claimed to be busy with his company or whatever else he did with his time and his blood money. No amount of ordering from Rogers or Romanoff had managed to get the bastard here. Even Rhodes was barely around after the first week.

Finally Wanda just couldn’t stand it anymore. She would have to put her plan in motion or she would just kill them all. As satisfying as that might be, she could get more out of them if she gave them to Hydra.

It was easy as pie to gather them all together in the hangar and then knock them out, even Vision. She was still connected to the Mind Stone in his head, after all. Then she took control of Romanoff and had her fly the quinjet to one of Hydra’s hideouts.

When they woke up, Rogers, Wilson and Romanoff were locked in cells (Vision was still out for the count, as the Hydra scientists didn’t know if any of the cells would be enough to hold them).

“What…?” Rogers asked.

Wanda stood in front of them with a smile. God, it was good to finally drop the “good little girl” act and be herself. “Rogers.”

“Wanda? What? What’s going on?”

Two Hydra soldiers with guns came into the cell block. “Take Wilson first,” she said. “He’s pretty worthless to us, so he can serve as a trial run.”
“What? Hey, what—” Wilson didn’t get to finish as one of the soldiers shot him with a tranq gun. It didn’t knock him out completely, but made it easier for the soldiers to subdue him and drag him out.

“Sam! Sam! Hey! Leave him alone!”

Rogers tried to bend the bars on his cell and got nowhere. He could do nothing but watch helplessly as his friend was taken away.

“You’re Hydra,” Romanoff said, and Wanda had to laugh.

“Of course I am, you idiot. I can’t believe you fell for my remorse act,” she sneered.

“But you… you helped us. Against Ultron,” Rogers said, looking confused.

“Well, obviously. I didn’t want to die too, did I? Ultron was supposed to destroy only you, not the entire world. I live in this world, Rogers. Just because I helped save it doesn’t mean I’m one of you so-called heroes. Or that I still don’t want you bastards to die.”

Rogers could only stare uncomprehendingly.

“But… What did we ever do to you?”

“What did you do? You exist, that’s what. You have everything and I have nothing. You killed my brother!” She yelled. Red mist gathered around her hands and she made them feel it – her pain and loss, her anger. They screamed. “You don’t deserve to live. You are parasites in this world, pretending to be heroes, to be important. And all the while all you care about is yourselves. I’ve seen your nightmares, and they are selfish. Just like you.” The power subsided and Wanda watched them trying to get their breath back. “Now all I need is that monster Stark and my revenge will be complete. I think I’ll make him watch you all die. That was his nightmare vision, did you know? He saw you all dead. I think I’ll make that a reality. That will be fitting, don’t you think? He killed my family, so I’ll kill everyone he cares about. Only then will I kill him.”

“You’re… you’re crazy,” Rogers wheezed out.

“And you’re only now figuring that out? My god, you are pathetic,” she said with contempt. Then she smiled. “Let’s go see what Hydra can get out of Wilson. I’ll be sure to bring him back for you when we’re done. Whatever is left of him, that is.”

Rogers was shouting and hitting the wall as she walked out, and it was music to her ears.

(Wanda’s satisfaction didn’t last long, however. Hydra believed they had destroyed the tracker in the quinjet, but they were wrong. It was Stark tech, after all. Iron Man and War Machine (followed by NATO’s Counter Terrorist Strike Force) descended on the base less than 48hs later. Knowing that Wanda was involved – which hadn’t surprised Tony in the least –, they had come prepared with tranq guns and a power suppressor collar Tony had just designed. It was too late to save Wilson, but the others were still alive.

Physically, Vision was fine, aside from the headache he had upon waking. It took him much longer to process the betrayal he felt at Wanda’s actions, and his own naiveté.

Natasha Romanoff eventually recovered, but the facial scar Hydra had left stayed with her. Her confidence, already on a bit of a shaky ground after the fiasco with SHIELD/Hydra took another big hit, and she went off the rails. If she couldn’t be a hero, she figured she might as well go back to what she knew – that is, being an assassin for hire. She was killed by one of her targets two months in.
Steve Rogers attempted to evade all responsibility for taking Wanda in, but Tony and Rhodes refused to allow it. The whole matter of Ultron, Johannesburg and Wanda’s actions then came to light, as well as the kidnapping that had resulted in Wilson’s death, and Captain America’s reputation was tarnished. It might have recovered eventually, but Steve kept being his own worst enemy, loudly proclaiming his ignorance and arrogance for the world to see until people weren’t willing to let it go anymore. The fact that he continued to butt in when he was not wanted was the last straw. He was arrested trying to enter Romania illegally. He fought the officers who caught him and injured two of them. He was tried and convicted of assault.

Wanda Maximoff was convicted of terrorism and multiple counts of assault and murder and sentenced to death.

Tony observed the others once Ross had left. It didn’t look as if Steve had understood anything that had been said and Tony could feel a headache coming on. At this point, he was seriously reconsidering the idea that the Avengers were necessary – at least, these Avengers.

Steve picked up the copy of the Accords in front of him and flicked through some pages. “This is just a bunch of red tape. And I don’t trust that Ross guy,” he said.

Tony sighed, silently asking for strength. He got up from his sprawl on the couch and approached the table. “This isn’t a request, Steve. This is happening.”

“Because Ross threatened us? How can you not see what’s going on? They’re trying to control us.”

“Yes, they are. And do you know why? Because you are out of control and people are dead. Do you understand? You’ve put us all in a very precarious position, and this” he pointed at the document “is the best way to mitigate the mess you’ve made.”

“Me? This isn’t my fault. We saved people’s lives,” Steve replied stubbornly.

“Is that what you really think? My god, you are even dumber than I thought.” Steve rose from his chair, jaw clenched in anger. Tony ignored him. “If you don’t believe me, okay, fine. Let’s get someone else to explain it to you, then.” He picked up his phone and dialed, putting in on speaker on the table.

“Stark? What is it? Please don’t tell me there’s been another disaster,” President Ellis said. Tony could see right away that Steve, Wanda and Sam didn’t recognize the voice. Didn’t they ever watch the news, Tony wondered.

“All right. What seems to be the problem, gentlemen?”

“President Ellis, I’m here with the Avengers. Secretary Ross has just told the team about the Accords but there still seems to be some confusion. I know you’re busy, but if you could just take a few moments to explain some things, I think it will be very beneficial for everyone.”

Ellis was silent for a moment, then sighed. Tony could picture him running a hand through his hair and wishing he didn’t have to deal with this shit anymore. Tony certainly thought that a lot these days.

“All right. What seems to be the problem, gentlemen?”

“Mr President, with all due respect, I don’t think these Accords are a good idea,” Steve began with an irritated glance at Tony. He did sit back down, though, at least. “The Avengers cannot be
controlled by people with agendas. We have to above governments and can’t afford to be bogged down by red tape and politics.” It was his best ‘I am Captain America’ voice, and Tony wondered when that went from being impressive to grating.

The silence now was even longer, and Tony would have loved to have been a fly on the wall so he could see Ellis’s expression. It must have been priceless.

“Above governments, you say,” Ellis finally said in a flat tone. “Kinda hard to do that when you prance around dressed in the American flag and call yourself Captain America.”

Sam winced at that, as did Rhodey and even Romanoff. Steve just pursed his lips.

“Sir–” Steve began, only to be cut off.

“Here’s the thing, Rogers. I’m sure you thought you were doing a good thing, but I have had the Nigerian president breathing down my neck for weeks about the mess you left behind in his country. And he’s not the only one. Russia is milking this for all it’s worth, going on about how a group of mostly American heroes going around the world blowing things up is almost a declaration of war. And, unfortunately, some people are eating it up. This is the compromise. This is what we need to do to avoid an even bigger mess. Is it perfect? No. Am I happy about it? No. But we have to do it. We have to show the world that we are taking this matter seriously. Nigeria wanted to have you and your team deported for trial. I managed to talk them out of it this time, but don’t think it will be so easy next time, because we really cannot afford a ‘next time’. Do you understand?”

Steve looked like he had sucked on a lemon. Wanda was scowling, a slight bit of red swirling around her hands. Sam kept his eyes down and Tony could see the tension in his posture. Natasha sat straight in her chair, eyes flickering through everyone in the room as if to gauge their reactions. Rhodey was watching Steve as if he’d never seen the man before and Vision kept his eyes on Wanda, frowning at her.

“We understand, Mr President,” Natasha said once the silence had, once again, gone on too long.

“Good. We’ll have a ceremony for you to sign the document in a few days.”

“And if we don’t want to?” Steve asked, still refusing to read the writing on the wall.

“Then you’re out. Let me make this very clear, Rogers. This is not a request. This is happening, whether you like it or not.” He paused a moment, then continued. “I have no idea what the hell you were thinking. First DC and that mess with SHIELD, then Sokovia and now this. This is the last straw, do you understand? So get your ass in gear, soldier, and do what you’re told. And that goes for all of you. Oh, and your passports have been temporarily revoked while the investigation is ongoing. Rogers, Romanoff, Wilson and Maximoff are to stay put. Stark, keep me posted. I have a few more fires to put out today.”

The call disconnected and Tony waited to see what the others would do.

“Well, guess the matter is settled, then.” Rhodey stood. “I need to get back to base.” He nodded at Tony, gave the others a rather exasperated look, and left.

“Steve,” Natasha said, a hint of pleading in her expression. “We have to sign.”

“And then what?” Steve asked. “What if this new Accords Panel, or whatever it’s called, decides to send us somewhere we don’t think we should go? Or we need to go somewhere and they won’t let us?”
“This is a contract, Steve, not a declaration of slavery,” Tony replied, rolling his eyes at the stupidity coming from the other’s mouth. “You don’t want to do something? You say no. You might have to deal with consequences, but the possibility is still there for you to say it. You want to go somewhere and get a no? You think about why. You think about you, with the American flag on your ass, entering a country that doesn’t want you there. Maybe you’ll realize not going is a good idea. Or, you know, just for a novelty, you could try being a good soldier and listening to your superiors.”

“Oh, like you do?” Steve sneered.

Tony remained perfectly calm. “First of all, I’m not a soldier. Second, listening to my superiors – and the world – is exactly what I’m doing. I’m American, so I answer to the president, same as you, and he’s just told us to sign. Even if he hadn’t, though, I’d still sign. You know why? Because it’s the right thing to do. This is not about you, or about me. It’s about the people of the world, who have the right to feel safe, and not like super powered people are running amok doing whatever they want.”

He gave Steve a hard look, then turned to Sam and Wanda. “Sign or retire. Those are your options.”

“Yeah, man, I get it,” Sam replied, a little subdued. “I didn’t know it was this bad.”

“Then maybe you should start watching the news. God knows there’s been little else discussed in the past few weeks.”

Sam had the good grace to look ashamed. Well, at least he looked like he was going to get his head out of his ass.

“And what about me?” Wanda asked, an angry glint in her eyes.

“Your visa is up in the air right now. You have to cooperate or you’ll end up deported back to Sokovia.”

“Deported? They can’t do that!” She exclaimed.

“You’ve just caused the death of 30 people!” Tony hissed, out of patience.

Wanda’s eyes narrowed. “You accuse me of killing people? You, with tons of blood in your hands? The blood of my family?”

“I had nothing to do with your family, you idiot! Do you want to know what killed them? They got caught in the crossfire of someone else’s war. Just like the people in Nigeria. Collateral damage. Maybe in a few years one of those orphans will try to take a shot at you for destroying their family. I wonder if you’ll still feel self-righteous then.”

Wanda stood and launched herself at Tony, but was intercepted by Vision, who grabbed her arms and sat her back on her chair.

“That is enough.” He looked almost sad, staring at her as if he’d never seen her before.

“Let her go, Vision,” Steve said.

Vision glanced at Tony, who nodded. He released her and she stormed out like a sulky child.

“Friday, keep an eye on her. Alert us if she tries to leave.”

“You got it, Boss.”

“Tony–” Steve started.
“No. I don’t want to hear it. That woman should never have been made an Avenger. She’s
dangerous and unstable.”

“She’s just a kid.”

“She’s 26 years old! Stop coddling her!” Tony took a deep breath and tried to get his
temper back under control. “She is a ticking bomb waiting to explode, and if you can’t see
that, then I really don’t think you have any business leading this team.”

Steve opened his mouth to retort, but Natasha put a hand on his arm and shook her
head. There was something almost pained in her expression.

“I still have a million things to do, so you guys think very carefully about what the
future of the Avengers is going to be,” Tony said. Without waiting for their response, Tony
walked out. “Friday, lock down all quinjets and equipment and let me know if anyone
decides to do something stupid.”

Later, Natasha came to him to ask if he could arrange for Steve to go to Peggy Carter’s
funeral in London. Tony considered it, he really did, but they couldn’t afford another
incident, and Tony honestly didn’t trust Steve to keep his head down. “It’s out of my
hands,” he told her. “I might be able to get you to come to Vienna with me for the
Accords ratification. It would be a good thing to have one of you there, to show people
you’re on board with this.” He hoped she understood what he meant by ‘one of you’. She
gave him a tight smile and nodded.

Friday reported Steve trying to break into one of the jets barely four hours later. Tony
had no more patience for Steve’s idiocy, so he called Natasha. “I’m gonna need you to
stay and babysit Steve. Vision is keeping an eye on Wanda. I’ll take Sam to Vienna instead.”
She wasn’t happy, but she knew he was right and didn’t complain.

When news of the Winter Soldier’s involvement in the bombing hit, Natasha called to
say that Steve had managed to give her the slip.

“Tony… there’s something you need to know. I thought Steve had told you, but… God,
how could I have been so stupid?”

“What is it?”

“Tony, I need you to promise you are not gonna do anything rash. We already have
Steve going off the rails and Wanda being a potential bomb. We need you to keep this
team together.”

Tony was beginning to get a really bad feeling about this. “Just say it, Natasha.”

So she did.

He heard the words, but was having trouble processing what they meant.

“Tony? Tony, are you okay? I’m sorry. Steve said he was going to tell you. I thought… I’m sorry.”

“I have to go,” he told her, and hung up the phone.

His first instinct was to find the goddam Winter Soldier and blast him to pieces – oh god, mom…
dad… – but he closed his eyes, took a few deep breaths and focused. Natasha was right. He
couldn’t lose his head now.

It was Rhodey who helped the Task Force apprehend the Winter Soldier (Tony didn’t tell him what
Natasha had revealed.) It turned out to be a good thing he was there, because Prince T’Challa
showed up and almost caused a disaster when he went after the Soldier as well, completely ignoring proper procedure and anyone else’s lives. He was arrested right along with Barnes.

Steve, meanwhile, had been arrested as well when he tried to board a plane to Europe. After some negotiation with the officers in charge, Natasha managed to get Steve back to the Compound – in a cell.

A man with false credentials was discovered trying to get into the facility in Berlin and also ended up in a jail cell. It was soon discovered that he was responsible for the bombing and that he had murdered the real Dr Brussard in order to gain access to Barnes. He had a tape with him that he insisted Tony had to see. Since Tony wasn’t there (still in Vienna and not anywhere close to Barnes), Rhodey saw it first.

“Tony, man… I don’t know how to tell you this.”

“I know, Rhodey.” It had not been hard to figure out what Zemo, the bomber, had wanted. “Natasha told me earlier. She and Steve knew. She said she thought Steve had told me.”

“Son of a fucking bitch.”

“Yeah.”

Rogers was convicted of obstruction of justice. After an evaluation, Wanda was deemed not fit to be an Avenger and was deported back to Sokovia, where they threw everything but the kitchen sink at her in terms of criminal charges. Natasha seemed genuinely sorry about her part in the deception. Somewhat against his better judgment, Tony agreed to give her another chance.

Under the Accords, the Avengers worked much better.

123. (prompt by izumi2, silvermuse)

T’Challa was beginning to regret his decision to come clean about Wakanda’s advancements. Since their announcement at the UN Conference a week earlier, he had been inundated with requested for interviews. He’d tried to refuse, but eventually he realized that the reporters weren’t going to go away until they got something. The media was not something that T’Challa was used to dealing with. In Wakanda, they didn’t have this obsessive need to get into everybody’s business. Still, there was nothing he could do about it, so he might as well get it over with.

He called for a press conference and was not surprised by the huge crowd that turned up. He left the UN people to arrange it all, and just showed at the appointed time, the Dora by his side as usual.

By the third question, he starting to get the feeling he had bitten off more than he could chew. The UN assembly had not been this hostile. They had listened to his statement, asked a few questions, and that was it. These reporters, however, seemed to be out for blood.

“King T’Challa, what do you have to say about the more than 30 people who have disappeared near Wakanda’s borders in the last 3 years?” A black woman asked, staring at T’Challa in challenge.

“I know nothing of this,” T’Challa said through clenched teeth.

“No? I have information that these people were last seen heading to Wakanda. These are poor people, your Majesty, fleeing from hunger, war and disease. Most of them from your neighboring countries, the ones your people have always refused to help. Were they imprisoned, so they could
not reveal Wakanda’s wealth and technology to the rest of the world? Or perhaps they were executed.”

For a moment, T’Challa didn’t know what to say. He knew that, despite their best efforts, outsiders did occasionally get into Wakanda. Of course, these people were not allowed to leave afterwards. They usually ended up trying to escape anyway. Wakanda had no choice but to protect its secret by any means necessary. It was not something T’Challa was proud of, but what else could they do?

His failure to respond had all the reporters shouting at once, and T’Challa didn’t miss the disgusted looks he was getting from most of them.

He tried to take control of things again, but it was too late. With a heavy heart, T’Challa called an end to the proceedings and left, escorted by the Dora.

The news was now painting them as murderers, and T’Challa realized sadly that it was not far from the truth. *We have been blind and ignorant*, he thought.

Then it got worse. With the news coverage talking about it all the time, people actually began to come forward with pictures and stories about missing loved ones. They demanded answers and soon a petition was sent to the UN. T’Challa was called in to respond to it, and he had no choice but comply. The feeling of accomplishment and triumph he’d experienced after reclaiming the throne and opening Wakanda up to the world turned into shame and dread. Wakanda had blood on its hands, and there was very little justification they could offer.

They were crucified. Even some of the missing people’s fate had nothing to do with Wakanda, enough of them did that it made no difference to the world.

And then, of course, having sensed blood in the water, the sharks started to circle around. The government of the neighboring countries began to demand retribution. They wanted money. They wanted entry into Wakanda, ostensibly to search for their people but in truth to spy on them (like Wakanda had spied on the world for years, T’Challa grimly remembered). They wanted vibranium. The Council refused to surrender any of their precious ore to outsiders, and that didn’t sit well with the rest of the world. The few Wakandans that had left the country to begin contact with the outside world were ostracized and even assaulted.

*Murderers. Thieves. Scum.* That was how Wakandans were called.

*What have we done?* T’Challa asked himself.

His people were angry and frightened. T’Challa ordered everyone back home and Wakanda went back to isolation, hated and despised by everyone else.

They had their little paradise within their borders, but they were no longer safe. It was only a matter of time before an ethical dispute became a military one.

(AN: Yep, I’m leaving this one open-ended. What do you think should happen?)
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Hey, guy! At long last, a new chapter! Sorry to keep you waiting, work has been keeping me busy. Hope you enjoy. :)

124. (prompt by IntentionallyMisspelled, Leefdoor, VWebb)

“Put on the suit, let’s go a few rounds,” Captain America said, an expression of smug superiority on his boyish, all-American face. Tony wanted to knock his perfect teeth out.

Tony had dealt with bullies his whole life, though it was surprising to find that Steve ‘I hate bullies’ Rogers was actually one. Still, maybe it shouldn’t be a surprise. The Cap of comic books and legend was a myth, a propaganda icon; the real Steve Rogers was obviously a different person altogether. Marketing could be misleading like that.

Usually, Tony’s response to bullies was to walk away with his head held high and screw them over later using his intellect instead of physical strength (since he’d never really had much of that – at least, not against the kinds of bullies he usually dealt with). This time, though, Tony wasn’t going to back down. His intellect had created the Iron Man suit, after all, and he would be damned if he let some overgrown lab rat get the better of him.

He stared Rogers straight in the eye as he made the gesture that would summon the suit to him. If this fucker wants a fight, I’ll fucking give him one, he thought. He was Tony fucking Stark and it was time to remind these people of that before they got any more ideas that he could be manipulated and pushed around.

“All right,” Fury said, “let’s all just calm down.”

Rogers turned to look at the spy just as the suit arrived and encased Tony. As the faceplate came down, a distant corner of Tony’s mind kept saying this was a bad idea, but he ignored it, far too angry at this whole mess. He had not started this, but he was going to finish it.

When Rogers saw Iron Man standing before him, his expression morphed into a mix of anger and fear. He jumped. Over Fury’s and Romanoff’s shouts of protest, the super soldier tried to take Tony down. Tried being the operative word.

If Rogers thought it was going to be an easy fight, he soon found himself disappointed. His punches and kicks were parried easily and the armor gave Tony plenty of protection against those few that landed. Of course, Tony could have simply reduced Rogers to a smoking corpse with minimal effort, but he didn’t want to actually kill the asshole, just teach him a little lesson.

“Sir, the program has found a possible location for the tesseract,” Jarvis told him. “Perhaps you should focus your efforts on that?” There was a note of reprimand in Jarvis’s tone, and Tony sighed to himself. His friend was right. This was a waste of time.

Rogers showed no signs that he felt the same, though. He looked like he would rather die than accept defeat. Really, considering the man had refused to hear a well-deserved ‘no’ from the army when it
was obvious he wasn’t fit to serve, it wasn’t a big surprise. Stubborn to the bitter end, apparently. So much for the great American hero Howard had always talked about.

“All right, enough of this. Stand down or be knocked down,” Tony said. He was pretty sure that Rogers wouldn’t listen, but he wanted to be sure everyone saw him being the bigger man.

The look in Rogers’s face was one of pure anger now, which Tony thought was a bit uncalled for. “I can do this all day,” the asshole replied. He redoubled his efforts and Tony repulsored him in the face. The super soldier was knocked all the way across the floor.

Tony noticed Bruce had left the room – smart move there – and that Fury and Romanoff had their weapons drawn. Thor was holding his hammer, glancing around as if trying to decide who to hit first.

“All right, time out.” Tony called. The computer started beeping louder. “We have a possible location. Who wants to go check it out?”

Romanoff and Thor immediately stepped forward, both appearing eager for a fight. Tony couldn’t exactly blame them. There was something egging them all on, it seemed.

The hud flashed with a warning and Tony flew up into the air just as Rogers tried to tackle him.

“Seriously?” Tony asked, thoroughly annoyed. “Chill the fuck out, dickhead. We got more important stuff to do.”

Then there was a loud explosion and the entire room rocked, sending everyone but Tony crashing down.

“We’re under attack!” Romanoff shouted.

“Godammit,” Fury said, running out to see what was going on, Romanoff and Thor hot on his heels.

Tony turned to the computer and tapped a few keys. “J? Talk to me.”

“There is a jet firing on the hellicarrier, Sir. One of the engines is damaged. If the attack continues, it may fail completely.”

“Guess I’d better get out there and sort this out.” Tony turned to leave and came face to face with Rogers still fuming. “Out of my way, Capsicle.”

It was like talking to a brick wall. “We’re not done here,” Rogers said in the most condescending tone imaginable.

Tony sighed. Then he straightened and punched the bastard in the face with all the suit’s considerable strength. Rogers went down like a sack of potatoes. “Okay, now we are.” He walked out, leaving the unconscious body behind without a second thought.

(Fury sighed inwardly as he closed down communication with the World Security Council. They were upset because Thor had taken Loki, the scepter and the tesseract back to Asgard. At this point, Fury really could care less about them – those were the assholes who had almost nuked New York, after all. Thank god Stark had managed to not only avert that disaster, but also single-handedly destroy the alien fleet. Perhaps Fury should reconsider his consultant status, especially now that Rogers had proven so utterly unfit for the Avengers. Honestly, having a dick measuring contest with Stark in the middle of a fucking alien invasion… It was probably a good thing he had still been unconscious when Banner, Romanoff and Barton had headed for New York. Stark had done a pretty
good job as field commander, and Rogers hadn’t been missed much; what good was a single super soldier against an alien army anyway? Clearly Fury needed to keep a closer eye on the idiot lest he make an even bigger mess of things, because right now, he was not SHIELD material, let alone Avengers.)

(AN: I know Tony is still using the assembly bots to get into the suit at this point in canon, but let’s ignore that for this one, ok?)

*  

125. (prompt by Belge_kitty, ConArtist718, Jen)

It had been a long journey and Clint was exhausted. He couldn’t wait to get home, kiss his wife and kids and sleep for a week.

After getting rescued from the Raft by Steve – and god, it had grated being on the same place SHIELD had sent the people he had captured, as if he was one of those criminals – Clint had been pretty dammed pissed. At Steve, at Stark, at Ross, at himself… at everyone, really. Fuck the UN and all those assholes who wanted to strong-arm the Avengers. Still, politics wasn’t his thing, and with the Winter Soldiers taken care of, there was little more Clint could contribute to the fight. So he’d decided to go home and let Steve sort out the rest of that mess by himself. He was the leader, after all, wasn’t he?

Using fake ids, funds he had stashed around in various accounts and all the skills Clint had learned as a spy, he’d made his way back to the US and then to the farm. It had taken weeks, but he was finally home.

The spare key wasn’t under the flower pot. Clint cursed. It was late, the kids were probably in bed so he didn’t want to ring the bell. He’d have to pick the lock, which, of course, presented no challenge at all. Within moments he was inside.

Only to come face to face with the barrel of a shotgun.

“Whoa!” Clint exclaimed, automatically falling back into a fighting stance.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Laura hissed, the weapon not wavering in the slightest.

“Hey, Laura, calm down. It’s me.” Clint put his hands in the air and smiled at his wife. Man, it was good to see her.

“I know it’s you, you idiot. I’m not blind. What the hell are you doing here?” she repeated, expression still not friendly.

“I know it’s you, you idiot. I’m not blind. What the hell are you doing here?” she repeated, expression still not friendly.

“Last I checked, I live here,” Clint replied, trying for a bit of humor.

It obviously didn’t work.

“No, you don’t. Not anymore. Not since you abandoned us.”

Clint sighed. Looked like Laura was a bit upset. He’d hoped she would have gotten over it by now and gotten to the ‘missing him’ stage of his being gone, but apparently not.
“That’s a bit harsh, don’t you think?”

“A bit harsh?! What the hell is the matter with you? Do you have any idea what you’ve put us through? Me and the kids?”

“Don’t be so dramatic, Laura. Come on, put the gun down. I’ve had a fucking long trip. I want a shower and a bed. You can yell at me later.”

Laura’s expression didn’t soften at all. In fact, she seemed even angrier. The gun stayed right where it was, pointed at his head. “Get out. I want a divorce. And I’m getting full custody. You are a wanted criminal and are not welcomed at my house near my kids.”

Now it was Clint who was starting to get angry. “For fuck’s sake, Laura. A divorce? I’m not a criminal. Come on!”

“The world begs to differ, Clint. You are not only a criminal, but a terrorist. I’ve had the FBI, the CIA and goddam Homeland Security crawling through the farm digging into everything and scaring the crap out of the kids. What the fuck were you thinking?”

Clint opened and closed his mouth like a gapping fish. What the hell? “This whole thing is a misunderstanding, Laura. There’s nothing to worry about, it will all blow over. You and the kids are safe.” Weren’t they?

“No thanks to you, you asshole. I came this close to being arrested.” She finally lowered the gun to shove her hand in her face, thumb and index finger a millimeter apart. “And what would have happened to the kids, then? Did you ever think of that while you were off destroying an airport?”

Clint winced. “Look, Laura… I’m sorry, okay? But we can sort this out. It’s going to be okay.”

Laura only stared at him. “In what parallel universe are you living in, Clint? This is not going to go away.” She shook her head. “I don’t even know who you are anymore. Now get out before I call the police to come arrest your ass.”

“You wouldn’t do that,” he said, though he wasn’t really sure of that. She certainly didn’t look like she was bluffing.

“What are you doing here?”

Clint looked up and saw Cooper and Lila standing on the top of the stairs. Neither seemed welcoming.

“Hey, Coop, buddy. Hey, Lila.” His smile was a bit weak, and it died down quickly in the face of their closed off expressions.

Cooper shoved his sister behind him, eyes blazing with fury. “Go away. We don’t want you here.”

“Clint, you need to leave,” Laura said, taking a couple of steps up to be nearer to the children. “Right now.”

Nothing was going right, Clint thought. It hurt to have his family so angry at him. If only they’d give him a moment to explain…

“Guys, come on. Let’s talk, okay? We can work this out,” he pleaded.

“There is nothing to work out, Clint. You walked out on us to become an international terrorist.
Because of you, our lives were turned upside down. We have been searched, interrogated and ostracized. I’ve had to pull the kids from school because they were being harassed. If I had enough money, I would have moved and disappeared. Unfortunately, the Feds are watching us and most of our assets have been frozen. And it’s all your fault.”

“People call you a murderer,” Cooper said, tears in his eyes. Behind him, Lila was crying silently, clutching her brother’s hand.

There was nothing Clint could think to say that. He hadn’t realized things had been so bad. Jesus, branding him a terrorist and going after his family? Fucking Ross.

“I’m not a murderer,” Clint replied, though technically he was. He’d killed plenty of people for SHIELD, but those were bad guys, they didn’t count.

“I thought you were a hero,” Cooper whispered. “But you’re not. You’re just a liar.”

“Cooper…” Clint reached out a hand for his son.

“I never want to see you again!” The boy screamed, and ran back upstairs, Lila following.

For a while Clint just stood there, unsure what to do. How had things gotten to this point?

“You need to go, Clint,” Laura said. She didn’t look angry anymore, just sad.

“I… Laura, I never meant to hurt you and the kids.”

“Well, you did. What the hell were you thinking? You were retired! You promised me. You promised the kids. And then you’re off, just like that. And for what? To fight the Avengers? To destroy and airport? Become a terrorist? A fugitive from justice?”

“For god’s sake, I am not a terrorist!”

“What the hell do you call helping to send Vision through multiple floors in the Compound? What the hell do you call wrecking an airport so you and your buddies can ignore the law and do whatever you want? What do you call getting Col Rhodes paralyzed because you thought you knew better?”

Clint swallowed. Put like that, it did sound kinda bad. “That’s not really what happened, Laura. It’s these Accords, they—”

She didn’t let him finish. “Have you actually read the Accords, Clint? Because I have. I needed to, to understand why you would abandon us. And they’re not bad, Clint. As a regular citizen, as a mother, I am in full support of super powered people not being allowed to go somewhere, blow things up and then disappear, leaving the people to pick up the pieces of their lives that got destroyed in the process. I don’t know when you got into your head that you’re gods, Clint, but you’re not. People have a right to feel safe.”

“That’s… That’s not…”


The shotgun came up again and Clint backed away. Maybe he should have thought things over a bit more carefully before coming back. Or leaving in the first place.

Once outside, Clint just stood there, utterly lost. A couple of days later, he was arrested. He was pretty sure Laura had turned him in after all.
Loki listened to Thor’s tale of yet another battle on Midgard with a mixture of exasperation and begrudging interest. It had started out the same boring way as all the others, but then it actually became intriguing. That the humans still had the scepter – and therefore the Mind Stone – was not news to him, of course, but this… This was different. If Thor was to be believed, they now had a being made with the Mind Stone. Remarkable. Loki would have to investigate this Vision more closely. The creature could be an ally against Thanos – or a dangerous adversary.

It was also noteworthy that the humans had a sorceress – or something like it anyway. That, too, bore further examination.

“Father?” Thor asked, after Loki had been silent for too long. It was a struggle not to roll his eyes. He couldn’t even think in peace anymore.

At first, it had been fun pretending to be Odin and fooling Thor and all of Asgard. Now… Now it was just tiresome. Loki wished he could still trust Thor enough to tell him the truth. Unfortunately, that was nothing but a dream; he was alone, just as he had always been. Though his anger with Thor had abated somewhat, he knew his supposed brother would never trust him again. It made him sad.

“Tell me more about this witch,” he commanded.

When Thor got to the part where the witch gave him a vision of doom, Loki frowned. When he heard that the other Avengers had experienced something similar, Loki was even more confused.

“This woman manipulated your mind and that of your shield brothers?” he asked.

“Manipulated? No, I don’t think that’s what she did.”

“Yet she made you see things.”

“Aye.”

“And she aided this Ultron creature in trying to kill you.”

Thor frowned. “Yes. But later she and her brother stood with us against Ultron.”

Well, of course they did, Loki thought. They would have died too if the planet had been destroyed. “And now she is an Avenger?” This time he phrased it as a question, since he wanted to be absolutely sure of the answer.

“Steve believes she could be a great ally. Her power is impressive.”

Impressive, Loki scoffed. She probably has no idea what real magic is. “So she has joined the team even though not that long ago she wanted you all dead.” Loki deadpanned. Were they really that stupid? He had never liked Rogers – too similar to Thor – but this… idiotic would be an understatement.

“She was… misguided in her quest for revenge. The Captain believes she walks a different path now. A better path.”
“I see.” Loki wasn’t sure the Captain was really that dumb, or if the witch was still somehow messing with his mind. Regardless, Thor seemed perfectly willing to give this stranger a second chance while he’d allowed Loki to rot in a cell for a lot less. How could any of them think this woman could be trusted? “What do Stark and Banner think of this?”

“Banner left after the battle. I know not where he has gone, of whether he plans to return.” I wouldn’t either, if I were him, Loki thought. “Stark argued against Wanda’s inclusion.” Good to know one of them has sense. “But Steve and Lady Natasha believes he is irrational with guilt over Ultron.”

“Why should he feel guilty?” Loki asked, wondering what nonsense Thor – no doubt echoing Rogers and Romanoff – was about to sprout now.

“It was him who created Ultron by dabbling in powers beyond his understanding.”

Loki had nothing to say to such an absurd statement. That Thor of all people would judge someone else as lacking understanding… Thor, who didn’t know the most basic principles of magic or the laws of the universe… The sheer arrogance was astonishing, but not surprising.

“Tell me more about the witch’s powers.” Perhaps she had affected Thor mind more than the thunderer had realized.

Thor described what he knew, which wasn’t much, of course.

“She got her powers from the Mind Stone?”

Thor nodded. “I am unsure how it was done, but that is what I was told.”

“And she was able to control the population of a city to make them leave their homes behind?”

“Aye.”

Mind control. It sent shivers down Loki’s spine. He despised mind control and manipulation of any kind. This woman could not be allowed to roam free, no matter what Rogers thought.

After dismissing Thor, Loki returned to his chambers to ponder what to do about the situation. The witch would have to be dealt with, obviously, but how? With Banner gone, Stark stepping back, Barton retired and Thor in Asgard, only the Captain and the Spider remained of the original team. New members had been added; the creature with the Mind Stone, a friend of Rogers’s, a friend of Stark’s and the witch. It did not seem like a good combination to Loki, not when Rogers and Romanoff were so quick to trust a woman with mind control powers. It would not do. When Thanos inevitably came, Midgard would have to be prepared to fight, so having the Avengers was a necessity. And they could not include a woman with such uncertain allegiance and morals.

It took a few days for Loki to sort out the kingdom’s affairs enough to have the time to go to Midgard. He had also surreptitiously checked Thor’s mind for any signs of tampering and had found… something. A small scar. Nothing serious, yet it did not sit well with him that this witch had had the gall to assault his brother – and who knows how many others.

Walking through the paths of Yggdrasil, Loki arrived on Midgard and made his way to the Avengers Compound, where Thor had said the new team had taken residence. He made himself invisible and crept in to see the witch for himself and determine the best way to deal with her.

She was sitting on a couch watching television when he entered, and did not seem to be aware of his presence at all. So much for being all-powerful… he could kill her right then and there and no one
would be any the wiser. It was tempting. However, he still needed to know more.

Footsteps announced someone else’s approach, so Loki stepped further back to observe.

It was Rogers.

“Hey, I was looking for you,” he said.

“What for?” She didn’t take her attention out of the television, continuing to flip channels with a bored air.

“I just wanted to remind you that we’re training again tomorrow. It seems like Rhodes is going to be able to come.”

The witch’s face twisted. “Why does he need to be here? We don’t need him.”

Rogers sighed. “With Thor and Stark gone, we need someone to be our air support.”

“Vision can fly,” she replied, sounding like a petulant child.

“Yes, but… We don’t know all that he’s capable of yet.”

“Fine. Is that all?”

“Yeah, I guess. Tomorrow morning then.”

She waved a dismissive hand and returned to the television.

“Wanda, I know you’re upset—”

“You don’t know anything!” she yelled, running from the room. Loki followed.

Wanda entered what appeared to be her private room and threw herself on the bed, gesturing to the door. Red tendrils shot out from her hand and closed it. What a ridiculous brat, Loki thought.

She reached into the nightstand and took out a faded photograph. Loki walked closer to see it. It showed two children, Wanda herself and a boy about her age with silver hair. Her brother, Loki figured. The one who had died in the battle.

“I hate them all,” she told the image of the boy. “Rogers and his condescending attitude, Natasha with her smug superiority, Vision’s stupid naiveté… They’re all idiots.” She paused, tracing the face of her brother. “I should have listened to you, Pietro. I should have just killed Stark in Sokovia and been done with it, instead of pushing him to build Ultron. You would still be here if I had, and I wouldn’t have to put up with these stupid people.” She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “If only Stark hadn’t left, I could have kept messing with him. He doesn’t deserve a moment’s peace after all he’s done to us. He doesn’t even come here anymore. I could kill him then, straight up like you wanted. I can’t stand that he’s alive and you’re not. It’s not right, Pietro. I hate it. I hate him.” She sighed, then sat up abruptly. “Rhodes! Oh, I have it, Pietro. I’ll use him to kill Stark.” A sinister smile spread across her face. “Yes, that’s perfect. Didn’t Natasha said they are like brothers? I can destroy them both at once. And then… Then I can get out of this damn place.” She put the photo carefully on the bed. “I’ll do it for you, Pietro. For mom and dad. Our revenge, finally.”

Loki had heard enough. This woman was as twisted as Thanos, and she had to be stopped. What she had already done was horrific enough, but what she was planning to do to Stark and his friend was simply monstrous. Stark was his best bet in the fight against Thanos. How dare this little ant threaten
him?

Allowing himself to become visible, Loki watched in satisfaction as Wanda jumped and shrieked upon seeing him.

“Who are you? How did you get here?”

“I am Loki, and you are a particularly despicable creature, aren’t you?” He was taking a risk in revealing himself, but he could not help it. He wanted the Avengers – Stark in particular – to see this, to see who they had brought into their midst – and who had saved them.

Wanda’s hands glowed red as she tried to attack him. Loki raised a shield and the energy dissipated harmlessly.

“You call yourself a witch, little girl? You are nothing.” He brought forth his own powers and sent her crashing to the floor.

“Who are you?” she asked again, eyes darting around wildly.

“I am the one who is going to put an end to you,” he replied.

“Help! Steve! Vision! Someone help me!”

Loki laughed. “Do you think they will care to save you after they realize what you’ve done? What you are? I daresay the Spider will happily dispose of you.”

Wanda got up and made for the door, but slammed against Loki’s shield and fell back. This time when she got up she went straight for him, red mist twirling around her.

The attack was clumsy and weak, and Loki had no trouble dodging it.

“I don’t think this power belongs to you,” he said. He could feel it now, a foreign presence in her, similar to the signature of the Mind Stone. “It is time you gave it back.”

Quick as lightening, Loki reached out and grabbed her by the throat, keeping her secure against him. He focused on the power he could sense within her and yanked.

She screamed. “NO!”

It did not take long. Wispy tendrils rose up and swirled around her for a moment before disappearing. When it was all gone, Loki dropped her to sob pathetically on the ground.

“That was for mind-raping my brother, you bitch. I hope they kill you.”

The others were finally arriving, so Loki made himself invisible again and stepped back to watch the aftermath.

“Wanda!” Rogers said, crashing through the door in uselessly heroic fashion. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

She did not answer, though, repeatedly moving her hands as if trying to summon her powers. “No… No… It’s gone, it’s gone…” she muttered, tears streaming down her face. Loki felt not an ounce of sympathy.

The Spider entered cautiously, looking around and finding nothing, the Mind Stone creature behind her.
“What happened, Wanda?” Rogers asked again.

“He took it. He took it from me…”

“Who?” Romanoff demanded.

“He said his name was Loki.”

Rogers and Romanoff exchanged a wary look. Vision stepped around Wanda and glanced around, eyes narrowing slightly as he swept by Loki’s position.

Perhaps it was time to go, Loki thought, silently leaving the room. Just as he was preparing to teleport away, a voice called out from behind him.

“Why?”

It was Vision, looking right at him even though he was still invisible.

“I’m sure you have ways of seeing what happens in this place. I suggest you watch everything the false witch has done. She was planning to kill Stark.”

Vision nodded and Loki left. He’d done what he’d come here to do. He would leave the actual killing of the woman to the others. Surely Stark had the biggest claim to that honor.

(Tony, Rhodey, Vision, Wilson, Romanoff and Rogers watched the recording, from the moment Wanda entered her bedroom until Vision left to follow Loki. He wanted to say he was surprised, but he really wasn’t.

“That’s not… It’s fake,” Rogers declared.

“Were you born this dumb or did the serum melt your brain?” Tony asked. He really wanted to find Loki – so he could thank him for saving his life.

“Jesus Christ,” Wilson said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I don’t know what else you guys expected from Hydra,” Tony replied.

“She’s not—” Rogers began.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake! What the hell is the matter with you?” Rhodey said. He looked a little pale. Yeah, no wonder. Fuck that bitch.

“We got played.” Romanoff laid a hand on Rogers’s arm to calm him down.

“So much for being a master profiler, huh? Well, I guess you’ve never been great at spotting a Hydra agent right under your nose,” Tony drawled. Romanoff pursed her lips and said nothing.

“So what’s gonna happen to her?” Wilson asked.

“I say we turn her over to the proper authorities. I know the Sokovians will probably be happy to get their hands on her. I’m sure they’ll have plenty to charge her with. I can come up with quite a few things myself.”

With a last look at Rogers’s stubborn disbelieving face, Tony walked out, Rhodey and Vision falling into step with him.
“Loki, huh?” Rhodey said. “Wasn’t he dead?”

Tony shrugged. “Wish I knew where he was hiding, so I could send him a thank you card.

“Yeah.” Rhodey shruddered. “I’d like to send him one myself.”

Later that night, Friday alerted him to an intruder in the Tower. Standing in the living room in casual clothes that accentuated his lean frame, was the god of mischief himself.

Tony smiled. “I think I owe you a drink. Or ten.”

Loki smiled back, eyes sparkling green. “Sounds good.”

(AN: I think this is the first time Loki has appeared in this fic. Weird, huh?)

End Notes

Translation into Russian by Somnambulistik now available here (off site link).

Works inspired by this one: P её - Handed by TheSovereigntyofReality, Calling you out! by Thunderbirdswolvesandlilacs, MCU Snippets by thequeensfan1117

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