After their time in space, the team finds that it has a hopeful future with SHIELD. Months later, things are looking up. Daisy is regaining her image as a hero. Elena and Mack work beside her, helping inhumans. In Virginia; Coulson, May, Fitz, and Simmons are rebuilding SHIELD Academy for the next generation of agents. Things are going uncharacteristically well for the divided team. It's been three months since they were last in mortal peril. Soon enough, the other shoe will drop.

This story follows Leo Fitz and Jemma Simmons as they finally reach some milestones while still recovering from everything that they've had to endure. SHIELD Academy is full of new faces, but their are mysteries inside its walls. Jemma learns that she and Fitz will soon be welcoming a child into the world, and simultaneously, Fitz's past comes back to haunt him. His ancestors and their legacy threaten the couple, SHIELD, and the entire world.

As writing began before season five premiered, there are unintentional canonical discrepancies.

***DISCONTINUED***
Week -9

Prologue

It had all been so much for the team. Between quickly resolving the mess with the Darkhold, and then being kidnapped by that alien observation and security agency and stationed at their facility in space. They had been sent across spacetime for a mission that was more harrowing than the last several had ever been. It was amazing, the seven of them were back on Earth, mostly alive. They agency had said because of the work they did, the government was willing to overlook what had happened the year before. The things that they did with the Framework, the Darkhold, and AIDA. Now that the team had their feet on the ground, firmly, this time, they all had somewhere they needed to go. In Arlington, Virginia, at the National Cemetery. A tall marble headstone with the SHIELD eagle etched into it. Further down, the name, Jeffery Mace. The Patriot. The inscription below read, “A team that trusts is a team that triumphs.”

“This stinks,” Daisy announced. “He died. We were kidnapped and forced to become astronauts. SHIELD moved on without us. Now what?”

“I’m glad you asked that question, Agent Johnson,” A man said. The seven whipped around. Glenn Talbot. “I know,” he said. “Last time you saw me, I was shot in the head.”

“You got better,” Coulson observed.

“I admit, Phil, it wasn’t like getting over a cold. Physical therapy is a bitch,” Talbot said. “And I’m never going into the field again, not that my wife minds. After all of you vanished and where you went was wrapped up tight in red tape, the President still thought, somehow, we ought to continue SHIELD. It’s like you guys have some guardian angel or secret society rooting for you. I wouldn’t put it past the Illuminati.”

“Are you saying we still have jobs with SHIELD, after all this?” May questioned.

“If you want them,” Talbot said. “Not that they’re what you had before. SHIELD and all of our security agencies are running a bit thin on agents, as you can imagine. We need people with expertise saving the world to teach a younger generation to carry the torch. The cream of the crop. All of you, except for Agents Johnson, Rodriguez, and Mackenzie, have been requested to join and lead the staff.
“Sorry, what are you saying?” Coulson asked.

“The Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division Academy. SHIELD Academy,” Talbot says. “It needs agents to teach the cadets.”

“And you want us to be instructors?” May asked.

“It’s not what I want, it’s what the President wants. Your little stint in outer space, oh yes, I heard, we in Washington see it as a swan song for one of the bravest and most annoying teams we’ve ever had to file paperwork over.”

“What about Mack, Yo-Yo and me?” Daisy asked.

“-and I,” Jemma corrected her lightly.

"No, I'm right," Daisy told her.

“The three of you have been asked to continue your work with training and monitoring inhumans and inhuman threats,” Talbot said. “With Agent Johnson being the director of this department.”

“I thought everyone hated me and wanted me imprisoned for killing Mace?”

“Well,” Talbot said. “Luckily. We have security cameras. It became clear that Radcliffe’s little experiment, aided by the Darkhold, really messed everything up. Especially with all the android remains, it really tells a story. Of course, you’re going to be monitored by me while in this position. Just to be safe. You can turn down the offer. If I was sent beyond the moon I know I would, but it’s on the table.”

Talbot nodded at them before walking away. They watched him go.

“What do you think?” Jemma asked.

“It’s an offer,” Coulson said. “They trust us enough to train cadets. That’s not a bad position to be
in. It’d be less risking our lives every day.”

“If I can help Inhumans, I’m going to,” Daisy said. “Even if that means we’ll be split up.”

“Are we going to rebuild the pre-existing Academy facility or should we expect a new one?” Fitz asked.

“Considering what happened to the other Academy, I don’t see them rebuilding on the mass graves of cadets,” Jemma said.

“I thought that was in the Framework,” Mack said. “Weaver never liked to talk about what happened. All I knew is something attacked.”

“It was gruesome,” Jemma agreed. They were silent for a few moments, half honoring the dead and half wondering what happened. “What do you want to do?” She asked Fitz. “You go anywhere, I’ll follow.”

“I was going to ask you that,” Fitz said. “Being a teacher… I think I could do that.”

Jemma nodded, “So could I. I’m done with the field. I’ve had enough aliens and magic and whatever else to last centuries. And none of us are getting any younger.”

“You aren’t the one in her fifties,” Coulson said. May raised an eyebrow. “I’m the one in my fifties. May is perpetually thirty-nine.”

“It’s not like we would be completely splitting up,” Elena said. “Inhumans will likely join the ranks of this new school for SHIELD agents. And if we work for the same agency we could always find some time to spend together.”

“Are we all gonna take up his offer?” Daisy asked. The team exchanged glances.
Thank you guys for all the grammar help! I'm actually really grateful that's the only thing people have been correcting me on. It means that you didn't find anything wrong with the rest of it and I consider that a win, personally.

Content Warnings: This chapter involves references to and descriptions of menstruation.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week One

Day Two

Jemma Simmons woke up in her bed. Sunlight streamed through the window and her alarm was blasting some sort of symphonic melody to wake her up. She shut it off and turned over, looking for warmth beside her, but her boyfriend wasn’t in bed. His lamp was on, and she sighed. It was something that they did now, to let the other one know they weren’t kidnapped or something else. They turned on the light. Jemma rolled out of bed and made her way to the bathroom, which already had condensation on the mirror. She turned on the shower so it would warm up a little and went to pee. She noticed, in her underwear, there was a dark red stain. She knew it was coming, of course, her menstrual cycle was ever so punctual. She would deal with feminine hygiene products after her shower. The shower was mostly quick. She washed her hair, scrubbed her body, rubbed her prickly legs and decided it wasn’t worth it, and then she stepped out, dried off, and got dressed. She left their bedroom, made her way into the hallway, and descended downstairs.

She and Fitz had bought a house. After being told where the facility was that Academy would be operational, she and Fitz had bought a house about twenty miles away, in Norfolk, Virginia. It was an accident, buying the home. Jemma had merely been looking while they still lived on the Norfolk base with Coulson and May and a few other members of the staff. Late one night. She found a house. It was on a newspaper listing, worth half its market price, and the widow who was selling it was kind enough to leave most of the furniture, which they either used or sold so they could buy something they would rather have. They lived a ten-minute walk from the beach. Their renovated colonial-style home had more rooms than they needed, but it had a great location, a sunroom, a jacuzzi bathtub and a double vanity in the master bath, a garage workshop, and a breakfast nook. Speaking of breakfast, Fitz was in the kitchen and things smelled good.

“Pancakes?” He showed her what was in the skillet.
“Are they chocolate chip?” Jemma asked. “You do know the way to a woman’s heart.” She smiled at him. "You're up uncharacteristically early.

“I had trouble sleeping.” Fitz shrugged. Jemma knew “trouble sleeping” meant a nightmare.

“You know, if you need me, you can wake me up, I don’t mind,” Jemma told him.

“It wasn’t that big of a deal, it wasn’t real,” Fitz said. Jemma nodded. Whether or not something was real sort of was his mantra, now. “So, how are the interviews going?”

“Ugh,” Jemma leaned against the counter. “We’re still several faculty members short, and officially behind schedule. Coulson and May have already completely staffed their departments.”

“To be fair, May’s department is how to hit things and Coulson’s department is how to send an email. You’re looking for more advanced credentials,” Fitz told her. “I got fresh berries the other day, want some?”

“Yes, please.” Jemma nodded. She switched conversations. “I know that, but I’m worried I’m being too picky.”

“You? Picky?” Fitz gasped dramatically. She rolled her eyes. He came out of the kitchen with two plates of pancakes and fruit. “I’ll be right back with the tea.” He promised her, setting the plates down at their breakfast nook. The nook was right against a large window, so they could see into their green backyard with bushes lining the wooden fence.

“So, May still thinks we’re living on the base,” Jemma said. “I thought you were going to tell people.”

“You’re the one who has weekly directorial meetings with her. I’m doing my best to try to make sure the engineering department works.” Fitz said. “Besides, I kind of like having this, for us, and no one else knowing about it.”

“Our secret double lives as residents in the suburbs?” Jemma asked. Fitz sat down across from her and handed her a mug of tea. “SHIELD agents by day, homeowners association members by night?”
“No need to be cheeky,” Fitz admonished her. “Eat your pancakes.”

Fifteen minutes later, with their bags ready for work, they passed through Fitz’s workshop, into the garage, and climbed into their eco-friendly car. Now, most eco-friendly cars aren’t as eco-friendly as they are assumed to be. They still require the coal-based electricity most residential areas are run on. But, Fitz and Jemma had spent a weekend on the roof installing solar panels and a government prototype of a cloaking device, so they didn’t get an infraction from the homeowners association for having solar panels. None of their neighbors questioned why it took so much equipment to reshingle a roof.

The neighbors of Selby Drive were nice people. They were a little militant about the neighborhood aesthetic, and Jemma had a list of “appropriate front garden flowers” they had given her she would occasionally glare at. The couple across the street had brought a strawberry rhubarb pie the day that Fitz and Simmons had moved in and asked when the wedding was. The house next door had three kids. The other house next door consisted of a newly wedded couple and the husband’s father. They all assumed that the couple worked at the Norfolk Naval Base in some capacity. It wasn’t a wholly incorrect assumption.

The couple drove to the base, checked in, and parked their car in a secure parking lot. Then they walked to a concrete building and scanned their way inside. It was a docking station for a small submarine that would take them to SHIELD Academy. It was a mean of transport until the airfield at the Academy was functional. Fitz climbed down first, Jemma handed him their bags, and then he helped her. They sat down and sealed the hatch.

“To Academy?” the pilot of the minisub asked.

“Yes,” Jemma said. There was whirring as the sub detached from the docking station and then flew through the ocean, going east, away from the shore. After about fifteen miles of blue, fish, and occasional bits of trash, the silvery metal structure could be seen on the ocean floor. They passed through one of the protective ion shields and into a docking station. There was whirring as the sub attached, and the couple climbed out in the same order they climbed in. They scanned their badges and made their way from the docking stations to the administration sector. If you didn’t know that the base was underwater, you couldn’t tell from the hallways of administration. It had pale beige painted walls, linoleum floors, and the occasional plastic potted plant. Fitz walked Jemma to her office. Outside the wooden door that said Dr. Jemma Simmons, Director of SHIELD Science and Technology Academy, he kissed her quickly goodbye, and she entered her office. The first office leading up to her office was that of her secretary, Karen.

“Ma’am! Right on time, you have five interviews today, an admissions meeting at three, and you need to call that equipment company because they backlogged our order again. Do they know
we’re the most advanced scientific training facility on the planet and not a local university?”

“Should I call them now?”

“No, you have an interview in fifteen minutes,” She said. “Psychologist, Harvard graduate.”

“Her file?”

“On your desk. It’s going to be a video call, ma’am, so you need to adjust your window,” Jemma’s office had wooden paneling, carpet floors, a large desk with a computer on it, a bookshelf, a couch, a plasma screen, and a single window. The window looked out into the ocean, where schools of fish swept past. When she could, Jemma liked to remember that she was in a place that could kill her. She pressed a button on the windowsill and the window flickered from the actual view to an image of the Chicago city skyline. There were over three-hundred real-time window options, she made sure she always selected a different one for every interview. She sat down at her desk and looked at what the file said.

The woman she would be interviewing shortly was named Ariel Regina McAllister, Ph.D. She was an American citizen, born in the year 1989. Her mother was from Scotland, a woman named Faiza Hussain. Dr. Ariel Regina McAllister’s father was listed only as McAllister, no first name, on all of her paperwork. Dr. Ariel McAllister had lived in Boston her whole life and was accepted to Harvard when she was thirteen years old. Jemma skimmed her page a bit more as she thought of questions to ask her.

“Ma’am, McAllister is ready to establish contact,” Karen said.

“As am I,” Jemma nodded. She pressed a button on a remote on her desk and Dr. McAllister’s face appeared. Dr. Ariel McAllister was a very beautiful young woman, Jemma observed. Her most immediately apparent feature was her round, bright, blue eyes. Her olive colored face was ovular with a defined, square jaw. She had a long hooked nose, her lips were narrow and well defined. Her hair was dark and was tied back in a severely tight ponytail. The other thing that Jemma noticed about this woman was that she was tall and willowy, like a model.

“You must be Dr. Jemma Simmons, it’s nice to meet you,” Ariel McAllister spoke. She had an American accent.

“Likewise,” Jemma smiled. “So, Dr. McAllister, you want to be a professor at SHIELD
“Academy?”

“I do,” Dr. McAllister nodded.

“Any particular reason?”

“I’ve received one of the best educations a girl could ask for, and I’ve had amazing experiences working at both the FBI and CIA as a profiler and therapist to select agents. For the past few years, I’ve had difficulty finding a balance between my exciting work, which I love, and my more important and recent job as a mother. Which is why working at SHIELD Academy is so appealing. I’d be a professor, but I’d still be able to assist on cases and help the students, and since the location is not going to change, I feel like I could settle down.”

“So you’re looking for some consistency?” Jemma asked, feeling odd. She and Dr. McAllister had a fair amount in common.

“Exactly,” Dr. McAllister nodded.

“So, let’s talk about your credentials. You received your high school diploma at a very young age. Why is that?”

“Well, I was in the fourth grade, nine years old, I was testing so high that they recommended moving me to high school. So I skipped fifth through eighth. My mother wanted to send me to a private school but she couldn’t afford it.”

“So how are you a Harvard alumni if financials have been an issue?” Jemma asked.

“Um, I became a National Merit Scholar and I received a full scholarship to Harvard.”

“Alright, talk about your time at Harvard, what did you do?”

“Well, I contemplated doing maybe biology or medicine before finally deciding to do the honors track of psychology. I received my bachelor's at sixteen. Then I started my graduate studies. I studied clinical psychology, and I received my doctoral degree at eighteen years old. I was an
assistant professor and did postdoctoral research at Harvard in cognitive neuroscience, group and intergroup relations, emotional and neurological disorders, judgment and decision making, psychophysiology and moral cognition.”

“So when did you start working for the government?”

“I was asked by the FBI when I was twenty-two to study profiling at Quantico, and I became employed full-time a year later. When I was twenty-five I did my first joint case with the CIA, and have done, since then, about thirty more.”

“Why not just ask for a different job in the FBI? One a little more secure? Why pick SHIELD?” Jemma asked.

“As I said before, this is marketed as a consistent job. But it also sounds like it's going to be an exciting one. I feel like this position is the best way to balance my personal life and my professional ambitions. Besides, I loved teaching back at Harvard, doing it again would be very enjoyable.”

“Well, you’re certainly more qualified than many of the prospective psychology professors. We’re going to run a comprehensive background check, but since you’ve worked for both the FBI and the CIA I expect that you’ll do well on that. Um, we’re going to have a follow-up contact in a few days, but I have to say, Dr. McAllister, I definitely am impressed.”

“Ariel, please,” Ariel corrected her. “I mean if that’s allowed. I prefer to be called Ariel.”

“Understood, thank you, Ariel,” Jemma smiled.

None of the interviews that followed were nearly as enjoyable for Jemma. There was something strangely familiar about Ariel McAllister. Perhaps it was just that Ariel reminded Jemma of herself. Highly qualified, ambitious, successful from a young age. And also, the desire for security and consistency for her family. Jemma’s hypothetical, prospective family and Ariel’s actual family, were both major factors in their recent career adjustments.

At five in the afternoon, Jemma texted Fitz and asked if he was alright heading home or if he needed to wrap things up. He replied that he’d meet her at the docking station in half an hour. The greeted each other and took a submarine back to the Norfolk Naval Base. Once they were in their car, they started to talk about their day
“How did the interviews go?”

“I liked the anthropologist and the nanoengineer,” Jemma said. “And the psychologist I interviewed was absolutely amazing. Her name is Ariel McAllister and she got her Ph.D. from Harvard at nineteen.”

“You got two from Oxford at sixteen.”

“Well, I mean, just because I set the curve doesn’t mean her placement isn’t exceptional,” Jemma shrugged. “I was reading a few of her papers and her case files, she’s very eloquent and incredibly thorough. And she’s worked for the FBI and the CIA before. So I recommended her.”

“How old is she?”

“A year and a half our junior,” Jemma said. “She was born February 1989.”

“Why become a professor at twenty-nine when you have all the opportunities in the government?”

“She’s looking for consistency after starting a family,” Jemma said. “But she still likes the feeling of adventure.”

“So… like us?” Fitz asked.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought, which is maybe why I liked her so much,” Jemma shrugged. “I want to go back to our conversation this morning. Our house, we were looking on a whim, found the perfect home here in Norfolk—” the truly perfect home for them would be nothing short of a cottage in Perthshire, maybe one day “—and then never got around to telling anyone we pay a mortgage now.”

“If you really want to announce it now, I guess we can,” Fitz said.

“Well, we can’t announce it now. Because they’ll expect us to throw a party and we’ve already
lived in the home for a month, so what good is a housewarming celebration going to do? The home is very, very warm already.”

“You’re overthinking it,” Fitz told her. “Just, invite them over, make dinner.”

“What if they take offense that we never told them?”

“Well, then they’ll take more offense if we do what you’re insinuating and wait until we have a better reason to throw a party. The closest thing coming up is my birthday which is in two months.”

“I know,” Jemma sighed. “With all the missions that Mack, Elena and Daisy do, we’ll have to give them some time to find a date just in case they keep needing to raincheck and save the world. Or we need to raincheck because the construction company floods the biology department again.”

“It was one time,” Fitz reminded her. “You can’t take it so personally.”

“We’ll tell them we want to have a celebration since it’ll be three months since we were last all together. Keep contact until a date can be established.”

“Jemma, it’s a party, not an mission,” Fitz said.

“Yes,” Jemma nodded. “It’s been three months. I’m just… I always feel like, eventually, the other shoe is going to drop.”

“I know,” Fitz agreed. “And it will, when the term starts, we’ll have our hands full with grading homework and dealing with syphilis epidemics, or whatever the kids are into these days.”

**Day Three**

“Get any replies to that party invitation?” Fitz asked as he and Jemma sat on the couch in the living room, a tangle of limbs, watching something on TV.

“Yeah,” Jemma nodded. “Daisy, Mack, and Elena said they can have a weekend off if they submit
a request. May, Coulson, you and I already have weekends off. But because Daisy has to go on some sort of publicity tour sponsored by SHIELD next week, it looks like it won’t happen for at least two weeks, maybe three.”

“Well, that gives you plenty of time to plan for every little thing,” Fitz told her. Jemma rolled her eyes, smiled, and nestled herself a little more into his embrace. “I was thinking, you and I should go on a date.”

“Really?” Jemma asked.

“Not this week because you have that big budget meeting at HQ, but next weekend. I can’t remember the last time we sat down and had dinner at a place with a wine list.”

“It has been a while, hasn’t it?” Jemma thought aloud. “I think, the last time we went out on a date at a place with a wine list was two summers ago. When Daisy was on the run. It really has been a while.”

“Which is why, before term starts and any shoes drop, you and I should go out,” Fitz told her.

“Make a reservation, I guess,” Jemma told him. “If you really want to wine and dine me.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, please give me any feedback or comments you have! If I make a mistake, I would love to know. Constructive criticism is always helpful, any writer has room to grow! And if you guys actually like this story and tell me, you have no idea how much that makes my day. Thank you for reading.
Week 2

Chapter Notes

Sorry if this took too long. Not only was it a longer chapter, but it was harder for me to write. I've never published smut before, so this experience is a bit intimidating. Anyway, I hope you enjoy the chapter. It's a little self-indulgent, I will admit, but isn't that what fanfiction is for?

Week Two

Day Ten

Jemma woke up in a panic. Her mind had been a mess of sensations. She had felt weightlessness, enormous amounts of pressure, falling and falling thousands of feet, blood soaking her hands and pain radiating through her whole body. She shot up in bed and clutched her knees, trying to keep quiet, trying not to wake up Fitz. The warm arms surrounding her told her that she failed, but she didn’t resist his embrace.

“It wasn’t real,” He told her.

“It wasn’t real,” She agreed. Once the anxiety had subsided and the tumults in her stomach stopped, she began to feel remorseful. “Sorry for waking you.”

“It’s alright,” Fitz told her. “I’m the one who usually has nightmares.”

“Yes, which is exactly why you should be getting plenty of sleep when you can.”

“Jemma,” she heard his smile. He stroked her hair. “Do you remember what you said in space?”

“I said a lot of things in space,” Jemma said. “I’ve spend more time in space than you have.”

“You said that I don’t get to be guilty because I’ve experienced trauma. You don’t get to be guilty because you experienced trauma. Alright?”
“Alright,” Jemma said. “Maybe we can go back to sleep?”

“It’s ten minutes to dawn,” Fitz told her. “Why don’t we go downstairs, make some tea?” he suggested. “We can watch the sun rise over the ocean.”

“That’s a good idea,” Jemma agreed.

They watched the pink and orange stream across the sky as they stood shoulder to shoulder. Once they had finished admiring the moment, they ate and got dressed. Fitz was done first, and so Jemma yelled at him to get in the car instead of awkwardly waiting for her to finish getting dressed. Ten minutes after he sat in the car, she finally showed up.

“Are you wearing a tie?” Fitz asked as Jemma climbed into the car.

“I thought I’d try revitalizing my old wardrobe. You know, patterns, colors, ties, cardigans. I saw this online and I had to have it.”

“A dark blue tie with polka dots?” Fitz asked.

“Nope,” She showed him the pattern proudly. It was a dark blue tie with little brown, smiling, monkey faces.

“That goes along with your menacing ‘Director of the SciTech department’ aesthetic,” Fitz joked.

“Maybe. But it definitely goes with my aesthetic as your ridiculously enamoured girlfriend,” Jemma said. Fitz looked at her eyes with the dazed, adoring expression he reserved only for her. He grabbed her tie tightly with one hand and pulled her to him, across the gear console, so he could kiss her. She kissed him back. What was a quick, appreciative kiss developed into something with more passion and hunger. They finally broke away after they had been kissing too hard for too long, and not breathing for any of it. They leaned their foreheads against one another.

“Now I don’t want to go to work,” Fitz whined slightly.
“Well, we could do plenty of kissing, and more, later tonight,” Jemma said. “And if you want to get even more romantic, I’m sure I could make some surprises for that date this weekend.”

“You’re a terrible person,” Fitz said, he kissed her nose and pulled away so he could back out.

“You love me.”

“To infinity,” Fitz agreed. “And beyond!”


“We aren’t married yet.”

Jemma narrowed her eyes at him, “You won this round on a technicality, Leopold James Fitz.”

“I do love you,” He told her.

She smiled at him warmly, “And I love you, you wazzock.”

“Wazzock?” He admonished her, tutting.

“You called me a ‘sassenach’ the other day, I can call you a ‘wazzock’,” Jemma protested.

“Well, that’s different, you are a sassenach, you’re English and you don’t speak Gaelic, which is the traditional definition-”

“Well then you’d be a sassenach, you don’t speak Gaelic either!” This bickering conversation continued all the way to the Norfolk base.

**Day Fourteen**
That Saturday Fitz and Jemma were going to go on a date. The reservation had been set a week in advance. Jemma had even gone shopping in preparation of the date night, since it had been so long from the last time she went out. She stepped out of the bedroom wearing a black, slim, button-up shirt and dark pink low-rise ankle pants, as well as the only pair of heels she owned, black ones, an inch and a half tall.

“You look nice,” Fitz told her, he was waiting outside.

“As do you,” She nodded to him. He had on a dark blue sports coat with matching slacks and a white oxford shirt. “Shall we?” He offered her his arm. She accepted it and they giggled as they made their way downstairs and to the garage, and into the car.

“So, where are we going?” Jemma asked.

“Byrd and Baldwin Bros,” Fitz answered. “It’s a steakhouse because you’re a closeted carnivore.”

“There’s nothing hidden about my dining habits, I like meat,” Jemma shrugged. “Being a non-consensual vegetarian for six months does that.”

“And freeze-dried space meat doesn’t count.”

“Exactly!” Jemma agreed.

It took a while to find parking, and then they had to walk about a block to the restaurant. They were greeted at the front by the patron, “Do you have a reservation?” He asked.

“Um, 6:00 dinner reservation under the name Fitz,” Fitz said.

“Right this way, sir, ma’am,” The patron brought them to their table. “A waiter will be with you both shortly.”

“Does it have a wine list?” Jemma asked. Fitz handed her a little leather-bound book with WINE printed on the front. She began to look through it. “I just remembered I know absolutely nothing about wine. Can you taste the difference?”
“It’s all bitter grape juice to me,” Fitz shrugged.

Jemma nodded, “I think a red is the best choice, the cheapest bottle being… thirty-six dollars.”

“That’s the cheapest?” Fitz asked.

“You’re the one who picked the fancy place, Applebee’s has a wine list, that was my only criteria. Criteria? Criterion?” She pondered her vocabulary for a moment. “It is a nice venue, I suppose, very historic and fancy.”

“Well, sometimes we deserve historic and fancy, especially when it’s not trying to kill us.”

“We’ll toast to that once we get some wine,” Jemma agreed.

The waiter came over a few moments later. “Hello, my name is Thomas, I will be your server this evening. The recommended wine of the night is the 2007 Araujo Altagracia.”

“Hello Thomas, we’d like the 2014 Rhino, please.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Thomas nodded. “Shall I start you with an appetizer?”

“Do you want an appetizer?” Jemma asked Fitz.

“I mean, I’m very hungry,” Fitz told her.

“Um-” Jemma looked at her menu, “-Let’s have a half dozen of the oysters, please.”

“Yes, ma’am. Red wine and oysters coming right up,” Thomas nodded and left.
“Why oysters? They have shrimp cocktail, I thought you liked shrimp cocktail.”

“Sure,” Jemma agreed. “But the D-aspartic acid and N-methyl-D-aspartate, amino acids found in most mollusks, actually increase testosterone and progesterone levels, and, therefore function as an aphrodisiac.”

“Oh.” Fitz avoided her eyes for a moment.

“Is that okay?” Jemma asked, concerned.

“Well,” Fitz laughed lightly, “You’re very forward, is all. And I’ll admit it’s a little, er, titillating.”

“Fitz, you’re titillated when I interrogate people with decapitated heads, being aroused by my desire to have sex with you shouldn’t be embarrassing.”

“We’re in public, Jemma.”

“So these people will hear the most interesting conversation of their night,” Jemma shrugged.

The waiter returned with oysters and wine, and they ordered their entrees. Jemma got an eight ounce filet mignon with asparagus and lemon hollandaise. Fitz ordered Double Maryland crab cakes. The couple talked about work and recent papers that they had read as they appetized and drank wine. They then ate their main course when it arrived fifteen minutes later. Stomachs splitting, they passed on dessert. They then ate their main course when it arrived fifteen minutes later. Stomachs splitting, they passed on dessert. They split the check, split the tip, and went back to the car. It was seven-forty five. Fitz started to drive them home, but instead of taking the right turn, he continued east to the ocean.

“What’s going on?” Jemma asked. Fitz parked in the parking lot of the Ocean View Beach Park.

“I thought we could have a stroll on the beach,” Fitz suggested.

“Wine and dine at one of the fanciest places in town and then an evening stroll on the beach?” Jemma questioned. “You really went all out on this date.”
“Well, I want to work on moving forward, and I want to make some good, new memories.”

They got out of the car, leaving their shoes, Jemma’s purse, and Fitz’s jacket inside. He gripped both of his pockets to make sure he had the car keys before closing the door. Then they tiptoed across the parking and made their way through the grass on the edge of the beach, before finally reaching the pale sands of the beach itself. The sun set behind them, orange and pink illuminated the west side of the sky, while the east side was a dark, hazy indigo. The ocean was the same color. They walked along the water’s edge, holding hands.

“This is pretty perfect, I have to admit,” Jemma said as they walked. “Thank you for this evening, it was a lovely idea.”

“Yeah,” Fitz agreed. He peered where the water and the sky met at the horizon, a complicated look on his face. “I have something I want to- something that I need to say.”

“What?” Jemma asked. He turned to face her and she followed suit. He opened his mouth and closed it again. “You can tell me anything.”

Fitz nodded, “I’m, um, I’ve been struggling, for a lot of my life, with my self-esteem. You know this. It started with my father, but for as long as I can remember I’ve always struggled with these feelings of uselessness, worthlessness, inadequacy. I’ve felt unloved, and not deserving of love.”

“Fitz-” Jemma started, it obvious in her tone that she wanted to argue with him that he was far from any of those things.

“Can I please continue?” He asked. She conceded with a nod. He continued. “So, when I first met you, I was infatuated. Not the way I am now, it was a lighter, more innocent, more mental sort of attraction. I recognized you were possibly the only person I’d ever meet who was smart like I was. Who could understand my feelings of ostracization in a way no one else could. Plus, you’ve always been this beautiful, vivacious woman. Even at sixteen. But, I didn’t know what to say. Every version in my head ended up with you not liking me. I couldn’t imagine what I could say that was clever enough to impress you. I had a notebook, an actual notebook, full of ideas. Articles I thought you’d like, jokes, even a pickup line, on a whim, if you would have liked that. Ultimately it didn’t matter. We were paired up in chem and, well, we both know what came next. And being your friend, it made me feel less inadequate, less useless, less worthless.

“But uh, then I fell in love with you. I think it actually happened very gradually, or maybe it was the day I first saw you and I didn’t know what I felt. But I realized that I loved you when I watched you fall out of that plane. And my first thought was how… inconvenient it was to you. Isn’t that a
stupid thing to think? I mean, I came to this epiphany that I couldn’t live in a world without you in it. I would only ever desire you. And my first thought was ‘poor Simmons, she’ll be so annoyed by this.’”

“Never,” Jemma said tearfully.

“And the reason,” Fitz continued. “That I thought this was because I couldn’t imagine a world where you reciprocated. You know? I thought that you would only ever see me as a friend. I was fine with that, because being your friend was an honor in itself. Which is- which is why at the bottom of the ocean, I forced you to take the oxygen. Because what purpose did I have if you weren’t-” He was crying now too, she brushed his tears away and nodded for him to go on. “And then I was damaged. And you left. And I know- I know you left because you were trying to help me and protect me, but my mind wouldn’t let me see it that way. I just… I scared you off with my confession. After all, I didn’t expect to live. And- and I sort of saw it as this finite conclusion that I’d always have this empty, bleeding heart. And when you tried to reconnect after all our miscommunication and confusion, when we were finally friends again, it was all I could have hoped for. So when you said you wanted to talk about what happened at the bottom of the ocean. When you said ‘maybe there is’- I couldn’t process it. I didn’t… I was supposed to be saving the world but I must have rehearsed asking you on a date the entire way there and the entire way back.”

“And then I got sucked up to Maveth.”

“Which wasn’t your fault, none of it was your fault. But it was an opportunity that I took to let myself feel inadequate again. It was this… insecurity I have telling me that I wasn’t good enough for you. But I wanted you to be happy, regardless of what that meant.”

“That means you,” Jemma told him.

He smiled and nodded, “I know. I know now. Because you know, we took it slow when I got back from that awful place. Well, we tried to take it slow. And things were good, and we were happy. Apartment shopping and secure in our jobs. And that summer was one of the happiest I’ve had since Academy. Even though we were all worried about Daisy, it was simpler. And then I made some mistakes.”

“Fitz, if you’re talking about Radcliffe and her -”

“AIDA, yes,” Fitz nodded. “She’s not Voldemort, Jemma, you can say her name. And she was a mistake. I’m not saying it was one I did intentionally. Hindsight is twenty-twenty, after all. I
caused pain with what I created, and then inside the framework, I caused more. Because of that, I felt like I didn’t deserve to be loved by anyone, and definitely not you. It compounded and, Daisy was right, I nearly lost myself. But I didn’t. I didn’t, because every moment you fought for me. And… that world was too real for me to wake up from, but I don’t think that was the point. You went in, for me, not knowing what to expect. You protected me in there, from SHIELD, even if when I was that thing. You believed in me even after I killed Agnes and Director Mace, and even when I held a gun to your head. And when I was suffocating in more self-loathing than I ever had at the bottom of the ocean, you were there. You held me, you let me cry, you let me heal, you reminded me who I was. You fought for me so hard and so passionately, I realized it wasn’t up for me to decide whether or not I deserved you. You got to decide who was worthy of your heart, who you fought for, who you loved. And, despite everything I had done, you still loved me and believed in me. And if you are as amazing as you are, and your wonderful mind and beautiful heart could love me so deeply, maybe I wasn’t that bad after all. Maybe I’m not worthless and useless, because you see something in me worthy of your love.”

“Fitz, you have always been a good man,” Jemma told him. “You have always been exemplary, sometimes I feel like I don’t deserve you.”

Fitz nodded, and he put on of his hands in his pocket, “I have a question for you, in light of all this. Because it’s your choice, right? Not mine. It’s your choice if you love me, it’s your choice if I deserve your love. And it’s your choice how I fit into your future. And I hope- God, Jemma, I hope that you decide that your future and my future… they’re our future, together, as one.” Fitz took his hand from his pocket, except he was holding something. A little black velvet box.

“Yes,” Jemma gasped out the words before she could stop herself.

“I haven’t asked you yet!” Fitz said indignantly.

“I’m sorry, continue,” Jemma said.

Fitz nodded and dropped to one knee, opening the box. “Jemma Anne Simmons, you are everything to me. And so I ask you here, now, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?”

“Yes,” Jemma said, nodding, tears rolling down her cheeks. She held out her left hand and he slid the ring onto her finger. Once it was on, she stared at it for a moment before launching herself on her kneeling fiancé. They fell backward into the sand. Her lips found him and she kissed him with all the passion she could muster. His hands splayed across her back and hers curled through his hair. They laid in the sand, kissing until the sun finally set. The world was dark blue, the stars twinkling above them.
“I would love to continue this,” Jemma whispered against Fitz’s lips a few minutes later. “But believe it or not, I don’t want to get sand in unfortunate places. Do you mind if we hurry home.”

“That’s a great idea,” Fitz said. She crawled off of him and helped him stand and they all but ran back to the car. Driving home was a little tense for both of them. They hoped that they wouldn’t lose the desire that oysters, proposals, and beach make out sessions had inspired in them. They parked in the garage and went upstairs, holding hands.

They went down the hall, to the master bedroom, and closed the door. They lived alone, but it was a force of habit. They kissed quickly a few times. Their mouths collided as they kicked off their shoes and pushed further into the room. Jemma’s hands left her fiancé’s face and pulled his blazer from his shoulders. She untucked his shirt and her fingers worked at the buttons. She unbuttoned his shirt quickly and precisely. This was somehow too slow for either of them. Once she finally undid his top button, she wrenched his shirt off. Her hands pressed and palmed against his warm, lean figure. She always admired his body. It was toned muscle, soft skin, and always burned like a furnace. Fitz ran his hands down her back, gripping and kneading her rear. She gasped and moaned against his lips. She gripped his shoulders so her nails dug into his skin. She kissed him deeper as if she was trying to meld their mouths into one.

Fitz broke away for a moment, and whispered, “You’re overdressed,” against her lips.

She kissed him quickly and then let go, pushing him back by the chest with one hand so he sat down on the bed. She began to unbutton her own shirt. She did so slowly. She watched him as his eyes transfixed on every inch of creamy, smooth skin that was revealed. She shrugged her shirt of her shoulders, revealing a black, lacy bra, underneath.

“Is that new?” Fitz asked.

Jemma smiled, eyes glinting with mischief. She nodded. She unbuttoned her slacks and kicked them off of her legs. Fitz noticed she had matching cheeky panties too. “Now,” Jemma said, still smiling from how his eyes darted around her exposed body. He was cataloging everything like it was the first time, “You’re the one who’s overdressed.”

She stepped forwards, swinging her hips, and dropped to her knees where he sat on the bed. She ran one of her hands from his knee up his thigh, brushing it against the bulge in his trousers. She reached for his belt buckle and unfastened it. She pulled it away from him and tossed it to the floor with a clatter. She undid his fly and button slowly, delicately. She ran her hands up and down his lean torso once more, before curling her fingers in the waistband of his slacks. He lifted his hips so she could yank the pants down his legs. She leaned across his lap and kissed him again, nipping his lips as she pulled away. He whimpered as she grabbed him through his boxers.
“Is it alright if I-?” She snapped the waistband as if she were asking for permission.

“Yeah, yeah,” he nodded, breathless whispers all he could manage with the anticipation.

She kissed him again and pulled off his last article of clothing. He sighed with relief, no longer painfully confined. She touched him, her hands ran up the insides of his thighs before lightly gripping his cock. She gave it a full, slow pump. He shivered and clenched his fists. Her thumb brushed across the tip a few times, making his toes curl. Then she bent her head down and pressed a light kiss to it. He shuddered.

“You don’t have to-” Fitz began.

“Believe me, I want to,” Jemma assured him, her voice was heavy with arousal.

“If you do this-” He warned her.

“I know your limits,” Jemma told him. Her breath glanced across the head of his cock, making resisting her all that harder. “I can stop if you want to last longer.”

“Well, I just want to take care of you,” Fitz told her.

“I assure you, you’re going to take care of me just fine,” Jemma said.

He licked his lips and nodded. She bent her head down again, kissing the head gently. She continued downwards. He rolled his head back as he felt the head of his cock enveloped in her mouth. She was slow, torturously slow, and he felt his heartbeat with all the blood rushing between his legs. She massaged with her hands what her mouth couldn’t envelope until she reached the base. She began to lift her head, her mouth going back up his length, until she released with a soft pop. She did it again, the same slow movements, down and up his cock. Down and up. Her hands would brush against the inside of his thighs, his testicles. Sometimes, between cycles down and up, she would brush her tongue along his slit or up his length. Each time, a jolt of electric heat pulsed through him, and he could feel his cock twitch in her grasp. All these sensations contributed to heat building in the pit of his stomach. He realized, after a while, that the entire time he had been gasping, grunting and groaning. He lost track of certain thoughts, and soon his mind was overcome with nothing but feelings. Like how he felt an insatiable pressure building and building and-
All the sensations and all the pleasure stopped abruptly. He felt empty from the lack of touch. Fitz let out a long, dejected sigh, “You’re terrible.”

“I’m only doing what you asked,” Jemma said innocently.

Fitz forgave her, mostly because he realized it was part of her game. And he could play dirty, too. “You are a terrible, awful, amazing woman,” Fitz told her. She kissed him again. He would be lying if he tried to say he wasn’t aroused by the salt on her lips that came from him. “You’re also overdressed.”

“Well, you’ll have to undress me,” Jemma whispered back.

Jemma leaned forwards and crawled over him as he leaned backwards on the bed. Her lips found his as soon as she could reach, and she continued to move over him. Soon they were lying down, Jemma on top of him, their feet dangled off the edge of the bed. Fitz rolled them over so there were no dangling feet, and he was leaning above her. The kiss broke when he sat up and she followed suit. He gripped her waist and kissed her jaw lightly, his hands ran up her back and unclasped her bra. He had experience with that part, especially in the last few months. Taking off her bra was the slower action. His hands ran along her back, her shoulder blades, as he gently tugged down her straps. He kissed her neck, and he could feel her pulse hammering in her carotid artery, against his lips. He was kissing the junction between her neck and shoulder when he finally pulled her bra down and off to the side. His lips left her. She whined. Then, she gasped as he touched her breasts. It started too gently. She was breathing heavily as his callused hands caressed her chest, the tops and the sides of her breasts. He seemed to recognize her growing hunger for his touch. He brushed his thumbs across her aerolas. She shivered and arched her back, moaning quietly. He lowered his head to her chest and kissed her breasts. Then he focused on one and took that nipple into his mouth. She stifled a louder moan. Now, things were building as he was getting harder. Sucking and rolling one with his mouth, pinching and rubbing the other with his fingers. The growing pulse of pleasure in her nipples caused the tension in her abdomen and the throbbing heat between her legs to build. Fitz must have known how much she was progressing, because he slowed and ceased. He ran his hands down her body and brushed her hips, to remove her panties.

“That won’t be necessary,” Jemma said, her voice was rough with desire. Fitz looked at her inquisitively. She opened her legs, letting him see that her panties lacked a crotch. He could see her dark hair, framing her own sex, which was visibly glistening. “Cue Fitz gasping,” She whispered. He did, he gasped.

“You were wearing those all night?” He asked timidly. She smiled and nodded. His expression was dreamy. He adjusted all his memories of the car rides, dinner, evening strolls, and the proposal. A wave of heat rolled over him.
“By all means, continue,” She requested. He nodded and leaned his torso between her legs. She shivered as she felt wisps of his breath against her inner thighs.

After a few tense seconds, he made contact. His tongue lapped against the insides of her already wet labia. It ran up her slit, and she gasped. He did it again, harder, and she gasped again, harder. The third time was slow. His lips and tongue against her, at her labia, at her entrance. She kept gasping and panting until he put his lips on her clitoris and she finally let out a long moan. He would alternate between pressing, sucking, and gently rubbing her nub. She kept moaning. The throbbing heat, pressure, tension, and anticipation was building. Every time she felt herself settling with the sensations, he changed. Once she started feeling slightly comfortable with that pace, he inserted a finger into her vagina and began to press against her walls. She became undone more and more. Soon, he added a second finger, and began to dig and press and curl his fingers inside of her as he thrust them inside of her. He curled them around a special, rough spot, she moaned out his name. She was at the point where the slightest breath of air could have pushed her over the edge and brought her to orgasm. But instead, it all ended abruptly.

“Not fair,” She groaned.

“Now, we’re even,” Fitz told her. He began to move up her body, his hands caressing her flesh.

Somehow, this little competition was keeping her stimulated. She let out an odd noise, a cross between a scoff and a chuckle. Then, she kissed him when his mouth was in proximity. She tasted herself, and a ripple of heat passed through her again.

“Now, my could my dear fiancé, please, stick his cock in me?” Jemma asked him as they broke away.

He smiled at her, “With pleasure.” He kissed her. Jemma laid down on the bed, her hair fanned out around her. Fitz centered himself above her, his hips between her knees. “Ready?” Fitz asked.

“Yes,” Jemma nodded. He grabbed his cock with one hand, positioned it, and moved forwards until he was completely inside of her. She gasped and he groaned. It was the feeling both of them had been aching for since they had collapsed in the sand together, not an hour ago. Her heat surrounded him, he could feel her muscles fluttering. Meanwhile, she was feeling stretched, as she adjusted to his girth. Fitz went to move, but Jemma crossed her legs around his arse, pushed against the bed, and flipped them over. So now, Fitz was splayed out with his back to the bed, and she was sitting above him, grinding down on him, still inside of her.
“You could’ve asked to change positions,” Fitz told her, but he was amused.

“But my way was more fun,” Jemma argued.

Fitz conceded, especially because she kissed him soundly. She began to roll her hips slowly, letting them rise and fall. She gripped his face and kissed him deeper. He caressed his hands down her back, stopping and centering them at her hips. He guided her movements, pushing and pulling her hips against him. Each stroke sent another bolt of pleasure through both of them. He would push her hips away as she lifted them, until he was barely inside of her anymore. Then he would pull her hips forward as she lowered them, having her sink onto him all the way to the base. As she came down, her breath would always hitch as she would grind her clitoris into his pelvis. The pleasure from this cycle built, a pleasant, heavy, burning sensation. He was throbbing inside of her. Their skin that was in contact burned against each other in the most delightful way, and she needed more. Her right hand went between her legs and teased her clitoris. Jemma pulled away from the kiss so she could gaze at him. His eyes were closed, his brow was furrowed, his lips were parted, sweat dripped down his forehead. She had seen his face in the throes of pleasure before, but there was always something erotic about it. The most arousing thing was her hand and his cheek, where an engagement ring glimmered.

“Fitz, Fitz, Oh, God, Fitz, Fitz,” Jemma was moaning with every roll of her hips.

“Jemma, Fuck, Jemma, Jemma,” Fitz groaned her name out at the same pace.

His hips began to buck involuntarily, hers would grind onto him out of sync. Soon their controlled movements became more and more erratic. Every sensation sent tendrils of white hot fire through their veins. There was a roaring in their ears, the lights were blindingly bright, and every moan and gasp from the other just increased the fierce tension. The tension was overwhelming, their only thought was how to just feel a little but more so the dam could burst. Jemma finally came. Her mind went blank, she arched her back and cried out “Fitz!”, her walls clenching around him. With a final throb, he followed suit. The pressure that had been building all night finally released into her. She collapsed onto his chest and rolled away so she was beside him on the bed. He turned his head to gaze at her, and she set her left hand on his cheek once more. The sight of the man she loved and the ring he had given to her jolted her.

“I love you,” Fitz told her.

“I love you,” Jemma replied. “That was fun,” She laid her head on his chest. He brushed a lock of hair away from her face. Every inch of their skin was sticky. “Having sex, with my fiancé, whom I adore.”
“Yes,” Fitz agreed.

“I need to take a shower, do some bathroom things,” Jemma told him. “Although, um, you can join me in a bit, if you want,” She smiled and kissed him. She crawled off the bed and making her way to the bathroom. He gave her a few minutes, waiting until after he heard the toilet flush and the shower turn on. Then he followed her into the bathroom. They got to be satisfied several more times over the course of that night.
Jemma was in her office, waiting because she had a meeting in a few minutes and not much else to do. She had decided not to wear her ring on her finger at work. She wasn’t ready to share it with the world, realizing now why Fitz wasn’t ready to talk about their home. Instead, it was on a chain tucked under her shirt. At the moment, however, it wasn’t on the chain, it was in her hands, as she kept staring at it. She must have memorized what it looked like but that didn’t stop her from looking at it again. It was white gold, the main diamond set in a vaulted cathedral-style frame. Each side of the main stone had a small blue sapphire, a small white sapphire, and a small blue sapphire descending the band in that order. The main diamond was a clean, glittering, white cushion cut. It was very much her style, and Jemma couldn’t stop staring at it. There was a knock on her door, she dropped her hand with the ring in it so it was under her desk and said, “Come in.”

It was Dr. Ariel McAllister. She was so much taller in real life. Between her being over six feet tall, and wearing heels, she was a towering figure.

“Oh, Dr. McAllister. I mean, Ariel, sorry,” Jemma greeted her. “Is today your first day?”

“Yeah, I just came here by submarine,” Ariel nodded. “This place definitely has all the secrecy of a spy school.”

“Well, I suppose that’s what we were going for,” Jemma smiled. She slipped her ring in the pocket of her pants and stood up. “I have a meeting with the directors of the other divisions in five minutes, but I can walk and talk.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean to be intruding or anything, I just wanted to meet my boss in person,” Ariel said. “Um, so, I run the psychology department?”

“Yes, meaning you’re responsible for finding all the other faculty members. It’ll be one of the documents in your welcome packet. It’s the division’s goal to be completely staffed by July fifteenth, which is in three weeks.”

“I’ll get to work right away,” Ariel nodded. “Do people live here, on the base?”
“We have residential levels, but they’re mainly for the students. Most of the faculty either have purchased homes somewhere in the Norfolk area or live on the naval base in a temporary residence,” Jemma explained.

“So, you live on the base?”

“I actually bought a house recently,” Jemma said. “I do recommend finding somewhere to live as soon as possible. Most of our professors do, the base is a little hard for former civilians to get used to.” Jemma was outside the meeting room, “Well, I have to go. It was nice to see you, Ariel, I hope you settle in well.”

“Likewise, Dr. Simmons,” Ariel nodded.

“Jemma, please,” Jemma smiled, and then she headed inside.

The directors of the academic divisions were Coulson, for communications. May, for operations. And Jemma, for science and technology. There was also the director of students and admissions, named David Purcell.

“Oh, good, right on time, Jemma,” Purcell nodded. “I have the final list of students for the first year of SHIELD academy.” He handed her a heavy stack of files. “These are the SciTech students.”

“How many?” Jemma asked.

“Eighty-six,” Purcell said. “Pretty impressive for a first year, I think. We have a hundred and nineteen in comms and ninety-three in operations.”

“Nearly three hundred students,” Jemma nodded. “Yes, I suppose for the first year, that is impressive.

“So, right now, it’s our job to work on scheduling,” Purcell explained. “Talbot at the execs want for this to be a two-year program.”
“Two years?” Jemma asked. “You can’t two years? SHIELD Academy before lasted four to six, depending on the amount of training required. You can’t train a SHIELD agent in two years. Not in any environment short of one-on-one.”

“I know it’s unreasonable, there is some talk of extending it to three, but this it the cards we’ve been dealt with.”

“And we can’t increase the faculty at all? Make the class sizes smaller?”

“I’m afraid not, ma’am. If you want to make the class sizes smaller we’ll have to pack the schedules.”

“We’re not doing that,” Jemma shook her head. “We promised all the professors they only had to teach four blocks, so they’re only going to teach four blocks.”

“We could increase the hours on the associate professors and instructors?” Coulson suggested. “Move them from four to five?”

“It could work,” Jemma agreed. “But if we do that we’re not doing a pay cut, they still get the same rate per hour, and they’ll just get paid more of the extra hours.”

Other than the radical bombshell of having to cut the time of the Academy program in half but still have equally trained cadets, the rest of Jemma’s day was pretty simple. She did paperwork, sent some emails, and approved some associate professors. She met up with her fiancé - still giddy about that - and they went home.

“I don’t want to get married during the academic year,” Jemma explained. “And I don’t want to wait until next summer.”

“What do you mean?” Fitz asked.

“Would you be alright with getting married in July or August?”
“In a month?” Fitz questioned. “I mean, yeah, I’d drive to New Jersey and marry you right now. But I thought we agreed we ought to have a ceremony for our friends and family.”

“And we should. Which means, well, we need to send invitations now,” Jemma said. “I don’t know, maybe during winter break.”

“Well, we want to get married in Perthshire, we talked about that,” Fitz said. “Do you want to go to Northern Scotland in the winter?”

“Fair point,” Jemma nodded. “Alright, so, I’ll order some invitations online tonight and we’ll have to call our parents, early in the morning.”

Day Eighteen

They woke up at four in the morning and texted their parents that they needed to call them. They had breakfast and waited. Their parents figured out how the three households could do a conference call on the laptops. It was quicker and easier to talk to both of them.

The laptop was on the coffee table. Jemma was drinking her tea and Fitz was troubleshooting with her father. Finally, the computer blipped, and the two windows appeared. One-half of the screen had Jemma’s parents cramped in her father’s home office. The other half of the screen was Fitz’s mother in her kitchen.

“Hi, Mum,” Jemma said. “Dad, Mrs. Fitz.”

“Mum,” Fitz nodded. “Mr. and Mrs. Simmons.”

“Oh, hello Jules, Malcolm,” Fitz’s mother greeted Jemma’s parents.

“Ruth!” They both smiled. Their parents knew each other, of course. When your children become best friends and work at a spy agency together, you tend to stay in touch.

“Not that we don’t love the call,” Julianne Simmons, Jemma’s mother, said. “But, um, what’s going on? Usually, you only face-call when there’s something big. You know, like when you
bought the house.”

“Well, we do have something big,” Jemma explained. She showed her hand to the camera. The glittering white and blue ring. The speakers whined as both mothers were screaming incoherently, voices overlapping.

“When are you-”

“How big is-

“When did you-”

“How did you-”

“Expensive-”

“Where did you-”

“Why now?”

“Mum!” Fitz and Jemma both exclaimed.

“Sorry, honey, we’re excited,” Jemma’s mother said.

“He proposed this weekend,” Jemma said. “Although we’ve been talking about it, hypothetically, for almost a year now. He proposed on the beach, at sunset.”

“Well, my son is a romantic,” Ruth Fitz said proudly.

“Um, as for the wedding, that’s why we called. With our jobs, we’ll be starting a project in September and we won’t be able to fly out.”
“Fly out? You mean you want to get married in Britain?” Jemma’s father asked hopefully.

“Yes,” Jemma nodded. “Um, so, that means the wedding will be, well we decided on August first. We’ll be sending out the invitations this weekend after we get a guest list. We were hoping that it would be a small ceremony—”

All the parents laughed loudly. Jemma’s voice died in her throat.

Ruth Fitz explained, “I have several siblings with many children. And from what I know from Jules, the Simmons aren’t a small clan either. And then there are family friends, I’m sure Malcolm has to invite certain people from Roxxon. Not to mention your friends and coworkers.”

“Yes, but—” Jemma sighed. “We were hoping for a small ceremony, the reception can be huge, will be, huge.”

“Perhaps we can compromise?” Julianne Simmons asked.

“Mum, that is a compromise, we’re doing this for you, Fitz and I are both fine eloping.”

“Alright,” Malcolm Simmons nodded. “Fine. We’ll get a list together and email the two of you later today so you can start addressing invitations. Oh, Jemma, you have to invite Mason and his new girlfriend.”

“I’ll invite Mason,” Jemma said coolly.

“Mason, is that your brother, Jemma?” Ruth Fitz asked. “I remember Fitz mentioned him. Isn’t he a lawyer?”

“He’s part of Roxxon’s legal team,” Malcolm said proudly.

“Well, if he’s half as smart as your daughter, Roxxon is lucky to have him,” Ruth Fitz smiled.
“Thank you, Ruth,” Julianne Simmons smiled. “Jemma, he’s been seeing this girl for a few months, almost six, now. He loves her, and I think she’s going to stick. A lot happened when you were gone for that year doing whatever classified things you do. Your brother grew up.”

Jemma nodded, “If you think she’s worth it, fine.”

“Good,” Julianne Simmons nodded. “So, where is the wedding going to be?”

“Well, we were looking at places in Perthshire,” Jemma explained. “Um, Blair Castle, Atholl Palace?”

“That’s a bit expensive, Leopold,” Ruth Fitz advised her son.

“Not a problem,” Malcolm Simmons assured her. “We can cover all the wedding costs. After Jemma went to Oxford, all the spare change went to the wedding fund. We must have about fifty thousand pounds saved up.”

“We’ve been waiting her entire life for her special day,” Julianne said proudly.

“Yep,” Jemma popped the “p”, clearly not as enthusiastic about weddings as her parents.

The conversation soon dawdled and the couple insisted that they had to get to work, even though they still had an hour. They said goodbye to their mothers and Jemma’s father and heaved a sigh when the laptop closed.

“Ugh,” Jemma leaned back. “I love my parents, I do, but what was draining.”

Fitz kissed her hair and took her left hand in his, he stroked her knuckles and gazed at the ring on her finger.

“I don’t know what’ll be more exhausting. Telling them or telling the team,” Jemma sighed. “They’re all coming this Saturday. Coulson and May are asking me about why the venue is a residential address.”
“Some spies they are,” Fitz snorted.

“I think May knows and is playing dumb in solidarity with Coulson,” Jemma pondered aloud. “But nobody knows about this, yet,” She looked at her ring. “I like being your fiancée, I wish I could be longer.”

“Yeah,” Fitz agreed. “But soon, you’ll be my wife, and that might be better.”

“Probably,” Jemma agreed.

Day Twenty

“Hey, Jemma,” Coulson called out, Jemma was on her way out, it was Friday, and she was ready to leave the Academy. “I had a question about the party this Saturday.”

“Look, if it's about the location, just use the address-”

“No, May’s just going to drive. My question is about the dress code. Like, is there one?”

“I- I haven’t really thought about it, wear what you wear to dinner parties. You know, something sort of nice, but not like you’re trying to impress?”

“Well, I mean, I don’t want to dress like I’m going to work,” Coulson said. His work clothes were still suits, although he often left out the tie.

“Well, then, don’t?” Jemma shrugged. “I really don’t care how you dress sir. You can wear a Hawaiian shirt if you want to, sir.”

“Okay, thanks for clearing that up, Jemma,” Coulson smiled. “See you tomorrow.”

“See you tomorrow,” Jemma stopped herself from saying ‘sir,’ “Coulson.” She continued to the
minisub docking area. Fitz was waiting for her.

“Hey,” He said.

“Sorry, I’m late, Karen had last minute paperwork and then Coulson wanted to ask about the dress code.”

Fitz snorted, “I mean, you’re particular, Jemma, so maybe he thought-”

“I’ve never given a dress code to a friendly gathering,” Jemma rolled her eyes. “I just expect for people to act as they perceive to be socially acceptable.”

“Well, considering the fact that you color-code the agenda for meetings in the SciTech division, I can see where his doubt lies,” Fitz told her. She frowned at him and lightly punched his shoulder. “Ow!” Fitz said dramatically. “The pain!” He slumped down the wall, “It’s broken, my shoulder! I shall never move my arm again!”

“Don’t be an arse,” Jemma scoffed. “Do you want to go home, or what?” She scanned her card and the door to the submarine docking station opened. Fitz hurried back to his feet and followed her through the doorway.

**Day Twenty-One**

In five minutes, their friends would arrive. Jemma was anxious. She rearranged the vase of daisies on the dining room table. She checked to make sure the lasagna was still warm. She peered out onto the street. She spun her engagement ring a few times. She stacked and restacked the magazines on the coffee table. They were arranged by date of publication. Maybe they should instead be arranged alphabetically and in order of edition?

“Jemma,” Fitz said calmly from the couch where he sat, watching her nest, “Everything is alright, Jemma. Nobody cares about the order of the magazines.”

“I’m sorry, I’ve just been so anxious.”
Fitz looked up at her with an oddly endeared expression, he motioned for her to sit down beside him. She did. He took her hands in his. “I know that you have some anxiety because we haven’t seen Daisy or Mack or Elena in person for months. I know you’re stressing about the wedding and telling them, and how they’ll react. And I know the recent developments at work aren’t making your life any easier. But we’re here to spend time with our friends, and relax, alright?” Fitz asked.

Jemma gazed up at him, smiling thankfully, “Why are you so perfect?” Jemma asked.

“I’m far from perfect,” Fitz told her.

“In your eyes,” Jemma reminded him. It was his turn to smile thankfully. “Can I please just check our stock of libations?”

“You can count the beer,” Fitz agreed. Jemma kissed him quickly on the cheek and went over to the refrigerator. She closed the refrigerator doors after assuring herself they had enough cheap beer and wine to sate their friends. Then the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Jemma exclaimed, practically knocking over a dining chair to hurry to the door. Fitz let her past. She smoothed out her floral, ruffled blouse and opened the door. It was Daisy. Jemma launched herself onto the inhuman, hugging her tightly.

“Missed you too,” Daisy laughed, hugging her back. “Mack and Elena are right behind me.”

“Look at you,” Jemma gasped, pulling away. Daisy’s hair was a tousled bob again. She was wearing a black jumpsuit with wide legs and a sparkly belt. Exactly what Jemma expected from a celebrity superhero. “You changed your hair, it’s shorter again. Suits you.”

“Look at you,” Daisy rebutted. “I haven’t seen you wear something so girly and bright in ages. And you’re glowing. Also, did you get highlights? Your hair is lighter.”

“The sun,” Jemma shook her head. “Fitz and I go to the beach at least once a week. It’s just a ten-minute walk from here.”

“‘Here’ being the home you’re renting?”
“‘Here’ being the home we purchased,” Jemma said, smiling. “My parents helped cover the down payment but we have a decently steady and frugal mortgage.”

“Okay, so, you and Fitz bought a house. Speaking of Fitz-?”

“He’s inside,” Jemma let Daisy in, just as she saw Mack and Elena park their car and come up to the house.

Daisy made a beeline for her friend and hugged him, “How are you doing, Fitz?”

“I’m doing well, Daisy,” Fitz assured her. “I haven’t had anyone try to kill me for three months, so it has been pretty boring, actually. Especially because I live here with Jemma. She doesn’t let me do anything fun.”

“I can hear you!” Jemma called as Mack enveloped her in a hug. He and Elena had brought a cake. Jemma half-hugged Elena as they traded over the cake, which Jemma put in the fridge. Mack and Elena hugged Fitz. As Jemma walked over to join the conversation, she crossed her arms and tucked away her ring hand.

“Where’s May and Coulson?” Mack asked.

“On their way, I’m sure,” Jemma said. “They’re living on the naval base.”

“Meanwhile, FitzSimmons here bought a house. Mortgage and everything,” Daisy said proudly.

“Pretty big for two people,” Elena said, looking at the couple inquisitively. As if daring them to guess what her next question may be.

“Two people,” Jemma assured her.

“Yeah, about that, I’ve been meaning to tell you, a goblin lives in our attic,” Fitz joked.

The doorbell rang again, Jemma went to open it.
“You have a house?” Coulson asked loudly.

“Phil,” May said calmly.

“Those two bought a house in the suburbs and didn’t tell us,” Coulson protested. “How long have you been living here?”

“A bit over a month,” Jemma said apologetically. “We just wanted a little bit of time to have a place for ourselves, sorry if we offended you.”

“I’m impressed you kept it from us for so long. We’re spies,” May said. “Maybe you ought to teach a class at the academy how to separate personal and professional lives. You know, to the point where your closest friends have no idea you made major financial decisions.”

“Look, May, I said I’m sorry,” Jemma said.

“We brought pie,” Coulson handed Jemma a pie-shaped object wrapped in tin foil. “I expect a full tour, Simmons.”

“Yes, sir,” Jemma nodded. She put the pie in the refrigerator. “Now that we’re all here, I think that’s a lovely idea. So, as you can see, we have an open floor plan for the kitchen, dining, living and entrance room. To the right of the door are the stairs leading upstairs. Over here, we have the half bath, and then our office, and through that door is the enclosed porch. Big glass windows, and a perfect view of the backyard and the sunrise.”

“No grill in the backyard?” Mack asked. “C’mon, Turbo, half of the suburban experience is backyard barbecue.”

“We just focused on the essentials for now,” Fitz shrugged. “Essentials, and some thrifty decor.”

Jemma continued, “In the garage is our car, eco-friendly sedan, and Fitz’s workshop which he never uses.”
“I’ll use it when I have a project that requires it,” Fitz rolled his eyes.

“A cupboard under the stairs with some shoes, and a poster of Harry Potter,” Jemma showed them.

“Nerds,” Daisy declared.

“And then, upstairs is the master bedroom, master bath, two spare bedrooms, and a second bathroom,” Jemma shrugged, looking upstairs. “Oh, and the descending ladder to the attic, which is for storage, not that we have a lot to store.” Jemma motioned above their heads with both her hands.

“What’s that on your hand?” Daisy asked.

“My hand?” Jemma played dumb, looking at her right hand.

“No, the left one,” Daisy marched over and lifted her hand up triumphantly. “That’s an engagement ring.”

“Really?” Jemma gasped sarcastically.

“How long have you been keeping that from us?” May asked.

“Just a week,” Jemma assured her. Daisy squealed and hugged Jemma.

“When are you getting married?” Daisy asked. “Are we invited?”

“Yes, Of course,” Jemma nodded. “And, August first. Which is very soon, but we wanted to go before either of our birthdays, or the term at Academy started.

Fitz went over to the living room and pulled some invitations from one of the coffee table drawers. He handed each of them an invitation.
Coulson read the invitation aloud, “Jemma Anne Simmons and Leopold James Fitz invite you on Wednesday, August First, 2018, to join them at Blair Castle in Pitlochry, Perthshire, Scotland, for their marriage ceremony and wedding reception. RSVP by July Fifteenth, 2018. Fill out the required information inside the invitation. And the secrecy clause on behalf of United Nations.’ You’re sending this to your families?”

“Sort of have to, considering the amount of SHIELD agents there,” Fitz shrugged.

“And for the reception, our parents are insisting a full house. They want to invite extended family and distant cousins. In my case, a few smaller politicians, and corporate gurus,” Jemma said. “But we’re doing our best to keep the ceremony itself smaller, just close relatives and friends.”

“Elena,” Daisy called her over. “Look at how pretty this ring is.” Daisy was still proudly presenting Jemma’s engagement ring.

“How long has Fitz been saving up for that?” Elena asked.

“A while,” Fitz admitted. “The ring itself I bought from an online jewelry company but the center gem itself, I made from scratch.”

“Is that why you kept blowing things up in the engineering labs?” Jemma asked.

Fitz nodded.

“Aww, that’s romantic in a weird way,” Daisy cooed,

“Now that we’ve had a tour and got to catch up on FitzSimmons’ impending nuptials, can we please eat?” Mack asked.

“Great idea!” Jemma said, wrenching her hand away from Daisy. “Sit down, I have a lasagna and garlic bread staying warm in the oven. Also, wine or beer?”

There was an uncoordinated chorus of responses. Jemma got to work on satisfying them and Fitz prepped the plates of food.
“So, Daisy, we saw you on TV last week,” Coulson said. “Late night television and superheroes, not a mix I was expecting.”

“Talbot has these PR people trying to rebuild my image, y’know, after he accused me of killing Mace,” Daisy shrugged. “They want SHIELD to have an accredited superheroes again.”

“I heard a rumor,” May nodded. “Do you think that means SHIELD might open up a superhero training facility?”

“If they do, I hope it’s not at the Academy. We’re busy enough as it is trying to train non-enhanced humans how to be SHIELD agents in two years,” Jemma shook her head.

“I thought Academy lasted four to six years?” Mack asked.

“Yes, well, they’ve decided we’re going to be doing the Academy Express,” Jemma was derisive.

“Jemma’s not too pleased,” Fitz announced.

“We don’t have enough faculty to ensure we have properly trained agents in two years,” Jemma said. “We’re loading hours on the associate professors. So it’s harder for us to find people for those positions. Not to mention how stressful it will be for the students.”

“We do our best,” May told her. “And one of two things will happen. Either we revolutionize agent training. We end up having a successful and rapid training program for SHIELD agents. Or, we don’t do too well. Then we’ll be evaluated by the higher-ups and you can rant all you want about how they set us up for failure.”

“May is right,” Coulson said.

“Of course I’m right,” May replied.

“Humble much?” Coulson asked.
“You know me well enough to know I don’t do humble,” May told him. “And as I recall, you weren’t complaining-”

“May!” Coulson whispered.

“Is something happening?” Daisy asked.

“Yes, but they’ll have you believe it isn’t,” Jemma said. “Superspies, they are, and yet we’re the ones who have a secret house.”

They continued to talk and catch up throughout the night. After lasagna, they had cake and pie. They moved out to the sunroom to eat it.

“So, Jemma, anybody interesting at the Academy?” Daisy asked, after having finished talking about three of the latest inhumans. “There have to be some characters.”

“Well, it has some of the most talented scientists on this planet-”

“You can talk about McAllister,” Fitz told his fiancée.

“Someone’s making Fitz jealous,” Daisy teased.

“Ariel McAllister is the head of our psychology department,” Fitz said. “And yeah, Jemma’s half in love with her.”

Jemma rolled her eyes. “She and I have a lot in common as women. Young, smart, brilliant, trying to settle down after an exciting life. Her parents are both British. She’s just two years younger than I am. She went to Harvard. She’s written psychology profiles on some of the greatest domestic criminals of our time. And she worked with the FBI and CIA.”

“Like I said, half in love.”
“I have respect for her as a woman and a colleague and she’s a nice conversation,” Jemma said. “You would like her too, you have the same sense of humor.”

“Well, she’s part-Scottish, Jemma, all of us have the same sense of humor,” Fitz joked.

“Really? All Scottish people?” Jemma asked. “I’m going to go clean up, does anyone want to give me their plate?” They handed her plates and glasses.

“I’ll help,” Daisy sprung up and took some of her load. They went to the kitchen together. “So, personal question, can I borrow a tampon?”

“Oh, yeah, sure!” Jemma nodded. They put the dishes in the dishwasher. Jemma took her upstairs to the master bedroom and master bathroom.

“Is that a king size bed? You need all that space?” Daisy asked.

“I’ll admit, buying a house with three bedrooms and getting a king size bed? it wasn’t completely without thoughts to the future,” Jemma said.

“Have you and Fitz talked about kids?” Daisy asked.

“No, we’ve been trying to settle into normal. Still, a girl can dream, can’t she?” Jemma asked. She ducked into the bathroom and handed Daisy her last box, which only had a few left.

“Can I say-” Daisy asked before they went back. “-That you and Fitz would have the cutest, smartest, chubbiest babies? Like, the best babies. I’d want your babies.”

Jemma smiled. “Thanks, I think.”
Sorry, this took a while. I've been busier than anticipated. For your patience, this one is very long. And also a little angsty, be forewarned.

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**Week Four**

**Day Twenty-Two**

That morning, Jemma woke up with familiar pressure and cramping in her abdomen. Fitz was still asleep, but her alarm would go off in fifteen minutes. She decided there wasn’t much point in going back to sleep. She stretched and rolled out of Fitz’s embrace and off the bed. Fitz grabbed her pillow instead and continued to snore. Jemma turned on her bedside lamp so Fitz knew she was alright. Jemma went to the bathroom. Sure enough, there was the first blood, a thin red streak. She had given Daisy the few tampons she had left last night. So Jemma had to sigh and dig through the cupboards for pads. She would have Fitz go to the pharmacy with her after work. A few hours later, the cramping had mostly subsided and she didn’t feel the squishiness of having a full pad. She went to the bathroom. There was a bit of spotting like there was this morning, but not as much as she expected. And there wasn’t any change later that night. Jemma assumed she must have had a false start, even though it was on time.

**Day Twenty-Three**

Jemma was woken up again that morning by something that wasn’t her husband or her alarm. She was hit with a wave of intense nausea. She felt acid shoot up her esophagus and wrenched herself out of bed, probably waking up Fitz in the process. But she needed to get to the bathroom. She collapsed at the toilet and emptied stomach acid and bile into it with a forceful heave. Remnants of the Chinese food she had for dinner last night came up as well.

“Jemma?” Fitz asked, sleepily wandering into the bathroom. “Are you alright?”

“Ergh,” Jemma replied, before having a second heave of yellow and brown.

“Was it the food last night?” Fitz asked.
“Probably,” Jemma replied. She wiped her mouth, finally feeling her nausea settle. She flushed the toilet and stood up shakily.

“Maybe you should stay home, in case it’s something else?” Fitz suggested.

“No, I have work to do, and I’m feeling much better,” Jemma assured him. “I’ll eat lightly, toast and a banana. But I really feel much better.”

“Alright,” Fitz sighed, knowing from experience you can’t tell Jemma she’s sick, Jemma has to decide that. And until then, you just have to hope she doesn’t projectile vomit on someone. “But if you can’t handle the submarine-”

“I can handle the submarine,” Jemma assured him. She did manage to survive the submarine, although being in it made her nausea return. She wasn’t sure what was more annoying. The feeling like she would throw up or Fitz constantly brooding over her like an incessant mother hen.

After the submarine, Jemma was feeling better. She actually got some work in that morning. Fitz kept asking how she was doing so she promised that they could eat lunch together in the faculty break room. It was a small room with tables, chairs, a microwave, a refrigerator and a little buffet table of fruit, sandwiches, beverages. Sometimes someone would bring pizza, most people packed a lunch and used the faculty microwave to warm it up. Jemma was very insistent that the place was kept tidy, the refrigerator was often cleaned out and they sanitized the microwave every other Thursday.

Fitz was more than halfway done with his favorite sandwich, and Jemma was “keeping it light” with crackers and a lemon-lime soda.

“Are you sure that’s enough?” Fitz asked her. “Are you still nauseous?”

“A little bit, but I’m fine. I have a strong stomach, I survived on alien flora for six months, remember, a bit of bad Chinese food isn’t going to kill me,” Jemma assured him. “Oh look, Ariel!” She waved over the tall psychologist.

“Mind if I sit here?” Ariel asked the couple.

“Not at all,” Jemma beamed.
“I couldn’t help but overhear you said you survived on alien flora for six months?” Ariel asked.

“See, Jemma, this is why you can’t joke about all the times we were sent into space, it’ll confuse the earthlings,” Fitz said.

“Look, I don’t mean to pry, but what the fuck?” Ariel asked. “I mean… like… I know you were field agents, but I had no idea… how are the two of you-” She stopped and sighed. “What’s your story?”

“Well, the long answer takes several days,” Jemma said. “Is it alright if I give her the short one?” She asked her fiancé. Fitz shrugged. “Alright, so, Fitz and I met when we were sixteen. At SHIELD Academy, the previous one. We were the smartest and youngest people there and became best friends after getting paired in chem lab the second semester. Up until then, I thought he hated me because he wouldn’t talk to me. And he wouldn’t talk to me because he wanted to impress me. How it took us a decade, I have no idea, with a start like that.”

“If only we were a bit dumber and a bit less driven we might’ve succumbed to our sexual tension back then,” Fitz added wistfully.

“Don’t you mean a bit less dumb?” Jemma asked. “If anything, the hypothetical Fitz and Simmons who got together in Academy were loads smarter than we are because they would have avoided a good half of our bullshit. And they would have had more sex. But, alas, we stayed friends. So dumb of us. Anyway, about five years ago, I decided I wanted to go into the field.”

“I thought you were crazy back then, still think you’re crazy, actually,” Fitz said.

“I love you, too. Anyway, we were on a mobile lab on a big plane with Coulson, May, Daisy Johnson - although she was Skye back then - and then Ward. Ward is dead, very happy about that. Anyway, I think that’s when Fitz realized he was truly, madly, deeply in love with me.”

“Yeah, because you thought it was a good idea to jump out of a plane without a parachute,” Fitz reminded her.

“I was infected with an alien illness that changed my physiology, I would have killed everyone on the plane. Luckily, we had worked together and thanks to Fitz’s recklessness, almost infecting himself to help me build an antiserum, I did not die a painful death plummeting thousands of feet
“So... you finally realized you had feelings for her when you almost lost her?” Ariel asked.
“That’s sweet.”

“Anyway, months pass, he’s hopelessly pining, jealous of male coworkers, won’t tell me because he can’t fathom the possibility of my reciprocation, which is stupid because he’s a brilliant, handsome, good man. Then Hydra shows up, Ward betrays us and ejects the two of us, trapped in a med pod, into the bottom of the ocean.”

“We did not die a painful death plummeting thousands of feet, lucky us,” Fitz said. “Instead, we became trapped at the bottom of the ocean. Certain we would die there. I was about to declare my love and how I felt and then Miss Brilliant here figured out how to blow the glass.”

“That’s Doctor Brilliant. We worked together on that, yes, but there was no way anyone could swim up without air. We had an oxygen canister, enough for one breath. And this man decided the best course of action would be self-sacrifice in a grand gesture. ‘I’ve decided I’m going to die because I love you and we haven’t talked about the possibility you love me and so here you go, here’s some oxygen and a lot of confusing emotions we won’t talk about for a year, have fun,’” Jemma mimicked the last part in a Scottish accent.

“You guys can joke about a traumatic experience like that?” Ariel asked, surprised. She had the surprise of a psychologist, leading the couple on to talk about their feelings.

“No, not at first,” Jemma shook her head. “Actually, not for a while. It happened, didn’t it? Can’t change that, but it doesn’t mean it has to haunt us. It’s part of our ‘epic love story’ as Daisy would say. We had to accept it.”

“And also, you’re a psychologist, you should know people use humor to deflect. We have a lot to deflect,” Fitz shrugged.

“We don’t joke about the fact that he got a traumatic brain injury, hypoxia, and resulting aphasia and psychosis,” Jemma said. “Although sometimes we do joke about the fact that he hallucinated me and had not one- not one sexual fantasy.”

“It’s like you’re hoping I’m a pervert,” Fitz rolled his eyes.
“It must have been strange for him to be hallucinating you during his recovery while you were there,” Ariel shook her head.

“Aha! But she was not there, no, she left,” Fitz said.

“Which is one of my greatest regrets,” Jemma reminded him. “But, you have to admit, your condition was worse in my presence. I- you got better when I left.”

“I got better when I had things to do, people to save, and friends being good to me,” Fitz told her. “You leaving didn’t help me. It helped you. And I’m fine, I just wish you told me that you were going to go undercover at Hydra. So I could worry about you rightly instead of hallucinating you.”

“I’m sorry about that, Fitz,” Jemma told him earnestly.

“And I forgive you.” Fitz nodded. “Because you had your own guilt and I was oblivious to that.”

Jemma disagreed, “I think a brain injury is worse than some complicated feelings—”

“That doesn’t mean your feelings weren’t valid.” Fitz urged.

Jemma sighed, “Still, you were recovering, you shouldn’t have been bothered—”

“I love being bothered by you,” Fitz told her gently. “If I could go back, I would have begged and begged to be bothered by you.” Jemma looked at him sympathetically, gazing in his eyes. Of course, he loved to be bothered by her, he loved her. And she would have changed so many things, and yet, she wouldn’t have changed anything. Because they were alive, and together, and happy, and getting married.

“This is the short version?” Ariel asked, breaking the intense gazing after a few minutes. “I got to go back to work. Can we put a pin in the epic love story?”

“That’s probably best,” Jemma agreed.
Jemma woke up that morning with a familiar surge of nausea. She sprung out of bed to dry heave into the toilet. Fitz woke up drearily and followed her into the bathroom, holding her hair and rubbing soothing circles against her back.

“So, not food poisoning,” Fitz declared after she flushed the toilet and grabbed mouthwash. “You’re staying home today, Jemma.”

“MnnMnn!” Jemma protested. Her mouth couldn’t open as she was still swishing the bright blue minty fluid.

“You’re ill. You could get other people ill. Not to mention, you need to feel better so you can actually eat later on. I know you survived a week without food on an alien planet but just because you’ve overcome the most severe doesn’t mean you have to recreate it.”

Jemma filled up a cup with water, swished it, and spit. Finally satisfied, she turned to face her fiancé. “I have a meeting today with the entire SciTech faculty. We need to discuss the scheduling and the budget. I’ve been prepping for today for over a week. I cannot afford to skip it because I’m throwing up! Do you want to lead this meeting, Fitz? Do you want to talk about the copy paper quotas?”

“Oh, I’d hate every second of it, but your well being comes first.”

“Look, the meeting is in the morning. We’ll have the meeting and head home afterward, I just need to attend that one meeting, Fitz. One meeting.”

“Jemma-” Fitz sighed. “Do you swear, the minute the meeting is over, we go home and you lie down in that bed and rest?”

“Cross my heart,” Jemma promised.

“Alright,” Fitz sighed. “But I’m not leaving your side.”
He didn’t. All morning. She went upstairs, he went upstairs. She went downstairs, he went downstairs. He was always within arms’ length. He had paper bags tuck ed in his work bag in case she got ill on the submarine. She didn’t. In fact, she began to consider arguing to rescind her promise because the moment she got to work and started going over the last bits of her meeting, the nausea was all but gone. But then, she went to the meeting.

When she entered the meeting room, she was hit with a wall of a pungent smell and nausea rolled through her. It took her a few minutes to realize that terrible smell was coffee. Almost all of the staff members had travel mugs, actual mugs, or paper cups full of that which smelled awful. Jemma wasn’t the biggest fan of coffee, but never before had it been so repugnant. So revolting. She wished more than anything to open a window, but the only thing that would result from that was everyone in the meeting room drowning because their base was underwater. She needed fresh air, but she also needed to go through the meeting. She plugged in her USB to the laptop. She had prepared some slides. The laptop was hooked up to a projector. She ignored the smell, she ignored the churning in her stomach and the burn in her chest. She instead glanced at Fitz, stared ahead at the table full of the heads of department, and began to talk. The first ten minutes and the last ten minutes were the worst. In the middle, she entered some sort of fugue state where the nausea was just a part of her, like the itch she couldn’t scratch. Near the end, at the final slide, she let herself relax. The moment her mental resolve cracked, a wave of nausea unlike she had ever felt before rolled over her. The coffee overwhelmed her senses, it was all she could smell, all she could taste.

“So in short,” She gagged. “Um, we’re going to have a very… interesting year, excuse me,” She dashed out of the room.

“Is she alright?” McAllister leaned towards Fitz. Fitz hadn’t hated McAllister when he met her, he just didn’t get why Jemma liked her. But he’d ran into her a few more times and he realized that McAllister was a genuinely caring, if not a little nosy, young woman. She was smart and had a sense smart of humor. She sort of reminded him of Jemma. He had been learning that while he and Jemma had this unbreakable bond, Jemma hadn’t had a truly platonic genius friend for a while. So he decided he’d be kind to McAllister, for Jemma’s sake, and respect her new friend.

“She’s been sick for two days now,” Fitz said. “Can you check on her, see if she made it to the women’s room? I’d go but I don’t want to frighten anyone.”

“Of course,” McAllister said gently, patting his wrist affectionately. She stood up and followed after her boss.

Jemma, meanwhile, made it to the women’s room, she had banged into the first stall and emptied the water she had been sipping all morning, which was a now tinged yellow. Jemma sighed, and tried not to cry, she was mortified by rushing out of a meeting to throw up. The door opened, she hurried to flush the toilet and pretend everything was fine. She stepped out of the stall and saw Ariel, standing tall in the doorway, arms crossed.
“Did Fitz send you?” Jemma asked.

“Yes,” Ariel said.

“Well, we’re going home, so I don’t see why he needs you to yell at me.”

“He didn’t ask me to yell at you, he asked me to check on you,” Ariel said. “How are you?”

“Ugh,” Jemma groaned, bracing herself on the sink. “Not well. I’ve been throwing up for two days now. I’ve not had any contact with anyone sick, and it’s not food poisoning. I can’t explain it. I rarely get ill.”

“When was your last period?” Ariel asked. Why was that a relevant question?

“A month ago, I’m due soon, why?” Jemma asked.

“Did you have an early start? Cramping, spotting, tasted metal?” Ariel asked. “Sore breasts? Fatigue?”

“I don’t see how those symptoms are relevant, I- yes. I’m the one with medical experience, Ariel.”

“And I’m the one with pregnancy experience, Jemma,” Ariel replied.

“I am not pregnant,” Jemma said. But then she considered the symptoms. And her confidence wavered. “...I think.”

“You use chemical birth control, right? What kind?”

“I was on a specialized hormonal uterine implant when I was in the field. When I left, I took it out, and I’ve been using those hormone patches on my ass.”
“Not the pill?”

“I mean, I don’t like to admit it because I’m always so put together, but I often struggled to take the pill daily when I was younger. And to be fair, I didn’t have a lot of sex when I was younger.”

“For those patches and most chemical contraceptives, with theoretically perfect use, there’s still a one percent chance of pregnancy. And with actual use, there’s more like a ten percent chance,” Ariel said. “I was on the pill, took it every day at seven-fifteen, and I still got pregnant. Some people are more fertile than others, maybe.”

“Well, I suppose they’re truthful when they say the only way to be certain you won’t get pregnant is not to have sex,” Jemma sighed.

“Eh,” Ariel shrugged. “Didn’t work for the Virgin Mary.”

Jemma smiled. Then she frowned, “Oh god, I might be pregnant.”

“Is that okay?”

“I mean, I’ve always dreamed of Fitz and me- ever since we…” Jemma sighed. “So, yes, I’m excited at the prospect. But this could not have come at a worse time. Between work and… Fitz and I are still recovering from our traumas. Not even a year ago, he couldn’t look at me. And now I’m possibly pregnant.”

“And you’re engaged to be married-”

“Fitz and I have never talked about kids. I mean, what if he doesn’t, what if he’s not ready? What if I’m not ready-?”

“You have a lot of ‘what if’s’,” Ariel nodded. “I think the first step is to be certain. If you implanted- which is what the spotting may have been- you should be able to use a pregnancy test.”

“Yes, Science,” Ariel agreed. “Go home, get some rest, tell him,” Ariel advised.

“Thank you,” Jemma said honestly. Ariel smiled softly.

Jemma cleaned her mouth and went back to the meeting room, where Fitz was waiting with her bag. He had packed up her laptop and USB stick. “Will you go home?” Fitz asked. Jemma nodded. “Good.” Jemma held his hand as they went to the submarine docking station.

Jemma survived the submarine. She survived the car ride. And she made a mental note that if she was pregnant, she was repulsed by coffee. She changed, climbed into bed, and Fitz climbed in beside her.

“If I’m sick, you’ll get sick too,” Jemma warned him half-heartedly.

“Good, then we’ll have an even better excuse to spend the entire week in bed,” Fitz smiled. She had a soda, electrolytes, a bowl, some crackers, and her laptop. She worked from home while Fitz laid beside her, watching some sort of nature documentary and reminding her to drink her fluids. They were like this until the sun was near to set, and the anticipation to test her urine had become unbearable.

“I’m getting hungry,” Jemma announced.

“Jemma-”

“That’s good, isn’t it? The nausea is subsiding. I’m getting an appetite. You should go to the store, get some chicken broth and jello at the store.”

“I’m sure we have some at home-”

“Please, go to the store-”
“Are you trying to get rid of me?” Fitz asked, he was probably joking, but Jemma wasn’t sure.

Jemma pursed her lips and avoided his eyes, “I just… want to be alone for an hour.”

“I can go downstairs,” Fitz said, a little sensitive in his tone. “If you want space.”

Jemma knew this was the moment any rational, sane, proactive woman who wasn’t overcome with anxiety would have admitted her pregnancy suspicions. But Jemma Simmons was none of those things, in that moment. She had an idea. It wasn’t a lie, but it was an extension of an ever-constant truth. “Okay… I’m going to be honest,” She said tensely. “I’m… um… getting antsy.”

“If you want fresh air-”

“Different antsy. I um… I need some alone time because to be in the same house as you are making it very hard to- and I don’t want to get you sick. And I don’t even think certain physical activities are a good idea when I’m-”

“Oh,” Fitz realized. “So you need some time to-”

“Yeah. Cold shower. A long cold shower. And no distractions.”

“I can go to the store,” Fitz assured her. “I could also-”

“Go to the store,” Jemma said firmly. Then she felt guilty, “I love you,” Jemma said.

“I love you, too,” Fitz smiled for a moment before getting out of the bed. “Be back in an hour.”

Jemma waited until she heard the car pull away. Then she jumped out of bed, got dressed, and went downstairs, going outside with a mission on the brain. She walked as fast as she could, turned a few times, to where she knew the pharmacy was. She entered, went straight to the pregnancy test section. Grabbed two three-pack boxes. She needed to be very sure. She paid with cash and avoided the cashier’s eyes. It was for pregnancy tests, not bomb ingredients, but she felt like the former was more dangerous at the moment. She tucked the bag of boxes to her chest and hurried back. Thirty minutes, not bad.
She had a text from Fitz. *Red or Green jello?*


Now, she had about thirty minutes to pee on some sticks and take a shower. Maybe she should masturbate just in case, to sell the lie? She grabbed some pajamas and stripped out of her pharmacy run clothes, putting them at the bottom of the hamper. She opened the boxes. And she peed on several sticks. She decided she’d set them on the counter, take her shower, and then know when she stepped out. She took her time in the shower, even shaving, because she was too afraid to see. She made sure it ran cold for a while so there wasn’t any condensation. She stepped out, shivering, and wrapped herself in her robe. Now was the moment of truth. She glanced at the three tests laid out. All three were positive.

Jemma placed both of her hands on her uterus and then peered down at herself. She was pregnant. Beneath her hands and a couple of inches of skin and muscle, was the endometrium of her uterus and implanted somewhere was a very small zygote, probably multiplying at a rate she couldn’t comprehend. The cleavage and the folding would differentiate the ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm and in about eight months, knowing when her last menses was, she would have a baby. With toes and eyes and a heart and a mind. As Jemma thought about the little thing growing inside her, a perfect bundle of cells that was half her and half Fitz, she began to cry. The worry was gone, for now, because all she could do was imagine holding a baby with Fitz’s curls and his bright blue eyes, smiling up at her. She had never had such a vivid image in her mind before. The only thing that broke her from her joy was hearing her husband come home. She made a quick decision, not to tell him, yet. She made sure to wrap up the tests so he wouldn’t know what they were. She cleaned off the counter, too, and got dressed into a pajama set.

She sat down at the end of the bed, and Fitz came in a few moments later, smiling boyishly, and for a moment, she imagined that was because he knew. He presented her broth and jello and she accepted it, smiling graciously.

“Did you have a good wank?” He asked. She remembered her story to get him out of the house and did her best not to spit out the broth. She gulped.

“Yes, it hit the spot,” Jemma replied, cheekily. She had regained her composure with the roll of his eyes. She continued to eat. She had heard the phrase ‘eating for two,’ but now she wondered what that actually meant she ought to add to her diet. She’d need to do research. And she’d need to tell someone, or else she’d burst. Fitz… she wanted to surprise Fitz. She wanted to make it happy, when she told him, in case he wasn’t as happy as she was. And to do that, the first person that popped in her mind was Daisy. She resolved to call her friend in the morning.
“Jemma, are you done?” Fitz asked.

“Yes… I think I should get some rest,” Jemma decided.

“Okay,” Fitz kissed her on the cheek and turned on his bedside lamp. “I’ll be downstairs if you need me.”

Once the door closed, Jemma’s hands found her abdomen. She cradled where she imagined her growing eventually-a-baby was. She sighed, she may have struggles ahead, but knowing that she would have the child of Leopold James Fitz assured her with a sort of silent confidence. He loved her, he would surely love the combination of him and her.

Day Twenty-Five

Jemma woke up feeling warmth at her back and hearing gentle snores. Sunlight streamed through a gap in the curtains and she knew she ought to call Daisy now before Fitz woke up, but at a time Daisy wouldn’t hate her. Luckily, for once, Jemma wasn’t wrapped in Fitz’s embrace. She slinked out of bed and turned on her light. She realized she woke up because the familiar pangs of nausea had returned. But she decided to hold on and go downstairs, to the half bath, so she didn’t wake Fitz. With a fleeting thought when she was halfway across the room, she went to her underwear dresser where the second box of pregnancy tests was stashed. Just to make sure yesterday wasn’t a dream. She crept downstairs and into the downstairs bathroom. Then she puked. Luckily, her jello and broth had digested, and all her stomach was able to force out was some bitter liquid that made her throat burn. She rinsed out her mouth, flushed, and then peed on some more sticks. She watched them this time, as the blank paper slowly became a little positive plus sign. On all three. She was most certainly, undeniably, pregnant.

Unlike last night, when all she could think about was a precious little infant with curls and blue eyes, the fear of this revelation washed over Jemma. Jemma was pregnant. She and Fitz were getting married, and the sanctity of marriage in terms of sex didn’t bother her. But her fear lay in the fact that Fitz might not want the child. Now, Jemma knew Fitz. She knew that he loved her unfailingly, unwaveringly, eternally. But she wasn’t sure if he would love a child. He wouldn’t run away, she knew that. She knew he wouldn’t hurt her or the baby intentionally. But she imagined his initial dissatisfaction. She imagined the growing distance it would cause, Her upstairs in the nursery building a crib as he locked himself in his workshop. Him not waking up in the middle of the night when the baby needed to have their nappy changed. For a frightening moment, she imagined Fitz looking at their baby with the same cold nonchalance he had for her in the Framework. Jemma knew that all of this was unreasonable, her fantasy was a hyperbole of her worst fears, that Fitz was most certainly not that man. But that didn’t stop her from nearly crying as she called Daisy. She had made her way to the sunroom, the sky calmed her, and as she learned, it was the best place for a phone call in terms of ambient noise.
Daisy answered, “Happy Fourth of July to you too, Simmons. It’s seven forty-five. You know some of us sleep in, right?”

“Sorry,” Jemma choked.

“Hey- hey, hey,” Daisy instantly snapped to sympathy, with a twinge of worry. “Are you okay? Is Fitz okay?”

“I don’t know,” Jemma whispered. “I mean… we’re safe. I’m… just… something happened.”

“Tell me,”

Jemma gave a wavering sigh, “It’s so stupid, It came at such a terrible time. And part of me is elated and overjoyed, and part of me is terrified and guilty.”

“You’re very vague, Jemma, I don’t know what you’re referencing,” Daisy told her calmly. “Why are you happy and scared?”

“Because something amazing happened,” Jemma let herself smile. “Remember what we talked about last time I saw you? When we snuck away?”

“My period? Oh… babies! We talked about babies! You’re having a baby?”

“Yeah,” Jemma said. Daisy screamed so loudly Jemma had to drop the phone so she didn’t lose her hearing. Once she didn’t hear the shrill whine from the speaker, Jemma returned the phone to her ear. “It’s… complicated.”

“Well it’s Fitz’s, isn’t it?”

“Yes, of course,” Jemma assured her. “But… I haven’t told him. And… I’m afraid of his response.”
“Why?” Daisy asked. “He loves you. He loves you so much the word ‘love’ seems too weak. Why would a baby be anything short of one of the best things ever?”

“We never talked about it. Ever. All I can think about is his reaction. And it being… not happy. About me having to choose… this is the one choice where I’m not certain I’d pick Fitz.”

“He won’t force you to make that choice,” Daisy assured her.

“Still... I’ve been lying to him since I started to suspect. I snuck away when I was on bed rest for nausea.”

“Morning sickness?”

“Yeah.”

“You ran away to buy a pregnancy test?”

“Several.”

“And now you’re afraid he’ll be mad that you lied. That he dislikes kids. That he won’t want you when you look like a whale.”

“You know, I never considered that last one, thank you for that,” Jemma snarked.

“Okay, well, I have a point,” Daisy huffed indignantly. “You won’t know how Fitz feels about this unless you talk to him about it. The man loves you like I said, I can’t imagine the world where he wouldn’t be ecstatic that you’re having his chubby, brilliant, British baby. And even if you’re not ready or he’s not ready, and I don’t think anyone can be ready for parenthood, you should at least talk about it. Because you love each other, and you’ve survived so much, and you respect each other enough to be adults about this new development.”

Daisy’s words instilled a sense of confidence. Jemma agreed with her, “So… basically you’re saying I need to tell Fitz.”
“Tell Fitz what?” Fitz asked. Jemma lowered the phone and stared at Fitz in worry. To say he looked concerned was an understatement. There were distinct combinations of fear, anger, sadness, and general sensitivity. And Jemma had no idea what to say.

When Fitz had woken up that morning, he realized his fiancée was missing. He jumped out of bed before he realized her light was on. He sighed. She was fine. He expected her to be throwing up in the bathroom, but she wasn’t there. Or in the other upstairs bathroom. Maybe she went to the downstairs one? She did. He saw the door open and her rush out of the bathroom shaking slightly. She picked up their house phone and dialed a number, stepping into the sunroom. Why was she calling someone at this hour? And why was she acting so strangely? Fitz quietly went downstairs, he was going to ask her what was up when he heard her talking.

“...part of me is elated and overjoyed, and part of me is terrified and guilty,” Jemma said, her voice was hushed. Fitz stopped in his tracks. What was happening? Why was Jemma telling this mysterious phone person she was happy and guilty at the same time? Jemma waited for the other person to talk. “Because something amazing happened,” Jemma replied. Fitz could hear her smile. Something amazing that made her feel guilty. “Remember what we talked about last time I saw you? When we snuck away?” Jemma asked. Now Fitz was feeling more nervous. Did she sneak away with someone? When did that happen? What did they talk about? Is this why Jemma was guilty? He knew Jemma wouldn’t be sneaking around with someone else behind his back in that way. He knew intellectually. But emotionally, there was this little nagging voice. Of course Jemma was trying to be happy with someone else, after all the pain he caused her. Of course she was sneaking around with someone who deserved her more than he did, and of course, she felt guilty about it. Because she was good.

He hung onto her every word as she continued. “Yeah.” Jemma agreed with something. She paused for a long while. “It’s complicated.” She said carefully. Now this situation was complicated, and Fitz knew for Jemma, ”complicated” and “bad” were close synonyms. “Yes, of course,” Jemma said firmly to the person on the phone. “But... I haven’t told him. And... I’m afraid of his response.” Was ‘him’ referring to Fitz? Why would she be afraid of his response? The nagging fears grew stronger. Jemma continued. “We never talked about it. Ever. All I can think about is his reaction. And it being... not happy. About me having to choose... this is the one choice where I’m not certain I’d pick Fitz,” Jemma said those words and it was like a truck hit Fitz.

The terrible voice in his mind was cackling nefariously as it whispered all the ways she should have decided he was the wrong choice long ago. There was someone else. She was sneaking around with someone else and she wanted to choose them over him. What did it? What made her decide he wasn’t worth it. Things were so well, so well. He should have barged in, but he remained frozen, listening like it was an awful nightmare.

“Still... I’ve been lying to him since I started to suspect. I snuck away when I was on bed rest for nausea.” Jemma admitted this to her phone partner with such guilt that Fitz had a pang of sympathy.
for her. He knew there was something odd about how she was acting that day, how she was adamant to get him out of the house. Her ridiculous lie about being horny. “Yeah.” Jemma sighed. “Several.” Several what? “You know, I never considered that last one, thank you for that,” Jemma said bitingly.

Jemma listened to something her mysterious caller said with rapt attention, allowing Fitz some time to process. He wanted to know what was going on. He wanted to know who Jemma chose over him. He wanted to know how it happened without him noticing. He just had so many questions. Things seemed so perfect, she had said yes, they were getting married. He just needed to know what he did that made it all fall apart.

“So… basically you’re saying I need to tell Fitz,” Jemma summarized the lengthy rant by her phone partner. Fitz couldn’t take it anymore, he stepped into the doorway.

“Tell Fitz what?” He asked. He could hear how raw his voice sounded. He could hear the crack in his resolve. He looked at her, she was beautiful in the sunlight, glowing and shining. No wonder she wanted someone else. She looked at him in utter horror, her eyes were rimmed red from tears. At least she did have feelings for him, otherwise, she wouldn’t have been so traumatized.

“How much did you hear?” Jemma asked carefully, but her voice was just as fragile as his.

“I heard that you’re sneaking around, and you’re guilty, and you lied to me, and you’re going to choose someone else,” Fitz listed off the highlights of this morning conversation.

“It’s- I- whatever terrible thing you think, I promise you, it is a misunderstanding.” Jemma told him. She raised the phone back to her face. “Sorry, Daisy, um, he overheard. I know. I’ll call you later.” Jemma hung up. She stared at Fitz, and swallowed hard, her mind running. He could see it from the look in her eyes.

“Tell Fitz what?” Fitz asked again, he needed to know.

“Ugh, I’m stupid, follow me,” Jemma pushed past him, making her way to the stairs, but she turned sharply and went down the hall to the half-bath. She sunk onto the toilet lid and held her knees, shaking. Fitz stood in the doorway. “Look in the sink,” Jemma told him, slowly, cautiously. Fitz stepped inside the small bath and looked in the sink. He didn’t know what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t three pregnancy tests. Each one was positive.
“Are they yours?” Fitz asked. Pregnancy tests? Another man got her pregnant, the voice whispered. But his own curiosity silenced that voice.

“No,” Jemma said sarcastically. “I collect them.”

“So you’re pregnant?” Fitz asked. Jemma nodded. “Am I the-”

“Of course,” Jemma squinted at him, confused. “Do you think there’s someone else?” Her voice was weak, she was terrified that’s what he thought. And Fitz hated himself because that is what he thought. Not because Jemma was a harlot, but because she could do better than him.

“I didn’t know what to think,” Fitz admitted. “I heard you telling Daisy, about sneaking off and lying and choosing someone over me-”

“I snuck off with her at the party to give her tampons and we talked about hypothetical babies,” Jemma sighed. “I lied to you yesterday, which is why I’ve been feeling so guilty because I wanted you out of the house so I could buy pregnancy tests. I had my suspicions but I needed to know. The pregnancy explains my nausea. And my false start for my menses earlier this week.”

“So what about choosing someone?” Fitz asked.

“We’ve never talked about kids,” Jemma sighed.

“Well, you were on birth control,” Fitz reminded her.

“Yes, but it’s not like those methods are perfectly effective. I had approximately a ten percent chance of getting pregnant with actual use,” Jemma stopped herself from rattling about statistics. “I didn’t know if you wanted a baby or even your initial thoughts on babies. I didn’t know if you were ready after everything. If you could do something as stressful as parenthood. But I’m ready. From the moment I knew I was pregnant, I couldn’t stop thinking about this baby. Our baby. And how badly I wanted them.”

“You were worried that I would want you to choose between me or the baby,” Fitz realized. Now he felt positively stupid. Jemma didn’t fall in love and want to marry someone else. She wanted to have his baby and didn’t know how he would react. “I’m sorry.”
“Why are you apologizing? I’m the liar,” Jemma spat, towards herself, mostly, Fitz assumed. He took a few cautious steps towards Jemma and kneeled at her feet.

“Jemma, I forgive you for lying,” Fitz said. “You were scared and confused, and probably mentally addled from hormones and hunger.”

“I forgive you for fearing the worst when I was caught lying,” Jemma told him. “We’re certainly a fucked up pair.”

Fitz agreed silently, nodding his head. He wanted to say something. To assure Jemma how much he was okay with this baby. How she wouldn’t have to fear his response because he would, of course, love her baby. It was half Jemma Simmons, currently residing in Jemma Simmons. And Jemma Simmons wanted him to be beside her as she brought her half-Jemma Simmons to and through life. But he didn’t know how to say it. So he took a deep breath, “Jemma,” He told her. “I love kids.”

Jemma let out a wail. It was really more of a watery sigh of relief, but she was so potently relieved she was louder than either anticipated. She collapsed forwards into Fitz’s arms and hugged him tightly, burying her head in his shoulder. He stroked her hair. Once she seemed to have stopped sobbing with relief, which he probably was doing as well, she sniffled and rotated her head so she could talk.

“You sure?” She asked. “Because you hate gross things. Babies are gross. They piss and shit and spit and barf. And they scream all the time.”

“I’m sure,” Fitz said. “I love you, Jemma Simmons. I love everything about you. And if this baby is one-half you, then I love everything about the baby,”

She hugged him tighter, which felt pretty damn impossible. She could have hugged him all morning except her stomach growled audibly.

“Someone’s hungry,” Fitz declared. “Come on. I’ll make you some toast.”

She let go of him and let him leave the bathroom, he heard her shuffling right behind. He got to the kitchen and began to make toast. She sat at the counter and rested her head on one of her hands, staring at him move about the kitchen. “It wasn’t a complete lie. A part of me always wants to be
“I hate any semblance of dishonesty or miscommunication in our relationship because it always seems to get worse,” Jemma sighed. “And I especially hate that I was the sole perpetrator. Any conflict between us was in my head, and I made a muck of it.”

“You were scared.”

“I shouldn’t be scared of you. Not when we’re a month away from getting married,” Jemma sighed.

“I’m scared of you all the time, scared that you’ll come to your senses and leave me,” Fitz said. “I think what’s important is that we worked through it.”

“We did,” Jemma agreed. “Want to stay in today and watch fireworks on TV?”

“I would love nothing more.”

Day Twenty-Six

Fitz and Jemma decided that they ought to go back to work the next day because Jemma’s illness was not contagious and would stick around for a few weeks. Fitz was constantly texting to check in on her in her office. He had his own growing anxieties over the prospects of a baby, which grew as his initial joy faded. He was absolutely certain that Jemma would be the best mother since his own, his anxieties, like her own, lay in himself.

Could he handle a baby? He would love their baby, her baby, of course. But could he be a father to it, the sort of father the child of Jemma deserved? There they were, his insecurities. The same ones that made him constantly question if he was good enough for Jemma, now made him wonder if he was good enough for their child. He generally liked kids, but Jemma had a point, babies were disgusting and solely dependent on him. Jemma could take care of herself, but her baby would need him. What if he wasn’t good enough? He didn’t want to tell Jemma. Because these were her anxieties as well (of course they were). But he needed help. He knew he needed help, and he needed someone who could help him understand what was happening. And so he found himself leaving his office, going up two levels, and knocking on a wooden door with a golden plate that
“Come in,” McAllister called. Fitz stepped into her office. “Fitz, I wasn’t expecting you. Is everything okay?”

“Um… you were the one who told Jemma she might be pregnant, right?” Fitz asked. It made sense, he knew McAllister was a mother herself.

“I am,” McAllister nodded. “Is she-”

“Pregnant, yeah,” Fitz nodded.

“Congratulations,” McAllister beamed.

Even her teeth were perfectly white and straight. Fitz always felt like McAllister was his rival, somehow. He didn’t know why he felt that way. He saw her blue eyes, dark hair, symmetrical face, extreme height, and perfect teeth. And he was jealous that Jemma was hanging out with her. Because he supposed if anyone was perfect enough for Jemma, it was this psychologist. She was almost as beautiful as Jemma was, and Jemma clearly liked to spend time with her. At the same time, he felt guilty for that jealousy. The same way he was mortified he suspected Jemma was going to choose someone else. McAllister wasn’t a bad person, she was, arguably, a good person. “I suppose,” McAllister said, breaking Fitz from his internal monologue, “That everything isn’t dandy?”

“It’s stupid,” Fitz admitted.

“You’re feeling insecure?” McAllister guessed. “Like you don’t deserve her or the baby.”

“How much has Jemma told you?” Fitz asked.

McAllister smiled, “I don’t get the acclaim I have without being absolutely amazing at what I do.”

“So you can tell I feel like I don’t deserve the baby because of my body language?” Fitz asked.
“It’s a combination of your body language and context,” McAllister explained. “I can tell that you’re happy, but I can also tell that you’re scared. I can tell that you’re jealous of me, for whatever reason, and I know from the context you were jealous of your male coworkers when you were feeling insecure about your relationship with Jemma. I know that you recently found out Jemma was pregnant, which has caused a shift in your behavior towards these insecurities, and I know you struggle with self-esteem issues based on your love of self-deprecating humor, as well as what I heard from Jemma in passing a few days ago. So I made an assumption, and I was right.” McAllister closed her laptop and leaned over her desk, “Please, sit.”

Fitz sat down.

“I’m flattered, by the way, that you think I’m to be jealous over,” McAllister said. “But I can assure you, I’m not interested in your fiancée.”

“I- like I said, stupid.”

“You become jealous of others because when you do start feeling insecure if you let that train of thought play out, it becomes worse,” McAllister explained. “It’s not stupid. It’s- it’s insecurity. And anxiety, things I’d expect from a new father. Hell, a new mother. I was terrified when I was pregnant, constantly worried I’d be like my own parents.”

“Yeah,” Fitz agreed. Realizing for a moment that in all these scenarios he imagined of him being a terrible father, he always echoed his own. Either in the real world or the Framework. Because he had two versions of an abusive father to be afraid of.

“I assume you’re afraid you’ll be like your parents?’

“My father. My mother was great. But he wasn’t. He was drunk. Cold. Angry. I… dissatisfied him.”

“And I’m sure that dissatisfaction was why you struggle with feeling unsatisfactory, especially when it comes to people you care about,” McAllister said.

“Yeah,” Fitz nodded.
“My mother was good, she did her best, my father, I never really knew him,” McAllister had a flash of hardness over her face even Fitz noticed. “But my mother struggled to get us by. And she worked two jobs and went back to school. And I respected what she did, but that didn’t stop me from feeling lonely. That didn’t stop me from feeling like a burden. And it made my childhood hard.”

Fitz realized they were talking less like psychologist-patient, as he expected, and more like friends, one of which just had a better knack for advice.

“How’d you get over it?”

“You don’t ‘get over’ these childhood conceptions,” McAllister shook her head. “You learn to reject them. To resist them. But they’re always going to be there. Always. Sometimes, I still feel like I’m burdensome or annoying to people I care about. And I was terrified when I was pregnant that I would doom my own child to loneliness, as I loved my career, especially after-” McAllister stopped abruptly. She glanced at Fitz and sighed. “My son’s father died when I was eleven weeks pregnant.”

“I’m sorry,” Fitz said sincerely.

“Thank you. It was hard. And I- I felt like my mother did. Alone, scared. I felt like, history was repeating itself, the cycle continued. But I didn’t want it to. Which is why I decided to not let it. We’re not defined by what is done to us, I refuse to believe that. We’re defined by what we decide to do. Our choices ultimately do matter. I could have been a good mother, I could have been a bad mother. But because I made a conscious effort to put my son first, a conscious effort to do what I thought was best.” McAllister’s face grew hard again. “I wasn’t perfect. I am far from perfect. But I did my best, and I think that tells more about who I am than... other things. I- I hope. The point is... The point is that you have to make that choice, every day. What sort of father am I going to be? Am I going to be like my own? Better? Worse?”

“I have a choice,” Fitz agreed.

“And a choice is a powerful thing, nothing has taught me that better than the times where I’ve lost mine,” McAllister said firmly. “So don’t let the things you couldn’t control scare you when it comes to something you can. Because you can control this.”

Fitz was silent for a few moments, “I’m sorry for bothering you-”
“No,” McAllister said so firmly Fitz stopped completely. “I was glad to be bothered by you. I like
you and Jemma, Fitz, I am happy to help. I mean... I’m qualified to help,” She motioned to her
certificates and degrees hung up on the wall beside them.

“Thank you,” Fitz told her. “Um, can I call you Ariel?”

“Please do,” Ariel smiled.

**Day Twenty-Eight**

Jemma and Fitz were curled up on the couch in their living room. Jemma had one hand draped over
her still-flat stomach, but it was now instinctive for her to cradle where life was growing,
protectively.

“We need to talk about pregnancy things,” Jemma said slowly after the credits of their show began
to roll past.

“Such as?” Fitz asked.

“Are we gonna tell anyone? Other than Daisy and Ariel?” Jemma asked him.

“I mean, we’ll have to, eventually,” Fitz said. “Soon you’ll balloon out as the baby grows.”

“Right. When?” Jemma asked.

“I think, after the wedding. Not that we care about that, or our parents care, but, just to keep things
simpler, one thing at a time, right?”

“One thing at a time,” Jemma agreed. “I’ll be eight weeks pregnant. Most people don’t recommend
telling until after the twelfth week because of.”

“Yeah,” Fitz nodded. They didn’t want to say the ‘m’ word. “So, we won’t announce it until the
twelfth week, but we’ll stop being secretive about it after the wedding?”
“I like that idea,” Jemma nodded. “Now, I need to tell my bosses, at least.”

“Yeah, that’s the only people who get to know before the wedding,” Fitz agreed.

“And, um, we’ll have to tell an- well, we’ll need a doctor, right?” Jemma asked. “I think - I mean - my body has done a lot. As has yours. Alien illnesses, portals, space, other universes. There’s no telling what it could- I mean, we need to be proactive.”

“You want to use someone at Academy-?”

“No. I want a specialist. I want one of the best gynecologists in the country, I don’t care if we have to drive a few hours.”

“Okay,” Fitz nodded. “We’ll find somebody. When should we schedule an appointment?”

“Weekend after next,” Jemma decided. “Most doctors don’t accept appointments until the sixth week, anyway.”

“Okay. You do research on that. Um, we need to still plan the wedding,” Fitz told her.

“Is it weird I don’t care?” Jemma asked. “Like, marrying you, amazing. But I’d elope anywhere. I don’t care about color schemes or floral arrangements or- It’s unnecessary. I don’t need some expensive pageant to celebrate marrying the man I love.”

“We’re doing this for our parents,” Fitz reminded her. “Because we never see them, and they deserve to get to see us do something normal.”

“For our parents,” Jemma agreed. “But that doesn’t make me care anymore. It’s weird. Because I love organizing and planning and now I don’t.”

“Well, tell you what, we’ll call the place and ask to get in contact with their wedding planner,” Fitz said. “The planner can send us things to decide on based on what the venue can get, and we’ll just
pick whatever?"

“Okay,” Jemma nodded. “And all the details and the stress-”

“The wedding planner will deal with, meanwhile we can… worry about our own things.”
Hi, Thank you to everyone who has been reading, enjoying, commenting and kudos-ing this, it means a lot to get your feedback! I hope you enjoy this chapter. Just a bit of a disclaimer, there is smut as well as a bit of violence, so just make sure you're comfortable with that. I hope you enjoy. And please comment, I love reading those.

Week Five

Day Twenty-Nine

Jemma sent two emails that morning after being woken up by nausea, which she was able to quell after having some toast and brushing her teeth. The first email was sent to the wedding planner for their wedding, asking for the available decorations because they wanted to be able to do the planning overseas. Jemma then emailed her bosses, including Talbot, informing them she was just five weeks pregnant, and that it shouldn’t interfere with her work until she was further along, but her work may lag as she was dealing with certain symptoms. She thanked them for understanding, and then actually hoped that a panel of men would be understanding.

Talbot emailed her back first, and his email was so amusing she had to wake up a grumpy, sleepy Fitz so she could read aloud the response.

From: “Brigadier General Glenn Talbot (Platinum)” <talbot.g@shield.gov>
To: “Doctor Jemma Simmons (Silver)” <simmons.j@shield.gov>
Sent: Sunday, July 8, 2018. 08:23
Subject: Re: My Medical Condition

Hello, Dr. Simmons

Thank you for informing us about this development, I know that I’m glad you feel comfortable enough with SHIELD to share this relevant information. I am also pleased how you are confident this new development will not affect your ability to manage the SciTech division of the Academy this upcoming year. If at any time you have any questions about your pregnancy and how SHIELD will accommodate for things like maternity leave, I recommend you contact our Human Resources
Speaking personally, if I may, Simmons, I would like to extend my congratulations. I’ve known you and Dr. Fitz for about five years now, and watching the two of you throughout all of the things that SHIELD has dealt with has been interesting. When I heard that he used a rock to rescue you from an alien planet, I knew the two of you would either die painful deaths or have long, happy lives together, and I’m glad for both of you it was the latter.

Congratulations again, and please don’t put “Medical Condition” in the subject of an email, because I was half worried you’d be talking about hemorrhoids.

Best Regards,

General Brigadier Glenn Talbot

P.S.: Glenn would be an excellent name for a boy, especially after everything I’ve endured because of you and your team.

“Why would you be emailing your bosses about hemorrhoids?” Fitz asked, rubbing his eyes, he was slowly waking up.

“I don’t know,” Jemma laughed. “And I mean… All I wanted to talk about was the fact that I may have a dip in productivity, but I’d be satisfied to put in my best amount of effort. He’s the one who started getting all friendly and suggested baby names.”

“Yeah, I don’t think I like the idea of you and Talbot getting friendly,” Fitz teased.

“Really?” Jemma asked. “Well, what are you gonna do about it?”

“I have a few ideas, after all, you need to make it up to me for how early it is,” Fitz leaned forwards and kissed her softly. She threaded her fingers through his hair and tugged at his scalp. Her other hand folded up her laptop. She strained as she set it on the bedside table. It teetered a bit too precariously, but she didn’t care, considering how she was kissing her fiancé. Once her lap was free, she moved towards him. She threw the blankets off her legs, exposing them, she was only wearing a pair of comfortable cotton panties and a tank top. She changed the slant of her mouth
against his as she climbed across his lap, straddling his hips. His hands gripped her waist, sliding up her back slowly. Gooseflesh prickled up where his hands went. Jemma deepened the kiss, lowering her body to have a better angle. She felt herself brush against something hard underneath the sheets. A pang of desire shot through her, followed by the desire to tease him. She ground her hips against the hardness; her nerves crackled with the welcome sensations. Fitz shuddered and broke the kiss to inhale sharply.

“Did you bring a gun to bed or are you happy to kiss me?” Jemma whispered against his lips.

“I’m always happy to kiss you, Jems,” Fitz muttered back lightly. She ground down on him again, and he gave another shocked exhale. She had a sudden rush of heat with the friction on her sensitive places. “Do you have to do that?”

“No- I- just… it’s early,” Fitz told her.

“It’s eight-thirty on a Sunday,” Jemma scoffed. “Besides, I’m trying to make up for how early it is, remember?”

“Well, I just woke up,” Fitz said “So-” he hissed as Jemma moved against him again, she smiled. “Just be careful,” He begged.

“Of course,” Jemma said softly, leaning in to kiss him again. This kiss was slower, sloppier; she let herself bask in the sensations of his lips against hers, the warmth radiating from his body, everything about him. His hands roamed under her sleep shirt carelessly, brushing her skin delicately. His nails scraped up her spine, and his fingers fluttered over her shoulder blades. Her hands, meanwhile, traveled from his hair and his face to his chest. He was wearing a simple undershirt, but she could feel his body through it. She let her hands run down his chest until she could curl her fingers around the hem, pulling his shirt up. Her knuckles brushed against his flesh as the shirt passed over his stomach and his chest. His hands left her body, and his lips left hers so he could lift his arms in the air, and she could pull his shirt over his head.

Once she tossed the shirt to the side, she dipped back down, pressing a gentle kiss to his lips, before moving her lips further down his body. She kissed his jaw; his whiskers were scratchy against her sensitive lips. She kissed down his his throat, smiling as she felt him hum in pleasure. Meanwhile, his hands went back to her body, they roamed further downwards, caressing her thighs and squeezing her ass through her pajamas. She began to breathe harder as she continued to make a trail of kisses down his body. When her lips were at his collarbone, she made sure to gently dig her
teeth into his flesh before kissing it softly again. He let out a small whine in the back of his throat. She continued to pay attention to the spot on his clavicle. As he moved her closer, her breasts were crushed and pushed against his chest. The flimsy fabric of her tank top did little to protect her. They were sensitive things because of the hormones, and the sensation caused for her to break her mouth away and let out a strangled moan. She put some distance between them. It was just too much and too hard for her. But it did give her an idea.

She ran one of her hands up his chest and then slid it to the side, so her palm brushed against his nipple. She didn’t know what to expect, but she was certainly glad when he gasped at the sensation. They were probably also sensitive spots for him; she supposed since everybody had them. Although hers were so sensitive at the moment, any stimulation would have to be gentler. She decided she’d see how much this aroused Fitz, and slowly dragged her finger around his areola, she watched, fascinated as his eyelids fluttered shut and his breath hitched. Sensitive. “Do you like that?” She asked softly, pinching his nipple between her two fingers. His back arched and she felt his cock twitch beneath the sheets.

“Yeah,” He sighed. Apparently, he liked that. He had never had it happen before, mind you. “How come you’re the one who gets to have it happen all the time?”

“I completely agree,” Jemma bowed her head to his chest and kissed the other one gently as she continued to pinch and roll the first one. “It’s a travesty.” She put her mouth against his chest again, this time applying suction. He felt his chest tighten and all the soft pulses of pleasure go directly to his cock, which was already much too confined. One thing he wasn’t expecting was to feel her teeth on her new favorite sensitive spots. He jolted, his toes curled, he let out a moan, and he threw his head back, it hit the headboard. Ow.

Jemma giggled. He let himself smile, too. “Do me a favor and try not to damage that brain of yours,” Jemma whispered from his chest. Her breath against his chest continued to add to those sensations. But as fun as that was - and believe Fitz, he was going to ask her to try that again very soon - he wanted to see her eyes squeezed shut as she gasped and moaned. She was enjoying it when it was him. To satisfy this new ambition, Fitz hooked one arm around her waist and twisted her in his lap, so her back was against his bare chest, and her body planted between his thighs. She squirmed against his lap, intentionally, probably, and his hips moved against her a little bit as well, heat rushed down his body. He let one of his hands roam across her stomach, and he remembered that something amazing was growing inside of her.

When he was younger, he thought the whole ‘pregnant’ bit would be a buzzkill to any couple’s sex life, but as he was deciding now, he was very excited to make his pregnant almost-wife very happy.

His hand began to ascend up her body, so his fingers grazed against the underside of her breast. She squirmed again and grabbed his arm to still him. “I need you to be careful. The hormones are making them sore.”
“I’ll be gentle,” Fitz promised. He was, barely brushing the pads of his fingers across her chest, not even daring to get closer to her more sensitive areas yet. His second hand descended from her stomach, so he dragged his fingers under her waistband. “Is it okay if I-”

“Continue,” Jemma whispered.

Fitz let his hand slip underneath her waistband further, until he felt his way to between her legs, through the patch of curly hair. His fingers found their way into her folds. He avoided her clitoris carefully, to tease her, and spread the lips of her labia apart with his fingers, letting some of her more delicate areas receive a light draft through her panties. She wasn’t wearing pajama pants, after all. He let his fingers slide into her a few more times. “You’re so fucking wet,” He whispered into her ear. “I’ve barely touched you.”

“So seeing you happy makes me happy,” Jemma admitted. Fitz liked that answer because he ground the heel of his hand into her clitoris as his fingers teased her entrance. She moaned and arched her back, pressing against his straining cock. He continued to move his hands against her, finally thrusting a finger inside of her, and then another. She kept moaning, “Fitz,” she gasped. Inside of her, he curled his fingers against a familiar rough spot on her walls. She moaned loudly again, “Oh, Fitz!” Her hands gripped his knees so she could steady herself, which was doing horrible things to his resolve. He began to rub her harder, thrust his fingers deeper, press kisses to the side of her neck, and his fingers gingerly brushed closer and closer to her already tight sore nipples. The sensations sent burning pleasure throughout her entire nervous system. Soon, her mind was lost to everything but the feelings of his hands on her, his lips on her. Just as everything went blank and she felt the peak of euphoria, she squeezed Fitz’s knees tightly and moaned his name loudly.

She collapsed against him, breathing heavily, recollecting herself after that very lovely orgasm. But she wasn’t sated. Not until he and she were moaning and swearing together, tangled limbs and sweaty flesh. She sat up and scooted further down, his hands left her as it was obvious she was on the move. Jemma hooked her fingers through her panties, now soaked, and let them fall to the floor. She turned to face Fitz and crawled back onto his lap. She kissed him, working her lips against his as she gripped his shoulders and made sure to leave a sliver of space for her sore chest. Fitz grabbed the sheets and began to pull them out from under her, away from him, so the only thing separating them now was his undergarments. Jemma straddled his hips, he could feel the warm air of her body, as she was mere centimeters away from grinding down on him again. As much as both of them loved the kiss as it was now, they both also needed to fit together as they did, one inside the other. Jemma broke away, letting Fitz grunt in frustration as she tugged his boxers down, under her bottom, so they were far enough down his legs he could kick them away. He was free, and he groaned with relief as the confinement was gone. It had nearly become painful. Jemma’s lips found him again. She was still straddling his lap, now the only thing keeping him from being inside of her was the air and distance between them. Something he hoped she would resolve soon.

Sure enough, he felt a tentative brush of skin against skin as she lowered her hips to meet him. The electricity of that contact rippled through both of them. More confident, Jemma reached down and
gently directed him to her entrance. They both sucked in a breath of air in anticipation, and she slowly lowered herself. He pushed inside of her, she stretched around him, and neither exhaled until he was completely sheathed inside of her.

“Fitz,” Jemma gasped.

“Jemma?” Fitz questioned, equally breathless. She leaned forwards, her lips ghosting across his. Her hands moved to either side of his head; her hands gripped the headboard. She was ready to continue, nodding at him. They moved against one another, Fitz adjusted his legs so he could lift himself against her. The first few strokes were uncoordinated, but they soon fell into a steady rhythm. Jemma had no idea why she felt so magnificent when Fitz was inside of her. She understood the carnal, human pleasures from the friction and burning their movements caused, sending pulses of searing joy. Jemma appreciated the intimacy of their position, moving against one another passionately and carelessly as beams of sunlight trickled into the room. She knew the romance of it, as her eyes locked on his. She could see his expression change when she changed the angle of his hips, and she could admire his bright eyes in the morning sun, she could watch his mouth make her name like it was the only word he knew. But none of that explained how when he was inside her, moving against her, she felt supernovas erupt, and stars form inside her mind.

They were approaching climax, she could tell by how white her knuckles had turned as she gripped the headboard, and Jemma supposed she wouldn’t be able to hold on much longer. Every pulse and ripple of pleasure, combined with her arousing mental stimulation, was blended, so all she felt was a steady roar of euphoria. Fitz was the same way, barely able to hold on because he felt himself throbbing within her, and the look of pure happiness on her face wasn’t making his resolve any better. Holding on began to become painful, but he didn’t want to finish until she was ready. Jemma realized his predicament from the telltale furrow of his brows and the slight frown. She let go of the headboard with one hand so that it could ghost across her incredibly sensitive breasts. The result was instantaneous, she collapsed her head against his shoulder, repeating his name, as her hips stuttered and her walls clenched around him. He relaxed as well, the pressure cascading out of him as he cried out her name.

Jemma wasn’t sure that she had the energy to roll off of him, let alone take a shower, which is what she probably should be doing after she was drenched in sweat and other bodily fluids. She just needed five minutes to regain herself, and it seemed Fitz wasn’t in any hurry to do anything after the resolution, either.

Finally, she pushed herself up and away, collapsing beside him in the bed. She exhaled deeply.

“You’re beautiful,” Fitz told her.

“So are you,” Jemma replied, reaching her hand towards his. “That was divine.”
Fitz smiled down at her, “Shower?”

“Sure, but just to get clean,” Jemma said. “Your child is sucking all the energy out of me like a vampire. I’ve never gotten tired this easily before.”

“Technically vampires only suck blood,” Fitz reminded her.

“Well, either way, it’s draining,” Jemma sighed. “Shower or no?”

“Shower,” Fitz decided.

Day Thirty-Three

That morning, Jemma was sitting in her office. The master schedule she was working on for the SciTech students was before her on her plasma screen. She was having some difficulty with the scheduling, as she currently had fifteen overlaps on the students’ master schedule, and one overlap on the teacher’s schedule. Jemma sighed as she cocked her head to the side if she changed what she was thinking of changing she’d have to reorganize the order of the physics department. Not to mention that History of SHIELD taught by Phil Coulson was a rigid period, and so she had to work around it as it always overlapped with the psychology classes. She didn’t know what she could do to make it work, and she had only a few days left to submit the master schedule.

“Ma’am?” Karen poked her head into the office, “I don’t mean to disturb you, but you have an urgent call from General Brigadier Talbot.”

Jemma nodded, wondering what Talbot needed, “I can answer.” Karen had enabled it so that the video call appeared on her large screen she was doing scheduling. “Sir,” She said politely.

“Simmons,” Talbot nodded. “I need you to do something for me. Is Fitz around?”

“He’s downstairs, sir,” Jemma said. “Is everything alright, sir?”
“Hunky-dory. I would like your consultation on a case that’s puzzling us all up here at HQ. Both of your consultations.”


“How is everything at Academy doing?” Talbot asked.

“Fine, sir,” Jemma said. “We’re just working through some of the admin things before the year starts. I suppose that will when it finally becomes interesting.”

“Are you teaching any classes?”

“Yes, Organic Chemistry, Xenobiology, and Inhuman Biology, Sir.”

“You have an inhuman biology class?”

Someone hasn’t been reading his memos. Jemma requested nearly a month ago that Talbot would permit that course despite the fact that Inhuman biology was relatively confidential. She asked for nineteen files she could use as reading material. He signed off. “Yes, sir. I believed as they are becoming an integral part of our society and the work we do at SHIELD, incoming biologists ought to understand the basic genetics of inhumans as well as the effects of Terrigenesis. Agent Johnson even volunteered to be a test subject for some demonstrations.”

“And Xenobiology, that’s aliens, right?”

“Yes, sir, I found myself uniquely qualified for that position,” Jemma said lightly.

“Right,” Talbot agreed hesitantly. Following that was an awkward period of silence where Talbot glanced away from Jemma several times to look at something off-screen. The door to her office finally opened as Fitz entered. “Oh, good, we can begin,” Talbot said. “Fitz, Simmons, I’m sending you a holofile.”

“Your office doesn’t have a holotable, does it?” Fitz asked. Jemma smiled at him regretfully.
“What other toys have you been hiding?”

Talbot coughed uncomfortably. Jemma held back a smile and went to her desk, pressing a button on the underside. One of the vertical wooden panels of her office walls opened, the hiss of a piston of some sort could be heard. There was a metal slab that began to slide out, with a red handle. Fitz pulled the handle, only half containing his enthusiasm. The holotable slid out of the wall on its track. Once it reached the end of the track, the top half unfolded, so it became an actual, horizontal, table. The tables’ surface flickered on and glowed white.

“Yours is fancier than the communal one we have in the engineering department,” Fitz asserted.

“I’m fancier than you are,” Jemma shrugged. She swept her hand across the table, and several multicolored boxes floated. She selected one, opening the file that Talbot had sent them. A video projected in the air, it was a bank robbery. The robber was wielding something rather unconventional, a broadsword. He was dressed like a common robber, wearing dark clothes and a ski mask. But he did have a broad leather belt with an ornate scabbard attached, also unusual. There was no audio, but they assumed that some yelling and screaming was taken place as he swung the sword through a pillar and it crumbled. People cowered to the ground. He pushed the sword through one of the teller’s windows, threatening the person on the other side. As he was doing this, the beefy security guard with a taser decided he could take the robber, and fired his Taser. The robber was clearly in pain from that, but he ripped the Taser off of his body and shoved the tip of the sword into the security guard’s gut. The guard keeled over, gripping his abdomen, as red blossomed across the front of his light blue uniform. The robber became impatient, smashing the teller’s window with his sword., he vaulted over the desk with one hand.

The feed cut to the security camera’s view of the vault. A second guard went to stop the man with a great sword. The robber swung wildly, and a streak of red crossed the second guard’s chest as he fell backward and out of the frame. Then, the robber did something incredibly odd. He stabbed the vault door. They expected for the sword to ricochet off, but it sunk into the steel vault door like it was butter, and the robber cut his way inside. The feed sped up, and ten minutes later, he stepped out with bags of money and the valuables in safety deposit boxes.

The camera changed again, to outside the bank. Sure enough, four police cars were sitting out front; the police crouched behind the hoods. As the robber came out, they yelled at him. He seemed not to be very pleased and charged, sword raised above his head. They opened fire. You could see him stop and writhe in pain when the bullets hit. But he pressed on, still, somehow, managing to stay upright. He got close enough to one of the cars, and he swiped. His sword went through the hood, through the engine, and even through the asphalt. The police stared at him in horror before he hacked at them too. Realizing their bullets didn’t work, they ran. He climbed into a squad car and took off, leaving the bank. The feed died.

Fitz and Simmons had many questions, and they looked up to Talbot with equally perplexed
expressions, silently begging him for more information.

“This happened yesterday in St. Louis. We’ve been able to keep the press quiet, but I doubt we have much longer before it leaks. After the robber sped away, police pursued. He’s not as good as a driver as he is a swordsman, as he crashed into the Mississippi River, through the windshield. Another reason to always wear your seatbelt.”

“You recovered the sword?”

“Unfortunately, no. The only thing that we found other than the money and his body was that scabbard. It got caught on the glass when he was thrown and was ripped from his body. We’ve done a complete analysis of it, but so far, we haven’t found anything.”

To corroborate what he said, Jemma swiped across the holotable, and the image changed to a three-dimensional model of the scabbard with a floating record of performed tests and their results. The interesting thing to Fitz was that the dating suggested it was a genuine antique from nearly a thousand years ago.

“Because of this, we believe the sword is the source of his ability, an artifact of some sort. The autopsy report confirms that he was entirely human,” Talbot explained.

“Look at his adrenaline levels on the tox screen, those are abnormal,” Jemma pulled up the autopsy report. “And he had no injuries other than those of being in the car crash?”

“The bullet holes you saw him get were just scars,” Talbot confirmed. “But that isn’t the weirdest part. He killed the two guards and one police officer. Can you guess the cause of death?”

“Blood loss?” Fitz offered.

“Shock?” Jemma suggested.

Talbot shook his head, “Wrong. Infection. They somehow became severely infected within five minutes of being touched by that sword. Within ten, they had died of the toxicity of sepsis.”

Jemma read the autopsy report of the guards and police officer while Fitz winced as a video played of the first dead guard writhing on the ground as he violently died of infection. “You can see why the fact this sword is now in the Mississippi is a bit frightening. We’ve been searching the entire
river, sending in scuba teams, nothing.”

“What if someone already recovered it?” Jemma suggested. “There’s no way this robber was working alone.” She pulled up his file. “He was a petty thief, recently off of parole for grave-robbing in Boston, of all things. He dropped out of high school. He wouldn’t have the intelligence to design something like this or the resources to find it.”

“You think he’s working for someone else?” Fitz asked.

“Are your labs going to do any more tests on the scabbard?” Jemma asked.

“No,” Talbot said. “Our lead scientist gave up.”

“Jemma,” Fitz said. “Do you want to investigate the sword?”

“I want to offer advice, because your labs are going to do more tests on the scabbard, and you’re going to kick that lead scientist in the ass for me because there is so much more to investigate. First of all, he only did one culture swab? One? I would have done several, from both inside and outside of the scabbard. Then, of course, the infection. Was it viral? Fungal? Bacterial? How is the sword making it? Is it coated in something akin to poison, or can the sword excrete it? You may be able to tell if you took whole cultures of the wounds as well, not just a tox screen. And finally, there is no way the robber magically healed. Something is causing it. The genetic test performed only evaluated to see if they had the inhuman marker or effects of terrigen. I would look for any other genetic abnormalities, as well as performing experiments on his corpse and taking comprehensive samples of bone marrow and cerebrospinal fluid to investigate anything unusual about his stem cells and those in their formative productions.”

“It might be alien,” Fitz said. “Look, the scabbard is old, first off. And second, the enhancements of hormones like adrenaline caused by touching a weapon has been observed in alien objects before, like the berserker staff back when we were on the Bus. Before Hydra.”

“Right, perhaps you could use some of the berserker staff’s properties as a theoretical basis for the sword and run simulations on how it would affect the physiology of the criminal who wielded it,” Jemma suggested.

“What if it has various excretions? Some dangerous infectious agent in the blade, and an alternative hormone stimulant in the handle, which also could stimulate cellular repair?” Fitz
“I expected nothing less,” Talbot said, pleased by their rambling. “I’ll be sure to pass along the message, and I’ll keep your access to the file open in case you want to contact any of the scientists we have investigating this. Either to give them other suggestions or to berate them for their inability to have those same ideas. I frankly couldn’t care either way. I expect for you to be in the loop on this, it’s top priority. We don’t want a sepsis sword to get into the water cycle. And while you might be working here, you’re still the most brilliant minds SHIELD has at its disposal.”

“Thank you for the vote of confidence, sir,” Jemma said. Talbot nodded. He pressed a button, and the screen clicked dead.

“You’re fascinated by this,” Fitz guessed.

“You aren’t?” Jemma questioned.

“I am,” Fitz assured her. He sighed. “How’s your day been?”

“Stressful. Can you help me with the master schedule? You were always better with those sorts of layered constructs.”

“You love itineraries.”

“Yes, but this is eighty-six overlapping itineraries agendas of students and fifteen overlapping itineraries of professors. And I’m getting…. Frazzled.”

“Can we use the holotable?”

“Sure,” Jemma sighed. “Are you going to come to my office now just to play with my holotable?”

“Well, when we’re married, we’ll have to share everything, so it’ll be my holotable-in-law,” Fitz joked.
“I’ll smack you with your stapler-in-law,” Jemma held up her bright red stapler as an empty threat.

**Day Thirty-Five**

“Are we seriously fighting about this?” Jemma asked as she slammed down a notebook.

“We aren’t fighting- we’re just… talking,” Fitz protested. “About something important.”

“Look, I told you my position,” Jemma said. “I’m not willing to compromise. After everything we’ve been through, I thought you’d understand.”

“And I do understand, but,” Fitz sighed. “But maybe I’m also unwilling to compromise.”

“So that’s it then?” Jemma asked. “We can’t agree with this? You’re just going to be unreasonable?”

“How am I the unreasonable one? You have other choices-”

“So do you!” Jemma urged. “An excellent choice, which would be more than appropriate. Do I need to remind you why my position is the better one?”

“Oh, you’ve made your subscription to antiquated gender roles quite clear-”

“Antiquated gender roles’? Because I want-”

“‘Yes, because you want! And I also want! And we have to find a way to compromise!’ Fitz huffed and crossed his arms.

“Maybe we should just let Daisy decide if she wants to be my maid of honor or your best woman?” Jemma suggested.
“Then she’d be picking between us, and I do not want to put that pressure on her,” Fitz said. “You have Ariel-”

“You have Mack! Our dear friend Mack, who would be an excellent best man,” Jemma told him. “Maybe neither of us get Daisy.”

“That’d break the poor girl’s heart,” Fitz sighed. “We have to conclude who gets Daisy. You said you didn’t care about wedding planning.”

“I don’t, but I care about Daisy. Remember whoever gets Daisy- she goes to their stag party. Daisy spends so much time among men at that Inhuman facility, Elena being her only close female ally. Being with me and my bridal party- she’d get some real female interaction, outside of your male batch.”

“Well, I don’t have any male friends other than Mack and Coulson. So you’ll have three women, and I’ll have two men.”

“Let’s make a compromise then, if you don’t want me to have a larger bridal party, I won’t let Ariel wear the dress. It’ll be Daisy and Elena. And… We won’t have separate stag night parties, we never cared about that, anyway. We’ll get all of our friends together the night before the wedding so we can drink and catch up and not worry about who has more friends.”

“Fine, but if Daisy isn’t in my groomsmen party, you have to talk Mack and Coulson into wearing kilts. Because my mother wants to uphold that tradition and-”

“Now who’s subscribing to antiquated gender roles?” Jemma asked. Fitz glared at her half-heartedly. “I’ll scare Mack and Coulson into wearing kilts. No promises they’ll be proper traditionalists and sans their knickers.”

“I can live with that,” Fitz shrugged. “You can have Daisy as your maid of honor.”
Week 6

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much, everyone who read, enjoyed, kudos-ed or commented! I hope you all enjoy this chapter as well. Just a little warning, it does include some more pregnancy stuff, as well as a little discussing on the ancient symbolism of genitalia. Trust me; it makes sense in context. Anyway, I just wanted for you all to know what to expect.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Six

Day Thirty-Six

When Fitz woke up, his soon-to-be wife’s bedside lamp was on, and there were the familiar sounds of retching coming from the bathroom. He sighed and kicked off the covers, standing up and making his way to the bathroom where Jemma was hunched over the toilet. They had learned over the last two weeks that her nausea came and went in waves. Some days, she would be okay. Other days, she’d be hugging the toilet all day. The fact that she had to pee every two hours, her breasts always hurt, and that she always had severe heartburn also made Fitz feel a little guilty for getting her pregnant. Them having a child in seven and a half months was a miraculous prospect, but right now, it didn’t seem that magical.

“You alright?” Fitz asked.

“Ugh,” Jemma said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you.”

“I’ll live,” Fitz assured her. “Are you alright?”

“I’m… tired,” Jemma admitted. “And nausea hit hard today.”

“Why don’t you go back to bed, I’ll get you some soda?” Fitz suggested.

“Does it matter, I’ll end up here again, anyway,” Jemma sighed. “I’ll spend the next seven months of my life living out of a bathroom.”
“Your books say nausea usually ends after the first semester, that’s only six more weeks,” Fitz said.

“Yes, but-” Jemma sighed. “Ugh, you’re right. I’m getting unnecessarily dramatic.”

“I still love you,” Fitz told her. “Come on,” He walked over and helped her up. “You’ll relax, we can watch something. Or we can use dice to plan the wedding.”

“That’s a terrible idea.”

“Says you,” Fitz said. “You kept saying you didn’t care, but that didn’t stop you from asking the wedding planner for help and getting nineteen possible themes, each one with fifteen details. And then you keep complaining about how you don’t care. But that doesn’t stop you from staring at the wedding themes.” He helped Jemma to bed and pulled the comforter around her. “And I can only assume what’s going through your head at times like those.”

“It’s just… It’s happening. And people are going to be there to see it… And that bothers me, a little bit,” Jemma admitted. “You know, other than our close friends, nobody we invited understand what we’ve been through. They’re incapable of appreciating what we’ve survived to get to stand there and say vows to one another.”

“I thought we were having a small ceremony.”

“Well, my parents managed to pack a hundred people under that adjective,” Jemma sighed. “Although your mom wasn’t much better.”

“They’re excited,” Fitz reminded her. “They can’t see the world through our warped perspective. Which is not a bad thing.”

“I know.” Jemma nodded. “Why is it so hard to feel ordinary emotions? About this ordinary stuff?” She motioned to her uterus.

“There’s nothing ordinary about us. Or what’s happening inside of you,” Fitz said. “Sure, it happens every day, but that doesn’t make it ordinary. How big is the embryo now?”
“The size of a pea,” Jemma answered, smiling. “And currently the major focus of development is facial structures.”

“I hope they look like you,” Fitz said earnestly.

**Day Thirty-Nine**

Jemma met her husband for lunch in the SciTech faculty canteen. A few days later, she was still sensitive regarding nausea, but she felt like she was on the downhill of how bad it was.

“How are you?” Fitz asked her as she pulled up a chair beside him.

“Okay,” She nodded. “I’ve been rereading that case Talbot read us in on, and some things don’t feel right to me. Our theory about the duality of the sword, it seems odd. I’ve been doing some research.”

“Do you want to talk about this here?” Fitz asked, glancing around at their conversing co-workers.

“Nobody’s eavesdropping,” Jemma assured him. “Look, how much do you know about the traditional symbolism of artifacts concerning human genitalia?”

“Um, nothing, why?”

“Well, I think that the abilities seen by the sword and the sheath can are with those sorts of symbols. Swords are phallic,” Jemma explained. “And phallic associations in this symbolism corresponds to traditionally masculine things. War, violence, death. Meanwhile, the sheath is yonic.”

“Yonic?”

“It resembles a vagina. In fact- the word vagina in Latin means both a sword sheath and an anatomical vagina. So, it’s a feminine symbol, one that represents life, birth, peace. For obvious
“Okay?” Fitz questioned her. “Do you have a point or do you just want to talk about vaginas again?”

“Look, we saw the sword as an object of death. It killed a man in ten minutes from an enhanced infection. We saw the robber also not die when he should have. When he was wearing the scabbard on his hip, and that explains how bullets couldn’t kill him but a car crash could. When he was thrown in the accident, he was no longer wearing the sheath,” Jemma explained.

“The lab did a lot of tests - at our discretion - they didn’t find anything.”

“Well… They kept it intact, so there could be inner workings we don’t understand. And nobody made a more experimental approach. Which is why I requested Talbot send the sheath here, to the Academy.”

“So what do you want to do, shoot someone and see if the sheath heals them?” Fitz asked. Jemma pursed her lips. “Jemma!”

“I don’t want to shoot anyone. But there is so much we don’t understand, that sword is missing, and I am confident that robber was working with an accomplice, at least. He seems like someone who was hired for grunt work. Do you disagree?” Jemma asked.

“Of course, I agree,” Fitz sighed. “But you can’t ask for people to volunteer for this, and you are not experimenting on yourself!”

“Volunteer for what?” Ariel sat down across from them, munching on a baby carrot.

“Classified project,” Fitz and Simmons said quickly.

Ariel nodded, “Don’t worry,” She looked at their faces. “That’s all I heard, and nobody else seems to be paying attention. Although, talking about something classified in a room full of people?”

“As you said, nobody was paying attention,” Jemma shrugged.
“Okay,” Ariel nodded. “Um, hey, quick question. So, is it okay if I bring along two people instead of my previously checked none? I know it’s last minute, but, um, well I want to bring my son. And his, well, my-” Ariel sighed. “So you know how my file says McAllister for my father’s name and nothing else? Yeah? So, a few years before Luke was born, actually, I found my father.”

“That sounds interesting, do you mind telling us a little bit about him?”

“Oh, well, um, he was married when him and my mum… yeah,” Ariel sighed. “And he wanted to-well, I was a mistake. He had a wife, and he wanted to work on their marriage, I was the product of one night of bad judgment, after all. So, um, that’s why my mom moved. But he still paid what he could, something my mother neglected to tell me. And um, I met him in Boston. He’s an archaeologist, sort of, and he was on a business trip to Harvard, imagine that. He recognized me because I look so much like my mother, and, um, we met up after all those years. And he wasn’t perfect, and he was busy a lot, but I got to know him. And when, uh, Dan died, and I was alone and pregnant with Luke, he came to Boston, and he helped. And when I was put in a psychiatric facility for depression, he took care of Luke. So, he’s been taking care of Luke while I’ve been trying to find my bearings here in Norfolk. And he talked me into letting him bring Luke to your wedding.”

“I’m happy for you, you got a second chance with your father,” Jemma said sweetly. “Of course your father and son can come. We’d love to have you. Um…are you alright with the fact you’re not a bridesmaid?”

“Not much of a maid, am I?” Ariel smiled. “It’s fine. Being invited to your ceremony was more than enough.”

“Nonsense, you’re a friend, Ariel,” Fitz assured her. Ariel smiled softly.

“So,” Ariel said. “You never did get around to finishing the epic love story. When we left off… Fitz had just returned from Maveth, and that Hive thing was in the body of that asshat, Ward?”

“Ah yes,” Jemma smiled. “Well, first there was recovery. I went back into therapy for my PTSD, now elevated because of torture. Fitz was feeling unnecessarily guilty for trying to kill Hive when it infected Will’s body. We finally agreed to start over. Push aside all of our miscommunication and guilt and just be friends again and see where that leads.”

“Well, I can imagine it lead somewhere nice,” Ariel guessed.
“Well, first there were a lot of nature documentaries,” Jemma squinted at him. “Still don’t completely know if you were trying to set a mood or not. But we held hands because it was predicted by an inhuman who could see the future.”

“And then Bobbi and Hunter had to leave, Daisy was taken by Hive, May, and Andrew, and we just kept seeing all these people we cared about ripped apart from one another,” Fitz supplied.

“So, we decided not to let anything rip us apart anymore,” Jemma said. “You know after you started apologizing for kissing me when I was kissing you back. I suppose it worked out rather well, though, we had sex for the first time soon after that.”

“Jemma!”

“What, I’m not giving any details, it was an important milestone!” Jemma argued. “And then, we fought Hive and... well, we lost Lincoln.”

“Poor Daisy,” Ariel sighed. “So, you were together, now, I mean, that’s it, no more obstacles?”

“Well,” Jemma sighed. “You should talk about it. You know, after what happened to you.”

“Right,” Fitz nodded. “Um, so, there was a man named Radcliffe who helped us stop Hive. He and I started working together on his new project. A Life Model Decoy or LMD. It’s basically an android. He named the one we worked on AIDA.”

“The A is for Artificial,” Jemma said quietly.

“AIDA wasn’t bad, at first. The purpose was LMDs be used as a diversion to keep people from dying. But she and Radcliffe became corrupted because of this book called the Darkhold. It had, from what we’ve observed, advanced scientific blueprints. I got trapped in a pocket dimension with Coulson and a man named Robbie Reyes by Reyes’ uncle who also read the book, Eli. Eli wanted to use the book to become a god. Anyway, Radcliffe and AIDA read the book to build a portal to save us, bring us back. It worked, but the book corrupted them. They betrayed us and tried to steal it and then started to work with the Watchdogs. Radcliffe abducted May and replaced her with an LMD of herself, and that LMD stole the Darkhold. Then they did the same to former Director Mace, Coulson, Mack, and me.” Fitz paused.
“What happened to you while you were replaced?”

“Um, I was hooked up to something called the Framework. Originally it was a training program, simulated reality. But with Radcliffe and AIDA’s meddling, it became something much more sinister. They ran a simulation, one where each of our regrets were reversed. But AIDA, who controlled the simulation, manipulated it and everyone inside. She wanted to be human, and she had the means to do so with the Darkhold. She betrayed Radcliffe. She made herself the queen of Hydra and made Hydra rule the world under a fascist claw. And I was her second in command. Because she wrote herself into my life, and she wrote herself into my heart.” Fitz exhaled harshly and wrung his hands.

“We can stop,” Jemma reminded him.

“You can; I’d understand,” Ariel assured him.

“No, I want to tell the story,” Fitz said. “So, I was a terrible person in there. Hydra. I didn’t know Jemma. In there she was dead, mass grave. And... I tortured inhumans, so I could give AIDA - which was different in there, Ophelia - powers. And, um, Jemma tried to save me, but you can’t break programming that quickly.”

“I shouldn't've killed your father in there,” Jemma said. “You would never trust anyone who threatens or hurts your family.”

“I know,” Fitz nodded. “We’ve talked and thought about what we could’ve or should’ve done in there. But it did happen. I hurt you. I said awful things to you. And Radcliffe had a change of heart; he freed me. And then AIDA took me. Her project worked, she was sort of human, then. With powers. And emotions. And I tried to have her use that humanity to be good, despite all the wrong she did. You know, we saved Mack. But, um, she wasn’t good. She did a good thing, but she wasn’t good. She wanted for me to love her, she wanted to control me as she could in the framework.”

“You rejected her?” Ariel guessed.

“Of course I did. I love Jemma. There couldn’t love anyone else the way I love her. With the same magnitude. And I thought we were over, after everything all that I did in there.”
“It wasn’t real,” Jemma reminded him.

“It wasn’t real,” Fitz agreed. “We stopped AIDA. Coulson killed her, well he was possessed by a demonic interdimensional- it doesn’t matter. Um, then we went to space.”

“Lots of time to talk about your feelings up there in the vacuum of space,” Jemma laughed. “And we did. You know, he finally realized I loved him, still. He learned to start forgiving himself.”

“I couldn’t’ve done it without you,” Fitz smiled. “And, we survived space, again. And, well, now we’re here,” He shrugged. “And it’s okay.”

“And it’ll get better,” Jemma added. “Because we have a lot to look forwards to.”

“Aw.” Ariel pouted. “You’re rather inspirational. It makes my cold, dead heart cry. I’m not ever going to get a happy story like that.”

“Daisy says the same,” Jemma says. “And I hope both of you are wrong, about your love life. But, when it comes to Fitz and I… I think, what you should take away is that you can find love. Anyone can find love. Sometimes in the strangest places. Sometimes they’ve been beside you the whole damn time,” Jemma gazed lovingly at Fitz.

“Yeah,” Ariel said, not convinced. “My therapist says- and yes, therapists have therapists. She says that when I can tell the story about Dan’s death without crying, I’m ready to move on. Well, I can recite the story without a tear, but I haven’t been attracted to anyone since Dan. Like, I’ve had lust and other superficial feelings. But the butterflies? Everything getting brighter and more colorful? I’ve never felt that before or after Dan. I’m okay. I am. I’ve accepted the fact nobody is gonna come into my life and sweep me off my feet.” Ariel shrugged. “I have my son and this job now. And, you know, my long-term relationship with grief. But, we’re in the later stages, like the ‘my annoying roommate who’ll punch me in the gut whenever Dan’s favorite movie is on HBO’ stage.”

“I think we’re still in the ‘annoying gremlin that lives under your bed and yells at night’ stage,” Jemma told Fitz.

“Agreed,” He nodded. The three of them laughed.
Day Forty-Two

It was the first appointment with an OB/GYN. It started with Jemma bringing a binder, and it didn’t get any less interesting. First, they had to disclose their medical histories and have the doctor sign special confidentiality waivers. Then, they had to deal with the doctor questioning them with the sort of disbelieving fascination they were growing more accustomed to. Finally, after they explained for the third time that they were on an alien planet, they finally proceeded with the multiplicity of tests that the doctor ordered, as well as a list of Jemma’s questions.

Jemma asked about everything. From her nausea to her urination frequency. She asked about how her family history might affect things, the amount of blood during implantation, and the habitability of her uterus. “...and so you’re positive that the scar tissue shouldn’t affect the pregnancy?”

“Certain,” The very patient doctor, Dr. Polga, answered with a smile. “If that’s all, can I proceed with the ultrasound?”

“Please, do,” Fitz said. “And, thanks for doing the pelvic exam while she talked. Otherwise, I think we’d be here for another half hour.”

“Arse,” Jemma said lovingly.

“Okay,” Dr. Polga grabbed the necessary things. “Now, usually, we’ll just have ultrasound technicians do these sorts of things but, well, I want to be vigilant with the two of you.” She motioned from Jemma’s face to her abdomen. “A baby is stressful on a body. With your history, I do want to be careful. Now, I’m not sure anything bad is going to happen, that’s why I want diagnostics performed carefully and regularly. I believe every three weeks is what we’re going to have to do. I know it’s a lot, but I’ve never dealt with a situation like this before.”

“We understand,” Jemma looked up at her fiancé, who nodded. “Um, can we hear the heartbeat?”

“Well, if you’re six weeks, going on seven, I believe so,” Dr. Polga said. “Let’s see,” She fiddled with the ultrasound machine and picked up the transducer and a bottle of blue gel. “I’ll need you to lift your gown more.” Jemma was wearing a hospital gown, with sheets around her legs for the pelvic exam. She pulled up the gown more to reveal her abdomen. The couple waited anxiously as Dr. Polga put on the gel and the transducer and began to calibrate the image. She squinted long and hard at the picture before smiling. “Everything looks perfect,” She told them, letting them see. “So this black structure is your uterus, currently a mostly empty cavity. But here, the white and gray, that’s the embryo and the amniotic sack.”
“It’s so small.”

“Yeah,” Dr. Polga agreed. “But, I don’t see any problems. Good placement, blood flow is fine. And, you said you wanted to hear the heartbeat.” She pressed a few buttons. “And you know, the heart rate is ideal, 102.”

While the couple was more than relieved to hear that their embryo was perfectly fine, the most magical thing was detecting the heartbeat. It made the prospect of a baby, a living thing made from the two of them, a reality. While the symptoms of pregnancy were a definitive reality, this was different. It wasn’t something so explicitly scientific. It was magic. And, while they had always tried to rationalize the monsters and the magic that they faced, they weren’t doing that now. They could explain the science of embryology and human reproduction easily. But that didn’t stop them from feeling lighter like the world was brighter. Fitz held Jemma’s hand as they gazed at the black and white image on the screen and listened.

“It’s okay to cry,” Dr. Polga assured the couple, both of which instinctively wiped their faces, and yep, tears. “We’ll get back to you on the results of your blood tests and chromosome screenings. In the meantime, do you have any other questions.”

“Can you- can you leave us here for a little bit?” Jemma asked. “With the ultrasound still on?”

“Of course,” Dr. Polga smiled. “Here, just hold it,” She let Jemma hold the transducer to her abdomen. “I’ll send someone to clean up when you’re done.” Dr. Polga got up and left. Jemma held the transducer with one hand and Fitz’s hand with the other.

“Look at them,” Jemma smiled. “That’s our baby, Fitz.”

“That’s our baby, Jemma,” Fitz agreed.

She inhaled shakily, “I love you.”

“I love you,” Fitz agreed.
Thank you! I hope you enjoyed! Please, if you can, comment! I love to talk with my readers and get feedback because it's what drives me to continue writing. Just a bit of a warning, but I am going to have a few busy weeks coming up, so this may be the last chapter for a while, but I promise I'll be back as soon as I can be!
Thanks, everybody for your patience. I hope the wait wasn't too terrible. The wedding is finally coming, although the actual ceremony won't be until next chapter. I hope you all enjoy. Just a bit of a warning, there is a mention of blood and a situation similar to self-harm. It's not supposed to be particularly emotionally charged, but I know everyone has had different experiences.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

**Week Seven**

**Day Forty-Six**

The first thing to be flown in on the new airfield of SHIELD Academy was a quinjet possessing a few agents and a critically important black quarantine box. They took it out onto the tarmac, where Jemma was waiting. It was getting late, most of the faculty had left.

“Thank you,” Jemma told them.

“Talbot says you’re responsible for this, now. He wants a report before you guys leave this weekend for your wedding,” The head agent informed her. “Congratulations, by the way.”

“Thank you,” Jemma smiled. He and his agents loaded back into the quinjet. It took off, back to Headquarters in Washington. Jemma used a dolly to pick up the box and drag it to the freight elevator and go down to the floor with her office. She pulled the box through the faculty floor and into her office, where Fitz was waiting.

“You’re not experimenting on yourself, you’re pregnant,” Fitz reminded her.

“Well, as you said, I can’t ask someone to volunteer for this. All I’d do is cut myself, in a safe spot. If it works, it’ll heal. If it doesn’t, I know first aid.”

“And maybe whatever it does to heal someone is dangerous to a pregnant woman, we have no data on the subject. I’ll do it,” Fitz said.
“I don’t feel comfortable about cutting you,” Jemma said. “Your LMD-”

“I know,” Fitz said. “You’re the one who keeps insisting we need to move on. Overwrite the bad memories.”

“Yes,” Jemma nodded.

“So, we need to overwrite your fear of me getting hurt,” Fitz said. “In this scenario. It’s a controlled situation. I’m me. You’re you. You want to know about this, and I’m not letting you test yourself.”

“Maybe we should do nonhuman trials,” Jemma suggested.

“You said yourself; there’s no way of knowing this would have any effect on non-human physiology,” Fitz said. “I won’t even need stitches. But you want to confirm this hypothesis, and this is the way to do it.”

“Fine, but, on the back of the forearm. Steer clear of your radial artery.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Fitz said. Jemma went over and opened the quarantine box. Wrapped in plastic packaging was the artifact. It was so much more beautiful in person. It was decorated gold, with rubies and intricate symbols and patterns etched in the metal. Jemma handed it to Fitz. She went over to her desk, where a medical kit was sitting, and picked up a scalpel.

“I trust you,” Fitz told her. He held the scabbard with one hand and offered her the other. She held his hand gently and made a thin cut down the back of his hand. He winced in pain. A streak of red appeared where his flesh opened, and then they watched as his skin began to piece itself together again. The entire process of skin regeneration. The vasoconstriction, the inflammation, the migration of cells, the angiogenesis, and finally the epithelization. A scab formed, and almost immediately, it began to peel away until a new scar was on the back of his hand. And even that seemed to be fading.

“Amazing,” Fitz and Simmons gasped.
“The technology in this could revolutionize medicine,” Jemma said. “We have to figure out how it works and replicate it.”

“We’ll have to tell Talbot what it does,” Fitz reminded her. “And then we’ll have to fill out paperwork requesting to be allowed to experiment with it and figure out its properties. Which, I think will mean more cutting.”

“I know,” Jemma sighed. “And as much as I would love to start tonight, I’ll follow all protocol on this. Hopefully, SHIELD will be able to see what an incredible opportunity this technology presents.”

“Hopefully,” Fitz agreed. “You were right, though, this vagina brings life.”

“It’s so weird,” Jemma said. “It was a random, desperate break in research.”

“Well, it wasn’t stupid, because you came up with it, and there is nothing random about Jemma Anne Simmons,” Fitz told her. “You know, I just realized something when you were cutting me for science.”

“What?”

“We’re getting married next week.”

“We’re getting married next week,” Jemma echoed. “Oh my god. And- and we’re done with the planning!” They had sent in their final decisions on the details that Sunday. Jemma was weirdly happy with the finished portfolio when she sent it to the wedding planner. “We have cake, and floral arrangements all prepared. We picked all the people. We have the reservations. Daisy is coming with us early for wedding dress shopping in London with our moms. We’re good!” Jemma gasped. “Why am I so worried?”

“Because you don’t want to admit it, but you need the wedding to be perfect, even if you don’t care about what colors are in the theme. Because this is just another way for you to flip off the cosmos for trying to rip us apart.”

“Let’s clean this up,” Jemma motioned to the quarantine box and scabbard. “And go home.”
“Good idea.” Fitz smiled.

**Day Forty-Eight**

It was late on Friday. Jemma had gotten thanks from Talbot for determining the properties of the scabbard, but no reply on whether or not she was allowed to use it to investigate the possible medical applications of it. She was currently telling Karen and the heads of departments, via email, what she expected of them in the next week. She and Fitz didn’t have time to go on a real honeymoon. After the wedding, that upcoming Wednesday, they would spend the rest of their week in the Scottish Highlands until they had to fly back on the following Saturday night so that they could get to work Monday morning. They were driving to Washington DC that morning to pick up Daisy. Daisy, being Jemma’s maid of honor and the couple’s mutual best friend, was coming with them before the wedding. They were flying out that Friday. They’d land in London, Saturday morning. Jemma Simmons, Julianne Simmons, Ruth Fitz, and Daisy Johnson were going wedding dress shopping. Meanwhile, Fitz would spend time with his future father-in-law and brother-in-law, Malcolm and Mason Simmons.

At the moment, they were saying farewell to their friends. Coulson, May, and Ariel, who wouldn’t fly in until Tuesday morning, just in time for the recital and party. Per their agreement, Fitz and Simmons were having a combined party before their wedding. They and their guests would drink responsibly (which meant not at all in Jemma’s case) and talk about anything and everything before the big day.

“Good luck with your parents,” Coulson told Jemma as he hugged her.

“Thanks, sir. Sorry, not sir, Coulson.”

“You can call me Phil,” Coulson offered.

“Not there yet,” Jemma shook her head, smiling. She approached May, “You’re getting a hug.”

“Fine,” May said, holding back a small smile poorly. “Have fun.”

Jemma beamed and nodded, “Ariel, I cannot wait until you get to meet everyone else. Mack, Elena, Daisy.”
“Oh, I think Luke is gonna have more fun meeting Daisy. He loves Quake,” Ariel laughed. They hugged. “You two have fun. And no nightmares on the plane. Doctor’s orders.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Fitz saluted. They made their way to the roof. Now that there was an aeronautical transportation platform, they took a helicopter into work. The helicopter landed fifteen minutes later at the naval base. They took their car home, loaded up their bags, and left their keys with the couple across the street so someone would water Jemma’s impressive and growing collection of rare flora in the sunroom. She had a weird obsession with the venus flytraps. They drove up to Washington DC. It was about a three-hour drive.

They pulled up at Daisy’s apartment building, somewhere on K street. It was one of those modern-looking buildings, with dark glass, gleaming metal, and pale concrete. A security guard was standing outside. He was packing a firearm and taser. Jemma texted Daisy that they were outside. Five minutes later, the woman came racing out of the building. She waved at the armed doorman and did all she could not go to quake herself to the car. She launched herself into their arms, hugging them tightly.

“When you asked me if I wanted to come to London and go dress shopping I nearly blackmailed my boss so I could go,” Daisy announced. “I have so much shit on him, Rising Tide days, total coincidence. Anyway, how is my favorite pair of—” she dropped her voice to a whisper “—expecting parents?”

“We’re good,” Jemma answered honestly. “It’s been exciting and new, and we’ve never been happier.”

“I’m so excited for you,” Daisy squealed. “Let’s go, got a plane to catch. I’m gonna meet your parents!” Fitz popped the trunk with the keys of the car so that Daisy could put her suitcase in the trunk.

“Look at her, she’s so happy,” Fitz smiled.

“You’d think she’s the one who’s gonna be a mom,” Jemma agreed.

“She’s going to be an aunt, that’s better,” Fitz explained. “She’ll get all the benefits of children, but can dump them on the parents anytime they get annoying.”
“You figured out my nefarious plan,” Daisy agreed, having overheard them.

The three of them smiled and then got in the car and went to Dulles International Airport. They checked in their luggage and received their boarding passes. They headed to security.

“Are you gonna be okay going in the backscatter scanning machines?” Daisy asked.

“We have special security passes,” Jemma reminded her. “Being agents and all. And even if I am requested to go in the machine, it’s non-ionizing electromagnetic waves. Perfectly safe.”

“Okay,” Daisy nodded.

Jemma, however, was right. Due to their affiliation with SHIELD, they only had to go through the metal detector, and they got to keep their shoes on. Soon, they were sitting in the waiting area in front of their gate, splitting an airport pizza.

“I’m surprised nobody has recognized you,” Jemma whispered.

“Well, to be fair, I’m very concealed right now,” Daisy said. She indeed was wearing a hoodie, with the hood up, and sunglasses. “Plus, most people don’t expect for a superhero to be hanging out with you nerds.”

“Rude,” Jemma laughed. “How’s that going?”

“Fine. You know, I’m just rolling out one welcome wagon after another. No major attacks, other than the occasional Watchdog group who gets confident. Still no intel on The Russian. He’s been dark for over a year. He must have run to whatever corner of the world that Ian Quinn and all those assholes hide.”

“Who knows?” Fitz sighed. “So, dating anyone? Superheroes must be popular in the capital.”

“Ha,” Daisy laughed. “No. I’ve just been focusing on work, you know? Helping inhumans and punching assholes. I met some Avengers and that bug boy. But I’m saving that story for your pre-wedding party.”
“That’s fair,” Jemma agreed. “So, nobody?”

“I mean, I’ve looked into it. I thought I was ready,” Daisy shrugged, “But I just, I’ve gone on a few dates with attractive people, and I had no interest. At all. I mean, they’re obviously appealing. And they’re obviously interested in me. But I feel like I’m talking to a potato, there’s no spark. No jitters. None of this,” She motioned to Jemma and Fitz, who were tucked beside one another, looking stupidly adorable. “There are cobwebs between my legs.”

“You’ll find love,” Jemma assured her. “And, even if there aren’t, there’ll be appropriately aged individuals at the wedding, both our relatives and in the collection of family friends. So, worst case scenario, you can make good use of your fancy room and dust out the cobwebs.”

“Jemma Simmons! Are you suggesting that I have meaningless sex?” Daisy asked. “What about not getting involved in my bad-girl shenanigans?”

“Please,” Jemma rolled her eyes. “I said that before everything. We were space fugitives together, the shenanigans have sailed.”

The intercom buzzed, saying that it was time for first class to board. And it just so happened that was what section the trio was seated in. They tossed the remains of their pizza and stood in line, boarding. Fitz took the window seat, Jemma sat beside him in the aisle seat, and Daisy was sitting a row behind them. She had been assured that there wasn’t anyone to sit beside her, which was good because she didn’t need anyone tweeting about her. The flight attendants went through the safety procedures. Reminding the passengers what to do if they needed to exit the plane, or in the case of oxygen masks descending from the overhead compartments, or how to find the lifesavers. Soon, the flight attendant sat down, the plane was taxiing across the runway, and Jemma was already asleep on Fitz’s shoulder. Pregnancy fatigue. Fitz himself was getting settled into sleep on the plane when he heard Daisy whispering behind him.

“Hey, Fitz? Can you do me a favor and grant a weird request?” Daisy asked.

“What?” Fitz asked.

“Don’t name the baby after anyone we’ve lost,” Daisy requested. “They’re you and Jemma’s future, not your past. Not our past.”
“Okay,” Fitz assured her. “Promise.”

“Thanks,” Daisy said. “I guess I should catch some z’s before I meet your mum and Jemma’s family. G’night,”

“Night,” Fitz agreed. He fell asleep soon afterward. And per Doctor’s orders, not a single nightmare.

Day Forty-Nine

Jemma, Daisy, and Fitz had woken up before the plane landed, in that order. They sat in a comfortable silence as the plane landed and they got their bags. They went through the terminal at Heathrow and customs. Daisy had to take the tourist entrance while Jemma and Fitz went through quicker, being citizens of the UK. They waited for Daisy at baggage claim.

“The damn person who checked my passport recognized me,” Daisy sighed as she joined them. “Wanted a selfie. The unprofessionalism!”

“There, there,” Jemma said soothingly. “Not every day you meet a superhero. There was a time you would’ve done the same thing.”

“Yeah, and there was a time I needed a diaper to shit. Your point?”

“Hey, if it becomes a problem, you’ll handle it. You’re still the best hacker in SHIELD,” Fitz reminded her.

“True,” Daisy smiled. “So… we got the bags. Does that mean we meet the folks?”

“Yes.”

The three of them with their five suitcases and two backpacks made their way to the greeting area, where eager families awaited their landed relatives. The Fitz and Simmons clan was recognizable from the top of the escalator. Malcolm Simmons was wearing dress pants, a dress shirt, and thickly rimmed glasses. Juliane Simmons had on a stylish but simple sheath dress and cardigan. Mason
Simmons, Jemma’s older brother, had khakis and a polo. On his arm was his girlfriend of six months, a record for the man. She was tall and beautiful, like a model, and her hair was abnormally luscious and blonde. Then there was Ruth Fitz. She wasn’t stylish or upper class like the Simmons family. She had on a patterned tunic, denim capris, and athletic shoes. Despite that, they were excitedly huddled together as they looked for Jemma and Leo.

“Leo!” Ruth Fitz cried out when she saw her son. “Jemma, Darling! Come! Here!”

The three SHIELD agents approached the huddled family. Daisy smiled politely as Ruth hugged her son tightly. Jemma had quick hugs with her parents and brother and shook her brother’s girlfriend’s hand.

“I’m Katherine Sinclair,” Mason’s girlfriend said in the most proper English accent. “You must be Jemma. Congratulations on the wedding.”

“Thank you,” Jemma smiled.

Ruth finally released her son, “Come here, Jemma,” She hugged her future daughter-in-law. Fitz shook Jemma’s family’s hands.

“Is this the groom?” Katherine Sinclair asked. “Why, he’s quite handsome. From what Mason was saying I expected someone… different.”

“Um, thanks?” Fitz blinked at her.

“I like him,” Jemma smiled. “Oh, Mum, Dad, Ruth. This is Daisy Johnson. Our dear friend and my maid of honor.”

“Lovely to meet you, Daisy,” Ruth Fitz said. Then she hugged Daisy tightly. “Ruth Fitz. Leo’s mum.”

“Oh my god, You give better hugs than your son, I didn’t know it was humanly possible,” Daisy gasped. Ruth pulled away after she was satisfied and let Daisy move on to the Simmonses.
“Nice to meet you, Daisy,” Julianne Simmons shook her hand. “I’m Julianne, Jemma’s mother. This is my husband.”

“Malcolm Simmons,” Malcolm shook Daisy’s hand. “Pleasure to meet you, Miss Johnson.”

“Likewise, sir.”

Daisy faced Jemma’s brother, Mason. Mason raked his eyes up and down her before offering his hand, “Mason Simmons. Jemma’s older brother. This is Kat, my girlfriend.”

“Hi,” Daisy smiled. “Daisy Johnson.” She said her name once more. Shaking Mason’s hand, and then Kat Sinclair’s.

“I’ve seen you somewhere,” Kat squinted at Daisy. “Are you an actress? Politician?”

“No,” Daisy shook her head. “Um… I work with SHIELD. I’m the director of the Inhuman Division.”

“You fight inhumans?” Kat asked.

“Well… dangerous ones, sometimes,” Daisy shrugged. “Our current focus is to help them manage their powers so they can integrate into society.”

“Oh my god, I remember, you’re Quake,” Kat gasped. “Wow, a superhero best friend and a hot fiance, Jemma is nothing like you said she would be, Mason.”

Jemma smiled tensely at her brother.

“Well,” Julianne Simmons said, “I think we ought to have breakfast. Then the girls will go wedding dress shopping, and the boys can spend some time together as Malcolm runs some errands.”

“Wonderful idea, Julie,” Malcolm told his wife. “We have a car outside.”
“A car will be big enough for all of us?” Daisy questioned.

“Oh, yes,” Julianne assured her, And Mrs. Simmons was correct of course, the party having a white limousine waiting for them. Julianne, Malcolm, Mason, and Katherine sat on one side. Daisy, Jemma, Fitz, and Ruth sat on the other.

“So, what do you do for a living, Katherine?” Jemma asked politely.

“Well, I have a degree in Art History,” Katherine said. “So, I’m an accredited fine art appraiser and collector. I was at a Roxxon benefit gala here in London after I had helped curate the head of the London office’s newest collection.”

“And all of the office heads were at the gala, so I was there with father,” Mason said.

They continued their meaningless small talk for the rest of the drive and the rest of breakfast. The mothers kept asking Jemma about what styles she wanted for her dress, the color of the theme they chose, and to look at her ring again. Breakfast ended too soon for their liking. The limousine took the party to the bridal boutique, where they dropped off the women and went running errands.

“So, tell me, why does Jemma call you by your surname?” Mason asked.

“I asked her to,” Fitz said. He squeezed his hands between his knees. “I don’t like my first name. As you saw, only my mum uses it. And, um my middle name is ‘James’ which I think is too commonplace, so I like to be called Fitz.”

“And you don’t have a dad?” Mason asked.

“Mason,” Malcolm said to his son, obviously warning him to be careful.

“He left when I was ten,” Fitz shrugged. “Good riddance.”

“Forgive me for all the questions. You’re marrying my sister and have been her friend for nearly
fifteen years, and this is the first time I’m meeting you,” Mason said. “Jemma and I were never close, mind you. My little sister was always so much smarter, she excelled in our home studies and got to go to University almost a decade before I did. Of course, I’m sure you knew that. I was the top of my class in Oxford Law but by then. She was studying at your fancy spy academy. Not that she has much to show for it.”

“Mason,” Malcolm said firmly.

“I don’t mean to offend. It’s just, either she’s never done anything interesting, or she’s done many interesting things and refuses to tell us.”

“It’s not out of refusal,” Fitz defended his soon-to-be-wife. “Or her desire to keep her life from you. Jemma and I have done things that are highly classified. The sort of codeword clearance that only world leaders have known about. And the few things she can tell you, she doesn’t because she doesn’t want you to worry.”

“See, why should I believe you?” Mason asked. Fitz shrugged awkwardly and squeezed his knees together tighter.

“Mason, there is no reason for you to be rude,” Malcolm said sharply.

“I’m not rude. What’s so wrong with wanting to know more about him?” Mason asked. “I thought you would want to know more. After all, this is the man marrying ‘precious Jemma.'”

“She loves him and trusts him, and therefore I do too,” Malcolm said. “As should you.”

“Fine,” Mason grumbled, going silent for most of the remainder of the morning. Malcolm went to pick up the men’s suits from a tailor shop, and they visited the Roxxon headquarters so Mason could take some files from his office. Fitz didn’t enjoy the Roxxon headquarters very much; it was full of stony-faced businessmen in suits, which reminded him of his father. But the trip was a quick one, and soon Fitz was thankfully back outside the wedding boutique. Julianne Simmons and Ruth Fitz were giggling amongst one another, while Daisy, Jemma, and Katherine Sinclair were having a pleasant conversation.

“All done?” Malcolm asked his wife.
“She’s going to look beautiful,” Julianne replied with a broad smile.

“She always looks amazing,” Fitz said, he wasn’t even aware he said that until people were cooing. “What?”

“They're so cute; they can't even tell anymore,” Daisy teased.

The group then rode to King's Cross Station, where Daisy insisted taking pictures with the Harry Potter exhibit, half a trolley screwed into a wall under a fake platform number. They departed for Scotland on a comfortable passenger train a bit before noon. It was a six-hour journey north, and slowly the group ran out of things to talk about. Jemma, Fitz, and Daisy couldn't speak of SHIELD, the Roxxon business deals were limited in their duration, and family gossip was only interesting for so long. When they pulled into the Pitlochry station, the only sounds for the last several miles were breathing, rustling and tapping as people scrolled their phones or read a book. Jemma was snoring lightly against her husband-to-be’s chest. They lugged their luggage off the train, Jemma drowsily trudging along with a garment bag that held her wedding. A car from Blair Castle took them to the local hotel, where they settled before going down to dinner together in a restaurant. After a meal that was more eating than speaking, they finally all headed up to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter they're getting married. It's been the hardest for me to write so I hope you enjoy it when it comes out, hopefully in the next week. I hope you found this one entertaining in the meanwhile. As always, I appreciate your feedback in the form of kudos/comments, and I especially love interacting with you! Have a great day!
It's finally the wedding chapter! I can't begin to explain how hard this was to write because I wanted it to be as perfect as possible. I think I'm more invested in this fictional wedding than I will ever be with my own hypothetically eventual one. A few familiar faces return, and you guys get to learn more about Ariel's family. I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Eight
Day Fifty-One

Monday morning, Jemma and Fitz finally met with the wedding planner, who showed them her portfolio and all the decorations in a storage room in Blair Castle. The menus were printed, the bridesmaids’ dresses ready, the flowers ordered. They had the rehearsal Tuesday morning and the wedding on Wednesday morning. They toured the entirety of Blair Castle and grounds, including the garden space they were getting married in. Then Jemma insisted on going to bed early, since the next two days would be incredibly busy.

“‘Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,’” Jemma said as she climbed into bed. “Benjamin Franklin said that, and he was a revolutionary thinker, quite literally.”

“Early to rise and early to bed makes a man healthy, but socially dead,” Fitz countered, but he still got into bed beside his almost-bride. “And might I remind you, you’re British, why are you making America puns?”

“Because I can, just like you can quote Animaniacs ,” Jemma said, “Goodnight, Yakko.”

Day Fifty-Two

Jemma, Daisy and Fitz were waiting outside the Pitlochry station for their guests from SHIELD. Most of the Simmons and Fitz family members had arrived yesterday and had not gotten a personal introduction by the three, but those who work for spy agencies together hang out at train stations together. May and Coulson could be seen first, both with two suitcases and light jackets for the brisk highland air. Mack was next, and he had three bags and a large backpack. Behind him was
Elena, with two suitcases, who was walking alongside Ariel, with luggage and a toddler. Elena and the toddler, Luke McAllister, were having a conversation in Spanish.

“¿Quien es este?” Elena asked as Luke waved a blue and purple beanie baby of a dinosaur in her face.


“¿Un carnívoro, que significa eso?”

“Le gusta la carne.”

“He speaks Spanish better than you do,” Elena told Mack with a teasing grin.

“Thank you for carrying that bag for me,” Ariel said to Mack, “Luke still won’t put his shoes on.”


May and Coulson reached the car that Daisy, Jemma, and Fitz had brought with them and greeted them before loading bags.

“How’s Washington?” Coulson asked Daisy.

“Full of assholes,” Daisy said. “But my apartment allows pets and I’m looking for a dog, so it’s amazing.”

“I’m glad you have your priorities straight,” May said.

“That shrink friend of yours has a smart kid,” Mack said as he set down the bags he was carrying. “How you doing, Turbo?”
“Good, you?”

“I still feel cramped from the plane,” Mack said. “And Elena wasn’t supportive. ‘It isn’t their fault you are too big for the seat, now shush, good pillows do not complain.’”

“They don’t,” Elena said as she, Luke and Ariel arrived last at the car. She whispered something to Luke and pointed at Daisy. The little boy looked at Daisy intently and then his eyes widened and his mouth opened into a gaping circle.

“Hi,” Daisy said. “I’m Daisy.”

Luke was still staring at Daisy with his mouth open, but now tears were welling up in his eyes. Daisy looked incredibly concerned that a toddler was silently crying while watching her in awe.

“Are you okay?” She asked.

“I love you,” Luke said. He turned to his mother, “Mummy, you’re fired.”

“What- don’t- You can have more than one mom!” Daisy exclaimed, apparently concerned. “I’m sorry-”

Ariel just laughed. “It’s alright. I get fired all the time, don’t I, Luke? He says that when he wants to be put down.”

“Oh.”

“But that’s a fascinating proposal,” Ariel smiled at Daisy.

“I - sorry - I just thought he meant, um - I’m sorry,” Daisy seemed embarrassed.

“Ariel McAllister,” Ariel offered her hand to Daisy.
“Daisy Johnson… that is my name, yep,” Daisy shook her hand. She was also staring up at her since Ariel McAllister was over six feet tall. Once the handshake was over, she rubbed her palms together while Ariel spoke to Luke.

“You can’t fire me until you’re wearing shoes, okay?” Ariel calmly inquired that he understood.

“Can I fire you if I walk on my hands?” Luke asked.

“Can you walk on your hands?” Ariel questioned.

“No.” Luke avoided his mother’s eyes.

“Then no,” Ariel said gently. “If you want to be put down, you need to wear shoes. I know the rules aren’t fun and I understand that they upset you, but it’s my job to take care of you. Your wellbeing is my responsibility, alright?”


“Thanks, buddy,” Daisy said brightly.

“One day, I’m gonna punch bad guys just like you do,” Luke said assuredly. “But I’m gonna be nice to them too. I’m not going to feed them to dinosaurs.”

“That’s good,” Daisy nodded.

“So, Ariel,” Jemma said. “Um, you said your father was going to come?”

“Oh, yes, he is coming. But he had some last-minute work to attend to,” Ariel said. “So he’s taking a later flight straight to Glasgow. He’ll be at the wedding. In the meantime, I get to spend more time with my favorite man, don’t I?” She asked her son. Luke agreed with her by hitting her in the face with Tyranno, his dinosaur plushie. She crinkled her nose and chuckled, adjusting him in her arms as she and the rest of the group climbed into the large car.
“So,” Jemma said, “You don’t need to look nice for the ceremony rehearsal, the things you’re wearing now are fine.”

“Rude,” Elena huffed.

“Ugh, you know what I mean,” Jemma said. “Anyway. After the rehearsal, my parents insist on having a later lunch with you, and then you can get settled and freshen up for our mutual stag night. Oh, Ariel, I’m sure my parents or Fitz’s mum could look after Luke for you-”

“Oh, no, that won’t be necessary,” Ariel said shortly. “My father will be here by then. I assure you.”

“Alright, then,” Jemma said. “Please be… as normal as possible for my parents. I’ve worked very hard to keep them very assured in my career choices.”

“We’ll do our best,” Coulson promised her.

The rehearsal went decently smooth. Usually, the agents had never gotten to rehearse public events before, so given the opportunity, they were very respectful. There was a bit of an issue with Jemma’s great-aunt telling Elena that they spoke English on this side of the pond. In which Elena had to be pulled away by Mack while she was muttering dirty things in Spanish, and Malcolm Simmons had to suggest to his aunt that she should perhaps go to her room and rest because of how cold it was. But other than that blatant display of xenophobia, things went rather well. Lunch with Jemma’s parents and Fitz’s mother was also smoother than anyone expected. May was even charming enough to present more than three facial expressions. Mack, Coulson, Malcolm and Fitz got into a very jubilant and very strange conversation about cars. Once lunch was over, Jemma and Fitz went back up to their room to change into something more appropriate for a night out. Jemma changed from a pastel cardigan and slacks to a low-cut white blouse and gray pencil skirt, which was promiscuous for her, especially with the dramatic eye makeup. Fitz took off his tie.

“You look fantastic,” Fitz said as Jemma emerged from the bathroom. He had been lounging on the hotel bed, half-watching some sort of medical soap opera with terrible science.

“You mean my breasts look fantastic,” Jemma said, trying to tug up the neckline of her top. “Will people notice that they’re larger than usual? You notice, don’t you?”
“Yes, but I also spend more time looking at them than anyone else there,” he smiled at her cheekily, and she rolled her eyes. “If you want to change, that’s your prerogative. But you also don’t want to be late, and it’s almost eight.”

When Jemma was confronted with being on time or showing more skin than the average second-grade teacher, her decision was clear. They went downstairs and walked to the pub across the street. Daisy, Elena and Mack were already waiting at the bar, Daisy passed Jemma a drink. They had arranged to keep up the pregnancy subterfuge that Daisy would arrive first and tell the bartender to make all of Jemma’s drinks non-alcoholic. With the growing numbers, they found a large booth and waited for May, Coulson and Ariel to arrive. May and Coulson showed up bickering about what color the shower curtains were in the room that they had. After everyone had gotten at least half way through their drink, did Ariel arrive. Never before at Jemma seen someone as tall as Ariel try to make herself look smaller before. She was in towering black heels and a form-fitting dress with a plunging neckline and cutouts on the sides. Ariel looked nervously at the blouses, pants, sweaters and skirts everyone else was wearing and must have realized she was overdressed. Meanwhile, a lot of the patrons of the bar were staring at her. She approached the bartender and motioned at something behind him. He reached for a glass and she shook her head, pulling a wad of cash out of her clutch. He looked at her with an odd expression and handed her a bottle of scotch whiskey. She sat down at the end of the round booth, beside Elena, and took a long swig.

“Everything alright?” Jemma asked once Ariel set down the bottle with a clunk.

“Oh, just my dad. He’s a bit old-fashioned. And also I think I’m dressed up a bit too much. I had no idea what was appropriate to wear to a party like this, I’ve never been to one.”

“Oh,” Jemma said. “Well, um, you look fantastic.” General random statements of assent followed from around the table.

“Thanks,” Ariel didn’t seem relieved and took another long swig.

To change the topic, Coulson started telling the story about the time he met Thor. Everyone had heard it before, so no one was intently listening. In fact, Jemma noticed that Daisy, May, Mack, Elena, and even Coulson were all focused on the door to the pub, refusing to let their eyes leave it for more than a minute at a time. She didn’t understand why. Perhaps they were nervous that some group of Watchdogs or Hydra or whatever would burst into the pub, and it was just the paranoia from their careers? Or did they not want to be here, and she was making them all uncomfortable with her insistence on getting together before her wedding. Or worse, was something actually going to happen and they neglected to tell her and Fitz in fear that it would scare the couple out of their matrimony, or make them worry excessively. Now Jemma was becoming anxious, and after sharing a wordless conversation with Fitz, she knew he was noticing the same thing and was also concerned. After about an hour of aimless conversation and stories they had all heard before, she
had enough.

“It’s a lovely door, right there,” She said. “I can see why it has all of your attention.”

“What, a door?” Ariel asked. She wasn’t slurring her words yet but based on the level of her bottle and her general incoherence; she was being affected by her liquor.

“Sorry,” Daisy said. “We should have known better than to, sorry.”

“What’s going on?”

“Um… we invited some more guests, and they’re running a bit late,” Daisy said. “So we’re all getting impatient.”

“Who?” Fitz asked.

“Well, it’s a surprise,” Mack said. “One we’ve been planning for a while.”

Jemma raised an eyebrow and opened her mouth to probably say something petulantly when the door to the pub opened and a monkey in a suit entered. And then two people were behind the monkey.

“That’s a Japanese Macaque,” Fitz said, pointing at the well-dressed monkey.

“That’s Bobbi and Hunter!” Jemma exclaimed, looking at the couple behind the monkey.

Everyone emptied out of the booth to greet the couple and their monkey. “Oh, goodness!” Jemma launched herself on them, pulling both of them down to her level and hugging them tightly. “Why are you here? How are you here? It’s been ages!”

“Well, you have Daisy to thank for that,” Bobbi said. “She helped find and get ahold of us. We shook our latest tail months ago, a clever train accident.”
“We had to come see Fitz, and you finally tie the knot, didn’t we?” Hunter said brightly. “We were enjoying Sweden with Hit-Monkey here when Daisy contacted us, and we made the arrangements as soon as we could.”

“So, it isn’t dangerous for you to be here?” Jemma asked.

“Well, we still like to hop around and not stay in one place for too long,” Bobbi said. “It’s safer that way, after all. So we won’t be staying long. But we had to see you at the wedding.”

“What’s with the Macaque?” Fitz asked Hunter.

“Oh, ol’ Hit-Monkey here? Well, that’s a long story which includes Russian mobsters under the guise of an exotic animal circus and Bobbi performing some excellent acrobatics while sword fighting a fencing master while on the trapeze,” Hunter said. He then told the story which was more bizarre than the initial synopsis, and incredibly riveting. “So, then, after Bobbi literally left the swordsman hanging, we freed all the animals and let them stampede over Nabokov’s arms deal. But Hit-Monkey refused to return to the wild after we freed him. He had taken a liking to me, didn’t you, you talented bugger. And since he was already a trained marksman, and a rather decent one at that, we decided to let him stick around.”

“And you didn’t want to name him something other that ‘Hit-Monkey’?” Ariel asked.

“Well, woman-I-don’t-know, it was better than Bobbi’s suggestion. Chewbacca. He’s a monkey, not a wookie.”

“He’s a handsome furry thing that can shoot a gun! It’s a perfect name!” Bobbi exclaimed.

“My son was born on May fourth, so I named him Luke,” Ariel said.

“See, this random woman, she gets it,” Bobbi said to Hunter.

“Oh, yes, introductions. Um, Ariel, I’ve told you about Bobbi Morse and Lance Hunter. Bobbi and Hunter, this is my friend and the head of the psychology department at SHIELD Academy, Dr. Ariel McAllister,” Jemma said.
“Hey,” Ariel said.

“Are you gonna be alright tomorrow after you finish that?” Bobbi asked Ariel, concerned for this new woman’s wellbeing.

“Well, so. You know how Daisy can vibrate stuff and Elena can go super fast and Mack has arms? You know, like, their superpowers?”

“Since when is having arms a superpower?” Mack asked, concerned. But Ariel continued.

“Anyway, so, they have all that. And I can get absolutely hammered, smashed, whatever on whatever terrible booze, but the next morning I wake up and I’m as chipper as a seventeen year old varsity cheerleader named Caytelynn. And that isn’t a respectable Catelin like Kaitlyn, but a really unnecessary one like Keightlinne.”

“I’m sure that made sense in your head,” Fitz said.

“Oh, look, someone’s wearing his sassy pants,” Ariel said. “Sassafrassy sassy. Hey, Daisy, I have a bad question. It’s very bad. Like, inappropriate and stuff. Can I ask it?”

“Go ahead,” Daisy said, abandoning her better judgment out of curiosity for what a now drunk Ariel would say next.

“Oh, so, um, your can vibrate things, right. That’s your power. Divine intervention or nature or whatever let you make anything wiggle really fast, right?”

“Um, yes. I don’t see how-”

“Okay, so like. Have you ever vibrated anything as a method of autoeroticism?”

“Autoeroticism?” Daisy asked. She knew what it meant. She was just shocked that this is where the conversation was headed.
However, Ariel though she didn’t understand the term and began to offer synonyms, “Yeah, you know, Shebopping? Lone rangering? Pleasure Cruising? Rubbing it off? Elabiaorating? Stuffing your envelope? Packing the love taco? Giving yourself a hand?”

“Um, I can safely say I’ve never done that before with my powers,” Daisy said. “But, uh, if I ever do, I’ll be sure to think of you.” Daisy turned pink. “Wait- um-”

“Okay, new rule, neither of you talk,” Coulson announced.

“But Dad, you haven’t heard the really cool story about the time I met some Avengers and bug boy,” Daisy said.

“Spiderman?” Coulson asked.

“Was I wrong?” Daisy pressed.

“I’ve also met the Avengers, Daisy,” Coulson said.

“Ouch,” Daisy grinned. “But have you knocked out Captain America?”

“I woke up Captain America. Wait- you met Steve Rogers?” Coulson asked, giving her permission to speak.

“Okay, so, I’m sure you saw in the news about two weeks ago that footage of Natasha Romanoff beating up gas station robbers? It’s an excellent video. The problem, of course, is the fact that she was in Dubai at the time the video was recorded. So, Piper and I were sent to New Jersey. In Jersey, we did a lot of hitting the pavement seeing if there was an enhanced link or inhuman link that would give someone the ability to turn into Natasha Romanoff. And during the, uh, terrigen epidemic while Jemma was in space the first time, there was this waterfront party where terrigen infected mist transformed a couple of people at a local high school, according to rumor. So Piper invaded the high school as a substitute teacher and we ended up tracking home this girl named Kamala. We were staking out Kamala’s apartment when we saw someone climbing the wall so we went in and it was spider kid. He’s like, sixteen, by the way. So, I was going to talk to him when Piper got hit over the head and I quaked her assailant into a dumpster. And that assailant was Captain America. Shield and all, not that vibranium is super effective when my ability allows me to blast him from behind his own shield. So, Spider Kid, Natasha Romanoff and I woke up Captain
America and Piper, and we had a little chat. Apparently the Avengers had their own investigation of why Natasha was in Jersey and Dubai. So then the five of us met this Kamala kid, who was a polymorphic inhuman, and talked to her, she’s a cool kid. She’s a huge fan of the Black Widow, apparently, and she writes Quack fanfiction. She totally freaked out seeing Natasha Romanoff and I in the same room. Anyway, afterwards, I got drinks with Steve and Nat while Spider Kid went home because it was past his curfew. We’re totally, like, best friends now.”

“When did he get pregnant?” Ariel asked. “Wait… no. I was… okay.” She set down the bottle and pushed it across the table, out of her reach. “Enough of that.”

“So, Ariel, you’re a psychologist?” Bobbi asked. “What kind?”

“I can do clinical, but my primary practice is behavioral analysis, profiling, and interrogation,” Ariel said. “I’m the best, very awesome.”

“I don’t know, Bobbi’s pretty good,” Hunter said. “She’s smart enough to know when I’m about to do something stupid.”

“You always are about to do something stupid,” Bobbi replied. “But I am curious, how good are you, Dr. McAllister?”

“Very good. Test me, if you wish.”

“Okay, profile me,” Bobbi shrugged.

“You were born in California and went to Georgia Tech. You’re an overachiever who hates to fail because you were expected to. You didn’t used to be tall or as much as a bombshell as you are now, probably needed glasses and was a lot shorter. You were in the sciences. You’re detail oriented and organized. You struggled with balancing your social and love life with your career, probably because of your laser focus. It didn’t allow you to fail in school or work until you gave something up for work and realized that it wasn’t worth it, I assume that person is your ex-ish-husband. However, despite the fact that you don’t easily forgive your own failures and shortcomings, you constantly do so to other people because no one told you as a child it was okay to make mistakes. Likely due to an overbearing and misogynistic father figure.”

Bobbi blinked at Ariel, “How did you know my dad was an ass?”
“She’s right?” May asked.

“On all counts,” Bobbi said. “How did you-”

“I recognized the dialects you used, your body posture, and the way you reacted to and clarified the details of the story you and your technically-husband told. And some other stuff, too. I can’t really think about my brain with this much alcohol. I should probably hit the sack.”

“Yeah, it’s getting late, isn’t it?” Jemma checked her phone. “Are you going to need help getting back to your room?”

“I’m in 217,” Ariel said.

“I’m in 220, so I’ll walk you,” Daisy said. “I think I want to hit the sack, too.” They got up, and Daisy allowed Ariel to stumble into her as she still somehow managed to walk in towering heels.

“Blimey, Mack, that woman’s taller than you,” Hunter said when they left.

“Well, you know how that feels,” Mack replied.

“I- Bobbi and I are the same height if she wouldn’t wear heels.”

“Yeah, and you wear them,” Fitz said.

“I agree with that random, scary drunk woman, Fitz, you are sassafrassy sassy,” Hunter said. “Anyway, I think we should all tuck in, the big day is tomorrow, after all.” Hunter stood up.

“Hunter, he loves weddings,” Bobbi whispered to Jemma.

“Well, I think he’s right,” Jemma said. “Let’s all head to bed. After all, tomorrow, we’ll be wed.”
“Did you intentionally rhyme that or did it just happen and you rolled with it?” Fitz asked as they headed out.

“Happy accident,” Jemma shrugged.

“Just like this one?” Fitz motioned to her abdomen.

“Exactly,” Jemma smiled.

**Day Fifty-Three**

Jemma woke up at six in the morning, kissed Fitz good-bye until she saw him later that morning, and made her way to the castle where she would be primped and prettied. There was a hairstylist and makeup artist in residence. Jemma had her hair washed and slathered with product before being rolled into curlers. The makeup artist covered her in primer, concealer, foundation, highlighter, bronzer, blush, and setting powder. She had to hold still as eyeshadow and liner was put on her eyelids, as well as false lashes, and her eyebrows were filled in and sculpted. Then her hair was taken out of the rollers, just as Elena and Daisy showed up, dressed up and made up by themselves. Her hair was pinned into some simple and elegant twist and the makeup artist finished by painting her lips a sort of dusty pink color. Then, it was time for the dress, which had been shipped up that morning with the final alterations nearly done. Jemma was helped into it, and another castle-employed person adjusted the folds and tied the sash, so she was perfect.

“Now, how do we get to the garden?” Jemma asked Daisy and Elena were drinking champagne.

“Horse-drawn carriages,” Daisy announced.

“Seriously?” Jemma asked.

“Your dad’ll meet you in the third one. We’re in the second of the procession, and then the flower girl, one of your cousins, is in the first.”

“I think her name is Amelia,” Jemma shrugged. “As you can see, we’re really doing this for our parents.”
“Yeah, I know if it were up to you and Fitz you’d have just eloped,” Daisy said. “But, you are instead getting a horse-drawn carriage.”

Jemma climbed into the third and final covered horse-drawn carriage of the three in procession. Her father was already in there, dressed in a black and white suit.

“You look stunning,” He complimented.

“Thank you, dad,” She smiled.

“You found a good man,” Her father assured her. “This ceremony is lovely.”

“I know,” Jemma nodded.

Over in the Hercules Garden, standing under a wooden arch covered in ivy, Fitz waited. The guests had already seated themselves and were chattering. There were two main columns of chairs on either side of the aisle, each column was ten rows of five chairs. That meant that everyone had a seat, with one empty in the very back. Fitz saw his mum, wearing a black and white floral dress which reached the middle of her shin, beaming up at him. May and Coulson say beside her. May was in a light gray dress with a darker gray lace overlay, Coulson had a matching dark gray suit with a light gray shirt. Fitz wondered if they had planned their outfits together. Bobbi sat beside Coulson, wearing a peach colored dress with a deep v-neckline. Bobbi’s husband for the second time, Hunter, stood beside Fitz, as they had decided last night he’d take up Coulson’s role in the groom’s party. Fitz assumed that their choice had been part of Daisy’s master plan because they so happened to have misordered Coulson’s suit and kilt in Hunter’s size. Ariel also sat in the first row, wearing a simple blue sheath dress, much different than the number she had on the night before. Luke was beside her, in a little suit, and the seat for her father was empty. She was tapping her foot rapidly and staring off into the distance with her brow furrowed. You could tell where the Americans ended and the British began because all of the rest of the female guests had silly looking hats on, with bows, feathers, and ribbons. Mrs. Simmons was an excellent example of this, wearing a respectable looking plum dress with a collar and lace overlay of the bodice. Her hat, however, was also plum, and had a particularly large floppy bow.

“The procession,” Hunter whispered. Three carriages drawn by actual horses came over. In the first was one of Jemma’s cousin’s daughter, a little girl with pigtails and a pale purple dress. The ring bearer had ended up being Hit-Monkey, who was actually intelligent enough to stand beside Hunter and hold the rings. This flower girl flung a bunch of white petals into the air while skipping down the aisle and when she reached the arch, she scampered back to her mother in the fourth row while the guests laughed politely. The second carriage had Daisy and Elena inside of it. They were wearing chiffon cream petal dresses, which were nice, Fitz supposed, they had ruffles. They carried small bouquets and Elena winked at Mack as they made their way to stand beside Jemma’s side of
the wedding arch. Then, the final carriage opened. Mr. Simmons stepped out and held out his hand for his daughter to follow him. The portable pianist off to the side began to play the wedding march as Jemma straightened her skirt, took her father's arm, and began to walk down the aisle.

Fitz couldn’t move, think, or breathe. Jemma was more than stunning, she was ethereal. No wonder his mum and her mum had been crying when she chose that dress, it was perfect for her. A sweetheart bodice with a lace illusion bateau neckline and cap sleeves. It highlighted her collar bones and her neck. The waist was natural, with a sash, and the skirt was a full a-line with a slight train. Her veil was lace and ended at her shoulders, but it didn’t cover her face, which was good. Fitz didn’t want a single inch of her face obscured. She honestly looked like one of the brides in the magazines, but so much happier. She and her father reached the end of the aisle. He kissed her on the cheek and sat down between her mother and brother, she turned to face Fitz as the song ended.

The officiant cleared his throat, “We are gathered here today to celebrate the joining of two hearts and two minds,” He said. “If anyone here has causes why this couple should not be united in marriage, speak now, or forever hold your peace.” There was a moment of silence. If anyone had said anything at that moment, there was a selection of SHIELD agents who would have fought them. “Very well. Today, we have come to witness the joining of these two lives. Every day, in a world of ordinary, the extraordinary happens. Two people meet one another and fall in love, loving long enough and strong enough to make their way here. Romance is fun, but what we are celebrating today is nothing short of true love. True love is many things. It is the desire to love one another eternally. It is holding hands and saying ‘I love you’ once a day. It is never going to bed angry. It is standing together and facing the world. It is the words of appreciation and the thoughtful demonstrations of gratitude. It is the capacity to forgive. It is fostering an atmosphere of growth. It is the universal search for the good and the beautiful. It is more than marrying the right person, it is being the right partner. This couple has written their own vows to embody their true love. The bride will speak first.”

Jemma nodded, “Do you remember when we first met?” Jemma asked. “Because I do. We were sixteen. And… you were so quiet and pasty and so incredibly smart and handsome. It’s a strange feeling, one that I have had my entire life, from the moment that I met you, I never wanted to be without you. You’ve heard this already, but I feel like I need to say it again, here, now, in front of everyone. When I met you, I couldn’t imagine how important that moment would be for the rest of my life. However I did somehow know, because I was drawn to you in a way I couldn’t explain or describe. You are my best friend, Fitz. You’ve been beside me for so long, and when we are separated, we always find a way back to one another. How could I have not fallen in love with you? We think like one person, we understand each other effortlessly, and you are kind, gentle, honest, loyal, compassionate, generous, sympathetic, brilliant… you make me laugh. I know that our lives haven’t been easy. I know we both have done things we regret, but that is the past. And this is our future, our marriage. I know it will be infinite and extraordinary. I promise, that as your wife, I shall love and cherish you more each day. I promise to be your supporter, your partner, and your protector, as long as I am.”

Fitz was misty when she finished, but it was his turn to go. “You know that I’m not the best with
my words,” He told her. “But I do need to tell you something, so, um, here it goes. Our lives haven’t been easy. Our story has been a long and hard one. But one thing I know that I can have faith in, one thing that I know will prevail, is how much I love you. We’ve defied the cosmos, to be standing here today, promising one another everything. And, um, I think that is a testament to us, to our love, to what we’re capable of. Life is going to be difficult, but I believe that we’re going to do okay because we do love each other. I don’t deserve you Jemma, you say that I do, you say that I’m everything to you, but the love you’ve given to me is more than I can hope for or fathom. I swear that my love will be just as infinite. I swear that I’ll always love you, help you, protect you, support you, respect you, trust you. Like you said, I can’t imagine my life without you, but I know it would be terrible.”

Now both of them were crying a little bit. The officiate continued, “Do you, Jemma Anne Simmons take Leopold James Fitz to be your husband? Do you promise to love him, cherish him, respect him and protect him? Through the best and the worst, the difficult and the easy? Forsaking all others and holding unto him forever more?”

“I do.”

“And do you, Leopold James Fitz, take Jemma Anne Simmons to be your wife? Do you promise to love her, cherish her, respect her and protect her? Through the best and the worst, the difficult and the easy? Forsaking all others and holding unto her forever more?”

“I do.”

“Now, for the rings. Rings are symbols of the unbroken circle of love, infinite, and signifying the union between these two in marriage. Who has the rings?” Hit-Monkey, with the pillow of rings, made his way to in between the couple.

Jemma picked up the silver band for Fitz. She slipped it onto his finger, “Leopold James Fitz, with this ring, I thee wed.”

Fitz picked up hers, which fit against her engagement ring perfectly. “Jemma Anne Simmons, with this ring, I thee wed.”

“Your marriage, going forwards, shall take trust, dedication, faith, and commitment to hold true to the journey you have pledged. By the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”
Not wanting to wait any longer, Fitz grabbed Jemma by either side of her face and surged forwards, pressing his lips against hers. She kissed him back eagerly and gripped him tightly by the lapels of his suit jacket. Daisy whooped, and the rest of the ceremony applauded. They may have kissed a bit longer than was probably appropriate, finally breaking apart to press their foreheads and noses together.

“May I now present the happy couple.” The officiant said. They held hands and made their way back down the aisle to the carriage to go to the ballroom. People threw rice. Once they were in the covered carriage and the door closed, the newly married couple went straight back to kissing one another. She ran her fingers through his hair, and he gently caressed her shoulders and cheeks.

“We’re married,” Jemma whispered to him.

“We’re married,” He agreed.

“You’re my husband.”

“You’re my wife.”

“And you’re our baby,” Jemma placed her hands on her abdomen.

The carriage took them to the main hall of Blair Castle, The reception commenced. There was food and drink, people at their respective tables spoke amongst one another. Daisy insisted that the couple had to obey the rule that whenever someone tapped their knife to their drinking glass, the couple kissed. Daisy then proceeded to abuse the practice by doing it at least once every five minutes, regardless of the amount potatoes that the couple had in their mouths.

Hunter gave a best man speech, “Alright, so when I met Fitz, he was a little weird but I dunno, likable. And um, he liked Jemma, pining after her he was so angsty about it. Fitz has been a good mate, though, you know, he doesn’t judge you he just smiles. It’s cool. He’s cool. You know he nearly died trying to find Jemma after the big liquid rock, Harold, ate her. Yeah, he fought Al Qaeda because they had a Hebrew scroll. He fought the rock, it usually eats people but he went in there and fisticuffed with it. Found out about the alien sand. He got her back, you know. Well, point is, those two nerds love each other so I think they’re gonna work out just fine.” Hunter sat down. Bobbi smacked him lightly.

“Thank god everyone here signed a nondisclosure,” Jemma whispered into Fitz’s ear. “You really
“fisticuffed with it?”

“I- yeah?” Fitz offered hesitantly. He was worried she would be mad, but she was too happy to be upset. She just sighed and squeezed his leg.

Daisy’s speech came next, she stood up, “When I met Fitz and Simmons I was a homeless hacktivist living in a van. And when I started working with them, I don’t know. They were really close, they worked with each other in this way that I didn’t know two people could work. You know, it was like they were psychically linked. And we’ve all been through things since I was a homeless hacktivist and they were a couple of nerds on a plane, we aren’t those people anymore. But you know what, despite everything, they’ve only gotten closer. They fell in love and I’ve been privileged to be their friend and get to watch this sort of epic love story. And let me tell you, it has been epic. Never before have I seen two people do so much for one another, do so much together. So, going forward, I know that we’re going to see them do even more amazing things. Raise a family, save the world some more, cure cancer, probably. So,” She raised her glass. “To Jemma and Leo Fitz-Simmons.”

“We are keeping our surnames-” Jemma tried to say over the applause and toasts in their name.

“No, no you aren’t. I’m the face of SHIELD, so I’m your technically-boss, and I’m gonna call you Dr. Fitz-Simmons and Dr. Dr. Fitz-Simmons from now on,” Daisy said.

“She’s our technically-boss, I guess she gets to make the executive decision on our surname,” Fitz sighed dramatically. Jemma rolled her eyes and rested her head on his shoulder.

Then they cut the giant white wedding cake. Jemma smeared icing from the cake onto Fitz’s nose with her pinkie and he nuzzled his icing-covered nose against her cheek, both of them were giggling. The first dance was next. They had picked a waltz, without any lyrics, and clumsily danced. Neither of them had particularly nimble feet, nor did they care. But soon, their friends and relatives were dancing and they were sated sitting off to the side. The party died down after reaching its climax when everyone got on the dance floor for the “Macarena” and the “Cha-Cha Slide.” It was nearly five in the afternoon when Jemma and Fitz said farewell to the last guests. Then the wedding planners had to talk to them about arranging where the gifts would go as well as the leftover cake, and all the photos done by the photographer. It was nearly eight when they were finally allowed to leave.

Jemma, exhausted, flopped down on the bed when they stumbled into the hotel room. “I have no energy.”
Fitz flopped down beside her on the bed, “I understand.”

“Getting married is *exhausting*,” Jemma complained. “I just want to sleep.”

“So sleep,” Fitz said. “You’re already pregnant, and I don’t think we’ll have any problems consummating our marriage.”

Too tired to laugh or scowl, Jemma crawled up to the pillow, pulled her veil off her head and tossed it onto the floor, and fell asleep, still wearing her heels and her wedding dress. Fitz sat up and looked at her fondly. Her makeup was faded, and whatever was left would be smeared against the pillow by morning. Her hair still had pins in it, but it was much looser and messier than it had been earlier that day. She still looked as stunning as she was that morning, maybe more so. He helped take her shoes off, so she didn’t kick him with a stiletto as she slept. Fitz then stood up and shed his jacket, tie and shoes. He climbed into bed beside his wife- she was now his *wife* - and settled himself on the pillows beside her.

“Good night, Jemma,” he kissed her on the forehead, turned to shut the light off, and fell asleep. Soon the room was filled with darkness.

Day Fifty-Four

That morning, everyone was leaving. Jemma and Fitz would stay in Perthshire, having rented a cottage in the highlands for a small honeymoon retreat. They were at Pitlochry station, saying goodbye.

“You know, I never got to meet your father,” Jemma told Ariel as she hugged her goodbye.

“Sorry about that, between work and the fact that he hates flying - well, he should’ve stayed in Boston. But he sends his best wishes,” Ariel said. “Luke, say goodbye to Jemma.”

“Goodbye!” Luke waved Tyranno the plush dinosaur in Jemma’s face fiercely. Jemma smiled at the toddler. “Goodbye also, Mister!“ Luke waved to Fitz. “Hey, Mommy, can we sit next to Daisy? I want to show her my dinosaur puzzle!”

“He really loves dinosaurs,” Jemma said. “Reminds me of Fitz, actually, and his obsession with monkeys. Speaking of, have you said goodbye to Bobbi and Hunter yet?”
“I have. And they also gave me this bag of items for our honeymoon which are very inappropriate to discuss in front of a toddler,” Fitz indicated to the bag he was crushing under his arm.

“Lovely,” Jemma said. “I’ll see you back at Academy.” She said to Ariel. Ariel nodded and boarded the train. They had given their farewells to Coulson, May, Mack, Elena, Bobbi, Hunter, Ariel and Luke now. The only person that was left was Daisy.

“You two better enjoy yourselves,” Daisy said as if she knew that Jemma was circling her in the mental agenda.

“We will,” Jemma smiled. “You enjoy yourself. Rumor has it Luke McAllister wants to show you puzzles.”

Daisy brightened up, “I like that kid. And Ariel’s pretty too, so I can see why you like her.”

“Pretty what?” Fitz asked.

“What?” Daisy asked.

“You said Ariel was pretty, but you never gave a second adjective,” Jemma pointed out.

Daisy laughed loudly. “Wow, you guys are so in love your hearing is failing you. Hope it’s temporary. Anyway, I gotta boogie.” She hugged them, grabbed her bags, and headed towards the train.

“Why do you think she said that?” Fitz asked.

“I don't know, and I don't care. I would rather focus on my very attractive and very brilliant husband right now,” Jemma said. “After all, you and I have the entire rest of the week to ourselves, and we’ll be in a cottage in the middle of nowhere.”

“Say that again,” Fitz requested.
“Middle of nowhere?”

“No, very attractive and very brilliant husband, I don’t think I’m ever going to get tired of hearing you say that.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, I hope that you liked it. As always, I appreciate your feedback. Comment, or give me kudos if you can't think of anything to say. One of the best parts of writing here is being able to interact with the lovely people. Have a nice day!
Thank you to everyone who read the last chapter, I hope you all enjoyed it. I know this next update is a little quick, but I was excited to put up this chapter after I was able to finish it rather quickly. I hope you all like this one, too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Nine

Day Fifty-Seven

After spending three days in a cottage in Perthshire and taking full advantage of their recluse, Jemma Simmons and her husband, Leo Fitz returned to Norfolk, Virginia. It was the fifth of August, and the Academy was officially opening its doors in one month, on September fourth. Jemma was already mapping out the last minute arrangements, paperwork and meetings she would have to assemble in this last month on the flight back. Their honeymoon was wonderful, and much too short. Now, Jemma had to focus on her job as the head of the Science and Technology division. A small helicopter took them to the now-functioning air platform at the Academy. Jemma kissed her husband farewell and went to her office. She was in such a daze worrying about the benefits of digital resources over print resources, she didn’t hear her secretary warn her there were people in her office and she didn’t recognize those people to be Talbot and Coulson until she realized the reason she couldn’t pull out her chair because her boss was in it.

“General Talbot!” She exclaimed nervously. “I didn’t notice- is everything alright?”

He was looking at her with sympathy, an odd expression before he was shot in the head. With a gruesome scar and a slightly misshapen cranium, not to mention his signature facial hair, any expression between angry and neutral seemed unnatural.

“SHIELD has received what we assume to be a threat of some sort,” Talbot explained. “Surrounding you, Agent Simmons. And your husband.”


“The actual nature of the message is unknown, as is the origin,” Coulson said. “Daisy even traced it through our systems. The geographical location is falsified and scrambled.”
“What was the message?”

“Five hundred image files,” Talbot said.

“Of what?” Jemma asked.

Talbot motioned to the monitor and an image Jemma recognized appeared on the screen. It was her wedding ceremony. It was taken from a row that was further back, the benches were partially empty, and nobody was yet standing under the archway. She began to scroll through the pictures, and it seemed every few minutes they took a photo regardless of what was in the image. Additionally, the position and dimensions were not fixed.

“Have you analyzed the layout to see where the images were taken?” Jemma asked.

“We haven’t had any reference images-”

“I have a file drive at home from the wedding photographer, I can upload that for analysis,” Jemma said. She pulled out her phone.

“What are you doing?” Talbot asked.

“Calling Fitz. Unless you’ve already sent for him?”

Talbot shook his head. “I understand he’s your husband, but this has been ranked above his clearance lev-”

“Bullshit,” Jemma Simmons said plainly. Talbot blinked at her oddly a few times. “He’s my husband, and he’s just as much in this as I am. I don’t care if I have to argue my case to the President, he gets to be in this office and see this.”

“I told you,” Coulson said, amused.
“Fine. Contact him,” Talbot said. Quickly, Jemma sent her husband a text telling her to get in his office ASAP there was a development. Talbot and Coulson are there. She didn’t get a reply, but within five minutes, he was walking into her office.

“What’s going on?”

As Talbot and Coulson relayed the circumstances to Fitz, Jemma flipped through some more images. She was standing with her nose to the monitor, intently scouring every image. That’s when she saw it, a black dot in the middle of her white wedding dress. It was a dead pixel. She flipped backward; it was gone. It wasn’t the camera and it wasn’t her monitor. She flipped forwards a bit more, there was another dead pixel, in another location, in the middle of the blue sky. She had a theory.

“Is this file convertible for a holofile?” Jemma asked.

“It currently isn’t saved as one but it’s compatible for conversion,” Coulson said. Jemma pulled out her holotable. “I have a theory.” With some arm movements and forceful jabs, the files uploaded onto her holotable. With some typing in a floating keyboard and some more moving, she isolated the dead pixels in every image. They were randomly scattered. She made a mental list of possible ways to analyze it and did the first. Collaging together the dead pixels got her what she wanted. A message floated in the air.

“‘Welcome to the family, Jemma’” Coulson read aloud. “What does that mean?”

“Well, clearly this was from one of my relatives,” Fitz said. “But… I can’t think of anyone who would do this. Except for—” He stopped. “It can’t be him. It’s been nearly two decades. I- it can’t be him.”

“There are coordinates,” Jemma motioned to the bottom of the screen. “And then two other sets of numbers. That second one looks like a typical combination lock.”

“Locker number? Storage pod?” Talbot suggested.

“Possibly,” Fitz agreed.

Jemma plugged the statistics into a geographical program. “It’s a self-storage facility in
Philadelphia,” She said. “Good news is it has a standard digitized security system, bad news it's only on the outside of the centers.”

“We’ll send a couple of agents to investigate,” Talbot said,

“You’ll send us,” Jemma said firmly.

“That may be what this person wants,” Coulson said.

“Well, they made it personal,” Jemma said.

“You have work to do,” Talbot reminded her.

“Then let Fitz go at the very least,” Jemma said. “I mean, you do want to go?”

“Of course. I want to know what’s going on,” Fitz said.

“Agent Fitz can go with a team of field agents, but I’m putting in my report it’s to assess the technology of the digital security system and acquire the necessary files. I can’t have my superiors thinking I always let you get your way,” Talbot said.

“Thank you, sir,” Jemma said.

“We should go so that they can talk,” Coulson suggested, holding open the door for Talbot.

“I’m not your wife, Phil,” Talbot said as he walked through the door.

“I was just polite!” Coulson protested. Their muffled conversation continued once the door closed.

“Do you think that it’s… Alistair?” Jemma asked her husband. He nodded.
“At first I was so flummoxed how he found me or why he was interested. But I remember that Radcliffe and he had spoken recently before the Framework, and I suppose he’s been keeping tabs on me for a while. I’m so stupid—”

“You’re stupid for not thinking that your absent father would sneak into our wedding and send us on a scavenger hunt? I’d be worried if you were able to predict that,” Jemma said. “The sooner we figure out who this is and what they want, the sooner we can get on with our lives. And our family.”

“Do you think he knows—”

“I don’t know how he would. And I don’t care. Fitz, after all, we’ve faced, I don’t think your father, as awful as he is, is going to be a great danger necessarily. Do you want to reconnect?”

“No.”

“Then that’s that,” Jemma stated and shrugged. “He’s just an annoyance. This isn’t at all going to ruin the optimism and excitement I have for what’s to come. Nor will it ruin our wonderful wedding.” Fitz nodded in agreement but it was clear that this had shaken him, so Jemma walked towards him and kissed his forehead. “It will be okay,” She promised. “You should probably get ready to go to Philadelphia.” Fitz kissed her soundly, which surprised her at first, but eventually she responded with a similar assuredness.

“I love you.”

“And I love you. So be safe,” She ordered him.

A quinjet took Fitz, Coulson, and a pair of Agents from D.C. to Philadelphia. The Safeguard self-storage facility was located on 66th Avenue. It was brightly lit and indoors. The number indicated by the code was for a storage box on the third floor. After talking to the manager and showing the federal warrant, they were allowed access to storage unit 391. Inside, there was a vault-style safe, of all things.

“Do you think it’s safe?” Coulson asked, trying to add some humor as Fitz tried the combination also supplied. It worked, the door clicked and he pulled the safe open. Inside, there was nothing but a leather journal. It was tied together with twine and was clearly used, the pages were not uniform,
they were yellow and clumped together. On the front cover was a cardstock letter that said LEO on the front in a cursive hand. Fitz’s chest tightened and he felt a large lump form and solidify in his throat. He reached for the journal with a gloved hand and pulled off the twine, opening the card.

Leo,

*I don’t expect you to understand. I didn’t for a very long time. But you have seen more than I had at your age, so perhaps you will do better than I. I hope that you can learn.*

Your Father,

Alistair Fitz.

“What does it say?” Coulson asked.

“Alistair sent this,” Fitz said, closing the letter. He opened the journal. It had Alistair Fitz written on the inside. The first entry was dated. “It’s a journal, his journal. The first date is a few months before my parents got married. August first, nineteen-eighty-six.”

“Maybe that’s why he was so adamant on sending the message based around your wedding. It was the thirty-second anniversary of when he started this journal.”

“Maybe,” Fitz said. “I should probably read it since it’s pertinent to the investigation. That seems to be it in here. We should check the payment information for this storage container.”

Upon looking at the data and questioning the manager, the storage container was purchased for seventy dollars, in cash, on May twelfth of that year. Every twelfth, a letter with cash would be sent to the facility. The person who made the initial purchase and filed the paperwork was an eighteen year old boy. The safe was moved in the following day by the same boy. Upon cross-referencing his name, he was not in any criminal databases, but he did recently graduate from a nearby charter school, Imhotep High School, and was attending Penn State. Upon questioning him, he said he was approached on Craigslist when he was trying to sell a guitar for extra college money. Someone said they would pay him four thousand dollars if he set up the facility for them, and he was told where and when to pick up the money and safe. Always somewhere on his campus. They checked online listing, the email, and the school staff, but they couldn’t find any definitive trail between the safe and Alistair Fitz, except for the contents.

Day Fifty-Nine

For two days, Alistair Fitz’s journal sat on the coffee table in the Fitz-Simmons home. It was in a
sealed evidence bag. Fitz would sit before it, staring at it, contemplating opening it. But he never was able to open the pages. With the journal being the only lead SHIELD had on how and why Alistair Fitz hacked their servers, Fitz knew he would have to open it. He would have to read it. But the moment he read it would be the moment he would be viewing the world from his father’s perspective. He didn’t want to have to think of his father ever again, and now, his father’s life was sitting before him. Jemma was supportive, of course. He didn’t understand why she wasn’t furious at him. He had attracted this danger to their family. He could hear her in his head, of course, her soothing voice assuring him that it was not in any way his fault. He lacked the ability to predict what his absent father would do, and why.

“Do you want me to make or order something?” Jemma asked from beside him on the couch. She was working silently, allowing him to process this. She was better than he deserved.

“Ordering something might be best,” Fitz said.

Jemma nodded and opened a drawer on the coffee table, where a stack of local takeaway menus sat. She flipped through menus, probably consulting her own pregnancy cravings, she lingered on a Thai menu before pulling out her phone and calling the number. As she placed the order, Fitz reached for the journal and faltered for perhaps the thirtieth time. He sighed and bounced his knee, dragging his fingers through his hair.

“You don’t have to read it,” Jemma told him gently.

“It’s - I do,” Fitz said quietly.

“You don’t have to read it alone,” Jemma clarified.

“Do you want to read this?”

“I made a promise to support, protect and defend you,” Jemma said. “In our wedding vows, alright? I want to help in any way that I can. And if you need someone to read it for you—”

Fitz nodded glumly, and Jemma sat down beside him, observing his face as she reached for the bag and opened it. She gingerly pulled out the journal and carefully turned the cover until she reached the first entry.
‘August first, nineteen-eighty-six. Dear Journal? Should I entitle this to someone? Dear Diary—no that’s too feminine. I am a man, after all. It’s rather effeminate of me to start a journal in the first place, but Leo recommended I do so—’ Who’s Leo?’ Jemma asked her husband.

“I don’t know; I’m the only Leo I know,” He replied.

‘—He said that one of the best ways to remember your best memories are to immortalize them on pen and paper. And I quite agree with him, starting my family is something I will always want to remember. Of course Leo would be the one to be clever like this, he was always the smarter of us, my dear older brother.’” Jemma stopped as Fitz audibly gasped. He had an uncle? Upon racking his brain, he realized he knew practically nothing about his father’s family. He knew his paternal grandparents died before he was born. He had no idea he had an uncle. He nodded at Jemma to continue. ‘‘What can I say about my current state of mind? Quite a lot, I suppose. I can say that I’ve never been more excited. It’s all rather cliche, isn’t it? To meet the girl of your dreams here at the University of Glasgow? But Ruth, I could talk about for days. She’s the most beautiful woman I’ve ever seen. Unlike those women fascinated with their lips and their hair, she’s instead insightful and witty. Father has always espoused the division between the intellect and men and women. But even he agrees that Ruth is clever enough to be an honorary man. Of course, I know fully well she’s entirely a woman.’’

“He’s disgusting,” Fitz said.

“Yes, I’m inclined to agree,” Jemma said. ‘I’m going to continue. ‘Father is happy for me. Leo may be the eldest and the favorite, but I know I am causing him exceptional pride due to my success in business school and my settling down. Leo is still the ladies’ man, as always. But he is the next one to inherit the company, so I suppose he doesn’t have the time to build a family like I do. I have seen how difficult it was for father to juggle his responsibilities. But he’s a proper man, he knows to put his career first. And luckily, mother was an excellent homemaker and caretaker, like I know Ruth will be. Well, I can’t think of much else to say, I shall make an entry when I do. Finally, Alistair Fitz.’” Jemma closed the book and looked up at Leo Fitz. “How are you?”

“He’s really disgusting,” Fitz said.

“I know,” Jemma said. “But you always said he was a misogynist. Do you want to stop? Continue? Take a break?”

“When’s the next entry?”

“Later in August,” Jemma said. “A few in September and October, a good chunk in November, one
in December, nothing again until February—"

“When’s the last date?” Fitz asked.

“August fifth, nineteen-eighty-seven,” Jemma said. “A fortnight before you were born. It’s not a huge journal—”

“I want to eat in peace, we can read more later tonight,” Fitz said.

“Alright,” Jemma said. “You know, we’re going to overcome this together. We always do.”

“Overcome or survive?” Fitz asked.

“Both?” Jemma offered.

August and September had nothing to reveal. It was just him talking about how hard his classes were, but how he was a stellar and proper student. He mentioned his brother several times, it seemed that they had a close relationship. But lately, Leopold Fitz the elder had been going on business trips across the globe with their father, leaving Alistair and his mother to make wedding arrangements with Ruth MacDougall’s mother. He constantly lamented over how he was being suffocated by femininity and how he was going to surely start wearing lipstick by the time the wedding rolled around. “At least I have old Holden,” Jemma read. “Fitz - do you think Holden…”

“Probably,” Fitz agreed. “Does it say anything about the nature of their relationship?”

“No… but he is getting a Master’s degree in International Business and Entrepreneurship from Adam Smith Business School at Glasgow in 1986.”

“So?” Fitz asked.

“So, Radcliffe received his Ph.D. in biochemistry in 1989 from Glasgow. They would have been in the same year, probably the same freshman classes.”
“I remember Radcliffe saying something about that,” Fitz said. “If they were friends back then, maybe Mum knew something. But I’m not going to bring this up to her. She’s been free from my father for years. I don’t want to put him back in her life.”

“We can call it a night?” Jemma offered.

“That’s best,” Fitz agreed. “Not sure how well I’m going to sleep tonight. Why did he want me to read this?”

“Maybe he wants you to understand him better? Or maybe there’s something more to the journal; I don’t know.”

**Day Sixty-Three**

Once they began to read Alistair’s journal, it was like a dam of curiosity had burst forth. Every evening, after work, Jemma would read aloud the journal entries and they would discuss them. Alistair had a detailed recollection of his amazing wedding and much more amazing wedding night, a scene that Jemma did not read aloud but made very concerned faces towards. The wedding was the last journal entry in November, and a month later he made a short update for the holiday season, saying that all was well, he had Christmas with Ruth without his family because they were on vacation. His parents and older brother, Leo, were spending their Christmas in “‘India, of all places. I don’t see how a place like that inspires the Christmas spirit, especially considering the number of Muslims and Hindus in that country. Nevertheless, I believe we had a wonderful holiday. Holden came by for Christmas dinner, he was very talkative, and Ruth has been feeling under the weather. Regardless, it was a lovely day. Happy Christmas, Alistair.’”

“When’s the next date?” Fitz asked.

“February third, of the next year,” Jemma said. She began to read. “‘Should I have made a new entry sooner? Perhaps not. I needed to come to terms with my new reality before solidifying it on a piece of paper. However, I have failed at that. I cannot accept or understand what has happened. Exactly one month ago, I received word that the plane that Mother, Father and Leo were on crashed in the Mediterranean on the way from India to Scotland. There were no survivors. I now own the company, a company I have never worked for and never trained to organize. I immediately had to drop out of school. It perhaps would have been wise to finish my degree, considering my new responsibilities. However, I need the money. Unbeknownst to me, I inherited a wreck. The recent economic environment has declined the fortitude of British Industry as jobs are outsourced to factories in southeast Asia. Because of this, our small mining equipment manufacturing company has slowly been losing money. Father was in India to look for cheap ways to outsource our labor and keep the company afloat. He was coming home with failure when the private plane crashed.-’ there’s a whole section here he scratched out, I can’t read it. Then it says ‘-"
But I do have some good news. My dear wife is expecting. And despite it all, I am looking forward to meeting our child.” Jemma looked at Fitz. “Are you okay?”

“I had no idea that my grandparents and my uncle... you know. Or that we used to have a mining manufacturing company. Why would he want to share this with me? Why now? In this way? With all the smoke and mirrors?”

“I don’t know,” Jemma said. “I wish I did, but I don’t.”

And then they continued. Alistair documented his grief and stress occasionally. He would give curt summaries of business problems and work his way through them, citing economic theories. He had small updates on Ruth’s pregnancy and his excitement for the future. The rest of his journal was simply complaining. At first, he complained about the journal was feminizing him and making him emotional and weak. Then he complained that his wife’s pregnancy was inspiring these vulnerabilities. He complained about her awful morning sickness for keeping him awake. He complained when he spilled coffee on himself or when he couldn’t find matching socks. He complained when the teaspoons weren’t polished and when the garden needed to be weeded. His complaints weren’t curt nor brief like his passages about work of the grief of losing his family. They sometimes went on for pages, slowly escalating into rants about how terrible the world was, how it seemed divine intervention was not in his favor.

“He’s like a petulant child,” Fitz observed after Jemma finished a passage which complained about the inconvenience his wife’s pregnancy had on him. “Did he really think this would make me change my mind about him?”

“Perhaps he sees this chauvinistic preaching as sympathetic?” Jemma suggested.

“Then he’s an idiot,” Fitz said firmly.

Chapter End Notes

And the plot thickens...

I hope you all enjoyed! I would love to receive your feedback!
Sorry for the unfortunately long wait! If you've read the comments of last chapter, you'd know I sustained a bit of a podiatric injury and it diminished my ability to write. I have the next chapter already in the works, and I want to put that one up this weekend. I hope that you enjoy this chapter.

Just a warning, this chapter has a doctors appointment and some talk about prenatal medical procedures. Nothing dangerous, but I know sometimes some things can bother certain people.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

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**Week Ten**

**Day Sixty-Four**

“Any progress on the journal?” Coulson asked Fitz in passing that Monday morning.

“It’s solidified my dislike for my father, but nothing so far explaining why he’s doing this,” Fitz said. “Jemma’s full of clever theories, so I’m sure we’ll figure something out soon enough.”

“We’ve unfortunately been unable to figure out how he got in,” Coulson said. “So that book is our only lead. No pressure.”

“No need to say that, I know how important this is,” Fitz said, “I still don’t understand why he did it this way. All the smoke and mirrors. He could have easily sent it to us in the mail.”

“Maybe you should ask the shrink in the house?” Coulson suggested.

“Ariel? I can’t ask her to psychoanalyze my father.”

“Why not? She’s a criminal profile, and hacking a government agency carries a criminal offense.”

“Yes, but… I don’t want to bother her with my issues,” Fitz admitted.

“Sure, but that’s her job, isn’t it?”

Coulson was right, Fitz supposed. So after a staff meeting finalizing standard grading policies, Fitz caught the long-legged psychologist in the halls.

“Yes, Fitz?” Ariel asked.

“Can I ask your advice about something?”

“Is this that weird scavenger hunt sent by your father?” Ariel asked. Fitz blinked at her. “Daisy told me.”
“You and Daisy are pen pals now?” Fitz asked.

“Something like that,” Ariel said. “Anyway, what do you want advice on?”

“I still don’t understand the secrecy,” Fitz said. “Jemma and I are nearly done with the journal, and we’re no closer to finding his motives. Do you know why someone would do this?”

“The first reason that comes to mind is power,” Ariel explained. “Due to how estranged your relationship and how long you’ve been independent of him, he lacks power over you. To ensure he has power, which places him in a comfort zone of control, he needs to make you run around. I’ve heard the levels of secrecy he went through, it’s the kind of detailed plans I’ve seen in many organized criminals, if not obsessively organized. I can say every city or place he makes you run is not where he lives. Organized criminals often avoid their territory to divert suspicion.”

“You say it like he’s planning on doing more.”

“Of course he is, he’s organized and power hungry. Until he has exactly what he wants, he’s going to continue. I can say this, with the complexity of the first ‘puzzle’ he gave you, I would go over the evidence and circumstances of finding the last journal. Often, organized criminals who taunt or lead with puzzles stick with that motif. There may have been a puzzle you haven’t noticed before,” Ariel suggested. Fitz remembered the dead pixels. There was nothing to indicate that there was a puzzle to decode, Jemma was just very good at recognizing dead pixels and clusters. “Does that help?” Ariel asked.

“Yeah,” Fitz nodded. “Thanks again. Hey, um, I’m turning thirty-one on Sunday and Jemma, and I are having a small little party at our house if you want to come. Do you want to come?”

“I would like that,” Ariel smiled. “Hey, Fitz, I just want you to know that I’m here for you and Jemma. I am.”

“Thank you. We appreciate that,” Fitz said.

Later that night Fitz and Jemma finished the journal. As always, Jemma read the entry aloud, “‘It has been a while since my last entry, I confess. Nearly a week. The reason for this, of course, is that Ruth and I got into a large fight. She harassed me after dinner, saying that after the death of my family, I was angry and I misplaced my anger at the entire world, and especially her. She complained that she did not want a child to be raised in a home with me if I was going to be too temperamental. I left the house, became rather intoxicated, and found my way to Holden’s home. He was very wise, Holden. He helped me understand that anxieties from the pregnancy surrounded Ruth and that the stress I was irradiating from work and my grief was causing her distress and hysteria. He told me I ought to go home and reconnect with her. However, I decided that both she and I needed some time apart to cool down, so I purchased a hotel room not far from the office and stayed there for a few days before returning home and having a calm discussion with her. We’ve both been through plenty lately, me especially. But we agreed that we have to leave that behind us now, our child will be born any day now. I am nearing the last page, but I have a second journal ready to continue this recording of my life. And so, I suppose this is the end of the first book and the beginning of a series. Perhaps I should be profound and say something to summarize or conclude this. Or perhaps I won’t.’”

“That’s the ending?” Fitz asked.
“I’m afraid so,” Jemma said. “I know it doesn’t have much. But we know that he planned to continue, at least.”

“Ariel said that it’s likely he’s going to continue because he’s trying to exert power over me,” Fitz said. “And she thinks he might have already left clues with the circumstances of how we found this one. It’s something.”

“I also think we should investigate the circumstances of the death of your grandparents and uncle,” Jemma said. “It might surmount to nothing, but we’ve been in this career long enough to know that tragic deaths often are linked to something suspicious when around us.”

“Agreed,” Fitz said.

Day Sixty-Nine

Jemma’s back was pushed up against the armrest of the loveseat in their living room; a laptop was perched on her knees as she scrolled through files and articles. A whiteboard with pages and images magnetically attached and color-coded notes in erasable marker stood in front of the television. The coffee table was covered in random files. They had spent their entire Saturday studying every lead they could from the journal. One of the things that Fitz found odd was that his father employed a student from Imhotep charter school, instead of a petty criminal, a homeless man, or high schooler from any school that was closer to the storage facility. And so Fitz was investigating all he could about Imhotep. Meanwhile, Jemma was doing extensive research on Leopold Arthur Fitz, Leander Hubert Fitz, and Regina Guin Fitz, the family of Alistair Fitz which died in a plane crash.

“My family has the worst names,” Fitz noted when Jemma pulled up their records.

Both of them found some things worth noting and added them to the whiteboard as they worked. It honestly felt for a moment like they were students again at academy trying to solve some odd puzzle. Except instead of it being something fun like quantum mechanics or microbiology, it was history articles, newspaper clippings, encyclopedia entries, and the occasional financial paper.

“You’ll like this Imhotep figure,” Fitz told his wife as he added a note to the board as he read it from his tablet screen, “He wrote one of the first ancient medical texts, with anatomical terms and treatments of injuries in third-dynasty Egypt. He was also a seer, poet, sage, scientist, theologian, architect and advisor to the pharaoh. He was elevated to the Egyptian Pantheon after his death around 2600 B.C.E. There are a bunch of obscure references of him in mythology fighting the god Set and some other things, but I haven’t found any concrete leads that could suggest what we need to do next.”

“I’m also unsuccessful to some degree,” Jemma admitted. “I know your grandparents and uncle traveled all over the world, all the time. And I know that your family owned this mining company until you father sold it when you were five. But nothing blatant. What if it’s a location he traveled to a lot of was of importance?”

“He had to mention a hundred places in that one journal,” Fitz said. “And I’m not bringing my mother in to help with this. She doesn’t need him back in her life.”

“We’re missing something,” Jemma sighed. “Maybe we’re overthinking this?”

“Maybe we’re not thinking hard enough?”
“Ugh, I hate this,” Jemma said. “I want to focus on the Academy, but instead I’m focusing on this.”

“Maybe we should just give what we have to a few analysts and let them deal with it?” Fitz suggested. “We have a job to do, after all. The Academy is more important than my father, and our family is more important than the Academy. What do you say?”

“Okay,” Jemma sighed. “I just dislike failing.”

“We’re not failing, we’re prioritizing,” Fitz told her.

**Day Seventy**

That morning, Jemma had an appointment with the obstetrician. Dr. Polga was as kind as ever and asked some routine questions before performing the ultrasound. Jemma was a little low on the goal for prenatal weight gain, but her vitamin usage was ideal. “Are you experiencing any headaches, dizziness or serious mood swings?” Dr. Polga asked.

“Headaches, but I always thought of them more from work-related stress,” Jemma said.

“Well, you should know I hope that you should be taking acetaminophen, not ibuprofen or aspirin,” Dr. Polga said.

“Yes, I’m very aware of the pharmacology of pregnancy,” Jemma said.

Dr. Polga was setting up the ultrasound machine and talking all the while to fill the time, “You have visible veins on your abdomen, I notice. It’s common, especially for slighter, lighter women. Although, you aren’t showing as much as I would expect for your build. I suppose you have stronger abdominal muscles than initial observation would suggest. But you should start showing in the next two weeks. Now, you’re almost eleven weeks? So you are ending your first trimester, exciting.” Jemma rolled up the hospital gown, and Dr. Polga squirted on the blue gel and applied the transducer. “And here’s your fetus.”

“Oh my god,” Jemma said. The image on the screen was absolutely a baby. The head was nearly as large as the rest of the small body, enlarged for the beautiful, brilliant brain that would occupy it.

“Your baby looks good,” Dr. Polga said. “I can’t find anything to worry over. Now, you scheduled a CVS procedure today. You are very aware of what this entails?”

“You’re vaginally sticking a speculum into my uterus to sample the chorionic villi of the placenta,” Jemma said. “To determine genetic abnormalities and the sex of the child as specified by chromosomes.”

“I just wanted to make sure,” Dr. Polga said before assembling the supplies.

“Look at our baby, Fitz. There’s a little nose - and ears,” Jemma cooed.

“Greatest birthday present ever,” Fitz said, kissing her cheek softly. “Speaking of birthdays, I was thinking… we should announce your pregnancy today.”

“Really?”
“Yes. You’re healthy, the baby is a healthy fetus, and I can’t wait any longer. Everyone is going to be there, except our parents,” Fitz listed on his fingers. Jemma pondered and then nodded in assent.

After all the tests were done, and Dr. Polga gave the couple a printed image of the latest ultrasound, they headed back to set up for the party. Jemma worked on the decorations for the event, and Fitz drove to pick up catering that they ordered. At five in the evening, the guests arrived in a slow but sure trickle. Ariel and Daisy were currently the only two who knew that Jemma and Fitz were expecting, which meant that they got to surprise everyone else. After the initial introductions and the settling around the dining room table for dinner, Fitz stood up.

“Thanks for coming. It means a lot you all could be here. Um, I’m hungry, so I want to make this short. I’m glad that we can all be here together. Thank you for celebrating my thirty-first birthday with me. There were a lot of times in my life I almost didn’t make it here. I’m sure that goes for all of us. But I’m glad that I am here. You know, despite recent events, I’m the happiest I’ve been in a very long time. I have a wife now, and she’s amazing. And we’re delighted to be together, and to be going forward with our lives, our relationship, and our growing family. So, thank you,” Fitz sat down.

“Sorry, um, growing family?” Mack asked. Jemma and Fitz shared a look, smiling.

“Congratulations!” Elena exclaimed, her voice cracking. “Daisy, you are not screaming- you knew!”

“Sorry,” Daisy said. “Jemma needed baby advice, and I promised to keep it quiet. Ariel knows!”

“So you told the newbie?” Elena asked accusingly.

“She didn’t tell me, I figured it out, I have experienced the same affliction,” Ariel explained.

“You’re really having a baby?” Coulson gaped.

“How far along are you?” May inquired politely.

“Tomorrow I’ll officially be eleven weeks,” Jemma explained.

“You aren’t - you know-” Elena pantomimed a pregnancy belly and blew a raspberry “-yet.”

“Our OB said that I have stronger abdominal muscles than normal, so it's taking longer for me to start to show. But my uterus should move forwards any day now, and then I’ll have a more noticeable bump.”

“So you conceived right around the time you got engaged?” Mack asked. “I just wanted to know if the reason the wedding was so soon was that it was a shotgun.”

“I don’t really care about that, we thought that before the Academy officially opens would be yes, and then we did also decide to marry before Jemma was showing particularly. Of course, I proposed before we knew we made or would soon make a baby,” Fitz explained.

“When’s the due date?” Elena asked.

“March sixteenth,” Jemma answered. “But there is easily a two-week uncertainty. Every pregnancy is different.”
“Do you know the gender yet?”

“Just earlier today I had a sample of the chorionic villi in the placenta taken. It has the baby’s DNA in it so we’ll be able to evaluate genetic concerns as well as learn the sex. We’ll have the results in two weeks.”

“She’s been quite influenced by her small library of baby books, websites, magazine subscriptions and articles,” Fitz said. “You could ask her anything about pregnancy, and she’d know the answer.”

“I like research,” she crossed her arms.

“That isn’t news to anyone here,” Fitz assured her, smiling. She rolled her eyes and smiled back.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! As always, I appreciate feedback. It’s what drives me to do this beyond my own muse. Y’all are the ones who motivate me to update when I can and make the story as interesting as possible. So please, send a comment or some kudos my way!
Week 11

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all your comments on the last chapter. I'm glad I was able to get this one up today. I hope you enjoy.

Just a bit of a content warning, we learn a bit more about Ariel's relationship with her father. However, that includes some references to depression and suicide. Be forewarned if that's a sore spot for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Eleven

Day Seventy-Three

It was early morning, Jemma just finished her shower and began to dry her body and hair. A selection of clothing sat on the vanity, neatly folded. Once she felt adequately dry, she began to put her clothes on for the day. She started with the undergarments and undershirt. Then she put on her deep green button-up blouse. The last thing to wear was black slacks. They went up against her legs just fine, but when she pulled them tight to close the button, she found that she couldn’t. She tried again, with her shirt untucked, and the button still wouldn’t fasten. She sucked in her abdomen, but there wasn’t anything substantial to suck in. It was her uterus, she decided. She had a large enough belly now that her trousers were too tight. She kicked off her slacks and headed downstairs to where Fitz was making breakfast.

“Jemma,” He said. “Um, you aren’t wearing trousers-”

“They don’t fit!” She exclaimed triumphantly.

“Really?”

“I mean, I haven’t seen much of a drastic difference, but I’ve also seen my abdomen every day so that it would be gradual I wouldn’t notice. But I must be showing enough I can’t fit into my size four slacks anymore. And I’m already spilling out of most of my bras. Fitz- I’m going to need to buy maternity clothes.”

“You knew that.”
“Yes, but it used to be a concept. I will eventually have to do this. Now it’s a reality!”

“I’m glad you’re happy about the pregnancy. I’m happy too. You can’t go to work without something on your bottom half, though.”

“Right! I have a stretchy waist skirt I think—” She went back upstairs. Fitz smiled and shook his head. Jemma had two modes when it came to shopping. She would buy one item every few months that she liked, or she would splurge on items she was sure she needed. They were probably in for a splurge. At least her birthday was coming up.

**Day Seventy-Four**

Jemma received good news that Thursday from Talbot. After requesting nearly a month ago for a grant and permission to understand and possibly develop medical treatments from the odd scabbard involved in the robbery, she was given permission and some small funds. She would have to keep it secure and appropriate lab time and an assistant, but she would be allowed to do so. Her husband was obviously going to be her assistant, she couldn’t imagine doing something like this without Fitz, even though it was more biochemistry than anything. And a fascinating project with that unusual artifact might distract him from his father and those concerns. Jemma finished her email thanking Talbot, finished her email to all the staff members about the icebreaker challenge they would give the students the first and second days at academy, and finally went to go find her husband. She went down the circular halls to the quadrant appropriated for the offices of the engineering professors. He, being the head of the department, had a decently large office. Nowhere near as large as Jemma’s, but she was the boss. She was greeted politely by engineers, many of whom now knew that she was expecting. She knocked on her husband’s door.

“Come in!” He called. She opened the door. He was tinkering at his desk with something small, and it looked like a microprocessor of some sort. She watched him work for a couple of seconds in peace. His brow was furrowed in concentration. His lips were parted as he breathed gently from them. “Jemma!” He noticed her staring at him.

“How are you?” She asked.

“Better now that you’re here,” he smiled. “Why’re you here?”

“Oh, I got confirmation from Talbot we can work on that scabbard to further investigate its properties,” Jemma said. “I think the end goal beyond understanding it is to see if we can replicate
the technology as a medical device. Imagine being able to use hormones or whatever the system uses to repair injuries like we've seen it do before completely?”

“We’d save lives,” Fitz agreed. “Especially because we’re using proper channels and paperwork, right?”

“Of course, completely, I’m even registering us for surveilled lab time instead of just taking the box home or using my office,” Jemma said. “I don’t know why you would be the concern. I follow the rules except in the most extreme circumstances.”

“And whenever you don’t agree with them,” Fitz agreed.

“What’re you working on?” Jemma asked, stepping closer. Fitz covered his small processor with his hands.

“Gift, for you.”

“On company time?”

“Our first kiss was on company time, Jemma Simmons, besides, I’ve done all my work for the day. It’s not my fault that SHIELD won’t let me go home until five.”

“Fair enough,” Jemma said. “I’ll see you then.” She closed the door and left. Fitz went back to his project, which was going to be a sort of scrapbook for her, but not on any medium that has been done before. He smiled to himself and went back to his work, making sure that the small processor would work with the small system and data storage he needed for his project to work. His phone chirped two hours later that it was time for him to head to the roof and take the small helicopter home. It was a two-person drone more than it was a helicopter, but it was perfectly safe. He had designed it, after all. He packed his project away, grabbed his coat and stepped out of his office and headed to the elevator. He took it to the roof. The airfield platform was raised so people could leave. Quinjets were strapped down and the small helicopters were lined up, ready to take people back to Norfolk base. Jemma wasn’t there yet, not unusually. It seemed that when someone at work had an emergency, they went to Jemma moments before she was ready to leave. He decided to enjoy the view while he could, there were a few spots on the outskirts of the airfield you could lean on a set-up railing and watch the water. He noticed Ariel doing just that. When he was closer, he realized she was talking on the phone to someone.
“I have made progress, you oaf,” She said sharply. “Who has a job with the government? Who has an apartment? Who is easily on top of her bills? Who is making friends? I’m working, functional, and on task.” The person she was talking to said something that infuriated her. “I’m taking too long? I’m taking too long? I’ve jumped through every hoop you asked, I’ve done everything you wanted, and I’m doing it all within the time you requested.” She seemed to be cut off by the person on the other side. “Listen to me you inflamed ballsack. I want to see my son!” It seemed the person hung up because she got mad and almost threw her phone into the ocean before stopping, slipping it into her bag, gripping the rails, and taking deep breaths.

“Are you alright?” Fitz went up to Ariel once he deemed that she wasn’t going to hit him. She jumped.

“Oh, Fitz. Ugh, I’ve been better,” she said.

“So, what inflamed ballsack were you talking to?” He asked, trying to be light.

“Oh,” She turned pale and looked down. “My father.”

“I thought you said things were well with him?”

“They’re sometimes better and sometimes worse,” She sighed. “He’s not letting Luke come to Norfolk. I’ve vetted the schools here. I have an apartment ready with enough room, a steady job here. But he insists that since Luke started the school year last week, it would be unfair to take him out, not that Luke has had enough time to get attached. It’s just because he wants to stay in Boston, and he wants Luke to be with him.”

“But… Luke is your son… isn’t he?” Fitz asked.

“As you know, I lost Luke’s father in my first trimester. I was incredibly depressed during my pregnancy, and my postpartum depression was severe enough that I was suicidal.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It was years ago. I got help, I went to a mental health facility and took care of my basic needs, took antidepressants, I became functional, then I worked to become better. But when I was away, I was scared my condition would make him a ward of the state so I gave my father custody of Luke
so he could take care of him. When I got back, father always wanted me to prove that I was a good enough mother for Luke. I had to find a job that paid well but gave me enough time off to be with him. I had to afford a nice enough apartment. So many things, and whenever I achieved one, he had another one lined up. It’s been exhausting. I took this job because he thought it was a good opportunity and he promised if I fit in well and I did what was necessary, I could have Luke. But I’ve done that, and he gave me more requirements. I suppose I should just go back to a facility. After all, isn’t insanity doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results?” She sighed. “Sorry, I got- ugh. I want to love my father, Fitz. He used to be so much to me. But…”

“At least your dad isn’t my dad,” Fitz said as conversationally as he could manage. “My father took pictures of my wedding and sent my wife and me on a wild goose chase to find his journal documenting how much of a prat he is. I had no idea he was such a complainer. He complains about everything, simple things, insignificant things. And for some reason, I suppose he thinks his journal will repair our relationship? I don’t know.” Fitz stared at the water. “Maybe fathers just suck.”

“No, that’s not true,” Ariel said sharply. “Jemma’s father is kind, isn’t he? And I’ve met men who would be or are fantastic fathers. I know Talbot put his son before national security. I know plenty of people over the years with fathers who pushed them to focus on their mental health. Dan would have been an amazing father. And you, Fitz, you're going to be a wonderful father to you and Jemma’s child. You’re bursting with joy and love for your growing family, I can tell. I think fathers are just given… the privilege to suck. Centuries of the patriarchy have made the role of women centered around the family. Even now, mothers have higher expectations placed upon them. Not that mothers should do less, fathers should do more.”

“Damn the patriarchy,” Fitz agreed. The pair smiled.

“There you are!” Jemma exclaimed. “Chatting up Ariel. Sorry, I’m late, there was a situation with the ARAC.”

“ARAC?” Ariel asked.

“It’s a surprise for the students on opening day,” Jemma said. “Fitz's framework technology inspires it, but instead of plugging someone into a world they can’t control, it’s bringing the simulation into our own.”

“Like the holodeck on Next Gen?” Ariel asked.

“Yeah,” Fitz said.
Jemma explained, “It will be used for training and activities. And it doesn’t mess with people’s brains—”

“So no brainwashing, fictional world-building, or general emotionally scarring experiences like that,” Fitz said. “It’s unfortunate that has to be a threshold, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Jemma and Ariel agreed.

“Well, don’t let me keep you lovebirds from going home and doing whatever it is you do in your free time,” Ariel said. “I need to go back to my office to grab my things.” She smiled at them softly and headed to the elevator. Jemma and Fitz found a ride and were on the Norfolk base in about ten minutes. Then they drove home.

“What were you and Ariel talking about?” Jemma asked.

“Her father,” Fitz said. “And my father. She and her father have been in a bit of an argument for years, I suppose. He has custody of Luke, not her.” Fitz explained to Jemma what Ariel said about her depression and her father’s requirements in an ongoing quest for custody of her son.

“That’s terrible, I had no idea,” Jemma said. “Nothing in her record said that she was going through that. Then again, there was nothing about having a son or a father either.”

“I suppose some people like privacy, she told you she was looking to settle down with family, didn’t she?”

“She did,” Jemma nodded. “I wish I could help.”

“Yeah,” Fitz agreed. “Maybe we can. There has to be some… rules that allow for her to have her son. She could sue in civil court?”

“Then she would have to prove that she was fit to be a mother in the court of law, and if her father has withheld Luke from her this long, he must have some pretty damning evidence,” Jemma sighed. “Maybe we can ask Daisy. If anyone can do something like that, it’s our Daisy.”
“You talk about her like she’s our child,” Fitz said.

“I mean, that’s not that far off. We took her in off the streets. Fed her. Bathed her. Trained her—”

“That makes it sound like she’s our dog,” Fitz complained. “She’s our friend.”

“Fine,” Jemma said. “She’s our friend.” Jemma was quiet for a few moments. “Do you think the Kree could have performed the same procedure on canines that they did on humans?”

“Why is this a question you find relevant?” Fitz asked.

“I was just wondering!” Jemma protested. “Why are you censoring my science?”

“I’m not censoring your anything,” Fitz said.

“You got that right!” Jemma proclaimed.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it. As always, I appreciate your feedback!

The next chapter looks like its going to be a long one. The Academy will open its doors, and we'll get to see how it functions with its new charges. Unfortunately, in my home life, I also am having some school things I need to pay attention to. I'm applying to a few Medical School programs, and it requires a lot of essay writing (I have five more essays to write, and I've done six so far). Which unfortunately means I'm going to need to dial back my creative writing. Most of my immediate applications are due early November. Until then, my updates may be sporadic and less frequent.
Week 12

Chapter Notes

I hope you all enjoyed the last chapter. In this chapter SHIELD Academy opens.

Applying to things is hard, but I should finish all my applications for November in about a week or two and hopefully I will make more progress.

This one is a longer chapter, so be forewarned. Additionally, there is some canon-typical violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Twelve

Day Eighty-Eight

“Fitz!” Jemma was upright in bed. Of course, she was always upright in bed now, because her pregnancy heartburn had attacked with a passion the last few days and her chest was continually burning.

“What? We don’t have work today because we’re working the weekend,” Fitz said drowsily. “Are we in danger?”

“I can palpate my fundus!” Jemma exclaimed happily.

“I mean, if that’s how you call it, I think Ariel’s elaborating was better, but-”

Jemma rolled her eyes, “Don’t be vulgar! The fundus of my uterus! It means it’s descended forwards! I can now guess the size of our baby at all time using the fundal height!”

“Cool,” Fitz said. “Why are you awake? Because I know you didn’t wake up for a fundus.”

“My esophagus burns,” Jemma admitted. “I’ve been doing everything I can think of doing. But the progesterone makes my cardiac sphincter weak, and I just keep pushing up acid.”

“The milk of magnesia isn’t helping?”

“It makes it better, but it’s still bad. Tell you what,” Jemma climbed out of bed and turned on her
lamp. “I’ll go downstairs. You sleep in some more,” She kissed her husband on the head and left. Three hours later, he was sufficiently rested and decided to come downstairs. Jemma had a finished bowl of what must have been oatmeal on the coffee table by her feet. She was on her laptop, typing something into a spreadsheet.

“Are you measuring your stomach acid content?” Fitz asked.

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’m budgeting. I realized that I’m finishing my first trimester next week. We have half a year until we have a child, and I know like it seems a long while, but between our work, we’re not going to have loads of time. So I’m working on the budget, just for the pregnancy. Maternity clothes, baby clothes, baby gear, pregnancy vitamins, doctors appointments. Just to get an estimate of how much we’re going to budget our salaries.”

“And are you making progress?” Fitz asked.

“Yes,” Jemma said. “I have a monthly checklist, starting next month. By the end of September, I need maternity clothes and a third appointment. We start buying baby clothing and furniture in November. Birthing classes in January. And I’m working on other major and minor expenses.”

“You know, typically, people watch television and sleep on their day off.”

“I know. I’m just… the baby is giving me anxiety. Work is giving me anxiety. There’s a lot of anxiety. I need to do something productive with it. I have so much work as a new mother and so much work with the academy. How am I going to go shopping for maternity wear while running SHIELD Academy?”

“We’ll make it work, Jemma. We always do. But you really shouldn’t have to worry about all this. It’s your day off. Besides, being unproductive is a lot more fun,” Fitz said. “We’re opening the academy on Saturday. You’ve been working on that for months. You deserve one day where you don’t think about any of it. What do you say?”

“Can we snog?” Jemma asked.

“Cuddling, watching television and snogging was my only plans for the day,” Fitz shrugged. “And food. I plan on food.”

“I think, as long as the snogging is at sufficient levels, I can agree with your unproductivity,” Jemma said, setting down her laptop. Fitz fixed himself some cereal, and once he was done eating, the couple settled onto the couch together. Occasionally, Jemma would interrupt whatever they were watching to kiss her husband thoroughly. Around noon, they went a little further than kissing, and then made grilled cheese sandwiches after picking up their clothes that were strewn around the living room. It was the calm before the storm.
Day Eighty-Nine

“Ladies and Gentlemen, tomorrow, SHIELD Academy shall open its doors to the first semester of students,” Jemma said. “Tomorrow is going to be an incredibly stressful day. It is our job to mesmerize, fascinate and intimidate eighty-six scientists. We have between three and six semesters, depending on the program, to train these scientists into those ready for employment at SHIELD. Now, this is going to be a learning curve for student and faculty. The reality is, students here are highly qualified in their respective fields, but working for SHIELD is an entirely different perspective of reality. Now, everyone should have an itinerary of their responsibilities for the day. I will do the initial introduction and orientation both at the Norfolk base and here. Then, we split off with our respective student clusters. I with the biology and chemistry students. Fitz with the engineering students. McAllister with the psychology students and Huang with the physics students. You’ll notice that your itinerary also accounts for the communications students heralded by Coulson. Know your itinerary. We have to look and feel like a seamless machine. At the previous academy, students were frightened the first day to educate them on the experiences here at SHIELD properly. I want to be more accurate and terrify them. If anyone has questions, comments, concerns, I will be in my office until nine this evening. Thank you.”

Jemma adjourned the staff meeting and headed down the halls to her office, where she got to work. She double checked all the plans. Triple checked that the ARAC was working. She had seven people come in with questions, which she spent ten minutes each answering despite the fact they warranted only one. She was working on memorizing her speech for the third time when there was knock on the door. She looked up, it was her husband, with a sympathetic expression on his face and an appetizing bag of Thai take-out.

“I promised I’d leave at nine.”

“Sure,” Fitz said. “But it’s eight forty-five, and you haven’t eaten since your afternoon snack. And with you on the lower side for pregnancy weight gain and the whole ‘eating for two’ generalization.”

“Yeah,” Jemma sighed in defeat. “I’m sorry. I’m a bad, overworked mom.”

“It’s alright,” Fitz said. “You’re allowed to be passionate about your job. Just make sure to eat,” He handed her a box and a fork. She opened it and dug in.

“SHIELD Academy is… all I’ve been working on for four months,” Jemma said. “After everything that has happened, I need it to be perfect, controlled, organized, safe. I saw what happened to the Academy- the one we went to- both in our world and that false one. Both times, kids who wanted to make the world a better place died. I need to move on from that legacy and build a better one.”

“I know how important this is for you,” Fitz said. “And it’s going to be amazing because you’re
amazing. And everything you do and everything you make is-”

“Amazing?” Jemma smiled. “Oh, what did I do to deserve you?”

“I ask myself the same question every day. What did Jemma do to deserve me?” Fitz teased. She chuckled into her food and then shoveled several forkfuls into her mouth. Fitz let her eat. “We’re going to have a hell of a weekend, aren’t we?” Fitz asked her. Jemma nodded.

Day Ninety

Rebecca Herschel stepped nervously out of the shuttle that had taken her from the International Airport in Washington DC to the base in Norfolk. She was holding onto the ID that came from SHIELD in the mail like it was a lifeline, ready to show anyone that she was prepared to defend herself as having been accepted to the Strategic Homeland Something. Did anyone know the full acronym? What if that was the question they ask before you can enter? Shit. Investigation? Integration? Dammit, she knew it had “Logistics” for the “L.”

She instead focused on reality. She was driving up to where her journey into mystery began. There were dozens and dozens of shuttles parked in front of a hanger? It was a jet hanger, it smelled like fuel and metal and sweaty socks. She and the other ten people in her shuttle climbed out. She went to grab her things from the undercarriage, but nobody else has their luggage. She supposed they left them? She presumed all her baggage had ID tags. Okay, it would be okay. She walked carefully to the doors where everyone was funneling. Two guards in cheap suits were checking the identification cards of the students with their tablets, letting them in one by one.

When it was Rebecca’s turn, she carefully presented her identification card. The guard checked her and allowed her to go through. She stepped inside into yet another line. Plastic walls were directing the students around the perimeter of the hanger, temporary plastic walls on one side, metal panels on the other. The line wasn’t slow, at least. It seemed that SHIELD was efficient enough that she probably stood for five seconds, stepped forward, and stood for another five. A few minutes later, she saw the hub of this efficiency. Three plastic tables, covered in black plastic tablecloths, blocked the entrance into the central part of the hanger. Students stepped forward and were handed orientation packets before being shuffled away by the fluid waves of future agents. The tables accepted and dismissed students in perfect order, right down the line like they had practiced the process. Did they practice? It was Rebecca’s turn. She went to the open spot, the rugged man handed her an information packet with a small smile and then she was moving away to the main room.

Metal foldable chairs sat in rows. Papers were on the seats with names and some documents particular to that student. Rebecca found her room number, class schedule, and an itinerary for orientation weekend. It said her advisor was J. Simmons. What was he like? Or was J. Simmons a girl? Was she a hypocrite to assume that the head of the biology, chemistry and medical departments was a man? Or was she just being cynical? More people filed into the hanger. Rebecca began to flip through her orientation packet. It talked about SHIELD’s mission, the facility, a handbook of expectations. This was just like college, actually, except for spies and
government scientists. Twenty minutes after Rebecca sat down, the last student sat in his chair, and the temporary stage had three people from the orientation packet tables stepping onto it. First, there was an older Asian woman, with dark hair slicked back into a tight ponytail and an all-black ensemble. She had a cold, expressionless face that sent shivers down Rebecca’s spine. The second woman had brown hair in soft waves around her face and a navy sheath dress with a white belt making it an empire waist. Rebecca could see the slight curve of this woman’s abdomen. She was pregnant. Could SHIELD agents get pregnant? Rebecca never imagined these kinds of people would want or have a family. The third person was a man, middle-aged or older but healthy. Balding brown hair. He had a gray suit and a paisley tie, a far better quality ensemble than the men in black outside. He looked approachable, like a cool principal or one of the quirky banker dads. There were three microphones on the stage, each person took one.

“Hello,” The pregnant woman said brightly. She was British. “I’m Jemma Simmons. Doctor of Biology and Chemistry, former field agent, and Director of the Science and Technology division here at SHIELD Academy.”

“I’m Phil Coulson. Former field agent and Director of the Communications division,” The man said.


“We would like to welcome you to SHIELD Academy's first year,” Phil Coulson said.

“Sixty years ago today, the doors of the first Academy in an old Strategic Science Reserve building. Peggy Carter opened the doors for the next generations of agents. After the academy and SHIELD went through some changes, we are glad to open the doors once more, honoring her legacy,” Jemma Simmons explained. Rebecca was still fixating on the small swell of the woman’s abdomen. She had to be pregnant.

“The goal of the academy is to train you to be agents we believe can survive SHIELD. Our goal is for all of you to be field agents, regardless of your school of training, you will be able to be part of a mobile team. Not all of you will be field agents. Failures will either be technicians, analysts and general security agents, or will leave the academy entirely. Most of you will fail,” Melinda May said. This woman was so bitingly honest Rebecca could feel the room freeze over.

“This is the threshold,” Jemma Simmons announced dramatically. “This is your final chance. You can stay in your chairs to eventually be escorted back to the airport and your homes. Or, you can move forward to the hardest thing you will ever face.”

“SHIELD Academy isn’t school. It isn’t boot-camp,” Coulson said. “It’s your chance to learn how to save the world.”

“If you want to subject yourselves to that opportunity,” May motioned to behind the audience. As
if they had rehearsed it, the massive doors of the hangar swung open, and everyone stared at a large plane sitting outside. Black, with no windows. The eagle symbol Rebecca knew represented SHIELD was painted on one side. The cargo bay lowered, showing the students that inside was just rows of tight seats, enough to fit a few hundred people. Coulson, May, and Simmons left the stage and walked towards the plane. Slowly but surely, the students grabbed their packets, pages, and small bags and followed the three teachers into the plane. It felt dramatic, with the sea air whipping their hair. The large spy plane being a large spy plane. There was no order, Rebecca found a seat and sat down, squeezing herself between two muscular women who squinted at her. But Rebecca sensed they were just as nervous as she was. Well, almost as nervous as she was. Nobody was as nervous as she was. Rebecca looked back and was surprised to see that about ten people stayed sitting in their seats, watching at the plane with wide eyes. They looked like they were hesitant, rethinking their decision. The cargo ramp of the plane began to close slowly, one man stood up, took two steps forward and then stopped. Rebecca couldn’t see what he did, or his reaction since the door closed and the rows of seats were plunged into darkness. A second later, the fluorescent lights turned on. Rebecca blinked in the bright light.

“We will reach the Academy in one hour,” The British woman, Jemma Simmons, said over the plane intercom in a clear voice. “Your items are in the hold of the plane and will be sent to your rooms. I will give you further instruction fifteen minutes to landing.”

Rebecca didn’t have the heart to talk to anyone. There were some quiet introductions, but most people stared into space, wondering what the hell they had gotten themselves into. Forty-five minutes must have passed because soon enough, Jemma Simmons was back on the intercom.

“When we land, all communications students will leave first. If you are in communications, you will stand up and leave with Director Coulson. He will escort you to the elevator and down to the communications facility where you will receive a lecture from him. Once we have received word that all communications cadets and only communications cadets are in the proper facility, Director May will lead the operations cadets and only the operations cadets to the operations facility where you will receive a lecture from her. After confirmation, I will lead the science and technology cadets to the science and technology facility. Any questions?”

Wait, Rebecca had seen the directors go to the cockpit. How were the students going to ask questions? Could they hear them? Oh, don’t be silly, Rebecca, SHIELD can probably scan your thoughts with some psionic device, Rebecca thought.

“How much walking should we expect?” A man called.

“Director May expresses hopes that you’re not in operations,” Jemma Simmons answered over the intercom. “Now, to answer your question, unlike the previous SHIELD Academy which was structured more similarly to a university campus, our facility is a single building. It’s a large building, however. So I wouldn’t discount physical movement.”

How big would the building be? And how would it stay secret if it was a big building? It was secret, right? Why else did they have a windowless plane to get them there? Aesthetic?
“Will we live with people in our school?” A girl yelled.

“No,” Jemma said. “The goal of the new SHIELD Academy is to prepare you for life as an agent. All three schools have shared living quarters, shared recreational facilities, same bathrooms. You will eat, sleep, play, laugh and poo with cadets of all different talent sets. For more questions about living quarters, your orientation packet, page nine has an explanation.”

Rebecca hurriedly switched to page nine. A picture of a “living quarter suite” was there. It looked like four bunk-bed bedrooms would share a bathroom, kitchen and living space. Would Rebecca live with eight other girls? Even the punchy-stabby girls? At least there was WiFi and a nice cooktop. The recreational facilities had a gym with a hundred cardio machines and a swimming pool. A food court. A library. This building had to be the size of a football stadium, and like, nine floors high. Maybe it was underground or something?

The plane didn’t land like a normal plane. There was no nosedive and touchdown. It sort of just hovered down. Once they landed, people seemed a mix of relieved and even more scared. The cargo bay doors opened, and Rebecca saw Director Coulson go from the cockpit to outside. More than a third of the students stood up and followed him out. Ten minutes later, Director May stepped out silently, the two muscle girls on either side of Rebecca went with her. Operations students were about a third. The remaining must be Science and Technology, and they were under a third. Ten minutes later, the pregnant Director Simmons stepped out of the cockpit and out of the plane. Rebecca followed her keenly, clutching her orientation packet tightly. After exiting the plane, Rebecca realized that the slightly salty smell she thought was sweat was the ocean. They were on an airfield in the middle of the sea. It was long and rectangular, with two runways and a field of small helicopters and jets. Were they on a boat? That didn’t make sense. Three hundred people and classes on a boat? People were gaping while they could, as Director Simmons set off to wherever she was going with purpose. There was a huge metal box building at the end of the rectangle platform. She scanned her card, and it beeped green. The doors opened, and it was a massive elevator. Probably big enough a school bus could comfortably drive inside. A few elephants. It fit the eighty-something students.

“Enjoy the view because this is the last time you’ll be above sea level for weeks, possibly,” Simmons said shortly. People gasped and tried to enjoy the blue sky, then the doors closed and the elevator descended to the belly of the beast. A digital floor-counter showed that they were four stories below sea level when the doors opened. They stepped out, and it looked like the inside of a building. White and blue tiles, beige walls, and frosted glass doors with classroom numbers. They followed Director Simmons down the circular hall until they reached frosted glass double doors labeled SCI-TECH LECTURE HALL 1. They entered. Several whiteboards were the background for the stage. There was a projector room in the very back. Rebecca got a seat up front. Most people tried to. Director Jemma Simmons stepped onto the stage and picked up a microphone that was in a holder on the wall. It was one of those face-microphones she attached to her ear that crossed her face. Like people wear to pop concerts and TED talks.

“I was admitted to SHIELD Academy in 1993 when I was almost sixteen years old,” she said. “I had two PhDs and some questions. SHIELD gave me more answers than I needed. In brevity, I was
there when SHIELD fell to Hydra. I went undercover in Hydra. I was one of the first people on the scene of the Inhuman terrigen contamination. I was not there to deal with the aftermath of that contamination because I spent six months starving on an alien planet. I’ve done surgery on an Asgardian. I’ve experimented with the remains of the Kree. I am the foremost xenobiologist at the government’s disposal. I’ve had friends die in front of me. I’ve escaped death. I am more than just my degrees and my science because SHIELD is not a traditional institution. SHIELD overlaps. I will only be with you for two or three years. In those years, I don’t want you to cram your heads with chemical formulas or formulaic blueprints. I want you to be able to improvise. To work well under pressure. To survive the unexpected and inexplicable. You will learn some science you didn’t learn before, yes. But I want you to learn how to apply that science more than anything.”

Director Simmons raised an arm. “This is Professor Leopold Fitz. He’s the head of the Engineering and Technology department, the second youngest graduate of SHIELD Academy, and my husband.”

Husband? So that explains the pregnancy. Rebecca turned to look at him. He was the guy who smiled at her. He was kind of handsome. Like a cute nerd combined with a rugged secret agent. He avoided looking at the students. He almost seemed nervous.

“I was the youngest,” Simmons said proudly. “Also top of our class.”

“Only because you loved homework more than life,” Fitz said. He was Scottish. What a brogue.

Simmons smiled. It wasn’t a polite or proud smile like she had been doing all day. It was an amused, loving, almost exasperated smile. She continued, “Professor Ariel McAllister is the head of the psychology department. She has a doctorate from Harvard and experience with the FBI and CIA.” McAllister was tall enough that Rebecca wouldn’t be surprised she wasn’t entirely human. “Professor Webber is the head of the physics department. Be careful with her. She’ll prank you into thinking she’s telekinetic.” Simmons said. “She was a few years ahead of me at SHIELD Academy, and there is a ritual of upperclassmen pranking underclassmen. Not that you’ll have to worry about that, you’re the first class at our new facility.”

“Are you saying telekinesis isn’t real?” A boy asked.

“Oh, it’s very real,” Director Simmons said harshly. “And incredibly painful.” She let that hang, people wondering fearfully what she meant by that. “Now, I am the head of the biology, chemistry and medical departments. Although, you may also have to refer to the assistant heads of each department as I am busy growing a human.” People gaped at her. Rebecca knew what she meant, but it seemed most people thought she was growing a human in some bubbling tank. “The way people usually grow humans, inside of me,” Jemma motioned to her slightly swollen abdomen.

“Oh!” The room said collectively.

“I hope this doesn’t reflect your typical intellectual levels,” she said drily. “Now, we’re going to divide you among your specializations for tours of our facilities, both academic and recreational.
The psychology department can go first. There are thirteen of you, I believe? We did lose three students at the last minute, but none in the psychology department. Two biologists and a physicist. Wimps.” The psychology department followed the tall olive-skinned McAllister. The nine physicists followed Webber next. Twenty-eight engineers followed Fitz. The remaining thirty-three were biology or chemistry and followed Simmons.

Simmons toured them through the small classrooms and the state-of-the-art labs. There were even a chilly cadaver lab and a mock emergency room. Rebecca forgot utterly she was four stories underwater until they passed by a thick glass window and saw a small shark swimming in the dark blue water. Simmons took them to a more modest elevator. There had to be ten elevators on every floor not including the huge one. This brought them even further down to a sort of lobby. At the end of the hall was a metal door with the letters ARAC painted onto it in that stencil font. They probably used stencils.

“This is where you’ll be performing field operation simulations. You should all aspire to be field agents, as that’s the expectation of all of you. We do not consider those in the program who decide to work in facilities as successes.

“Are you in the field? Does that mean you’re a failure?” A girl asked. Director Simmons turned on her.

“I joined Scientific Operations. I became a field agent and worked in a mobile command center. I’ve fought androids, aliens, inhumans, and interdimensional creatures. I’ve been to space twice. I’m not a failure. I’m retired,” Jemma explained. “Was it after only five years? Indeed it was. Spending the five years in the field, I did without dying at least once is a monumental success. Director May died, I brought her back during a blackout. And Director Coulson, he was a shish kebab for quite some time, not to mention he lost his hand. I suppose I was killed and dumped in a mass grave, but that was in a computer simulation I was trapped in, so I doubt it counts.”

“Sorry,” the girl shrunk away.

“Your first evaluation in the ARAC is tomorrow. Now to show you the recreational facilities,” Director Simmons said, leaving all of the students shocked and confused. The recreation facilities were on the highest floor under the airfield. The high windows of the tall stadium-sized floor let in the only sunlight in the underwater base. Sea life swam past. There was a gym with cardio machines and a pool. A rock climbing wall, tennis court, and weightlifting room. There were a cafe and a food court, an arcade, a grocery store, an infirmary, and several lounges scattered everywhere. “And the nightclub,” Director Simmons said. “Open evenings and weekends. When I went to Academy, it was rigorous and straight-laced. But we just smuggled in our alcohol. It was quite a debate between the directors of the academy, but we agreed to give you a place to… relax. I know our boiler room bar when I went to Academy was a hub of libations and inspiration. Historically, mathematical epiphanies have been written on bar napkins. But if you just get drunk and throw up on someone’s face, that's fine too, I suppose. And this concludes our tour. Now, to get to the residential floor, go down to level eight. You’ll follow your directions to your specific residential apartment. Have a good night. I’ll need you all in the ARAC lounge by eight tomorrow morning.”
Day Ninety-One

Fitz was tasked with supervising the ARAC to make sure that the simulations went according to plan. Meanwhile, Jemma, Coulson, and May observed the students and made notes evaluating them. Several other instructors and professors came to the command room of the ARAC as well. ARAC stood for Augmented Reality Activity Center, but it was a different form of virtual reality, unlike the Framework. The government expressed an interest in using Fitz’s virtual reality technology in training scenarios. Scared about the implications from previous experience, Fitz had built the ARAC as an alternative to the Framework.

Inspired by the holodeck, the ARAC utilized an advanced light projection system to make holographic images, a surround system, and artificial olfactory productions. The ARAC uniforms allowed for participants to interact with these holograms. The uniforms could stimulate dermal and nervous receptors so the users would feel objects, the stress of weight on muscles, and changes in temperature. Unlike the Framework, this augmented reality in no way could genuinely control someone. The uniform could turn off quickly, and once it’s off, the holograms can’t do anything. Of course, the placebo effect made people have more profound responses to specific simulations. May, being a guinea pig for a combat exercise, actually fell over when a hologram kicked her in the gut because she expected to fall over. Despite the fact that the pain from the uniform stimulation was barely a tenth of what getting kicked feels like.

The simulation they were running evaluated the students in a hostage situation. Holographic civilians were tied up in a room with a bomb, which could only be deactivated by cutting four wires in a particular order (there were twelve colored wires). There were four challenges, each one would result in giving the students a number and color if fortunate. They had ten minutes to solve all four problems and defuse the bomb. If they received fatal injuries, they would be deactivated from the program. The challenges and order of wires would change between simulations. Fitz had ten simulations per academic path.

“Samuel Ackerman, Mary Anders, Rosa Asturias and Jeremy Babcock,” Jemma said. The three directors had done auditions in the intercom system a few hours before collecting the students, and Jemma won the title as announcer due to her clear British enunciation. Thanks to the biometric elevators, they knew the sizes of the students in advance. “Please put on the uniform provided and step into the ARAC.”

“So what’re they?” Ariel asked, who was sitting behind Fitz and Jemma.

“Anders is a nuclear physicist from Los Alamos, New Mexico. Both Ackerman and Asturias are in communications. Ackerman has a degree in journalism and Asturias in advertising. Babcock is a former navy,” Jemma said.

“So I am programming in two communications challenges, a science challenge, and an ops challenge,” Fitz said, typing a few things in. He winced “Oh, they get the guy with the barbed wire
“At least the colorimeter lab is easy,” Jemma glanced at his screen. She pressed the button for the microphone, now that all four were in the ARAC. “Welcome to the Augmented Reality Activity Center. Please activate your ARAC uniforms by pressing the SHIELD logo on your left shoulder. If at any time you need to turn off your uniform, hold down the same button for two seconds. If you cannot reach the button for whatever reason, other members of your group can turn it off for you, or you can give verbal requests for us to deactivate it from our command center. Please activate your uniforms now.

All four pressed their logos and the program launched. The panels on the walls changed image and projected walls, furniture, dust, hostages and a bomb into the room. The projected civilians began wailing and begging for help. The comically large bomb began counting down from ten minutes.

“What do we do?” Ackerman asked.

“Save them from dying,” Jemma said over the intercom. “You cannot evacuate them. You must deactivate the bomb.”

“How do we do that?” Ackerman asked. But Jemma had given him all the assistance they were allowed to.

“We need to open up the bomb panel,” Mary Anders, the nuclear physicist, said. Babcock helped her begin to pry open the bomb panel.

“What if it’s rigged?” Ackerman asked fearfully. “What if they’re Kobayashi Maru-ing us?”

“Then we fail,” Babcock said, annoyed.

Rosa Asturias went to the hostages and helped them calm down, telling them that it would be alright, they were there to help. The civilians stopped sobbing loudly. Babcock and Anders opened the panel and saw all the multicolored wires.

“Which do we cut?” Babcock asked Anders.

“I can’t tell…” Anders looked around. “There are four doors, each one with a number on it.”

“So?” Babcock asked.
“So, what if one of them has any clues?” Anders suggested.

“Alright,” Babcock said. He pointed at Asturias, “You stay with them,” He motioned to the hostages. “You two with me… we need weapons,” Babcock said. Anders grabbed a metal pipe. Babcock broke two legs off a chair. Ackerman picked up another splintered chair leg and held it aloft like a club. They went to the first door, Babcock kicking it open. Inside was the colorimeter lab. Beakers of unlabeled liquids lined up on one of the lab benches. On the wall, a chemical formula was scratched. The colorimeter was set up on a lone table in the center.

“What the hell?” Ackerman asked.

“I get it,” Anders said. “I need to determine the chemicals in these beakers, synthesize that solution, put it in the colorimeter and figure out the corresponding color. Absorbance or Transmittance… the colorimeter is already in absorbance mode. Alright. I can do this.

“Ackerman and I will clear another room,” Babcock said.

“We will?” Ackerman asked. Babcock dragged him to door number two. They opened it, and a man with a spiked baseball bat came flying out at them, whacking Ackerman across the face. He screamed, collapsed, and his suit deactivated. In the scenario, he died. Coulson clicked his tongue and scribbled a note: Learn infiltration techniques - zero caution.

Babcock launched himself on the man. Civilians screamed. The two men rolled around on the ground, exchanging fists. Eventually, Babcock was overpowered and smashed into a wall, unconscious but not dead. May wrote a note sullenly about his bad form.

“Hey, asshole,” Anders was behind the man with the bat. She had a beaker with her and splashed it on him. He screamed as the strong acid ate at his face until he curled up into a whimpering ball with melting skin. “The first color is purple,” She said to Asturias. She used a bit of glass from a broken beaker to cut the wire.

“That guy is wearing all orange,” Asturias said. Anders cut the orange wire.

“Two left,” Anders observed. “The guy from operations is still alive. I can’t believe you can get knocked out by a simulation.

“She’s resourceful,” Ariel observed in the control room.

“And her scientific procedure was incredibly efficient,” Jemma said happily.
Door three and four were the communications challenges. Door three had a riddle. “You’re standing in a house. Each wall has a window. Every window of the house faces south. You see a bear. What color is it?” Asturias read. “For the only direction to be south you’d have to be true north, so a polar bear. White.”

“That was your riddle?” Ariel asked Fitz scrutinizingly.

“To be fair, it stumped half the operations instructors,” May shrugged. Anders cut the white wire. They had four minutes left. The last challenge was filing paperwork. The room was crammed with filing cabinets. One cabinet had a drawer which had a folder and in that folder was a color written on a piece of paper. Anders and Asturias tried to figure out the befuddling alpha-numerical filing system as the clock ticked down. Asturias finally found the right folder, saw the blue piece of paper, and Anders cut the wire with twenty seconds to spare. The countdown stopped and the simulation faded. The two women screamed with joy and hugged each other.

“Thank you for participating in the ARAC, the results of your evaluations will be posted tomorrow morning at six both online and on the message board in the recreation area,” Jemma said. She finished her evaluation of Anders, and they brought in the last next group.

They continued to be impressed by a few students. Psychologist Rozalyn Backus interrogated a suspect and then took out two armed guards with her training in MMA. Joan Eaton tore her way through a room of guards with frightening ease. Hector Espejo hacked his way through nineteen firewalls to get a green screen. Sarah Garza did a background search for someone so thoroughly she learned their favorite color. Rebecca Herschel shocked herself when she shoved a metal pipe down an assailant’s throat and then performed the organic chemistry challenge alone in half the expected time. Roger Juniper smashed two hologram heads together with so much force that the program said they died on impact. Ashley Kafka performed the engineering challenge after their engineer, Kreah, “died,” even though she was a therapist. Fiona McMurdo electrocuted a room full of men with guns after finishing the circuitry challenge. Jake Oh beat three sequential operations combat challenges, outlasting his entire team. James Power weaponized Newton’s cradle. Kavita Rao and Narda Ravanna decimated both chemistry challenges in mere minutes. Austin Salmi and Heather Sante avenged the death of their physics team member, and Sante figured out the physics problem on top of that. Grady Scraps corroded the bombshell with chemicals from the colorimeter challenge and disabled it without the wire method. And seventeen-year-old Riri Williams built a combat robot out of miscellaneous parts after their ops team member got a holographic knife to the eye and was deactivated.

At eight in the evening, each academy was ranked by the directors. The thirty best of each program was recommended for the field operations classes immediately, all but two didn’t accept.

“I don’t know what you were so worried about,” Jemma told her husband as they left that night after a long weekend of work. “The ARAC worked perfectly.”

“I’m the one who was worrying?” Fitz asked her incredulously. “You looked like you were about to cry this morning when there was that glitch in the power system.”
“I have a lot more hormones than usual because I’m making our baby,” Jemma said stiffly. “And I was only worrying this morning. You’ve been antsy about this for a month, on top of marriage and children and all of those things we’ve been doing.”

“Children plural?” Fitz asked.

“Child,” Jemma corrected herself. “But we will be more than one, someday.”

“Really? You know, we never talked about the ideal number of little wee babies you want,” Fitz said. “How many wee ones do you want to make, Jemma?”

“Two or three, it depends on what sorts we get,” Jemma said.

“The sorts we get?” Fitz asked. “Are you expecting a lime child or a raspberry child?”

“Don’t be facetious,” Jemma laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading, I hope you enjoyed. As always, I appreciate your feedback. Kudos, subscribe, bookmark or comment it's all appreciated!

The Rebecca Herschel character is just a way I broke writer's block. I didn't know how to write SHIELD Academy opening from Jemma or Fitz's perspective so Rebecca is sort of an outsider looking in. That being said, I might reference some of the Academy students now and then.

The next one might not come out until I've done all my applications and essays, I really need to focus on prioritizing those, but I hope to post as soon as I can.
Chapter Notes

I am so sorry this took so long, but I am happy that I have the next chapter ready! I hope you are too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Thirteen

Day Ninety-Five

Jemma was half-sitting and half-lying across the couch in the living room, nibbling on the tip of her red pen. She had a stack of papers, the first written assignment she gave her students and was in the process of grading them. She was wearing an oversized sweatshirt and flannel lounge pants. Her hair was tied up, and she had a pair of reading glasses perched on the bridge of her nose. She was worried that with all the reading and grading she would need to do it would be unfortunate for her eyesight, so the lightest level reading glasses were preventative more than anything. Fitz was also grading, but his students had submitted abstracts online, so he was reviewing them on a tablet, hunched over in an armchair.

“Were we this stupid when we went to Academy?” Jemma asked aloud, scribbling furiously. “I know that might be an unfair generalization, but I expect for a student taking organic chemistry to know the difference between trigonal bipyramidal and trigonal pyramidal atomic structures.”

“At least your students didn’t forget the difference between centrifugal and centripetal. And didn’t call centrifugal motion a ‘force.’”

“Seriously?” Jemma laughed. “And here I am complaining about VSEPR theory.”

They went back to working on their grading. Fitz finished before Jemma, and he watched her. Her eyes would dart back and forth across the page. She would nibble on her lips and squint as she read. And she was sighing with exasperation at every ridiculous error.

“You’re adorable,” Fitz said aloud.
“Is that so?” Jemma looked at him over the tops of her glasses. He nodded. Her lips quirked and returned to her grading. “At least they’re paying more attention in Xenobiology. Although I don’t know what on Earth inspired three of them to think there could be Germanium-based lifeforms.”

“Well, it is a Xenobiology class, so they were thinking off of Earth,” Fitz teased. Jemma frowned at him and threw a pillow at his face. He caught it and shook his head. “Rude.”

“I’m rude?” Jemma asked. “You’re distracting me from my work. How is it that you’re done? I’m always more efficient than you are.”

Fitz shrugged and tossed the pillow back on the couch. He walked over to it and sat at Jemma’s feet. “Anybody not stupid?”

“Rao seems rather intelligent,” Jemma shrugged. “What about you?”

“Williams. Definitely her.”

“Oh, the one who made the robots, yes I liked her. She’s quite young, isn’t she?”

“Seventeen, youngest cadet we have,” Fitz nodded. “So, of course, she’s in engineering.”

“Ah, is this what’s going to happen? You’re going to compete with me through our students. So unprofessional, Professor Fitz,” Jemma teased.

“Want to see something unprofessional?” Fitz asked. He surged forwards and shoved his hands up her sweatshirt. He began to wiggle his fingers across her ribcage, tickling her. She laughed and squealed and kicked, trying to shove him off while tears of laughter streamed down her cheeks. Deciding she couldn’t kick him off, she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him down to her lips. His hands stopped tickling her and rested on either side of her body; he was stunned for a moment before returning her kiss with similar ferocity. His hands drifted up and down her sides lightly. She curled her toes and deepened their kiss. As much as she wanted to continue, she became aware that there was a stack of papers digging into her lap, and she pulled away.

“As much as I love this,” Jemma said quietly. “I don’t think my students would be pleased to know we snogged on their homework. And they definitely would be mortified if we did anything more. I have to finish grading. Can we put a pin in this?”
“A little pin?” Fitz inquired.

“Absolutely,” Jemma agreed. “If you go upstairs and let me finish this-” she motioned to her grading “-I promise we’ll finish this-” she motioned between them “-tonight.”

He leaned down and kissed her cheek sloppily. She squealed and shoved him off, wiping her wet cheek with her sleeve. She might have graded the final thirty papers quicker than the rest, and she practically sprinted upstairs into her bedroom and her husband’s embrace.

**Day Ninety-Seven**

That Saturday, the day before Jemma’s birthday party, Fitz went to meet Ariel at a coffee shop. He had a manila envelope under his arm. It had come in the mail about a week prior, from the hospital. It had the results from Jemma’s CVS procedure taken on his birthday. Ariel agreed to be the first person to know the results so she could go to the local bakery and order a cake. Jemma’s birthday cake would double as the sex reveal cake. The icing would be white, and the cake itself would be pink velvet if the baby had XX chromosomes or blue velvet if the baby had XY. The doctor had already assured them the report had no chromosomal anomalies.

“It means a lot to me you’re letting me do this,” Ariel said as she sat down.

“Well, Daisy can’t get here until tomorrow,” Fitz said. “And cake orders are a day in advance.”

“I know,” Ariel said. “It’s just… you could have picked someone you’ve known for longer like Coulson or May, but you picked me.”

“Well, you knew before we did,” Fitz said. “It seems fitting we keep that trend.”

“I’m grateful. You know I haven’t had a lot of opportunities to make friends. And you and Jemma are some of the greatest people I’ve had the pleasure of knowing. It just means a lot to me that I get to be part of your life.” Ariel looked down, “Sorry, that was a bit much, wasn’t it?”

“I understand,” Fitz assured her. “We’re glad to be your friends too, Ariel.”
Day Ninety-Eight

“Do you think we throw too many parties?” Jemma asked her husband as they were setting up for the party. Jemma realized that in the last few months, they had hosted three parties in their new home and an entire wedding in Perthshire.

“Well, I feel like we didn’t throw a lot of parties while working as SHIELD agents, and we’re not going to throw a lot of parties for us after having the little one. So we’re getting in the last stretch of adult parties in a small amount of time,” Fitz said.

“Makes sense. Although, when you call it an adult party some might suspect a different connotation,” Jemma said.

“Oh, don’t be inappropriate,” Fitz protested lightly. Jemma laughed gleefully. Then the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it,” Fitz said. He strode towards the door and opened it. Coulson and May were on the other side. May had a gift bag that seemed to be from both of them for Jemma. “Thanks for coming.”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Coulson said. Fitz took the bag from May and placed it on the coffee table. “Are we the first ones here?”

“Daisy texted that she, Mack and Elena are a few minutes out,” Fitz said. “Ariel’s on her way. He dropped his voice and softly said, “Did you do what we talked about?”

“Don’t worry,” May said. “It’s all you said Jemma would want.”

Fitz nodded and let the pair head over to the kitchen where Jemma handed them glasses of red wine while she had a stemless Bordeaux glass of orange juice.

“Is that a 1947?” Coulson motioned to Jemma’s orange juice. May rolled her eyes, and Jemma smiled. “I thought it was funny,” He said.
In the ten minutes that followed, the rest of the guests arrived. Ariel had a large box she held with both arms and a smaller box, the cake, which teetered on top. Daisy had three gift bags. Mack and Elena combined had a gift bag and a box. The bright and glossy boxes and bags sat on the coffee table, and the cake was stored on a shelf in the refrigerator. First, the group had dinner. Those who worked at SHIELD Academy complained about their students and talked about the few excellent ones. The others talked about the Inhuman training and control program that Daisy, Mack, and Elena were working on. They also had two stories about new inhumans, but the number of new inhumans had declined after the immediate terrigen outbreak.

“How’s the dad thing?” Daisy asked Fitz.

“I’ve decided not to waste my time on him,” Fitz said. “I have the Academy to worry about.”

At that moment, Ariel made a strange, choked gurgling noise and wine spilled onto her pastel blue blouse. Daisy hurriedly stood up and fetched her a wad of napkins.

“What happened?” Jemma asked.

“I sneezed half a second after I took a drink,” Ariel said. “Sorry for being gross.”

“It was an accident,” Daisy said. “Do you need more napkins?”

“I think I have enough,” Ariel smiled. “I’ll take this to the dry cleaners and see if they know how to get this stain out.

After that incident, they finished dinner and went on to the birthday cake. Ariel added a package of colorful candles to the white and lit them. They sang an off-key Happy Birthday for Jemma. When it ended, she blew out the candles. This was the most important part, the color of the inside of the cake would reveal the gender of the baby.

“Do you want to do it?” Fitz asked his wife.

“I mean, we made the baby together,” Jemma said. “We should do it together.”
“I barely helped make the baby, you’re the one who is going to have it grow inside you for nine months,” Fitz said.

“Does that mean you should cut the cake so you do some of the work or I should cut the cake as I have the honor of being a human incubator?” Jemma asked.

“Fine, we’ll do it together,” Fitz said. He stood behind her, and together they cleaved the knife through the cake and removed a piece. It was pink.

“Oh, thank god,” Fitz sighed.

“You didn’t want a son?” Jemma asked.

“Not for the first one,” Fitz said. “I want to know how to change a diaper efficiently before having the baby spray it up at me.”

“That isn’t fun,” Ariel agreed.

“Okay, everybody, have some pink cake,” Jemma said, and she served everyone a piece. After they were finished eating, they all headed over to the living area. Jemma was to unwrap her birthday gifts. “You all bought quite a lot. I don’t think I need as many things as I got.” Jemma said.

“Just open them,” Daisy said.

Jemma opened the gifts from Mack and Elena. On top was a maternity tee that said due in March. “Oh, that’s cute.” The next thing was a large maroon drape sweater, probably designed for maternity wear. The last gift was a Christmas ornament with a space to put an image, and it read our little present.

“Fitz said that you plan on having a sonogram at twenty-six weeks, just a bit before the holidays,” Elena explained. “So we thought this would be appropriate for that time.”

“Thank you. And the clothes are lovely,” Jemma said. She moved on to May and Coulson’s gift. They had gotten her an athletic hoodie as well as a silver winter coat. It was a maternity coat and
had an additional front panel for when she was very pregnant. “I love this,” She held the down coat and felt the soft fur that lined the hood. “Thank you.” Daisy had also purchased maternity clothes. A black pencil skirt, black slim-leg dress pants, gray straight-leg dress pants, a pink paternity blouse, a navy maternity blouse, a white maternity blouse and a black maternity dress that she could probably wear to semi-formal functions like work parties. “Let me guess,” Jemma said when she opened Ariel’s box. “Maternity clothes.” Ariel, however, had gotten Jemma a face wash, stretch mark butter, and sugar body scrub, as well as an ergonomic pregnancy pillow.

“Did you all plan on getting me baby stuff?” Jemma asked.

“Yeah,” Coulson said. “It was your husband’s idea if you’re mad.”

“Well, I know you were concerned about the expenses for things like maternity clothes and you have that little spreadsheet you made. And I just wanted to make things easier to I pointed them to things you planned on buying in September. Ariel, of course, went off-book and bought what she thinks a pregnant woman needs.”

“Well, I do have more experience than you in that situation,” Ariel said. “It might not be a problem now, but in a month or two, that pillow is going to be your favorite thing ever. And stretch marks are inevitable, but the scrub and butter will make it, so they don’t itch a whole ton. The face wash is because I at least had bad pregnancy breakouts. But it doesn’t hurt to have face hygiene.”

“Thank you,” Jemma said firmly.

Chapter End Notes

Someone in the comments on the last chapter mentioned that they wanted to see what the newer characters looked like. I have a couple of reference images that I’ve been using, and I was wondering if any of you would like to see them?

As always, I would love to receive your feedback. So please, if you have anything at all to say, comment!
I hope you all enjoyed the last chapter. I realized this weekend after watching the 17 minutes of Season 5 that was uploaded to YouTube that Agents of Shield premiers this Friday. It was my goal to get halfway through by that point. It doesn't look like that is going to happen, but I plan to get at least chapter seventeen published by Friday. I have sixteen drafted and ready for edits, so expect that Wednesday-ish?

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy this chapter.

Week Fourteen

Day Ninety-Nine

The day began with the couple waking up. Fitz started to make breakfast while Jemma took a shower. She came downstairs dressed and finished cooking while he changed into his work clothes as well. They ate together. Sometimes they talked about their dreams, sometimes they ate in silence. Sometimes, like today, they bantered.

“Are you legitimately wearing a tweed jacket with elbow patches?” Jemma asked. “This isn’t going to help your reputation.”

“What reputation? I have a reputation?” Fitz asked.

“Ariel and I were chatting about it a few days ago, and we’re pretty sure you have an Indiana Jones reputation,” Jemma said.

“Sorry?”

“Come on. You seriously haven’t noticed?” Jemma laughed. “Fitz, the cadets like you. Especially the female ones.”

“Are you saying I’m the sexy professor?”
“Well, you were always sexy,” Jemma shrugged.

“You’re joking,” Fitz said.

“I wish I was. But you know, the sort of people we teach have a particular type. They like attractive, somewhat rugged, intellectual men,” Jemma said.

“And I’m attractive, rugged and intellectual?” Fitz asked. “So much so that cadets- that’s -ew.”

“I’m sorry to break it to you Fitz, but most of them are in their mid to late twenties. You’re in your early thirties. It’s not that much of an age gap.”

“Please don’t tell me I have a nickname.”

“You totally have a nickname.”

“What?”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out,” Jemma said happily.

“Well - the male cadets have to like you then. You’re stunning and attractive, and glowing with pregnancy,” Fitz said.

“But you forget Fitz, I’m scary,” Jemma said. “If there is a cadet who is attracted to me, they keep it hidden.”

They brushed their teeth, packed their bags and headed to work. Morning classes were often the lectures and seminars. They would collect and assign homework, preside over class discussions, give lectures, and do the occasional activity. Jemma had a bit more time that Fitz did out of the classroom, because she had mountains of paperwork and meetings with other staff members to keep the place functional. They already had to discipline two students in the first week.
At one in the afternoon that Monday, Fitz and Jemma video called her parents and announced her pregnancy. It was a bit late, the announcement, but they wanted for their parents to have a bit of time between wedding and pregnancy announcement. After a tirade of questions and answers (Yes we knew at the wedding. The conception was around the same time as the proposal. We didn’t think I was pregnant until a few weeks later. Yes, that probably contributed to why it was so early. We’re having a girl) they finally hung up. They called Fitz’s mother, who asked the same questions and received the same answers. Jemma knew Fitz was biting his tongue not to bring up his father or the journal. As much as Fitz hated his father, he couldn’t stop his natural curiosity. Once they’ve done speaking to his mother, they had to go back to work. They both had labs to supervise and homework to grade. The next significant evaluation of all the cadets was in a few weeks, and they wanted to make their classes better than they were when they started.

They got home a bit after six and cooked dinner together while sharing stories about their day. After they were finished with preparing food and their summations, they sat down and ate while talking about the current events and science studies they last read that they wanted the other one to know about. They worked until a bit after nine, which is when they were done with grading and paperwork they had taken home. They went upstairs then. Fitz took a shower and Jemma put on her sleepwear. A t-shirt she stole from Fitz’s closet and baggy lounge pants. She picked up the pregnancy book she had been marking up as if she was studying for an exam, and continued to read. A pen and a pad of sticky notes on her bedside table, ready for notes. The shower shut off and Fitz came out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist.

“Ooh-la-la,” Jemma called from her spot on the bed.

“I forgot to get a change of clothes,” Fitz said.

“I’m not complaining,” Jemma said. He rolled his eyes, found sleep clothes, and went back into the bathroom to finish changing. Jemma got out of bed, they brushed their teeth, and then headed back to bed. He kissed her on the cheek and turned out the lights.

**Day One Hundred**

When Jemma woke up that morning, her husband was not in bed beside her. His lamp was on. Why had he gotten such an early? Her question was answered a minute later, when he came upstairs with a tray of breakfast.

“Happy actual birthday,” Fitz said.

“Thanks,” Jemma said. “That’s a pretty omelette.”
“Mum’s recipe, you know,” Fitz shrugged.

“You’re sweet,” Jemma said. “Now for me to shovel it down so we can get to work on time.”

“Thus the life of a professor at a spy academy,” Fitz agreed. “I made you something.”

“You made me something?” Jemma asked. He handed her a small jewelry box with a bow taped onto it. Jemma opened the box. Inside was a locket. It was silver, on a silver chain. Protected by a resin half-sphere, an image of the pillars of creation decorated the front.

“It’s beautiful,” Jemma said.

“You should open it,” Fitz said. Jemma nodded and opened the locket delicately. Instead of having two pictures on either side, there were two lights. They projected a holographic picture into the air. Jemma recognized it as a wedding photo, when she and Fitz were kissing at the altar. She extended her hand towards the image and it changed, into a selfie the pair had taken at a peruvian temple, their second field mission ever. She touched the hologram again and it changed into the video the team had made Jemma for her birthday while she was at Hydra. She had watched it a thousand times on Maveth. Seeing it again brought tears to her eyes. “Is it okay?” Fitz asked.

“It’s perfect,” Jemma sobbed. “Fitz, it’s amazing. You’re amazing.” She grabbed him by his arm and kissed him firmly on the mouth. His lips melted against hers, and then pulled away gently. He opened his mouth to say something and the air was punctuated by the shrill doorbell.

“I’ll get that, you eat,” Fitz said, the moment gone. He headed downstairs, and looked in the peephole. Nobody was there. No cars were speeding away. He opened the door, there was a small envelope on the stoop. That was concerning. His mind immediately jumped to all the bad things. Some sort of detonation device or toxin. He closed the door and headed to the coat rack. In a large yellow raincoat there was a handheld scanner. He booted it up and pointed the sensor at the envelope. The backscatter showed the only thing in there was a flash drive and there was no chemical residue. Satisfied it was safe, he bent low to pick it up and took it inside. He opened up the envelope and let the disk slide out. It looked like a standard eight GB flash drive. He decided that he would take it to work and see what was on it when he could analyze the file with a secure and independent server.

“What was the doorbell about?” Jemma asked when she came downstairs, clean and dressed. The chain of her new locket was tucked under her blouse.
“Mysterious package with a flash drive,” Fitz said.

“Your dad?” Jemma asked.

“Maybe. I was gonna wait until we were at Academy to analyze it,” Fitz explained. Jemma nodded.

After morning classes, Fitz was ready to figure out what was on that flash drive. He checked out a secure laptop that was not connected to the SHIELD servers and booted it up, plugging in the USB stick. There wasn’t any immediate viral download or message. The USB stick had a title: USBPort_1. He clicked on it. The document window showed a PDF file and a folder. He clicked on the PDF file first.

Dear Leopold,

I was upset to find out that you were no longer pursuing the opportunity I gave you to learn more about our family. I would think with the child you have on the way, you would want a little bit more understanding of the old family tree.

Oh, yes, I know all about the fact that Jemma is expecting a child. In fact, I’ve known since July 4th, over two months ago. I’ve known all this time. I haven’t said anything because I wanted to give you the opportunity to reconnect, but it seems like that will not happen.

In the folder of this flash-drive there are a series of documents leading you to a home that I have lived in for some time. It is the center of where I discovered our family line. I hope you visit it like I did. Once you have visited, I will know, and I will guide you to our legacy. I promise you that much, Leo.

Truly,

Your Father, Alistair Fitz.

Fitz immediately called his wife. She arrived quickly, a pen still in her hair from paperwork or grading of some sort. She read it as well, puzzling visibly.
“How has he known since July 4th?” Jemma asked.

“Why is that weird?” Fitz asked.

“Fitz, I told you on July 4th, remember. The only other people who knew where Daisy and Ariel. Although I hadn’t confirmed it to Ariel.”

“Did he bug our phones?” Fitz asked.

“I doubt it. You made them incapable of being bugged or hacked-”

“Maybe I made a mistake,” Fitz said. “I left something for him to exploit.”

“I would believe your father was psychic before I would believe he or anyone on his payroll could exploit your technology.”

“I mean, I’m grateful for the vote of confidence, Jemma, but-”

“No, it was something else,” Jemma said surely.

“Well, Daisy’s phone was secure. Our house is secure. Maybe the man at the drugstore where you bought the pregnancy tests?”

“But why would Alistair do that? Of all people to hire to spy on us, the cashier at a pharmacy near our house? I would think the sanitation services had more access into our lives. Unless he wanted to know what brand of tampons, painkillers and shampoo we use, I can’t see the relevance.”

“The only person who knew anything at the time other than us, Daisy and the pharmacy cashier was Ariel,” Fitz said. “She went into the bathroom when you threw up, she suggested you were pregnant, remember.”
“Why would Ariel be working with Alistair?”

“Maybe she told him unintentionally. Like he bugged our colleagues or something. We could ask her. Wouldn’t kill us.”

“She’s out with the sniffles today,” Jemma said. “We could stop by her townhouse after work, check for bugs? Maybe she was talking to her cat?”

“She has a cat?”

“I don’t know. It’s weird how Alistair knows and she’s our only lead.”

Once work had ended and the couple left the base to the mainland of Norfolk, they drove to Ariel’s townhouse, having sent her a courtesy text first. She lived on the other side of the Elizabeth River, on Crawford Parkway. Like many homes in Norfolk, it was close to the water. The townhome was one of many, in rows of connected brick three-story buildings. Fitz parked across the street at a public lot and they walked over to her townhome neighborhood.

“This place is cute,” Jemma observed. They reached her door and pressed the button. There was a muffled buzzing from inside. Not a minute later, Ariel reached the door. She certainly didn’t look sick, no red nose or obvious mouth breathing. She was wearing a large t-shirt and jeans. Her hair was down. She certainly didn’t look well either.

“Hi,” Ariel said. She sounded tired and weak. Fitz noticed a bottle of whiskey was open on the coffee table in the split-level living area.

“Sorry to barge in like this, are you feeling better?” Jemma asked politely. She also realized that things were odd.

“Kinda,” Ariel shrugged. She didn’t seem very honest.

“Well, nevertheless, I have a few questions. This morning, a USB stick was delivered to our house with information on it pertaining to Alistair. He said in his message on this stick that he knew that I was pregnant since July 4th. As I found out on July 3rd that I was pregnant, we consider this a concerning revelation. Since only Daisy, Fitz, myself, and to some extent, you, knew about my pregnancy on that date, we were wondering if there was any way someone might have learned?
I’m sure if you did inform somebody it was a mistake—”

“Come with me,” Ariel said shortly. She turned her back and headed up the carpeted stairs. Fitz and Jemma shared a confused look but followed her. They passed the first landing and reached the second. At the top of the stairs was a bedroom with an attached bath. The bedroom was furnished for a child. A twin bed was against the wall with the window. The eggshell colored walls were decorated in stick-on decals of different dinosaurs. There was a desk against one wall, a bookshelf on the other. It seemed the place was also stacked with toys. Action figures and stuffed dinosaurs. A closet full of clothing for a boy, all of which had never been worn, the tags still on them. The room was much too neat and unused for what should be a room for a child, it was unsettling.

“It’s for Luke,” Ariel said. “When I get him back. That’s why I’ve bought this place and I got that job at the Academy.”

“It’s extensively furnished,” Jemma noticed.

“That’s why I do anything, for Luke. He’s my son. I have an obligation of a mother, and that’s more than any of my other obligations. I have to be there for my son, even if the things I have to do are horrendous.”

“What did you do?” Fitz asked.

“I’m the one who told Alistair about your baby,” Ariel said. “I’ve told him more. I’ve been telling him things because… I’m stupid. When Dan was killed, I couldn’t be a mother. And he used that to his advantage, and he’s been extorting custody of my son to get to you. First, it was using my contacts in the federal government to know what missions you were doing and where you were stationed. Then SHIELD fell, and I spend months trying to find you again. Probably a year, more accurately. The only leads I had were doctors appointments and rumors of your psychotherapy after your brain trauma. I followed crazy leads of you jumping around the world looking for leads about some ancient monolith. I almost got a job at the ATCU to work my way into SHIELD but that all went curmudgeon too. Kept looking for leads, doing what father demanded. Eventually, I found you again, a year after that mess of things with Nadeer and Talbot, here in Norfolk. And the Academy was hiring, and I took that opportunity, and I was ready for it to be over, but he kept needing more. shouldn’t have done it.” She stopped and took a deep breath. Her voice had grown steadily shakier. “I knew the entire time that I was betraying you and that you would hate me for it, I hated me for it. But, I had to do what I could for Luke. I should have stopped. I should have told you. But what I should have done doesn’t matter. I did what I did, and I regret it, but I did it. I put you in danger, and I wish any apology I could give could rectify it, but it can’t. I expect for you to turn me in and for SHIELD to arrest me.”

“I don’t understand,” Fitz said.
“Fitz,” Jemma reached for him. She did understand.

“You said that your father was the one who had custody of your son. Do our fathers know each other?” Fitz asked.

Ariel closed her eyes and sighed, “I suppose they do. But only because we generally know ourselves to some extent. Fitz, I’m Ariel McAllister. My surname literally means ‘child of Alistair’ and that’s who I am. My father was Alistair Fitz, and my mother was his secretary, Faiza Hussain. They had an affair when you were still in diapers and here I am.”

“You’re my-” Fitz couldn’t finish the word. He stared dumbly with his mouth open.

“Sister,” Ariel supplied helpfully. “I’m your half-sister.”

“You understand we’re going to have to contact the proper authorities?” Jemma asked.

“I’m very aware,” Ariel said simply. “I wouldn’t have expected anything less. I know it means absolutely nothing, but I am incredibly sorry.” Ariel walked over to the bed she had furnished for her son, picked up the pillow he had never slept in, and clenched it to her chest. She stared dully at a spot on the floor, unmoving. Jemma called Talbot.

**Day One Hundred and Three**

Fitz and Jemma were in Jemma’s office that Friday, getting briefed on Ariel McAllister by Talbot.

“She was incredibly cooperative,” Talbot explained. “She wrote a full confession and gave us as much information about Alistair as we could ask. She was probably in the interrogation room for thirty-six hours. It seemed he didn’t trust her because he kept major parts of his operation and where he kept his son from her. She pleaded guilty for espionage. Between her cooperation and the circumstances, she was given a five year sentence at FPC Alderson, in West Virginia, but she’s up for parole in half that.”

“And what about the other thing?” Jemma asked, glancing at her husband. Fitz had been quiet for most of this ordeal.
“The DNA test came back positive,” Talbot said. “I suppose Alistair is her father.”

Fitz didn’t say anything, so Jemma did. “Thank you, Talbot.” The man nodded and left. Jemma turned to her husband. “How bad is it?”

“Oh, well, I have a sister I never knew about, so there’s that,” Fitz said. “And she’s been spying on us for three months for my father. So, I suppose I’ve been betrayed again. But it’s not as bad.”

“It isn’t? I would think it would be worse to be betrayed by your- our friend.”

“Do you think she told the truth about Luke?” Fitz asked.

“Well, knowing how SHIELD runs an interrogation and the fact that they believed her confession, I do think so,” Jemma said.

“I’d do it all for you,” Fitz said. “Lying, spying, all of it. I’d do it for our daughter. She was doing it all for her son.”

“She should have told us,” Jemma said.

“With Alistair?” Fitz asked. “Would you trust anyone with him?”

“I wouldn’t.”

“I understand,” Fitz said. “Why she did it.”

“So do I. That doesn’t excuse what she did,” Jemma said.

“I know,” Fitz replied. “I know, and believe me, I’m not saying it excuses anything.”

“Something’s on your mind.”
“Luke is on mind. Because he’s my-”

“-Nephew. And you just imagine-”

“-Knowing the childhood I had with-”

“-Alistair, and you’re worried-”

“-worried about him. He’s just a kid.”

Jemma nodded.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that "twist" wasn't too much of a surprise.

As always, I love to hear your feedback so comment or kudos to let me know what you think!

I didn't get any replies last chapter for this question, but are any of you interested in me uploading a section full of reference images I've been using? You don't have to answer; I'll consider the idea unfavorable if I don't get a response this week.
Chapter Notes

Thank you for those of you who enjoyed the last chapter, I've appreciated all of your feedback. Based on your responses, Chapter 18 will be a sort of extended Author's Note or Behind the Scenes look at Forty Weeks.

This chapter is long. I knew that I wanted to dedicate a section for SHIELD Academy before all the drama with Ariel and Alistair reached its zenith. So this is that chapter. Like my previous Academy-centric chapter, I utilized the point of view of Rebecca Herschel. A lot of you liked looking at the Academy through a student's eyes, and I wanted to make a bit of a humorous chapter before the chapter that I will be posting on Friday.

Anyway, I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Fifteen

Day One Hundred and Six

Jemma was finishing up in class on Monday when she got a text from her husband.

*Found Him* .

“Alright, I want those lab reports turned into the box in my office on Friday. And I have an update on the field program; there is another field examination this Thursday. For all who joined the field operative program, attendance is compulsory. For those who are not part of the program, doing well in this examination may allow you to join the program. If that is not a benefit, the examination is also off-campus. Sign-ups are in the elevators. Please just sign up just once. Alright, I know we’re supposed to have five minutes left but I have to get to my office, so consider yourselves dismissed.” The class hurried out, talking to one another quietly about the field examination. Once the last student had left, Jemma locked up the lecture hall and headed to her office.

Fitz and Daisy were there, each one with a laptop on their lap, taking advantage of Jemma’s office futon by working quite comfortably on it.

“You found him?” Jemma asked as she entered.

“Yep,” Daisy said. “Thanks to my brilliance and the Academy’s awesome internet connection.”
“Thank the massive fiber optic cables,” Jemma said.

“So, first I based it off of what Ariel knew. He owned a penthouse near the financial district of Boston. It was pretty straightforward, although there are a lot of very expensive Penthouses. But he moved there with Luke a little bit after she got out of the mental institution. So I cross-referenced Penthouse purchases in or near the financial district of Boston within two months of when she was released. Nada. I expanded the timeline. The only penthouse I found was sold a few years later. I checked rents, nothing. Then, I had an aha moment, and I checked if any apartment buildings were bought or sold within two months of her getting released.”

“And?”

“Number One Huntington Avenue was purchased nearly three and a half years ago by a man named Elie Lawrence who wired the money to the original owners from an offshore account.”

“I grew up in Glasgow in a house on the corner of Elie and Lawrence,” Fitz supplied why this was the revelation.

“Ninety-one units in Number One Huntington Avenue are up for rent, lease or purchase. That’s all of them except for the penthouse which is the reported residence of this Elie Lawrence.”

“There is a lot of white-collar crime tied to real estate,” Jemma said. Ariel’s confession revealed that Alistair had made a name for himself and some money to his name by joining the ranks of white-collar criminals and con men. He was supposed to have an artifact collection worth tens of millions of dollars. “Now all we need to do is get Talbot’s permission,” Jemma said.

“Talbot’s permission?” Daisy asked. “I thought we were gonna be naughty with this.”

“We can’t be naughty anymore,” Jemma shook her head. “Every time we’ve gone off the book in the past it’s bitten us hard.”

“He’s going to say no,” Fitz said.

“You don’t know that,” Jemma argued.
**Day One Hundred and Seven**

“No,” Talbot said.

“Sir, might I remind you that Alistair Fitz currently has Ariel’s son in his custody?” Jemma suggested. “The only reason she did any of this was that of his extortion.”

“That doesn’t excuse what she did and it doesn’t mean that its SHIELDs job to fix it. We’ll give the information that Agent Johnson discovered to the FBI but this is not SHIELDs responsibility, and it is not your responsibility, Dr. Simmons.”

“Sir, this most certainly is my responsibility, this is my nephew,” Jemma said. “Fitz’s sister’s son. I don’t agree with what she did, but you of all people should know that we do certain things for our children. Need I remind you that we helped when yours was kidnapped?”

“Yes, I remember.”

Jemma nodded, “Don’t you think it might be a tad hypocritical to-”

“Yes. There is going to be a double standard, Dr. Simmons. Because this time Luke is in possession of his legal guardian. Yes, it’s Alistair Fitz. Yes, he’s likely a criminal. But until we can charge him on those counts, it is not the responsibility of SHIELD to retrieve Luke from him.”

“So you’re just saying we need to wait for the FBI to do their jobs?”

“Yes,” Talbot said. The video call ended. Jemma sighed angrily and hit her desk.

**Day One Hundred and Nine**

At four in the morning on Thursday, Rebecca Herschel’s SHIELD phone began to buzz loudly. She had been wrapped up tightly on the bottom bunk, her communications roommate groaned loudly. Rebecca struggled to free an arm and turn off the alarm. She didn’t set the alarm that early. She saw, with a start, that it was a text from Director Simmons.
“Holy shit!” Rebecca sprung out of bed and rifled through her bottom drawers for her rolled up cadet uniform. Black cargo pants, a black sports bra, a black tee with the SHIELD logo, a black insulated windbreaker, black socks, and black combat boots. She tied her hair back with a pink striped scrunchy while grabbing her bag and running to the elevator. Dozens of tired and frantic students were piling into the elevator to the airfield. Agent May was keeping the elevator open, her eyes steadily fastened to her watch. When it was four twelve, she closed the doors. Rebecca knew from a headcount that nine of those who signed up weren’t in the elevator. It was cold and windy outside, the plane they used to go to the academy in the first place was still there. Or rather, it had returned to that spot. They piled into the squashed rows, lit by fluorescent lights. At four-fifteen, the bay doors of the plane closed. The missing number had reduced to seven. Agent May disappeared into the cockpit. A couple of minutes later, the seatbelt light turned on and immediately after, the jet engines began to blast. The plane shot into the air, students who hadn’t buckled in held tight, even though there wasn’t enough room in the narrow cockpit for them to go anywhere. Once they were no longer shooting into the air, the intercom crackled, and Director Simmons spoke.

“We are estimated to arrive at the testing location in two hours. Water bottles and granola bars are in two large boxes at the front of the cockpit. Help yourselves.”

When Director Simmons said large boxes, she wasn’t kidding. There were three packs of water bottles and eight different types of granola and protein bars. The students were able to grab water and two or three bars apiece and munch on them carefully as the plane sped through the air.

“What do you think we’re going to do?” Joan Eaton asked. She looked like a fitness model, with broad shoulders, chiseled but feminine features, blonde wavy hair, and blue eyes. She used to work in the Army as a fitness instructor.

“We won’t be in the ARAC this time,” Steven Tyler said. He had black hair and a pornstache. Rebecca knew he used to work for the NSA as an analyst.

“We should think about what we’ve been taught so far in the field training classes,” Jake Oh said. “This is supposed to be an exam.”

“Our last exam we had no preparation for,” Riri Williams, the kid, reminded him.
“But that was a placement exam,” Eaton reminded her.

“What’s to say this isn’t?” Williams inquired.

The foreboding small talk continued until Director Simmons was back on the intercom. “Alright, cadets. We’ll be over the drop point in fifteen minutes.”

“Drop point?” Grady Scraps yelled in confusion.

“Have none of you seen the parachutes under your seats yet?” Director Simmons asked. There was a flurry of motion as students found parachutes. “Now, you should have gone over parachute procedures in your field examination class, correct? That’s what Agent May said. You had some experience opening them in class and practicing landing by bungee jumping in the recreation hall. Apply what you learned here. If you decide to stay on the plane, you will be disqualified from this examination.”

The few students who were not part of the initial field examination class were begging their fellow cadets to help them learn how to open parachutes. Another number, entirely Communications and SciTech students, sat down with resignation that they would be disqualified.

“Have you ever parachuted before, Director Simmons?” Scraps asked.

“Sure,” Jemma said. “Although I’ve also jumped out of a plane without a parachute. I don’t recommend doing that.”

“What if we die?” Scraps inquired.

“If you paid any attention in your field class, you shouldn’t,” Jemma said. “Get ready. Suit up.”

Rebecca tied her field bag to her waist and set up her parachute harness. All she had to do was pull the chute once she was at a sufficient distance. If her first parachute failed, the emergency parachute was the red handle. She was supposed to know when to pull it.

“Alright. We are currently at an altitude of five thousand feet above the ground,” Director
Simmons said, “You have five minutes until the jump. Make sure you have your phones on your person, that is how you will receive all further instruction.

“How long before we pull the chute?” Steven Tyler asked. The SciTech students were doing that equation in their head. Those who had performed jumps before knew already from practice.

“Rebecca,” Andrea Hope approached her. She was a communications student who Rebecca had been paired with in the ARAC examination, “Do you know how long-”

“Twelve seconds,” Rebecca said quietly.

“So, I count to twelve, and then I pull,” Andrea nodded. “What happens if I pull too late?”

“Don’t pull too late,” Rebecca said. Andrea nodded.

The bay doors began to open. Students grabbed the handles on the sides to steady themselves. They ten-minute to jump out of the plane two or three at a time. Slowly, the line dwindled. Rebecca had been near the back, hoping seeing people jump would fill her with some confidence, but it didn’t. Before she knew it, she was in front of the open bay doors. The pink sunrise barely illuminated the sky below her. She felt like her protein bars were going to expel from her mouth, but she didn’t let it bother her. Okay, it bothered her, but she still leaped full force out of the plane, and she began to count.

One- AAAAAH- two- AAAAAAH- three- AAAAAAH- four- AAAAAAH- five- AAAAAAH- six- AAAAAAH- seven- AAAAAAH- eight- AAAAAAH- nine- AAAAAAH- ten- AAAAAAH- eleven- AAAAAAH- twelve!

With the assurance that she had fallen the proper height, Rebecca pulled her parachute. During her fall, the sharp morning air had made her numb. Now that she could focus on something other than the feeling of falling, she could see around her. Six dozen open parachutes were below her. Several more were opening above her. Her stomach dropped when Andrea shot past her, still in free fall. She was considering cutting her parachute to catch up to Andrea when she didn’t need to. A sleek black drone seemed to manifest from nowhere and extended a twisting cable. It latched onto Andrea’s torso like a tentacle, forming a metal cable harness, and began to fall with her. Gradually, the small propulsion engines began to whirr, slowing Andrea down until she was suspended in the air by this drone, which was probably the same width and length as a compact car, but a fraction of its that height.
Knowing Andrea was safe, Rebecca focused on the task at hand, landing. If she pulled slightly on the cords of the parachute, she could manipulate her direction. Below her was fields of a midwestern prairie. She was observing the area around her. She could see a black tar road several miles to the… east. She wondered what was so unique about this area that her directors would decide for her to land here of all places. While she had some time floating to the ground, she let her mind wander. Soon, she realized that she was much closer to the ground than she had initially thought. Rebecca remembered what Director May had said. She needed to land running. She straightened her legs and slowly worked them in a circular motion like she was walking or running. As she got closer to the ground, the pit in her stomach sunk deeper, but she continued the movements as they felt comfortable. When her foot hit the ground, it felt like fire shot up her leg but she ran until she was entirely on the ground, and she stopped suddenly, her parachute flopping over her. It took some maneuvering to free herself, but soon she was free of the harness and the chute. Looking around, Rebecca could see that the prairie was dotted with various students. Her phone buzzed from where it was in a zippered pocket of her field bag. She pulled it out.

*Get to the coordinates as soon as you can. Additional points for resourcefulness and creativity.*

39.110184, -94.580719

Half wondering how they could evaluate resourcefulness and creativity if they were on a plane, Rebecca set out to determine where she was. She remembered seeing a narrow road to the east, the same direction as the rising sun. Recognizing they were timed, she tried to settle into a comfortable jog. “Tried” was the central point there, as she was not used to jogging, she didn’t have the endurance and was walking and panting by the time she reached the road. There were no cars. Not knowing where civilization was, Rebecca just decided to head North and began to walk that way. After walking for about two hours, she came upon what looked like a grocery store in the middle of nowhere. The red and white letters said *Chester’s Apple Market*. It was incredibly odd to see a store here, especially with no parking lot. It seemed to be open. The sign was lit. Rebecca stepped inside. It looked like a typical grocery store. There was a produce section, a freezer section, dry goods and cleaning materials. Only one person was working the register, an old woman.

“You lost, sweetie?” The woman said.

“Where am I?” Rebecca asked.

“Chester’s Apple Market,” The woman said.

“What state is this?” Rebecca asked.

“Kansas,” The woman said.
“Where’s the nearest town?”

“That’d be Council Grove. It’s about a ten minute drive north on the 177.”

“How long is it to walk?” Rebecca asked.

“Oh, an hour,” The woman said. Rebecca groaned. She was already two hours behind, and she still didn’t know where those coordinates lead to. Coordinates. “Do you have any maps of the state with longitude and latitude?”

“Yeah,” The very helpful cashier pointed to a kiosk. Rebecca went over and pulled out a map. In her bag, she had a ruler, pad and a pencil. She opened the map and found where she was, south of Council Grove. She saw the coordinates she was looking for was in Kansas City, on the Missouri side, near the Missouri river. She flipped to a map of Kansas City and found the exact street. Around 300 Grand Boulevard.

“I need a car,” Rebecca announced. "Or a truck, anything with wheels and an engine.”

“Sometimes somebody drives through,” The woman said. “Of course, we got an old bike in the back.” A bike was better than nothing.

“Show me,” Rebecca said. The woman walked out of the cashier booth and showed Rebecca to the loading docks, where an old motorcycle sat. It was a honda moped from the late 1960s. The blue paint was faded and cracked. The chain looked grimy. “Is it okay if I take this?” Rebecca asked. There was a helmet hanging from one of the handlebars.

“I’m not using it, and it looks like you have somewhere to be,” The woman said. “With that get up and all.”

“Thank you. You have no idea-”

“Just take good care of her. I know what kooky business you SHIELD agents get into.” The woman then made her way back inside, leaving Rebecca with more questions than answers. Rebecca had never ridden a motorcycle before, but she assumed there was the same physics
involved as a bike. The faster you go, the easier it is for you to balance. Lean or turn the handlebars
to change direction. It was not as simple as it seemed, logically, but Rebecca was steady enough to
make her way up the 177 to Council Grove. She filled up the bike at a gas station and then headed
east, to Kansas City. She took a two-lane backroad highway that was mostly empty. So empty she
felt comfortable going a good fifteen miles above the speed limit on her small, borrowed moped.
She had remembered all the toll roads and made sure to avoid them. She changed direction near
Ottawa, Kansas and took the I-35 Northeast to the sprawling Metropolitan area that was Kansas
City. In Kansas City, she got off the highway as soon as she could, near a World War One
memorial. She went up Main Street, across on 6th Street, and up Grand Boulevard until she
reached the coordinates. She parked the moped on a bike rack and walked inside.

“Fifteen!” The diner yelled when Rebecca entered. She jumped in surprise and reached for her
field bag.

“Relax, cadet,” Director May said. She, Director Coulson, and Director Simmons were sitting in a
booth in the diner. Fourteen other classmates of hers were seated either at the bar or in a booth,
eating.

“I’m the fifteenth?” Rebecca asked.

“Total time, four hours and fifty-two minutes,” Director Coulson pointed to the clock. “What was
your ride?”

“A moped from the late sixties,” Rebecca said. “A nice old lady gave it to me.”

“Where?” Director Simmons questioned.

“Uh… off the 177 scenic south of Council Grove.”

“You were one of three to go northbound on foot. Everyone else went south,” Director May
explained. “What was so appealing about going north?”

“I didn’t know where to go, so I just decided to pick a direction and stick with it. I ended up at this
weird grocery store in the middle of nowhere called Chester’s Apple Market.”

“You found Chester’s?” Director Coulson asked.
“The woman knew I was SHIELD. It was weird.”

“Chester’s Apple Market is an old SSR base of ours in central Kansas. They used the prairie fields out here for training. That’s why I picked it. I had no idea the Apple Market base was still operational,” Director Coulson explained.

“So… do we just wait here until all one hundred get back?” Rebecca asked.

“No,” Director May said. “After six hours, the challenge is over, and those who failed to make it here will be picked up at their location. The winners go to St. Louis.”

“What’s in St. Louis?” Rebecca asked.

“That’s for you to learn,” Director Simmons said. “In the meantime, eat, talk, watch television, charge your phone, you can even go sightseeing if you make it back in the next hour for stage two.”

“What happened to Andrea?” Rebecca remembered her friend who had been taken by the drone.

“Of the eight who were unable to deploy their parachute safely, they were taken back to Academy,” Director Simmons said. “She’s fine. The rescue drones were developed by my husband, Professor Fitz.” Rebecca looked away when Director Simmons mentioned Professor Fitz. She never had a class from him because she wasn’t in engineering, but she had seen him in the halls, and he was something to see. “He built them. Calls them the Great Eagles.” Rebeca burst out laughing. Director Simmons smiled fondly and rested a hand on her curved abdomen. “The only part of Cadet Hope that suffered any injury was her confidence, I’m afraid,” Director Simmons said.

“Thank you, Directors,” Rebecca stood up. The diner had been closed for housing SHIELD missions, but the staff were still serving. Rebecca had a burger, fries, and milkshake while sitting with the other fourteen who arrived before her. Five of them successfully hitchhiked. Seven stole cars. Two took a plane together and used their emergency chutes to land successfully in the nearby river and swim. That pair won first and second place respectively. They became competitive in the last mile and raced to the diner. Eight more people arrived in the hour between when Rebecca came, and the challenge ended. They had similar stories, hitchhiking and theft. Nobody else visited Chester’s Apple Market.
Day One Hundred and Eleven

Only eight students were not yet retrieved from the excursion to Kansas and the field challenge. Jemma was quite satisfied that they had twenty-six students make it in six hours or less. What was interesting was that there was a limited advantage for the Operations students. It even a biologist or analyst could complete field challenge despite it being the primary objective of their training. After the six hours were up, the directors headed home, telling the twenty-six who succeeded they would get to spend their weekend in St. Louis on their first ever mission.

Since the total number to go to St. Louis was thirty-two with staff, students, and guests, they did not take the Academy Bus. Instead, they took Daisy’s Zephyr Three.

With the Academy Bus in its hangar, Zephyr Three landed on the main airfield atop SHIELD Academy. The twenty-six excited students waited in the elevator, watching the plane descend. Zephyr Three was like Zephyr One, except explicitly outfitted for Daisy’s team and slightly smaller. Daisy and Piper were the two guest chaperones. The three Directors and Fitz were from Academy. It almost felt like the old days, if Jemma ignored the twenty-six students. With the opportunity to help her secret nephew, Luke, taken from her, Jemma had to divert her efforts elsewhere. She hoped to work on the scabbard SHIELD had collected months prior when another half of the perplexing case graced SHIELD’s systems.

“Cadets,” May barked. She spent the most time with the field agent cadets, and they snapped to attention at her voice. “We will be riding Zephyr Three. You will be briefed in the air. Two high-ranking SHIELD agents will assist us. Do not embarrass yourselves.”

The bay of Zephyr Three descended, and Daisy stepped out, Piper alongside her. The tension was palpable as the students slowly realized who was making her way across the tarmac.

“Hi Daisy,” Coulson greeted the superhero casually.

“What’s up, ACDC.”

“ACDC?”

“ACademy Director Coulson,” Daisy explained with a smile. “So you’re the cadets? I don’t know why I expected teenagers. I mean, I’ve been here before, I know you’re mostly adults. Maybe it’s
just because Fitz and Simmons were teens when they went to your SHIELD Hogwarts. I became a SHIELD agent with constant trial by fire, and then I got superpowers, so I’m not used to this. Anyway, um, Hi. I’m Daisy Johnson. This is Piper, my partner. Professional partner, not that she isn’t cute.”

“Don’t patronize me,” Piper said.

“And that’s Zephyr Three. Our plane. Today you will be observing and maybe even assisting Piper, myself, and your teachers investigate an 084. Fun fact, I was an 084, and my second mission ever with your teachers was investigating an 084. Coulson has the best 084 stories, Don’t you ACDC?” Daisy asked.

“Something like that,” Coulson agreed.

“Uh… you’re in school so I should quiz you. Anybody know what an 084 is? Have they done code number terms yet?”

“It’s in the textbook,” May said.

“I can’t imagine you and textbooks in the same plane of existence,” Daisy said.

A young girl raised her hand. Daisy called on her, “An 084 is an object of unknown origin, potentially useful or dangerous.”

“Thanks, uh-”


“Cool. Yeah, uh, Williams is right. So that’s what we’re doing. Usually I have a couple more staffing my plane but Mack and YoYo are visiting his brother this weekend, but I think the twenty-six of you combined could be as useful as the both of them. No offense. You’re just really green. So, uh, let’s go into Betsy.”

“Betsy?” Jemma asked.
“That’s what I named Zephyr Three,” Daisy said as the group walked across the airfield to the large plane. “She needed a name. Any luck on the Talbot-y side of things?”

Jemma shook her head. “We’re visiting Ariel tomorrow to give her an update.”

“I honestly think she doesn’t deserve as long as a sentence as she got, she was protecting her kid,” Daisy said. “And Talbot is a goddamn hypocrite to not give her leeway when we got our asses kicked saving his son a while back.”

“I know,” Jemma agreed. “But she did commit treason, parole in thirty months isn’t terrible considering the circumstances.”

Inside Zephyr Three, the twenty-six cadets, three directors, two agents and Professor Fitz assembled in the briefing room. Three analysts worked the computers as the thirty-two of them clustered inside.

“Hold onto something,” Daisy said as the plane took off. Fifteen cadets fell over. They pulled themselves up once the plane was comfortably cruising to St. Louis.

“This is a level-five case,” Jemma said. “You cannot disclose the details to anyone, including your fellow cadets. If we learn that you breached confidentiality, you will be excused from SHIELD Academy. Am I clear?” There were murmurs of assent. “Director Coulson, would you like to do the rundown?”

“I would, Director Simmons. Two months ago, in St. Louis Missouri, a man robbed a bank with a sword,” Coulson said. Security camera clips showed the robbery. The man was slicing through bank guards and vault doors with the jewel-encrusted sword and withstanding a spray of bullets by the police. “He then crashed into the Mississippi and died. SHIELD recovered his sheath, but not the sword. The scabbard has healing properties, which is why he didn’t die when he got shot, but he did when he crashed and was thrown from the car. The sword has unique and unidentified killing abilities, which is why SHIELD has kept an eye out for it. What are the theories, Simmons?”

“An extended analysis of the scabbard revealed that it turns fat and tissue cells around a damaged area into stem cells. Additional unreplicatable foreign agents stimulate cellular regeneration, we suspect alien origin,” Jemma said simply. “Therefore, we believe similar cellular-manipulating properties exist in the yet to be recovered blade, as the cause of death of all victims was an extreme
and rapid onset of sepsis and septic shock. Upon analysis of confirmed deaths by the sword in autopsy, there was a minimal level of bacteria and a disproportionate level of inflammation and lymphatic response. We predicted that victims of the sword would appear in a regular autopsy to have a severe autoimmune disorder.”

“We were correct,” Coulson said. “In the last two months, four bodies have been flagged by a recently-launched algorithm. All of these bodies had sharp force trauma consistent with a longsword, as well as signs of sepsis and infection disproportionate with swabbed cultures. All four of these bodies have ties to the St. Louis crime family, headed by Vincent Giordano. It was bigger during prohibition; now it’s just low-level enforcers, gambling, some drugs. Not a huge family, which is why these connections are so interesting. We need three things to be done to figure out where the sword has ended up since it’s displacement to the river. The first is to create a timeline for these murders and investigate the family for anyone who might be angry. The second is actually to talk to these enforcers. And the third is to create a cure of sorts for this sword based on our limited information. Fitz, Simmons and the SciTech Cadets will create the cure, using the scabbard, possibly. May, Piper and the Operations Cadets will be on the ground and try to talk to members of the crime family. Myself, Daisy and the Communications Cadets will work on analyzing and checking everyone involved.”

Jemma and Fitz already had created full specs for a cure, but they needed a lot of biochemical and engineering busy work to be done to develop a treatment. They took the eight Sci-Tech cadets to the lab in Zephyr Three. Coulson, Daisy and the seven Communications cadets got to work as well. In the conference room, May went over game-plan with the eleven Operations cadets. As expected, the SciTech Cadets were respectful in their first cure prototype, and when the culture testing had some bugs, they offered the occasionally insightful suggestion to tweak it. Nothing Jemma hadn’t already thought of, but it was essential to put them through the process.

Operations and Communications together determined that all four victims had no connection to the first bank robber, but they had gotten into skirmishes with Antonio Lombardi, a driver the crime family used sometimes.

“We have a theory,” Daisy told Fitz and Jemma outside the lab. “Our robber got out of the passenger side door on the external camera feed. The car drove away. The angle was crap, but if Lombardi were a driver, he would know about the sword. Lombardi was an opportunist, if some guy from Boston with a magic sword promised him a cut to drive him around- I mean the robber wasn’t the best getaway driver, he drove into a river. If Lombardi bailed or chickened out or maybe betrayed the guy…”

“So we need to find Antonio Lombardi?” Jemma asked.

“Yeah. May and I aren’t going to risk any little ones. May, Piper and I are going to stay to find this guy. Any luck on the cure?”
“It’s a work in progress,” Fitz said. He had been pensive and quiet ever since he learned he had a sister. Jemma was aching for him to talk to her, but she knew he needed to come to terms with it first. In the meantime, she was as supportive as she could be.

“Just blast him from a distance with your powers, he doesn’t have the scabbard,” Jemma suggested. “The sooner we have Lombardi, the sooner I can bug Talbot more.”

“Yeah,” Daisy agreed. “But keep those cadets working. I know it meant a lot to me when I was new to get to help. And they’re not former hacktivists. So you can rely on them a bit more.”

“Will consider,” Jemma agreed.

The three women deployed to Lombardi’s registered address. The cadets listened on comms and watched with the body cameras the three agents had on. The man was skinny and greasy, and was trying to entertain a (likely hired) girl when SHIELD kicked his door down. He surged for the sword which was on his coffee table, under a pizza box. Daisy blasted him against the wall with a force of vibrations. He hit the wall. They brought him to Zephyr Three along with the sword, and the plane departed back to Academy.

“You sure you don’t want to head the analysis?” Daisy asked as Jemma and Fitz packed up.

“I’m busy enough using the scabbard to reverse-engineer alien stem-cell science,” Jemma said. “I’ll submit suggestions, but between Fitz’s father and this job, I think I need to keep the pet projects to a minimum. Plus, I know Fitz would be worried if I worked with a deadly sword while pregnant. He’d be worried anyway, but, I mean, it is our child I need to be less mad scientist.”

“Well, tell me how it goes with Ariel tomorrow.”

“Will do.” Jemma agreed.

**Day One Hundred and Twelve**

Fitz parked at the FPC Alderson visitor center a bit after noon. He opened the door for his pregnant wife, despite the fact she was still very capable of walking on her own. They headed inside,
checked in, flashed their badges, and requested a private room with Ariel. The interrogation room wasn’t spotless. The metal table was bolted to the ground, and the metal prisoner’s chair was chained to the table. The walls and floor were dirty concrete, and the one-way mirror was scuffed from violence over the years. Jemma and Fitz said down on folding chairs that the prison provided, and they said that Ariel would be there shortly.

Ariel stepped into the interrogation room nervously. She saw the couple and tried to shrink deeper into her baggy orange uniform. She walked slowly and nervously sunk into the chair.

“We understand,” Jemma said. “We don’t think what you did was right-”

“Don’t,” Ariel said. “You don’t need to be conciliatory. I suck.”

“You did it for Luke, we can respect that,” Jemma said. “That’s who we’re here for. Luke.”

“Did Father contact you?” Ariel asked.

“No, why?” Fitz asked.

“He- one of his people was here yesterday,” Ariel said. “Gave me this-” She reached down her shirt and took a letter from her bra. “Sorry about the condition, these things don’t have pockets.”

Leo and Jemma,

I am aware that you know of Ariel’s relation. I am aware of her imprisonment. If you would like to alter the custody of Luke McAllister, go to Boston. Trinity Church on Clarendon Street, Noon, on Friday the 28th, third pew on the far right. Contact for arrangements will be made there. Both of you must be present, do not inform your superiors of this or Luke won’t be found ever again.

Alistair Fitz

“How did he know we were coming here?” Jemma asked Ariel.
“I have a theory,” Ariel said. “I might have made a psychological profile for both of you that I gave to him. Both of you have strong ties to family and firm loyalty. He might have assumed correctly you’d come to see me.”

“So he has no established surveillance other than you?” Fitz asked.

“If he did, he didn’t tell me,” Ariel said. “But I don’t think so. I was incredibly compliant. He would bank on that.”

“We plan to, if we can, take Luke from him,” Fitz said. “Not for you, but for Luke.”

“Thank you. I know it’s not for me but- really,” Ariel reached for her neck and grasped it as a nervous tic. “I just want him to have a good life. And I did it in the worst ways. I can’t take back what I did, as much as I wish I could. I just- I am so sorry. I just- I want to help. I want to make reparations in any way I can. If I can do anything-”

“Keep quiet about this,” Jemma said. “Talbot denied us permission to go to Boston earlier this week when we figured out Alistair’s address. Usually, I respect Talbot’s caution, but we have a unique opportunity we didn’t have before.”

“You figured out his address?” Ariel asked. “I spent ages-”

“Daisy,” Jemma and Fitz said. Ariel nodded, accepting that explanation.

“If we have a plan, we need to talk to the team,” Jemma told her husband. "Do you think we might-but what if we-""

“Can I have a minute alone with Ariel?” Fitz asked gently between his wife's hurried mumbling.

Jemma looked up at him. She nodded. “Sure. I need to pee anyway.” Jemma kissed him on the cheek and left.
Fitz turned to Ariel, “Everything you said, about how you thought I would be a good dad and all the help- was that real?”

“Yes,” Ariel said. “It was real.”

“You meant it?” Fits asked.

“I did. I tried to be there to help you and Jemma beyond Father’s expectations. I hated the position I was in. I wanted to help you if I could at all. I still do. I screwed up, and I know what I did was inexcusable, but you need to know that this wasn’t because of you, it was because of Father. You can't lose faith in your judgment of people because I exploited that.”

“I would have done the same,” Fitz said. “If he had someone I loved. So… I’m not mad at you.”

“Really?” Ariel questioned.

“I’m a bit miffed at myself, actually,” Fitz said. “This happens a lot.”

“Don’t blame yourself for being good, and having people take advantage of that,” Ariel said. She looked down, “For having me take advantage of that. Or Father. You’re the odd one out in the family, I think. You’re the most selfless, courageous person I know. I was a coward. I bent to Father’s will out of fear.”

“You had a right to be concerned.”

“I didn’t have a right to commit treason,” Ariel said. “That’s kind of why I’m in prison now.”

“You did it because you thought your son was in danger. I did some reading, if you had a decent lawyer, you would have been declared innocent in a trial easily,” Fitz said. "But you plead guilty, and that means something.”

“I am guilty," Ariel said.
"I think I've learned that people who feel remorse and guilt for actions that weren't entirely theirs are decent people. So, considering what I know about what you did and what I know about myself, I forgive you," Fitz said. "Jemma might hold a grudge a while longer, but I know she understands."

“I don’t deserve to be forgiven,” Ariel said sharply.

“Too bad,” Fitz stood up. “I've felt the same way, and we both know I was wrong then. You're wrong now. The next time I come here, I promise I’ll have Luke.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Seventeen will be published this Friday before the Agents of SHIELD two-hour premiere. If I do not post it in time, something terrible probably happened because I've been planning to publish that chapter at that time for months. I hope that sounds ominous enough.

As always, I appreciate your feedback! If any of you have anything to say, I urge you to comment. I like talking to you, and I promise I'll be nice! If you don't want to communicate directly, kudos-ing, bookmarking, and subscribing all let me know how you feel, and it drives me to update this and enjoy doing so.
I'm glad that all the feedback I've gotten so far has been positive. Thank you to those who read and enjoyed this story so far. I'm excited about this chapter; I've been fleshing it out for weeks with drafts and notes.

This chapter does have a content warning. I've included mild violence, minor self-harm, and some conversation or situations that might just generally make people feel uncomfortable.

I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Sixteen

Day One Hundred and Fourteen

Jemma and Fitz had called May, Coulson, Daisy, Mack, and Elena to an emergency meeting at their house that Monday to discuss the prospect of a meeting with Alistair.

“How close is Trinity Church to his apartment?” Mack asked after Daisy, Jemma, and Fitz had explained everything.

“A bit over three hundred meters,” Jemma said. “Not even a third of a mile.”

“So you think he’d take you to his penthouse?” Coulson asked.

“He’d feel the most in control there,” Daisy said. “The bad guys always do this kind of stuff at their lair.”

“Fair enough,” Coulson agreed. “Are you going to talk to Talbot?”

“No,” Jemma said. “He's a hypocrite. Besides, this is a family matter.”
“So what are you going to do?” May asked.

Jemma looked at her husband. Fitz took a deep breath and explained, “We were hoping you will help us. Alistair doesn’t know we know where he lives, so we have an advantage. We can even contact the FBI team in Boston that is supposed to be surveilling him. I’m sure they’d do anything that Quake requests.”

“Anything for you, Fitzy,” Daisy said.

**Day One Hundred and Seventeen**

Friday morning, Jemma woke up when her alarm blared. The couple went through their morning routine as usual, but when they headed to the base, they boarded Zephyr Three instead of a helicopter to Academy. May, Coulson, Mack, Elena, and Daisy were already geared up and ready to go. The flight to Boston took less than an hour. From the International Airport, they took an SUV to the FBI Office in Chelsea, fifteen minutes North of Boston.

“Thank you for coming. General Talbot informed us that SHIELD had a vested interest in this Alistair Fitz, but I had no idea they’d send a superhero,” The director of the field office was gushing over Daisy.

“SHIELD received a threat from Alistair, threatening the life of a child,” Daisy said. “We have reason to believe there’s merit to it. We’re playing by his rules here. Two agents will make contact in Trinity Church. We were hoping that the FBI and local PD would cooperate with us, but we need to keep this quiet. If Alistair smells something fishy, the child is at risk.”

“We’ve already drafted an operation plan,” Coulson said. “Do you have a room we could set up in?”

“Right here,” The director brought them to a conference room, “We have SWAT and Boston Police at your disposal, Quake.”

“Appreciate it,” Daisy smiled.

A few hours later, Jemma and Fitz walked into Trinity Church. The church was a beautiful landmark. The masonry was exquisite. Across the street, a towering building reflected Copley
Square in the large windows. If they looked behind them, they could see the apartment building Alistair owned down the block, among some of the other tall buildings in the area. They stepped through the gothic arches into the church. The church was dark, lit by a few lamps and the sun streaming through the stained glass windows. There were four columns of pews and probably twenty rows. They headed to the far right, up to the third bench, and sat down. While trying to fit in, they observed their surroundings. They noted exits. Jemma felt a hard lump under her. She reached under the red pew cushion and pulled out a black flip phone. She opened it; her husband leaned into her to see. In the contacts, there was one entry. CALL ME. Jemma did so and held the phone up to her ear. Fitz leaned close to listen as well. The phone rang and rang. It finally went to voicemail. The voicemail entry was the exciting part. They both recognized Alistair’s voice.

“Sit on the benches outside of the church that faces north in Copley Square. A black sedan will park outside of the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel at twelve-fifteen. A man wearing a red shirt and black trousers will step out and open an umbrella. Get in the car. Make sure you aren’t followed.” The phone’s automatic voice cut in. “Leave a message after the beep. Beeeeeep.”

“Did you catch that?” Jemma whispered. Fitz nodded. They left the church just as quietly as they entered, found the benches, and watched the Fairmont. The woman sitting beside them set down her newspaper and rifled through her coat pocket for her phone. Jemma tapped her nails against the peeling wood of the bench. Tap-ta-tap-ta ta-tap ta-tap-ta. Tap-ta tap-tap-tap. Ta-ta-tap-ta tap-tap-tap ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta tap-tap-tap ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta tap-tap-tap ta-tap-ta ta-tap-ta tap-tap-tap ta-tap-ta tap-tap-ta.

A black sedan parked in front of the Fairmont. A man stepped out, red shirt and black slacks, he opened an umbrella despite the fact it was partly cloudy. The couple interlocked fingers and headed towards him. He closed his umbrella when he saw them and opened the door to the backseat. They climbed inside. He drove them to Blagden Street, where there was a back lot to the apartment building. The entire car trip took two minutes. They did their best to look surprised how short the ride was. Fitz focused on a couple arguing on the street. The woman huffed and marched away, leaving the broad man to stand there, flustered. The driver opened the door and beckoned for them to exit. On the steps of the front entrance, the second man in a black suit escorted Jemma and Fitz into the building and to the elevators. Before entering the lift, he checked them for weapons. Jemma sighed as she handed him the small pistol strapped to her ankle. They went up to the eighteenth floor with him. They noticed when they stepped out that there was a door to the stairwell - the alarm will sound - that also had roof access. The man knocked on the door to apartment 1801 and stood to the side. Fitz squeezed his wife’s hand, and the door opened.

Alistair Fitz looked precisely as he did in the Framework, the couple both thought. Gray hair combed back, a permanent frown on his face, a blue shirt, gray cardigan, and gray slacks. He was even wearing loafers. There was also something different about him. He wasn’t as stiff. He, by no means, was less imposing. His eyes scanned the pair, and a smug smile graced his face, “Leo, m’boy. And you must be Jemma. I’m charmed. Alistair Fitz,” He offered his hand. Jemma didn’t take it. His smile faded, and he straightened, “I’m sorry that our first meeting couldn’t be more jovial, please, come in.” He beckoned the couple inside. They slowly followed. The penthouse was beautiful. It was exquisitely decorated, everything looked expensive. “Lunch is almost ready.”

“Yes,” Alistair was still trying to be respectable. “He’s finishing up a music lesson,” Alistair headed down a hall. The couple followed. Alistair opened a door, and Luke was sitting before a piano. He was playing an awkward rendition of Yankee Doodle. A music teacher stood behind him. She looked like the typical kindergarten teacher. She was in her early twenties, she had brown curly hair, and she was wearing a brightly patterned jumper and simple jeans.

“Christine,” Alistair said. “I think it’s time to wrap things up.”

“Oh, yes,” The woman smiled. “Sorry, we got carried away. Same time next week?”

“No,” Alistair said. “Victor will pay you. Goodbye.” He handed the woman her bag.

“Bye, Luke,” She said, she was slightly puzzled. She left.

“Luke, you remember Mr. and Mrs. Fitz, you attended their wedding,” Alistair showed the boy to them. “Now, go to your room.” Luke kept his head down and walked swiftly out the door. Fitz watched him go into the third door on the left. “Now, Lunch.” He headed back out to the dining area. Fitz and Jemma trailed him. He sat down at the dining table, where a manila envelope sat, “After I feel we’ve converse sufficiently, you can have this. Custody papers that will give Luke to whoever signs them.”

“May we check?” Jemma asked.

“Alright,” He pulled the pages from the envelope and spread them on the table. Jemma gingerly checked that he had signed and initialed every spot he needed to and that the papers were legitimate. Satisfied, she nodded to her husband. Alistair put the paperwork back in the envelope and set it beside him. The door to the kitchen opened, and a woman in a blue uniform and apron brought out a platter of sandwiches and bowls of beef stew. She set them in front of the three, poured them sparkling water, and left back to the kitchen. Jemma and Fitz thanked her weakly while Alistair ignored her existence, and acted as if the food magically appeared.

“Are you going to glare at me for the entire meal, Leo?” Alistair asked his son as he absentmindedly stirred his stew.
“What do you want?” Fitz asked his father.

“Well, it’s been two decades. I believed a family reunion was in order,” Alistair said.

“It wasn’t,” Fitz said.

Alistair pretended that he didn’t hear that, “I’m sorry about the circumstances which you met Ariel. She’s quite lovely when she isn’t neurotic.”

“We know she’s lovely,” Jemma said.

“So, Jemma, tell me about yourself. I want to know more about the woman my son fell in love with.”

“I’m sure you already know plenty,” Jemma said sharply.

“Humor me,” Alistair ordered.

Jemma sighed, “I went to Oxford.”

“Good school. I can tell you’re an intelligent woman. Quite a rare thing, an intellectual woman. I hope Leo treasures you.”

“He does, but not because of my elusive intelligence. Women are plenty clever,” Jemma said haughtily.

“Agree to disagree,” Alistair said. Jemma felt a wave of anger so strong she wanted to reshoot him. “Are you excited about your child?”

“Of course,” Jemma said.
“I hope you’ll invest the proper amount of time into him or her. You'll stay at home, I hope?”

"I intend to work,” Jemma said.

Alistair tisked, “Children need mothers.”

“They also need fathers,” Jemma said. “You didn’t do quite well on that front.”

“Leaving Leo is my greatest regret,” Alistair said. “I was a foolish young man. I was drunk often, I cared more about what I lost than what I had. It wasn’t until I left did I realize how important my family is. I thought I had a second chance when I found Ariel, but after the death of her fiance, she couldn’t handle the mental stress. Ironic, considering her profession. I cared for Luke like my own, but I realize she doesn’t trust me. I don’t want to cause her undue stress, so I’m willing to give Luke to someone she’d trust. Like you two.”

“Oh yes, no undue stress. Prison is so relaxing,” Jemma said sarcastically.

“Are you always this irreverent, lass?” Alistair asked.

“Only to complete and utter arses like yourself,” Jemma shrugged.

“Jem- dial it back a bit,” Fitz whispered.

“I was disheartened, Leo, to learn that you had no interest in learning about our family. I thought you would take the opportunity I gave you to learn more about your legacy.”

“Too busy,” Fitz shrugged. “I have my work and my family to care about.”

“Blood is thicker than water, Leo,” Alistair said. “And our blood deserves your attention. It’s much more special than you realize.”
“What do you mean?”

“We don’t have time to explain. Neither of you has eaten. It’s not poisoned,” Alistair said. He waited expectantly for them to eat some stew and sandwich. “Now, I will tell you that there is a family tale that the firstborn Fitz son has an unusual purpose. My father and elder brother each had this purpose, but I do not. However, you do, Leo. I’ll give your wife Luke’s papers if you come with me.”

“To do what?”

“I need your blood. The purpose is there, quite literally. Don’t worry, not enough to be dangerous. But it has to be taken at a certain place at a certain time.”

“He won’t be of any use to you,” Jemma said. “Whatever test or purpose his blood serves, it isn’t pure. We were infected by a chitauri virus years ago. He didn’t have any physiological effects, but we both had the antiserum, which means we have harmless but present alien antibodies. Our blood is tainted.”

Alistair looked at Jemma hard, squinting and scrutinizing, “Ariel said you’re a terrible liar. So I suppose I’ll have to believe you. But even I know that vaccinating a person won’t vaccinate any genetic offspring of theirs. And thankfully, Jemma, you’re carrying a firstborn Fitz Son.”

Jemma could have argued their baby was a girl, but she opted for her response to be a violent one. She picked up the sandwich platter, made of thick glass, leaned across the table, and hit him across the face with it with all her might. The glass shattered across his cheek and he slumped out of his chair. Jemma grabbed the custody papers, “Get Luke!” She exclaimed, upending the table onto Alistair as well for good measure.

Fitz hurried down the hall, third door on the left. Luke was under the bed, clutching Tyranno. Fitz dropped to his knees, “I can take you to your mum,” He said. The boy looked up at his uncle nervously, and then scrambled out from under the bed and into Fitz’s arms.

“FITZ!” Jemma shouted. Fitz heard a loud thump and a masculine groan. “HURRY UP!” Fitz clutched Luke to his chest and hurried. Jemma seemed to have hit one of Alistair’s guards over the head with a dining chair. Fitz grabbed her hand and pulled her out the door and to the elevator. Luke was crying, and Fitz tried to calm him. Jemma was pushing the button for the elevator doors to close.
It happened so fast. The doors were closing when a hand grabbed Jemma by a fistful of her hair and pulled her out of the elevator. The doors continued to close. Fitz pressed the button hurriedly to open the doors, but she had pushed the button to the ground floor, and the elevator was going down. He picked up the manila envelope that had fallen in the scuffle, the custody papers. But- Jemma. He had to get to Jemma. He reached the lobby. Daisy was waiting there, with May. They had been on backup.

“Where’s Jemma-”

“He has her,” Fitz panted hurriedly. “Luke- it’s Quake. She’s gonna protect you from Alistair. Okay?” He handed Daisy the toddler and hurried back to the elevator, hitting the button on the eighteenth floor. As he was on his way up, an alarm blared. The elevator stopped suddenly.

Fitz remembered the stairwell. The alarm will sound. The alarm deactivated the elevator. He called May.

“They- stairwell- roof?”

“Coulson said that surveillance shows a helicopter just started on the roof,” May said.

“Is Jemma-”

“I don’t know,” May said. “He can’t see that close. Daisy is disabling the alarm system right now. I’ll update you.” The line was silent. “The helicopter took off. Boston PD has eyes on it. They’re deploying a SWAT helicopter to intercept peacefully. Everyone has eyes on that helicopter, Fitz.” She was silent. “They’re landing at the international airport,” She updated. “The elevators need to be manually reset in the basement. Mack is down there now. Ten minutes.” Five silent minutes. May returned to the line, “She wasn’t on the helicopter.”

“Where is she?” Fitz asked.

“We don’t know. Local law enforcement is going to comb the building for her- we’ll find her Fitz. They’re setting up roadblocks. We’ll find her.” May hung up. A few moments later, the elevator turned back on and reached the top. Fitz searched the penthouse and the roof, but he realized she could have just as quickly gone downstairs. Fitz cursed himself for being such an idiot if he hadn’t suggested she went to the roof-
He went downstairs, dazed. Four hours later, at the FBI office in Chelsea, Fitz was told his wife was officially a missing person. Alistair’s name and face were plastered on every television screen on the East Coast. They promised to find her. Fitz excused himself to the bathroom.

He splashed his face with water and looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes had been rimmed red. Was he crying? Probably. He looked so lost. His hair was a mess from nervously running his hands through it.

He was an idiot.

He was an idiot.

He knew it was dangerous.

Talbot was right.

The advent of having a sister, a nephew, his desire to help his family- it cost him his wife and unborn daughter.

He was an idiot.

He looked at his face in the mirror, his eyes narrowed, and with all the rage, he punched the glass mirror. Pain shot up his arm. Blood gushed from the glass cuts in his hand. He hit the mirror again. He felt his knuckles crackle from the glass and bone impacting. The adrenaline and numbness quickly faded. The pain became so severe that he doubled over into the sink. The door burst open and Daisy entered. Coulson, May, Mack, and Elena were on her heels. Fitz felt embarrassed they heard his outburst, he felt ashamed for having a violent outburst.

Daisy wrapped her arms around him carefully, to be careful of his hand, and rubbed his back, “We’ll find her,” she promised.

“We’ll find her,” Coulson agreed.

“You two always find a way to make it work,” Mack said. “No need to freak out this early, Turbo.”
“My fault,” Fitz mumbled.

“It’s Alistair’s fault,” May said. “Don’t blame yourself. He takes advantage of people.”

“He wants the baby’s blood,” Fitz said. “For a ritual. What if they-”

“Not happening,” Daisy said. “Now come on, you need to see a doctor, get some rest.”

**Day One Hundred and Eighteen**

Jemma woke up on a soft surface. She was lying on her side, hair plastered to her face. There was a pool of dribble under her mouth, her mouth itself was dry and had a bad taste, her head throbbed, she felt both nausea and hunger. The room seemed to be rocking. Her mind felt clouded. She remembered going with Fitz to see Alistair. Alistair creeped her out to the point she felt like her safety was in danger, so she knocked him out with a glass platter. Fitz got Luke. She was by the elevator when someone grabbed her hair from behind and pulled her out. The elevator doors closed, she remembered the look of horror on Fitz’s face. She threw a decent elbow into the ribs of her assailant. Something of his cracked, but two more grabbed her, having been somewhere on the top floor. She kicked and screamed, and something sharp pressed into her neck. She remembered something cold inside of her, and everything went dark. She pressed her hand to her abdomen. She hoped the baby was okay.

So Alistair’s people sedated her and brought her here. Where exactly was “here?”

Jemma rolled over and sat up, looking around the room. It was well furnished. A beige settee with brown and silver pillows sat beside a bookshelf on one side. She had two nightstands on either side of the bed, a closet, and two doors. The walls and ceiling were a combination of white wallpaper and mahogany. All of the woodwork was mahogany. The doors were mahogany. The first entry was locked. The second lead to a bathroom. Small light brown tiles covered the floor, walls, and ceiling. There was a mahogany vanity, jacuzzi tub, walk-in shower with a glass enclosure, and toilet. There was also a window, covered with white drapes. Jemma rushed over to the window, to see where she was. Her hopes deflated when she saw outside the window.

There was nothing for miles but the turning dark sea.

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**Chapter End Notes**
What do you guys think of that?

As always, I love your feedback. I adore your comments, and when you kudos this story I appreciate your response that way as well.

The next chapter is going to be Forty Weeks: Behind The Scenes where I explain some of my writing decisions, give you some of my research links, and also talk about my previous drafts.

Also, I have an anecdote that I think you'll all enjoy. I do a lot of writing and updating at the public library because of the free internet. While I published this chapter, the man sitting next to me was probably seventy or eighty years old and was reading Harry Potter Fanfiction on fanfiction.net. Since I saw the name of the story in his tab bar, I looked it up. It's Drarry Fanfiction (Harry Potter/Draco Malfoy). I do not judge you, you geriatric Drarry shipper. Anyway, I thought it was funny.
Behind The Screen: An Extended Author's Note

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the wait. I've been busy with finals as well as the fact that I've been asked to interview by a medical school I applied to, so I have been busy focusing on other things. Thank you for your patience, and to all of you who have given feedback.

This chapter is a bit of a behind-the-scenes look at Forty Weeks whereby I discuss some of my inspiration and give research links and the likes. Some of the readers requested the concept of "dream casts" as well as some other information. I am working on the next chapter of actual plot, and I will try to publish it by this weekend, but no promises.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Title

For those of you who didn’t know, the reason this is called Forty Weeks is that that is how long the average pregnancy lasts, and the focus of this story is Jemma’s first pregnancy.

Chapter One: Prologue (-9 Weeks)

In my timeline, this chapter takes place the second week of April in 2018.

This chapter was my attempt to set up where all the characters end up post-season five. I desired to make it as ambiguous as possible what happened in season five because I had no idea and I didn’t want to be incredibly wrong.

I got inspiration for Forty Weeks publishing another piece of Agents of Shield Fanfiction that I never posted and eventually abandoned called Down The Rabbit Hole. It was supposed to be a post-season-four time travel story. In it, Jemma learned she was pregnant while having time traveled back to season one (I was ecstatic about time travel in season five because I’ve always wanted to write a story where Jemma time-travels to the first season and now I might have a canon method of transportation instead of making something up. It’s a monolith, go figure, my idea for that plot started the first time she was sucked in.).

I realized that I wanted to write a story about Fitz and Simmons going through the pregnancy of their first child in the aftermath of season four and I started a draft for the plot to cope with the
angst that was the Framework pod. Once the fact that season five would be in space was revealed, I decided I would instead rewrite that plot post-season five rather than make it an AU. So that’s how the Forty Weeks that you’ve all been reading came to be.

Chapter Two: Week 1

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from June 11th to June 12th, 2018.

I opened the story with Jemma’s menstruation because pregnancy is not measured by how long from when there was fertilization, but actually from which day the mother’s last cycle ended, which means the day she menstruates before getting pregnant.

The house I placed them in I based off of some I found on Zillow. I knew I wanted them to have a colonial-style with a sunroom, so I searched that, and I liked one on Selby Place. It wasn’t an exact copy of the home in my head, but it lets you get a feel for the area. You can find the listing HERE.

Of course, I had some other plans for the original furnishings and how the entire house looked. For my reference and your enjoyment, I made a home on homestyler. THIS is the first floor, and THIS is the second floor. I've never shared links to floorplans on homestyler before, so I'm not exactly sure whether or not it's going to work, I apologize if it doesn't.

Ariel’s character existed in my first draft of Forty Weeks as Fitz’s psychologist to help him cope with the trauma of the Framework. In the earliest versions, her name was Rebecca Herschel, and she wasn’t Fitz’s half-sister, just his psychologist. Alistair had a different way to get information on Fitz. When I changed the timeline and the plot, I had to make Ariel become Fitz’s sister for it all to make sense. I turned her surname to McAllister because it means “child of Alistair” and her given name to Ariel because it means “lion of God” and that had a lot of relevance to her connection to Fitz and her role in the story. What does Ariel look like? She’s supposed to be of Indian/Pakistani descent, and in my mind, she’s a tall and lanky woman with dark hair and blue eyes. However, there are some actresses I think could be possibly cast to be her.

1. Jameela Jamil
2. Necar Zadegan
3. Aishwarya Rai

Personally, I do think Aishwarya Rai looks the most like my image of Ariel, but they all have things about them that fit her character.

Chapter Three: Week 2
In my timeline, this chapter takes place from June 19th to June 23rd, 2018.

I miss the ties Jemma wore in season one, so THIS is the Monkey Tie she wore this chapter.

Their date was to Byrd and Baldwin Bros because I searched “steakhouse in Norfolk” in Google maps and that was my favorite response. I downloaded a PDF of the menu to plan their meal.

I used THIS article from The Telegraph to explain why Oysters were aphrodisiacs:

It took me about two days to write the sex scene, but I knew I wanted to include it because it was the night she got pregnant.

Chapter Four: Week Three

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from June 26th to June 20th, 2018.

I gave Jemma a brother because in the Marvel-616 universe she has siblings and I wanted to stay true to that. Jemma’s family has the women’s given names start with “J” and the men’s start with “M.”

I selected Blair Castle because I wanted for them to be married in the highlands, and why not a castle? You can check out the website HERE.

Chapter Five: Week Four

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from July 1st to June 4th, 2018.

Chapter Six: Week Five

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from July 8th to July 14th, 2018.
Chapter Seven: Week Six

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from July 15th to July 21st, 2018.

Dr. Polga was their OB/GYN in my first draft of *Forty Weeks*, she had a more substantial role and a subplot before, but I don’t feel sorry for reducing her.

Chapter Eight: Week Seven

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from July 25th to July 28th, 2018.

Any of the science in this chapter was directly from my lecture notes.

Chapter Nine: Week Eight

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from July 30th to August 2nd, 2018.

I wrote the wedding chapter a few months before I published the section because it was part of my original *Forty Weeks* draft. I had to do some edits for changes I made, but it was probably the only part of my initial draft that stayed mostly whole as it endured the process of becoming my published version.

The Japanese Macaque “Hit-Monkey” I had Hunter and Bobbi have is an actual character in *Marvel*. The Inhuman Kamala that Daisy was talking about is supposed to be *Kamala Khan*. Her Ms. Marvel comic run is fantastic, and they’ve had Coulson and Jemma in them. She’s one of my favorite Marvel characters, and I knew I wanted to include her in some way.

*This* is the dress that Ariel wore to the party the night before the wedding.

*Jemma’s wedding dress*

*Bridesmaid’s dress* (Daisy and Elena):
Fitz and the groomsmen wear the MacDougall tartan because that’s Fitz’s mother’s clan and there isn’t a “Fitz” clan because “Fitz” is a component of a name, not a name itself.

And also, this is Tyranno, Luke’s dinosaur plushie:

Chapter Ten: Week Nine

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from August 6th to August 12th, 2018.

I selected the storage facility in Pennsylvania because of its location to Imhotep Charter School.

Chapter Eleven: Week Ten

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from August 13th to August 19th, 2018.

Chapter Twelve: Week Eleven

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from August 22nd to August 23rd, 2018.

I thought the Framework was useful before AIDA, and the Darkhold manipulated it, but I could still imagine applications from the technology, which is why I felt if Fitz developed augmented reality instead of virtual fact, it would eliminate the creep factor of the Framework and still have useful applications.

Chapter Thirteen: Week Twelve

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from August 28th to September 2nd, 2018.

I didn’t know how to write the first day from the perspective of Jemma and Fitz, so I decided to use the view of a student. Rebecca Herschel was a name in my first draft, and I decided to recycle it for
the student character. One exciting thing that I might mention is all of the “successful” academy students are inspired by and named after characters in the original Marvel-616 comics. Another thing about Academy is that the characters aren’t a bunch of twenty-somethings like they used to be. I like the idea that the people who want to join SHIELD may be well into adulthood.

Rebecca Herschel is an original character. She’s supposed to be a way for the reader to have a student’s perspective of SHIELD Academy. Although I do want her to be Jewish because I feel like for a show like Agents of SHIELD that has so many plotlines involving Nazis, there aren’t enough Jewish characters. Possibly cast: Emmy Rossum

Mary Alice Anders was featured in Spider-Man Unlimited #3 as a former girlfriend of Otto Octavius. She was an atomic physicist in the comics. Possibly cast: Jessika Van

Rozalyn Backus was a criminal psychologist that worked in the vault, where all the supervillains went. She was featured in Spider-Man Breakout #1. Possibly cast: Michelle Borth.

Joan “Nails” Eaton was an elite SHIELD agent featured in Captain America Annual #2000. Possibly cast: Ronda Rousey

Hector Espejo is the “king of hackers” and was featured in What If: Captain America #1 and What If: Thor #1. Possibly cast: Manolo Cardona

Sarah Garza was a tech-ops agent in SHIELD who had latent powers due to her inhuman physiology. She was featured in Secret Avengers Vol 2 #10. Possibly cast: Dania Ramirez

Roger “Buddy” Juniper was a SHIELD agent who helped Hercules (as in, son of Zeus Hercules). He was featured in Hercules: Hear of Chaos #2. Possibly cast: Charlie Day

Ashley Kafka was the founder of the Ravencroft Institute for criminally insane villains. She was featured in The Spectacular Spider-Man #178. Possibly cast: Odette Annable

Fiona McMurdo was an engineer who fell in love with a displaced time traveler in Rampage Vol 2 #43. Possibly cast: Erin Richards

Jake Oh worked with War Machine, was a former SHIELD agent, and military contractor with Eaglestar International. He was featured in Agents of Atlas #1. Possibly cast: Lee Byung-Hun

James Power was a physicist from Columbia University who gave all of his children superpowers accidentally in a Honey, I Shrunk The Kids sort of way. He was featured in Power Pack #1. Possibly cast: Nic Bishop

Kavita Rao was a mutant geneticist and worked with the X-Men and SWORD and notably developed the mutant cure “hope” in the comics. Her first appearance was Astonishing X-Men Volume 3 #1, and since then she has been a recurring X-Men character. Possibly cast: Freida Pinto

Narda Ravanna was a chemist and cosmetics designer who became a villain because apparently, the world of designer cosmetics is cutthroat. She was featured in Peter Parker: The Spectacular Spider-Man #43. Possibly cast: Rose McIver

Austin Salmi leads the SHIELD team Viper Squad in Avengers A.I. #4. Possibly cast: Johnny Simmons

Heather Sante was a SHIELD agent who was a specialist on time paradoxes and alternate realities.
She was featured in *Captain Marvel Vol 6 #1*. Possibly cast: **Felicia Day**

**Grady Scraps** worked at Horizon Labs in *Amazing Spider-Man #648*. Possibly cast: **Adam Conover**

**Riri Williams** became “Ironheart” in the comics, a prodigal engineer from Chicago who reverse-engineered Tony Stark’s Iron Man suits. She was first featured in *Invincible Iron Man Vol 2 #7* and was in other Iron Man comics as well as *Secret Empire*, *Civil War II*, and *Marvel Legacy Vol 1*. Possibly cast: **Skai Jackson**

Professor Sally Webber was referenced in season one, episode nine as the girl that pranked Fitz and Simmons their first year at Academy and made them believe she was telekinetic. Possibly cast: **Heather Matarazzo**.

**Chapter Fourteen: Week Thirteen**

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from September 6th to September 9th, 2018.

**Chapter Fifteen: Week Fourteen**

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from September 10th to September 14th, 2018.

The “pillars of creation” on Jemma’s locket are a reference to this fairly famous image of stars being formed:

I thought that a small holographic locket was the innovative but nostalgic gift that Fitz would give to Jemma, and something he could engineer.

Ariel’s apartment I also drew inspiration on the location by browsing around on Zillow. As for the reveal that she was Fitz’s sister, most of the evidence was brought up in the comment section for that chapter, but I tried to highlight parallels between Ariel and Fitz throughout the story for the first third, so the twist was foreshadowed enough. The timeline for Ariel’s story is that Dan died in November of 2012. Luke was born May 4, 2013. That would have been a year after the events of *The Avengers* and the Battle of New York. Ariel spent that summer in a mental health facility, leaving the facility just a bit before the pilot episode of *Agents of SHIELD*, which occurred in early September of 2013. SHIELD fell in January of 2014 considering the in-universe events of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. The events of the timeline of the show are fuzzy, but Ariel spent the next three and a half years searching for Fitz for Alistair.

**Chapter Sixteen: Week Fifteen**
In my timeline, this chapter takes place from September 17th to September 23rd, 2018.

I made an error with Daisy’s dialogue, she said Alistair purchased his penthouse “three and a half” years ago, but it should have been “four and a half.” This error is due to the fact the story takes place in 2018, and I keep doing all my math with 2017 as the year. Of course, it doesn’t subtract from the substance of the chapter.

I included two more SHIELD Academy students in this chapter. Per the usual, both were based on actual characters in the comics.

Steven Tyler was a member of a SHIELD surveillance team who was disintegrated by celestials. He was featured in *Eternals #6*. Possibly cast: George Blagden

Andrea Hope was a SHIELD researcher who worked on the Helicarrier and the *Iliad*, she applied several times to get into the operations program but was continuously overlooked. She was featured in *Deathlok Vol 5 #1*. Possibly cast: Summer Bishil

The drone that saved Andrea was a next-generation drone based on DWARF technology designed by Fitz. If you’re going to have cadets skydive, you need some safety provisions. The reason they’re called “Great Eagles” is that the Great Eagles always came to the rescue in Tolkien's works and when I think of dwarves, I think of Tolkien.

The place the cadets landed was the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, just outside of Strong City, Kansas. Most of the cadets went to Strong City, but because Rebecca was one of the last it was an equal distance from her either way. When I was looking in the area on Google Maps for something that I could include to make the plot more interesting, I saw this grocery store which was nowhere. It was along the 177, and there was nothing around it. So I, of course, had to include it and make up an explanation.

The bike that Rebecca was given was a 1967 Honda SS50 which was convertible between being a moped and motorcycle. The difference between a moped and a motorcycle is a moped is a motorized bicycle and needs to be pedaled, while a motorcycle has a combustion engine. Rebecca doesn’t know this, so she keeps calling it a “moped” when she’s using it as a motorcycle.

My favorite thing about Daisy calling Coulson “ACDC” is that she could have said “Academy Communications Director Coulson” but instead it was “Academy Director Coulson.” The AC/DC is, of course, an allusion to when she called him “AC” as short for “Agent Coulson” In season one. I was always upset she never called him “DC” when he became the director because it was the best way to continue that joke.
FPC Alderson or Federal Prison Camp Alderson is a low-security federal penitentiary in West Virginia. It made the most sense to me that Ariel was sent there.

Chapter Seventeen: Week Sixteen

In my timeline, this chapter takes place from September 25th to September 29th, 2018.

It was never really explained, but in the scene where Jemma and Fitz are taken to Alistair’s apartment, there are scenes where the team interacts and surveils them. When Fitz and Jemma sit on the bench, the woman with the newspaper is May in disguise, and the tapping Jemma does morse code to pass along a message in case they were being watched. The message spells out “CAR NO FOLLOW” as a way for Jemma to tell May the message of transport and whether or not May should tail them. Later, the couple arguing on the street are Mack and Elena who were covering that entrance. Daisy and Coulson were covering different entries, which is why they weren’t seen.

From what we know about Alistair, the only things that are firm about his characterization was that he was an abusive alcoholic and a raging misogynist. I decided to make him oppose Fitz’s personality in a lot of ways. He’s very haughty and thinks himself above people, something I think makes sense if he cares so much about wealth.

Jemma lied about Fitz being infected with the chitauri virus. She thought it was the best way to protect him, and it was, but she inadvertently put herself and Fitz at risk.

Jemma’s kidnapping was the hardest thing for me to write because I wasn’t sure exactly how it was going to happen or how it would impact the plot. I eventually decided to split up the couple for three crucial reasons. Reason one is I want to have some conflict to prolong the resolution since this is week sixteen and I have to get the plot to last until week forty. Reason two is I want to have more time to develop Ariel, Luke, Alistair, Jemma and Fitz with the context of this conflict. You’ll see in upcoming chapters what I mean by that, but I want to make it possible I can give each member of this family time to know more about each other and this legacy that Alistair likes to talk about. Reason three is a surprise, but I hope to subvert the traditional “Fitz or Simmons is in danger, and the other one has to save them” plotline we see on the show a lot.

Jemma woke up on a yacht. I did do some research on luxury yachts, and Alistair’s is a fairly standard three-story multi-bedroom yacht. It probably cost ten million dollars, which sheds some light on how Alistair has proliferated in his criminal enterprises.
The Future

I suppose I don’t exactly want to spoil what I have planned, but I will give some insight on what to expect.

First of all, expect some puzzles. As the story progresses and more is learned about Alistair’s motives, there’s going to be some things that have to be solved. Whether it be morse code patterns, ciphers, or historical references. I love puzzles, and I’m excited to integrate them into the plot of *Forty Weeks*. Second of all, expect some familiar faces. Bobbi and Hunter have made a cameo, but there may be various characters from the show (and other Marvel properties) that may make an appearance. And third of all, expect for Fitz and Jemma to be separate for several chapters. Fitz now has to care for Luke as Ariel is still in prison. Jemma might look like she’s in danger, but her time with Alistair Fitz will be essential. Fitz has been resistant to understanding his father’s family, but Jemma might be more curious.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, I hope that you appreciated this or at least found some part of it interesting. Thank you again for reading, and I always appreciate your feedback.
Week 17

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your patience after I left the last chapter hanging and then published the
Behind The Screen chapter. I'm grateful for all of your interest in this.

This chapter isn't necessarily disturbing, but there are some references to things like
death and torture, although I don't consider them particularly graphic. However, I
understand some people might be more sensitive to things like that, so that's why
there's a content warning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Seventeen

Day One Hundred and Twenty

Fitz’s Saturday had been eventful. The appointment at Massachusetts General Hospital resulted in
his hand having eight pieces of glass removed from it, nineteen stitches, and a cast as he had
fractured his knuckles. He could take it off in six weeks. He felt quite embarrassed but grateful that
the team was always with him. It seemed they had set up a system of rounds where one of them
would spend two hours with him, and then they would switch out with someone else.

It was May who was with him when Talbot came. Talbot was curt, telling Fitz that he was
disappointed and that their actions had defied a direct order, they lied to the FBI about the
officiality of this case, and they put lives at risk. Fitz took these criticisms and expected some form
of disciplinary action. Fitz agreed. The worst had already come to pass. His father had Jemma.

The third significant activity of Fitz’s day was signing the custody papers for Luke McAllister. A
social worker came to supervise Luke while the documents were verified. Fitz understood the
team’s concern about him taking care of his sister’s son, especially after what had happened.
However, Fitz wasn’t going to retreat when it came to his family. He signed the custody papers.
He was the legal guardian of Luke McAllister.

Luke was much more reserved when Ariel wasn’t around. He liked talking to Daisy and Elena,
probably because he had the best relationships with women. From what Fitz knew about his
father’s treatment of the five-year-old, the women in Luke’s life were probably kinder to him. He
wasn’t upset, not being spoken to gave Fitz time to process. Beyond the self-deprecation that was
floating around in his head, Fitz also struggled with the anxiety. Where was Jemma? He had
different versions of her. Possible scenarios spun through his head like old cinema reels.

One version of Jemma was dead. It was the version he liked the least. He imagined Alistair was much more violent in his extraction of their daughter’s blood, and his wife lay in an unmarked grave somewhere, her eyes blank and expressionless. The second version was her in a sterile room, like the ones he had put inhumans in as The Doctor. She was wearing a hospital gown and handcuffed to her bed. Why was she in a hospital? Perhaps the blood extraction was a lot less violent. Maybe his father just wanted her to sit in bed for another ten or fifteen weeks before he stimulated birth at an early enough date to perform whatever ritual he needed. She was always too cold. There were versions of Jemma locked in dark cellars. Crying. Some versions were being moved around, in a car or a plane, some guard with a large gun keeping her docile. Perhaps she was drugged. Some versions of Jemma were fanciful. She had overcome her guards, her abductors. She was fighting her way home, outsmarting everyone. Each version of Jemma existed in his mind simultaneously. He supposed each version was real until he knew it wasn’t. Like Schrodinger’s cat. He didn’t know where his wife was until he found her.

“Do you need help?” Daisy asked the next morning on the plane home. They took Zephyr Three from Boston to Norfolk.

“In general?” Fitz asked.


“Do you?”

“Well, no, but it could be easier if you had someone else, especially because of your hand.”

“This is my problem,” Fitz said. “You don’t have to feel like you need to help.”

“I don’t, Fitz, I want to help. You’re my friend, and I don’t want you to be alone right now.”

“Coulson and May will keep an eye on me. You have the duties of a superhero, Daisy.”

“Yeah,” Daisy sighed. “Sure. But I also have the duties of a friend. If you need me, call me, Fitz. I’m here for you.”
“Thank you,” Fitz said. “When we land I was going to take Luke shopping.”

“Good idea, plenty of sales for Columbus Day,” Daisy said.

“I wasn’t thinking about it regarding celebrating Columbus,” Fitz said. “I’m not American.”

“Fair enough. I don’t celebrate the guy either. Something about murder, raping and pillaging island natives rubs me the wrong way,” Daisy joked. Fitz smiled weakly.

“You know what?” Fitz asked. “Maybe you could help me go shopping.”

Fitz and Jemma’s car was still sitting in parking at the base. Fitz realized he didn’t have a car seat. He didn’t have a lot of things needed for a kid Luke’s age. They had a guest room with an uncovered mattress, maybe if Fitz could buy some things- he had a lot of things to buy. He went to Target, with Luke and Daisy in the backseat. Luke sat on Daisy’s lap and talked about different kinds of dinosaurs.

“Most people think dinosaurs were really big, but a lot weren’t, it’s just really big bones are easier to find, so we know more about the big dinosaurs. Carnivores had hollow bones, like birds.”

“Was that so they could run fast?” Daisy asked.


At Target, Daisy pushed Luke in one of the large plastic carts and talked to him while Fitz was figuring out what he would need. Would Luke need diapers? Was the guest bed low enough for him? Would he have to put child locks on everything? He asked Luke these questions, and Luke responded politely. He could use the bathroom by himself. He could probably get into the bed. He didn’t know what a child lock was and was fewer inquisitive enough that Fitz bought some. He also got a few sets of sheets, the ones with themes. He found dinosaur ones, which he considered a win. Additionally, he got a plaid set, a Power Rangers set, an airplane set, and two Star Wars sets. Luke picked out a medium-firm pillow as well. The booster seat was adjustable for when Luke got older. Fitz realized a lot of the toys and clothes that Ariel had bought for Luke had gone into storage. He could find those. He also wanted to let Luke select a few toys and clothes he liked. Fitz remembered his father had an expectation for what a child would wear, and that Luke probably wanted fewer button-ups and more graphic tees.
“Did you know that Tyranno can’t chew?” Luke asked Daisy.

“Why is that?” Daisy asked.

“Because his teeth are just for biting. Not for chewing. So he swallows the meat,” Luke said.

Daisy pursed her lips and began to giggle. Fitz frowned at her. He was both relieved and guilty that this shopping trip was keeping his mind from Jemma. SHIELD and the FBI were looking for her. He had to have some faith.

After they checked out, Fitz assembled Luke’s new booster seat while they were still in the Target parking lot. Considering his skill in engineering, he did so quite quickly. He drove, with Daisy still in the backseat with Luke, to his and Jemma’s home. It was strange how everything looked the same, despite the fact that an essential piece had been cut from it. Jemma was gone, but the home seemed like everything was ordinary. Daisy declared she would make lunch, so Fitz had to show Luke to his room. It was at the end of the hall. The mattress was in a low bed in the corner. There was an old armoire with peeling yellow and blue paint. Fitz thought that it used to have sunflowers and the sky on it. He would have to figure out what happened to Ariel’s belongings for Luke so he could put more clothes in it. Luke helped him decorate the bed with the dinosaur sheets.

“What happened to your hand, Mr. Fitz?” Luke asked politely.

“Oh, um, I hit it on something, and it got hurt bad,” Fitz said.


“Me too,” Fitz agreed. “So, do you know who I am?”

“You’re Mr. Fitz. You're friends with Miss Daisy, and you got married to Mrs. Fitz. Mummy called her Miss Jemma.”

“She’s a Doctor, actually,” Fitz said. “I’m your Uncle, Luke. Do you know what that means?”
“You’re Mummy’s brother?” Luke asked. “Was grandfather your father too?”

“He was,” Fitz said. “You can call me Mr. Fitz if you want to. What did you call your grandfather?”

“Grandpa Al,” Luke said. “Because his first name is Alistair Fitz. Like your first name.”

“Well, Fitz is my last name.”

“What’s your first name?”

“Leopold,” Fitz said. Luke squinted and tried not to giggle. It was a pretty funny name. “My parents called me ‘Leo’ but I just let family call me that. Since you’re family, you can call me ‘Uncle Leo’ if you want.”


“I’m fine calling you ‘Luke,’ are you okay with that?”


“Aunt Jemma,” Fitz said.

“Okay,” Luke said. He picked up one of the barbies he had picked out at Target and sat her down on his bedside table, “What happened to Aunt Jemma, Uncle Leo?”

Fitz’s chest constricted, “She got taken,” Fitz said. “By your grandfather.”

“Like… on vacation?” Luke asked. “Grandpa took me on vacation a lot on his boat.”

“His boat?” Fitz asked, perking up. They were close enough to the Boston Marina that Alistair
could have gotten her on a boat before the roadblocks were set up.

“I didn’t like it. I had to stay in my room, and there were fireworks sometimes,” Luke said. “Does Aunt Jemma not like her vacation?”

“No, Luke, she hates it,” Fitz said. “Which is why I want to find her and bring her home.”

“LUNCH!” Daisy called from downstairs.

“Miss Daisy is cool,” Luke said as he and Fitz headed downstairs.

“I agree,” Fitz said.

After lunch, in which Fitz struggled eating soup with his left hand, he and Daisy talked.

“Luke said that Alistair would take him on a boat sometimes. It’s where he could have taken Jemma,” Fitz said to Daisy.

“It’s a lead,” Daisy agreed. “What are you doing with the rest of your day?”

“I was going to drive Luke to FPC Alderson,” Fitz said. “To see his mum.”

“Can I come with?” Daisy asked.

“I’ll be okay-”

“Maybe I won’t be,” Daisy said. “Jemma’s remarkable, but I’m worried about her and the baby. And with my anxiety- I can’t even imagine yours.”

“You can’t move in,” Fitz told her. “You have a job-”
“I’ll head back to DC tonight, I promise. I’ve really wanted to see Ariel for a while anyway.”

Fitz didn’t have the heart to deny her. She was making it easier for him, which he appreciated. After lunch, they all climbed into the car once more. Luke quickly fell asleep for a post-lunch nap.

“How are you going to find Jemma?” Daisy asked. “Like, what’s our game plan to get Jemma and my Goddaughter back?”

“We never announced who we would- well, of course, it's going to be you, but Jemma wanted to be ceremonial about it,” Fitz sighed. “Alistair is taking her somewhere. Our best bet is figuring out where they’re headed. Which means understanding his motivations.”

“You besides being a dick?” Daisy asked.

“Daisy! There’s a child in the backseat!”

“He’s asleep,” She shrugged. Fitz sighed and rolled his eyes. Since Daisy was driving, he had the opportunity to look out the window.

“Don’t get pouty,” Daisy said. “You’re getting her back. With all the things that have kept you apart? This is a piece of cake.”

“I know,” Fitz said. “I just don’t think I’m going to like getting into Alistair’s head and our family’s past. But that’s probably my best shot at finding Jemma.”

The drive to FPC Alderson was over four hours, which meant they had to stop three times for Luke to pee after his nap ended. Small children have small bladders, they learned quite well. Luke liked more than Dinosaurs. Daisy could ask him what specific types of trees were and he knew about half of them. Luke explained to Daisy that he wanted to read. Fitz predicted Alistair’s chagrin; if he remembered anything about his father, he didn’t respect bookishness. They played I Spy. It was different from Fitz’s typical car ride activities. Either he would talk to Jemma, listen to podcasts, or listen to audiobooks. Maybe he could get some audiobooks for Luke. Was five old enough for Harry Potter?
The prison was a low-security prison full of either women who were involved in white collar crimes or drugs. Fitz was still firm with Luke about safety in the prison.

“Wherever you go Luke, you need to be with either Daisy or me,” Fitz explained. “Prison is where adults who made mistakes and did bad things go. Even though some people here want to change after they did a bad thing, some people might still do bad things.” They had called ahead so Ariel should already be in the interrogation room. Luke held onto Daisy and Fitz’s hand as they were escorted to that place. When they reached the room, sure enough, Ariel was sitting in the chair.

“Luke!” She exclaimed as she saw her son. He ran towards her, and she dropped out of the chair, onto her knees, to wrap him in a fierce embrace. Luke pulled away.

“Why are you crying, Mummy?” Luke asked.

“Because I am so happy to see you,” Ariel said, adjusting his hair and touching his face gently. She turned to Fitz. “How did you-” she stopped her question abruptly when she saw Daisy. “Daisy? What are you doing here? Is Jemma alright?”

“We don’t know,” Fitz answered honestly.

Ariel grabbed her neck in horror. “What did our father do?” She asked.

Fitz delicately explained what happened. The meeting. His cryptic discussion of the Fitz line’s blood and its abilities. Jemma’s lie, and then her abduction as they were escaping with Luke.

“This is all my fault,” Ariel declared, distraught. “Fitz- I am so sorry- I-”

“How is it your fault?” Fitz asked. “We both agreed to be there and put ourselves at risk. It’s my fault more than it’s yours, it was my job to protect her.”

“Yes, but you wouldn’t have put yourself at risk like that if it wasn’t for me,” Ariel argued.

“You didn’t force us to be there,” Fitz said.
“Ugh, you two are pathetic,” Daisy sighed. “For God’s sake, it’s like a competition to see who can blame themselves more. Neither of you is responsible for what your father did. Alright? You both did what you thought was the best thing at the time you did it. Hindsight may be twenty-twenty, but you can’t blame yourself for what you didn’t know was going to happen. Were mistakes made? Yes. Could you have avoided what happened? Possibly. But that was then, this is now, and we need to find Jemma more than we need to assign blame. Alright?”

“You’re right,” Fitz said.

“What happened to your hand?” Ariel asked.

“I’m a little hot-headed,” Fitz said.

“Yeah, no shit,” Daisy quipped. “He punched his reflection and mirrors are sharp when broken.”

“Are you going to be okay?” Ariel asked.

“I can take it off in six weeks,” Fitz assured her. “Not my worst injury.”

“Okay,” Daisy turned to Ariel, “Ariel, honey, what do you know about your father’s boat?”

“My father has a boat?” Ariel asked. “I’m sorry, very little. He kept me from a lot of his operation. He never trusted me.”

“Do you know why he would want my blood?” Fitz asked.

“It’s iffy,” Ariel said. “I have a theory.”

“We’d love to hear it, anything,” Daisy said.

“Okay, when I met our father, he was at Harvard University for the archaeology department. He
was supposed to be a potential donor who wanted his new artifact appraised by one of the archaeology professors on staff. While his day job seems to be organizing drug-running, money laundering, and shady real estate practices, his hobby was being a collector of stuff. He only liked really niche objects. I remember the thing he was appraising was rumored to belong to some Persian dude, Jabir Ibn Hayyan?

“Mean anything to you?” Daisy asked Fitz.

“Yeah, he was an Islamic alchemist and chemist,” Fitz said. “He invented some of the most important and basic pieces of chemical equipment we still use today.”

“Yeah, anyway, that was what he did. He was always searching for some ancient manuscript or artifact. He always tried to find someone to have them evaluated for legitimacy and added to his collection. His journals might talk about why he searches for them.”

“So maybe some artifact he wants, he needs your blood to use it or find it?” Daisy suggested.

“But why the blood of specifically my patrilineal line? And why only firstborn sons?” Fitz asked.

“Beats me,” Daisy said.

“Your best shot is his records. Which he was trying to give to you. I guess he hopes if you learn what he learned, you’ll work with him or come to the same conclusion,” Ariel explained. “Does that make sense?”


“Storage facility in Norfolk,” Ariel said. “Along with most of my stuff. Jack Rabbit Self Storage. On Hampton Boulevard. It’s a ten-by-fifteen little room. Um, the keys are with my prison stuff so you’ll have to talk to the front desk. The unit number is on the key.”

The guard opened the door, “You got five minutes.”
“Mummy,” Luke turned to his mom. “When are you going out of here?”

“Not for a while sweetie,” Ariel said tearfully. “But your Uncle is going to take care of you. And he’s much nicer than Grandpa Al. Alright?”


“I’m sorry, baby,” She said. “I just wish that this could be better for you. I made a mistake, and you’re being affected. And I am very sorry.”


“Thank you,” Ariel said. She hugged him. “You’ll visit?”

“Every weekend,” Fitz promised. “And I’ll bring drawings and schoolwork and everything for you to see.”

“Thank you,” Ariel sobbed. “You’re better than I deserve.”

“Well, you can’t pick your family,” Fitz shrugged.

“I’m sorry about Jemma. I am. You’re going to find her.”

“I hope so,” Fitz said.

“You take care of yourself,” Daisy told Ariel.

“Me?” Ariel smiled. “I’ll be fine. I’ve already profiled my entire cell block.”

“Why am I not surprised?” Daisy smiled.
They picked up a pizza on the way from Alderson to Norfolk. It was past nine in the evening when
the car parked in the garage of Fitz’s home. He carried Luke out of the car and put the kid to bed.

“You know, you’re not bad at this,” Daisy said to him. She had been standing in the hall, watching
him. “You’re gonna be okay. When you need help, I’m gonna be there. We’re getting Jemma back.
Never doubt that.”

“I won’t,” Fitz promised. “You should go.”

“If you need anything Fitz, you call me. I don’t care what. A background check, fake passports,
Chipotle at three in the morning, I’ll get it.”

“Thank you,” Fitz said. Daisy hugged him tightly.

**Day One Hundred and Twenty One**

May and Coulson both told Fitz he didn’t have to show up at work, but Fitz couldn’t just sit at
home. Even if he had Luke to care for and that was probably a job in itself, Fitz needed to work
and have some semblance of a routine. He woke up at six-thirty and got dressed. At seven in the
morning, he woke Luke up and set clothes out for him. Fitz didn’t have the dexterity to cook, so he
prepared cereal, toast, and strawberries. He went back upstairs, roused Luke a second time, and
finally, the two ate downstairs. He made sure he packed up his things and a bag of things for Luke.
Coloring books, crayons, and a few toys. Luke was at least a polite child, but Fitz remembered he
was as well, and he was concerned that their manners were taught the same way.

He drove to the base and took one of the small air transport drones from the base to the Academy.
He went to his office, where Jemma’s assistant was waiting outside. Why was she here?

“Um… Hi?” Fitz asked.

“Oh, thank god, I have things you need to sign—”

“Me?” Fitz asked.
“You’re the Assistant Director of the Science Department, meaning in Director Simmons’ absence-”

“I thought you were the assistant.”

“I’m the assistant to the Director,” She sighed.

“I never had any work to do as the Assistant Director.”

“That’s because your wife was exceptionally on top of things. Look, she always planned on not giving you a large amount of work if you ever needed to become the interim Director. But I will need your signatures and your attendance in meetings with the other Directors.”

Meetings and signatures, Fitz could probably do that, “Okay. Um… Okay. Just leave everything in my basket, and I’ll get it done by the end of the day.”

“Appreciate it,” She hurried off. Fitz went into his office, where he still had the flash drive his father had given him. He opened it and looked at the digital file folders he hadn’t opened before. One folder had a series of PDFs. His father’s second, third, and fourth journals, all scanned into a digital form. The second folder consisted of a single image of a small cabin. He recognized the rolling hills of the Scottish highlands in the background. Then, Fitz’s phone buzzed that he had class in fifteen minutes. Shit, he never graded the homework. He sighed.

“Luke, we need to go downstairs,” Fitz said.

“Okay, Uncle Leo,” Luke said, packing up his crayons and putting the box in Fitz’s bag. It was one of the jumbo boxes, with sixty-four crayons. Fitz and Luke went downstairs to a classroom. The lecture halls were usually only used for the classes that consisted of many students, like the required classes of the entire SciTech department or when they got the whole class together for announcements. Fitz unlocked his classroom door, set up the small professor’s desk for Luke to sit in, and waited as his students filed in. They whispered until they entered the classroom, and were silent. Many of them looked at him with concern and the boy with confusion. At nine, Fitz started class.

“Before I begin, I want to talk about what happened this weekend. I’m sure the Academy had an official announcement, by my wife, Director Simmons, has been abducted while working on an
assignment. We didn’t know at the time that the person we were attempting to apprehend during a hostage rescue had a reason to want Jemma. SHIELD and international law enforcement are looking for her. Also, this is my nephew, Luke. Luke was the hostage we rescued. He’s going to be a new addition to our class until I get him enrolled in Kindergarten. Alright, your homework I never had a chance to grade, forgive me, but we’re moving on to the next unit. So, get out your books and get ready to take notes on some schematics.”

Day One Hundred and Twenty-Two

It was Tuesday, Jemma knew that much. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday she had little contact outside her room. At eight in the morning, noon, and six in the evening, a man brought Jemma food. Breakfast was usually scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and yogurt parfait with decaffeinated tea and a prenatal vitamin in a little cup. Lunch was often a sort of soup or stew and small meat and cucumber sandwiches with a glass of sparkling water. Dinner was the most different meal. On Saturday it was salad, garlic bread, and baked ziti. On Sunday it was pan-seared chicken, brown rice, and broccoli. Monday, she was served salmon, potatoes, and asparagus. Her dinner beverage was always a glass of milk. She knew the times she ate because she had a digital alarm clock on the left nightstand in her new room.

It was always the same man who brought her each meal. This man was tall, he wore a polyester suit, and he had gang tattoos that his outfit had mostly hidden. He was clean-shaven, in his late twenties, and curt. He resented his task of bringing her food. He was not one her main guards, those she saw glimpses of when the door opened. Her four main guards cycled on six-hour shifts. She heard them change shifts at four in the morning, ten in the morning, four in the afternoon, and ten in the evening. They never spoke to each other, but she heard them get out of a creaky chair and walk down the hall. As one set of footsteps faded, another set approached. The chair would creak again as the new guard sat down for his shift.

The small window Jemma had in the bathroom was not very useful at telling her where she was. With the weather of early fall, it was too overcast at night for her to see the stars and determine where she was. She was able to know when they were moving and when they stopped. Indeed, they were only moving for thirty-three hours after she had woken from her time of being unconscious. Sunday afternoon and all of Monday, they had been stopped a few miles away from land. Jemma couldn’t tell where based on the landmarks. But she guessed Canada, based on the sunrise and sunset times and how long they had traveled.

As she couldn’t spend all her time deducing what had happened her, she took advantage of the one entertaining thing she had in her room, books. A small bookshelf beside a leather settee was stocked with books. Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* was indeed an interesting read, despite how rampantly incorrect the science in the first chapter was, concerning its medical science. It was almost funny. Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* was fascinating and genuinely a psychological horror. *The Martian* was hilarious but gave her unpleasant memories of Maveth and the Lighthouse. *Fahrenheit 451* and *1984* she had read before, but both were pleasant to read again. It seemed the only things on that bookshelf were dystopian science fiction and trashy historical
fiction, in which all of the male leads on the cover were just wearing kilts. Had Alistair selected these for her? Or did he like to read titles such as *Never Seduce a Scot*?

What set that Tuesday apart from all the other days thus far was that she was allowed out of her room. The guard arrived at her door without a tray, “Come with me,” He said. She obeyed, eager to see more of her watery prison. The yacht she assumed she was entrapped on had mahogany paneling and beautiful leather furniture. They headed up the stairs, and the man brought Jemma out onto the deck of the yacht, where there was a partially-enclosed alfresco dining area. Alistair was sitting at the table, two plates of breakfast were at the table as well. One before him, and one to the side of him. He was looking at the ocean.

“Sir,” The guard said gruffly.

“Ah, Jemma, my dear. I apologize for the nature of your stay here, but you’ll understand in time, I assure you,” Alistair said. “Come, sit.”

Jemma sat down in front of the second serving of breakfast. She ate quickly.

“We aren’t starving you, I hope?” Alistair asked.

“I’m always hungry,” Jemma admitted, her cheeks puffed with egg.

“Well, we’ll rectify that. I hadn’t had time to contact this boat and tell them you are a guest. They’ve unfortunately been a bit militant.”

“Are you sure you didn’t want to get back at me for clocking you with a glass platter?” Jemma asked.

“You were scared. I understand that women can be irrational creatures,” Alistair said, touching the stitches on his forehead gingerly.

“Your doctor did a terrible job. It’s gonna scar,” Jemma said before taking a long swig from a glass of orange juice.
“You don’t seem very nervous considering the circumstances,” Alistair said. “Not that I want you to be uneasy, but I assumed more hysteria from you.”

“Please,” Jemma laughed. “Of times I’ve been kidnapped or held against my will, this doesn’t make the top ten.” She was slightly concerned, with Alistair’s desire for her child’s blood, the fact she was not carrying a son, and the fact that she had no plan to escape at the moment.

“I hope your stay here isn’t unpleasant,” Alistair said. “If we cooperate with each other, I see no reason why you have to spend your days in that room. You can eat all you want whenever you want, use the jacuzzi, the gym, spend your days out on the deck, watch movies in the salon. That’s appealing, isn’t it? I’m having your room’s closet stocked as we speak, so you can change out of that thing you’ve been wearing for the last few days. I want you to feel comfortable and safe here because you are safe. As is your child. I have no plans to remove your son from you unnaturally. Once he is born, and I have what I need, you and he can go back to Leo.”

“Why do you need his blood?” Jemma asked. She meant Fitz, but she knew the way she said it helped Alistair believe the baby was a boy.

“It’s a long story,” Alistair said.

“I’m due in March,” Jemma said. “We have time.”

“Perhaps. Does that mean you’re going to be cooperative?”

“One condition,” Jemma said. “And you shouldn’t take my requests lightly; there’s a reason I’ve survived this long despite all the mortal peril of my job. I want to contact my husband and tell him I’m safe. I want to make a video, and I want you to find a way to get it to him. If Fitz knows I’m safe, he may take it easy on you.”

“I’m his father,” Alistair said, affronted by Jemma’s suggestion.

“You aren’t exactly in his good graces,” Jemma said. “You kidnapped his wife. He chose me. He was assigned to you.”

“I see your point. I had hoped I could repair Leo’s childhood anxieties I contributed to and our relationship.”
“Pro tip,” Jemma said. “When you’re trying to get along with someone, don’t kidnap their pregnant wife.” She took another sip of her tea. “Just a suggestion.”

“Does Fitz like your cheek?” Alistair asked. “It’s tiring.”

Jemma shrugged, “He married me, didn’t he?”

“Many men would marry you for your face alone, my dear,” Alistair said. “Add your intelligence, and I don’t think any man worth his wits could resist you.”

“That was a little creepy,” Jemma advised him. “So, I want to send a message to Fitz. And I want to be sure he got it, the best way to do that is to have him reply to it. And I’ll know if it was Fitz. I know my husband better than you do. That’s my requirement. If it isn’t granted, I’m going to be an absolute nuisance.”

“I’ll grant it,” Alistair said. “But you must give me a bit of time to arrange the equipment to record the video. It’s going to be untraceable.”

“Fair enough,” Jemma said. “If I request a notebook and pens, could that be granted? Writing is a hobby of mine.”

“Yes, yes, any entertainment you fancy. Writing, reading, drawing, watching the television. Of course, for safety, you will be supervised. I have twenty guards on my staff as well as a surveillance system.”

“Of course,” Jemma nodded with pseudo-understanding. Her sass seemed to go above Alistair’s head.

“I’m glad we could be civilized,” Alistair said, standing up.

When she went back to her room, indeed the once-empty closet was now stocked with clothing. What Jemma found interesting was that these clothes were not what she would have ever selected for herself. All the clothes were incredibly colorful and feminine. There were more dresses and skirts than anything else. There was also jewelry and shoes that Jemma would have never gotten
for herself due to the sheer cost of those items. She knew the price because all the tags were still on the clothes. There was something strangely violating about having your husband’s father buy your clothing. Not just sweaters, skirts and dresses. But also undergarments, all of which were impractical and sexually appealing. Jemma hoped the sorts of clothes he bought were only due to his misogynistic perceptions that women should always look as impressive as possible. Jemma grabbed one of her four pairs of trousers, a simple white button-up blouse, and the most unattractive undergarments she could and took them to the bathroom. She locked the door and turned on the shower spray. She scrubbed her body with the provided toiletries and massaged her scalp until she felt clean. She dressed in the simple clothes. As she was doing the clasp, she realized a second unsettling thing, everything she was wearing was her size. Jemma doubted that Ariel had reported back her bra size, and hoped that all measurements were done at a distance and not while she was unconscious.

Her hair was brushed out and dried with the hairdryer. She looked like herself, at least. She remembered the last time she was somewhere against her will, they painted her face gold and made her deaf. She sat down on the settee she had grown used to. There was now a stack of legal pads and an unopened packet of black ballpoint pens waiting for her in her room. They must have come in and delivered the items while she was showering. She didn’t have time to waste; she needed to figure out what and how she was going to tell Fitz, and how she was going to escape.

**Day One Hundred and Twenty-Five**

That Friday, Fitz had arranged a meeting with the principal of the local school, Stirling Elementary. He had no idea what he was doing. Thankfully, the principal was very kind on the phone and assured him that she would help him understand all the paperwork after their meeting that Friday. Fitz roused Luke, made sure he didn’t put both socks on the same foot, fed both of them, and strapped Luke into his car seat. The drive to Stirling Elementary was only six minutes. Fitz and Luke headed into the administration office. “Um, hi, I’m here to see the Principal, Miss West?”

“Oh, hi, that’s me,” A woman walked in. She had curly blonde hair and was wearing a white peasant skirt and a blue and white t-shirt that read *Stirling Stingrays* under a navy blazer. “Geraldine West, but I like Gerrie better.”

“Leopold Fitz and this is my nephew, Luke McAllister.”

“Hello Luke,” Miss West said. “We should talk in my office, Mr. Fitz.”

“It’s Dr. Fitz, technically, but I just go by ‘Fitz.’”
“Fitz. Alright.” Gerrie West sat down behind her desk. There were inspirational posters on one wall and a large bookshelf full of Norfolk Public School Common Core manuals and child development books. “I’d like to formally welcome you to Stirling Elementary, home of the Stingrays. So, I understand that Luke needs to start kindergarten. Do you mind if I ask why he’s starting in October?”

“Yes, um, he used to live with my father in Boston, and now he lives with me after my father lost custody,” Fitz said.

“And his biological parents?” Miss West asked.

“Daddy is dead, and Mummy is in jail,” Luke explained with the cadence only a child could have when saying something like that.

“Oh,” Miss West paled.

“Luke’s father died before he was born and his mother was arrested for something unrelated. It’s a long story.”

“One you don’t have to tell,” Miss West assured him. “So you are Luke’s sole guardian?”

“And my wife, but she’s… overseas,” Fitz explained. “So I’m the one taking care of him right now.”

“Do you have any school records for the last place Luke attended?”

“Um, my father homeschooled him but I contacted his tutors, and I have the homeschooling paperwork,” Fitz reached into his bag and handed the papers to Miss West.

“He’s five?” Gerrie West asked.

“Yeah.”
“It’s just, his math tutor said that he was starting him on fractions,” Gerrie said. “And his languages tutor said he’s studying Spanish and Latin?”

“Yeah,” Luke said. “Mummy said that Daddy’s Mummy was from Puerto Rico and she wanted me to know Spanish. And then Grandpa Al wanted me to know Latin because it made all the other languages. Well, not all the languages but like, Spanish, and like, French, and also like, Italian, and also, Portuguese.”

“Can you read, Luke?” Miss West asked.


“What’s your favorite book?” Miss West asked.

“It’s a Dinosaur Encyclopedia,” Luke said. “Uncle Leo has it in his bag. Uncle Leo, show her the dinosaurs!” Luke ordered.

“Really?” Fitz asked. “Are you forgetting something?”

“Please?” Luke asked. Fitz showed Miss West the book.

“And he reads this himself?” Miss West asked. Fitz nodded. “I usually don’t believe in skipping grades; I feel like it displaces students from their emotional peers. However, I think that he’s far too advanced to be in kindergarten. I’d recommend the second grade. Did anyone in your family skip grades?”

“My sister and I both did,” Fitz nodded.

“So it’s genetic,” Miss West said. “I’ll help you through the registration paperwork, and then I’ll introduce you to one of our second-grade teachers, her class is a bit small, so I’m sure one more won’t hurt.”

“I appreciate it, Miss West.”
The paperwork was tedious, but Luke seemed to acclimate to the second-grade class of Miss Leslie. Fitz expected some ostracization from the older kids, but the seven-year-olds appeared to accept the possibility of Luke in their ranks. Fitz and Luke had lunch together at a nearby pizza restaurant, and then they headed back to the house. After Fitz pulled into the garage and Luke jumped out of the car to go upstairs and draw, Fitz went to check the mailbox. Inside were the utility bills, some advertisements from a local loan company, and one envelope with nothing written on it. There was something hard and square inside the container. Fitz opened the envelope carefully. It was a compact disk in a hard plastic case. Fitz went inside and locked up the house. He was both concerned and eager. If this were from who he thought it was it would have information about Jemma. He opened his laptop up, placed the disk in the slot, and watched as the data loaded. There was a single mp4 file. He opened it.

It was Jemma. She looked like herself. Her hair was loose around her shoulders. She was wearing a teal long-sleeved blouse with bell sleeves. Her legs were crossed in front of her, and her knee was exposed, she was wearing a skirt, it seemed. The locket he had given her for her birthday was hanging around her neck. She was looking behind the camera. She seemed to get indication they were rolling because she looked right at the camera. “Can he hear me?” She asked, looking back behind the camera. “Audio. Near that switch- Alright.” She looked back at the camera. “Dearest Husband. As you can see, I’m alive. Can I tell you where I am? Only if I wanted to put myself at risk. At the moment, I’m safe. Seriously, I am. Try not to worry too much. Here’s what I need you to know. Everyone here isn’t a danger. Alistair has promised to keep me safe. Despite the fact I whacked him. I’m safe, and the baby is safe. Nobody is going to hurt us. God knows how worried you’ve been these past few days. So, I need you to calm down. Once Alistair has what he needs, I’ll come home.” She looked down at her hands.

“Um… The baby is going to come home too. He - your father - only needs a little bit of blood and that’s it. Only a bit, barely a milliliter, that’s what he said. Nothing terrible is going to happen, I promise. You can’t blame yourself for this. After all that we’ve been through, this separation is nothing. Carry on as regularly as you can. However, if I need you, I’ll have Alistair contact you. Try not to be entirely against his attempts at communications, in case. Even though he kidnapped me, try. Um… Right now, I need you to know you’re in my thoughts. Of course, you always are, but… Perhaps I’m a little scared. Even though I am okay, I’m still going to worry about what’s happening to you. My life is better with you in it. And this roadblock isn’t a curse or divine intervention. You always blame the cosmos, but it’s not that, it’s just people. Be forgiving of the world, and everyone in it. Even yourself. Whatever happens, we’ll come home. I promise you this.

“Last time this happened, you slept for seven decades. Let’s both agree not to do anything that drastic. Can you promise me that? He - your father - isn’t going to hurt me. And he isn’t going to harm the baby. Right now, he’s just focused on this one thing. This thing about your family’s legacy, I believe he said. Probably. And he wants you to learn about it too. Try to do that. He says what you might learn will quell your worries, and I don’t want you to worry. Um…. Perhaps he’s right? Let me know, when you can, he hasn’t really been telling me everything. Of course, I haven’t been very conciliatory. And I don’t think I will be. Despite the fact that I know I am safe. Try not to be like me. Or be exactly like me, I don’t know, whatever makes it more comfortable.

“Leander, your grandfather, had a special place. Only he knew about it. Can you find it? Keeping yourself safe, of course. Even I want you to find it; it was your father’s idea. To find it, he said, is to understand what’s going on. Fitz, I know you can find it if you want to. It will help you understand, he’s said. Not just about why he’s doing this. Darling, from what he’s told me,
Leander Fitz knew so much more. Alistair has told me a little bit. Curiosity has always been a trait of mine. Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back, after all. Even if it doesn’t bring me back soon, I will come home. Safely. Soundly.” Jemma paused, swallowed, took a deep breath. “I hope you get this message. I hope you understand what I’m saying to you. I hope you’re not too worried. I hope you take care of yourself. I hope the rest of the team is doing alright. And lastly, Fitz, I hope you know that I am alive and well and every bit of me loves you dearly.” She nodded and the video cut off. Fitz started it over and watched it again.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and (hopefully) enjoying! As always, I appreciate your feedback as it lets me know that you all like what I’m doing and that you’d like to see more. Also, I enjoy talking to you all very much.

I might have to go on a mini-hiatus for the next couple of weeks. I have interviews with medical schools scheduled this month as well as school starting back up again, and since it’s my final year, I must invest my time there. I shall update when I have the time, but until then, thank you again for your interest.
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay between uploading. I have been busy, and I will continue to be busy for a while, but I'm glad that I was able to make some progress. I hope you appreciate this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Eighteen

Day One Hundred and Twenty-Seven

“So, remember what happens after I drop you off?” Fitz asked Luke who was sitting in the back seat. His backpack and lunchbox which Fitz had packed the night before sat at his feet.

“We go to Miss Leslie’s class because she’s my teacher,” Luke said. “Then you leave and I go to school.”

“And what happens when school ends?”

“I go to the cafeteria because of the after-school daycare and I stay there until you come,” Luke said.

“Good.” Fitz said. He found a parking space and got out. He opened the door for Luke. Luke unbuckled himself and climbed out. He put on his backpack and grabbed his lunchbox. Fitz offered Luke his hand and Luke took it. Fitz closed up the car and they walked to Miss Leslie’s class. Kids were going into class alone and with their parents. Luke stopped a few feet from the door. “You okay?” Fitz asked his nephew.


“Are you scared?” Fitz asked.

Fitz dropped down to one knee in front of Luke, “It’s okay if you get scared. You’re doing something new, and new things are always scary. But I promise you, you’re going to be okay. Because you’re smart, and you’re kind, and you’re going to be brave if you get scared. I know it. You’ve lived through things far scarier than school. I’ve always liked school, I think you will too. Okay?”

“Oh, well that’s very noble of you,” Jessica said. “That’s Charlotte, my youngest. Her older brother, Jonathan, is in fifth grade.” She pointed to a girl with curly blonde hair who was also talking to Miss Leslie. “I just wanted to welcome you and Luke to Stirling Elementary on behalf of the Parent Teacher Association. I also wanted to invite you to our parent night next Wednesday,” She pulled a flyer from her purse. “We’re going to talk about fundraising and charity the school
might do, and there’s going to be free cookies.”

“I’ll, uh, consider it,” Fitz said.

“I hope you do, Leo,” Jessica said.

“Uh, I prefer to go by ‘Fitz,’” He told her.

“Fitz,” Jessica smiled. “Is there a Mrs. Fitz?”

“Um, yeah, I’m married. But she kept her last name,” Fitz said.

“We’d love for her to come too,” Jessica said.

“Well, uh,” Fitz scratched his beard, “She’s um, not in town. She’s overseas-”

“Oh.” Jessica said. “Oh, well, it’s fine. You know, plenty of families here work out of the Norfolk base, I myself has a husband who’s stationed in Afghanistan right now. We’d still love to have you, Fitz.” Jessica smiled and walked down the hall. Fitz looked back at Luke who turned and smiled at him. Satisfied, Fitz headed back to the car to go to the Academy.

At Academy, he had a class first thing. After the questions were answered, the tests were handed back, and the homework was assigned, Fitz could finally recuse himself to his office. There, he had his working attempts at encoding Jemma’s message. He was confident he had figured out what she was doing, an extended anagram. The first letter of each sentence was part of the message.

CANADACOASTHEADINGSOUTHEUROPEMAYBEWILLCHARTPATHUPLOADTOLOCKETFI

The message took him looking at it once or twice. But he believed she meant “Canada coast, heading South, Europe maybe? Will chart path [and] upload to [the] locket, [you should] find access.” The “IIIIA” was actually her speaking to him outside of code. That being said, it seemed that what she was saying about her and the baby being safe was also true, based on what he had gotten back from the logistic analysis and what he knew of his wife. The things about his father and his grandfather’s special home were, then, likely also true. He had contacted Talbot, of course, but not after being sure that she wasn’t in immediate danger. He was amazed that Jemma was able to encode a message on top of actual information, but that was Jemma Simmons. He now had to
find access to the locket’s drive. It was quite ingenious of her. He had installed access to “the cloud” in the drive so they could easily upload images to the locket or from the locket. He had enough room while developing it, so he had installed a nano camera. He hadn't had a chance to show Jemma all of the bells and whistles to her locket, but she didn’t need him to, it seemed. If he was able to secure a platform, they could contact each other with images and video. He focused on the task at hand before he had to go to his next class of the day.

**Day One Hundred and Twenty-Eight**

It had taken Jemma three days to create the message to Fitz. In trying to figure out what to say, she was able to get some information from Alistair. He never directly answered her questions. He kept making denials and refusals. But it was in those refusals that he revealed more information than he probably intended. Like how much blood he needed for the ritual, and why he knew what he did, and where they were not going. The information about Leander Fitz’s secret location came from her incessant pressing about how he knew what the ritual needed and where he retrieved that information. Evidently, he did know about the location of his father’s source of information, but he refused to tell her. Jemma didn’t know what was more insulting to her intelligence, how much he disregarded her queries or how oblivious he was to the fact she was still gathering useful information from him. In a way, she was grateful for his male ignorance. It made her life easier.

They had stayed docked in Canada until her message delivered, which must have happened on Friday, because that’s when they departed. She knew they were going to go South because she had overheard a cook saying what he needed the next time they docked, and the other cook questioned if they could get those supplies in Bermuda. She had encoded that information in her message to Fitz. She asked Alistair when she should expect her husband’s reply, he said it depended. It really didn’t matter either way to Jemma. If she couldn’t get into contact with Fitz, she would find her own way. She wouldn’t feel comfortable escaping in the open ocean or even on an island, so she had to wait until they reached the next continent. She believed that was Europe. Again, the talkative guards mentioned Gibraltar, which was a Spanish city at the mouth of the Mediterranean sea.

They reached Bermuda after two days of travelling. They docked there for only a day, to get provisions and fuel. At the moment, they were heading south on the open ocean. Jemma knew they were heading south because of the direction of the sunrise and sunset. And she was even more sure of their location because of the stars. She would do yoga before going to bed, often on the deck of the ship. While holding poses, she did what she could to memorize the locations of the constellations as they sailed. Back in her room, she would notate the night sky and use it to chart their course. She would use the camera in her locket to upload them to the locket’s holodrive.

She had found the camera when she was looking to see if there was any way she could use the locket to get into contact with Fitz. To open the locket, she needed tools. She was quite satisfied with the way she managed that, she had broken the large television in the main room by jabbing flower petals into one of the vents. As it was being repaired, she swiped a few small tools from the repairman’s toolbox. The camera was clear when she pried the back off the locket, and she even
figured out how to activate it. That gave her the plan to send Fitz her location with the night sky. If this plan didn’t work, she had until they landed in Europe to come up with another one.

She barely ever saw Alistair, except for meals. He spent most of his time sequestered in the executive office, which was just off of the master bedroom. She had no idea what he was doing in there. It was the only room she wasn’t allowed to enter. She didn’t press that boundary. If she did then her plotting would be too obvious even he would start to realize something. She instead spent her time writing letters to Fitz. It was almost like when she was on Maveth. Here, she was on a luxurious yacht with everything a person would need. She wasn’t starving, searching for water, or running for her life. She had day and night regularly. And yet, she was equally lonely. Her letters were often of mundane things, her opinions on cilantro, the contrasting anxieties of Orwell, Bradbury, and Huxley in their well-known pieces of science fiction. Other times, she wrote him long winded discussions of how much she loved him, what love meant beyond the scientific, the importance of love, and how much she missed him. She felt slightly like a philosopher, writing pure opinion until it filled pages and pages. The only other thing she talked about in these letters were the milestones of her pregnancy. Now that she was four months pregnant, she was starting to experience discomfort while trying to sleep, which was exacerbated by the fact that she was sleeping alone. She was worried that Alistair wouldn’t allow her to see an obstetrician or have any other ultrasounds, as those were important to assess the baby’s development. She was also worried that he would because that would mean that he would know she was having a girl. Jemma didn’t know what he would do if he learned that the child wasn’t going to be a boy, that was the entire reason he kidnapped her. She kept telling herself that women had healthy pregnancies before ultrasound imaging, but as a woman of science, she always felt some discomfort when she couldn’t rely on it.

That night, she lay in bed, unable to sleep. Her back had aching tension in the muscles of her lower back that connected to her pelvis and lumbar vertebrae. The pain rippled down her legs, meaning she wouldn’t be able to sleep if she tried. Knowing she didn’t really have anything to wake up to, she stood up and paced across the floor of her bedroom. She considered pulling out a notebook and writing to Fitz. What would she even write? A long-winded essay about how much she missed listening to the sound of him breathe as she drifted to sleep? A rant about why the human body made pregnancy so uncomfortable and she wished she could just lay an egg as if she was some avian?

Something vibrated against her chest. She pulled the locket up by the chain, it was vibrating subtly. She opened it eagerly and an image awaited her. It was a floating picture of a piece of paper, she recognized Fitz’s scrawl. She gasped into her hand, looking at the message from her husband. So he had gotten her video. And he had decoded it.

*Are you really okay? I’m getting your star charts, you’re about 25° north and 60° west, with a 2.5° margin of error.*

She grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and replied, uploading the image.
I’m fine. So is the baby. That makes sense, I think we’re going to Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands.

It took twenty minutes for him to reply, probably because of the fact that all of the uploading and downloading was to a satellite-connected locket.

I can contact Talbot to deploy the Navy. Should I or would that be dangerous?

Jemma thought about it. There were about twenty people on the Yacht in Alistair’s employment. Clearly, no match for any organized operation by the United States government. But she was still concerned of being rescued. While being able to speak to Fitz and have him in her arms again was something that she needed as gravely as air, she took her opportunity to communicate her husband as an opportunity to actually consider the values of her position. They still had no idea what Alistair’s plan was. They had no idea why Fitz’s blood was so special. They had no idea what this ritual was going to do. Jemma had a position on the inside, Fitz was on the outside, they could take advantage of this to actually be ahead of Alistair for once. She began to write out her plan to her husband, it would require she delve into the life of his least favorite thing: his father. However, Jemma was certain that, even separated, she could solve this.

If something goes wrong, if you get the feeling something may go wrong, if he so much looks at you funny, I’m going to get Talbot to send the entire Navy after you. But in the meantime, I’ll look into his journal and his notes until you reach Europe. I want you and the baby to be safe. I love you. I can barely function without you.

Fitz’s response was sweet, but also an exaggeration. Jemma knew enough about him was that he was able to function quite well without her, even if it was as painful for him as it was for her. They had a plan. By the time she landed in Spain, which should be in a bit over a week, Fitz would know exactly why Alistair needed his blood.

Day One Hundred and Thirty

The quinjet touched down in Scotland early that morning. It was a grassy plateau in the Scottish highlands. The mountains rose behind it to the North and West. The plateau was covered in a grassy, floral meadow. The only structure for miles was a small brick and wood cottage. Fitz stepped out, the cold early october air bit at his nose and ears. Daisy padded out of the Quinjet behind him. “Not that I’m not grateful you invited me to help you on your mission, but shouldn’t you just let Talbot send a team to do this?”
“Coulson and May are babysitting Luke,” Fitz said. “And Webber didn’t mind administering a test for me in my classes today.

“Alright,” Daisy said. “So, what is this place?”

“My grandfather’s cabin, evidently,” Fitz said. “But it looks older, doesn’t it?”

“I’m not an architect,” Daisy said. “But yeah, looks like the setting of an Edwardian period piece. With all the poofy dresses and horses.”

“Don’t you mean Elizabethan?” Fitz asked. “Or Victorian?”

“I don’t know what I mean, I don’t know the difference between any of those ‘periods,’” Daisy did air quotes for emphasis. “Let’s just figure out why your father sent you here. What are you getting from his diaries?”

“Well, I finished the fourth one last night,” Fitz said. “I got to read about how I was a whiny, snotty, shitty little child. Um, his affair with Ariel’s mother while my mother stayed at home to care for me because he flitted between work and his mistress’ home. And the financial troubles he went through, as well as his slow march towards alcoholism.”

“So, there was nothing about this place?” Daisy asked.

“He mentioned having good memories of going up to his father’s cabin outside of Ballindalloch for hunting trips,” Fitz said. “That’s this place.”

“So, we have no idea what we’re walking into?” Daisy asked. Fitz shook his head. “Good thing I have superpowers, then.”

They reached the front door. Fitz tried the door. “It’s locked.”

“Oh no, our entire plan, foiled,” Daisy said dramatically.
“Can you just open it?” Fitz asked. She pointed her hand towards the door and blasted it to splinters.

“You mean like that?” She asked.

“I was thinking of the lockpicking kit you had in your bag, but sure, that works,” Fitz said, stepping into the dusty cabin over the pile of wood shards.

“Jeez, talk about filthy,” Daisy said. “This place doesn’t look like it’s been visited in a good decade or two.”

Fitz was looking at the dust patterns. There was a strip on the dining table that had slightly less dust than the area around it. Fitz trailed his finger over the line as he walked into the kitchen. The grayish brown powder clung to his finger. He brushed it off with his thumb, “My father’s been here. Not recently. But it was him,” Fitz said. There was something about that motion that reminded him of the way his father criticised his mother’s cleaning after dramatically dragging his finger across a surface.

“You got that from dust?” Daisy asked.

“Just a feeling,” Fitz said. They headed deeper into the building. There was a master bedroom, two smaller bedrooms, and a study. It seemed the bathroom was an outhouse twenty feet behind the cabin.

“No running water,” Daisy noted. “And no electricity either. This place is pretty far off of the grid. Do you think this is where Alistair is bringing Jemma?”

“That wouldn’t make sense. He sent me a picture of this place. And she said that he was heading to Gibraltar, Spain. Besides, from what I can tell, he’s quite a fan of running water, electricity, and people in white uniforms to rub your feet.”

Daisy nodded. “So, what’s so special about this place? Other than the memories?”

“No idea,” Fitz said. “The study is the best place to check, it’s full of books.”
“And when in doubt, read?” Daisy asked.

“Exactly,” Fitz said. They went into the study. Fitz began to brush his fingers against the old spines of books and read them. He wasn’t finding anything of particular interest. Meanwhile, Daisy was looking at the other side. She squealed loudly with excitement. Fitz turned around.

“Look!” She said, pointing at the dust in the air. In the gap between two bookshelves, something was blowing the dust away. The air was cool. “You know what that means? There’s a secret door behind the bookshelf! I’ve always wanted to find one of these.” She began to pull books off of the shelf without prejudice. Fitz shined a light into the gap and could tell she was right. There was a doorway behind the bookshelf. It didn’t seem that there were any gears behind the bookshelf. In fact, Fitz didn’t think there was a mechanism. On the other side of the bookshelf, he noticed, the thin layer of dust was disturbed, as if the bookshelf had been moved to the side. To test his theory, he pushed on the bookshelf Daisy was emptying. It slid with a hard scraping noise. Daisy stopped pulling books off the shelf.

“It’s a push, not a pull,” Fitz said. “Give me a hand? One of mine is a bit out of commission.”

Daisy grumbled that it wasn’t as exciting as she was hoping, but they moved the bookshelf out of the way and revealed a small stone archway. Fitz had to duck, which indicated how small it was. They crept into a passage, which suddenly dropped off to a steep spiral staircase. Fitz kept his casted hand on the wall as he descended. He heard Daisy do the same behind him. They went down thirty-two shallow steps, ending in a black room. Fitz shined his light into the room. It was full of books.

“Do you Fitzes always hide your bookshelves behind another bookshelf?” Daisy joked. Fitz went to a shelf and looked at some of the titles. There were no formal titles. It seemed these books were old manuscripts, many were wrapped in silk as preservation. Fitz opened one and gasped. “What?” Daisy asked.

“This is a notebook belonging to John Napier,” Fitz said.

“Cool, cool, cool. No idea who that is”

“He was a scottish inventor and mathematician,” Fitz said. “He invented logarithms!”

“Okay,” Daisy nodded. “I know what those are. Well, are you like, a descendant of his?”
“Not that I know of.” Fitz wrapped the manuscript up again. Now Daisy was searching the racks as well.

“I found something in Italian, and I think it belonged to Leonardo Da Vinci,” Daisy said. “Just a guess based on the name in the inside cover.” She flipped gingerly through the pages. “Oh shit.”

“What?” Fitz asked, walking over to her. She held up a sketch. “Leonardo Da Vinci was sketching a monolith?” Fitz asked.

“Oh my god,” Daisy said. “Fitz, I don’t know any Italian at all, but I know the word Kree when I see it.”

“Leonardo Da Vinci knew what a Kree was?” Fitz asked.

“I mean, I think so,” Daisy said. “We need to get SHIELD in this basement.”

“Why does my family have the secret basement full of manuscripts involving aliens?” Fitz asked.

“Well, whatever this means, Fitz,” Daisy said. “I don’t see how it helps us find out what your dad wants with Jemma. There has to be hundreds of books here.”

“One of them has to have something,” Fitz said.

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Two

Ariel lit up when Fitz and Luke entered the visitation area of FPC Alderson. She rushed over and hugged her son. “How have you been?” She asked her son.

“Good,” Luke said. “Uncle Leo’s been really nice.”

“I’m glad,” Ariel smiled. Luke spoke to her happily and showed her the work he had been doing in
Miss Leslie’s class. Ariel was glad he was making friends despite the fact he was two years younger than his classmates. Luke asked Ariel if she was doing anything special in prison, and she said she was trying to ask the prison to teach the prisoners vocational skills. Of course, when she explained it to her son, she said it much simpler.

“Don’t they have something like that here already?” Fitz asked.

“Well, you can work in the kitchen or the laundry and some of the women are allowed to help train service dogs. A lot of the women in here live below the poverty line, and they should be able to leave prison being able to get a job.”

“Shouldn’t you be worrying about yourself?” Fitz asked. “What are you going to do when you get out? You really shouldn’t be here.”

“I lied on federal papers, I gave state secrets to a private source-”

“You were extorted,” Fitz reminded her.

“I’m in prison. I confessed, I got a plea deal,” Ariel said. “There’s no lawyer on Earth who would try to argue me out of prison, I don’t even think they can.”

“Daisy says she knows a guy,” Fitz said. “I’ve been in prison. I hated it.”

“I appreciate your concerns, really,” Ariel said. “I’m not the one you should be concerned about. Do you have any leads on Jemma?”

“We’re in contact, Alistair is taking her to Gibraltar,” Fitz said. “Mean anything to you?”

“No,” Ariel shook her head.

“I looked into the journals he gave me, it lead me to an old hunting cabin in the highlands. There was a secret entrance in the study, and beneath the cabin was a bunch of books.”
“What kind of books?”

“Manuscripts, dating back millenia. All of them revolve around, well, the stuff I do. Aliens, unusual artifacts, advanced technology. Writing from some of the greatest minds. Isaac Newton, Galileo Galilei, Leonardo Da Vinci, Aristotle, Maria Gaetana Agnesi.”

“So physicists, alchemists, mathematicians, philosophers,” Ariel said. “I mean, Father always was interested in those things. I never understood why. If it’s part of the family legacy- are you having S.H.I.E.L.D. look into it?”

“There’s seventy agents assigned to just read and take notes or translate,” Fitz said. “Talbot’s been updating sporadically and there’s information on Monoliths, the Kree, Asgardians, the Darkhold.”

“Still no idea why our family has those records?” Ariel asked.

“None,” Fitz shook his head. “It’s frustrating. Especially because I still don’t understand why he needs Jemma.”

“But you’re in contact with her? Why haven’t you rescued her?”

“Her idea. She has a point, but I don’t like it. We should try to get ahead of Alistair, understand why he’s doing what he’s doing. If we don’t, there’s no predicting what he’d do next. She promised to contact me if she was in danger.”

“How does she contact you?” Ariel asked.

“Her locket,” Fitz said.

Ariel nodded, “Thank you for coming, bringing him, I know it’s a long drive and you’d rather be working-”

“I’m glad to be here,” Fitz said. “I care about family.”
“Well, you’re just amazing,” Ariel said. “I’ll ponder on what you said, with Daisy’s mysterious lawyer friend. See you next weekend?”


“I’m gonna have even more pictures next week,” Luke said. “You can keep those. Make your room look nice.”

“Thank you,” Ariel told her son. “Ask Uncle Leo to take you for ice cream.”

“Okay,” Luke said. “Uncle Leo, can we go for ice cream pretty please with sprinkles on top?”

“Does the ice cream or the pretty please have sprinkles?” Fitz asked.


“Sure,” Fitz said, walking out to the car with Luke holding his hand.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed! I'm not exactly sure when the next chapter is going to be out. I have an outline for it, so that's something, I guess. I've unfortunately been busy and will be for a while. If you have anything to say, I appreciate your feedback in whatever form you prefer. Thanks!
Week 19

Chapter Notes

Thank you to anyone who left feedback. And thank you for your patience these last few weeks. I'm sorry I can't keep a regular update schedule. I would say I will improve, but I am a realist. I'm glad to release this chapter finally. I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Week Nineteen

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Four

It was two in the morning, just a few miles from the coast of Gibraltar, Spain. Jemma was wearing a camisole, sweatpants, and had a silk robe wrapped around her, the knot offset on the left side of her swelling belly. She pulled the thickest, fuzziest socks she could find over her feet to mask the sounds of her steps, and she opened the door. The guard who usually sat watch outside her door for that shift had fallen asleep. It wasn't his fault; they should have known the biochemist would have figured out how to combine basic medicine-cabinet chemicals into a potent tranquilizer. Her bathroom would, of course, smell like burned chalk for a few weeks, but if all went according to plan, she wouldn't have to stay there for much longer. She crept past the guard and headed to the one room she hadn’t yet scoped out, Alistair Fitz’s executive office. She pulled a hairpin and a paperclip from the elastic strap of her camisole’s built-in bra. She used the paperclip as a lever and the hairpin to jiggle the tumblers into place. The lock clicked and rotated. She opened the door, collected her tools, hid them back in her top, and pushed her way into the room. There was a beige leather chaise against the wall with a window, dark mahogany bookshelves full of antique books, and a desk with a sleek silver laptop.

Jemma hurried to the laptop, booted it up. There was a login page. She clicked Alistair’s account, and it asked for a pin code. Jemma had seen him unlock his phone, and guessing his age. She assumed he used the same pin for everything. She plugged in the four numbers, 7-8-9-1, and the computer opened. She opened his email and stamped in her husband’s address with deft fingers. She typed a message hurriedly, and her fingers hovered over the trackpad, ready to press the send button.

“Not so fast there,” Alistair said from the doorway. Two of his guards were pointing guns at her. Jemma looked up, stricken. She rose her hands in the air cautiously. “What were you even planning on doing?” Alistair asked. He stalked over to her and grabbed her harshly by the wrists, pulling her away from his computer and to the chaise. He pushed her to sit. “Ah, a letter to your dear husband.” Alistair clicked his tongue and deleted the email. “I thought you said if I let you send a message to my son, you’d be a good girl.”
“Part of that agreement was that I would get a response from him. And I haven’t.”

“You women need to be more patient.”

“You men need to honor your promises,” Jemma replied sharply. “I don’t need to justify myself to you. I’m your captive.”

“And here I thought we were getting along.”

“I was trying to get some reconnaissance. All for naught, I suppose.”

“How did you get it?” Alistair asked. “Did you steal a key?”

Jemma sighed and reached into her robe’s pocket, tossing him a little silver key she swiped.

“You’re a foolish girl,” Alistair told her. “Waiting until we reach our destination. You don’t even know the destination. I don’t have any business in Gibraltar; we’re going to Monte Carlo.”

Jemma seemed shocked, “But I saw-”

“Don’t you realize I was expecting for you to try to gain evidence? This entire ship is full of things to confuse you. My plan worked, clearly,” Alistair said with a self-satisfied smile.

“Can you blame a girl for wanting to know more before she’s subjected to some potentially dangerous?” Jemma asked.

“It’s not dangerous,” Alistair said sharply.

Jemma raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips, “Why don’t I believe you?”

“I don’t think it’s dangerous,” Alistair specified.
“You mean you’re not sure?” Jemma seemed aghast and horrified.

“Well, I’ve never performed it,” Alistair admitted.

Jemma shrugged. “Still, you can infer-”

“I can’t,” Alistair said.

“Because you’re an idiot?”

“Because I don’t know,” Alistair said. “I’ve only heard references to it. I’ve never seen it or performed it. I don’t even have all the ingredients yet. That’s why we’re going to Monte Carlo.”

“Oh, now I’m assured,” Jemma quipped sarcastically.

“I don’t appreciate your glib,” Alistair said.

“I don’t appreciate your existence,” Jemma replied.

“Go to your room!” Alistair exclaimed. “I was trying to be kind, but if you want to behave like a prisoner, you can be a prisoner.” He grabbed her by the upper arm and dragged her out of his office and into her room. He pushed her inside and slammed the door. The lock clicked. “I’ll retrieve you when we reach Monte Carlo.” He told her. “In the meantime, you’ll be fed with trays again. I hope you’re happy with this development.” His heavy footfall left.

Jemma went to her desk. “You have no idea,” she said. She scribbled a note to Fitz of the developments and sent it to him with the locket. Alistair was unbelievably easy to trick. Jemma would have assumed Fitz’s brilliance came from his mother’s side, but she had met Ariel, so perhaps Alistair was just useless.

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Six
That Wednesday, Fitz left work early to pick up Luke and head to the conference room at Stirling Elementary, where the Parent-Teacher Association had set up the little meeting. A table full of food was pushed against one side of the room. The other tables with rolling chairs were centered on the other side of the room. Fitz wasn’t late; thankfully, there was a healthy number of parents (mostly mothers) milling around the conference room, with paper plates of snacks. There were even kids there too, although not a lot. For the most part, the kids were keeping themselves busy.

“Fitz! I’m glad you could make it,” Jessica Orwell walked over, her high, blonde ponytail was swinging with enthusiasm. “There are snacks we brought, they all have an ingredients list in case of any dietary restrictions. The meeting will start in five minutes. We’re just going to go over the member benefits and PTA mission for some of the new parents and guardians here, and then we’ll dive right into our current affairs here at Stirling Elementary.”

Jessica was high-strung and bubbly, Fitz realized she probably would get along great with Jemma, but in the meantime, he didn’t mind being there. He found a place to sit with Luke. Their plates were piled high with an assortment of goodies. Jessica seemed satisfied with the turnout because she closed the door, plugged her laptop into a projector facing the whiteboard, and began to talk.

“Hi, I’m Jessica Orwell, President of the Stirling Elementary PTA chapter. The purpose of the PTA is to empower parents to advocate for their children and their children’s education. We have five values. Collaboration, commitment, diversity, respect, and accountability. It’s our goal to work with the school and the community to ensure that all children are having an equal, fair, well-rounded and successful academic experience.

“As a member of the PTA, you will have a discounted subscription to Our Children, the National PTA’s official publication; professionally designed public service announcement flyers to bring awareness to the community; resources to provide information on parent involvement, fundraising, collaboration with the schools; leadership and training opportunities; and lastly, you’ll get to be a part of our network which lobbies Congress when there’s relevant legislation about children, education, and welfare. I know what you're probably thinking, the PTA lobbies Congress? What? Well, it’s our responsibility as parents to make sure our children have the best resources available. We are more than just the grown-up version of a high school mean girls clique. We care deeply about our children’s success, and we hope as parents, you also share our values. Any questions?”

One of the moms raised her hand. She had a toddler sitting on her lap, “How long have you been President of this chapter?”

“My son’s in fifth grade, and I joined when he was in kindergarten. I became President when he was in first grade, so four years ago. We hold an election every year, but so far I think the parents are satisfied with me. I’m pretty good at organizing this, I’m an economics professor at Old Dominion University,” Jessica explained. “Any other questions? No? Okay, so, to give you a taste I’m going to use the powerpoint. Give me a minute.”
Jessica was typing and clicking her laptop. She turned on the projector, adjusted the HDMI cables, tried again to do something, turned the projector off and on again, and kept attempting. It was apparent she was having an issue.

“Does anybody know how to figure out what’s wrong with this?” Jessica asked hesitantly.

“I might,” Fitz volunteered. “I’m an engineer.”

“Thank god,” Jessica said. “I never know how any of this stuff works.”

Fitz stood up and went over to help. The projector was working. The laptop couldn’t see it though. Fitz rechecked the cables. The cable plugged into the computer was okay, but it was weirdly twisted at its plug-in at the projector. Fitz unplugged it and saw that the HDMI cable was adjusted strangely on that side. He turned the cable, so it wasn’t a corkscrew, checked the plug-in, and tried to insert it again. There was a hard click. He tried again, and now the laptop could see the projector.

“There you go,” Fitz said.

“Thank gosh you were here,” Jessica said. “I’m useless when it comes to this stuff. Not that my husband is much better, he just thinks he is. So what kind of engineering do you do?”

“I got my doctorate in robotics, but I’ve done a lot of everything,” Fitz said. “Software, mechanical, aeronautic, civic.”

“What do you do?” A mom asked.

“I design things for the government,” Fitz said. “And teach.”

“Maybe I should bring you around,” A different mom joked. “My husband keeps saying he’ll figure out how to affix our TV to the wall mount, but he tossed the instructions in a masculine frenzy, and it’s been propped up against the wall for two months now.”

“Come on, Karen, the man has a life,” A third mom said. “And a wife of his own, probably?”
“Yeah, I’m married,” Fitz said awkwardly.

“For how long?” Karen asked

“Not too long. Our wedding was in August, but we've known each other since we were teenagers.”

“I miss being a newlywed,” A fourth mom said. “The only thing better is being a newly-divorced.” A few women laughed.

After the meeting, where they talked about local fundraising and charity programs, there was some time to linger. It seemed that a lot of the moms were lingering around Fitz.

“So, where do you work?” The divorced one asked.

“Oh, the base,” Fitz said. “With the Navy, sort of.”

“And your wife?”

“There, also, but she’s overseas right now. Temporarily, it’s not like she was deployed or anything. It’s really more like an extended business trip. I want to go see her, but my boss won’t let me.”

“Why not?” Jessica asked.

“Well, she’s somewhere kind of dangerous, and there’s all this… red tape. It’s unfortunate because this is the longest we’ve been apart since… the last time she went on a big assignment mission like this.”

“Your wife sounds cool,” Karen said.

“She is,” Fitz agreed. “She’s amazing. I have no idea why she likes me.”
They laughed.

“If you want some advice talking to your boss,” Jessica said. “I think I could give you some advice.”

“Really?” Fitz asked.

“You need to show him that the marginal benefits outweigh the costs,” Karen said. Jessica rolled her eyes. “It’s a joke because Jessie is an economics professor and that’s all I remember about economics.”

“What you should do is you should make the argument why letting you see your wife is in his best interest. It will improve your ability to work, it will make both of you feel better, probably. I’m sure you can think of more things,” Jessica said. “We do what we do because we look for ways for it to benefit us. You just have to show him that.”

“Thanks for the advice,” Fitz said. “I appreciate it.”

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Seven

Jemma was roused that morning by a loud banging on her door. She opened it, and a guard stepped in, with a black bag.

“Are we there?” Jemma asked.

“Yes,” He said. He set the bag down for her. A second came in with a cylindrical box. He also set it down. “Those are for you from Mr. Fitz. He wants you dressed and ready to go in the next hour. At six, you’re departing the ship.”

“To go to Monte Carlo?” Jemma asked. “How fun.”

“Don’t wear anything other than your undergarments, wedding ring, and what’s provided, Mr.
“Fitz’s orders. That includes your necklace. Leave it here, you’ll come back.” the bodyguard said. “Be ready on time.”

“Whatever,” Jemma shrugged as they left and locked the door behind them. She wrote a final message to Fitz, sent it to him with the locket, tucked the necklace on the bedside table, and went to go see what she was working with.

She opened the black laundry bag. Inside was a gown. Jemma had a strange feeling flutter through her abdomen; probably, because the dress was a dark gold. She didn’t hate gold, but why did creepy men who kidnapped her like to dress her in it? The dress itself wasn’t terrible. It looked like a floor-length gown. It was one-shouldered, and the fabric was gathered into an elegant twist against where her stomach would lie, opposite the single right shoulder strap. There was a slit up the left side of the dress, which ended around where her knee would go. Jemma decided to do makeup first. There was a box underneath the vanity in her bathroom. She made herself look appropriate, as she didn’t want to upset Alistair anymore before she escaped, and even added a splash of gold to her eyelids. She also did her hair, tying it up in a high knot. She headed back out to the dress, discarded her loungewear, put on appropriate undergarments, and then the gown. After adjusting it, she opened the box. Inside were shoes, jewelry, and a black lattice Venetian masquerade mask. She put on the necklace first. It was a substantial black gemstone on a golden chain. Then she put on the mask and the shoes. Just in time too, it seemed. There was a knock on the door.

“Are you ready?”

Jemma took a deep breath, “Yes.” She said.

The door swung open and she was escorted to where Alistair was waiting on the deck. He was wearing a solid black mask that covered half his face, like Jemma’s. His suit was a plain white and black tuxedo.

“Ah, Jemma, as stunning as ever,” He told her. She ground her teeth silently. He offered her his arm, and she accepted it, insides twisting. They walked off the deck, down the stairs, towards a black convertible of some sort waiting off the pier. Alistair opened the door for Jemma and then got in after her. They drove through the luxurious Mediterranean town. The sun was beginning to set, and streaks of pink and orange were filling the sky. Jemma had always wanted to go to Monte Carlo; it was on her honeymoon list as one of the few places she hadn’t gone to work. It wasn’t on her list after this. The car took them to the famous Casino de Monte Carlo. Jemma strangely felt like she was about to walk into a James Bond movie, with all the well-dressed people walking around. She realized that a lot of them were wearing masks. She spoke for the first time all night.

“Is it a costume party?”
“It’s a meeting,” Alistair said. “Half-masks are the buyers. Full masks are the sellers.”

“It’s a black market sale?” Jemma asked. “What kind? Silent auction?”

Alistair sighed, “It’s like a convention. We all established contact prior, but with the saturation of sales happening here, the police are less likely to arrest us.”

“Are we going to gamble?” Jemma asked.

“No, my dear, we are going to see the opera,” Alistair said. Indeed, it seemed like many of the mask-wearers were heading away from the game rooms, and toward the opulent atrium to the opera hall. The marble pillars looked like there were made of caramel, and the moulded ceiling was plated with a warmer, brighter gold than Jemma’s dress. Alistair procured two tickets from his breast pocket and handed them to the docent. Then, he led Jemma to one of the opera boxes overlooking the opera hall. In the box were eight seats. The opera house was even more extravagant than any room thus far. The gold plating continued into this hall. There was a painting on the ceiling of the Greco-roman deities. A huge chandelier of crystal and gold hung directly overhead the audience. The walls, curtains and seats were upholstered with red velvet. Jemma couldn’t help but gape.

“If you and Leo worked with me, going to an opera hall like this could be a regular activity,” Alistair told her, observing her awe. “With what I seek, you could live like a queen for the rest of your life.”

“I’ve found that anything luxurious never should be used in excess,” Jemma told him. “I would be satisfied with a quaint cottage in Perthshire and a quiet life.”

“You tell yourselves that,” Alistair said. “To repress your true desires. Everyone wants to be a god.”

Jemma didn’t say anything, but it was clear the extent of his delusions. She instead just watched people file into the hall. Two other couples entered the box, and a lone woman wearing a silver and white full-face mask. Jemma only saw her from the corner of her eye, so she had no idea how the rest of her looked. She sat directly behind Jemma and Alistair. She leaned forward, “Beautiful night, isn’t it?”
“The stars are fine diamonds,” Alistair replied.

“Indeed they are.” She sounded satisfied.

“I assumed your employer would be joining us. Is he not?” Alistair asked.

“He is in his suite across the street,” she said. “I will take you during the intermission. My employer follows his security protocols religiously.”

“It makes sense, considering what a powerful man he is,” Alistair said.

And so, they watched the first half of an opera. Jemma didn’t comprehend much, considering there was a lot of Italian. She assumed there was some dramatic romance plot. She appreciated the music. The curtain closed and the lights turned on for the intermission. Alistair stood up, Jemma did the same. They followed the woman out of the opera box. She was wearing a black dress, with a silver belt. Her hair was tied back and was shockingly blonde. They followed her out of the opera house, through the caramel atrium, and outside of the building. They took a different convertible to the hotel across the street. They stepped out of the car and were escorted into the hotel and up to the top floor. The woman led them to a suite. She opened the door with a keycard in her clutch and escorted them in. She took off her mask. She was very beautiful. She looked expectantly at Jemma and Alistair, so they removed their masks as well. With a nod, she led them into the sitting area of the suite.

“You!” Jemma said fiercely as she saw who was selling Alistair the items.

“I can’t say I was expecting a SHIELD agent,” Ian Quinn said. “What is the meaning of this Mister Black?”

“I suppose, if you know my dear Jemma, I owe you an explanation,” Alistair said. “My name is Alistair Fitz. This is my daughter-in-law, Jemma Simmons. How do you know her?”

“Agent Simmons and I were on opposite sides of the Hydra fallout four years ago,” Quinn said. “Last I saw her, Grant Ward was chasing her and Agent Fitz - your son, I presume - to their deaths. Evidently, he didn’t succeed. Since they apparently got married and pregnant.”

“Ward is dead,” Jemma said proudly. “And I’m not. And neither is Fitz. Or Daisy - Skye, as you
I recognized that Skye had become Agent Daisy ‘Quake’ Johnson. Are you working with SHIELD?” Quinn asked them.

“We are not,” Alistair said. “I kidnapped Agent Simmons as I need my unborn grandson, and she would not let me near him willingly.”

“And you’re sure she’s not in contact with SHIELD?” Quinn asked. “I’ve learned to be very careful. You have no idea how hard it has been to evade the agency for these years.”


“Please, don’t listen to my dear daughter-in-law. She’s never been polite,” Alistair said. “I hope this doesn’t change our agreement.”

“Not at all,” Quinn said. “I see you have brought what I asked for, and I have what you need. Of course, I must warn you, I don’t think you’re ever going to be able to solve it.”

“How so?” Alistair asked.

“I’ve tried. The man I purchased it from tried. Some codes are impossible to break.”

“I have been studying ancient codes and ciphers for nearly fifteen years,” Alistair said. “I wouldn’t waste my resources on something I think is impossible to break. I want to see it.”

Quinn nodded and opened one of the drawers on the entertainment center. He pulled out a silver tube with engravings all around it. He held it up so Alistair could read it. “My diamond,” he said.

“Yes, yes,” Alistair said. He walked over to Jemma and grabbed the gemstone hanging on her neck tightly. With a hard tug, the chain snapped, and she yelped in pain.
“You could have asked,” Jemma said sharply.

“After the stunt, you pulled a few days ago?” Alistair asked. “I don’t think so. You’ve lost my good graces.” He handed the gemstone to Quinn. Quinn held up the stone to the light and nodded, giving Alistair the metal tube. Both men admired their new gift. Jemma glanced around the room. She observed the city of Monte Carlo outside of the tall glass windows. She saw the landscape, the skyline. She drew her eyes back inside, looking at where everyone was standing and how the furniture was upholstered. She looked out the window once more and had an idea.

“We were never looking for you,” Jemma said to Quinn. She walked behind the minibar. “You were old news.”

“Are you implying I’m not anymore?” Quinn asked.

“Well, I saw you,” Jemma said. She smiled. “I’m sure you recall the cybernetic implants we gave to Mike?”

“Deathlok, yes,” Quinn said. She looked at him expectantly. He paled. “No. I don’t believe you.”

“It happened when I was on Maveth,” Jemma lied. “I’ve had it in me this entire time.” She smiled, tapping her right eye. Per the dramatic effect, a helicopter could be heard approaching. Jemma had seen the helicopter out of the large windows, she knew when it was going to be audible.

“Yelena! Shoot them!” Quinn said, running to his bedroom to pack. Yelena, the blonde, pulled a gun from a thigh holster and aimed it at Alistair. Jemma picked up a bottle of whiskey and lobbed it through the air. The glass bottle hit Yelena square in the face, her gun went off and shattered a window. Jemma thanked her ability to do kinematics in her head and ran. She was too close to Alistair, and he grabbed her ankle, tripping her. She fell on her hands and knees, but adrenaline was rushing through her. She dragged herself away from him and kicked him hard in the side, heel-first. There was an uncomfortable resistance and then squelching as the force of her kick impaired the two-inch stiletto heel into his side. He moaned in pain. It was a fair trade, considering she had been forced to wear them. She grabbed the metal cylinder he took from Quinn, kicked off her other shoe, kicked Yelena in the face, lifted her gun, and left the suite.

The helicopter was just a random wealthy person with a helicopter, as far as Jemma knew. She saw her chance and took it, but she had no backup, no escape route, and there would soon be plenty of law enforcement with that gunshot. She fired the gun several more times down the hall so that they would indeed call the police. Then she tossed it in a potted plant and went to the stairs. She tucked the cylinder in the painfully tight band of her strapless bra and headed downstairs, exiting to the
lobby. She was barefoot, so she wasn’t eager to go outside. The lobby was a mess, from the recent sounds, no doubt. People were crowded around the front desk, and the phones were ringing uncontrollably. That’s when there was the explosion.

It must have been at the top floor, it was loud as many explosions were, people screamed and began to run out of the hotel. Dust was floating down from the damage and the marble pillars inside cracked. It was absolute chaos. Jemma headed out with the people piling into cars and evacuating. Ambulances twittered over.

“Help!” Jemma called, clutching her stomach dramatically. The pregnancy was an excellent way to be evacuated quickly, and they put her in an ambulance and began checking her vitals and asking her questions in French while they sped away.

“I need to call my husband!” Jemma said, miming a phone.

“Vous pouvez appeler ton mari à l'hôpital, Madam,” One of them said. After deciding she wasn’t in immediate danger, they set her up in the emergency room and had an obstetrician check Jemma with an ultrasound.

“Your daughter is fine,” she said. They made sure that Jemma was drinking enough water and had normal blood pressure, and then she was allowed a phone.

“Hello?” Fitz’s confused voice said. He sounded a little frenzied.

“Hey, babe,” Jemma said. “So, I might have stabbed your father.”

"He probably deserved it." Fitz laughed, “It’s Jemma!” He said to someone across the room wherever he was. “We’re on our way. I got your message. It took me an hour to get Talbot to let me take Zephyr Three to Monte Carlo and then all the reports of that explosion started flooding in, I was worried sick-”

“I’m okay,” Jemma said. “We have so much to talk about when you guys get here. I’m at the hospital, they’re keeping me for observation to be safer rather than sorry.”

“And does my father-”
“I’ve changed out of what he dressed me in, and my name is Melinda Coulson,” Jemma said. “He won’t find me.”

“We’ll be there in half an hour,” Fitz promised.

“I can hardly wait,” Jemma said.

Fitz could hardly wait either. He had gotten the message from Jemma at ten fifty-three. At eleven forty-five, he was boarding Zephyr Three with Daisy, Coulson, and May. Mack and Elena promised to pick Luke up from school after Fitz called the principal and made sure that no one would suspect they were kidnapping him. It was a six-hour flight in Zephyr Three from Virginia to Monaco. Fitz had gotten the call from Jemma at what was, for him, a bit past three in the afternoon. They were half of the way to Monaco, over the Atlantic. Hearing her voice had been the highest relief he could ask for. Just two hours after he received her message that she would be in Monte Carlo that night, there were reports of a massive explosion on the top floor. One dead, but twenty-two injured. He knew well enough that it was not a coincidence. But she was fine. He sighed with relief. She had called him from the hospital.

“You okay?” She asked.

“I’m so glad you’re alright,” He said.

She told him what hospital and room he could find her in, and they hesitantly hung up.

“She’s alright?” Daisy asked.

“Yeah,” Fitz smiled. “She stabbed my father, apparently.”

“Good for her,” Daisy said.

The next three hours could not go fast enough. Fitz paced across the Zephyr so many times. He wondered if his shoes still had soles. May told him no less than nineteen times that she was going as fast as the plane could safely go, and that if he wanted a faster plane, he should have built it that way. They landed outside of Monte Carlo and took a car to the hospital. It felt like a whirlwind, as
the four of them found out where Jemma - or Melinda Coulson - was residing. A nurse led them up to a private room, and Fitz did all he could from sprinting into the room. He opened it slowly. The only source of light in the room was the small television. Its dim blue light cast long shadows in the room. Sitting in the hospital bed was Jemma. She didn’t look at him. She was asleep. She was wearing baggy blue scrubs. Her hair had clumps from her updo and hairspray. Her makeup was smeared around her face. Her mouth was wide open, a string of saliva was dribbling down her chin, and she was snoring. It wasn’t a delicate snore, either. And yet, Fitz was sure that she was the most amazing and beautiful woman on the planet.

He slowly walked over to where she was sleeping and gently took her hand with the one of his that wasn’t in a cast. She stirred quietly, smacking her lips and fluttering her eyelashes. She saw him and smiled. “Dreams really do come true,” she said. “I was waiting for you, watching the news. I fell asleep-”

“Don’t worry about it,” Fitz told her. She reached out and cradled his cheek. “I’m so glad you’re okay.”

“I’ve survived an alien planet for six months. I can survive two and a half weeks on a yacht,” Jemma said. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed this, but I’m pretty cool.”

“I’ve noticed,” Fitz smiled. “How long do they want you to stay here?”

“Just overnight,” Jemma said. “It’s routine. They just want to make sure our little girl is okay.”

“Did Alistair find out-”

“No,” Jemma said “Alistair is an idiot. Are you sure he’s your father?” She joked.

“Pretty sure,” Fitz said with a soft smile. Jemma adjusted herself.

“Daisy! Coulson! May!” she grinned as she saw them in the doorway. “You can come in.”

“We didn’t want to interrupt a moment in case you two started boning,” Daisy said.
“Daisy! We just wanted to give them privacy,” Coulson said.

“That’s what you say, but you know them as well as I do,” Daisy said. “One minute, they’re being adorable, and the next minute, they’re being abhorable.”

“Clever wordplay,” Jemma said.

“We were going to investigate the explosion,” May said.

“You might want to see if Alistair’s yacht is still in the Marina,” Jemma said. “I’ve been trying to ask for a police officer, but they’re trying to keep the investigation tight-lipped. His yacht is called The Princess of Glasgow.”

“We shall try to find her majesty,” Daisy said. “You two catch up now, we’ll all regroup in the morning.”

They closed the door, leaving Fitz and Jemma all by themselves.

“Hi,” Jemma said.

“Hi,” Fitz replied.

“What happened to your hand?” Jemma motioned to his cast.

“I, uh… punched a mirror,” Fitz said. “When you were… taken.”

“It was not your fault,” Jemma said fiercely.

“Didn’t feel like it at the time,” Fitz said. “I regretted it instantly. Especially when it took them an hour to pull glass from my hand. The prognosis is good, and I’m okay.”

“Ariel is getting used to prison, I guess,” Fitz said. “Luke is good. He’s in second grade now, despite the fact he’s five. Skipping grades is genetic, apparently.”

“No sequential mutation could guarantee-” Jemma stopped herself. “Obviously you're speaking nonliterally. I’m exhausted.”

“So go back to sleep,” Fitz said.

“No,” Jemma shook her head. “I’m not sure if you’ll be here when I wake up.”

“Why not?” Fitz asked.

“I’m just…” Jemma trailed off. “I’m needy.”

“What do you need?” Fitz asked.

“You,” Jemma replied. She began to adjust herself, scooting to the very far end of her narrow hospital bed. “Come here,” She requested. He didn’t protest. Instead, he took his shoes off, lowered one of the bed rails, and delicately squeezed into the hospital bed with her. They shifted a bit, being careful of Jemma’s stomach. Eventually, she was comfortably squished in his embrace, her head on his chest and her shoulder in the crook of his arm. She sighed deeply, exhaustion overwhelming her. Fitz wasn’t tired, and he watched her slowly drift to sleep against his chest until she was lightly snoring once more. He smiled and kissed her forehead. At one point, he must have drifted to sleep, content for the first time in weeks.

Day One Hundred and Thirty-Eight

It was so strange to be standing in the room again, Jemma thought. The Princess of Glasgow had never left the marina, Alistair had never returned to his Yacht, but he was also not one of the injured or the dead. He had escaped, albeit empty-handed. Interpol and SHIELD had apprehended his employees, although none of them seemed to know anything. A forensics team was going through Alistair’s ship. Jemma requested that she go on board as she was the only person who had real experience. She was giving the team and forensics a tour when she reached her room. Her prison, now just looked like some luxury bedroom.
“This was where I stayed,” she said. She entered and pulled her locket from the nightstand. She was glad to be reunited with it. She tuck it into the pocket of the pants that had been brought for her. “All of the clothes, makeup and jewelry were Alistair’s choice,” she said. “Apparently, I need to wear more colorful patterned dresses.”

“This looks like where a mad scientist lives,” Daisy looked at the piles of notebooks and papers strewn around the room.

“I’m a scientist, I was mad,” Jemma shrugged. “I was bored, more than anything. I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction of enjoying his yacht and expensive, criminal lifestyle. I think the only things I enjoyed were the writing utensils and the books.”

“Did you request Never Seduce a Scot?” Daisy asked, thumbing through the small bookshelf.

“Evidently, that was already in his possession,” Jemma said.

Fitz made a face.

“Did you write anything useful?” May asked.

“I wrote everything. I have a seventy-page theory on the cytogenesis properties of the Kree in here somewhere.” Jemma said. “Of course I have the maps of the stars, my messages to Fitz, and journals of things I heard people say. Things that I thought might be of use to the investigation. But I came here for the locket. And these pants,” Jemma headed to the closet and pulled out a pair of army green joggers with a paper-bag waist, “They’re good pants.”

With the investigation no longer in their immediate interests, and a promise by Talbot to keep them updated, the four of them went onto the Zephyr Three to head back to America.

“So,” Daisy said, “Jemma, of all the times you’ve been kidnapped, ranging from surprise birthday party to alien planet, how bad was this experience?”

“Not as bad as a Kree slave, so probably a five?” Jemma shrugged. “What’s depressing is that we’re having this conversation.”
“Yeah,” Fitz said. He had been within arms distance of her since they were reunited. Something that she was sure may become annoying in a few days’ time, but was currently much appreciated.

“Thinking of names?” Daisy asked. “I can’t imagine that you spent two weeks locked in a room and you didn’t make, like, a flowchart of baby names.”

“Why would you make a flowchart?” Jemma asked. “Flowcharts for a baby name means there’s some procedural determination. I have a list.”

“Okay, list, fine. How many names?”

“Seventy-two,” Jemma admitted. “Of course, Fitz and I are going to narrow them down.”

“You’ve been back for a few hours, and I already have homework,” Fitz complained.

“I mean, I can go spend some more time locked in a bedroom,” Jemma said, “If that’s what you want.”

“It is what I want, I just want for it to be our bedroom,” Fitz said.

“That was suave,” Daisy said. “When did Fitz get so suave?”

“I’ve always been suave!” Fitz protested.

“You weren’t very suave when you were asking me to look at your thing. You know, your hardware. Your equipment.” Daisy teased him.

“Oh, my apologies. It’s not my fault that genitalia and technology have overlapping terms in English vernacular,” Fitz said.

“It is your fault that you made the connection so obvious,” Jemma shrugged. “You should have
just winced and moved on.”

“I don’t need the two of you haranguing me,” Fitz said. “We should be telling Jemma about the basement.”

“Basement?” Jemma asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Daisy said. And so they explained what they found in the basement of the Scottish cabin.

“And to think we were trying to move away from the weird by working at the Academy,” Jemma said once the story ended.

“I blame my father,” Fitz said. “At least there’s no time travel yet.”

“And only references to aliens,” Daisy added. “No robots trying to kill us.”

“That is fair, just good old-fashioned human villains and a possible link between Fitz’s genetic material and an ancient ritual,” Jemma said. “Compared to our past experiences, it’s all quite simple.”

The three of them smiled, and the plane continued its way home.

Chapter End Notes

Yay, reunion! I enjoyed writing Jemma being a bit more of a traditional spy, even though she was nineteen weeks pregnant. And I am looking forward to exploring what she got from Ian Quinn, and what it means for the couple, as well as what happened to Alistair. Anyway, thank you all so much for reading. As always, your feedback is very appreciated. I’ll do my best to update reasonably in the future, but thank you again for being patient.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!