**You Need Wonder Woman to Slay a Hydra**

**by** trashofalltrades

**Summary**

Steve Rogers is honored that he keeps getting compared to Diana. Then one day she happens to drop by, leading to lasting friendships with Steve, Peggy, and the Commandos as she works to save the world during WWII and far beyond.

**Notes**

Much thanks to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading as well as listening to me talk about this when we were literally still in the theater after watching Wonder Woman. I am obsessed.
Captain America and Howling Commandos Destroy Hydra Base

January 17, 1944

Captain Rogers has once again led the Howling Commandos to victory over Hydra. The past three months have seen a string of attacks as the Allies continue their attempt to break through enemy lines.

The Hydra facility was destroyed in an explosion. There were also reports of sniper fire, most likely the responsibility of Sargent Barnes. Allegedly the Commandos gained control of the base’s weapons stash, but the U.S. Army has declined to confirm or deny these reports.

Those of a certain age may remember the important role Diana Prince played as “Wonder Woman” during the last days of the Great War, and especially her defeat of Ludendorff at the German airfields. Once more the world finds itself at war, but this time another superhero has joined the fight.

Like Prince, Captain Rogers leads his band of men proudly into battle, while also liberating villages and protecting innocents. His shield as well as his moral convictions are just as important now as they were to Prince a generation ago.

Bucky tossed the paper towards Steve. “Front page news again.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “They publish an article any time we so much as fire a gun. It’s not a big deal.”

“Stop being modest. That mission was a huge success.”

Steve gave a slight hum of concession as he skimmed through the article. As he reached the end he smiled. “I’m glad they’re giving Wonder Woman credit.”

“Yeah. She’s still fighting I think, at least that’s the rumor.”

“Maybe after this is all over I can meet her. That would really make the press go nuts.”

“Peggy too. I swear that woman is obsessed.”

Steve laughed. “It’s a healthy obsession. Maybe I can get an autograph for her…”

The next morning Steve and Bucky sat in the mess hall, each eating a plate of slightly soggy pancakes. They said hello to familiar faces as they trickled in, and the room began to fill as the morning wore on. Steve was about to get a refill of watery, though still caffeinated, coffee, when a group of men approached him.

“Hey wonder boy! Gonna use your lasso on me?” one of them taunted.
“What?”

The group laughed. “Maybe wear a skirt? That would sure be a look.”

Next to him Bucky tensed, ready for a fight, and Steve kicked his leg in warning.

“What are you talking about?”

“It was front page news, Captain,” one of the younger guys said. With a smirk, he continued. “You and Miss Prissy Princess are going to save the world with your noble ideas.”

Steve stood up and stared down his nose at them. “I’m sure you aren’t insulting Ms. Prince,” he said, his voice icy. “Her contributions on the battlefield are why we’re not all wearing pickelhaubes right now. It’s an honor to be compared to her.”

“Well, we’ll be wearing them again along with swastikas if you let your idealism get in the way of the war.”

In an instant Steve’s fist was in the man’s face without him knowing how it got there. He crumpled, falling to the floor with a thump that could be hear throughout the now silent mess hall.

“How's that for idealism?” he spat. He turned back to the rest of the group, who had backed away from where he stood. “You don’t get to criticize Wonder Woman until you’ve also braved no-man’s land alone. Is that clear?” he barked, causing the group to frantically nod and then get as far away from him as possible.

With a sigh he turned, cleaned up his tray and left, everyone’s’ eyes still on him. He heard Bucky behind him as he pushed through the door.

“That was stupid.”

“I know. I’m a headstrong idiot.”

“Your words not mine.”

Steve shot him a dirty look. “It wasn’t even really about her, they’re just fed up with this god-awful war.”

“Still doesn’t mean they should have said it. I can’t believe I’m saying this but for once I’m glad you took someone on.”

“And look, I didn’t even get hurt this time,” Steve snorted.

Peggy was waiting for them when they got back to their tent.

“I heard you stood up for Wonder Woman,” she said, smiling up at Steve.

He gave her an awkward shrug. “News travels fast I see.”

“Well I think it’s great.”

“Saves you from having to deck another solider at least.”
She laid a hand on his arm. “It was more than that, and you know it.”

Bucky made gagging noises and entered the tent, leaving them outside. “You guys should get ready,” he called.

Peggy looked down at her watch, a faint smile still gracing her face. “He’s right you know. I’m sure I’ll talk your ear off about her later.”

“I’m counting on it.”
Two Shields Are Better Than One

Chapter Summary

Steve and the Commandos are in for a surprise on what would have otherwise been a regular mission.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Commandos were crouched down by the edge of the forest, looking up at yet another Hydra base they needed to destroy.

“They’re dedicated, I’ll give them that,” Dugan said, staring up at the gun towers and the guards in them.

Bucky shifted his position to get a better look. “That dedication is a pain in the ass,” he muttered.

Steve turned back to face his men. “We need a distraction. Any ideas?”

“Worst case is we radio for backup to keep them occupied while we sneak in.”

Steve nodded. “Maybe. Or we could-”

His planning was cut off by the sound of machine gun fire. The group fell flat, the front of their uniforms becoming coated with leaf bits and dirt. After a moment they cautiously looked up at the base, trying to figure out what had just happened.

They saw a woman running full speed towards the guards, a shield on one arm and the other raised to deflect bullets.

The Commandos gaped and then with delight Dugan yelled, “It’s Wonder Woman!”

A cheer went up as she continued her charge towards the gun tower.

“Shush you idiots,” Steve said, failing to keep the smile off his own face as he pushed Jim and Pinky back down.

“Well, there’s no use trying to sneak in now,” Bucky said.

Steve waved the group forward. "He's right, she’s drawing their fire. Let’s go!"

With a yell they joined the charge, falling in line beside her.

She didn’t seem at all surprised to see them there. Catching Steve in her periphery she smiled
before turning to take out one of the guards that had rushed out to meet them.

They slowly pushed their way forward, everything else falling away as the battle intensified. Gunfire rang out in a deafening wave, hopefully from more friend than foe. Steve dodged an explosion of some sort as he ran, trying not to trip over the ruble in front of him. He occasionally caught a glimpse of one of the Commandos—a well-placed shot by Bucky or a Hydra agent dropped with a punch. And then they were gone, dissolving back into the battle, safe, at least for the moment.

The group worked their way towards the doors and began filtering inside. With a few more throws of his shield he was in as well, sliding carefully wall as he tried to figure out who else was inside.

Bucky and a few other commandos were standing on the other side of the room, making quick work of some more guards. He ran towards them, a bullet narrowly missing his left shoulder.

“More of them on the balconies!” he warned, throwing up his shield to deflect the next volley.

“We’re working on it!” Bucky yelled, pointing to Dugan and Pinky who had made it to the second level.

The others fanned out below. Steve found a control panel and was trying to figure out which button would cause the most chaos when Diana came charging in.

She skidded to a stop and deflected the hail of bullets aimed her way before turning and lassoing one of the closer guards, throwing him across the room.

She looked up at the balconies. Immediately sensing the problem, she looked around for Steve and yelled “Shield!”

There was a moment of confusion as she barreled towards him, and then with a sudden understanding he squatted, holding tight to his shield. As soon as her foot made contact he pushed upwards and stood, sending her flying towards the upper balconies where she promptly created a path of destruction.

The Commandos followed suit and within a few minutes they had control of the building.

“Good job everyone,” Steve said after they had all reconvened. He counted heads. “Is everyone okay? Where’s Jacques?”

Diana stepped forward. “One of your men is injured. I helped him to the forest, but it does not seem too bad.”

He shot her a relieved smile and sent someone to go get him. The others split up to search the base, leaving the two of them to walk to the control room alone.

“Thank you for your help,” he said, extending a hand to shake. “Steve Rogers.”

She smiled. “Diana Prince. And it was my pleasure. I was in the area and figured I could help out and also finally meet you.”

“We’re all glad you did. I’ve wanted to meet you for a while too. See if the comparisons are accurate,” he joked.

“From what I can tell, the main difference is that my shield remains in my hands the whole time.”
He burst out laughing. “You’re not wrong. Anything else?”

“No, the rest is true.”

“Thank you. That’s high praise,” he said, looking down with a small smile.

She searched his face, her eyes wide. “I knew another man once—he was named Steve as well.”

“Oh?”

She nodded as they entered the main hallway. “He was just like you” she continued softly.

“In what ways?” He thought about adding “besides our names,” but she seemed too serious for him to joke about it. He wagered that based on her expression this Steve she spoke of meant far more to her than she was letting on. And in her line of work past tense most certainly meant dead.


“You sound like Bucky,” he groaned, trying to lighten the mood, “But I’d argue you’re also like that.”

Arriving at the control room, he bent down to bash in the lock. There was a sharp crack and then they were free to let themselves inside.

“Maybe so.”

She followed him in, letting the door close behind her. “What are we doing here?” she asked, scanning the room.

“Collecting whatever information they left behind.” He pointed to the stacks of files scattered in various piles on the desks and around the room. They gathered what they could, loading the various papers and maps into boxes, Diana skimming through them as she did so.

“What do they say?”

“This stack is a bunch of reports. I think those over there are future plans.”

“Good to know. Way to put a translator out of business.”

“Being multi-lingual does come in handy. I haven’t really had this much use for it since the last war.”

Steve leaned towards her, suddenly interested. “How was the Great War? In relation to this, I mean.”

She thought for a moment, setting her boxes down on the table. “Different,” she finally said. “Better in some respects, worse in others.”

Steve’s nose crinkled. “Trench warfare was better than this?”

“The Great War was certainly bad. And by the end no one really knew why they were fighting. But this...” She looked over at him with a frown, her eyes haunted. “I thought it was the worst man could be. The suffering I saw. The villages destroyed. But the scale of the destruction this time-”

save them all...I could hardly save anyone.”

She turned away and went back to collecting papers, trying to compose herself. “And there’s the regular bombing and fighting on both sides of course. The only good news is that this war is less needless—no archdukes this time.”

Steve’s lips pressed into a thin line. “Damn Germans just don’t quit, do they?”

“All men never quit,” she retorted. “That is why I am here to help.”

“How can we possibly deserve that?”

A smile spread slowly across her face as she looked up at him. “It’s not about deserving. It’s about what you believe.”

He smiled back, turning her quote over in his mind as he surveyed the mass of paper in front of him.

“Well right now I believe that I need to get all this back to base and gather up my men.”

He hefted a box to his waist, turning back to Diana. “Do you want to come with us? I’m sure the Commandos would love to chat. And my friend Peggy...well it would make her day if she got to meet you.”

Diana blushed. “Well then let’s go. I’d hate to disappoint them.”

Chapter End Notes

So this is the most productive obsession I’ve had in a while. And the similarities between the Steves never fail to amuse me.
Diana found the Commandos to be lovely.

They were funny and managed to take the mission seriously without doing the same for themselves. It was nice to have that sense of camaraderie again, even if it was just for a day or two as the group made their way back to base.

They followed the river, staying close to the tree line. It was harder walking, but preferable to bumping into a Nazi patrol. The men amused themselves largely by pestering Diana and peppering her with questions. What was Themyscira like? Where did the lasso come from? How was she so strong? Why was she so badass?

She laughed, answering beautiful, and then magic, magic, and you flatter me in that order.

Steve was the first to ask a question that, while not stumping her, at least forced her to stop and think about her answer.

“What will you do when all this is over?”

She was silent for a moment, her head tilted to one side. “Well,” she started slowly, “It will never actually be over. I will always have a role to play in mans’ conflict.”

“But then what did you do after the last war?”

“Worked to bring peace. People found out who I was and so I was invited to be a diplomat of sorts.”

Steve snorted. “Destroying an airfield does tend to draw attention.”

“Are you going to do the same after this?” Bucky piped in.

She ducked under a branch, turning to help the others over a fallen log.

“I do not know. I obviously was not successful,” she said, with a sweeping gesture at the scene before them. “I suppose I will protect something else.”
“Like what?”

She shrugged. “Oh, anything. Refugees of course, and soldiers returning home. Stories and places. Art.”

At that last thought her eyes narrowed, mouth pressed into a thin line as she looked at them. “Do you know what the Nazi’s are doing to art right now? It’s horrendous!”

Bucky groaned. “Don’t get Steve started. He’s into art. That’s all he talked about for a three-week period. I’m surprised he didn’t go join the Monuments Men.”

Diana grinned, her indignant expression instantly disappearing.

“Hey now,” Steve said, giving Bucky a fake-glare, “It’s a worthy cause and something I still want to take part in.”

He thought for a moment, dodging a mud puddle before turning back to the pair of them. “After this is over we could start our own foundation. Aid the Monuments Men for as long as they’re around and pick up the slack once their units are dissolved.”

Diana nodded, her face lit with excitement. “We could curate the art too-let the public in to see.”

Steve raised his eyebrows. “Does that mean you’re in?”

She extended her hand to shake. “It is a deal.”

By evening they had reached the base, the forest greenery broken by a sprawling expanse of gray concrete buildings and canvas tents.

“We shouldn’t take you in through the front gates, you’d be mobbed,” Steve said, eyeing the various people and jeeps milling around the entrance.

“I’ll go get Peggy and bring her around back. Once she’s sufficiently impressed we can introduce her to the CO,” Bucky said.

“Sounds good,” Steve said, clapping him on the back as Diana nodded in agreement.

The rest of them were left to gather their things and follow him, Dugan and Pinky racing to see who could get back to the mess hall first for a hot meal.

Diana laughed. Looking back at Steve with a raised eyebrow she asked, “So who is this woman you speak so highly of?”

“A dear friend who thinks you’re amazing.”

“I see,” she said, a knowing smile flitting across her face. “How dear?”

“Well-”

“As dear as Sargent Barnes?”

“No-he and I-he,” he spluttered, his face turning red.
She chuckled. “I’m sorry, I did not mean to make you feel uncomfortable. I just assumed- It is how life was on Themyscira. I always forget that mankind needlessly shames others for such things.” With that she turned and walked ahead, leaving Steve to close his gaping mouth and hurry to catch up.

The two of them where waiting outside the back gate, Bucky watching Peggy with a bemused expression as she bounced up and down on her toes.

As soon as Diana came into view Peggy stilled and squared her shoulders, a huge smile overtaking her face as she moved to shake hands. The pair began to talk quietly, Peggy’s eyes wide with awe.

“Damn it.” Jim muttered, slipping Gabe five bucks. “She didn’t shriek.”

“Nothing cracks her professionalism. You should have known that,” Steve scoffed, trying not to laugh as Gabe pocketed the money and headed towards the canteen, with Jim following dejectedly in his wake.

The Commandos slowly dispersed as the women talked, both to give them some privacy and also because they needed food and showers now.

After a few minutes Steve was the only one left and went to go pull the two of them apart so Diana could go meet the CO.

“How’s it going?” he asked.

Peggy beamed up at him. “We were just talking about fighting styles.”

Steve smiled back. “I expected nothing less.” He glanced back at the base. “I hate to cut this meeting short but we really have to get you to the commander. He’ll want to thank you for your help, and he can find you a bed here for the night.”

Peggy flashed her badge and they were through the gates, followed by some wolf whistles aimed in Diana’s direction.

She scowled. “How do you deal with that, Peggy?”

“A combination of sheer patience and punching.”

Diana shook her head. “It is hard to be so outnumbered, isn’t it?”

“That’s why I always looked up to you.”

Diana blushed and looked down at her feet. “Well, in return I look to those like you, those who give me a reason to fight.”

With that they arrived at the commander’s tent, greeted by a slack jawed young soldier who gave them a nervous salute and then invited Diana inside.

“I bid you goodnight. And Peggy, we must continue our conversation in the morning.”

“Of course.”
They watched as she pushed aside the tent flap and stepped through, then turned and headed back to their own quarters.

It was a beautiful evening. A cool breeze carried the sound of laughter from the mess hall towards them, while a clear night lit their path with a soft glow.

“Thank you for that,” Peggy said, wrapping her arms around Steve as they reached the entrance of her tent.

“Was it everything you had hoped for?” he murmured, kissing the top of her head.

“Even better. Meeting her after years of admiring her strength and determination…” she sighed with content. “She’s why I’m here now.”

“Well then it appears I have one more thing to thank her for.”

Chapter End Notes

A lot of notes on this one:
The Monuments Men worked with military forces during WWII to protect monuments and locate stolen art. Much thanks to ChimaeraKitten for telling me about them, since it worked so well with how I wanted to show Diana's appreciation for art.

For those of you that are history nerds, I envisioned Diana's diplomacy after WWI as being something to do with the Kellog-Briand pact or the Washington Naval conference.

Make of Steve and Bucky what you will. I know it's not a stucky fic, but I couldn't pass up the line.
To Thine Own Self Be True

Chapter Summary

Back on base everyone has some downtime. Diana, Peggy, and the Commandos train and play an after dinner game.

Chapter Notes

Much thanks to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading and informing me of Peggy's one-armed push-ups.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Diana’s leg swept over the ground, nearly knocking Steve off his feet.

“Youre legs are still exposed,” she huffed, taking a step back to let Steve catch his breath.

They had spent the afternoon sparing and exchanging various shield techniques. Steve and Peggy were *supposed* to be showing her around base, but there quickly became a limit to how many concrete bunkers and barracks Diana was interested in seeing.

He rolled his eyes. “This shield is only so big.”

“Well Diana managed to fit *her* whole body behind *her* shield when she was facing an onslaught of bullets in no man’s land,” Peggy called from the sideline.

Steve gave her the stink eye while Diana tried to hide a smile.

“Do you wanna try?” he challenged.

“Actually, I do,” she said, lifting her head and walking over to them.

She took Steve’s shield and turned to face Diana, her jaw set.

Then they were charging at each other, limbs flying all over the place. And sure enough, her whole body disappeared behind the shield, thwarting a kick from Diana.

She stepped back, panting, and turned to Steve. “In your defense, I am about half your size.”

He just smiled and shook his head, as Diana stared at her with wide eyes.

“That was quite impressive. What training have you received?”

“Well from now on you’re joining us.” she said firmly. “I was planning on instructing the Commandos anyway. What is one more?”
Peggy opened her mouth to protest.

“The commander cannot say no to me. Besides, won’t it help you with future missions?”

Peggy smiled. “You make a good point.”

“Yes. Now, shall we try some more sparring?”

The three of them continued their training. After a few times of being knocked flat on his back, Steve did eventually manage to protect his legs.

Later on they moved to shield throwing for Diana’s benefit. Simply flinging away a shield that could be used for protection was not something a Themysciran warrior would ever do, and here Steve was encouraging her to throw her shield as far away from herself as possible.

She did eventually figure it out, and easily caught on to how she could use various throwing angles to her advantage. Her only failure was when she nearly took out a bird, an offense she found much more horrifying than unprotected extremities.

They would have kept going if not for Bucky’s arrival to tell them that the other Commandos were all heading to the mess hall and for the love of god they needed to take a break and eat something.

They trailed behind him, nursing their bruises, and plopped down at a table with the other Commandos where they promptly devoured everything in front of them. After coming up for air, they sat and talked. Diana fielded more questions, both serious and trivial, that eventually came to revolve around her lasso.

“So it does actually force you to tell the truth?” Bucky asked.

“Yes. It was given to the Amazons by Hestia.”

“Goddess of the hearth and home,” Peggy added.

Diana smiled at her. “Very good. In ancient times Hestia was always waiting on Mount Olympus, tending the hearth and waiting for the gods to return. It is the same for truth- it is always there. Sometimes you just have to find it.”

“Well…” Bucky said slowly, a gleam in his eye. “We should test it out.”

“I assure you it works.”

“Oh, I know. I was thinking that we should play truth or dare.”

Around the table everyone’s eyes widened, while Diana looked back and forth between them.

“What? What is this truth or dare?”

“A game,” Steve explained. “Where you either answer someone’s question or do whatever challenge they set out. But in this case…”

“You can’t lie,” Peggy said, rolling her eyes. “Men. She just told you about this godly weapon, and you want to use it as part of a party game.”
“Yep!”

“I don’t know about this…” Diana said, reaching protectively for her lasso.

“C’mon, a couple questions can’t hurt,” Bucky said leaning towards her. “It will be fine.”

She sighed. “I suppose. But for the love of Zeus let us go somewhere more private.”

The group migrated to the area behind Steve and Bucky’s tent, and gathered around in a circle.

Diana sat and gently placed the lasso on her lap.

“Who will go first?”

The others stared at her blankly.

“Don’t look at me. I cannot believe I even agreed to do this.”

“I’ll do it,” Bucky finally said. “Since it was my idea.”

He looked over at Peggy. “You ask first.”

She sighed. “Truth or dare?”

Bucky took a long look at the lasso in Diana’s lap and then at Peggy who was beginning to give him an evil grin.

“I’m beginning to regret this. Dare.”

The Commandos hooted.

“You scared of the lasso, Barnes?” Dugan jeered.

“You know it.”

Peggy’s eyes narrowed, her chin resting on her hands. “I dare you… I dare you to go streaking past the commander’s tent.”

A loud “ooooooohhh” went up from the group.

Bucky smiled and ran off, ripping off his shirt as he went.

He returned a few minutes later.

“How’d it go?”

“I don’t think he saw my face.”
And with that the game continued around the circle.

Dugan was dared to kiss Diana, which he wisely didn’t attempt after seeing her death glare.

When Steve’s turn came he challenged Peggy to a push-up contest.

She laughed, kicked off her heels, rolled up her sleeves and then got into a push-up position, facing Steve.

“Ready to lose?” she asked.

“You wish.”

Bucky timed them. Steve cranked out 65 in a minute. Peggy did 50. One handed.

As the evening progressed, the game became more serious. There was still screwing around, but more people began to choose truth.

Pinky was asked about his worst interaction with a date.

“We were in a pub,” he said, face bright red with the effort of trying to contain what came next. “I… I… I shit myself, tripped trying to make it to the bathroom, and spilled beer in her lap.”

They all roared with laughter, and moved on to the time Dugan got stuck in a tree back in Belgium.

As people began to head off to bed, the smaller group asked more serious questions. Biggest fears and failures. Unbecoming secrets. All of it came out. At the very end only Steve, Peggy, and Diana remained.

“Truth.” Steve said, as Peggy wrapped him with the lasso.

"Why do you draw?” asked Diana.

Peggy groaned. “That was an easy one.”

Diana shushed her, motioning for Steve to speak.

“I guess it’s calming. I have complete control over what I want to create.”

Diana nodded. and extended an arm for Steve to wrap the lasso around for her turn.

“Truth or dare?”

“You have to ask?”

Steve smiled. “Do you wish you could visit Themyscira again?

She answered automatically, the lasso completely unnecessary. “Yes. I always will.”

Peggy laid a hand on her arm, and took the lasso from her.

“Hmmmm, Biggest regret?” Diana asked.

“That I lost sight of my value. I pushed away the one person who believed I could be more than I was, and then I never got to apologize.”

Steve pulled her into his side as Diana recoiled her lasso. They sat in silence, contemplating their
various answers until Peggy said, “I should go. I have to be up early tomorrow.”

Steve helped her stand. “Gotta love 7:00 a.m. meetings.”

She snorted and gave him a quick hug before heading back to her tent.

Steve turned to Diana. “C’mon, I’ll walk you back.”

“I have a non-truth-or-dare question,” Steve said as they walked along the main path through camp.

“Oh? Do tell.”

“Will you stay here? I hear the Commandos are hiring,” he smiled.

“I cannot stay permanently. I will help when I can, leave when I need to.”

“Where will you go?”

She sighed. “At this point I can only do-what do you call it? Damage control?” she kicked at some rocks before looking back up at him. “I’ll go wherever human suffering is the worst. And right now that is too many places at once.”

Steve nodded. “I wish we could help.”

“What you’re doing here is just as important. You’re preventing Hydra from hurting more than they already have.”

She was quiet for a moment before she said, “I know that Peggy helps the Commandos coordinate missions. I asked her to do the same for me. If there’s an emergency she can get in contact- lead me to wherever you all are.”

“That works. Thanks again for everything,” he said, with a wave of his hand. “Especially agreeing to train with us.”

“It is my pleasure. You and Peggy and the Commandos are all so kind.”

“Well we have to be now that you can blackmail us.”

She laughed. “What if that was my plan all along?”

“Well if you tell, Pinky won’t be getting anymore dates for a while, that’s for damn sure.”

“That is true.”

Chapter End Notes

So some google searching informed me that the general idea of truth or dare has existed for hundreds of years under various forms and names. The name "truth or
dare" wasn't in use till the 1950's, but for simplicity's sake I left it as is.

I based the bit about Hestia off of her description and conversations in the Percy Jackson series. If nothing else, Rick Riordan has provided me with entirely too much knowledge about Greek mythology.

Lastly, Peggy's response to her biggest regret is a reference to her engagement and her brother's death as shown in the Agent Carter TV show.
March 1945

Diana gently picked up the baby that was fussing in its crib.

“Hush, little one.”

For the past few days she had been bouncing between Polish villages, trying to help where she could and keep everyone safe from the Russian advance. Today that meant watching the children so their parents could work to rebuild the town.

At the moment, the older children were amusing themselves by running off all their energy outside. It made her job much easier, and aside from a few skinned knees from a rather extreme game of tag, nothing had gone wrong.

Shifting the baby to her other arm, she went to call Peggy, taking advantage of the momentary peace to do her check-in. She desperately hoped that things had been going well for the Commandos, or at the very least hadn’t been too hectic.

The War was obviously winding down, with the allies quickly closing in on Germany. Everyone was rushing around without a moment to spare, making preparations and doing who knows what else.

She had been equally busy for the past year. She had traversed the continent, smuggling Jewish families to safer places, rebuilding homes, and liberating towns. She worked with the Commandos off and on as per their request, helping take out a Hydra base every few months and then moving on to her next location.

Her call went through on the second try, answered by a very tired sounding soldier who put her through to Peggy.

“Hello Diana.”

“I am glad you were available. How is everyone?”

There was a long, heavy silence on the other end of the line.
She set the baby back down, her brow furrowed. “Peggy? What is wrong?”

“If possible, we need you to come back.”

“Is it another Hydra base?”

“No. We-we need you to retrieve a body.”

She froze, her stomach clenching. “Whose?”

There was a soft sob on the other end of the line. “Bucky’s.”

She searched the mountains to no avail, hoping against hope that the Army sweep before she arrived had missed something. But he was simply gone, most likely swept downstream. At the end of her first day they called off the search. She and Peggy had decided that it could no longer be her priority. There were too many other living people who still needed her help.

She thought Sargent Barnes would have agreed.

That evening she paid condolences to the Commandos. Steve was functioning, but barely. His eyes were still rimmed red and he focused on finishing Hydra off with a single-minded intensity.

He wasn’t at fault and everyone told him so, Diana included. He still didn’t believe them, and avoided the issue by retreating into a series of meetings with the Commandos and higher-ups, leaving her to collapse into bed in the first vacant tent she found.

It was a far cry from the late-night laughter and storytelling that they all used to partake in.

She was startled awake early the next morning.

Peggy was breathless standing just inside the entrance of the tent. “Oh, thank God I found you,” she said, a hand on her chest. “We’re attacking Hydra headquarters. Everyone’s getting ready to leave.”

“What?”

She began rattling off information. “It’s an underground bunker in the alps. Hydra’s planning to attack the East Coast with some new weapons. We have to stop them.”

She hastily got out of bed and started throwing on her gear.

“I would have warned you sooner but technically you’re not affiliated with the U.S. Army and there were ‘security concerns,’” Peggy continued, rolling her eyes.

Diana waved a hand in Peggy’s direction as she strapped on her shield. “It is fine. What will I be helping with?”

Peggy lowered her voice. “Steve and the Commandos have the first breech. You and I and the
107th will help secure the base and then assist them.”

Diana nodded. “Understood.”

She opened the tent to let the two of them outside.

A sea of tan uniforms greeted them. Soldiers milled around waiting for troop transports while others rushed back and forth, gathering supplies or carrying messages. She briefly caught sight of Colonel Phillips and Howard Stark before they vanished behind a line of jeeps.

Peggy waved Diana on as they waded out into the crowd. “Come on, I’ll explain the rest on the way.”

By the time they made it to Hydra headquarters it was early afternoon.

Peggy hadn’t told her about the part in the plan where Steve was intentionally captured until after it was already successful and her “He did WHAT?!” rant could be cut short by the 107th’s charge against the base.

She turned towards Peggy, indignant. “You omitted the truth!”

Colonel Phillips gave the order to move out, and as they all began to surge forward, Peggy let out a huff. “It was classified information!”

She and Peggy ran towards the bunkers. She watched as men around her simply vanished, vaporized by Hydra. It was a sobering reminder of what was at stake. Maru’s gas would have killed millions, but whatever technology Hydra had was somehow capable of far worse. If left unchecked it would be like Veld all over again, but with entire population centers.

*Say what you want about mankind,* she thought as she disarmed a Hydra agent with her shield and then ducked to let Peggy have a clear shot. *But they never fail to innovate.*

Hydra began to fall back, vastly outnumbered by the 107th. Diana and Peggy worked in unison, a kick here, lasso there as they forced their way through the tide of soldiers.

A massive BOOM made everyone duck, stopping the fighting for the briefest of seconds. The explosion flung chunks of concrete through the air and created a convenient entrance in the side of Hydra headquarters.

She and Peggy were some of the first ones to breech the building. Diana took her place at the front of the group, deflecting Hydra’s shots with her gauntlets and shield while Peggy stood next to her, clearing a path with a spray of bullets.

As they rounded the corner, they saw Steve’s shield wedged between a door while Steve himself hid behind a wall, attempting to dodge blasts from a flame thrower.

Peggy rushed forward, her gun extended and a look of pure rage in her eyes that Diana had never seen.

A few well-placed shots and the threat was taken care of. Steve emerged from his hiding place, flashing a smile at Diana before turning to Peggy.
“You’re late,” he said, stepping towards her, his eyes softening.

Diana cleared her throat, trying to hide a smile.

“Weren’t you about to...” Peggy asked, taking small step back.

“Schmidt. Right.”

“I’m going with you,” Diana said, giving him a look to silence any protests.

The two of them squeezed through the doorway. Steve pulled his shield and as the doors began to close she looked back towards Peggy with a reassuring smile.

“We won’t do anything unwise!” she called before turning and sprinting after Steve.

On the other side, Peggy’s mouth dropped open. “Did she just lie!?”

They made it to the hanger in time to see Schmidt hop in the Valkyrie and begin to taxi.

“I’ve got to stop that plane. The weapons-”

“I know.”

The two of them ran out of the hanger and onto the runway, where the 107th and Hydra were still locked in battle.

Both of them plowed right through, body slamming Hydra agents out of their way.

Steve looked across tarmac, and seeing yet another wave of soldiers called for a time saving measure.

“Shield!”

Diana launched him, sending him soaring over the rest of the fighting. As soon as he landed she leaped and joined him.

With a clear path, the two sprinted towards the ship.

Steve turned towards Diana as she pulled even with him. “Stay here! I’ll get on!”

“Let me help you.”

“No,” he panted. “Make sure…the base….is secure.”

“But-”

“They need you.”

The Valkyrie continued to speed away and it became increasingly clear they weren’t going to catch up. They both slowed to a stop, breathing heavily, and Steve with a look of pure desperation on his face.

“Get in!” A voice next to them called.
Diana whipped around and then broke into a grin. Colonel Phillips and Peggy had managed to get their hands on Schmidt’s coupe and had driven up alongside them. She hoped it got scratched.

As Steve jumped in he turned back towards Diana and raised a hand in a gesture that was part farewell and part thanks. She returned it with a smile and watched as Phillips gunned it, beginning to close the gap. Peggy pulled Steve down for a kiss and then he leapt, narrowly grabbing on to the plane’s wheel and leaving the car to skid, almost toppling off the edge of the runway.

As she watched the wheels retract, she should have felt happy—he had a chance to stop everything. But all she could focus on was the feeling of dread that was beginning to make her feel sick to her stomach. It was like this last time. The plane—the cost of failure that he so clearly understood.

No, she thought, shaking her head as if she could shake loose the images. *Those are memories. It is different now, it has to be.*

“Safe travels, Steve,” she whispered, glancing up at the plane one more time before turning and rejoining the battle.

Chapter End Notes

I felt that Diana had to hold a baby. Hopefully it makes up for some of the angst. This was somewhat of a two part chapter if that's even a thing. The next one will pick up as the battle is ending.

I won't be updating for about two weeks due to vacation, but am very much looking forward to posting when I get back!
Steve was right, they needed her. She rejoined the 107th as the battle was winding down, taking out the remaining Hydra agents in order to finally secure the base.

After a few last yells and the sound of fists hitting flesh, the tarmac fell silent. She surveyed the scene before her, bodies and weapons strewn every which way, and let out a ragged breath before moving to aid the wounded.

She was inside one of the hangers propping soldiers up against the wall when she saw Peggy walk by. She waved her over to where she knelt. “I am glad you two showed up when you did.”

Peggy smiled. “It was a lovely little car. A shame it got pushed off a cliff.”

Diana snorted, handing over her canteen to the injured man next to her.

“I’m going to the control room to chart his progress.”

“Okay. I will join you after I finish here. Oh, and Peggy?” she called, as she turned to walk away, “You two make a great couple.”

The medics eventually came and took over. She made her way towards the control room, weaving through corridors made narrow by the jumble of men and supplies.

She spotted the Commandos off to one side and rushed towards them, smiling and exchanging congratulations as well as some choice words for deciding to zip line directly into headquarters without her.

Farther down the hallway she found Colonel Phillips, as well as Peggy who was seated in the control room off to the side.

She began to walk towards her, anxious to receive an update on how Steve was doing.
Phillips stopped her, his arm extended to block her path. “Let’s give her some privacy.”

Her brow furrowed. “What do you mean? She is tracking Steve and the plane. Why would she need…”

She felt the air get sucked out of her as she realized that something was very wrong.

His face, creased with tiredness and sorrow, confirmed her fears. He nodded. “He’s forcing it down.”

“No!” she said shaking her head. “No. No no no, not again.”

She clasped her head and turned away, her eyes clenching shut.

Suddenly she was on the airfield again, a different one, everything inside her being squeezed tighter and tighter as she was forced down into the concrete. It was supposed to be different.

She leaned back against the wall, listening to the faint sounds of Peggy’s voice that filtered out from the control room.

“Saturday… Don’t you dare be late… Just be there.”

And then the words that made her want to dissolve on the spot—filled with so much pain that she could hardly stand to listen.

“Steve?” Peggy asked, her voice breaking. “Steve?”

Colonel Phillips looked towards the control room with a deep frown and then slowly made his way towards those assembled in the hallway.

“She’s taking the night off. Is there someone who’s willing to take her back to base?” He asked, scanning the crowd for volunteers.

Diana took a breath and stepped forward. “I will do it.” She didn’t have to think twice. Who else could possibly understand the exact situation Peggy had just been thrust into?

She walked down the corridor, ignoring the silent stares that followed her.

She entered the control room to find Peggy slumped in her chair, her head in her hands, still listening to radio static.

Diana squatted down, laying a hand gently on her back.

“Peggy? Let’s go back to base.”

Peggy followed mutely behind Diana, her face sticky with tears as she got into the jeep.

The car jerkily started down the road.

“You don’t drive much do you?” she mumbled.
Diana grimaced. “The best horsepower is a real horse, so no. But you will not be driving so I must.”

Peggy shook her head and went back to looking out the window. They were silent for a while until Diana said, “I’m sorry. I should have stopped that plane from even taking off, or at least gone with him. I…I should have been able to save him.

Peggy tuned towards her, taking in her white-knuckled hands clenching the steering wheel.

She laid a hand on Diana’s arm and for the second time that week said, “You did everything you could.”

Diana glanced over at her. “As did you.”

“It was his choice to make,” she said, her mouth twisting up into an attempt at a smile while her voice dropped to a whisper. “He must have thought we were worth it.”

They managed to make it back to the temporary camp the Army had set up without hitting anything.

Diana took Peggy to an available tent, sitting her down on the cot while she went to go raid the mess hall for some coffee. She measured out the grounds as tears streamed down her face, her body on auto pilot as she used her moment alone to mourn.

She reemerged dry-eyed a few minutes later and deposited a steaming cup into Peggy’s shaking hands.

She pulled up a chair and sat down in front of her while Peggy gave one last sigh and blew her nose.

“Well then,” she said, looking up at Diana.

“Well indeed.”

“Thanks for the drink.” She raised the cup in a half toast before taking a sip.

Diana waved a hand. “It was the least I could do.” She frowned as she looked at Peggy. All evening she had been back at the airfield, watching that fireball in the sky. It replayed over and over as even as she tried to push it away and focus on one loss at a time.

“For once I understand exactly. It is a fate I would wish upon no one.”

Peggy looked at her, eyes pooling with tears as she gave her a shaky smile.

“You have been such an inspiration for my life and work. When I was little I wanted to be you.” She continued in a whisper. “But- but never this part.”

“Oh, Peggy,” Diana said, pulling her into a hug.

They sat there for a while, Peggy’s tears dripping onto Diana’s cloak.
After she had calmed back down Peggy asked, “Was it like this for you?”

Diana sighed. “Very similar yes. A quick goodbye and he was gone. And you are feeling the same way I did, I think. A mix of grief, pride, annoyance, and guilt.”

“Exactly. Stupid noble idiot.”

Diana chuckled. “Yes. And we loved them for it.”

“It’s just—he owed me a dance,” Peggy said in a small voice. “I was going to teach him.”

“I know.” She looked at her with a wistful smile. “My Steve did the same for me.”

“You don’t know how to dance, for one thing,” he had said in a futile attempt to dissuade her from attending the gala.

She gestured to the other villagers. “I would argue that they don’t know how to dance,” she countered.

He smiled, pulling her towards him.

“All right. Give me your hand like so and I’m going to put my arm around you like so…”

Now instead of the fireball it was snow, swirling around them as they danced— or rather swayed—outside, the sound of Charlie’s singing carrying over the villager’s laughter and conversations. Gone. All of it gone.

She dug around in her coat and pulled out an old pocket watch. “This was his. It brought me great comfort for the first few months. It still does.”

She ran her finger lightly over the surface. If she tried hard enough she could almost feel the heat from his hands as he clasped hers.

She gently placed it in Peggy’s palm.

“What is your saying? Time heals all wounds?”

Peggy gave her a weak smile and rolled her eyes. “Yes.”

“It is both a bad pun and an untrue statement. It never heals, but… it becomes manageable. You know this.”

Peggy nodded.

“Get something of Steve’s to hold onto. It helps.”

Diana placed the watch back in her pocket, a small sense of comfort coming from the return of its familiar weight.

“I’ll stay here a few days and make sure that everything is okay.” she said looking over at Peggy. “But after that I’m needed in other places with the end of the war being so near.”

“Of course. I’ll call if there’s any problems. And I expect you do the same.”

Diana gave her a small smile. “Anything to avoid your wrath.”
She stretched and stood. “I believe that we should go find some food. There is no use being upset and hungry at the same time.”

Peggy joined her. Before opening the tent Dina spun back towards her, her mouth partway open as if to say something.

“What is it?”

She wanted to tell Peggy to rest. To head home, far away from this place of death and destruction. No one would fault her for it. But Peggy wasn’t the sort of woman who would stand down, not when there was work to be done. Diana, of all people, would know.

Right now Peggy needed to keep busy, and so instead she smiled and asked, “Would you like to do some training with my lasso tomorrow? Or show me how you weaponize ordinary objects?”

Peggy raised an eyebrow. “Of course, but what’s the rush?”

“Because now it is up to us to save the world.”

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Chapter End Notes

End of vacation and back to regular updates! (though let's be honest, I never had a regular update schedule for this)
Direct quotations are from the movie's companion novel by Nancy Holder
Hope is the Thing With Feathers

Chapter Summary

Diana heads back to base on VE Day to say her goodbyes.

Chapter Notes

Much thanks to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

VE Day-It’s All Over!

May 8, 1945

Germany has surrendered unconditionally to the allies, bringing an end to the war in Europe.

President Truman will broadcast a statement and Prime Minister Churchill will issue a VE Day proclamation. Gen. Charles de Gaulle also will address the French at the same time.

The surrender, which brought the war to a formal end after more than five years of bloodshed, was signed for by the supreme allied commander…

Diana pushed her way through the crowds, working her way back towards base. Peggy was leaving soon to work for the SSR in New York and she wanted a chance to say goodbye.

She took in the joy and relief around her as she passed through the town, the rowdy crowds, military flyovers, and widespread laughter as everyone reveled in the feeling of finally having something to celebrate.

Once again, she couldn’t full enjoy it. She had smiled at seeing children decked out in flags or the young couples reunited. But then the thought of Steve—both of them—put a damper on her mood, neither of them ever able to see the wonderful fruits of their sacrifice.

She had just entered base when she ran into Dugan.

He smiled and grabbed her arm, pulling her in the direction of the enlisted club.

“You’ll want to say goodbye to the Commandos, won’t you?” he asked over his shoulder as Diana was dragged along behind him.
“Of course. Is Peggy with you all?”

“She’ll be packing up. Have a drink with us first.” He winked at her. “Once she puts you to work you’ll never escape.”

They walked over to the bar area, where she immediately had a drink thrust into her hand. She carried it over to where the Commandos stood, quietly chatting amongst themselves in one corner of the packed room.

Once everyone was assembled Falsworth raised his glass and called for a toast.

“To the Captain.”

“To the Captain,” they echoed.

She took a small sip, the alcohol burning more than usual as she swallowed.

She nursed her drink as she made the rounds, saying goodbye to men that had become her friends. They talked to her about their future plans, the elusive “after the war” that was now right in front of them. Trips home to see family, the next mission, work, all of it was suddenly possible.

On her way out, Dugan came up to her, taking care not to spill the glass of bourbon in his hand.

“We’ll be working with you again, I hope?”

Diana smiled. “Oh, you will. You cannot get rid of me that easily.”

He laughed and clapped her on the back, waving farewell as she left to go find Peggy.

Sure enough, she was in the main office packing up her personal items and files, just as Dugan had said.

She looked up and broke into a smile when she saw Diana walk in.

“Glad you made it. I was worried the celebrations might have provided you with new crises to fix.”

“No, I was just visiting with the others. Besides, I could not miss packing.”

She laughed. “There is a stack of files along the back wall if you don’t mind.”

They fell into an easy rhythm, quietly working alongside each other as they tried to put various documents into some semblance of order. Among other things, war creates a great deal of paperwork. It appeared that while the conflict may have ended, the military wouldn’t be giving up on bureaucracy any time soon.

“Peggy, do you have more boxes?” Diana asked a while later as she wrestled with the packing tape.

There was no response.

“Peggy?”

Turning towards her, Diana saw that she had a file in front of her that she was gently sorting
through, handling the contents as if they were precious works of art.

She looked up as Dana approached her.

“Remember what you suggested? About keeping something of Steve’s?” she asked, running a finger lightly over one of the photos she had pulled out.

She slid the picture over to her. “Well, I found something.”

Diana looked down at it, her eyes crinkling as she smiled. “Good choice.”

It was a picture of Steve from before he was the captain. He was looking away from the camera, staring at something off in the distance, wearing only a plain t-shirt and his dog tags.

“He seemed much bigger in real life.”

Peggy was still staring at the photograph, her mouth compressing as she fought to keep her expression neutral, flashes of bemusement and sorrow still breaking through regardless.

“Yes, but this was him at heart.”

That evening, the two of them retreated into Peggy’s tent for a last chat before she left the next morning. It was like the early days of the War, the two of them up late talking and sipping tea they had stolen from the dining hall.

Partway through the conversation Peggy blurted “Quick, what can you use as a weapon?”

It’s a game they had played before-Peggy’s attempt at breaking Diana of her conventional weapons only mindset.

“My chair?”

“Yes, good!” she said as Diana laughed. “We’ll make a brawler of you yet.”

Peggy looked over at her with a sly smile. “Speaking of- how about one last sparring session?”

Diana cocked her head to the side, her eyebrows raised. “Only if you are ready to lose.”

The two of them charged outside, carting their weapons of choice. Peggy had grabbed the chair, while Diana had staunchly refused to give up her shield and lasso.

Almost immediately the chair came flying at Diana’s head, her shield barely blocking it in time.

Peggy cackled at seeing her shocked expression. “Normally I use guns, but I have to say this is a lot more interesting.”

That was it. Jaw set, Diana caught her foot with her lasso, yanking Peggy onto her back.

From there things devolved and by the end they were fighting hand to hand, arms locked around whatever they could grab a hold of. Peggy had ground her foot into the dirt for traction, her
muscles burning with the effort of containing Diana who was trying to pull herself free with her lasso.

The two made eye contact, and taking in each other’s’ scrunched up faces and gritted teeth, promptly burst out laughing, both of them collapsing into the grass with a groan.

As their breathing slowed they could hear partying coming from the other side of base, the raucous cheering reminding everyone of their victory, just in case they had managed to forget.

Peggy rolled over to look at her. “Good fight. You know, my offer still stands. The SSR would love to have you.”

“I appreciate it, but I will never work for just one organization or country.”

“I know,” she grumbled. “Doesn’t mean they still won’t call you for help, wherever you end up.”

“Of course. That will probably be Europe for a while-helping those who have been displaced. And then I really must move to the Pacific Theater.” She ticked the locations off her fingers, suddenly very conscious of all she had to do.

Peggy nodded, seemingly reading her mind. “You’ll be busy for a while.”

“That I will, but…” she shrugged, struggling to find the words to explain and falling silent.

“But what?”

She scooted into a sitting position, looking over at Peggy with a frown. “I want to help but I do not want to become a symbol like Steve was. I am not here for fame or to be the figurehead of a cause. I know Steve was not either,” she added hastily, “but people projected onto him so many expectations.”

“A dancing monkey, as we called it.”

She barked out a laugh. “That is a good term. A dancing monkey,” she mused. “I just cannot be everywhere for everyone like people are coming to expect.”

“So stay under the radar. It isn’t that hard to disappear. You can do your job with only the Commandos and some select SSR people knowing you exist.”

She raised an eyebrow. “And how in the name of Zeus do you propose I do this?”

“Simple, we say you’ve gone back to Themyscira.”

Her eyes narrowed. “So we lie.” In her head she could hear Steve’s exasperated sigh. “I’m a spy-it’s what I do,” he had explained, trying to make her understand that he had no choice. That sometimes the truth didn’t win you any favors. She knew Peggy’s job was similar, but that didn’t mean she had to like it.

“Do you see any other choice? It will be easy, it’s really just the 107th and some select villages that even know you’re more than a myth. Thankfully the press was focused on Steve rather than you. Especially…especially now.”

Diana sighed. “I suppose. That is it? You just tell them?”

“Yes, just don’t do anything more ridiculous than usual. And maybe wear civilian clothes when
working on humanitarian projects,” she added, eyeing Diana’s armor. “It will be fine. People tend to move on and forget.”

Diana nodded. “Then… I would appreciate if you did that.”

“I’ll ask Philips to casually mention it tomorrow. Word will spread.”

“Thank you.”

Peggy nodded, tipping her head back to look up at the stars before turning back to Diana. She looked at her with an odd expression- not awe like at their first meeting, they knew each other too well for that now. Instead her eyes were wide in something more akin to disbelief.

“What is wrong?”

“How? How do you still do this?” She asked quietly. “It’s like you said-being everywhere for everyone. Knowing full well you can’t save them all but trying anyway.”

Diana waved away the comment. “You do the same thing.”

“But it’s not the same—there’s a limit for me. Mankind grows old. You have to face war after war forever.”

She threw up her hands. “This one’s barely ended and there’s already tension with the bloody Soviets.” That was putting it mildly. The SSR had intel that Stalin would not be leaving Eastern Europe quietly, not to mention the rumors that were swirling about assassin training programs, espionage, and the way the Russian people themselves were being treated.

Diana shrugged. “That is what I feared after the last war.” It had terrified her actually. She had learned so much about mankind and yet she had still clung to her last shred of naïveté, hoping that at the very least the “war to end all wars” would result in many years of peace. It obviously had not. “There was a brief period of bitterness when this war started. I realized that previous sacrifices had not mattered as much as I thought, and that I would be constantly moving between conflicts, always privy to bloodshed.”

“So what changed?”

Diana leaned back, smiling. “Have you heard the story of Pandora’s jar?”


Her smile widened. “Greek yes-myth no. My mother used to tell it to me before I went to sleep. Remembering it is what changed things.”

She looked at Peggy. “Hope is the only thing that remains in that jar- with us despite the war and plague and misery unleashed upon the world.”

“So when you give up hope…” Peggy started.

“That is the only time you’ve truly lost everything.”

Peggy drew her knees up to her chest, mulling it over. She seemed to agree, despite how idealistic Diana knew it must sound. She shouldn’t have been surprised, Steve had been the same way, so optimistic and convinced they could change things—it was a refreshing turn from the fear and despair that had seeped into every crevice of this damn war.
“And after meeting you I realized that while I may be bouncing between conflicts, I am not doing it alone.”

Peggy shook her head, with a smile that seemed to say “obviously.” “Of course you’re not. There’s me and the Commandos and whoever else you manage to drag along with you.”

“I know. And I’m so grateful.” She stood, offering Peggy a hand to help her up. Her eyes glinted, one side of her mouth tugging up as she joked, “It is rare indeed to find a friend willing to throw a chair at your head in the interest of saving the world.”

Chapter End Notes

Once again, I’ve shamelessly drawn on ideas from Percy Jackson in regards to the conversation about Pandora’s jar (or alternately box depending on your preference) I don’t remember specifics, but it’s the scene where Percy can announce their surrender by releasing hope.
The newspaper article at the beginning is a partially re-worded version of the actual VE day edition of the New York Times.

After this I promise it gradually gets more upbeat, so if angst isn’t your thing bear with me. Also instead of trying to summarize and write in-depth chapters for all the events for the next 70 years after the war, I’m planning on highlighting some specific ones. If you have any suggestions feel free to comment or shoot me an ask on tumblr (trash0falltrades.tumblr.com) and I'll try my best to work it in!
Stop All the Clocks, Cut Off the Telephone

Chapter Summary

Diana is once again forced to confront man’s darker side as the war in the Pacific draws to a close.

Chapter Notes

Much thanks to Chimaera kitten for beta reading, as well as going on a plotting walk with me.

Fair warning: I accidentally lied about this chapter being more upbeat. It deals with the destruction caused by nuclear weapons and while it’s not graphic, it isn’t exactly cheery in some places.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

August, 1945

Diana had been on Guam when the news came. It had been nearly a year since the island’s liberation, and already progress had been made towards rebuilding. She provided further aid where she could, repairing damaged buildings and cleaning up the beaches, as well as helping the military distribute food and other supplies. Never in her life had she seen so much SPAM.

It was hard work, but it brought her happiness to see that mankind could move on. Slowly, painfully at times, but moving forward none the less.

Then out of the blue there was the radio bulletin that the U.S. had dropped a bomb on Hiroshima-an atomic bomb. She vaguely recalled Peggy mentioning such a thing during one of their late-night chats back on base, but any useful information had been classified. Whatever had happened, she knew she needed to pay a visit to the city and see if she could help rebuild.

The problem was there wasn’t much to rebuild.

She figured she had arrived a few miles outside the city, and as she began meeting people along the road they pointed her towards what had been the downtown. They described a flash of blinding light and then heat that caused an inferno, destroying any buildings that hadn’t already collapsed. But none of them mentioned a squadron of bombers or a prolonged siege. Somehow this single weapon had done the work of the hundreds that had destroyed Dresden and other European cities.

It only got worse as she worked her way inwards. There was progressively more rubble than buildings, plant life burned to a crisp, and fewer people around.
And then there was the part of the city where there was just…nothing. A lifeless gray space watched over by a mostly collapsed domed building.

*Please let there be survivors. Please.* It hadn’t been that long—there should have been people to save trapped under buildings or in bomb shelters, calling out for help.

With mounting horror, she turned in a circle, her head clasped in her hands. It was Veld all over again. She could almost see the orange gas swirling around her, settling in and choking the town.

There was no one. No one but shadows, burned into concrete.

She stumbled back the way she came, not stopping till she found signs of life, however bleak.

Volunteers and police had established a morgue in the library and multiple makeshift hospitals in buildings that had managed to survive the blast. She stepped inside one and offered to help, fetching water and providing comfort to the injured. There was little else she *could* do, not for something of this scale.

She held it together until she stepped back outside a few hours later, away from those that needed her help.

She slid down against a crumbling wall feeling numb, her chest and stomach heaving.

*You wanted me to save the world, Steve?* she thought, tilting her head to look towards the sky. *Well that is hard to do when mankind is intent on destroying it.*

The next day she left, planning to head south until she found a working telephone. There was nothing else she could do that wasn’t already being handled by others. Aid from outside the city was also beginning to trickle in in the form of relief supplies and medical personnel. It was a display of kindness and hope that was helping to keep her sane.

Diana found her phone in Kokura, the city miraculously untouched by the Allies nightly bombing raids. She steeled herself for the conversation to come, not looking forward to being the bearer of bad news.

“Hello?”

“Jim, it is Diana. Do you or the other Commandos know what has happened in Hiroshima?” she asked, cutting straight to the point.

He sighed. “Yeah the bomb. It’s bad, they’ve released one photo of the mushroom cloud. I guess I can ask Peggy if she knows anything else.”

“No it is fine, I was already there. It is awful. I just wanted to-”

“No it is fine, I was already there. It is awful. I just wanted to-”

“Wait you were *there*?”

“Yes I-”

“Diana that was incredibly dangerous! No one knows what the bomb’s long-term effects are!”

“I feel fine, I do not think it can hurt me.” She didn’t seem to be falling ill like the others had. She
was immune, just like with Maru’s gas. Doomed to live to tell the tale.

She continued. “I wanted to tell you that I tried to find your extended family.”

His breath hitched.

“You did say you still had family there, correct?” she asked, desperately hoping that she had forgotten or mixed up the stories he told her. Hoping she was wrong. “The Morita’s that lived by the hospital?”

“Yes,” he said in a whisper before clearing his throat. “Yes, grandparents and a great uncle. Are they…”

The hospital had been at the center of the destruction, the building gone. “No. I am so sorry.”

She had planned to leave the country that evening. She needed to be somewhere where it was still possible for her to help, far away from this place of death.

And then the second bomb fell.

This time it was Nagasaki, though the result was nearly the same. The rubble, the injured, the thick black rain that fell from a smoky sky.

But now there was more fury on her part. *Once was not enough?!* she wanted to scream. *You had to do it again? Kill again?*

For the first time, she truly understood what Ares meant.

*They have always been and will always be weak, cruel, selfish, capable of the greatest horrors.*

She wondered if he had found a way to continue whispering in someone’s ear. Providing the inspiration for these weapons. But even if so, he was right—he didn’t make men use them.

For a brief instant, she saw the appeal of the world returned to a paradise. A world without the war and suffering she had seen far too much of in her time among man. In a way, the bombs were just the final, ultimate capstone to a string of atrocities caused by two world wars.

She understood him. And it terrified her.

No. She thought, her eyes clensed shut. No.

She reached for the watch in her pocket, clinging to it. There was good in the world, things worth saving. Right now they were just hard to find.

After providing some basic medical assistance she once again left, heading back to a base in England where jubilant soldiers greeted her just as they did last time, celebrations already in full swing.
Everyone knew this was the end, the Japanese would surrender any day now, especially with the USSR joining the fray.

She had smiled at seeing the joyful scene around her, these men and women that finally got to go home. But it was a tired smile, lessened by the fact that these people could never fully comprehend the horror that had just happened half a world away.

It was the end of the war and she still couldn’t enjoy it.

She almost wished she could go back to what she had been working on a few months ago. Helping evacuate stolen works of art from Neuschwanstein Castle with the Monuments Men, just as she had promised Steve. Re-connecting families torn apart by conflict. Apprehending Nazis that had fled Germany.

Back before cities could instantaneously turn into wastelands.

She knew she needed to call Peggy now that she was in Europe again-for updates and potential missions if nothing else. She forced herself to pick up the phone and slowly dialed the number, not at all eager to relive the past week.

Thankfully for her, Peggy seemed just as worn out when she answered.

“Hello?”

“It is me.”

“Thank god.” she breathed. “Jim told me you were in Japan, but I didn’t know where-and Nagasaki was hit- And the SSR- I tried to pull some strings- no one knew- and thank God you’re okay,” she finished in a rush.

Her jaw clenched. “Thank you for your concern. Jim’s grandparents were not so lucky.”

She closed her eyes and took a breath. She was being unfair-this wasn’t Peggy’s fault.

“I’m sorry, I just…”

“I understand, you have every right to be upset.”

But she didn’t understand, not really. The sheer level of destruction was incomprehensible even to her.

“No, you do not. Peggy, it was atrocious.” She couldn’t get the images out of her head. A church in ruins. A baby rattle amidst the rubble. A stopped clock forever displaying the time of the explosion.

“I do know it must have been hell on the ground,” she said quietly, sighing. “At least it saved us an invasion of the mainland.”

Diana reeled back, her lip curled. “Is that what they told you? Peggy-you-it was-I do not even know how to describe it. This was the type of event we were supposed to be fighting against. This was what Steve and I tried to stop!” Whether the threat be gas or Hydra’s weapons, their goal had been to save civilians. She didn’t care what country they were from.
“I know!” she burst out. “I know. That’s why Howard and I fought it. We contacted so many higher ups, Howard especially. He tried so desperately to stall it.”

“Why Howard?”

“Oh, er,” Peggy started. “Well, he had a hand in creating it.”

Diana’s voice turned cold. “He did what?” This was Howard — their friend. The man who had refused to give up on his search for Steve, who never stopped loving him. The upbeat visionary who would lead them into a better, brighter future. He had helped create this?

“You know how he gets,” Peggy added hastily. “He loves the science behind things but he doesn’t think through all the possible consequences. He was presented with a problem to solve, he didn’t think anyone would actually dare to use it.”

“He should have.”

“Yes he should have, and he knows it. He hasn’t been sober since it happened-he looks worse than when Steve died,” she said, her voice strained.

“But Diana, he wasn’t the one to push the button. And when it became clear he couldn’t change things he threw his weight behind the Secretary of War’s idea to get Kyoto taken off the target list. To protect the art and culture there. He knew Steve would have wanted at least that much.”

Diana took another deep breath. She couldn’t totally forgive him—not yet, but she knew it wasn’t his fault either.

“You are right. It is not on him-everyone is to blame.” She shook her head. “I am just so tired of all this bloodshed.”

“Well you didn’t hear it from me, but it will be over soon,” she said in a low voice. “We’ve heard another day or two at most.”

“Well that is good.” There was a small sense of relief, but mostly just exhaustion. It was over at a terrible cost.

“Yes, it is. Where will you go now that we’re momentarily done killing each other? I hear France is lovely this time of year…” She could hear a smile in Peggy’s voice as she tried to lighten the mood.

“Well,” she started. “That is something I wanted to talk to you about. I am retiring.”

Peggy spluttered. “You’re what?”

“Maybe not retiring exactly-I will always fight for mankind. That will not change. I am just… giving up the armor. Like you suggested.”

“Diana, I didn’t mean you had to do this! You can stay undercover and still-”

“It’s not about being undercover,” she broke in. “Peggy, I have hope, but I do not wish to test it more than I already have. I am taking a step back. I want to focus more on humanitarian issues rather than doing battling and I can do that better as just Diana.”

She was silent for a moment, trying to find a way to describe it.

“What is the saying? Hanging up the towel?”
“Throwing in.”

“Ah, well I like hanging up better. I will not just throw out the armor, it will still be there if I ever want or need to use it again.”

Peggy let out a breath. “Well all right then. You better still check in so you can let me know if there’s some angry villagers or art thieves you need help with.”

Diana smiled. “Of course. And I will call to make sure no new evil cults are threatening the world.”

“Obviously. God why can’t things be boring, just for a day,” she said with a sigh.

Diana snorted. “I have no intention of retirement being boring. I do not want to have to take up shuffleboard or knitting to keep myself occupied.”

“You technically are a very old lady…” Peggy trailed off chuckling, “but I suppose being busy will keep you limber. Just don’t get yourself killed.”

Diana smiled again, grateful that she understood. “I would not dream of it.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this is a controversial and emotionally charged topic and that I've presented a mostly one sided perspective. However, after living in Japan for a few years and visiting the peace park in Hiroshima I didn't feel like I could just gloss over it, and from a writing perspective I thought it would be interesting to force Diana into a gray zone where the "good guys" don't seem as good and her friends act more in Allied interests than she would have. Since this is such a serious topic, I tried to make all historical references as accurate as possible.

Thanks to all of you for putting up with a pretty erratic update schedule thus far!

In other notes:
The title for this chapter is from W. H. Auden's wonderfully depressing poem "Funeral Blues."
I also lived on Guam for a while and there is a LOT of SPAM. Guam is the world's biggest consumer per capita and there's SPAM cook-offs and stuff.
Out of the Mouths of Babes

Chapter Summary

Diana rejoins the Commandos on a mission to help clear Howard's name.

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

April 1946

Diana had done many unusual things in her time among man, but hiding in the forests of Belarus had not been one of them.

Over the past months Peggy had been filling her in on developments at the SSR including Leviathan, the charges against Howard, and being overlooked in the organization. It all seemed so tiring. Once again, she was glad she didn’t have to deal with governments or espionage or workplace sexism. It was just her and the people she was helping.

At times Peggy seemed tired of it too, especially surrounding Howard and Jarvis’ betrayal. Even hearing about it second hand had made Diana furious. It was one thing to lie when you had to, another to lie needlessly to a friend. And about Steve no less. If anyone had a right know about a vial of Steve’s blood, it was Peggy Carter.

Yet here they were, trying to clear his name. Peggy had initially seemed nervous asking for her help, afraid she wouldn’t want any part in aiding Howard and by extension the U.S.

“With our luck, we’ll have to do some fighting. And the SSR is very much involved, as is Howard…” she had said, trailing off. “But I’d feel better if you were there. Something seems off about all of this.”

She needn’t have worried. Diana wanted to bring whoever had the weapons to justice just as much as Peggy did. She wasn’t certain of much anymore, but she damn well knew Howard hadn’t been selling dangerous weapons to anyone. Not after what had happened with the bombs.

If Peggy was willing to forgive and help him, then she would too.

“How could I say no to fighting alongside old friends?” she had replied. Sure the SSR would be there, but so would the Commandos.

After Diana was introduced to Agents Thompson, Li, and Ramirez, the group made their way to the
designated meeting point. She observed Thompson as they walked. She had heard much about him from Peggy, mainly that he could be obnoxious, but by the way he held himself, his posture straight and movements sure, she could also tell he was also a good soldier.

Peggy was also eyeing Diana. “I like the outfit,” she said with a wry smile.

Diana laughed. She had dressed like she had seen Peggy do for other missions with combat boots, pants, and a jacket. She was dressed like a civilian, and it suited her just fine.

Diana smiled back. “Well I did learn from the best.”

Their conversation was cut short by a crackle of underbrush coming from the other side of the clearing. Everyone drew their weapons and circled up as Thompson called “Don’t move.”

A loud whisper cut through the quiet “Emu!”

“What?”

“Emu!” the voice repeated, only to be interrupted by someone else who muttered “Ostrich man, Ostrich!”

Diana relaxed, as did Peggy. Only one group could manage to be great fighters and complete idiots at the same time.

“Emu!”

“Carter, Dugan forgot the password again.”

Peggy stepped forward. “The password is eagle you apes.”

Diana tried to hide her grin, completely failing as the Commandos stepped out from the shadows.


Catching sight of Diana he laughed. “Well look who decided to show up!” He walked over to her, enveloping her in a bear hug.

From there Peggy began making introductions, which thankfully weren’t as awkward as Diana had feared. These agents knew she was still living among mankind, though there were still some impressed faces, or in Thompsons case intrigued.

“The papers were right, you are the female Captain America.” he said.

“Except I came first.”

Peggy let out a snort, causing Thompson to turn towards her, scowling. She covered by introducing the other Commandos, who Ramirez was extremely excited to meet due to their proximity to Steve.

“I can’t believe you all fought with him,” Ramirez said in awe, staring up at them.

Dugan shrugged and looked over a Peggy. “Not as long as she did.”
That evening Diana had a chance to catch up with everyone as they all swapped stories around the campfire. They had spent the night near the Russian border, yet it was enjoyable, reminiscent of their campouts during the War.

The next day was a different matter. The group had to trek up the hill to the compound the SSR wanted searched. They had all woken up painfully early, and with Thompson barking orders left and right no one was in a good mood.

“We beat the bad guys here,” he declared, dropping his binoculars to his side.

“So we could have slept in for another hour.” Dugan muttered,

Peggy rolled her eyes. “Then we wouldn’t have the advantage of surprise, Timothy.”

Diana’s mouth twitched. “Timothy?”

He sighed. “Don’t start.”

It was too late. She and the others were already snickering and repeating his name in a poor imitation of Peggy’s British accent.

“Timothy.”

Thompson turned to face them and they quieted as he began outlining the plan.

The Commandos returned his stare, silent. Thompson may have been the leader, but neither she nor the other Commandos were happy about it. Peggy had been aiding them for years, and with Steve gone it made sense she would fill his roll.

“Carter?” Sam asked, stone faced. The rest of them looked towards her. They would do nothing without her approval, Diana included. She still wasn’t thrilled the SSR was in charge, but Peggy had explained there wasn’t a choice. It was only through petitioning that she was even here, despite her experience and connections.

Peggy held in a sigh. “Thompson’s lead.”

He raised his eyebrows “You got a better idea?”

She very much did, and began rattling off an entirely different set of instructions. “Smaller groups are faster, but larger groups safer. And since we have the time…”

“Fine,” Thompson said, as he split the group in half. “See you in there.”

Peggy took Diana, Dugan, Li, and Junior with her, the five of them working their way to the ground floor. They inched through dark hallways, Peggy and Diana in front with their guns and shield respectively.

Peggy swung open a door and Diana and Dugan quickly stepped through, scanning the room for threats.

Diana had to admit, it was an adrenaline rush. She hadn’t exactly missed it, but it wasn’t unwelcome either. She still preferred staying away from bloodshed and yet it was comforting to be
a part of a team again, if only temporarily.

In this case, though, the room was clear. There was nothing threatening because somehow they had found their way into a classroom. There were rows of desks and a chalk board at the front of the room with equations still written on it. Most unnervingly, there was an American flag and a map of the U.S.— things that most certainly did not belong in Russia.

She felt Peggy shiver next to her and as they made eye contact Diana saw her own unease reflected back. At last it wasn’t just her.

“Does anyone else feel a chill going up their knickers?” Peggy asked.

Junior scanned the room, his eyes wide. “I would if I wore knickers.”

They continued searching the room, the silence suddenly broken by Li bumping into the projector, a movie springing to life on the pull-down screen.

“Shut it off!” Dugan barked over Li’s apologies.

Peggy held up a hand. “Wait.” She grabbed a hold of the wheel and rotated it frame by frame until two Russian words appeared.

“Instill fear,” Diana translated. “What kind of classroom is this?” She had never been to school, but even she knew that this wasn’t normal. Who would feed that information to children?

Their feeling of unease only deepened as the sounds of a child crying drifted in from the next room.

Li turned to look. “What’s a little kid doing in a place like this?”

Peggy’s mouth hardened as they walked towards the sound. She looked like she knew exactly why.

They slowly walked into the next room, the group greeted by rows of beds that all had handcuffs dangling from their frames.

Diana looked at them horrified. “Children’s beds? Why are there shackles attached?”

Dugan shrugged. “It’s Russia.”

“It’s a boarding school,” Peggy explained, scanning the room in an attempt to piece everything together, her eyes coming to rest on the source of the crying.

There was a little girl in the far corner, sitting curled up against one of the beds. They cautiously walked towards her, Peggy and Diana in the front.

“Peggy,” Dugan called, part in question, part warning. She nodded back.

Dugan stepped forward. “Hey there. You okay?”

Diana joined him, repeating his question in Russian in case she didn’t understand. She held up her hands and smiled. “It is alright. We are here to help.”

The girl looked up at her, her eyes pooling with tears, and Diana felt her heart break.

This poor child, she thought, as she and Dugan kneeled down beside her their hands still raised.
“We won’t hurt you.”

The girl looked over at Dugan as he spoke, pointing up at his hat.

He smiled. “You like my hat?” The girl nodded, shrinking back a little.

Diana turned towards the others, who had moved to stand behind them in a semi-circle, their weapons still drawn.

“Put those away, she is scared.”

Dugan had turned towards them too, and was about to add something else when suddenly the girl’s hand darted out, a knife clenched in her fist.

She stabbed Dugan, and then flung herself upwards and out towards Peggy.

“No!” Diana cried, lunging toward Dugan as he fell to his side, groaning.

She quickly realized it had hit his armor and only bruised him rather than puncturing the skin. Breathing a word of thanks, she threw her shield on top of him and stood up to help the others.

Peggy was fighting her hand-to-hand, trying to disarm her. It wasn’t working—this girl was good. She had been trained, it was clear by the way she dodged and feinted and how her blows landed.

Junior and Diana rushed towards her aid, as did Dugan who had managed to get back on his feet.

A flurry of shots rang out, deafening her. It was all she could do to throw up her arms, hoping to stop as many bullets as possible.

It wasn’t enough.

Her mouth opened in a silent scream as she watched Junior fall backwards, she flung herself at him trying to catch him- to help him. When she saw the wound, she realized there wasn’t a point.

Behind her she heard Peggy swear, and turned to see the girl leap over one of the beds and into the ventilation duct.

The remaining four of them ran over, looking up to where she had disappeared.

Dugan yanked a grenade out of his pocket, moving to throw it in the duct.

Diana grabbed his arm, horrified. “Dugan! She is a child!”

“A child who just killed Junior.” He looked over at Peggy, seeking her opinion.

Peggy sighed. “No… she’s right. She’s a kid. Besides, it would alert anyone else here.”

Dugan nodded, slowly putting the weapon back down.

Diana walked over to where Junior lay, her face pinched in sorrow as she bowed her head.

“We have to leave him,” Peggy said softly, coming to stand beside her. “We can’t carry him back.”

Dugan nodded, bending down to remove his dog tags. “For his family,” he explained.

Diana looked up at Peggy. “I should have gone after her. She needs a home, somewhere besides this place.”
She shook her head. “Diana she’s a trained assassin. It’s not like you could have kept her.”

“I know, but I could have done something. Tried to send her to Themyscira maybe…”

They fell silent, surveying the room one last time before they turned away, leaving to go meet up with the other group.

The other Commandos had been understandably upset upon hearing the news, but for the moment attempted to hide behind a stoic façade to various levels of success. They didn’t really have a choice—in addition to a few more classrooms Thompson’s group had also found some holding cells that still needed to be searched.

Diana and Sam offered to act as guards, remaining in the hallway while the others descended a flight of stairs to investigate whatever lay below.

She paced her end of the hallway, mulling over what she had just witnessed. For the first time, she was glad her mother had forbidden her to fight when she was young. It had protected her from being discovered, but it also protected her innocence. Then again, indoctrination was very different than training. There wasn’t an ideology to go along with it.

Everything about this place reminded her of the child soldiers in Germany at the end of the war. Boys, no older that twelve or thirteen bearing arms because of Hitler’s unwillingness to give up on his warped fantasies.

She had rescued a few where she could, in situations where it was obvious they had no interest in fighting and weren’t a real threat. But so many others had been brainwashed by Hitler’s propaganda that was fed to them through their homes, schools, and activities. An ideology that so pervasive it was nearly inescapable. She had seen too many of them needlessly slaughtered for a doomed cause. She couldn’t let it happen again.

*If I run into another like her,* she vowed, envisioning that little girl, scars around her wrists from the shackles, *next time I will help. I will try to get her out from under these peoples’ influence.*

The others emerged a few minutes later with two new men in tow.

“This is Nikola and Ivchenko,” Peggy briefly explained as they turned to leave. In a low voice she added, “Good news is Howard’s clear. They said Leviathan stole the weapons.”

Diana smiled. She had never doubted Howard’s story, but it was good that they now had evidence. When Peggy returned to the U.S. she would be able to explain everything and then Howard could stop living like a fugitive and settle down.

The smile was wiped off her face, however, by the guard who appeared at the other end of the hallway and upon seeing them yelled for backup.

“Bad news,” she said, “We have company.”
Guards streamed in, forcing everyone back and below ground. Diana stood in front, bearing the brunt of their attacks and deflecting most of the bullets, while those behind her took turns shooting.

She thought of What Peggy had told her when this was being planned. *With our luck, we’ll have to fight.* She had always been good at predicting future problems.

Dugan and a few others managed to make it to a door leading outside, yelling on their way out something about “Busting you guys out.”

Everyone else who remained continued the firefight in the boiler room. They were holding their own, though vastly outnumbered and with dwindling ammunition. Soon they would have to resort to Peggy’s favorite fighting style of simply throwing objects at your opponent, though that tended not to work as well in large groups.

In between rounds Peggy yelled into her radio, trying to contact Dugan. “Now would be a great time to use your plan!” she called before turning and emptying bullets into the nearest guard.

Diana agreed. The sooner Dugan came back the better. They were barely holding their positions, and the sudden shouts behind her didn’t bode well for their chances of making it out.

Whipping around, she saw the girl peeking out of a vent, aiming her gun at her friends below.

“Stop!” she yelled, running towards her.

She startled and looked towards Diana, fired a few shots and then scampered away.

“Li!” She heard Thompson call. He had collapsed to the ground, unmoving, just as Junior had. This girl had at least two kills to her name. How many more?

*I should have helped her when I had the chance.*

By the looks of it she had also injured Sam, who was holding his leg, grimacing.

“Keep fighting, I’m fine,” he grunted. He was very obviously not fine, and his situation not helped by the fact that Nikola ran over and grabbed him, screaming in Russian about taking Sam as his hostage.

She started towards them trying to figure out how to break them apart, her attention split between the two of them, a panicked looking Thompson sunk down against a wall, and Peggy, who was calling for more Ammo.

“Let me take care of this,” Ivchenko said, pushing past her. He briefly exchanged words with Nikola and then frowning, he pulled his gun and shot him, dragging Sam to safety.

She gaped. That wasn’t taking care of it, that was murder. How dare he shoot a teammate, and over something easily fixable.

Peggy’s yelling forced her out of it. “Thompson-Li’s ammo!” she called, frantically looking over her shoulder. Li might be dead, but they still needed his supplies.

Thompson was still slumped against the wall, breathing heavily and completely oblivious to Peggy’s request. It was like what had happened to Charlie she realized, and herself on occasion.
Freezing up in memory. Shellshock, the doctors called it.

Instead Diana was the one to rip ammo off Li’s body and toss it to Peggy, before turning and crouching down next to Thompson. The others could handle the fight for a moment, Thompson obviously needed her help.

“Look at me,” she said, laying her hands on his shoulders. “Whatever you are seeing is not here. You have to snap out of it.”

He looked at her, his eyes wide.

“It is not real.”

He nodded, but before she could say anything else Dugan decided to finally implement his plan, which consisted of blowing up the wall.

“Wa hoo!” he cried, running in to join them, oblivious to the massive dust cloud he had just created.

Peggy rolled her eyes. “About damn time. Stop wa-hooing and get over here!”

They exchanged a few more rounds until it became obvious they weren’t going to be able to subdue the guards.

“Everybody out!” Peggy yelled falling back beside Diana and Dugan and covering those that were trying to run.

“Thompson that means you too!” She added, seeing him still sitting on the floor.

Diana helped him stand and practically pushed him towards the door, leaving only the three of them behind.

“Go!” Peggy told Dugan still firing at the guards.

He looked over at her, incredulous. “What would Cap say if I left his best girl behind?”

“We can handle it,” Diana said, the same time Peggy yelled “He would say do as Peggy says!”

Wisely, he ran off.

Peggy kept firing as they slowly backed up, until they both turned and sprinted towards the trucks waiting outside.

Diana hung back, deflecting bullets with her shield until Peggy flung herself in the truck. Once she was safe she followed, the both of them lying in a heap, panting, the others staring down at them.

“Not bad for girls,” Ivchenko said, smiling.

Peggy groaned, trying to keep from smiling herself. “I hate you all.”

For Diana, one of the worst parts of missions were the goodbyes at the end. She had already had to do that permanently for Junior, and to a lesser extent Li and Nikola. A high price to pay for the
information they sought.

Now it was time for the others, though thankfully not in a permeant sense. The SSR group was heading back to the States with Ivchenko in tow, while the Commandos would head back to the border and split from there. Dugan had joked about bringing Diana with them, teasing her about all the fun they would have without her.

She laughed along. “Sadly I cannot. I’m supposed to be visiting an old friend in England and then helping the Monuments Men with their efforts in Japan.”

He heaved a dramatic sigh, and looked over at Peggy beside him.

“Fine. At least try to keep tabs on Miss Union Jack over here, will ya? Don’t let her get in too much trouble.”


Chapter End Notes

Any real dialogue snippets are from Agent Carter season one episode five, "The Iron Ceiling"

There was really a monuments men effort in Japan after the war was over, originally led by George Stout.

Feel free to leave a comment or send me an ask on tumblr (trash0falltrades.tumblr.com) if you have any more suggestions for future scenes or just really wanna scream about Wonder Woman.
July, 1947

Peggy was in trouble. Between Howard’s near plane crash with the midnight oil, Dottie Underwood, and Zero Matter, it wasn’t an entirely new phenomenon. This time, though, it was Peggy who had gotten hurt.

When she had called for her usual check-in, it was Jarvis rather than Peggy who answered the phone.

“Oh, you must be Ms. Prince. Ms. Carter told me to expect a call from you.”

“Where is she?” She asked, a feeling of unease settling over her. Peggy rarely, if ever, missed speaking to her.

“I’m afraid Ms. Carter has been injured. She’s resting up right now.”

Diana bolted upright. “What happened? Will she be okay? Is she-”

He cut off her questions with a reassuring, but firm voice. “It’s serious, but I think she will be alright. She was, er, impaled on a mission yesterday evening.”

“Impaled?” She asked, aghast. That settled it. “I will come to check in on her. Can you give me the address?”

“I’m terribly sorry Ms. Prince, but that’s the exact thing Ms. Carter didn’t want you to do. She just wanted you to know so you wouldn’t worry.”

Diana barked out a laugh. “Well if she knows me at all, she knows I won’t listen. What is the address?”

Jarvis picked her up at the airport the next afternoon. After making quick introductions he ushered
her into his shiny white car and headed towards Howard’s estate.

Themyscira may have been warm at times, but L.A. was *hot*. She was dripping sweat before they even pulled out of the parking lot. Despite the weather it was also beautiful, everything so big and bright, with palm trees lining the streets. There was no indication at all that a war had recently ended, none of the lingering rubble or undetonated bombs that still characterized European cities.

Jarvis made small talk, pointing out various business and talking about some of Peggy’s recent exploits.

“She has always been a busy woman.”

Jarvis snorted. “I’ve noticed.” He glanced over at her. “She’s going to want to go gallivanting about with you on SSR business. I ask that you try to dissuade her. She needs to take a break and let her body heal.”

Diana nodded. “Of course. Is there anything else I need to know before we arrive? Any other injuries? People? Missions?”

He hesitated for a moment, thinking. “Well, you shouldn’t aggravate the flamingo. He can be rather difficult.”

“The flamingo?” Diana vaguely recalled hearing of such a thing when she was working in a town in Chile. Where such animals native to California?

He sighed. “Bernard. You’ll see.”

She laughed. “Well that sounds ominously delightful. Anything else?”

“I’m trying to think of who else you’ll run into. You’ll have heard about my wife Ana and Agent Sousa of course.” He said.

Ana she had. Peggy had asked her to try and locate family members that had been displaced or sent to the camps. She wasn’t successful, but she had talked to her a few times over the phone to ask for more information. Sousa, though, was a newer name for her. Peggy had mentioned some of her coworkers in passing, especially the ones that annoyed her, but rarely him.

“He’ll probably pay her a visit while you’re staying with us. He was the one there when she was injured and his fiancé stitched her up at their house. He was so upset—he didn’t want to leave her side.”

“That is some dedication.”

“Well they do fancy each other, though so does Dr. Wilkes,” he mused.

Diana’s brow furrowed. “They what?” She knew Peggy wasn’t the type to concern herself in personal affairs or social matters, but she could have mentioned it.

Jarvis turned red. “Oh, er, you didn’t know? It’s not my place—I suggest you ask Ms. Carter any further questions.”

“Yes, of course,” she said faintly, trying to decide whether she was more confused or amused by the information.
Sure enough, when they pulled into the driveway a flamingo greeted them.

“Oh, he’s beautiful!” Diana cooed, staring at him as Jarvis pulled her bag out of the trunk.

“He’s a royal pain is what he is. It’s no wonder Howard took to him.” Diana laughed and turned back to look at the bird again before the pair headed inside.

Ana greeted them, guiding her through the hallways and towards Peggy’s room. “She’s so glad you could come. I’ll have Edwin send up some refreshments for the two of you in a moment.”

Thanking her, she opened the door and promptly froze, completely unprepared for the sight that greeted her. She was unaccustomed to Peggy taking breaks, much less lying in bed in the middle of the day. She was pale, her face creased with pain, and her middle obviously wrapped in bandages.

“Oh, Peggy,” Diana said, shaking her head as she pulled up a chair next to her.

She gave a weak smile. “I might have gotten into some trouble.”

Diana snorted. “I can see that. For once my daily activities are safer than yours. I have done some reckless things, but I have never been impaled.”

“‘Yet’ being the operative word.” With a groan, she slowly scooted up into something resembling more of a sitting position, readjusting the pillows behind her. “You didn’t have to come, there’s many other emergencies a lot more important than me.”

Diana rolled her eyes. “Right now you are the most important emergency. I cannot just let my best friend die on me. Besides, I left some old friends in charge. They can handle it for a few days.”

Charlie, Sameer, and the Chief were all settled with families, yet they still jumped at the chance to be “on call” for a few days. She and Etta speculated that it was a way for them to feel young again. Though they were solidly middle aged, she had no doubt they could handle an emergency that popped up until she could get back.

“Well that’s good. But I’m not going to die.” She sat up further in an attempt to prove her point, but gave up half way and slowly eased herself back again.

Diana just shook her head. “But you could have. Peggy, how on Earth did this happen?”

With a sigh, Peggy launched into an explanation, summarizing their break in to the Roxxon facility before describing how Whitney Frost had pushed her over the railing and onto the spiked pallet below.

Diana cringed. “You’re lucky nothing vital was hit.”

“That’s what we all told her, Ms. Prince,” Jarvis said from the doorway. He was carrying a tea tray that he deposited on Peggy’s bedside table. “Though I suppose it’s still better than being destroyed by Zero Matter.”

“She used that on you?”

Peggy waved a hand. “She tried to. We’ll get to that later. I have a lot I need to show you.”

“Thank you,” she said, turning to Jarvis.
He smiled as he turned to leave. “My pleasure. My mother always said there was nothing a good cup of tea couldn’t fix.”

Peggy took a small sip. “Did that answer your question? I promise that I won’t make a habit of getting impaled, it’s rather unpleasant.”

“So I see.” She took another look at Peggy’s bandages with morbid fascination. She recalled what Jarvis had told her, that it was Daniel Sousa’s house where she received first aid, rather than a hospital. That he hadn’t wanted to leave her.

“I do want to ask something else, if you don’t mind. Why did you not tell me about Daniel?”

Peggy froze, slowly setting her cup down. “How did you-“

“Jarvis let it slip that you were close to him and a Dr. Wilkes. He also told me about a flamingo, but I do not think that is pertinent right now.”

“Bernard,” she said before letting out a sigh. “At first it wasn’t important, and by the time it was I felt ridiculous. There are more important things than men to worry about.”

“But it mattered to you?”

“Yes,” she said softly, “which is also why. I didn’t want it to seem like I was rushing into things after Steve.”

“Peggy, he would have wanted you to move on and be happy.” They had planned so many great things, the two of them. Art school for Steve, the SSR for Peggy, both of them settling down out of the spotlight. It likely wouldn't have worked, the military wouldn't just let Steve go, but she could understand how compelling that dream was, how hard it was to just give up.

“I know that. It’s part of why I got rid of his blood.”

“I thought Howard gave it to you?”

“He did, but I poured it out without telling anyone. I didn’t want someone to try and take it again.”

“That is commendable.” Diana couldn’t imagine how hard that must have been, getting rid of a physical piece of him. She was angry Peggy even had to. She should have been able to mourn as she wished without anyone breathing down her neck, attempting to weaponize what little of Steve remained.

“Is it?” She looked up, her brows knit in worry.

“You saw how people wanted to use it. Creating more super soldiers is not what this world needs. And if it brought you closure…”

“It did.”

“Then no one can fault you for it,” she said firmly.

Peggy smiled. “Thanks.”

“Anything else you haven’t told me? Secret family members? A fake alias?” Diana teased.

She laughed. “Nothing I’m allowed to tell you, no.”
Before Diana could say anything else, Jarvis walked back in to collect his tray and change her bandages.

Diana helped, making a face as she disposed of the bloodied cloth.

“Nasty, isn’t it?” Jarvis asked. “I think it’s time we let Ms. Carter rest so she can recoup a little before dinner,” he said with a pointed look at Diana.

Peggy started to protest, but it was quickly cut off. “He’s right, you need to sleep.”

Peggy rolled her eyes. “I’m fine I just—”

“You were impaled!” Diana and Jarvis said at the same time, causing the three of them to laugh, and in Peggy’s case groan.

“You just proved my point,” Jarvis said dryly, before ushering Diana back out of the room. “Rest.”

Jarvis showed her to the sitting room, where there was another man waiting. His looked exhausted, with worry lines etched into his face. He stood to meet them, a crutch making up for a bad leg. Yet another thing the war had taken.

“Ms. Prince, Agent Sousa,” Jarvis said, making introductions. “I’m afraid I have to go run some errands, but Ana is here if you need anything before dinner. Make yourselves at home.” As an afterthought he added, “Though I’d prefer if you two didn’t help Ms. Carter escape out the window or something of the sort.”

Diana smiled. He was smart enough to realize that to the SSR and superhumans, ‘make yourself at home’ could result in a number of unintended consequences. “We’ll make sure she is okay.”

After he left, Daniel turned towards her. “How’s she doing?”

“She can’t handle sitting still.”

He laughed. “Yep, that’s Peggy.”

Daniel looked over at her, an odd expression on his face. “Are you...”

She smiled as she stared him down, daring him to question her. “Wonder Woman went back to Themyscira.”

“Right,” he said slowly, the corner of his mouth tugging up. “Well Peggy’s mentioned you here and there. I appreciate everything you’ve helped her with.”

“It was my pleasure, she has aided me just as much.”

She paused for a moment before adding, “Jarvis told me what you did for her. I cannot thank you enough—you saved her life.”

“It was nothing. I just happened to be there.”

She shook her head. “You didn’t have to take her to your house and sit with her and be checking up on her now. I am so glad she has people here who care.”
Her eyes narrowed as she grew more serious. “Whatever is between you, do not mess it up.”

He stammered. “Of course not-why-why would I.”

“Men,” she said simply, “Are not always good.” She had learned that the hard way. It had been a letdown when she realized Steve had lied when he said he had been an average man. He was so much more

“I know,” he said, “She deserves better than that.”

She opened her mouth to continue and was cut off from a shout down the hallway. “I can bloody hear you talking!” Peggy called, causing the two of them to burst out laughing.

“The Jarvis’ must be saints,” Diana snorted, the two of them walking back to Peggy’s bedroom, “to put up with all of you.”

Dinner that night had been a casual affair. They had given up on making Peggy rest, helping her out to the sitting room to chat with them while Ana cooked.

Jarvis returned with various metal instruments and Howard in tow. They half carried Peggy to the dining room table, eventually getting her seated, though not without a bit of cursing.

Ana had made traditional Hungarian food. As plates were passed around they talked about Howard’s movie and the L.A. scene as well as Ana and Diana’s time in Hungary. Howard kept offering Diana and Peggy minor rolls in his film, describing the various characters and their motives.

“Thanks, but I am not really one for acting.”

“Besides,” Peggy added, “We should play the main roles.”

He sighed. “The problem is the audience would never accept a female lead.”

Towards the end of the meal the conversation inevitably turned back to SSR business, as much as the Jarvis’ tried to deflect the conversation to their favorite eight p.m. radio shows.

Peggy pushed away her plate and leaned back. “We have multiple problems, but for now just one thing we want help on.” Peggy said, with a long look over at Daniel. They appeared locked in a silent conversation, or possibly an argument, about how much to tell her.

With a slight nod, she turned towards Howard. “If you don’t mind we need to show her to your workshop.”

Diana had the privilege of helping Peggy hobble down a flight of stairs, depositing her in a chair at the bottom.

Tables covered in various papers greeted them, as did a man at a chalkboard studying some formulas.
“Diana, this is Jason Wilkes.”

She smiled, holding out her hand to shake. He hesitated but with a nod from Peggy reached towards her, his hand passing through her own.

She reeled back, drawing her hand away.

“He’s intangible, it was easier to show you.” Peggy explained. “We’re working on making him tangible again, but we’re not completely sure how. We don’t know enough about how Zero Matter works yet.”

“Couldn’t you ask someone from the company? Or other scientists?”

“We have been. Howard talked to other experts and I asked Whitney Frost myself. She dismissed us.”

“She said I’m a communist and there was ‘nothing she could do’” Wilkes said, rolling his eyes.

“Why would she say that?”

“I’m black. To her I’m disposable.”

“Oh,” she said, her mouth compressing in anger. She knew mankind had ridiculous ideas about race, she had seen it first hand with segregated military units or the way people spoke about the Japanese. And now with this. It wasn’t right.

“So are you asking me to help find a way to bring him all the way back? I do not know if I can.”

“Oh, no,” Howard said, moving towards the projector in the center of the room, film reel in hand. “Leave that to me. We need you because of this.”

The film started playing, showing a wide expanse of desert, with trucks and people milling about. At the top of the screen, a vortex of sorts opened up causing everything to be sucked into it.

She turned to Peggy, her eyes wide.

“I know,” Peggy said softly before she could say anything. “I know. It’s bad.”

“Yet such a great invention,” Howard said, still staring at the film.

Diana whipped towards him, her fists clenched as she stared him down. “Are you serious?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I don’t want to use it.” He looked at her with a pained expression. “Believe it or not I’ve learned from my mistakes.”

“It gets worse,” Wilkes said. “Frost is trying to get her hands on an atomic bomb. She wants to replicate the conditions in that clip to make the zero matter appear again.”

Diana paled, taking a deep breath to try and fight off the images of utter destruction that floated into her consciousness.

Peggy nodded, seeing her expression. “We’ve already diffused one set of bombs. We can’t let it happen again.”

“So how do I help?”
Daniel broke in. “She’s tied to the Arena Club which has connections worldwide. We’re just asking you to keep an eye out for other members and their activities.”

“I can do that.” She would do anything if it meant these weapons wouldn’t be used.

Daniel smiled at her. “We can’t thank you enough. We all still have to figure out what we’re going to do stateside.”

“I have a plan.” Peggy announced, standing up before promptly sitting back down a hand pressed to her side.

“I bet you do,” he muttered.

“Granted, it’s a terrible one. We need to get our hands on some zero matter which means getting a blood sample from Frost.”

The others exchanged looks before Daniel eventually sighed and asked, “Why do I find myself agreeing with you?”

“Because it makes sense. We can keep tabs on her here while Diana searches for connections overseas.” Peggy turned towards her, her head tilted and eyes wide as if to say ‘back me up.’

Diana smiled. “It will be no trouble at all.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter mostly brings an end to content from the Agent Carter T.V. show, so if you haven’t seen it hang in there, the references end soon. The next chapter also includes some fluff because it’s high time I deliver on that promise of this story being more upbeat. Feel free to leave me a comment or shoot me an ask on tumblr at trash0falltrades.tumblr.com if you have any more suggestions for future scenes or just really wanna scream about Wonder Woman.
They say bad things come in threes. Diana could offer plenty of evidence as proof, whether it be Peggy’s injury or Zero Matter fiascos. Maybe it was the optimist in her, but Diana believed the same principle also applied to good things. Sometimes they just took longer to find.

For all her determination about lying low, Diana had pulled her lasso out of storage as soon as it became clear Peggy was getting better. She figured a looming world-ending threat was grounds to use it.

She never enjoyed spying, yet her supposed disappearance made her perfect for the job. It was an irony Peggy had pointed out as soon as the mission started, and one Steve would have teased her for as well. Her spying strategy consisted of whatever she had seen Peggy do, mainly hiding in plain sight, listening in and playing the ditz when caught as opposed to direct confrontation. She hated it, but it worked.

There were occasions when she was forced to directly interrogate people, and at those times she didn’t shy away from using her tools. The lasso made sure she got the information she needed, though not without a lot of cursing and sweating on the parts of those being questioned. At the end, she simply recoiled her lasso, knocked the men out and left. She didn’t even have to worry about her cover—no one would believe a story involving a magic rope and a supposedly mythical woman.

It was almost too easy.

By the end she had pieced together a ring of people in the Arena Club from nearly every European country. Just like in the U.S. it was an old boys club, as Peggy had phrased it. They were politicians, bankers, lawyers, and other rich and powerful white men who reduced women to mere adornments on the rare occasions they were let inside their “club.” It made her furious every time she thought about it.

She sent the list of names back to Peggy and Daniel, highlighting those that said they knew of Whitney Frost or where nuclear weapons were stored. They were thrilled to have it and conscripted a few other agents to track the subject’s movements. For Diana, though, it was a dead end. She kept searching through European banks and governments, but had gleaned all she could short of dragging people back to the SSR herself. She was more than willing to seek out the truth, but kidnapping would have complicated their plans even further.

Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that Diana’s lists wouldn’t be that useful. Whitney Frost didn’t need international connections—she had everything she needed right there in California.
As a result, crises kept popping up when Diana wasn’t there. It was incredibly frustrating hearing of events after they happened, especially when she knew she could have been useful. At times she felt like calling Frost and asking her to delay her scheme for a day so she could catch a flight and come to Peggy’s aid. Hearing about Ana’s injury and the Zero Matter rift, on the set of Howards movie no less, after the fact made her more worried than she would have been just fighting at their side.

So when Peggy called that afternoon, her voice thick with emotion, dread settled in her stomach. Peggy was in trouble again, and she hadn’t been there to help.

“What is wrong? Are you hurt?” she asked. “Do I need to fly to New York?” She thought her new location would be slightly less dangerous. She had obviously been wrong.

“What? No, no,” she rushed out. “Everything’s fine! I just wanted to tell you that you that I’ve been named director!”

“Director?” she asked, slowly realizing that the emotion in Peggy’s voice was happiness. Director was good thing. A great thing in fact—Peggy had always wanted to advance within the organization.

“Director!” Peggy said with a whoop.

Diana let out a breathy laugh that was part relief and part happiness. “Peggy that is wonderful! That is-it is-wow!” she finished at a loss for words, her mouth turning up in an earsplitting grin.

“Thanks,” Peggy said laughing back.

Diana shook her head still smiling. She had shown all of them. All those cups of coffee she had fetched, the paperwork she had filed, the times when she was dismissed by her coworkers because she was only seen as Steve’s best girl. She had advanced in spite of it. She got to lead the very people who doubted her.

“How did you get them to see reason?”

“I retrieved an extremely dangerous weapon.”

Diana snorted. “Of course you did. I do not want to know.”

“No, you probably don’t. But even after that they still weren’t keen on me doing it. Howard had to confront my superiors about it.”

Diana’s smile faltered as she heard the trace of bitterness in Peggy’s voice. All her hard work still didn’t mean anything till a man came along and vouched for her. “You will be great,” she reassured her. “You deserve that job, the SSR will be forced to understand just how valuable of an agent you are.”

She could hear the grin in Peggy’s voice as she said, “Well, that’s the other piece of news. The SSR is being replaced by a new organization led by Howard, Colonel Phillips, and I. It’s called the Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division. Or S.H.I.E.L.D., since that’s a mouthful.”
Diana beamed, “Oh Peggy, that’s even better, you get to found it. And the name…”

“Howard and I thought it was clever. We both wanted to honor Steve and build it around his values if that makes sense.”

“Of course. Peggy, he would have been so proud.” Steve had always been supportive and interested in her career. She wished he could be here to see all this.

“But Diana, he’s not the only one with a shield,” she continued. “We also wanted it to serve as a thank you to you— for everything you’ve helped us with so far.”

Diana brought a hand to her lips, her eyes pricking with tears. “Peggy…” she stopped, once again at a loss for how to properly thank her. “I am honored.”

“I’m glad you like it. We should be up and running in a year or so, and we can fill you in as everything progresses. Howard and I have already been discussing plans.”

“That still gives you plenty of time to continue recovering weapons or whatever crazy stunts you are going to pull next.”

“Funnily enough, that’s pretty much what Daniel said.”

“Smart man.”

**November, 1948**

If Peggy’s promotion was the first piece of good news, the birth of Etta’s granddaughter was the second.

Etta had called to deliver the news from the hospital. “7 pounds one ounce!” she crowed. “Little Eleanor—her parents are big fans of the Roosevelts. And you wouldn’t believe the amount of hair she already has….”

Diana headed back to London to see them all as soon as she could.

She had made the rounds to visit her friends’ newborns in the years after the Great War, delivering baby gifts and catching up. Nearly thirty years later the same children she had once cradled had children of their own. It was strange. She felt so old and yet she hadn’t aged a day.

Etta’s daughter Marian was who answered the door and welcomed her inside. “Come on in. You got lucky, she just woke up.”

Etta was sitting on the couch holding her, and as Diana walked in she picked up Eleanor’s hand and waved it. “Look who it is!” she cooed. “It’s aunty Diana.”

She passed her over for Diana to hold. The child looked up at her with big, round eyes, gave a little stretch and then promptly fell asleep again as Diana cradled her against her chest.

She smiled down at her. “She’s so little,” she whispered. She always forgot just how fragile human life started out as. And yet a whole future was contained within.

Eleanor gave a little snuffle that made Diana melt.

“A blessing, aren’t they?” Marian asked.
January, 1949

The third thing she had been expecting for a few months. Her best friend was getting married.

“YES!” she cheered, “I knew it. I knew it!”

Peggy laughed. “Well, I’m glad you approve.”

“How did he propose?” Diana still found the customs of engagement rather odd, but there was a ring, she knew that much.

“Well…” she started, “I came home after a mission a little worse for wear. I was looking forward to a hot meal and icing various limbs. And then when I opened the door there Daniel was, down on one knee. Afterwards he helped bandage me up.”

Diana burst out laughing. “Very romantic.”

“I know, I know. He proposed with a wedding band since I didn’t want an engagement ring. I told him a stone would get caught on things in a fight.”

“Very practical,” Diana mused, “though if it was hard and sharp enough you could potentially use it as a weapon.”

“Good point. Maybe I’ll have Howard make one…”

Diana smiled. Daniel and Peggy were perfect for each other. Few other people would be willing to discuss how jewelry might interfere with their next mission. They both had the same drive to help others, and weren’t the type to stand down. Yet they also balanced each other out, letting the other know when a plan crossed the line from dangerous to completely insane.

While she had her qualms about Daniel in the beginning, she soon realized he was a rare man indeed. She was so happy things had worked out between the two of them.

“You’ll be a bridesmaid of course,” Peggy continued. “The wedding’s not for a while, but I want you there.”

Diana was indignant “How could I possibly miss it?”

“Oh, a number of things. Natural disasters, conflict, your standard humanitarian crisis…” she trailed off.

“I’ll make them reschedule it.”

Peggy chuckled. “Good luck with that. Just don’t bring a fight to the wedding.”

“Well, that is why you need a weapon ring,” she said, trying to keep a straight face and failing miserably.

Peggy just sighed. “You’re as bad as Howard. I think my mother would keel over if I brought weapons to the wedding. She’s already not thrilled that it’s not going to be completely traditional.”
“Hm,” Diana acknowledged. “Well, what about weapon earrings?”

Chapter End Notes

I hope Diana holding a baby makes up for some of the previous chapters' angst. The chapter title is taken from the John Denver song of the same name.

Come say hi on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades or comment if you have any more suggestions or just wanna scream about Wonder Woman.
March, 1950

A new decade, a new husband, Diana mused as she set the final vase of flowers down on the side table. She had been running around all afternoon, carrying boxes of decorations and helping set up for the wedding. The only thing left to do was help Peggy get ready.

She and Daniel had each been squirrelled away in separate backrooms of the church. She knocked and stepped through the doorway, finding Peggy and Angie laying out various clothing items over the back of a chair. Peggy turned towards her and immediately burst out laughing, clapping a hand over her mouth.

“Your outfit!” she gasped before breaking into another peal of laughter.

Diana looked down and shrugged. “You are supposed to wear white to a wedding, no?” Peggy had said to wear “business casual.” Semi unclear what that meant, she had opted for a white jumpsuit with some fringe accents that looked nice but wasn’t too fancy.

“The bride is, not the guests. It doesn’t really matter though, Daniel and I don’t care.” She looked Diana over once again. “You look fabulous, if somewhat untraditional.”

She smiled. “Then I should fit right in.”

Peggy hadn’t been lying when she said the wedding wasn’t traditional or what her parents wanted. They had planned an unusually long engagement, intending to get S.H.I.E.L.D. up on its feet before the two of them would even consider taking a few days off for the festivities. For a time Diana wasn’t sure if it would ever actually happen, because even as S.H.I.E.L.D. approached the one year mark, Peggy still hadn’t been completely satisfied with how things were operating. Colonel Philips, bless him, had practically forced the two of them to take leave, promising that he wouldn’t let the organization collapse while Madam Director was gone.

It was also very small, the two of them inviting only immediate family and some close friends. A few old SSR people were there, as were Jarvis and Ana, Angie, and Dr. Wilkes. The Commandos, Howard, and herself rounded out the list. There would be no sit-down dinner, just a short ceremony and reception, and, of course, the main sticking point of Peggy not wearing an actual wedding dress.

In Diana’s opinion, the dress in question was beautiful, though she might have also been slightly biased since at the moment she was helping Peggy into it.

It was a deep red, the hem hitting just below her knees and the waist cinched in to accentuate her figure.
Diana and Angie fulfilled their bridesmaid duties by oohing and aahing over how she looked. Diana handed over her shoes and makeup bag, while Angie rushed out of the room to look for more bobby pins.

Peggy looked at herself in the full-length mirror, straightening her skirt with a frown.

“What is wrong?” Diana asked gently, moving to stand behind her. She picked up a brush and began attempting to tame her hair. “At times it seems like Angie and I are more excited than you are.”

Peggy shook her head and smiled. “I am excited. It’s just nerves.”

Diana raised an eyebrow “Nerves?” Peggy was rarely nervous about anything. “I don’t need a lasso to know that is a lie.”

He voice softening, she asked, “Is it Steve?”

Peggy turned to face her. “Not really. I made peace with this decision a long time ago. And in a way, he’s still with me, or at least his legacy is. He saved Daniel’s battalion—he gave me the man I love.”

“Then what is wrong?”

“Michael.” she said, her smile fading. “We got the news right before what would have been the wedding.”

Diana felt her heart sink. “Of course, I am sorry.”

She waved a hand. “It’s fine, I’m being ridiculous.”

“No, you’re not. Is that why you didn’t want…” she trailed off, waving a hand to encompass everything.

“In part. I had no desire for it to be the same as last time. And I couldn’t handle seeing myself in a white dress again without it bringing up bad memories.” She continued with a snort. “Daniel and I also just didn’t care very much about putting on a show.” She looked up at Diana, her eyes coming to rest on the fringe.“And it looks like you have the white dress covered for me.”

Diana laughed before turning serious again. “Nothing bad will happen today. I’ll fight people off myself if I have to.”

Peggy smiled. “Thanks. But-“

“Your mother would kill me, I know,” Diana said rolling her eyes. “Honestly, it’s a wonder you survived your childhood.”

She laughed. “I wonder the same thing sometimes. I love her, but lord can she be trying.”

“You can say that again,” Angie said as she re-emerged with two handfuls of hairpins and started attacking Peggy’s head with them. “She asked me why I was waitressing when a ‘respectable young woman’ would be getting married.”

Peggy blushed. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine. Let’s just get your hair fixed up. The sooner you get ready the sooner we can get this show on the road.”
The ceremony was lovely. It was short and sweet, the couple beaming the whole way throughout.

The bridesmaids and groomsmen walked down the aisle first in pairs, Howard with Angie and Diana with Dugan.

Then Peggy appeared, radiant as ever, walking towards Daniel with tears in her eyes.

The pastor gave a brief spiel about commitment and love and a variety of other positive terms. Everyone’s eyes lost their slightly glazed look as he moved on to the vows, perking up as he moved on to the whole point of the ceremony.

With the last ‘I do,’ Daniel bent down to kiss her and everyone cheered, Diana loudest of all.

And then there was the reception. Everyone filed into the fellowship hall for dancing, and Diana helped drag out a table with drinks.

A record player in the corner provided some music, and Dugan’s fiddle was sitting in one corner which he had brought ‘just in case.’

Peggy and Daniel had the first dance, which was mainly a sway, thanks in part to Daniel’s crutch. After that it was a free for all. Diana joined in, dancing next to Peggy, the both of them laughing at her mother’s scandalized expression at some of the hip action going on.

Diana leaned over. “Remind me that at some point I should teach you traditional Amazon war dances. Your parents would love it.”

Peggy’s eyes widened “Do they include weapons?”

“Well, it is not a war dance without a sword.”

Peggy smiled. “Count me in.”

Another slow song came on, and Diana moved aside to let Daniel dance with her again. She wandered over to get a drink, standing next to the gift table.

Various presents were stacked up, though Howard’s was out of sight. Peggy had made the mistake of mentioning their conversation about weaponized jewelry and, Howard being Howard, he had gone and created not only a weaponized ring, but a new metal crutch for Daniel that supposedly shot bullets. The bride and groom wisely decided to stick it in the church's basement in the hopes that if it blew up, it at least wouldn’t hurt anyone.

She surveyed the scene before her with a smile. Aside from the small potential for destruction, the wedding was going great. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves, the music was good, and Peggy and Daniel hadn’t stopped grinning.

As the next song came on Dugan came up beside her, setting his glass on the table.

“May I have this dance?” he asked with a smile.
Diana hesitated.

Dugan extended his hand and smiled. “I can’t let Wonder Woman sit this one out.”

She laughed and rolled her eyes, joining him on the dance floor for a slow waltz.

He was surprisingly elegant, his movements sure and smooth, and he had managed to avoid stepping on her feet.

“You are great at this.”

He gave her a wry smile. “Surprised?”

“A little.”

“Well I have to give credit to my teacher.”

She tried not to laugh. “You took lessons?” she asked, indignant.

“Well, not officially. Early on in the war a bunch of us fellas wanted to dance with some off the nurses, but we didn’t know how. There was this rather odd young man from New Jersey who did and he taught all of us the basics.

Diana tried to image Dugan learning foot work while in his military gear and found she couldn’t. It was simply too ridiculous.

“What about you?” Dugan asked. “Where did you learn?”

“Oh, Themyscira mostly. Swaying from Steve. And then a lot of folk dancing from traveling around the U.S. and Europe.” She had come across various celebrations and parties amidst her travels, both alone and with the Commandos. The locals were always very welcoming and willing to show off and teach their various dances.

That gave her an idea. “What can you play on your fiddle?” she asked, a gleam in her eye.

Dugan raised an eyebrow, catching on to what Diana was suggesting. “Peg’s mother would kill me.”

Diana grinned wider and Dugan laughed. “Fine. I’ll see what I can do.”

A few minutes later a fiddle started up, playing one of the songs they had heard in Bulgaria. The Commandos and Diana immediately started clapping along, moving to the center of the floor. Peggy joined them laughing hysterically.

“I can’t believe- this is amazing!” She yelled at Diana over the noise, grabbing her hand and moving to get into a line.

They moved in and out, turning and jumping and laughing. Dugan played a variety of songs, ending with everyone circling up for the hora. Even Peggy’s parents got in on the fun, clapping along to the beat.

When Dugan tired they turned the record player back on for a few last dances. The reception began
to wind down, with people slowly trickling out after saying goodbye to the bride and groom.

Diana, Dugan, Howard, and the happy couple made their way down to the basement to retrieve Howard’s invention, chatting amongst themselves while remaining family and friends helped take down the decorations.

Howard pulled Dugan over to his creations to show them off, talking animatedly about propulsion and heat-proofing and other things of the sort.

Diana turned to Peggy. “Did you two decide on a honeymoon?” Along with engagements, she found the tradition of the honeymoon rather odd. Why did people feel they had to take a vacation in order to spend time together?

“Scotland!” Peggy said. “It should be lovely.”

“We’ll stay in an inn for a few nights and explore a little bit,” Daniel said. “Somehow we’ve never made it up there.”

Diana nodded, talking about how beautiful the country was, but breaking off as footsteps came down the stairs. She went to meet them, figuring it was Angie or Peggy’s mom coming to ask a question.

She was preparing to call up ‘the decoration box is still in the backroom’ when she realized it wasn’t either of them. Instead it was a man, wearing overalls and looking a little disheveled.

“She can’t see you! The reception just ended, but there should be someone upstairs.”

He whipped out a gun. “You can freeze.”

Diana did just that, everything seeming to slow as she frantically assessed the situation. He had a gun, maybe multiple. He might have backup. They were currently all unarmed, and the others upstairs most likely weren’t aware of what was happening and couldn’t help overpower him.

She thought through their options and inwardly cursed. She couldn’t even stop any bullets without her bracers. Right now all she could do was stall. But if Peggy and Daniel could grab Howard’s hair brained inventions without drawing attention to themselves…

Diana slowly raised her hands, next to her Howard did the same. “What do you want?” she growled. “And how dare you pull a weapon in a church? This is a sanctuary.”

He barked out a laugh. “Not for much longer,” he said before wheeling towards the others. “Hands up! Now!”

Peggy and Daniel slowly turned. Out of the corner of her eye Diana noticed a glittering diamond on her left hand while Daniel was propped up on two crutches rather than his usual one.

“Yell or make a move and someone gets shot,” he said.

He looked them over. “Two women, a cripple, an egotistical scientist, and a brute,” he chuckled to himself as he surveyed them. “My, Captain America’s friends have seen better days.”

She could practically hear Peggy’s jaw clench, yet she calmly asked “Who are you? I had everyone vetted.”

He swept a hand down at his clothing. “Pretended to be a workman and came down here. no one
questioned me, thankfully. I’ve been watching you for too long to let you get away.”

“Have you?” she asked, feigning nonchalance. Diana knew better. Peggy was scared, which didn’t bode well. “How did you know I would be here?”

“We have our sources.”

“We?”

“Enough with the questions!” he snapped. “It won’t change anything.”

He took a step towards them, still brandishing his gun. “When I realized Captain America’s old flame was now in charge of an agency, I knew I had to talk to her.” He looked over at Peggy. “To stop you before you stop me.”

He scanned the rest of them. “And when I realized she was friends with the rest of you lot, well that was too good to be true.

He smiled, his mouth twisting upwards. “How could I pass up the opportunity to bring back Wonder Woman and the greatest scientist of our age as well?”

Diana’s eyes widened. How did he know? Had she not been careful enough interrogating Arena Club members? She didn’t recognize him though, so perhaps one he was one of their lackeys?

He turned towards Howard. “You will be invaluable. You can help us invent our next weapon. Be the one to find the tesseract and hasten our return to glory.”

Howard turned white and took a step back. Next to her, she felt Peggy tense. He couldn’t find out Howard already had found it, not without jeopardizing their safety further.

The tesseract wasn’t well known either. Diana felt her throat tighten as she realized this couldn’t be the Arena Club’s work. This was something far worse.

“With your help we will rise again. A world without flags! No U.S. or U.S.S.R. No more conflict at all!” He turned towards Diana. “Don’t you want a world without suffering? A world with only the pure and good? We can reshape the world how we want it.”

A world without suffering. She shook her head. “No, that won’t happen. The tesseract only brings death.”

“You are a fool!” he spat, his eyes wild. “A fool.” He took another step towards them, reached out and yanked Howard towards him, holding a gun to his head.

“All of you follow me. Or he dies.”

Daniel stepped forward, as if to plead their case. “Leave him here, take me instead.”

The man looked at him in disgust, his gun lowering slightly. “I have no use for you.”

“Please,” Daniel begged, lifting his crutch slightly off the floor. “He can’t help if he’s dead.”

The man turned towards him and there was a bang, followed by a scream of pain.

Diana looked down, a blood stain slowly covering the man's lower leg. Apparently Howard’s invention had worked.
Almost instantly she and Peggy rushed him, Peggy slicing away with her ring, or rather knife attached to her hand, by the looks of it.

They quickly had him subdued, all of them piling on to hold him down and Dugan ripping the gun from his grasp.

“Who do you work for?” Diana growled, leaning over him. “Why do you say such things?”

“Diana, there’s no point.” Peggy said gesturing towards him, her mouth in a thin line.

“What?” She looked down and noticed the foam coming from the man’s mouth.

He shuddered and gasped, and then whispered two words that made her blood run cold.

“Hail…Hydra.”

They stared down at his body silently before Dugan kicked it away in disgust.

Everyone knew Hydra was still around. The SSR and Commandos had taken out the remaining cells, but there were bound to be some who had eluded capture. However knowing Hydra existed and seeing them here firsthand were two very different things.

Peggy’s voice and expression were calm, but her hands shook as she said “They’re more powerful that we thought. We need to increase security.”

Daniel put his arm around her. “We’ll figure it out. They obviously aren’t well organized. He was alone and overly talkative.”

Peggy nodded mutely. Diana looked at the others, their faces all drawn. She understood. Not only was there general shock, but, with the exception of Daniel, they all had fought alongside Steve. He had died fighting this organization and yet here they were again.

Peggy took a breath, steeling herself. “We can stop them while their numbers are still small” She turned to Howard. “Good news is we run S.H.I.E.L.D. We can make this a priority.”

“Of course.”

She looked up at Daniel, slightly sheepish. “I know were supposed to leave for Scotland…”

He pulled her in for a hug. “We can reschedule. This is more important.”

“Blame me,” Diana said with a sad smile. “You were right Peggy, I helped bring the fight to the wedding.”

Peggy waved away her concerns. “They were bound to make an appearance eventually. It’s just unfortunate it was here.”

The sound of footsteps on the stairs carried towards them again, this time of family wondering what all the commotion was about.

In the last seconds before Peggy was forced to turn on her Director voice and explain what had happened, she looked over at Diana with a smile. “I was wrong. Weapon rings are perfect for a
wedding.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this is a day late. School is back and full swing and so for the rest of this fic I may occasionally be a day or two behind. Thanks for sticking with me despite a wonky update schedule!

Thanks to badoodles whose comment gave me the idea for Diana's dress. It's technically her costume in a later time period, but I felt like adding some fringe to this story. The dress Peggy wears is from the first Captain America movie. The chapter title is taken from the wonderful E.E. cummings poem.

Come say hi on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades or comment if you have any more suggestions or just wanna scream about Wonder Woman.
It Takes a Village

Chapter Notes

Much thanks as always to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1950

The drums of war had gone to coda for a repeat. Diana wished she could say she was shocked. Instead she was just disappointed.

She had been in and out of the U.S. and U.S.S.R multiple times over the last few months. Each time she could feel the tension in the air, the way both countries were itching for a fight.

It was a proxy war, they said, as if that somehow explained it. Someone suffered either way, it was just Korea rather than a superpower. Still, she counted her blessings. For now it wasn’t a world war, and she refused to consider the possibility it might turn into one.

As soon as she heard the news she called up George Stout, assuming the Monuments Men would all be activated again or have a new team put together. Instead Stout told her that he had already offered, but the military wasn’t interested.

Diana seethed. Not interested? Why was their culture not worthy of protection? She called up a few others and they told her the same thing. There was no team for her to help.

She would just have to do it herself.

She told Peggy as much when she called to explain her plans that evening.

“Hopefully I will get a few people volunteers to help me on the art front. I cannot just stand by no matter what the U.S. military decides.” She sighed, rubbing the spot between her brows. “I am working through the logistics. Thankfully the rest is the same as last time. I will continue general protective measures for soldiers and civilians.”

Peggy hummed in agreement. “It will be nice to have a pair of eyes there I can trust. Let me know if things go south.”

“I will,” Diana assured her.

Poor Peggy had been swamped since the Hydra incident at the wedding. Not only did she have her usual work, but she and Howard were now moving the Tesseract between locations every few weeks to throw off anyone who was watching. Howard was devoting extra time to researching the cube, hoping that by figuring it out he would also learn how best to guard it.

Trust had become a bigger issue than usual, and Peggy was worried about Hydra having infiltrated various government organizations. She cracked down on security, taking extra time to make sure communications were secure and that new recruits were given the mother of all background checks.
Another war wouldn’t help matters any, only increase the information she had to sift through. Privately, Peggy had voiced her suspicions that Hydra was involved somehow. The war would have happened regardless, there was no doubt about that. But odds were Hydra hadn’t reappeared just to say hello. They had a hand in it, and she wanted to know where.

Behind her back people whispered that she was paranoid or over reacting. She shut down that line of thinking quickly. Hydra may be resurfacing, but she wasn’t going to make it easy for them, and she sure as hell wasn’t letting them infiltrate S.H.I.E.L.D.

“I appreciate it,” Peggy said. “And I’ll send a few Commandos to keep you company. There’s no need for you to go at it alone.”

1951

The line dividing North and South Korea moved constantly, back and forth, back and forth. After the first few months she gave up caring. She was there to save people and things. If someone shot at her that was their mistake.

Dugan and Sam joined her off and on as they trudged between cemeteries, shrines, churches, and museums, trying to document and preserve as much as they could. Unlike the Second World War, there was no organized attempt by either side to take and horde art from the other, but there was certainly carelessness about where the bombs fell and what was destroyed.

She had never fully appreciated how much work it must have took for the Monuments Men to get the military to agree to anything. Some commanders understood what she was trying to do and abided by the posted signs to stay away from vulnerable buildings and artworks. But with others she had to fight threaten and beg for them to even listen to her. How the fine arts division had pulled it off on larger scale with fewer men she had no idea.

Her work did seem to be making an impact, despite how difficult it was to get things done. There were still sites that were destroyed, but with she and the Commandos and various volunteers working together they had saved more than she had hoped for.

True to her word, she also spent time reporting back to Peggy on the situation on the ground. In between excursions she typed up reports to send through Peggy to humanitarian agencies and the UN. Diplomacy had failed this time, but they still had the potential to help those that she couldn’t and oversee peace negotiations.

And then of course there was all the people. The civilians she helped to evacuate and rebuild or the soldiers she and the commandos brought supplies to. Dugan kept a running list of stories from recent missions they had been on that he loved to tell to new recruits to amuse and or terrify them. His favorite by far was when a crotchety soldier had seen Diana walking by with five fifty-pound bags of flour to deliver to civilians.

"You should have seen his face," Dugan always said, with a laugh. "And then Sam just shrugged and said 'American women are very strong.'"

Her feeling of satisfaction resurfaced at seeing what she and others had helped to do. It happened with saving people of course, but especially with art. She hadn’t paid enough attention last time, what with rushing around an entire continent, but there was something different about saving the symbols of human ingenuity and spirit. She was protecting artworks, but, perhaps more importantly, the history they represented.
July 1953

She couldn’t fully enjoy the end of the war. She made peace with the realization that she never would, and that was okay. She had done what she could.

She called Peggy as soon as she landed back in London, anxious to hear how troop withdrawal was being handled.

“Thank the lord it’s over,” she said after she answered. “If I had to fill out one more report…” She laughed, some of the tiredness in her voice disappearing. “Though I suppose I’ll be even busier soon.”

“With what? Not more bureaucracy I hope?”

“Well that’s the surprise, now isn’t it. I figured some pure good news would help redeem your faith in humanity.”

“A surprise? Did you get promoted again? Or perhaps Howard and Jarvis worked something out?”

Diana could hear the smile in her voice as she said “Even better. I’m pregnant.”

Diana gasped, her face lighting up. “Oh Zeus, Peggy that’s wonderful! Congratulations!” She shook her head. “Wow, I just…” she trailed off with a laugh. “I’m slightly shocked I guess.”

“Yes, that does tend to be the reaction. You should have heard my mother, she was all excited and then went on a five-minute rant about how she had almost given up on me providing her with any grandchildren. Apparently Michael’s kids weren’t enough—all of her children needed to reproduce.”

Diana snorted. “That does sound like your mother.”

She smiled again. Her friend was having a baby. All at once the questions rushed out “When are you due? And what did Daniel say? I’ll come visit of course, will you want my help with anything? And what-“

Peggy cut her off with a laugh. “It would be easier if you slowed down you know. Well my due date is at the end of November, and-“

“November?”

“I know, it’s soon. We wanted to hold off for as long as possible for telling anyone. Then I could get work done without people trying to force me home.”

“You haven’t been doing field work, have you?” she asked, slightly horrified, envisioning the thousand different ways she could hurt herself.

“No, thankfully being director is mainly a desk job. I’ll wait to do more fieldwork till after the baby is here.”

She had seen Peggy’s pent up energy after only a day or two off for an injury. Somehow Daniel had survived five months of that already, with more to go. “Daniel hasn’t tied you to a chair yet?”

She laughed. “No, though I’m sure he’s wanted to at times. He’s thrilled though. And what else did you ask? Oh, of course we want you to visit. I was actually wondering if you’d be willing to stay
for a week or so afterwards to help tide S.H.I.E.L.D. over while I’m not there?”

“How could I say no to more time with a baby?”

“You can’t. They’re irresistible.”

**November 1953**

She had been waiting for the phone to ring for days, and when it finally did late that night she almost thought she was dreaming.

“It’s a boy! Baby Michael!” Daniel sang.

Diana gave a teary laugh. “Congratulations! Did it go well? Are they both okay?”

“Both fine and resting now,” he reassured her. “She told me as the contractions kicked in that if she could handle being impaled she could handle childbirth.”

Diana smiled. “Was there ever really any doubt?”

“No. Now the swearing though,” he whistled. “That was mildly surprising.”

Diana burst out laughing, easily imagining Peggy keeping up a running commentary of curses. The military had taught her well.

“The poor doctor was scandalized,” Daniel continued. “Between the swearing, Peggy working till her due date, and me being in the room for the end, the man looked like he needed a drink.”

“Knowing you two he went and had one directly afterwards.”

“You’re probably right,” he laughed. “They should be out of the hospital by tomorrow evening or the next morning. Peg wondered if you be here a few days after that.”

“My bags are already packed.”

**December 1953**

Diana looked over the heads of the other passengers, scanning the crowd for Jarvis as she disembarked. She finally spotted him standing off to one side by the benches and walked over.

“How was your flight? Mrs. Carter wanted me to thank you profusely for coming. A dreadfully long trip, isn’t it?”

She waved a hand. “It was passable. How are Peggy and Daniel doing?”

“They are well. I don’t think either of them got more have gotten more than a few hours of sleep in the past week, but they seem to be happy.”

She smiled. “That does tend to happen with newborns.”

“Well thankfully I am in no danger of falling asleep at the wheel. Shall we?” he asked, gesturing in the direction of the car.
The two made their way down to the parking lot, discussing work and the new baby.

“I’m glad everything’s calmed down a bit. If only so they all aren’t pulling fourteen-hour shifts. It’s been nice these past few months seeing everyone spending more time with family.

Diana hummed in agreement. “Yes, at times it was a ridiculous war. I wish-“

He cut her off. “Not here Miss Prince,” he said firmly, ushering her into the car.

As soon as the doors for closed he turned towards her, addressing her bewilderment with an apologetic smile.

“It’s not that I disagree. It’s just that any potentially anti-American sentiments are not the wisest thing to speak about in public. Has Mrs. Carter told you about McCarthy?”

“Oh,” Diana said as snippets of conversation came back to her. “Yes, she’s told me about the hearings. But surely they couldn’t punish someone for a simple statement?”

“They have been. Sometimes you don’t have to do anything at all. Ana was questioned a few times. A Jewish, liberal, Eastern European immigrant is the trifecta.” he said, bitterness creeping into his voice.

“I am sorry.”

He shook his head. “It’s fine now, I think Mrs. Carter spoke up for her. Leading S.H.I.E.L.D. does give one some credibility.”

Diana snorted, envisioning Peggy telling off the higher ups.

“She thinks it will be over soon. There’s some truth to his concerns, but he’s exaggerated it and the people know.”

He sighed. “There’s just always something, isn’t there.”

Diana nodded, saddened by the conversation. In this land of freedom how was there so much injustice? She hoped baby Michael would never know of such things.

Daniel was leaving the house as Jarvis was dropping her off.

He gave her a quick hug. “Sorry to run, I have to go into the office. Apparently crime doesn’t stop for paternity leave.” He checked his watch. “I should be back to help you ladies with dinner.”

“Have fun!” Peggy called from the door way before turning to Diana, enveloping her in a bear hug. “It’s so good to see you! I love Michael but God will it be nice to have another adult in the house.”

Diana laughed. “Yes, where is this wonderful baby of yours?”

A wail from the backroom answered her question.

Michael was quickly fed and changed. Peggy rocked him back to sleep, her face softening as she smiled, the worry lines around her mouth disappearing.
She gently deposited him into Diana’s arms as they moved to sit on the couch, quietly chatting and catching up. Partway through, Michael gave a little burp and fell back asleep, much to Diana’s delight.

“Makes you want one of your own, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, sometimes,” Diana said. “But I don’t have the time or stability. And I’m much too old,” she joked, trying to keep her tone light. She didn’t want to explain that she had thought about it. A lot in fact. And she had come to the cheery decision that she could not bear outliving her own child.

She gave Peggy a teasing smile. “So I’m left with the hardship of spending time with everyone else’s children instead.” She looked over at her. “And I honestly don’t know where you find the time to do all this.”

Peggy shrugged. “Don’t ask me, I’m not sure either. Suddenly there’s a million things to do. The Jarvis’ invited us over for Hanukkah, my parents are visiting at Christmas,” she said, ticking the items off her fingers. “And next week I’m filming a piece about Steve for the Smithsonian, which isn’t nerve wracking at all, plus there’s all the usual work.”

Diana smiled. “Ever heard of a break?”

Peggy shook her head. “But I want to do all of this. No one is forcing me to.”

“Besides,” she said with a smile, “I full intend to make use of you while you’re here.”

Diana gave an awkward left-handed salute, Michael resting on the opposite shoulder. “Reporting for duty. Howard and I can update you on S.H.I.E.L.D. business while you’re out. And afterwards I fully intend to be a babysitter. Poor Angie will need a break.”

“Thanks. Hopefully we won’t need you too often—I can park a crib in my office. He’ll be the best conversation starter ever.”

Diana laughed, looking down at the tiny figure she cradled on her chest. Children truly were the embodiment of hope. She could only hope that she had done enough—that he would be safe long after he had outgrown being held.

She looked back up at Peggy with a smile. “He’ll certainly be your most adorable employee.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of you for sticking it through an unannounced two week hiatus-school and other projects hit hard. Diana with a baby is once again my way of making up for it.

Historical notes for other history nerds: McCarthy was part of the red scare and I did a big paper on it last year so I couldn’t not include it. Also some of the Monuments men really did ask to be sent to Korea and the military declined the offer. Since then and up through Iraq and Afghanistan they haven’t made it a priority to protect the local art and culture. Finally, the Diana lifting flour story is based off a similar event where soldiers during WWII lifted inflatable tanks and freaked the locals out.
1956.

Michael had a sister.

Diana went to visit, just as she had last time. Michael practically ran her over as soon as she stepped through the door. He yelled “Aunty Diana!” at the top of his lungs, causing baby Elizabeth to wake up and start wailing.

Michael latched on to legs, giving the lower half of her body a hug.

She bent down and lifted him up. “Oof, you are getting so big!” she said with a smile. She turned towards Peggy who was trying to calm Elizabeth back down. “What have you been feeding him?”

Peggy shook her head. “I know, it’s insane. Daniel keeps joking I held back some sort of growth serum.”

Diana laughed, envisioning a muscled up three-year-old wreaking havoc on Peggy’s home.

“In actuality? A lot of peanut butter. It’s not very English,” she sniffed, “but it’s quick and he likes it.”

“Peanut butter! Peanut butter!” Michael chanted.

Peggy rolled her eyes. “Come drop your bag in the guest room. Then you can meet Elizabeth and listen to Michael tell you all about dinosaurs.”

She stayed a week, helping Howard run things and giving Peggy a break. The little she saw worried her. Last time she was dealing with the clean-up from war. Now intelligence pointed to escalation again, the cold war becoming less and less “cold” each day as the two superpowers barreled towards each other on a collision course.

While the job may not have been enjoyable, spending time with Peggy sure was. She watched the kids for a few hours to let she and Daniel go grab a kid-free bite to eat, and spent time playing around with Michael, who insisted that they play “t-rex.” The game mostly involved roaring, but he seemed to be enjoying himself.

Elizabeth, while unable to join in the fun, made up for it by being absolutely adorable. She already had a full head of hair, and was more unfazed by the action around her than her brother had been.

Diana gently rocked her, trying to usher Michael to bed with the other available arm.

“A name fit for a queen,” Peggy had said, “and a family name to boot.” Diana smiled down at the tiny figure she held. A queen in time, perhaps, but for now a princess.
October, 1961

She headed to Miami, every fiber in her screaming to turn around and run the other way.

Instead she set her jaw and checked into her hotel.

Peggy had protested, trying to discourage her more than she ever had in the past. “Diana the bombs are bigger now, this is insane even for you. And you’d be in the blast this time, that makes a big difference.”

"Peggy, if there’s to be a nuclear attack then I must be there. To bear witness if nothing else,” she said, silently praying to Zeus that it would not come to that. It could not.

“But-“

“Peggy, it is my choice. I will be fine, I promise.”

On the other end of the line Peggy fell completely silent before she took a deep breath. “I’ll book you a room. But don’t you dare get killed on me Diana Prince.” she said, the force in her voice surprising even herself. “I’m not losing you.” The unspoken “too” at the end of the sentence went unsaid, but Diana still felt it, a sinking feeling deep inside her stomach.

“It will be okay,” she said with as much reassurance as she could muster. “I’m not going anywhere. There may not even be an attack.”

She closed her eyes, trying to steady herself. “Tell the kids I’ll bring them back a souvenir. Maybe a shirt or something similar.”

“Or,” she continued, a smile flitting across her face despite the seriousness of the conversation, “maybe a flamingo?”

Peggy snorted. “Don’t you dare. We don’t need another Bernard. I’m sure a shirt or some seashells would be just fine.”

And so she waited for several tense days, calling Peggy to check in every few hours. She tried to distract herself, but her magazine and reports went untouched in favor of listening to the news. She ventured out once or twice, figuring it would be ridiculous if she didn’t at least try to see part of the city. The last time she had been in Florida was for the Freedom Rides. She had hoped to visit again under better circumstances, but obviously she would have to wait a little longer.

No matter what she did, her focus wasn’t far from the looming threat. All she could think of was Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dust swirling around her and carrying with it the lives of thousands upon thousands of people.

In the end, the doomsday clock offered a reprieve. The missiles would be removed. She tipped her head towards the sky, thanking Zeus that all remained well. There would be no obliteration today.

She walked down to the beach, taking in the evening air as she collected shells, before heading back and collapsing into her bed for her first good night of sleep in a week.

November, 1963
She still couldn’t believe Howard was actually married. He had proposed to Maria, of course, but there were many other people he had loved at one time or another. She never thought he would actually go through with it.

Yet here they were. The ceremony had been small, but the current reception was massive. The Hilton’s ballroom was bursting with movie stars, politicians and various other high-profile individuals. Diana stuck with Peggy and some S.H.I.E.L.D agents, trying not to get swallowed by the crowd.

The ballroom was beautiful, the ambiance made even better by the view of snow swirling outside. A wedding in November meant Howard could take leave for Thanksgiving and a honeymoon all at once, but it also meant the guests froze on their way to and from the venue.

She ran into Maria by the buffet table and offered her congratulations. She was a lovely woman, and very caring. Diana still didn’t know how Howard got her to marry him.

“You are a brave woman,” she joked, “to put up with some of his antics.”

Maria laughed. “Oh, he’s not so bad. It just took a little convincing to get him to blow up his inventions somewhere besides the basement.”

“I can hear you, ya know,” Howard grumbled from a few feet behind them, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“I know dear,” Maria said, laughing. “Consider it a reminder.”

Diana made the rounds, catching up with the Commandos and Jarvises She found her way over to Elizabeth and Michael, both of whom were complaining about itchy dress clothes.

“I have an idea,” Diana whispered to them, bending over. “If you agree to be on your best behavior for a little bit longer, I’ll help you go on a covert operation to get some more cake.”

Elizabeth’s eyes widened. “It’s a deal!” she said, bouncing up and down.

Michael rolled his eyes. “I guess.”

He was at that age where he thought he was too grown up for the games Diana had played with them as little kids. She knew better. Michael loved challenges and puzzles just as much as Elizabeth did. They were definitely Peggy and Daniel’s children.

“Good,” Diana whispered. “Now the key is that no one must notice where we are headed. We should start at the hors devours table and slowly creep our way over to the deserts.”

Elizabeth nodded seriously, scanning the room. Diana tried to keep from laughing as Elizabeth tiptoed alongside her, the both of them slowly edging along the wall. Michael headed out in front of them, gesturing impatiently to hurry up and dodging between the legs Howard’s powerful friends.

They ducked down behind the cake table and Elizabeth reached her hand up, grabbing a plate and serving fork. Diana quickly cut them each a small piece and they relaxed, digging into their prize.

A minute later Peggy leaned over the table, looking at them with raised eyebrows.

“Oh, hello. What are you doing back here?” Diana asked, her mouth twitching as she ate another bite.
Peggy rolled her eyes, barely suppressing a smile as she turned towards the kids. “I thought I told you two no more desert.”

They looked up at her guiltily for a moment, before each set their face, exuding confidence.

“It was just a mission,” Elizabeth said, “like the ones you and dad go on.”

“Yeah,” Michael agreed. “Besides, it was Aunty Diana’s idea.”

Peggy turned towards her. “Is that so?”

Diana smiled. “I couldn’t say no to more cake.”

“Fine, but this is it. I don’t want you two to get sick for the ride back home.”

“Yes mom,” they mumbled before Peggy shooed them in Daniel’s direction.

Peggy turned towards her, eyebrows raised.

Diana shrugged. “It is my duty to spoil them.”

She laughed. “Well, you’re doing a great job. And with the informal training they’re getting from us, they’re going to be the best cake-stealing spies the world has ever seen.”

Before she could say anything else, someone Diana vaguely recognized as another agent came up and whispered in Peggy’s ear. She blanched before letting out a long breath. She grabbed Diana’s arm and started hustling the two of them in Daniel’s direction.

“What happened?” Diana murmured, scanning the room. After what happened at the last wedding she was at, she had brought her bracers to wear under her dress. She wouldn’t be caught unprepared again.

“Nothing here, thank God,” Peggy said, knowing exactly what she was thinking. “It’s Kennedy. He was…assassinated. In Texas.” She turned to look up at Diana, her eyes full of worry. “We need to get back at the office.”

Diana’s mind reeled. Assassinated? Why? By whom? Of all the things Peggy could have told her, an assassination was not high on her list of plausible incidents.

Peggy let out a strangled breath. “God, his kids are so little. And Jackie..”

A general murmur went up around the room as guests heard the news. The party began to break up, everyone scurrying back to home or to work.

Peggy gathered their group and they all walked back to the car, with Daniel attempting to distract Michael and Elizabeth along the way with a game of “I-spy.”

“Sniper” he mouthed at them over their heads. “Didn’t hear anything else.”

Diana turned to Peggy. Her eyes narrowed as she tried to piece together what to do. Even as director there wasn’t much she could do, aside from damage control and even more security protocols. “Hydra,” she whispered, “I’d bet good money they’re involved somehow. Between Cold War policy and Civil rights there’s reason enough to hate him.”

Diana nodded. There had been a few more isolated Hydra incidents and she wouldn’t be at all surprised if this was one of them.
Peggy sighed a sigh that was full of the knowledge of the investigations and paperwork that would follow, as well as the increased danger that went along with it.

“Hurry along, all of you,” she said looking back at them. “We have work to do.”

August, 1964

Diana called her the day the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was announced

“Peggy.” A greeting, a question, and plea all rolled in one.

“I know,” she said, her voice strained. "I’m sorry.”

“Just…” Diana trailed off trying to hold back tears. “It never ends. Four. Four wars in 50 years.” She shook her head. “I should have seen it coming. All the tension, the military buildup— it was all pointing to this.

“You hoped,” Peggy said. “And that’s admirable. It’s nice that there is still someone who sees the best in us.”

She had hoped. Despite military advisors, troop escalation, and then the Gulf of Tonkin incident and subsequent resolution that gave President Johnson the ability to fight a war as he pleased. It came anyway and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

Diana sighed. “I did. I just wish it was enough.”

“You’re going I presume?” Peggy asked. “We think there will be a few Hydra agents lurking around and need someone to neutralize them. I’ll be visiting a few times but we need other backup.”

“I can help out. I will be in and out of the country anyway for art and humanitarian issues.”

Diana closed her eyes, steeling herself for the next few years of bloodshed that were sure to follow. Between the war and usual disasters she would be busy, and Peggy would once again be swamped at work.

“Good,” Peggy said. “Troop escalation won’t really begin for a few months so we got some time to prepare.

“Of course. It will be just like last time.”

Chapter End Notes

So this is kind of a two part chapter, I ended up splitting it because it got too long. Chapter 15 should be up within the week.

Some historical notes:
Diana's trip in Miami is referencing the Cuban Missile crisis.
The freedom rides were part of the civil rights movement and an attempt to desegregate public transportation.
The Vietnam war semi started back in the 50's with military advisors and such. In August of 1964 it escalated, with congress giving Johnson permission to carry out all acts deemed necessary to protect the country after the North Vietnamese attacked a U.S. ship.

The title is taken from a protest song by Tom Paxton called "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation."

Come say hi on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades or comment if you have any more suggestions or just wanna scream about Wonder Woman.
1968

Vietnam was a proxy war, but it was no Korea. It was dragging on and becoming so costly in terms of loss of life.

It was nothing like last time.

With less of a defined front, there wasn’t even much she could do to aid the troops. Guerilla warfare and smaller units of soldiers cutting their way through the forest made it impossible to know where everyone was, much less help them in time.

Instead she focused on protecting civilians and art. Dugan and a few other Commandos came in to help her at times, but they had families of their own now. She mostly traveled between villages herself, delivering supplies and cataloguing and locating artwork. It was also more dangerous, the Viet Cong or rebels potentially lurking around every corner. It made her jumpy, and Peggy as well when she came to visit.

“Christ,” Peggy yelped, a hand on her chest. “Don’t startle me like that.”

“Sorry,” Diana said, holding up her hands. “But our ride is here.”

Peggy had flown in to meet her in Saigon, the pair of them attempting to track down a suspected Hydra agent. She had managed to sweet talk someone from the U.S. embassy into giving them a car, and with transportation taken care of they set out in the direction of the hotel he was supposedly staying in.

The city was swarming with military personal, the increase in numbers partly due to the Tet Offensive, as well as the usual civilians trying to go about their daily lives as best they could. In daylight if someone didn’t look that closely it was almost like normal. The shops were still open with people milling around and chatting amongst themselves. But then a squadron would fly over or bombs rumbled in the distance and the illusion was broken. Diana leaned back, doing her best to enjoy the ride.

They ended up killed time in a café. The pair ordered coffee and sat down in one of the booths making themselves comfortable for a stakeout. Peggy peered out the front window at the hotel across the street, shading her eyes with her hand.

When they were both on their second coffee and third scone Peggy finally tapped her on the shoulder. “That’s him!” she announced, leaning forward to see. “Look,” she pointed.

Sure enough, he looked like the man from the file-white, balding, and middle aged. Normal at first
glance until Diana realized he was looking over his shoulder, taking evasive measures not to be followed.

“Let’s go, we’ll lose him,” Peggy said, throwing money on the table and practically running outside.

He was already gone.

She cursed. “I need a high advantage point. He can’t have gone far.”

“Church tower,” Diana suggested, and they were off, sprinting up flights of stairs.

Diana was the one to spot him this time, heading west, only a few blocks from where they were. They ran back down, Peggy charging ahead. For an almost fifty-year-old she had some serious stamina.

They finally slowed, Peggy putting a finger to her lips as they inched forward, guns extended.

They fell back into their old rhythm, the give and take of the same nonverbal cues they had used on missions for over twenty years. It was comforting, Diana realized. Despite the danger it was like catching up with an old friend, albeit one who enjoyed a good fight.

Peggy peered around a corner and there he was, trying to unlock a door that backed onto the alley. They both jumped out, weapons raised. He turned towards them, his mouth opening in surprise before turning up in a faint smile.

“I see you brought a friend, Director.” His glance shifted between the two of them, as he backed against the wall. There was no way out and he knew it.

“You know as well as I do that this exchange doesn’t matter. Everything’s already in motion.”

Diana took a step forward and he took a step back, still smiling, a trickle of blood ruing from his mouth as he bit down on what must have been a cyanide tooth.

“We...did it.” he laughed, his mouth beginning to froth. “He’s ours.”

His legs buckled, his breath slowing as he rasped his last words.

“Hail...Hydra.”

Diana shuddered. It was such a disturbing way to die. Not to mention that every time it happened she was reminded of another alleyway—one in London in 1918.

Next to her Peggy stared down at him, mouth in a thin line. He was taken care of, but it meant one more confirmed Hydra agent, and one more they didn’t get information from.

“Let’s head back,” she said softly.

They were quiet on the ride home, Peggy drumming her fingers on the steering wheel.

“Sorry you came out here for nothing.”

Peggy sighed. “He’s not on the loose, that’s what matters. I just wish I could have gotten more
information as concrete proof for the rest of S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Diana looked at her, eyebrows raised. “They don’t believe you already?”

“Not really, no. They think there are a few random agents, but not that there’s any organizational structure or resurgence. They just think I’m paranoid.”

Diana shook her head. “That… does not make any sense. How do they not see what is happening?”

“Wishful thinking, I suppose. In a way I understand. It’s a failure on S.H.I.E.L.D’s part if they’re still around. Easier to pretend there’s nothing wrong.”

“But that’s ridiculous,” she spluttered.

“You’re preaching to the choir. As long as Howard and I are in charge it will be fine. We remember what it was like—we’ll take it seriously. But I worry what will happen when we leave.”

“Then I will fight them,” she cut in. “I will not let them regain control.”

Peggy smiled at her “In between saving the rest of the world? You can certainly help, but you have so much else to do. I don’t think you’d want the full-time position anyway. What we really need is an independent team or something similar to handle this.”

Diana thought through the never-ending piles of paperwork, the staff meetings, the interviews with suspects, and internally shuddered. Peggy was right, she had no interest in that job.

“You know, you aren’t even obligated to do this,” Peggy continued, gesturing out the window. “I know it’s hard for you. You could go focus on other humanitarian issues and leave war behind.”

Diana almost laughed. “You are telling me to take it easy?”

Peggy could still do plenty of one-armed pushups and take someone down no questions asked. But she also had, hair streaked with gray, mild back problems, and two kids that kept her and Daniel busy. She needed a break too.

Peggy snorted. “Well I didn’t think it would work. I just wanted to make the suggestion.” She hesitated for a moment before pressing on. “It’s just… you’ve seen atrocious things over and over for the past fifty years, and it’s not getting any better. If you wanted, you could retreat even further, let yourself recover a little before diving into the next thing.

Diana closed her eyes, head turned towards the window. Peggy wasn’t wrong. The injured soldiers and civilians. Agent orange floating over the forest that would always remind her of Veld. And most of all the Napalm and the burned everything and everyone it touched.

“How can I leave?” she asked. “When the horror is the reason I must stay?”

“I know,” Peggy said. “Just think about it. Fight against that stubbornness of yours.”

Diana snorted, her moth twitching. “I learned from the best.”

**November, 1969**

“Did Michael the gift I sent?” she asked, smiling. How he was sixteen already she had no idea.
“Yes, he loved all the books. He said to tell you thanks. Elizabeth is already trying to make him
share.”

Diana laughed. “Tell her not to worry, I have a great surprise for her for Christmas. I can’t wait to
visit you all again.”

“We’re excited too. Though Michael may well be taller than you now…”

Diana scoffed, still in denial. “Preposterous, he can’t possibly grow anymore.”

Peggy gave a doubtful hum that Diana completely ignored. “So did you all have an enjoyable
evening?”

“Oh yes, he invited a few friends over for dinner and cake. Just the usual celebration …” she trailed
off, not at all sounding like she had had fun.

“But you did not enjoy it?”

“What? No, it was good. We-“

“Peggy.” Diana said gently, “You are lying.”

She sighed, shaking her head. “Yes, but I’m also being ridiculous.”

“Something is bothering you?”

“Well,” she started, “yes. I was telling Daniel—and I know this is an awful thing to think—but if
the war keeps going then…” she trailed off and took a deep breath. “Then Michael may very well
be drafted.”

The statement sucked the air out of Diana’s lungs. While in Vietnam she had seen young men, boys
really, fresh out of school and already bleeding on the battlefield. They did remind her of Michael
at times, the serious ones with shy smiles, or the groups that played ball to pass the time. She
hadn’t thought through that one day they wouldn’t just remind her of Michael, it might be Michael.

“Peggy…” she started, trying to think of someway to be reassuring. “He has two years. A lot can
change in that time.

“But what if it doesn’t?” She could hear the panic rising in her voice, the fear she normal tamped
down on slithering between her words. “I can’t lose him Diana. I know that’s selfish—other
families are sacrificing—but I can’t do it again. I worry about you and Daniel and the Commandos
and agents, I can’t worry about him as well.”

“He is your child, it’s understandable. You have sacrificed more than enough already. But Peggy
even if he is drafted there are deferments, correct? He is planning on college anyway, it would all
work out.”

Peggy laughed a bitter laugh. “Do you think he’d choose that? Diana, he’s grown up around us.
He’s already told me that he wants to fight because it’s what I supposedly want. Forget being
drafted, he could very well choose to enlist.”

She was right as much as she hated to admit it. He was surrounded by adults that had sacrificed
everything for their work, why wouldn’t he do the same? He was like Steve on extra steroids, with
the stubbornness combined with selflessness that made for a deadly combination.
“Still,” Diana said, determined. “One of us will talk sense into him. Or better yet the war will end.”

She would do everything in her power to make sure of it.

1970

Diana ducked into the inn, waiting for the sun shower to pass. It had been a quiet few days, the Protestants and Catholics refraining from killing each other, if only temporarily. The entire time she had been in Northern Ireland she had been torn between simply protecting as many civilians as she could and screaming that regardless of religious or political beliefs, they needed to stop hurting one another.

She walked up the stairs to her room, planning to make a nice cup of tea while she wrote up reports for Peggy and read over the Hydra briefings.

She had taken Peggy’s advice, taking a week away from the war to deal with issues that were marginally better. Sadly, that didn’t mean the paperwork stopped.

She was just about to take a break and stretch when the phone rang, Peggy jubilant on the other end.

“It’s Howard and Maria! She delivered! It’s a boy—Tony!”

“Oh, how wonderful!” Diana said with a grin. “Baby Tony.”

“Guess you have another child to spoil.”

Diana laughed. “And good thing, your two only have a few more years till they fly the coop.”

“Shhhh, don’t remind me.”

She grinned. “Fine. Is Maria okay? I know the doctors were worried.”

“Mostly. She had some complications but should be fine. Howard asked me to play messenger for everyone so he could stay with the two of them while they run more tests.”

*The two of them.* She couldn’t wait to see Howard as a father, experiencing all the joys of parenthood.

“He said he’d try to call everyone later with updates,” Peggy continued, “So hopefully you’ll hear from him soon.”

“I look forward to it. It is a hell of a lot more exciting than briefings.”

She poured herself a second cup of tea after hanging up and got back to work, finding it practically impossible to focus on the words in front of her. A new little one was much more engaging then suspect movements or the sentences that blurred together on the page in front of her.

Not thirty minutes later, the phone rang again. She rushed towards it, eager to wish Howard and Maria congratulations.

The voice on the other end wasn’t one of theirs.

“Diana?”
A “Congratulations!” died on her lips, as she instead asked “Hello?”

“It’s Marian.”

“Oh! she said with a small smile. “Forgive me, I was expecting news from another friend. How are you doing? I talked with your mom just the other day. She was going on about equality for women in the workforce in typical Etta fashion.”

There was a moment of silence on the other end on the line. “It’s, er, I’m calling about her actually,” she said her voice breaking on the last word.

Diana’s smile faded.

“I…I don’t want to tell you this,” she continued her voice strained. “I really don’t.”

And then Diana knew. She knew the words that were about to tumble out of her mouth, braced herself for the impact. She wanted to run from them, to lay down the phone and sprint outside with hands over her ears. If she was fast enough maybe she could make it to London, and cut off the call from its source. Or maybe she could run all the way back to 1918, and begin all over again.

“She died last night. It was a stroke.”

Diana’s eyes welled with tears as she sank down into her chair. It had started. She had seen the wrinkles slowly line Etta’s face, the kids and grandkids grow up. But she thought she had more time until she had to worry about this. She should have had more time. She had talked with Etta just days ago. And now she was gone.

“I’m so sorry.” Diana whispered, her voice shaking. “She-she was simply amazing.” She took a breath. “I’m heading back to the war soon. I will stop by on my way for the funeral.”

“I really appreciate it,” Marian said. “And I’m sorry too.”

Diana gently hung up and sat down on the bed facing the window, one hand covering her mouth as she sobbed. She was gone. The bubbly woman who wasn’t afraid of a good old fisticuffs, who mourned Steve with her, who had been her friend from the very beginning. Gone, just like Steve and Veld. Just like the others would be over the next decade. And then would the only survivor of the Great War be herself? The only one to remember exactly how the men had dug into the trenches and risked their lives? To remember the victory promises made or the way the snow swirled after a liberation?

It would have to be. She would carry their stories—and Etta’s—to make sure little Tony knew about them too.

**November, 1971**

Nothing had changed, or at least not enough. There was technically a policy of de-escalation, but she would believe it when men stopped being sent to fight. Men like Michael.

Peggy had delivered the news in a detached sort of way. Michael had volunteered the day after he turned eighteen. He was going, and no amount of cajoling or pleading to at least take some time to think could get him to reconsider.

She sounded exhausted. “I don’t know any more Diana. I’m proud that he is dedicated to his
beliefs, but I also know he doesn’t understand exactly what he has to lose.”

“Peggy, I’m sorry.”

She sniffed. “I’m—we’ll be fine. Things are winding down, he won’t be in the worst of it.”

“I’ll watch over him best I can,” she said. “I promise you he’s coming home.”

Like all promises, this one too was unbreakable.

She made sure he was situated with his battalion, and checked in every so often. Anything to see him safe. Even when she was busy with other things, he was always in the back of her mind. It was personal now, this war, in a way it hadn’t been for a long time.

She continued her work as she always had, looking after people and art. Dugan flew in again to help deliver some more supplies, adding a much-needed pair of hands as well as levity to the job. This time it was she who told the stories, especially the one where Dugan had tripped ass over teakettle into the mud after being startled by a songbird. It made even the commanders laugh.

At times it was exhausting, bouncing between helping soldiers and civilians, all the while reporting back to Peggy with any Hydra related news. Then again, it meant something was being done to change things.

1972

Diana would have volunteered to be exhausted for the rest of eternity if it could have prevented the next piece of bad news.

She could count on one hand the number of times she had seen Peggy lose complete control of her emotions. It simply didn’t happen.

“What is it? What is wrong? Peggy, you are scaring me.” she pleaded, listening to Peggy’s shuddering breath.

“Michael, she choked out. “It’s Michael.”

Diana froze, making every bargain she could possible make to Zeus, to the universe, to whoever. If she could just will it hard enough maybe he would be safe.

*Alive. Let me find him alive.* She begged.

“Peggy,” she started, trying to keep he voice from wavering. “I need you to take a deep breath and tell me exactly what happened.”

Peggy gulped, practically gasping. “He’s—he’s injured … I don’t… don’t know where. The message just said critical condition. But when it was delivered there was a moment when I thought… when I thought he…” she said, unable to finish.

“Oh, Peggy,” Diana breathed. *Alive.* Not safe, but it was something.

“Daniel’s on a mission and unreachable, Elizabeth gets home from school in an hour, and I don’t know what to do short of flying there myself to find him and I can’t even do that. I have to stay here in case there’s more news.” she rushed out, her voice still panicked. “Diana, I’m stuck.”
She took a deep breath of her own. “It will be okay. I will go find him and see how he is doing.”
She wasn’t that far from his group, and they of all people would have to know where he was taken.
“I will call you as soon as I find out where he is and what is wrong. I’ll stay with him, or whatever else you want me to do.”

“Thank you,” Peggy said in a broken whisper, one that made Diana’s heart ache just hearing it.

She was told he had been airlifted to a field hospital outside Da Nang. No one knew exactly what had happened. It was like a bad game of telephone, but one where the stakes made it infinitely more frustrating.

Cursing, she “borrowed” a jeep and headed out.

The whole time she kept up a silent mantra. *Let him be safe,* she begged. *Let him come home.* She refused to consider the alternative.

When she arrived at the hospital, she practically plowed over the first nurse she saw.

“Is Michael Carter here? I need to see him—is he okay?”

The nurse shook her head with a frown.

“There are no visitors, ma’am. This is a field hospital, not your local nursing home. Unless you’re from his command we can’t let you in.”

“So he is here? I must see him. Can you not—”

“I told you, no visitors,” she repeated, annoyed.

“But I—“

“No.”

Diana was about to continue her protests when another nurse walked in.

“Is there a problem out here?” she asked, looking between the two.

Diana turned to her woman, drawing herself up to her full height. “My name is Diana Prince. I’m here in place of Director Carter, head of S.H.I.E.L.D. I will be let though to see a patient.”

The woman’s eyes widened. Yes, yes of course. If you come right this way…”

Diana practically ran through the ward, trying her best to ignore the groans and beeps and smell of alcohol.

She flung open the door, bracing herself for what she might find. *Zeus let him be safe.*

She found Michael resting in bed, various body parts bandaged, and a look of surprise on his face as she barged in.

She must have looked rather disheveled because he slowly inched upwards, eyes full of concern as he turned his pale face towards her.
“Aunty Diana?”

She let out a sob of relief and rushed towards him, carefully gathering him in her arms. Safe. He was safe.

“I’m okay, I’m okay. Well—kind of okay, but it’s alright.” He said pulling away from her after a moment. “You didn’t have to come all the way down here.”

She wiped her eyes and looked at him as she sat down. “Your family is worried sick, of course I did! What on Earth happened?”

He sighed. “Me and some guys were going to interview a few people from this village. We got ambushed.”

“Oh, Michael…”

He gave a shrug that turned into a wince. “It could have been worse. Just banged up.”

Diana just looked at him. He was Peggy’s son all right, downplaying a major injury to make others feel better or just out of sheer stubbornness.

“You are in critical condition. Would you like to explain what ‘just banged up’ means?”

“Well, they downgraded me to serious overnight. It’s not a big deal.”

She raised an eyebrow.

“Fine,” he said, beginning to tick ailments off his fingers. “Mild concussion, cracked rib, the usual cuts and scrapes, and a bullet in my abdomen.”

“A what?!”

He looked up at her sheepishly. “Yeah, I knew you and mom weren’t going to be thrilled about that. I got, er, shot. In the stomach.”

Diana’s eyes widened as she leaned over to examine his bandages.

“They did surgery,” he continued, “it really is better now. I just lost a lot of blood”

Diana cringed. She knew that “lost a lot of blood” was the sugar-coated version of almost bled out. She almost regretted asking.

“Well I’m glad you are okay now.”

She rubbed her temples, her worry increasingly giving way to frustration. “Your family is worried too. You realize I get to explain all this to them, right?”

“I can call. I-“

“You most certainly will not, you need rest. I promised your mother I’d report back anyway, but what the hell am I going to say?”

“That I’m okay first off. And then what I told you.”

Diana shook her head. “Michael do you know how worried they’ve all been? It is one of the only times I have ever heard your mother sound truly terrified. So I do not relish explaining to her that
her son nearly bled to death half a world away from where she is.”

He looked down at his lap. “I know it must have been scary, which I’m sorry for. But this is what happens during war. I’m doing all this for them.”

She gave him a sad smile and realized with a jolt that this must have been what her own mother felt like. The pride and fear at looking at someone you watched grow up, someone with every good intention in their heart, who didn’t yet understand the situation they had run into.

“No,” she said. “They fought in the hopes you would not have to.”

He shook his head, confused. “But it’s what my family does. It’s what you and the Commandos do. I’m serving our country and trying to help people. You’ve all done so much good—“

“And we have paid dearly for it,” she said, leaning back with a frown.

“How much have your parents told you and Elizabeth? About their work?” she finally asked.

“What do you mean? A lot of its classified.”

“No, their experiences. Peggy and Daniel have shared a few select stories with you two, the funnier ones, correct? Like Jarvis hearing them kissing over the radio. Or dramatic retellings of the Commandos glory days. But there is so much you still don’t know.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Why? Can’t you just tell me now?”

“Because some topics were better left alone.”

“Like what?” he pressed.

She blew out a slow breath. “Did you ever wonder why your mother never went with you all to Fourth of July picnics or parties?”

“I thought she just didn’t like crowds.”

“Did she ever tell you about Steve-Captain America?”

“A little. She never really talked about him much.”

“The Fourth of July was his birthday. It upset her to see the country celebrating his values when he was not there to join in.”

“Oh.”

“Do you know the real reason she jumps at the doorbell? How your father was injured? Why Howard works himself to the bone day after day and why Ana will never have children of her own? Even me,” she said, her voice soft. “Why I cannot stand the sight of agent orange? Why an old pocket watch is my most prized possession?”

Michael looked down at his lap.

“I am not angry with you. I understand the desire to fight—I gave my mother some scares of her own.”

His mouth opened in surprise. “You’re not going to try and stop me?”
She chuckled. “I think we both know that would not work. Your parents too.”

“Then what do you want me to do?”

Diana closed her eyes. “All I ask is that you fully understand. That you know the cost of what you are getting yourself into on yourself and others. If you decide that the risk is truly worth it—that the job is important enough—then by all means continue. But if not…”

He nodded solemnly.

“Good.”

She smiled as she stood up and gently pushed him back into the pillows. “I’m going to make some calls. And you are going to rest.”

He begrudgingly laid back down.

“I mean it. Rest first, then we will see how to get you out of here.”

He smiled and gave her a weak salute. “Yes Aunty.”

April, 1975

The last helicopter left the embassy, and with it the war.

After so many years with so many dead or wounded it was finally over. As for the final outcome, well, that remained to be seen.

She had boarded her own plane a few months previously, glad to be leaving the destruction and pain for good.

Even the soldiers had been discouraged by the end. It reminded her of a song she had heard the troops sing during the Great War: \textit{We’re here because we’re here because we’re here because we’re here.} There was no purpose for continuing the fight, yet they plodded on. And then they went back to a country that at times showed them outright hatred, it’s citizens unable to make the distinction between the soldier and the war.

It was largely what she had come to expect from conflict. The depressing events were not what had shocked her, rather it was the social change and counterculture that had developed and was so different from wars in the past.

First there were the hippies, with their wild hair and clothes and commitment to love. They were strange—she would never forget Peggy’s confused expression at seeing some of the pictures in the newspapers—but they cared, and often that was enough.

Then there was the music that never failed to get stuck in her head. She couldn’t help but sing along to “These Boots Were Made For Walking,” or cry while listening to John Denver.

Colleges turned into hotbeds of discussion and debate, the youth reclaiming their voice. Michael returned home after his tour of duty and joined them, Elizabeth following soon behind. It made her proud to see them both changing and growing too.

She saw the world developed new technologies she couldn’t even begin to understand. Science so magnificent it appeared magic to outsiders. It was this technology that allowed man to step foot on
the moon, claiming Artemis’ territory as their own in a feat worthy of the gods.

Most off all she watched as the world became a more equal place with marches and sit-ins, the Stonewall riots and Title IX. Mankind was far from perfect, but they were working on it.

It was all so wild and wonderful, almost primal in a way. It wouldn’t last, social movements rarely did, but she hoped the ideas, at least, would stick around.

On that final day of war, she headed to celebrate as best she could with Peggy and Daniel. There was a cost to the end of war, as always, one the Vietnamese would continue to pay. It would be a long time yet before the country would be able to sound their own “last all clear.”

Even so, she smiled as she approached their house. The kids were on break from college, and the Starks were stopping by with Tony in tow. Her favorite people, safe and sound and all in one place.

As she knocked on the front door she couldn’t help but feel that President Ford had been right. Their long nightmare was over.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for sticking with me through what turned out to be an unannounced hiatus. Life got crazy, partly due to me making a wonder woman cosplay for Halloween (there's some pictures on my tumblr.) That being said, I am now intentionally announcing a hiatus for the rest of November/early December so I can work on NaNoWriMo and plot the rest of this fic. After I'm back I'll be posting chapters as I finish them. Hopefully this longer chapter will tide you over!

There are obviously lots of historical references in this one, though the only one I really played with was Ford's quote since it referred to Nixon's resignation more than the war. The "last all clear" is taken from the Vera Lynn song. The title is taken from the Bob Dylan song of the same name.

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Good Things Come in Small Packages

Chapter Notes

Much thanks to ChiameraKitten for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

1979

Diana beamed as Michael made his way back down the aisle, now with his bride. To think that the little boy she had played spy with all those years ago was married.

She heard Peggy sniff behind her and turned just in time to see her smile up at Daniel and give him a quick kiss, the two of them clearly remembering their own wedding day.

The reception was held at Peggy and Daniel’s house, everyone cramming themselves into an assortment of cars for the short drive back.

She helped Peggy pass out food and drinks, making the rounds and catching up with the people she now only saw once a decade for special events.

Dugan roped her into a dance like last time, spinning and dipping her like a pro.

“Did you bring your fiddle again?” she asked, still smiling at the memory of Peggy’s mother’s expression all these years later.

He winked at her. “How could I forget it?”

She made sure to nab a dance with Michael too, though he had never been very graceful. He spent the majority of the dance apologizing for stepping on her toes, much to her amusement.

As the reception wound down she found her way outside to the back patio, where Maria was keeping Tony entertained on the swing, pushing him with different levels of force so he could compare the swing’s arcs.

She met Maria’s eyes and smiled, shaking her head.

He was so much like Howard, though Maria had softened him, making him less high strung. It may have been for his own survival—if Tony was as antsy as his father Maria would have murdered the pair of them years ago.

Daniel found his way outside too, an extra cup of tea in hand which he delivered to her.

“Refreshment delivery.”

She closed her eyes and breathed it in, causing him to laugh.

“That good, huh?”
She hummed in agreement. “The perfect drink for a perfect day.” She looked over at him and smiled. “You must be so proud.”

He smiled at her. “I am. When they’re little all these milestones seem so far off. And then you sit down and bam,” he said, snapping his fingers. “It’s here. I’ve never seen Michael happier.”

“Do you miss it? The kids being little?”

He leaned back, making a face as he set his drink on the patio table.

“Not really, it’s nice being past all that. Besides, there will be grandkids soon enough, and we watch Tony every so often.”

When she had first arrived there had, in fact, been Legos scattered everywhere, from a big box of old toys Daniel had retrieved from the attic. Tony had built a detailed replica of the Eiffel tower complete with a Lego figurine on top.

Daniel jerked his head in Tony’s direction. “As you can see, Maria and Howard have their hands full.”

Tony had moved to climbing one of the backyard trees, the low hanging branches and a few old boards from what used to be Elizabeth’s tree house making it easy to scurry up.

“Be careful.” Maria called from below. “I’m going back inside and I don’t want you to break your neck in the meantime.”

“I just want to build a pulley system. Then I can bring snacks up here!”

Diana laughed, shooing Maria and Daniel back inside, promising to keep an eye on him.

She climbed up to set next to him, scooting out onto one of the branches.

“Acquiring snacks is indeed a noble quest. Maybe Daniel could help you rebuild the tree house, then you’d have a spot to sit down and eat.”

Tony hummed in agreement, looking down at the ground and then back up at the branch they were sitting on, and then back down again.

“Mom said once that you had a lasso that makes people tell the truth? Can I borrow it to see how much rope I need?”

Diana’s mouth twitched as she admired his creativity. “Your mother was right, I do have a golden lasso, though it is supposed to be a secret.”

“Ohhhh,” he said. “Well, I won’t tell, I’m good at keeping secrets. Dad always says that loose lips sink ships. That’s why he can’t tell us everything he does or why he’s always gone.”

“Yes, that is an old saying,” she agreed, wondering if she needed to be concerned that at just barely age nine he knew about it from firsthand experience.

“I appreciate you keeping quiet, but unfortunately I do not have my lasso with me.”

He turned towards her, curious. “How does it work? Does it affect brain chemistry? Or hurt you if you lie? Is it magic?”

“It is in fact magical—the goddess Hestia created it.”
His eyes widened. “That’s cool! How did she do that?”

Diana shrugged. “How do the gods do anything? With their powers I suppose.”

“Do Mom and Dad’s gods have powers like that too? They don’t talk about that stuff at the holidays.”

The question startled her, she hadn’t even thought of it, or where else Tony’s line of questioning would lead. Maria was Catholic, Howard Jewish, and throw in some knowledge of the Greek gods and whatever other magical or alien creations popped up and poor Tony wouldn’t know what to think.

“Er,” she started. “If you believe they do then yes.”

“Cool. I wonder if they have lassos too.”

She nodded. “It is a good question. How about you climb down and ask your mother after you say farewell to the guests?”

People had begun walking out to their cars, and the music must have finally stopped since she could hear individual voices carrying through the screen door.

“She’ll want you inside soon anyway.”

He groaned and slowly stood up, reaching back towards the trunk of the tree.

“I hate talking to all their friends. They treat me like a baby.”

“They’re just surprised about how much you have grown.” she said, following behind him. “But if you go down quickly you may be able to get some more dessert before it’s all wrapped up.”

Even Tony’s stubbornness was no match for more sugar.

“Fine.” He turned and shimmied down the trunk, waiting for her at the bottom.

They walked inside, finding Peggy, Maria, and Jarvis saying goodbye to one of their old friends in the sitting room.

Tony walked over and tugged on Maria’s sleeve, and, completely ignoring her stipulation of asking his question after goodbyes, asked, “Mom? Does God have a lasso?”

Peggy raised an eyebrow in her direction, pressing her lips together to keep from bursting out into laughter.

“Later.” Diana mouthed.

Maria sighed. “This is an at home discussion, okay? I don’t know where on Earth you got that idea,” she added, with a pointed look in Diana’s direction.

She simply smiled and joined them in saying farewell to the guests, while Tony tried to make a break for the dessert table.

That next morning Diana sat at the kitchen table alongside Daniel, both of them reading the paper and drinking their coffee in peaceful silence aside from an occasional sigh at the state of the news.
or a chuckle at the comics.

Peggy came bustling in, leaning over Daniel’s shoulder to read the headlines.

“Are you ready for our girl’s day?” She asked, sitting down next to Diana.

Daniel snorted, and Peggy looked at him with mock affront.

“What? Two friends can’t go get lunch on a fine Sunday afternoon?”

“Two friends and half of S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Oh, shush,” she said with a smile. “We’ll go get some food and swing by the office. Just a little bit of work, right Diana?”

“Right” she agreed, burying her face in the paper to avoid Daniels unimpressed look.

They had lunch at a cute little diner near where the old SSR building used to be, both ordering what the restaurant claimed was the “the best French toast in the city.”

After dousing their plates in maple syrup, the pair leisurely chatted about nothing in particular for what seemed like the first time in months. In between bites they talked about Michael and Elizabeth, home improvement projects, and various movies including the latest Star Wars.

“I wish they could have come out a few years earlier when Elizabeth was younger,” Peggy said. “Seeing Leia up there on the screen would have meant a great deal to her.”

Diana nodded. “Tony showed me the last one on VHS tape. She is a very strong character, one that represents hope.”

“Oh!” Peggy said, slapping her hand on the table, “That reminds me—I can’t believe I forgot to tell you!”

She leaned forward. “Remember that God-awful radio show about Steve and I? Well it finally ended reruns. How it continued this long I have no idea, it wasn’t like it was any good.”

She tilted her head in the direction of the cash register. “Angie used to work here. I’d come down late after work and she’d force some food to me and then listen to that damn program. She didn’t know it was me, but she hated it almost as much. Her running commentary about the show was better than the show itself.”

Diana snorted. “What will you do with yourself now that Steve does not have to save you from being kidnapped ever two seconds?”

Peggy put a hand to her forehead dramatically. “I guess I’ll wait for a new man to come save me then settle down and learn how to properly iron clothes.”

Diana laughed, envisioning Peggy wrestling with the ironing board. Now wielding the iron as a weapon on the other hand…

Peggy just shook her head “I never thought I’d say this, but thank god kids are more interested in all these new videogames than radio.”
They left the diner much fuller, piling back into the car and heading to Peggy's office.

“I do not know we haven’t done a girls’ day before. It is very enjoyable.”

Looking back, it was because she was never with Peggy for more than a day or two at a time, and those trips were for specific work or social functions. Even this trip wasn’t due to last much longer. New York was lovely, but duty called, as did Eastern Europe.

“Life has a knack for getting in the way I suppose.” Peggy replied, cranking a window open to let in some air. “Right now it’s Hydra and weddings, later it will be grandkids and retirement parties, and then new threat briefings. It doesn’t slow down.”

Diana hummed in agreement. “If anything, time is speeding up. Old women, the two of us.”

Peggy raised an eyebrow. “I don’t look a day over 25. You and Howard on the other hand…”

Diana swatted her. “Speaking of—where is Howard on this fine day? Is he part of the ‘half of S.H.I.E.L.D.’ Daniel was talking about?”

“Possibly,” she said, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

“Possibly?”

“Yes, he’ll be there. We have a surprise for you.”

“Oh really. And should I be concerned that this surprise requires us being at S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters?”

“Maybe. Remember how I said that we should get a whole team of people like you and Steve?”

“Yes,” she said slowly, suddenly afraid that when they arrived there would be a group of muscled up individuals jumping out at her like a super human surprise party. If that wasn’t grounds for concern, she didn’t know what was.

“Well, you’re never going to believe this.”

She and Peggy entered her office, finding Howard and another man poring over blueprints spread out across the entire surface of the desk.

“Diana, this is Hank Pym,” she said, making introductions

“Pleasure,” he said, “Director Carter over here has told me a little about your powers. Fascinating stuff. But you’re here to see the inventions?”

She looked over at Peggy, unsure. “Well…”

“Yes,” Peggy said. “She needs to see the suit.”

His eyes narrowed, causing Peggy to sigh.

“She’s trustworthy Hank, you can show her.”

Diana nodded. “I do have a lasso of truth.”
“Fine, wait here. I’ll go get the suit and the ants.”

“The ants?” Diana asked, turning to Peggy.

“You’ll see.”

Hank returned with an armful of metal armor and an ant colony teetering dangerously on top of the pile.

He brushed the blueprints aside and spread out his supplies before turning back to Diana.

“After I put this suit on, watch me very carefully,” he instructed.

She nodded, staring back at him as he struggled into the various pieces. He looked up at her and smiled before pushing one of the outfit’s many buttons, seemingly vanishing into thin air.

She stumbled backwards, scanning the room for what could have happened to him.

She looked over at Howard and Peggy with a frown. “Is he okay? Where did he—”

Out of nowhere, something flashed in front of her eyes. Then it happened again, as whatever it was began circling her.

She stepped to one side, thinking it a bug, before realizing it had to be him.

She gasped, and Hank appeared before her again, the suit looking a little worse for wear.

“I always love a new audience,” he said, laughing at her expression. "Suit could still use some work though.”

She stared at him. “You can shrink?”

“Yes, using something I call Pym particles.”

Her mouth opened and closed, before she finally said. “Alright then. What are the ants for?”

“The ants? I can control them. Do you want me to show you, I could make them all move to a specific location, for instance?”

“No need,” she said faintly. “I believe you.” She had seen many odd things in her time among man, but never had she expected to be in the presence of a literal army of ants.

“I know it’s strange. I’m working hard to fine tune things and see what else I can do with all this.”

Behind him, Howard smiled. “We’re still having a few little problems with it, but it’s interesting stuff.

Diana groaned at the joke.

That’s our cue to leave,” Peggy said with a smile. “We’ll leave you two to it.”

Hank waved a hand in their direction, already looking at the blueprints again.

“Of course. Swing by any time.”
Diana shook her head to clear it as they climbed back into the car.

“So? Were you properly surprised?”

“Very much so. What he is doing is incredible.” She had always been amazed with what new technologies and scientific discoveries could do. Sometimes she thought that in a different word she would be working right there alongside Howard.

“I think it is interesting, but I have to say that I am also worried about the ramifications. Suddenly we have an army of superheroes running amok? How on Earth would that work?”

Peggy sighed. “Yes, well I think it’s somewhat inevitable. It’s not just me who wants a team anymore, it’s other higher ups in S.H.I.E.L.D. and by extension the government. There will be some oversight at least. And we can move slowly.”

“That is some comfort,” Diana said. She would much rather have searched for individuals that already had powers than introduce new technology, but that was not her decision to make. She and Peggy had also agreed that there needed to be a similar group outside of U.S. government control, one that could look after world interests, but that was far in the future.

“Baby steps,” Peggy said. “That’s what I keep telling myself and Howard. We’ll get where we want to be eventually.”

Diana nodded. “Rushing things could be disastrous.”

“I agree.” She hesitated, looking over at Diana. “I already had to speak with Howard. He wanted to concoct a new batch of super solider serum and use it to help form the team.”

Diana gaped. “And what did you say?”

“That it was a terrible idea and he was doing the opposite of what Steve would have wanted. I got him to agree to focusing his energy on Hank’s new invention.”

“I suppose that is safer.”

“I hope so. Hank isn’t thrilled at the prospect of letting us anywhere near his suit, but maybe he and Howard will be able to invent something else.”

“You could always enlist Tony’s help. That child is brilliant. I’m sure he could come up with something,” Diana teased. “Though it may be Lego based.”

Peggy laughed along. “There’s no way I’m doing that. Howard will kill me if I let him don one of these hairbrained suits.”

1985

“I have two favors to ask you,” Peggy said.

Diana sandwiched the phone between her ear and shoulder, using her other hand to stir the soup she was making for dinner, all while trying not to get the phone cord tangled around her in the process.
“Of course.”

“First I was wondering if you could meet Hank Pym when he goes to Berlin? He needs to recover some old Hydra technology, and it would be useful for him to have a contact there.

“Sure, just let me know what times I need to be around or what he needs access to.”

She thought it through. If he got in a little early she could even pick him up from the airport and take him to one of her safe houses for a hot meal and help brief him.

“Thank you. I’m sorry to bother you with it, we’ve just had so many problems arranging things.”

“I understand,” Diana said with a smile. Peggy had called multiple times throughout the week, ranting about everything from Hank’s insistence that he remain in control of his suit to scheduling problems. “I’m happy to do it. What is your second question then?”

“Second,” she said, unable to hide her excitement, “are you willing to help me plan an engagement party and baby shower?”

Diana dropped her spoon, stunned into silence for a moment before breaking out into a grin. “Are you serious? Of course! Oh, Peggy, how exciting! Both of them?”

Peggy laughed. “Yes, apparently my children decided to stage major life events at the same time.

“Well, I suppose they’re being practical, even if it does make things hectic.” She leaned against the counter. “We can start planning now. I saw the most adorable knit baby booties at a shop in Paris…”

She picked Hank up at the airport that weekend, and immediately drove him to the Berlin Wall.

“The sooner I get in and out, the better,” he said, politely turning down any mentions of food, drink, or breaks.

They reviewed the plan on the way, eventually coming to a stop on a side street where they parked the car. As dusk fell they made their way over to the wall and Hank strapped into his suit.

Peggy had phoned ahead to the West German guard units explaining what Hank was doing, not that they really cared. If some government idiot wanted to get shot at trying to cross, that was their prerogative.

On the West German side, the wall was covered with graffiti. She examined it as they walked, the random assortment of initials, pictures, and political messages all blending together into a beautiful spray-painted piece of art.

Looking out across the wall to the other side was a different matter. There was no graffiti, nor any signs of life for a few hundred meters.

Hank walked up alongside her. “The guards call it no man’s land.” he said, a hint of nervousness in his voice. “Land mines, barbed wire—I don’t know how I could do this without my suit.”

“There have been other so-called ‘no man’s lands’ before,” she said looking up at him. “The name is a lie. Somehow, men always find their way though.”

She had done it herself all those years ago, proving to the others that a line in the sand could be
brushed away if people were willing to take a stand and fight. Or there was the story Steve had told her as they traveled, where no man’s land turned into a soccer pitch for Christmas Day. Opposing sides set down their weapons and battled only for control of a ball. “The Christmas Truce” they had called it, perhaps one of the best things that had come from the war.

He nodded. “I can do it. There isn’t really another option.” All of a sudden, he looked at her, an odd expression crossing his face. “How do you usually get into the U.S.S.R.?”

She shrugged. “Faked papers or with humanitarian groups. The times I’ve had to cross a border, I typically chose a point in the middle of farmland where I can hop barbed wire instead of trying to get past this concrete monstrosity.”

She hadn’t run into any problems yet. She had been chased by an angry sheep once, but she would take that over being shot at any day.

He smiled. “Sensible of you.”

He looked down at his watch. “They should be changing guards now.”

“Go. Good luck.”

He hit the button, shrinking down. He hovered for a moment before her flew over the wall and disappeared.

Now was the waiting game, the part she most hated. He would either come back alive, or never return at all. There was nothing she could do to change those outcomes, except maybe call Peggy for backup if things went horribly awry.

She was just about to head back to the car when she heard the commotion.

There was a dog barking, loud and persistent on the other side. She groaned. One of the few things Hank’s suit didn’t change was his smell.

The barking continued, soon followed my machine gun fire. She ducked by instinct, and ran back to the car.

*Please be okay,* she repeated over and over. *Please make it.*

He didn’t return that evening or the next morning. She got breakfast in a coffee shop and called Peggy with an update before resuming her position under the wall, a structure she was beginning to hate more and more by the minute. If he didn’t show up soon she was going to have to leave, a proposition she didn’t want to have to consider.

Close to noon, something flew by her ear and she bolted up right. With a small pop Hank appeared full size in front of her again, nearly giving an old woman passing by a heart attack.

“Thank Zeus. Are you okay?” she asked, scanning him for injuries. He looked exhausted, with a few new cuts and scrapes to show for his efforts, but nothing too serious.

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” he said waving her off. “It was just that the God damn dog nearly gave me away.”

“I heard. Did you get what you came for at least?”

He patted his pocket and smiled. “Right here. It was a success.”
“That’s great, Hank. The car’s parked around the corner, we can head back or we can—”

“Food,” he declared. “Can we get some food first? Being nearly killed by Fido can really work up an appetite.”

1989

To Peggy’s grandchildren, Christmas had come a few weeks early.

She handed out the Chocolate she had brought back from Eastern Europe and watched them pounce on it, completely delighted.

Peggy sent them, shrieking, to go eat it outside where any messes could be washed off with a garden hose.

Peggy shook her head. “It’s going to make them all hyper.”

Diana just shrugged. “I have a world’s best aunty reputation to uphold.”

She smiled. “Well I for one am glad the world’s best Aunty made it back to visit. How’s the good old U.S.S.R. doing? And wherever else you’ve managed to travel in the past week?”

Diana let out a sigh, leaning forward on the kitchen counter.

“That good, huh?”

It hadn’t been great. She had seen increased Hydra activity throughout the region, which didn’t bode well. There had also been more independence movements—one of the few bright spots of the job there. She hoped more than anything that those peoples’ voices would be heard, and that they did not get hurt during their fight.

“The Soviets are the same as usual,” she said, snapping off a piece of chocolate for herself. “And the past day or two I was traveling around trying to get resources for AIDS patients.” Governments may have been ignoring the crisis, but she refused to do the same.

“You?”

Peggy smiled. “Not completely terrible. We cracked some domestic cases and there’s a lot of promising new hires I’m excited to work with.” She bit her lip as she continued. “Only issue is that we had a SNAFU with Hank.”

Knowing Peggy, calling it a SNAFU was probably an understatement.

Diana swallowed and asked, “Oh?”

“S.H.I.E.L.D. erm, had a bit of a disagreement with him. He won’t be giving us any of his formulas.”

“That is too bad.” She had heard from Peggy that Hank’s wife had died on a mission. That had to have affected him, she couldn’t imagine Hank simply walking away like that.

“And so,” Peggy continued, frowning, “Howard is working on the super solider serum instead.
She snapped her head up to look at Peggy, biting back her anger.

“Does he not understand? That is not a good idea.”

“No,” Peggy agreed, “it isn’t, that’s why I’m telling you. I can’t seem to get through to him, and I only want to ask Maria to say something to him as a last resort. He brings work home too often as it is.”

Diana nodded, handing the chocolate bar over to Peggy. “Is that why Tony is so…”

“Moody?” Peggy responded with a strained smile. “Partially.”

Diana had gone over to visit with them earlier in the day. He had still joked around with her and been polite, but he and Howard appeared to be circling each other the entire time, preparing for a brawl. After a little while Tony disappeared up to his room to work on his latest project.

“He’s just being a teenager,” Peggy said trying to reassure her. “There were times when Michael and Elizabeth fought with us too.”

“Yes, but you were not emotionally constipated,” Diana muttered. “If they would only talk through their problems…”

“I know.”

Diana rubbed her temples. “I do not know what to do about the serum. If he has not come to the conclusion that it is an unwise decision by now, nothing we say can change it.”

She thought back to the bombs. He had taken a step back after he had seen technology’s consequences, and now he was jumping in headfirst again. In a twisted way, she understood. The serum had helped beat Hydra the last time. It would make sense for Howard to try again if it wasn’t so dangerous.

“I’ll talk to him,” she said. “But I don’t know how much it will work.”

Peggy nodded. “I’ll try again too, I suppose we just have to hope he comes to his senses.”

She broke off another piece of chocolate at the same time the screen door slammed open, interrupting the conversation. The kids came running through, faces smeared with chocolate and shrieked “TAG YOU’RE IT!” at Diana before running back outside, going as fast as their little legs could carry them.

Diana startled, looking over at Peggy with a faint smile.

“It appears the children have no regard for our business discussion,” she said, inching forward as Peggy inched back.

From the next room a faint “Grandma! Grandma, run!” could be heard.

Peggy smiled back a gleam in her eye. “No, it appears they don’t. We can continue…later.”

She casually took another step back before turning on her heel and running down the hall yelling “Diana’s it!”

Diana rolled her eyes and gave chase.
Chapter End Notes

I'm back from NaNoWriMo and plotting the rest of the fic! From here on out there will be more characters making their appearances, which I'm very excited for. I hope all of you are having a healthy and happy holiday season. See you in 2018!

Come find me on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades
December, 1991

Diana had promised herself she would keep it together. She had cried on the phone, packing her suitcase, and on the way to the airport.

She forgot about the promise entirely as soon as Peggy opened the door and pulled her into a hug, the two of them going thoroughly to pieces.

She let go, wiping her eyes, and went around the room to hug Daniel, Jarvis and Ana, and Tony. She held him tightest of all, wishing that she could have somehow protected him from this.

Maria and Howard where the only ones missing from the reunion. And they were never coming home.

It was almost harder to be in the presence of the others’ grief than her own. She mourned Howard and Maria, but she was also the farthest removed from interacting with them in day to day life. It had become a balancing act between processing her own feelings while simultaneously setting them aside to try and care for everyone else.

It was she who had helped arrange the funeral when the Jarvises and Tony needed a break, or made sure that Peggy wasn’t working too hard. Those few days morphed into a sleepless blur, the preparations and grief settling in around the house, threatening to smother it.

Eventually everyone agreed to just do the service and everything else outside, simplifying as much as they could.

“They would have liked it, I think,” Peggy said, mustering a smile. “Short and practical. As Howard always said, we’re not getting any younger.”

The night before the funeral Jarvis retreated into the study to work on the eulogy with a strong cup of tea. Daniel, on the other hand, uncorked a bottle of wine and passed glasses around. The rest of them stayed up, talking and drinking as if they could keep the next day at bay.

Morning came anyway, a cold but clear day that would have been beautiful if not for the task at hand. A line of cars snaked their way up the hill towards the cemetery, the crunch of gravel seeming jarring after a mostly silent ride.

In one car was the Jarvises and Tony and Daniel, then followed by Nick Fury, deputy director and Peggy’s protégé, along with other S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and some of the Commandos. There was
also the assorted businessmen, scientists, and politicians that would be showing up, the byproduct of Howard’s rather prolific career.

She and Peggy rode separately, for, as always, there was business to attend to after everything else was over.

As Diana stepped out of the car, adjusting her black coat and hat, she noticed that Tony had stormed ahead, making his way towards the woods at the edge of the cemetery. She stared at him, her chest tightening.

She made to follow after him, but a hand on her arm stopped her.

“Don’t worry, Ms. Prince. Ana and I will go speak with him in a moment,” Jarvis said, his voice pained.

“No, no it is okay. I want to be able to help, to talk to him.”

She headed after him, walking up through the grass he had trampled before coming to sit on the ground next to him. She rested a hand on his shoulder, looking at him with a frown.

“You don’t have to do this,” he said, his voice muffled, knees curled to his chest.

“But I want to.”

They sat in silence for a while before Diana sighed and said, “As unenjoyable as it is, the service will start soon. Everyone will be wondering where we are.”

“My mom is dead,” he said hollowly. “I don’t really care.”

She looked at him. “And your father?”

He didn’t respond.

She shook her head, watching as chairs began to fill near the podium at the bottom of the hill. “Howard called me the day you were born, absolutely ecstatic,” she said with a smile, remembering how he had talked too fast at first for her to understand anything he was saying. “I remember it well, the news helped lessen the blow of an otherwise very difficult day.”

“And after that he stopped caring,” he spat.

“No,” she said firmly. “He did not. I would not lie to you about this.”

“Then why didn’t he make an effort?” he asked. “He left me a video, about the company, advice, all that crap. Why didn’t he give me that when he was alive?”

She didn’t have an answer—didn’t know how to explain to him that people could be worthy of love just as much as they could anger.

He rose to his feet, shaking his head. “I appreciate the pep talk, I really do,” he said, his face softening a few degrees as he looked at her. “But it doesn’t really matter now, does it?”

She blew out a slow breath as he left rejoin the rest of the group. He was young, much too young to be dealing with all of this, and at a time when he was supposed to be focusing on college and his future. He was right though, there was no fixing anything now. And the truth could not change his mind if he was not yet ready to listen.
With a grunt she stood and plodded back towards the group, sitting down next to Peggy in the front row of folding chairs.

The pastor began to speak, talking about Howard and Maria’s accomplishments and how they were gone too soon and the gates of heaven and so on. She tuned out after a while, instead imaging Howard’s running commentary and snide comments about the service, as well as Maria’s piercing glare that meant “knock it off now or else.”

A hysterical laugh bubbled up inside her that she fought hard to stifle. These were the actions the pastor should have described—their humanness rather than the washed out saintly shells of people he spoke of. Jarvis’ speech would be better, she knew, and less hollow. These words may have offered something to mere acquaintances, but certainly not friends.

To distract herself she turned her attention to the two gleaming white caskets on the platform, covered with flowers and each with a picture from thirty years ago. For some reason, they made her angry. How dare they sit there, beautiful and perfect, as if everything was okay?

It almost made her glad that there hadn’t been a funeral for Steve. In a way he had made it simple for her—an explosion and he was gone. She didn’t think she would have been able to handle such a display of sorrow. Even now, this funeral brought back long suppressed grief. Steve. Captain Rogers, Etta and then over the past few years every other member of her original team. Charlie, Sameer, Chief—all of them were gone, graves scattered around the world.

She looked around at everyone around her. A decade or two more and most of them would be gone as well. She was stricken by the thought, and Peggy next to her sensed it, for she laid an arm around her shoulders and squeezed, as if to say “I’m here.”

The two of them watched as Jarvis mounted the platform next, giving a small smile to the crowd.

“I believe that if Mr. Stark were here he would have, in less polite terms, told us to ‘get on with it.’ I also believe he would forgive me for delaying but a few minutes more. I’ve worked for Howard and Maria Stark for most of my life, and so as you can imagine I have some stories to share.”

He surveyed the crowd, eyes coming to rest on Tony. “Not about their wild younger days, no, I’m sure you’ve heard rumor aplenty about that. No, I wish to share with you all stories about the Starks as a family, and the laughter Mr. and Mrs. Stark brought to their household…”

It was a lovely Eulogy, one Howard would have liked, she thought as she watched Jarvis shakily sit down. As soon as his bit was over Tony stood to lay one last flower on each casket before stepping back, his hand lightly brushing Maria’s casket in a final goodbye.

She and Peggy left right after, neither wanting to mingle with other mourners longer than they had to.

Peggy turned to her, eyebrows knit in concern as soon as they were safely back in the car.

“Are you okay? You looked…” she trailed off.

Diana turned towards her, nodding her head to proceed.

“Haunted,” she finished with a frown. “I’m sorry that much of this burden has fallen to you, I
should have—"

“It is not that,” she said, trying to reassure her with an attempt at a smile. “I do not mind. I just…
dwelt for too long on aging I suppose.”

She took a long look at Peggy. Her face was creased with permanent frown lines, her hair solidly
gray. Then there was Daniel, his limp exacerbated from arthritis, or Jarvis, who couldn’t rush
around nearly as much as he used to.

She put a hand up to her own cheek, wondering what marks should have been etched there. Even if
she had not changed physically, she sometimes worried that her actions had changed—that she had
become more willing to bend the truth or rush to conclusions.

“It startled me,” she added. “How we have all changed, and how you all will keep changing
without me.”

Peggy’s eyes softened as she shook her head. “Sure, everyone’s changed, but never to the point of
becoming unrecognizable. Howard never stopped creating, you have never given up hope.”

She closed her eyes before looking back over at Diana. “Even at the very end you’ll have memories
of who we all were and who we grew to be, all of it wrapped up in one. That, I think, is what’s
important.”

Diana nodded, turning to look out the window, city buildings beginning to flash by as they drove
towards headquarters. She still didn’t like it, but she felt a little bit better. Peggy had a way of doing
that.

As soon as they stepped into Peggy’s office the pair shrugged off their coats and Peggy went to go
make a pot of tea.

Diana glanced around the room, eyes coming to rest on a file on her desk that read Howard and
Maria Stark across the front.

She pulled it towards her, suddenly feeling sick.

“Don’t,” Peggy said, seeing what she was looking at. “What’s in there isn’t something…it isn’t
pretty.”

Diana jerked her hand back, instead reaching for the cup Peggy handed her.

“That’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about,” Peggy added, rifling through a different folder
to pull out a photo of a totaled car surrounded by police tape. She slid it over. “Do you see any
signs of foul play?”

Diana scanned it, taking in the crumpled front of the car and spiderweb cracks across the
windshield.

“No, I don’t.”

“Neither did I or Fury, but I just don’t know anymore.”
“Peggy,” she said softly, “it would have taken an incredibly trained professional to make foul play look like an accident like that.”

“But it’s possible. They were on their way to a S.H.I.E.L.D. base, they could have had information with them. And Howard is—was—famous enough, someone could have wanted him or something he created.”

“But who?” She ran through the list of common antagonists in her head. She didn’t think any of them had the strength or organization to pull this off, and if they did there were bigger problems to worry about.

“Hydra, some new organization, a rogue, I don’t know.” She hesitated for a moment, tapping her fingers on the desk and checking to make sure that the door was closed.

“Rumors have been floating around the intelligence community for a few years about a skilled assassin. Strong, highly intelligent, no hesitations. Almost superhuman.”

“It is not just a myth?”

“Like you?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

Diana smiled. “Point taken. I am not saying to totally discount it. I’m saying to have caution. There may not be one enemy to hunt down, no easy closure.”

She understood why Peggy desperately wanted to believe it was something else. Of all the ways she expected the two of them to die it was not in a car crash, life snuffed out in an instant by a patch of ice or slam of the brakes. Howard had survived too much to be taken by an automobile, and not even a flying one at that.

The desire to point a finger at something or someone was overwhelming, but it was not always right.

“I know that,” Peggy said rubbing her temples. “Something just feels off.” She sighed. “I just wanted you to know since I—since I won’t be the one investigating.”

Diana tilted her head to the side. “What do you mean?”

She took a deep breath and gave her a wavering smile. “I guess that’s the other piece of big news. I’m retiring.”

“Oh!” Diana said, trying to absorb the information. She didn’t know why she hadn’t thought about it sooner. Of course there was a limit; even Peggy Carter couldn’t hobble into the office into her eighties and nineties. She looked around the office. Even so, it was hard to imagine Peggy not being here. She had built this organization, and for forty-plus years called it home.

“It’s time,” Peggy said, trying to explain. “I can’t believe I’m saying this, but it will be nice to have a few years of downtime. I can relax a little, give the agents under me a chance to advance. Not to mention with Howard…”

Diana nodded. “No, I understand completely.” It would be like showing up to work with ghosts, reminders of him everywhere she looked.

“I volunteer to organize the retirement party,” Diana said, mouth tilting up into a half smile.

“Oh, I didn’t even think about that,” Peggy said with a half laugh-half groan. “One last thing to
plan I suppose.”

She shook her head. “This doesn’t mean you can’t still help here, though. Fury may still give an occasional call and I have other family in the organization.”

“‘I know, someone has to keep this place afloat,’” Diana teased. She was happy help out. In a way S.H.I.E.L.D. was like Peggy’s third child, and she would do her best to look after it just as she would Michael or Elizabeth.

Peggy rolled her eyes before her expression turned serious again. “‘I’m glad you’ll be around, to watch over all this even if I can’t. Though it’s not like you’re not working hard already.’”

Diana gave her a bemused look, debating whether or not this was the time to tell her. “Actually…”

“What? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“I have some news too, though not quite as exciting as yours. It’s just more work,” she said with a small laugh. “I got a job at a little art museum in France”

“Oh, that’s wonderful! You’ll be absolutely great at it, I’m sure.”

“Thanks. I just realized that I have time—more time than I could ever use.”

It was unfair, she would have gladly given up that time to everyone else she cared for. But she had it, and so she figured she might as well use it to do some more good. With the U.S.S.R. about to collapse and, for the moment, no wars to galivant about in, she could protect art and culture in a new way.

“I’ll start small, make sure I can balance It with everything else, but the directors told me it would be easy to work my way up if I wish. I have, well, a rather unique knowledge of Greek art you see.”

Peggy snorted. “And do they not wonder how you have a very detailed, never before heard knowledge of said art?”

“I think they are afraid to ask.”

Peggy smiled. “It will be good for us, I think. To, I don’t know-”

“Start something new,” Diana finished.

She stayed through the holidays, Hanukkah and Christmas being so close to the funeral. None of them were in particularly cheery moods, the festive spirit feeling particularly forced. Still, Peggy had insisted they carry on, even if the celebration was much more muted than in years passed. Ana made some delicious food, and they all exchanged small gifts Christmas Eve.

After a lazy Christmas morning, she peeked her head into Tony’s room to see what he was up to. He was laying on his bed, reading when she walked in. He startled, slamming the book closed.

“Don’t you ever knock?”
She shrugged. “Sorry, I am used to catching people by surprise.”

He rolled his eyes, gesturing to the room around him. “Well, welcome to my humble abode. Can I offer you a refreshment?”

She smiled, sitting down in his desk chair. “Not at the moment, I just wanted to see how you were doing.”

“Peachy.” He waved his book in the air. “Jarvis cut me off of alcohol, so now I read to forget.”

She snorted, looking at the cover. “*Catcher in the Rye*?”

“Yeah, it’s actually an assignment.”

“Is it good at least?”

“Well,” he shrugged, “it’s about an entitled rich boy roaming New York, drinking and trying to figure out how to socialize with people all while grieving the loss of a family member. So basically, it’s completely unrealistic.”

Her shoulders shook as she tried not to laugh. He’d always had a knack for sarcasm.

“Glad you at least found that funny. Jarvis just asked if I ‘needed to talk to someone.’”

“You know full well he has a sense of humor, he’s just worried about you. He has every right to be.”

He scoffed.

She silenced him with a look. “I promise. If we’re talking about books, Jarvis and your father were actually the ones to recommend *Catch-22* to me, which is very sarcastic and amusing.”

He looked up at her. trying to hide his surprise. “Isn’t that the one that mocks war and bureaucracy though? The things they were part of?”

She raised an eyebrow. “That is why they find it funny.”

He merely shrugged. “Well, if you’re looking for other reading material you’re welcome to check out the shelf of stuff I have over there, though it’s mostly science and engineering manuals.”

She went over to skim the different titles, eyes coming to rest on the skateboard half wedged under the bottom shelf, buried with blue prints and notes.

She dusted it off. “Do you skate?”

“What? Not since, well, middle school I guess.” He looked at her, his brow furrowed. “Why, do you know how?”

“Actually, yes. I had to use one during a chase once.”

He stared at her open mouthed before shaking his head. “I’m not going to ask. It’s yours if you want it, though I’m sure you could have one of our cars if you need a uh, more *reliable* mode of transportation.”

“No this is fine, I just want to try it out again, maybe show the little ones when they come over later.”
“Right,” he said with a smirk. “For the ‘little ones.’”

She ignored him and wandered out into the hallway, wanting to show Peggy what she had found. She walked through the sitting room and happened to glance out the window, causing her to let out a little gasp. Snow. It was a white Christmas.

She pulled back the curtains so she could get a better look. There was already a decent covering over the grass and mailboxes, with plenty more falling.

Her mouth turned up in a slight smile. She could almost hear Steve’s voice if she really listened, the white stillness bringing back flashes of her better memories. She thought she would hate it early on, the snow. To her delight she found she didn’t. It was impossible to hate something so beautiful.

“Oh, it’s snowing!” she heard Peggy say behind her. She joined Diana at the window.

“I should go get Daniel, we haven’t had a proper white Christmas in a few years.” Peggy smiled. “It makes everything seem a little bit brighter, doesn’t it? I know the kids will be all excited.”

Diana turned towards her, eyes bright. “Let’s go out.”

“Right now?”

“Well somebody has to prepare the snow forts before your grandchildren arrive. We want them to have a good Christmas despite the circumstances, don’t we?”

Peggy gave her a small smile, already moving to get her coat. “I suppose.”

Half an hour later, two small forts had been built each with a pile of snowballs sitting next to them.

Peggy and Diana had “tested a few out,” resulting in both of them being splattered with snow. Somehow Peggy’s aim had only improved with age.

When Diana looked up after one particularly hard hit she saw Tony standing in the doorway, his mouth agape. She made eye contact and he slowly broke out into the first real smile Diana had seen in nearly two weeks.

“Come join us!” she called.

He hesitated for a moment, hands in his pockets, before Peggy landed a direct hit in the middle of his chest.

He looked up at her, scandalized.

She just shrugged. “Easy target.”

He laughed, stepping towards them at the same moment the rest of the family pulled into the driveway, the kids spilling out of the car in their gigantic puffy coats and waddling as fast as they could towards them, forming snowballs as they went.

Their problems could be put on hold for a moment. A snowball fight called.
This chapter was a lot of fun to write, despite being sad. I'm so excited for the more modern day chapters. Also, if you haven't seen the clip of Lynda Carter's Wonder Woman skateboarding, you're missing out.

The title is taken from Thomas Paine's 1776 essay "The American Crisis." In it he speaks of how "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country." If only there was a winter soldier who would do the opposite...

Come find me on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades
May 1994

She told her colleagues at the museum she was taking a leave of absence for a month or two so she could study more Greek art and “do personal research into preservation techniques.” What she didn’t say was that in this case she would be preserving life, rather than art.

She flew to Greece to keep up appearances, spending a night in a little seaside town. She always loved visiting this place in particular—it was where she felt closest to Themyscira and her fellow Amazons. Everything from the ocean to mythology felt like home. She relished it, the familiarity of it all. Even the air felt better.

She took a walk along the beach that night, trying to soak up as much comfort as she could in preparation for the hard weeks she knew would follow. She stared out at the horizon line, easily imaging that the water could just continue forever, unhindered by mere continents. It didn’t stretch forever though, despite what it seemed, and that meant that at the end of ocean, far past it’s waters, there was something waiting for her.

Rwanda was chaos. She had been here years ago on one of her trips to help end colonial rule. She had stayed a few days before moving on to Kampala, Uganda and working from there.

She wished she could do that again, or better yet, that everyone in danger could simply move to a safer place. Everything looked so different now; towns lay in ruins, jeeps carrying aid or soldiers drove by in a steady stream, orphans and widows trudged by along with sights she could not bear to describe.

She buried the dead and tried to help the wounded. “Why are there not more counselors here?” she asked the aid organizers at whatever humanitarian camp she happened to be at that day. “Thousands of cases of sexual violence and no resources? Why can’t we get them more food? More security? This is a genocide, people.”

Why, why, why, she asked, her questions met with tired eyes and frowns and she knew that they had no more answers than she.

The UN provided some security and basic aid but it wasn’t enough. France, her new home, worked too and opened humanitarian zones, but they also fell short. The U.S. didn’t even try.

There were brave individuals of course, citizens who sheltered Tutsi people or refused to participate in the slaughter, foreigners who stayed behind to help, or select politicians. It still wasn’t enough—they were all bystanders playing catchup after slaughter had already occurred.
This would only come to an end, one way or another, through force.

As she stacked food or searched for missing people she knew were dead she felt a hollow anger inside. They had done this already and said they had learned from their past, yet hundreds of thousands again lay dead with only more destruction to follow.

Mankind had failed these people. In a way she had failed these people, though deep down she knew that she couldn’t single handedly end this.

All she could do was throw her support behind the locals and organizations already working. She spent her days with humanitarian organizations, and nights out in the country side, able to protect individual homes from would be attackers, usually groups of the town’s own residents.

That was one of the things she found most horrendous. Where Hitler had his army to do his dirty work from him, this government partially relied on its own citizens. Mankind would do what it willed, she knew. They would hurt who they wanted, Ares or no, and damn the consequences. Still, she would fight off the attackers and transport the family to a safer location. But safe for how long? And how long until this happened again, somewhere else?

After another month it did finally, mercifully, draw to a close. It wasn’t a victory though—she and the other aid workers knew that there could be no winners when part of a culture had been destroyed.

There was also still plenty of work to do; entire communities needed to be rebuilt, not to mention the government itself. She got a message to the museum, explaining that she would be gone for another month and something about “research of the greatest cultural importance.” She could figure out the details later.

Even with everything that still needed to be done, it made her smile a little to see the glimpses of what life was like before and what it could return to. A group of children playing outside their temporary shelters, women talking while they cooked, a small party in the afternoon. All the daily experiences that had become not just a statement of their own existence, but one, for her at least, of hope.

1996

Diana walked through the market place, taking in the crowd and the wares. She loved how lively the town was, especially on sunny weekend mornings. On her days off she would see if there was any urgent business, have herself a cup of tea as she read the local news, and then set off, trying to beat the rush.

She didn’t need anything in particular, but she couldn’t possibly pass up the chance to bring home some fresh fruit or new type of cheese. Plus, there was that little craft stall toward the end of the street that she had been meaning to visit for weeks. She scoured through bins, looking for good gifts to bring back to New York. Exactly what she wasn’t sure. She needed holiday gifts for Peggy’s family, and some sort of good-job-on-running-your-company gift for Tony. What do you get for the man who can literally build everything himself?

While she was searching she was jostled, nearly falling face first into a pile of handmade scarves.

She turned around, running straight into the woman who must have bumped her in the first place, and accidently knocked her over.
“Oh! So sorry,” she began to say. She trailed off, startled as she registered how carefully the woman had fallen, rolling to lessen the impact.

She reached down to help pull her up, the woman staring in confusion at Diana’s extended hand. Diana hauled her into a standing position, brushing her sleeve upwards in the process and revealing old scars around her wrist.

*Handcuff* scars. She had seen these only once before—on someone who had been chained to a bed night after night for many years.

Diana sucked in a breath, gripping the woman’s arm as she tried to pull away. What were the odds, she wondered as she stared at her, eyes wide, and seeing not fear exactly, but unease reflected back. Was it the Fates that had allowed her to cross paths with one of these poor girls again?

She felt her jaw clench as she looked down at the scars. It hurt to see the definitive proof that these girls were still being trained staring her in the face. Hell, the figure before her was probably still a teenager and she had been sent to what? Trail her? Kill someone? Steal something?

“I will not hurt you,” she whispered in Russian. She had made a promise to herself many years ago, and it was a promise she intended to keep. She would help her.

That only seemed to scare the woman more. She turned away, her red hair flashing as she tried to inconspicuously free her arm. Diana prepared to chase after her, and she was saved from doing so only by the group of well-meaning people that descended on them.

A stall owner and a few bystanders had come bustling over to make sure the woman was okay, and the owner went to go fetch her a glass of water, forcing her to sit down and rest for a moment while he did so.

Her chipper thanks and smile died on her lips as soon as he was out of sight, and she instead trained a glare on Diana.

Diana crouched down beside her. “I meant it,” she said with a small smile. She needed to move slowly, carefully, or she would never listen. “I will not hurt you. I know what they did to you.” She gestured down to her wrists. “You do not need to live your life as a prisoner. I can help get you out.”

The woman remained silent, a blank expression hiding her unease.

“My name is Diana,” she continued, her tone still light. “Though you may already know that if you were following me.”

Her eyes widened and she moved to stand.

“It is okay, I do not care about that right now. Besides,” she said smiling again, “tauling me was a useless endeavor. I take precautions when I travel, and the only thing of value on me right now is my shopping bag.”

She gestured down to the canvas bag at her side, now filled with fruit.

“But I could be mistaken. Perhaps you wanted to see if I was smuggling messages within apples?”

The woman looked slightly shocked she was telling her all this, her mouth twitching in what Diana was going to believe was a sign of amusement.
“What is your name?” she asked gently.

There was a long silence, the woman looking down at her clenched hands in her lap.

“Natalie,” she finally said.

Diana nodded. Real name or not she didn’t care, she was making some progress.

“Lovely to meet you, Natalie. Now, you do not have to keep working with these people. We can help you leave, if you want to.”

She gave Diana a hard stare. “And if I don’t?”

“That is your call. But I, for one, would much rather meet again as friends rather than enemies.”

Diana could see the owner approaching, and she turned back to Natalie, voice urgent.

“Whoever is making you do this do not actually care for you, and you know this. Why bother helping them when they hurt you? I have contacts that could get you out, protect you.”

Natalie stared at her, shaking her head. “It’s not that simple,” she said, before she allowed a smile to overtake her face again as the owner approached with a cup of water and ice pack.

“Merci.”

He fussed over her for a little longer, sending the both of them on their way with some free produce.

As they left the stall, Natalie passed her to turn in the opposite direction. She paused besides Diana for a moment, avoiding eye contact by acting overly interested in a sale on ceramic tiles.

“Maybe,” she said quietly, causing Diana to hide a smile. “Maybe.”

She continued walking, moving through a group of tourists before she disappeared into the crowd.

Diana watched her leave, strollers and unfurled maps seeming to overtake the spot where she once stood. She was hopeful she would listen. Had she grown bored with their little talk, Diana was sure one of them would already be on their way to either the hospital or the morgue.

1997

There were two perks to her new job and location. The first was that she could specialize more on Greek art, and the second that since it was one of the many museums in Paris, she got to play tourist on her days off. Or, in this case, play tour guide.

Peggy had flown in the week before, both to visit Diana and see some old S.H.I.E.L.D. friends. Now that she actually had time to do things, she didn’t know what to do with herself, and compensated by traveling as much as she could.

“She can’t sit still,” Daniel had complained with a laugh. “She’s going to wear out a hip with everything she’s doing.” The phrase had become a joke, one that neither Diana nor Daniel could stop gently teasing her about.

It was what she asked Peggy on one of her first days in the city. They got the most touristy of
places out of the way first: the Eiffel Tower.

“Are your hips wearing out yet?” she asked with a smile. “We have been doing a lot of walking.”

She scoffed “You can’t be serious? We’re just getting started.”

She craned her head to look up at the top of the tower, raising a hand to block the sun. “It’s odd to think that during one of my visits here there was a swastika flying up there. It seems like such a long time ago, and yet no time at all.”

Diana nodded, looking up as well. She much preferred the tricolor that was there now, or the beautiful fireworks displays that lit up the tower on special occasions. “It does, doesn’t it? There is so much history in this one city.”

Peggy turned, looking back at the park with a wistful smile. “And memories. Like when Dugan fell into the Seine.”

“Nearly blew our cover,” Diana snorted. “Or when Bucky took a bet and spoke in that atrocious French accent for an entire week before Steve threatened to kill him?”

Peggy sighed. “Hon hon, I am here fooure youer baguette.”

“Exactly like that.” She turned back to the tower. “So, do you want to go up?”

“And wait in that line?” She asked, pointing over her shoulder. “That would really wear out my hips. It’s fine, I’ve checked the box before, plus it can’t be any better than being in the Statue of Liberty.”

Diana looked scandalized. “There are some that would take offence to that. The French gave you the Statue of Liberty, after all.”

“Shhhh,” she laughed. “Let me relish in American superiority for a moment.”

On her last day there, they visited various art and history museums, including her own. It was technically closed for the day, but she snuck Peggy in, allowing them to have the art all to themselves. She gave a mini tour, describing the paintings and sculptures she had worked on and the museum’s main collections.

“It’s all so gorgeous,” Peggy said. “I can see why you love it.”

“Yes, it is. On the way out I can show you my little office. It’s where all the magical art restoration happens.”

“Really?”

“No. I mostly just use it for paperwork.” Diana led her through to the restricted backrooms, eventually unlocking a plain door with her name on it.

“Voila.”

Peggy burst out laughing. “You weren’t kidding,” she said, taking in the stack of paperwork on the desk. “But I still thought there would be more art.”
“All the art is on display, I don’t need anything in here.”

“You should at least have some knickknacks or pictures. You don’t even have snacks in here!” she said with mock horror.

“It’s like I am not even human, isn’t it?”

“I see what you did there, and I don’t particularly like it.”

Diana laughed. “Let’s go get food. Obviously, I have nothing to offer you here.”

They took the long way there, Peggy wanting to walk though some local parks to work off some of her restless energy.

“It’s art overload,” Diana joked. “Happens to the best of us. Too many hours in silent museums and sometimes you feel like running outside and yelling.”

Peggy gave a faint laugh. “That’s one explanation, I suppose. Though I promise not to yell.”

Diana took her to one of her favorite Cafés for a late afternoon meal.

“They have the best scones of any place I’ve tried. Not to mention their sandwiches.” She sighed. “You’ll see.”

As soon as the food came Peggy took a giant bite. “Oh my god,” she groaned. “This is amazing.”

“Even better than that bakery you were telling me about?”

“Bakery?”

“The one that just opened by you?”

“Oh, yes. This is somehow even better.” She took another bite. “I’m ruined now. How can I possibly go back to eating anything else?”

“To bread,” Diana laughed, holding up her glass for a toast.

“To bread. And to your new job.”

Diana smiled, her eyes bright as she talked about the next project she got to handle.

“You didn’t see it today, it will be part of our Winter collection, but it’s an absolutely stunning sculpture.”

“What are you doing until then?”

“Just the usual upkeep. And separating drunken tourists. That was exciting—the security guards were very impressed. One of them even asked me out to dinner.”

Peggy laughed. “And what did you say?”

“That I was old enough to be his mother.”
She shrugged and took a sip of her drink as Peggy continued to laugh. “What? It is true. Anyway, the director was impressed too, though not just because of breaking up the fight. He says that I'll likely be hired by the Louvre within the next few years, which would be absolutely incredible. I just need a little more experience in between my saving the world business…”

She trailed off, noticing the napkin twisted in Peggy’s hands and odd expression on her face.

“What?”

“Nothing,” she said with a half-smile. “I just like seeing you so happy.”

“Oh,” she said tilting her head as she looked at Peggy. Something wasn’t right, behind her eyes there was some sort of repressed emotion, more akin to grief than joy.

“But you’re not happy,” she said. It was a statement, not a question, and as soon as she said it she knew it to be true.

“Oh, I just…” she started, her mouth half open as she struggled with what to say.

“You’re not. What is wrong?”

“God damn it,” she finally whispered. “I’m going to have to tell you here, aren’t I?”

Diana stilled, knowing with a sickening certainty that this was the last untarnished moment before something happened. She wanted to bottle this feeling, the two of them eating delicious food, sunlight streaming in through the windows and glittering off the glasses and dishes around the café.

“Whatever’s wrong, we can fix it.” she said, taking Peggy’s hand. “Is Daniel in the hospital again?”

He had suffered from a heart attack a year ago, but he had been doing much better for the past few months. If not him was it one of the kids? Or Jarvis? He had been ill recently as well.

“No, it’s not that…” she said, her forehead creased.

“Oh?”

“I was trying to find a good time to tell you,” she started, voice strained. “I didn’t mean to wait till the very end, I just couldn’t bear to ruin such a lovely trip.” She took a deep breath, clutching her napkin. “I went to the doctor a few weeks ago and I—I was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.”

Diana’s hand flew to her lips, jaw quivering. The clatter of plates and sound of people chattering in French fell away, leaving her instead with the sound of her own ragged breathing.

“No!” she cried, almost in a whisper, as if saying it out loud would make it more real.

“No! No no no no no.” That couldn’t happen, not to Peggy. She felt a sob build in her chest, choking her.

“I know,” Peggy said, brushing away tears. “I know.”

“Outside,” Diana whispered, throwing money on the table. The people at the table next table over began to stare, their voices hushed. “We can talk where there is some air.”
She and Peggy headed back to the park they had visited earlier, back when everything seemed okay, back when she was still living in that bottled feeling instead of only remembering it. She understood why Peggy had waited as long as possible to tell her. It had given them one last good week together, One Diana, at least, would remember.

They came to rest on a park bench, near a little pond where people would come sometimes to feed the ducks.

_Hera, give me strength_, she thought as she looked over at Peggy, her face crumpling.

“I was diagnosed a few weeks ago,” Peggy started softly. “I knew I was forgetting a few things, but I thought I was just getting old.” She gave a small shrug. “Daniel thought I should get checked out just in case, and I did.”

Diana looked over at her, surprised. For Peggy to willingly agree to go to the doctor, something must have scared her badly.

“He was right. Forgetting to attend your grandchild’s birthday party isn’t normal,” she said bitterly, her voice breaking.

“Oh, Peggy.” She pulled her into a hug, her head resting on her shoulder. She wished she could make the pain she must be feeling go away, do something, anything, to help her.

“I’m sorry,” Peggy said after a while, sitting back up. “For blubbering all over you in the middle of a public park.” She gave a watery laugh. “It’s not really what I came here to do. I wasn’t even sure I was going to tell you today. I was just so nervous.”

Diana shook her head. “You have nothing to be sorry for.” If anything, she felt like she should be the one that was sorry. If she had paid more attention, visited more frequently, maybe she would have noticed, maybe they could have caught it earlier. But regardless of what had happened, she was going to try and fix it now. She had reluctantly accepted that her friends would grow old and leave her. She refused to accept that Peggy would slowly, painfully, wither away in front of everyone she loved.

She set her jaw. “I can try to heal you if you want.”

“Diana, you can’t,” she frowned. “There’s a set progression. Hopefully I’ll have a few more years before everything gets worse, but then I’ll…forget.

“That’s with mortal medicine. I could have Zeus heal you, or try and take you back to Themyscira. We have options, I could—”

“Diana,” she gently cut her off. “I greatly appreciate the offer, but I don’t think It will work.”

“It could, I can try,” she said, her voice desperate.

“And at what risk to yourself?”

“What?”

Peggy gave her a wry smile. “Diana, I have never prayed to your gods, it seems rather presumptuous to ask them to save me now. And you know that searching for Themyscira is dangerous.”
Diana frowned. Sure, there was some danger involved, and technically she wasn’t allowed back on the island. But if she could somehow find the island again, one of the Amazons could help her, she knew it. She was willing to try if Peggy wanted her to.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Everything I have is here—I can’t possibly leave Daniel and the kids. Who would keep them from making fools of themselves?” she asked with a quiet laugh. “Not to mention S.H.I.E.L.D. is here, along with so many other things and memories.”

“I understand.” Diana closed her eyes. It gnawed at her, the knowledge of all the hurt that was to follow. But it was Peggy’s choice to make, and if she couldn’t fix things then she would put on a brave face and do whatever else she could to help.

“Is there anything else I can do?”

“Well,” Peggy shrugged, looking out at the pond, “You can help me remember for as long as I can. I’m not becoming senile without a fight.”

Diana threw herself into this new piece of work. She wrote pages upon pages of stories and memories down in between restoring art at the museum or traveling to fix the latest crisis. She called Peggy whenever she had the chance, both to simply chat and to help compile stories together. Her memory might fail her, but journals and notes would help, at least early on.

Daniel, Tony, and the kids helped on her end, recording family information and stories from her time in the S.H.I.E.L.D. offices. Meanwhile, Diana traveled back to old haunts, interviewing anyone who might have known her. She also tracked down a few of the Commandos and got them to spill stories she hadn’t thought about in years. It was the least she could do for Peggy, and in the end helped reconnect her with old people and places too.

She delivered all the journals and bound notes in person a few months later. Even just by stepping foot in the house she could tell that things were different. There was a stack of lists on the counter, not to mention an avalanche of papers in the living room.

“Sorry for the chaos, we’re trying to organize and catalogue things before…you know.” Peggy said in greeting.

Diana nodded, tilting her head to read what was on the nearest document.

“Actually,” Peggy said, steering her in the opposite direction, “there’s a good chance that something in that mess contains government secrets, and I’d like to become senile in the comfort of my own home, rather than prison.”

Diana cracked a smile. “I’d like to see someone try to arrest you.”

Peggy led her into the kitchen where Daniel was busy pouring drinks.

He smiled as she walked in. “Are those all the notes?”

“Yes. She dropped them on the counter with a thud. “Courtesy of Prince Post.”

He and Peggy paged though some of them, carefully turning the pages.

“These are great,” he finally said “Thank you, Diana. Now we just have to find space to put them.” He looked over at the papers coating the living room and grimaced. “I guess that’ll be tomorrow’s project. Maybe if we moved the bookcase?”

They insisted she stay for dinner, which involved Peggy sticking a casserole in the oven that Michael had brought over.

“He dropped it off earlier,” Peggy explained. “Very sweet, said he didn’t want me to worry about cooking with appointments and your visit and everything else going on this week.”

“The kids never wanted you to cook,” Daniel mumbled into his plate.

Peggy glared. “I’ll remind you of that when you and your children aren’t getting any of my fresh baked cookies.”

“My children?”

Diana smiled at their play-bickering while simultaneously feeling a profound sense of loss at seeing the way their retirement could have gone. It should have been dinner parties and grandkids visits, and old stories shared after too much wine. They were supposed to be happy and healthy in their age. It was all so undeniably unfair—Peggy had sacrificed everything else, why must her memory be sacrificed too? Her small moments of forgetfulness in their dinner chatter ate at her, and forced her to come to terms with a situation that she would much rather deny.

Peggy rolled her eyes and looked over at her. “What do you say, Diana? Do you want cookies? I promise not to give you food poisoning or burn the house down.”

“Of course,” she said, wiping her mouth with a napkin. “But only if they’re chocolate chip.”

“Well obviously.”

She stood and carried their plates to the sink. The second her back was turned Diana saw Daniel’s smile slide a bit, and she laid a hand on his arm.

He looked at her, eyes clouded with worry. She stared back, probably with the same expression, one that asked what do we do now?

She pressed her lips together, standing to clear the rest of the table with Daniel following suit. Neither of them really knew.

She joined Peggy, searching for ingredients and a mixing bowl. She didn’t have an answer to the question aside from making cookies, and so that’s what she would do. She could reevaluate tomorrow, and the day after that.

Maybe that’s all she could do.
Chapter End Notes

This was a difficult chapter to write, but I hope that the familiar faces beginning to make their appearances make up for some of the sadness. There is way too much history about the Rwandan genocide to fit into one scene, so what I included is only the bare basics.
The title is taken from "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas.

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1999

Diana, Peggy, and Daniel stood on the back deck to escape the oppressive noise and crowds inside the house.

“Tony really knows how to throw a New Year’s Eve party, doesn’t he?” Peggy asked, drawing her coat up around herself.

“I suppose that is one way of putting it.” She had originally balked when Tony had invited the three of them to Switzerland solely for this one evening, but with some minor schedule adjustments they were able to also tour the arts districts where she could network with curators and look at some new collections. Tony had been largely absent from their activities, and tonight seemed no exception. Diana had caught a few glimpses of him inside as he meandered around, completely drunk and hitting on whatever pretty face happened to walk by. Music blared, rattling the windows as the first notes of “Party Like it’s 1999” began to play.

Peggy grimaced. “Am I forgetting things or is this not the third time they’ve played this song?”

“No, you are right. Everyone else is either too drunk to care or thinks it’s clever.” Peggy’s memory had actually been holding steady. It obviously wasn’t great, but wasn’t too much worse than when she was first diagnosed. It was something Diana gave thanks for, this small reprieve, for she knew that it could have already been more serious.

Peggy shook her head. “Yet another reason to party out here. It may be cold, but at least we’re separated from the mob.”

“I can bring back some warm drinks,” Diana offered, hoping that tea or coffee could flow as freely as the alcohol did. She pushed her way back inside and was making a beeline towards one of the waiters when Tony spotted her.

“Diana!” He called, sauntering towards her, the crowd parting down the middle to let him through. He grabbed her hand, trying to pull her onto the dance floor.

“Tony, no…” she started, craning her head in the vain hope that Peggy or Daniel would come in and save her.

“Come on, lighten up a little. It’s supposed to be fun.” She was dragged along behind him, joining in the awkward group of swaying couples in the middle of the dance floor. She remained silent through the first song, hyperaware of how inept everyone else seemed. What they were doing barely even constituted as swaying, much less dancing. She didn’t know whether to be amused or annoyed at the scene around her—here was their Moses, the life of the party, and he kept stepping on her feet.
The song changed again and Tony attempted to spin her around, resulting on him nearly falling on his face, more, she suspected, from the alcohol than anything else.

“See? It’s relaxing.” he said.

She sighed, searching his eyes. “Why do you keep doing this?”

“What, the parties? The people love it, helps get the name out there, you know?”

“I meant your attitude.”

He waved a hand. “I’m having fun, Diana. Speaking of fun, there’s an art dealer somewhere here tonight, his stuff is way over priced but you should take a look. He’s over by the blackjack table.”

“I am fine, thanks.”

He shrugged “Suit yourself. I for one, just bought something as part of my midlife crisis.”

“Tony, you are twenty-nine.”

“Exactly. Spend the money while I can enjoy it, right?” He winked at her before his attention was drawn by a woman in a low-cut dress standing off to one side.

Diana frowned as he gave her a half-hearted wave and walked off, presumably to follow her. She went to grab drinks before heading back out to the deck, silently hoping that the poor waitstaff was getting paid overtime.

Peggy took one look at her a clucked her tongue in sympathy, reaching for the mug Diana handed her. “Tony?”

“Yes. He still has…some growing up to do. Like father like son, I suppose.” There wasn’t really anything she could do about it short of literally knocking some sense into him, and she didn’t think that would go over well. He was in charge of his own actions, for better or, right now, for worse.

Daniel snorted. “That’s putting it diplomatically.”

“Come on now,” Peggy chided, “it took a while but Howard did eventually settle down. Give him some time.”

They sat, sipping their drinks and chatting, the evening growing more pleasant as the wind died down. One of the waiters came out and got the fire pit going, and the three of them convinced him to stay for a few minutes. Other partygoers trickled out for a break from the rowdiness, warming their hands by the fire until a call from a friend or lover drew them back inside. It was shaping up to be an almost peaceful night, that is until “Party Like It’s 1999” began to rattle the windows for a fourth time, the party spilling onto the deck.

“I take it back,” Peggy growled, setting her mug down with a thud. “Tony won’t have any more time if I murder him and the DJ.”

Daniel laughed. “I think by now it means were close to midnight.”

They all headed back inside, congregating by the clock and T.V. along with everyone else. Some people were already blowing on their party horns, wearing tacky plastic New Year’s glasses that clashed with their formal dresses.

She made eye contact with Peggy and stifled a laugh. Some of these people looked absolutely
ridiculous, yet they did appear to be having fun. Maybe that was the spirit that they all needed to bring into the New Year—a peppy, crazy optimism that things could work out. She hoped that they would. She could almost see the future played out in front of her, of the problems, yes, but also the winding road of progress and new discoveries that she knew could define the coming years. This was a chance for a reset of sorts, one the whole world could participate in.

Around her everyone began a countdown chant and she joined in. Every year she found the tradition silly, but it also never failed to fill her with an infective sort of excitement. She watched Peggy and Daniel kiss right as the clock struck midnight, a huge cheer going up throughout the room.

“Happy 2000!” she smiled, pulling Peggy into a hug.

Behind her a man pumped his fists in the air and screamed, “The world didn’t end—LET’S PARTY!” causing everyone to laugh before they began blasting the music again.

Daniel nudged her. “Looks like you’re stuck here for another thousand years.”

She gave him a little smile. “There are worse places to be.”

September 2001

She watched the towers fall from her office in France. She couldn’t look away, couldn’t stop staring at the horror blaring across the T.V.

She reached for her phone. Peggy and Daniel lived far enough out that they were probably okay. Probably. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Everyone was probably fine—S.H.I.E.L.D. offices in New York and D.C., Fury, Michael and Elizabeth. Probably. But she wouldn’t know for sure and wouldn’t be able to relax unless she called.

The problem was the phone line were jammed, everyone else having the exact same idea. She gave up after a few minutes, hoping that maybe someone could make it through to her.

The T.V. was still blaring in the background, repeating clips of the plane’s impact interspersed with images from the ground. Dust and debris choked the city, the destruction in a few of the blocks looking not all that different from ground zero of Hiroshima.

She buried her head in her hands, debating whether it was worth trying to call again when the phone rang. She dove for it, breathless.

“Hello? Peggy?”

“We’re fine. I just got through to the kids and they’re okay too,” she said trying to reassure her. In the background she could hear Daniel talking, as well as their own T.V. “Daniel is still working the phones, but everyone seems to be accounted for. We’re all okay.”

Diana nodded, her body relaxing as she sank into her chair. The feeling of relief, however, abated almost as soon as she had first felt it. As stricken newscasters scrambled for information and Peggy tried to fill her in, she realized with a sickening certainty that this millennia would begin with more war.
She helped first in Afghanistan and then in Kuwait. Fury got her base access for a few days and so she hopped between where the military was stationed, posing as an aid worker.

She did her usual work during the day and then returned to base, the evenings reminding her of her time spent with other troops in other wars. Her tent was still hot and uncomfortable, just with entirely too much sand, rather than mud.

She spent one such evening with a group doctors and nurses, both because they had offered her Girl Scout cookies from a recent care package and because they were great at cards. All during that week she’d return to base after her work was through and eat thin mints while getting pummeled in hearts and blackjack, or at times play an insult-filled game of Operation while a bad 80s movie played in the background.

One night she called Peggy, partly out of a lack of anything else to do. The joke on base was that during deployment people turned into the hunk, the chunk, or the drunk, and with limited other activity options she completely understood why.

They made small talk, Diana filling her in on the day’s events. “Earlier today I thought of another memory to write down in your journal. It’s so hot here in Kuwait that it reminded me of that time when Steve and I tried to fry eggs on our shields.” Tried had been the operative word in that story. Instead of frying, the eggs instead had turned into a semi-heated mess. Here, though, she was convinced it was hot enough for it to actually work, and it was only a matter of time until someone tried.

“Wait, you’re in Kuwait?” she interrupted to ask for the second time. “I thought you were staying in London for a few months.”

“No,” she said gently—always gently when it came to Peggy’s increasing forgetfulness. “I haven’t been to London for a while, I’m in Kuwait right now.”

“Oh!” she said with a little laugh. “You go so many places I get confused.”

“It is confusing, isn’t it?” Diana said, her mouth turning up in a sad smile.

The next day she really did help out an aid organization, this time trying to organize healthcare services. Diana sat with a map in front of her, both trying to figure out the best ways to travel to deliver medical supplies and to figure out where she should go next for her own personal work.

She returned back to base exhausted, and instead of friendly card game greeting her, it was a frantic phone call from Daniel.

His voice was rough and she could hear Peggy sobbing in the background. “What is wrong, who is in trouble?” she asked, mind spinning with possibilities before she reluctantly settled on what was the most likely event. Please no, she begged. Not yet. Not now.

“Jarvis—Jarvis died.” he confirmed, his voice shaking. “He’s gone.”

A cheer went up from the rec room as she stood there, head bowed.
She took the next plane back.

Everyone was gathered at the Jarvises’ house. Peggy and Daniel answered the door, both with eyes rimmed red. She walked in to find Ana resting on the couch, either asleep or pretending to be, and Tony already tipsy at the kitchen table, absolutely distraught.

“Jarvis can’t take the alcohol away from me now,” he said with a bitter laugh as soon as he caught sight of Diana. “Might as well indulge.”

She gave him a long hug, reaching around to take the bottle from his hands in the process. “I’m so sorry, Tony” she whispered, rubbing his back. She gave the remaining alcohol to Daniel to dispose of, leading Tony into the living room so at least he wouldn’t be by himself.

They sat there, quietly sipping their drinks. Diana looked out the window, watching trees shed their leaves or cars roll by. It would be cold soon, something she knew she would miss when she was back in the desert.

It almost felt like Jarvis would walk in any moment with a tray of refreshments. After all, it wasn’t unusual for any one of them to spend a quiet afternoon in their sitting room, catching up on the news or reading with Jarvis occasionally piping in with his usual measured advice.

The fantasy came to an abrupt halt as Tony bowed his head and began to speak, voice shaking. “He was like a father to me. And I–I never told him.” She could see the guilt in his eyes, the lingering regret of things left unsaid.

“He knew,” came Ana’s faint response, her eyes still closed. “We always knew. What else would we be when we always thought of you as a son?”

He let out a sob as she sat up and pulled him into a hug, the both of them clinging to each other.

She went back to Peggy and Daniel’s house that night, the three of them trying to give them a little bit of privacy. They waited a day to start arranging the funeral and whatever else needed to be done, the situation reminding her very much of Howard and Maria’s deaths. She wondered who would give the Eulogy this time.

The next morning, Diana sat reading the morning paper trying not to think about her meeting with the funeral director later in the day. She had just flipped to the arts and culture section when Daniel walked in. As soon as he caught sight of her his face crumpled, the expression accentuating his age so that he looked truly elderly.

He swallowed. “That was Tony on the phone. Ana is gone too.”

“An already weakened medical condition” was the doctors’ explanation when they asked for
Tony made it through the (now joint) funeral and then holed himself up in his laboratory, ignoring all requests and pleas to talk to him. Diana gave him two days and then kicked down the door, approaching him and his work bench with caution.

Tony sighed. “Jarvis, set a reminder to install a new door with a better lock.”

“Setting reminder.” came the disembodied voice.

Diana’s hand flew to cover her mouth as she searched the room. It was like Jarvis was there with them. “How? Is that really his voice?” she asked, a small part of her wondering if somehow Tony had managed to bring him back entirely.

He turned, taking in her wide-eyed expression, “No,” he explained. “It’s just a fancy computer program that sounds like him. So that…he’s still helping me in a way.”

“Tony…”

“It’s fine.”

“Tony, he isn’t coming back. Neither is Ana. We have to learn to live with that.”

He turned and began tinkering again. “I know.” After another moment he added. “I’m going back to California full time. I can’t stay here, not without them.”

“Of course.”

“It will be good, I think,” he said, forcing a smile. “I’ve always liked the scenery, and Jarvis used to tell nice stories from when he and dad were there. He seemed to like it too, aside from the flamingo.”

She grimaced.

“Don’t worry, I won’t be recreating that particular experience. I want to ease back into things, let the dust settle.”

“Good.” She gave him a slight smile. “I’ll come visit. Just please never make me kick down your door again.”

2005

Peggy stood out front with the moving van, watching as they packed up the final boxes. Michael was there too, his car loaded with Peggy and Daniel’s suitcases.

She joined Peggy for one last walkthrough inside.

“It was such a lovely home,” she whispered, brushing away tears. “So many good memories—it was a great place to raise a family.”

“I know,” she said, pulling Peggy into a side hug while trying not to start crying herself. She had
visited this place for so many years, she couldn’t image not coming here anymore. The next house could be nice, but it wouldn’t have the dent in the kitchen floor from where they had dropped the Thanksgiving turkey, or the kids’ heights throughout the years on the pantry doors.

“I know it’s silly,” she sniffed, “It’s just a building, but I’m going to miss it.”

She nodded “You’ll be closer to Michael and the kids, at least.” That was the main purpose of the move. With increasing health problems for the two of them, it made sense for them to be near someone who could check in as needed. There was a state of the art nursing home in D. C. near Michaels house too for if, and when, they needed it.

She smiled. “I’m excited for that. I just hope we won’t be a burden on any of you.”

“You will not,” she said her voice firm. “We are happy to help.”

“But—”

“No buts.”

She nodded. “All right then. Can you get a picture of the empty house for a memory book?”

“Of course.” She had already asked and Diana had already taken one from earlier in the day, but what was one more?

She showed it to Peggy. “Beautiful,” she said, taking one last look around before she decidedly turned around and headed back to the car. “Now let’s get to D.C.”

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2006

“Diana? Why are you here?” Peggy asked as she greeted her at the door.

She made eye contact with Daniel who stood behind her, leaning on his cane with a deep frown. He shook his head.

“To visit you of course, and to see whatever gadget Tony has created for Daniel.”

“Oh! Well you really must come in, if I had known I would have tidied up a little bit more.”

Diana followed her inside, she and Daniel neglecting to mention that she had known for weeks. As Peggy went to go get them all drinks, Daniel pulled her to the side.

“She’s starting to really forget,” he said, confirming her fears. “Fury had to block her cell phone number because she’s called a few times to ask for a morning S.H.I.E.L.D. briefing like she used to. He hated telling her no.”

Diana nodded, her eyes closed. She knew it was coming, knew it would begin to get worse, but she didn’t want to acknowledge that that time was now.

“And obviously I’m not doing so hot either,” he said with a wry smile. “We’re all falling apart aren’t we?”

His assessment wasn’t wrong. His legs had only gotten worse with age. Even with advances in
medicine his motion was limited. He staunchly refused to use a wheelchair, much to Peggy’s dismay, and instead got around by leaning heavily on canes and nearby furniture. Hopefully Tony’s visit could change that.

Peggy returned and set the drinks down on a side table, forced Daniel to sit down, and then answered the door for the second time, revealing Tony and a giant box of who knew what.

Diana was right behind her to welcome him in, setting the box and his tools near where Daniel was sitting and praying that nothing inside exploded.

“How are the legs?” Tony asked in greeting.

“Could be better.”

“Well I promise that you’re going to love this.” His salesman charisma began to show as he started talking about his creation. “At first I thought I would just trick out a wheelchair, but after hearing your, ah, reservations, I created something even better.”

He carefully opened up the box. “Who needs a wheelchair when you have this.” He flourished a hand, revealing what appeared to be two metal leg braces.

“Oh,” Daniel said, less than enthused. “Thank you, Tony, but I already have something like that.”

“No, wait for it.” He raised a hand to speak into his watch. “Jarvis, activate the mobility device.”

“Activating. What level do you desire?”

“Oh, let’s say one.”

The braces began to move, becoming much sleeker looking, and able to stand upright by themselves. She watched wide-eyed. The braces’ transformation was jarring, as was the sound of what seemed like Jarvis responding. She still didn’t find it natural, but if it brought Tony some comfort she decided the program couldn’t be all bad.

“Okay, now I’m impressed. What do they do?”

Tony brought them over to where he sat, explaining things like gait stabilizers and automatic joint support. “Strap them on and they’ll help you walk. They’ll get used to your movements and can change their shape and color to better hide under clothes.”

Daniel looked stunned. “Tony, this is amazing.” He took a few laps around the room, a little unsteady but with a huge smile on his face.

“What do the other levels do?”

“Well, about that, I don’t advise that you try them. There are some rather unique features…”

“Don’t even think about it,” Peggy warned, looking directly at Daniel. “Lord knows we don’t need you shooting bullets from your ankles or whatever else he included.”

“That’s not to level seven, but yes, you’re right, probably not for civilian use. The military however…”

“Tony.”

“Fine. Anyway I hope this helps. This is just the first one, I can mail any new and improved
versions out as I develop them.”

Daniel walked over and gave him a hug. “Thank you. For making this and flying all the way out here to explain how they worked.”

He waved a hand. “Don’t worry about it. Saved me from a bunch of stuffy company meetings.”

Daniel turned to Peggy with a grin. “Guess whose hips can never wear out now?”

“Oh, I bet you could still find away.”

Diana laughed, helping Tony take the empty box and supplies back outside to store in the car.

“What else are you planning on using this technology for?”

He shrugged, staring back at the house for a few seconds. “I have a few ideas, but I don’t know helpful they’ll actually be to the military. And if they can’t use it I can’t sell it.”

She shook her head. “This is really wonderful Tony. You can’t stop working on things like this.”

“I’ll figure something out.” he reassured her. “Just wait. But first I should go back inside and warn Daniel about which buttons not to touch. Wouldn’t want Peggy to get angry.”

She turned to follow him back inside, clearly envisioning all the ways this could go wrong, and all of them ending with Daniel or someone else being thrown across the room.

“I do not want to know.”

Chapter End Notes

For those of you that are Tony fans, there's more of him coming up.

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2008

Diana had just arrived home when the phone rang.

“Ms. Prince? This is Colonel James Rhodes, one of Tony’s friends.”

“Yes?” she replied, already feeling a sinking feeling in her stomach.

“I regret to inform you that he’s…well he appears to have been kidnapped,” he said, his voice strained.

“He what?”

“Kidnapped,” he repeated. “Right after doing a weapons demo. I’m notifying you since you’re now listed as his next of kin.”

She sucked in a breath. Kidnapped? Next of kin? She struggled to process the information, trying to figure out how in Hades Tony had gotten himself into this situation.

“I see,” she finally said. “Do you know if he’s okay? Or have a general location? I don’t know how much Tony has told you about me, but I have, er, some unique training that may be useful.”

She hadn’t broken out her lasso in years, but if they had a witness she could use it on…

“Kunar Province in Afghanistan was the last place we were, right in enemy central, but we don’t know where he was taken from there. Tony has mentioned you, but I can’t have a random civilian, no matter what you can do, in an active war zone.”

She barked out a laugh, wanting to let him in on just how many active war zones she had visited. “I assure you, I will be perfectly fine.”

“Ma’am—”

“Diana.”

“Diana, we have enough foreign policy problems in the Middle East as it is. We can’t have you running in there and making a scene, as convenient as it might be. I promise you that we can find him without having to disobey current U.S. policy.”

“And I promise you, that I will have a hand in finding him.”

He let out a sigh, hesitating for a moment, and she could sense he was considering relenting.
“Is this a secure line?”

“What? Yes but—”

“I personally helped Director Fury of S.H.I.E.L.D. and former director Carter take down Hydra agents. I am very well acquainted with how to fight back against terrorist organizations. With all due respect, I guarantee that I have more experience and qualifications than nearly any other person under your command at present. I have been close friends with the Starks for many years, and Tony is counting on me to help. I will not let him down.”

She could hear Peggy cheering her on in her head. “I know my value,” is what she always said when anyone questioned her, which back in the day was all too often. Like most everything Peggy did, the method worked wonders, not to mention it was an incredibly satisfying feeling.

“Well…” he started.

“Hypothetically, I could always fly over there and just happen to run into you at a base, yes? And hypothetically I could work within the confines of your team?”

“Hypothetically… yes. But you would have to know that we were still staying at a base near the Pakistani border and that I’m helping lead the search.”

“Interesting.”

“And if someone were to do this, I would also ask that they check in on Tony’s personal assistant. She seemed very upset when we called.”

“Understandable. I am certain that someone will do that.”

She heard a smile in his voice as he said “All right then. Take care, Diana.”

She flew out to L.A. that afternoon. She knocked on Tony’s door, hoping someone would answer. She hated to show up unannounced, but she figured that a kidnapping could excuse poor manners.

A woman answered the door, her eyes rimmed red.

“Is Ms. Potts here?”

She gestured to herself. “That’s me.”

“Oh! Well, I do not know if he has mentioned me, I am Diana Prince, one of his friends and I—”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Oh, why didn’t you say so earlier! Please, come in.”

She got Diana a drink and showed her to the sitting area, leading her through a string of various other rooms. The house was immaculate, with all the futuristic design elements she imagined Tony had chosen personally. It was almost too immaculate—she expected more debris from failed projects past scattered around.

Pepper kept up a polite chatter as they walked despite her obvious worry. She could see why Tony had hired her, not only did she appear to be friendly and hyper-organized, but also thoughtful in a calming way that he desperately needed.
“Obviously what happened with Tony was such a shock,” she said, her voice soft. “It’s been entirely too quiet around here for the past few days.” She shook her head. “But that’s not really important, you’ll want to search his lab, won’t you? Dig through whatever mess he left behind.”

“In a moment, perhaps, but I actually came her to check in on you.”

“Me?”

“Colonel Rhodes asked me to. I wanted to make sure everything was okay here before I jet off to who knows where to find him.”

“Oh, that’s sweet. But, you aren’t seriously going…Rhody would never let you,” she started, taking a long look at Diana’s completely sincere expression. “Or…apparently you are. I don’t know why I expected anything different.” She gave a little laugh. “I tell anyone associated with Tony not to be stupid. I suppose that extends to you as well, not that you really need it.”

Diana smiled. “I’ll try my best. Are you okay here?”

“As long as the media doesn’t eat me alive I’ll be fine. Go bring him back.”

The next evening, hungry and slightly jet lagged, she met Colonel Rhodes in front of the guard gates.

“Fancy meeting you here,” he said, his eyes twinkling.

“I was doing…humanitarian work in the area and wanted to visit with an old friend?” It was only a small lie. Tony was an old friend and finding him was work.

“Good enough, he said with a smile. “Let’s come get you briefed.”

He filled her in on the weapons test, the attack on the Humvees and then how he just up and disappeared.

“We’ve already searched the surrounding area within a twenty-five-mile radius. We’re planning on expanding, but I don’t think it will help.”

“The caves?” Diana asked.

“Probably, they can’t have gotten far so they must have taken him underground somewhere. We’re on the lookout for a list of demands, but so far nothing has come through, which is odd. You’d think they want money.”

“Or his technology.”

Rhody grimaced. “We’re hoping that’s not the case. The damage his stuff can do—” he let out a whistle. “The other side gets their hands on that and it will be ugly.”

After a month of searching, the military decided that it would cut the amount of time spent on Tony’s case. She understood it wasn’t practical, just like what happened with Bucky, but it still stung. She refused to accept that he was gone. Tony was too smart and too stubborn to die right
now. If anyone was going to escape a kidnapping it would be him, if only out of pure spite.

Air Force troops still combed through satellite images and did the occasional helicopter search, but found nothing. She stayed in the area, searching for him in between helping other people. She needed to feel like she was still doing something that was providing concrete results instead of just disappointment.

It took another two months of this arrangement before she finally got the excited call from Rhody that she had been waiting for.

“You need to get over here. A bunch of caves just went up in flames.”

“Tony?” It had to be, no one else was as good at making things explode.

“That or the terrorists messed up realllllllyy bad. We think it’s him. There was also some unknown airborne object that launched around the same time. We think he might have built himself an escape pod.”

“Sounds like Tony. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

She got into a chopper with Rhody, both of them pouring over maps and satellite data on the way there. She tried not to get too overly excited, it could still be nothing, but as they approached the sight of the projectile she couldn’t help but hope.

They passed over a pile of debris, strewn a few feet in each direction and already half-buried in sand.

“Is that the projectile?”

“Apparently. I have no clue what it was supposed to be though.”

“Neither do I, though it does look like he could have made it himself.”

They did a few small circles around the wreckage before they were forced to head back to base to refuel.

“There are a few more quadrants to check,” he assured her, his frown matching her own. “We can try again tomorrow. He could still be out there.”

There was an undertone of fear in his voice that she understood well. He could be out there, but if he wasn’t, they both knew that the search was as good as finished.

The next morning thankfully proved to be luckier. Within minutes they spotted him, frantically waving up at the choppers. As they descended, she could see the relief on his face, along with what looked like a lot of dried blood.

She was the first one out of the chopper, sprinting towards him with Rhody a few paces behind.

“Tony!” she called embracing him. He began to collapse and she helped him down.

“Thank Zeus! Are you okay?”
“Fine,” he groaned, as Diana began to look him over for injuries. “There’s an arc reactor in my chest but it could be worse.”

“There’s a what?” Rhody asked coming up behind her.

“Shh, let everyone know why don’t you.” He waved a hand, half delirious, as Rhody squatted down beside him.

“Alright, alright. How was the fun-vee.” Rhody asked, a relieved smile over taking his face.

Tony gave a half smile half grimace in return. “Could have been better.” He turned to Diana as she helped him into a standing position again, waving away the airman with the medical bag to give him some breathing room. “Diana, I messed up bad,” he whispered, his voice small. “They have the weapons. Diana, the terrorists have my weapons and Yinsen is dead and I—”

“Hush,” she soothed, trying to help walk him to the helicopter.

“No,” he said, insistent, “they have my weapons.” She could tell he was serious, his entire body straining to get the words out.

She tried to tamp down her shock, half carrying him across the sand while Rhody ran ahead so he could radio back to base. Whatever had happened could be dealt with later, first they needed to get him sewn up and on fluids.

“Okay,” she said as they approached the chopper. “Okay, we will figure it out.”

He nodded, a relieved look on his face as he slumped against the medic who was trying to help him step up into the helicopter. As soon as they got him onto the IV drip he promptly passed out. Diana sat next to him, forehead creased as she helped clean out minor cuts and scraps. The feeling of relief was finally beginning to overtake the adrenaline, though his frantic words kept replaying over and over in her head, preventing her from fully relaxing.

As soon as they landed they had one of the doctors look him over. He was dehydrated and generally banged up, a half-dislocated shoulder and broken ribs proving the most serious, but he would recover, and considering his situation that was a miracle in it of itself.

Diana stayed, dozing in a chair while he slept everything off, jolting awake when she heard his cot creak. He looked awful, his hair unkempt and face bruised.

She gave him a small smile. “Good morning sunshine.”

He groaned, gingerly sitting up and looking over at her. “Hardly. Did you have a good nap at least?”

“Passable.” She scooted her chair closer to him laying a hand on his good arm. She looked down at him, fighting to keep her expression and tone neutral.

“Don’t you ever scare me like that again,” she started. “You cannot go dying on me too. Pepper has been worried sick, not to mention Peggy and Daniel.” Not to mention herself, but there was no need to make him feel worse than he already did, she figured the severity of her look probably conveyed the message anyhow.

He nodded along. “I can imagine. I’ll give them a call.”

She leaned back and let out a long, slow breath to compose herself, feeling some of her fear drain
away as she talked. It felt like she was deflating, like the mood when a party winds down. The excitement was over, and now it was time for the clean-up.

“Now that you’re not half-dead, what is this about selling weapons to terrorists?” She could still hear the urgency of his words, and she knew that if they were haunting her, they were definitely still haunting him.

He looked down at his lap, any remaining bluster or charm instantly disappearing—an emperor who had finally discovered that he wore no clothes.

“The Ten Rings was the group that took me—they wanted me to build the latest weapon for them.” he started. “I scoffed, explained that I didn’t build things for people like them. But it turns out I did—I am,” he said bitterly, pounding his fist on the bed.

“Tony—”

“It wasn’t—I wasn’t—all this was supposed to be for the U.S. military, which I know still isn’t great, but it was better than selling to literal terrorists. Good people are dead because of me. Yinsen is partially dead because of me and I…” He shook his head, abruptly cutting off his rambling.

“What do I do now, for myself and the business? How can I even call what I’m doing ‘business,’ unless I work for a God damn undertaker?”

She squeezed his hand, debating what to say. “I know you will hate this, but you sound so much like your father right now.” A sad smile played across her lips. “It is eerie.”

He grimaced, opening his mouth to protest.

“The best parts of him,” she insisted, “the times he admitted he made a mistake.”

“And when did he ever do that?”

“After Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He had…a crisis of sorts. Took a break for a while.” The break had been a long and drunken one, filled with she and Peggy’s worried phone calls that went unanswered. He slowly worked his way back, taking greater precautions on what he chose to work on from then on. But he never honestly spoke about the topic again, burying his concern like most of the rest of them had and simply moving on.

A small part of her wished that for his own feelings, Tony would do the same. The rest of her knew that that wasn’t possible, as much as it would hurt him, he needed to confront things head on.

“I can’t believe I was proud about that,” he groaned burying his head in his hands. “I bought into it all, we both did. God, us Starks are a bunch of fuck ups.”

“Hardly. At times very flawed? Yes. But so are all of us.”

“I don’t see you selling weapons to terrorists,” he scoffed.

“No, but I am not infallible. Nor are you. You have at least acknowledged the problem, now all you must do is correct it.”

“You make it sound like it’s so easy, like I can just magically poof everything away.”

“It is your company, you are in charge of what you sell. You have created so many wonderful things, like whatever in Hades is in your chest right now, or what you built to escape. You have options, Tony. You can keep things from getting worse.”
He gave her a small smile. “I’ll have you know that this is a miniature arc reactor—nearly infinite clean energy. And that debris was part of a suit with similar technology to Daniel’s braces.”

She pointed at him, her face lighting up. “See, I knew it would be useful! Create more of that and you will be fine. Do you know how many people could use good prosthetics like that?”

“I’m guessing a lot. I’ll start working on something.” She watched as the gears began to turn, his eyes narrowing as he started to plan whatever the latest and greatest idea was.

“You can work in it after you get better.”

“Sure, whatever. Speaking of: when are we heading back to the States? I wanna blow this popsicle stand—places to be, announcements to make that kind of thing.” It was as if as soon as he decided on a new course of action, he had to jump in immediately. The anxiety ridden Tony of five minutes ago slowly faded, replaced by his usual hyperactivity. “I need to talk to the press, announce all these ideas and everything.”

“We leave in a few hours, though you really should rest when you get back. Sleep on this for a day or two and then make a grand announcement.”

He gave her a look, jaw set with that stubborn expression she knew all too well. She sighed. What was the saying? Pot meet kettle? “Fine. I’m going to go call S.H.I.E.L.D. They will want to talk to you at some point.”

“I’ll call Pepper. I have a sense she’s going to be a lot less thrilled than S.H.I.E.L.D. will be.”

“Oh, she will be furious. If you sound pitiful enough though, I think she’ll just be relieved.” Even with that, she still wouldn’t be thrilled about the seemingly impulsive announcement. That poor woman wasn’t possibly being paid enough, what with the media on her heels at all hours of the day and Tony perfectly willing to incite them.

“Got it,” he said, looking slightly nervous. “If she or Peggy, or S.H.I.E.L.D. for that matter, yell at me, I’m calling you in for backup.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time.”

When they touched down back in the states Tony wanted nothing more to do with medical care or rest. “Cheeseburger and press conference,” he kept repeating. He was intent on channeling his grief into action, and she needn’t wonder where he had seen that before.

She and Pepper made eye contact in the back of the limo, sharing in their mutual bemusement and annoyance.

“Fine!” Pepper eventually sighed “We’ll get you a damn cheeseburger on the way there.”

When they finally stepped out to go to the press conference, the media was already swarming. They forced their way inside, Diana searching the crowd for Fury or a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent as she did so.

She and Pepper stood out of the way towards the back of the room, trying their best to become
wallflowers. Right before Tony was set to take the stage, a man walked over to them and introduced himself to Pepper as Agent Coulson.

He shook her hand and launched into an energetic spiel about S.H.I.E.L.D., apparently deciding that the best way to formally introduce the agency was with its insufferably long un-abbreviated name.

“I’d like to arrange a meeting with Mr. Stark about the events of the past few months.” he finally concluded, handing her a business card.

Pepper stood there, looking slightly stunned, unsure of why this man was in her face. “Okay, I’ll let him know…”

Diana put a hand on her shoulder. “I can vouch for him,” she said with a smile. “He’s with the same agency Howard and Peggy worked for.”

Coulson turned to her, blushing slightly. “You’re Ms. Prince, right? Director Fury told me you’d be here but I didn’t want to bother you—I know you’re trying to lay low—but I just can’t help it because I’m such a huge fan of the Commandos and I know you worked with them and the Captain so I just had to say hello.” It was said all in one breath and Diana smiled, deciding to speak while she could still get a word in edgewise.

“Of course, it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Pepper looked between the two of them, eyebrows raised, before shaking her head and turning back towards the stage as Tony appeared before them.

There was polite applause before he promptly plopped down in front of everyone, still with his burger, and began to speak.

“I never got to say goodbye to my father,” he started quietly, forcing the media to lean in. “I would have asked him if he ever had doubts about what this company did, or if he was in fact just as self-assured as people remember.”

He took a deep breath. “But I do have doubts. I’ve seen Americans killed with weapons created to protect them. This company is part of a system that’s comfortable with zero accountability, and I find that unacceptable.”

He looked directly out at the press, pausing for a moment before he said, “Which is why I’m formally announcing that we will be shutting down our weapons manufacture.”

There was a beat of silence before pandemonium broke out, the media all clamoring for more information and shoving microphones in his face. Tony ignored them, scanning the crowd till he made eye contact with her.

She gave him a small smile and mouthed “I’m proud of you.”

She left Pepper on the phone, already fielding media questions, while she walked back out front, where to her surprise Fury was waiting for her. He stood in front of a black SUV, watching people stream out from the building, motioning her to join him.
She raised an eyebrow. “You know, people would be less scared of you if you didn’t ominously pop up out of nowhere.”

“It keeps you on your toes.”

He told the driver to take them to one of S.H.I.E.L.D.'s remote offices, hidden away on the opposite side of town. As they sat in L.A. traffic, he looked over at her with a slight frown.

“You being part of that rescue operation could have made us look really bad.”

“Rhody warned me of the dangers.”

“It jeopardized more than just your safety or even the agency’s safety. We have decades of policy that you could have just destroyed in one go.” he countered.

Diana bit back her retort that the U.S. seemed to be perfectly content destroying things on their own, but instead settled for a hum in agreement.

“It’s not that I’m not glad you helped, but the more you’re seen and the more the government pushes for Peggy’s superhuman program, the harder it’s going to be for you to toe the line. You have to work within the bounds of the agency.”

“I know.” She had tried to help make Peggy’s vision a reality, but the more success she had the more penned in she became. She knew the decision Fury was hinting at was coming soon, yet she also knew that she would not make it until she absolutely had to. What did it matter who she was affiliated with or how she operated anyway, as long as she was saving people?

“Speaking of superhumans, I may have found you one.”

“Who?”

“Tony Stark.”

He burst out laughing. “You’re kidding, right?”

“No, he has some technology he’s developing that you are going to want to see. Coulson tried to set up a meeting.”

“While I be damned. Tony Stark. Jesus, Howard’s going to kill me from beyond the grave.”

“I don’t think Peggy will be too thrilled when I tell her either.” She still had solid memories from her time at S.H.I.E.L.D. and had always voiced reservations about family and friends getting caught up in the organization. It clearly wasn’t turning out the way she had hoped.

He let out a low whistle. “You can’t deny things are getting interesting. The program just gained another potential member.”

“You already have others?” This all seemed to be moving so quickly, especially for S.H.I.E.L.D. They had spent so long tracking potential candidates, it had never really seemed like anything would actually happen.

“We have a few possibilities. Technically Agent Barton— he’s the one I mentioned a while ago—is on the list and he’s already in the organization, but we also have someone else we need you to meet.”

“That is not suspicious at all.”
“Like I said, I'm keeping you on your toes.”

When she finally stepped inside the door to Fury's office, she stopped dead, causing him to run into her. She took no notice, her attention completely focused on the red-headed woman leaning up against the wall.

How was she here? How could she possibly be the other candidate?

“Natalie?” she asked.

“Maybe,” she said with a small smile, a real one, causing Diana to smile in return. “It's actually Natasha.”

“Nice to see you again, Natasha.” she said, pulling her into a hug. She stood there tense for a moment, before cautiously patting Diana on the back.

As Diana stepped back she noticed the man standing off to one side, a bow slung over his shoulder.

“I'm Clint Barton,” he offered.

“Oh yes, lovely to finally meet you, but why are you—”

“He brought her in,” Fury said, less than enthused. “A bit of a deviation from the plan, but I guess we'll see how it goes.” His words were pointed, a clear threat lingering underneath. “We'll see how it goes,” in this business was code for “We'll see how much of a liability you are.”

“He means that Clint was sent to kill me,” she said with an unnerving smile. “Obviously it didn't work. Couldn't resist my charms.”

Clint protested. “I didn’t want to kill you, I was trying to convince you to join our side!”

“Well, lucky for you Diana laid the ground work on that one. For some reason having a bow trained on you doesn't lend itself to peaceful compromise.”

“Well I’m glad it worked out for everyone,” Diana said, trying to stop their bickering. Hearing Fury’s loud sigh from behind her she added “Everyone except maybe S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Well, technically Miss Russian Assassin passed the test, so she gets to stay.”

“Be nice,” Diana reprimanded. “And what could you possibly be testing her on already?”

“To see if she actually knew you. Clint vouched for her, but we needed another sponsor, so she gave me your name. Obviously that raised some questions.”

She snorted, looking at his completely unamused expression. It was a gutsy move for someone on such shaky ground, but it had worked. “Well, clearly I do in fact know her. And I'd be happy to sponsor you,” she said turning back to Natasha. “Though you could have just called. It would have been a lot less stressful for everyone.”

“This way was more interesting. Besides, I knew you would help.”

Diana’s mouth twitched. She liked this woman. Maybe she shouldn’t have, considering what all
she had likely done in the past, but she had a sense of humor about her, and had willingly chosen to come to their side when she could have just as easily killed Clint and been done with it.

“If the love fest is over, I say we go get Ms. Romanov settled in.” Fury interrupted. “You’ll need somewhere to sleep until we figure out what the plan is.”

Clint turned towards Natasha, lips pressed together to keep from laughing. “Maybe you can help him? Russia invented the five-year plan after all.”

Fury halted in the doorway before letting out a small sigh, muttering under his breath about “God damn dad jokes,” and leaving Clint snickering behind him.

She spent the next few days back at the Louvre, trying to finish a restoration project on a Greek vase before heading back to the latest crisis.

It served as a much-needed break, just she and her tools and plenty of art. One evening she headed home early made and settled in to watch the news and read for a while, a cup of tea always within reach.

The first thing she saw on the T.V. was a robotic looking suit, flying all over the place, rescuing civilians and blowing up whatever terrorist enclaves happened to be nearby. The newscaster was describing the armored figure’s exploits from earlier in the day, culminating in the liberation of an entire town. Upon closer inspection, some pieces looked similar to what Tony had been talking to her about, almost like they could be his.

She swore and reached for the phone, drumming her fingers on the table as she waited for him to pick up.

“The news is showing pictures of an armored figure flying around the Middle East. Would you happen to know anything about this?”

“What?” he started, his voice an octave higher than normal. “That’s insane, the technology must be super complex.”

“Tony.”

“Fine. Yes. I improved on the original. But for the love of God don’t tell anyone, only Rhody knows and that was only because he was about to shoot me out of the sky.”

“He what?”

“It’s fine, the tech is safe, it was just, uh, a misunderstanding.”

She shook her head. “Tony you could have called me for help, you shouldn’t have tried to do that by yourself. What you did was reckless, trying to take down groups of terrorists your first time. And with no training?” Her voice had grown louder until with a start she realized she sounded exactly like Fury, which only annoyed her more.

“Maybe it was,” he admitted. “Except people were being hurt with weapons I created. They were partly in that situation because of me, and I couldn’t just sit back and do nothing.”
She relaxed slightly, feeling a little bit of pride at his words. “Trust me, I understand. Do what you must, but please be cautious, at least at first. You are no use to anyone dead.” She could see about a million different ways he could royally mess up doing this, but he also had a new robot suit. She’d like to see someone try to keep him from using it.

“I will.” He hesitated for a moment, weighing his words before he added, “Is this the kind of situation you’ve been dealing with all these years? That sort of desperation and… and misery?”

“Yes,” she admitted. “Not always of course, it depends what I am working on, but often.” For every training program she helped set up or safety measure that was implemented, there were also people trapped in war zones or on the brink of starvation. Looking at it from Tony’s perspective, she knew the situation must have seemed bleak.

“I never knew it was that bad,” he mumbled. “I knew you were helping people but I just assumed…”

It was a close to an admission or apology as she was going to get. “It is hard, I am not saying otherwise. But that doesn’t mean it is not worth examining your actions as you just did, or trying to change the way things are.”

“And that’s what you do.”

“Yes.”

“Where do I sign up?” It was said with such conviction, and in that moment she knew that Peggy’s goal of putting together a team would really come to pass. Tony would be the first official member. He would don his hair-brained suit and rush into help, doing what needed to be done all while flying around at dangerous heights. He didn’t know it yet, of course, that would come in its own time. For now it was probably a good thing he didn’t know—it meant she could delay hearing him brag about adding the title of “superhero” onto an already long list of descriptors. Genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist, super hero. Zeus help them all.

“You would need to speak with Fury. I have a felling he will be contacting you soon anyway.”

“What? Why?”

“You’ll see. I do not think I can talk about it yet.”

“Ominous much?”

She shrugged. “Fury says it keeps you on your toes.”

A few days later she flew back to the states to visit Peggy and Daniel and help them get organized before their move into the nursing home later in the month. She had barely settled in and was already rattled from discussing the move at hand when Pepper called. The conversation did nothing to help her nerves, with Pepper filling her in on news of Stane’s betrayal, multiple explosions, and Tony nearly dying on three occasions. Again.

So when Pepper texted her the next afternoon with a message that simply said “turn on the news, the press conference is about to begin,” it seemed practically mundane. Whatever had happened could be explained a way and a miraculously-still-in-one-piece Tony could move on.
She and Peggy turned on the T.V. and sat down, Diana with some confusion. “Why does he want us to watch this?”

“What did you say?”

Peggy was staunchly opposed to wearing the hearing aids she was beginning to sorely need after spending years in combat zones. Maybe she could have Clint come demonstrate how useful they were, though she doubted even that would work. Stubbornness, unfortunately, didn’t disappear with age.

“I was just saying,” she repeated, “that this is just going to be lies to smooth things over. I do not know why Tony wants us to watch.”

Peggy hooted with laughter. “Well, it will have to be one hell of an explanation, maybe he thinks we’ll find it funny. Like the damage control for the Commandos that were such bullshit Steve joked we could provide fertilizer to all of the Allies.”

Diana never stopped being amused by the fact that, while Peggy’s memory continued to fail, every stupid thing they had ever done with the Commandos remained intact. She was convinced they wouldn’t have wanted it any other way. After all, all the ridiculousness is part of what made them a team.

“I think S.H.I.E.L.D. gave him something to read. Maybe he is announcing something else too?” Knowing Fury, everything had been meticulously planned out and seemingly plausible. Agent Coulson probably hand delivered the notes himself, if only as an excuse to talk to Tony.

They watched as he took the stage and pulled out his prepared statement. He began to read, but even watching through the television she could tell there was something he wasn’t saying. He appeared to struggle for a moment, before he sighed, throwing his notes over his shoulder like a lazy basketball shot.

He stared out at the crowd and with a slight shrug announced, “I am Iron Man.”

Diana burst out laughing, imagining the horror on Pepper’s face. It was comforting to know that even with this new role, there was still some of that old, reckless Tony left.

“Ahhhhh,” she sighed, letting out one last laugh. “You were right, that was some explanation.”

Peggy glanced over her, eyes twinkling and perfectly clear. It was as if the veil of perpetual confusion had lifted, if only for a few moments. “It looks like it’s finally happening then? The superhuman program we planned?

“Yes,” Diana said with a smile. “Yes, it is. Fury is calling it the Avengers.”
being nearly done was not true. There are about six more chapters left, and I'm aiming to finish by the end of the summer.
2008

The assisted living facility Peggy and Daniel had moved into overlooked the Potomac River, meaning that when it was warm they could sit outside on the back patio and enjoy the view. Here they had access to nursing staff and more help if they needed it. For the circumstances, it was lovely.

Diana helped them unpack, though they hadn’t brought much besides some personal effects—the benefit of an already furnished space.

She hung up the checkered curtains Peggy had received from her mother and that she staunchly refused to part with despite the fact that they didn’t match anything in the rest of the house. Secretly, she was pleased that Peggy insisted they be displayed. The worn, burgundy gingham had been in every house of theirs she had visited, and there was no sense messing with tradition now.

She was about to move on to hanging up a photo collage when Michael and Elizabeth walked in, carrying a few more boxes along with a carry-out pizza and some drinks.

“I don’t make dinner, I make dinner happen,” Michael declared, setting everything on the table and grabbing a slice.

Peggy swatted him. “What you’re going to make is a mess. I think the plates are in the cupboard next to the sink.”

Once the table was properly set they sat sown to eat, all inhaling their food. Diana had discovered over the years that moving makes you hungry even if you’re not physically moving much. Her personal theory was that the stress of remembering which items were in which box burned extra calories.

Afterwards they split up, she and Michael going back to hang the remaining decorations and while everyone else went to unpack the boxes for the bedroom.

Michael made a beeline towards the collage that was still propped up against a wall, examining the various pictures.

“It turned out great.” Diana assured him, looking over his shoulder. As part of the mission to write everything down for Peggy, he had taken it upon himself to organize the scattered family photos and actually get the best ones printed. There was everything from Diana posing with Elizabeth at her wedding to a candid from Peggy and Daniel’s fiftieth anniversary party, plus countless others that ended up stacked in a shoebox due to a lack of space.

“Yeah, this is good. It looked fine online but you never really know till it’s actually printed.”
She hummed in agreement, handing him a few command strips and a level. “I meant to get this done earlier but pizza called.”

“The irresistible force,” he joked. “Thanks again for helping with all this. I know it’s not an ideal situation per se, but…”

“It’s what they need,” she finished. “You all made the right choice, so do not worry about it. I think it will save you all a lot of stress.” Michael’s hair was now almost completely gray, and while he joked was from his own kids’ antics or long hours at work, she knew Peggy and Daniel’s health contributed as well.

He nodded “And you too. I know Mom and Dad don’t want you putting the rest of the world on hold in order to keep making sure they’re okay.”

“It is not a problem at all. I’m glad they’ll have extra help, but I’m perfectly capable of multitasking.”

He raised an eyebrow and she raised one back. They stared at each other, each appearing intensely skeptical before Michael broke first and laughed. “I swear you’re worse than mom.”

“Of course not—who do you think I learned that look from?”

2009

Diana was in and out of the U.S. at least once a month now to visit Peggy and help Fury get the Avengers program set up. They were trying to bring a man named Dr. Banner on board, and Fury was busy working out all of the details. His entire personality appeared to change whenever they talked on the phone, his voice much more soothing and cautious than the no holds barred man she knew.

“I don’t want to upset him,” was the only thing he provided for his usual cryptic explanation. “You’ll see.”

Fury handled all of the paperwork, but he needed her to describe her experiences in all the various places she had visited. The goal was to gather enough information in order to create general guidelines for how the team should intervene and act in various situations. On one hand she was glad that her expertise could be useful to others, but lately it felt more like she was being used. S.H.I.E.L.D. wanted everything from her, regardless of how it could impact her work or the people she was serving, and they expected her to be more than willing to comply with all of their requests. She was loyal to Peggy’s idea, not to the government, and the more everything was organized the more she was convinced that there had to be superhumans that remained outside anyone else’s control.

While slogging through multiple interviews and briefing sessions she did have the opportunity to get to know Natasha and Clint better. The two were becoming fast friends themselves, though there was also little other option since they were now training together for multiple hours day.

Natasha was incredibly kind, and the only person besides Peggy and Steve that she had a legitimate challenge sparring with. If she felt like she needed to blow off steam after multiple bad meetings she’d meet her at the boxing gym in the basement and they’d spar for a while until they both grew tired and settled for talking about whatever came to mind. Sometimes they’d speak Russian just for the hell of it, though Natasha increasingly wanted her to teach her a variety of other languages.
“How about ancient Greek?” she mused after one particularly intense session.

“How on Earth would you want to learn that? I thought you wanted to learn something that would be useful out in the field?”

“Oh, but you’re one of what—a miniscule number of people that speak it? Just you and maybe some classical studies nerds. This way we could talk to each other and drive Clint and Fury absolutely batshit.”

Diana snorted, her eyes crinkling. “I like it. It is a little mean, but certainly funny.” She sensed this was payback for she and Clint having sign language conversations that no one else understood. It hadn’t technically been an intentional way to annoy anyone, though lately Clint experienced a certain glee whenever he signed in the vicinity of Natasha.

“I’m taking that as a yes.”

“Fine. We can start with greetings and basic vocabulary next time.”

“And insults. And then maybe sign language? So I can freak him out when I start signing back.”

Diana sighed. “We’ll see.”

Tony was just as busy as she was, albeit minus the impromptu language lessons. In between running his new energy company he also had to work with Fury to organize everything for his role on the team and also develop technology that could specifically be used in this specialized group setting. He mainly focused on communications devices, though he had already managed to singe a S.H.I.E.L.D. intern who tested one of his new weapons.

He was also in the process of moving back to New York and was trying to get his personal affairs in order. Pepper was busy playing a game called “how do I rent out a billionaire’s house and move hundreds of luxury items across the country,” making for interesting conversations whenever the two of them chatted.

Tony did generously decide to donate a portion of his art collection to the Getty Museum in L.A. in order to both downsize and get a rather hefty tax break. He had an absolutely beautiful Monet—one of his studies of light and seasons—that now everyone would be able to enjoy. She flew out as soon as the collection was installed, allowing Tony and one of the curators to walk her around all the various exhibits and, to her delight, the gardens. They were a work of art all by themselves with manicured patterned hedges and so many flowers that she couldn’t even begin to pick a favorite.

She wished she had the time to spend weeks there and examine every work of art and the museum’s research facility, but duty called. There was some consolation in the fact that a few weeks later she was invited along with others from the Louvre to meet with the director and other higher-ups from the National Gallery of Art in D.C.to discuss current museum policy and new restoration techniques. And of course, her business trips always provided the opportunity to visit other museums under the guise of “professional development.”

She was touring the national Portrait Gallery with her coworkers after day one of their discussions when her cellphone buzzed. She tore her attention away from the Gilbert Stuart they were pouring over and was greeted by a panicked Elizabeth.

“You need to get to the GW medical center ASAP,” she said, her voice rough. “It’s Dad. Mom needs you.”

She gave a hasty apology to everyone in her vicinity and sprinted across the Mall, nearly mowing
down various tourists and a Boy Scout troop. She hailed a cab, threw money at the driver and told him to move. Elizabeth called her back with more details. She and Michael were already there, Tony was going to come down as soon as he could, and Daniel wasn’t looking at all good.

“A massive heart attack,” she said, sounding dazed. “A nurse called an ambulance after he started complaining of chest pain. He’s having emergency surgery but they don’t—they don’t think he’ll make it,” she whispered.

The ride took forever, every red light and pedestrian crossing seemingly existing solely to spite her. The driver didn’t talk and didn’t ask questions about why she had her eyes closed, lips soundlessly moving for nearly the entire trip. She alternated between pleas, prayers, and thanks to Zeus that at least she was already in D.C. when this happened.

Once she was finally inside the building she headed straight towards emergency services. She found Elizabeth and Michael in the hallway, finishing up a conversation with a doctor.

“It’s not good,” Michael said, wiping his eyes as he turned towards her. “Even if he wakes up they don’t—don’t know if —”

Diana hugged them both and they seemed to fold into her like they were little again, back when they would hang off her legs or climb into her lap. She wished that making them feel better could be as simple as it once was, with merely a bed time story or piggy back ride to take their mind off things.

She left them to chat with the nurses while they directed her to where Peggy had taken a walk in an attempt to keep herself occupied.

Diana found her waiting in the next room over. She sat stick straight, a hand on her cane and jaw set, looking regal as the queen herself while at the same time looking so incredibly small.

Diana sat down next to her, grabbing her hand in her own.

“He survived a POW camp” Peggy started, letting out an annoyed huff. “And the universe decides that cholesterol and goddamn cigarettes are what’s going to do him in?”

“I am so sorry Peggy.” There were other things she wanted to say, but even if she could find the words to do so it wouldn’t save Daniel.

Peggy closed her eyes and pressed her lips into a thin line, her face suddenly looking every bit her age. “I’m going to be the one left behind again.” It was stated calmly, as a fact. “I had just hoped maybe we would go together.”

Diana bit her lip, not wanting to repeat what the doctor had said. Peggy seemed to know regardless. She glanced over at Diana and added, “You were with me last time too.”

She glanced over at Diana and added, “You were with me last time too.”

Diana’s breath caught in her throat, recalling the scene from so many years ago. The back of her nose burned as she fought off tears, asking “Do you still remember all of it?” She wondered how similar her reaction would be this time. She had lived a full life with Daniel. She didn’t want to think about whether or not that would make grieving easier.

“Nearly all. You took me back to base—showed me the watch. She reached into her purse and pulled out a picture of Daniel that had a missing corner. “I have this with me anyway, but then I realized that it was also something I could hold onto.”
She squeezed Peggy’s hand. She began to feel an urgent need to do something besides just waiting there, pure desperation driving her forward.

“I’m going to go find us some tea.” she started. Diana knew refreshments couldn’t really do anything except provide a façade of comfort, but it was something.

She returned from the hospital cafeteria with two cups of tea in hand, one with one cream one sugar, just as Peggy liked it.

Peggy forced a plastic smile when she handed it to her, both settling in for the dreadful waiting period. Michael and Elizabeth wandered over to where they were sitting, and their own families along with various other relatives and friends trickled in to provide a kind word and ask for news. For such a large crowd it quickly became uncomfortably silent, every one of them on edge. Anytime hospital staff emerged from the swinging doors they snapped to attention, only to deflate when it was a different doctor. She wanted to get it over with. It was best to just rip off the band aid and know than to cling to a false hope.

After another hour of waiting part of the surgical team came out faces grim. One of the surgeons who had treated Daniel before squatted down in front of Peggy and whispered something that no one else heard, but all knew.

Peggy stared at him blankly for a moment before she ever so slowly folded in on herself, shoulders hunched as she sobbed.

After some necessary paperwork she drove Peggy and the kids back to Michael’s house where everyone could crash for the night before regrouping the next morning. It was late enough that the automatic porch light had clicked off for the evening, and Michael had to fumble with his keys before they were all finally allowed inside.

Peggy headed straight to the guest room, not speaking to anyone.

Diana watching Peggy disappear from view, realizing with increasing panic that this could be another Jarvis—Ana situation all over again. What if she woke up tomorrow and Peggy was gone too?

As soon as the door clicked shut behind her she spun towards Elizabeth and Michael and saw her own fear reflected back at her.

“It will be okay.” She said, her voice too forceful at the end. One of the few problems of not making a habit of lying was that when she finally needed to do it she was very much out of practice.

Elizabeth just bit her lip and went to go grab bedding for them from the closet down the hall, mechanically stuffing pillows into pillow cases. They spoke little, completing only the tasks necessary for them to finally get some sleep.

The light knock at the door startled them, Tony’s arrival disrupting the precariously constructed
sense of acceptance they were all clinging on to.

He was sporting a five o’clock shadow and carrying only a sloppily packed suitcase and the best alcohol money could buy on short notice. He offered them general condolences before simply dropping his stuff on the couch and sitting down, rubbing his forehead.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t get here earlier enough to be with you guys.”

“It’s fine, I’m glad you were spared the waiting.” Michael said.

Tony just sighed. “How’s Peggy?”

Diana stared at him turning the question over in her mind. It was bad and she didn’t know how to tell him that without scaring the others or herself.

“She’s obviously distraught. She’s already in bed,” Elizabeth answered for her, her voice tight.

He scanned their faces, and Diana could see the exact moment he puzzled together their unspoken fear. He tensed for a moment before he slowly relaxing back into the couch and with a forced calm said, “I can imagine. I think in a few weeks it will become more manageable—if she was going to keel over from stress or shock it would have happened ten times over by now.”

He was right, and it was hearing him say it out loud—effectively talking the three of them off the edge—that allowed Diana to relax a tiny bit. He had to be a right, she thought, laying out the argument in her head. He had to be.

They chatted for a minute more before Michael and Elizabeth each staggered off to bed.

Diana set a stack of paperwork on the counter and went ahead and unloaded the dishwasher, still with the cheery green “clean” light that must have been left over from earlier in the afternoon.

Tony was rustling around behind her, digging through his bag in an attempt to find his toilet kit.

“You should get some sleep,” she eventually said, drying her hands on the checkered dish towel. “There should be an air mattress for you in the backroom.”

He hefted his things onto his hip and turned towards her. “Thanks. You should do the same.”

She blinked at him, her head feeling heavy. “I will. I was just going to sort through some of the papers over there for a minute.”

He pointed a thumb over his shoulder “You can’t help take care of them if you’re exhausted too. Fasten your oxygen mask first, or whatever the Amazonian equivalent is I guess. Sharpen your spear first?”

She shook her head, granting him a faint smile. “I understand.” He waved goodnight and retreated down the hallway, leaving her to turn out the lights.

The next morning proved Tony right. Peggy was far from good, but she was up and moving, trying to throw herself into whatever work she could and thwarting their attempts to make her rest.

It wasn’t lost on Diana that Peggy hadn’t only lost a husband, she had effectively lost a memory
bank. Certain memories from her time at the S.S.R. and S.H.I.E.L.D., the kids’ early years, their private lives, were now only held by her. There was no one to remind her or confirm the details of the memories only she and Daniel had shared.

Diana had been perfectly willing to plan another damned funeral and let the others recuperate, but in true Carter fashion they instead decided to ignore her, insisting on making various phone calls and arrangements.

At one point in the afternoon Michael had tried to suggest that Tony take Daniel’s braces back.

“It just seems wasteful to bury them,” he had said, offering them up.

Tony blanched, pushing his hand away. “No—no I can’t. They’re his. No returns or exchanges.”

In the end they decided to donate them to a local veterans group. That way someone, at least, could get some more use out of them.

By early afternoon they were all completely drained. If Diana had to listen to one more scripted condolence message from whatever funeral-related business she was calling, she was going to punch something. They took a much-needed desert break, breaking into the tray of cookies one of Daniel’s former nurses had kindly dropped off earlier in the day. Elizabeth made the executive decision to eat off recycled birthday party plates, the lettering in a blinding neon shimmer, so that there was no need to muster the energy to wash dishes later. Diana shoveled it in, hoping that chocolate would continue to uphold its tradition of solving her problems.

Michael soon meandered away to find some solace in his own family, while Tony and Elizabeth took a whole stack of cookies out onto the back porch to eat.

Diana puttered around, not wanting to really rest, but too tired to do anything labor intensive. She rearranged random clutter in the living room, as if combining two stacks of papers into one would somehow help the room’s feng shui.

“If you’re looking for something to do,” Peggy interrupted from her place on the couch, “do you mind putting the funeral home form back on the counter? We need to take it with us tomorrow, and I’d rather not lose anything.”

“Of course.”

She skimmed the page as she walked over, the top just detailing the order of Daniel’s tombstone. **Beloved husband, father, soldier, and patriot.** Diana pressed her lips together, remembering how he and Peggy had laughed at bad epitaph suggestions like a high schooler would about yearbook quotes. It was never supposed to become *real*, she thought. Not like this.

When she got to the bottom of the page her gaze froze, and she stared fixated at the section that read “Pre-planned.”

It read **Margaret “Peggy” Carter 1918— To be completed upon burial. Pre-planning requires that the buyer...**

Her hands shook too badly for her to read the rest. She delicately placed it on the counter, and took a hasty step back, pausing in the doorway to the living room.

Peggy looked up from the same newspaper article she had been staring at for the past ten minutes and asked “What’s wrong? Did Michael move the pile somewhere?”
Diana tried to swallow, her mouth sticky. She wondered if she should just drop it and pretend she hadn’t seen anything at all. Perfectly normal, nothing to see here, and definitely no reminders of her friend’s ailing health. It would be impossible. She took a deep breath and said, “You ordered two.”

When she thought about it objectively it made perfect sense to do the engraving all at once. Practicality— that was the Peggy way. And right now she hated it.

Peggy gave a little shrug. “I thought it best to just get it over with. And it will save all of you all some painful work in the future.”

“I appreciate the thoughtfulness,” Diana started softly, “but you shouldn’t have had to order your own.”

Peggy patted the space on the couch next to her, and Diana sat, her hands clenched in her lap.

“I know it must be upsetting, but I truly didn’t mind. It made sense, and it was one last thing I could do for the two of us together.”

Upsetting was an understatement. And yet… it brought Peggy some sense of peace, and so she let the matter go.

“Plus,” Peggy added with a shrug, “now I can’t forget to do it.”

Diana blinked, trying to figure out whether she should laugh or not.

Peggy let out a faux dramatic sigh. “Oh, come on then. Don’t tell me I’m losing my humor on top of my memory.”

“No, she said, offering up a hint of a smile. “No, of course not.”

2010-2011

Diana had stayed in D.C. for another week before reluctantly heading back to the Louvre. She had always called Peggy frequently, but now she did so every day without fail, mentally doing mathematical gymnastics to determine the time change every time she reached for the phone. More than anything, she didn’t want Peggy to feel like she was all on her own. They all visited as much as possible, Tony making an effort to leave the New York scene and fly down when he could. Sharon Carter, Peggy’s great-niece, had also relocated to D.C. to work for S.H.I.E.L.D., and she was more than willing to drop by in between her own busy work schedule. From what Michael had told her, it acted as an unintended symbiotic relationship, with Peggy offering up plenty of S.H.I.E.L.D. related advice in exchange for the company, though it wasn’t like Sharon really needed it. She was quickly working her way up through the ranks, reminding her very much of Peggy herself in the days following the war.

Yet as much as Diana had quietly hoped, no amount of pure love and support could cure her. Right before the holidays she went into a month-long tailspin before her health leveled off, leaving her memory worse than before. It had been terrifying, forcing her to imagine a world where that second gravestone was needed. It was serious enough that Peggy herself arranged to go into a memory care facility— by the time Diana and the kids approached her to talk about her options she already had a room waiting, one step ahead as always.
Diana had \textit{intended} to take a week of leave from the Louvre to help get Peggy settled in and make up for a lackluster holiday season. Instead her plans were scrapped as soon as the news came in that the political uprising and protests in Tunisia and Algeria had spread to Jordan. Once was a random event. Three times was the beginning of a pattern. Rather than pack up winter wear for D.C. she hastily changed her flights and googled the temperature in Amman.

Of all the times this could have happened... she grumbled to herself. She closed her eyes, trying to stop that line of thinking. Of course it was inconvenient, world events didn’t give a damn about her personal schedule. There were bigger issues to worry about. With any luck she could provide help for a while and soon things would calm down enough that she would have time to visit Peggy.

She should have known the second she put the thought out into the universe that it wasn’t going to be that simple. Dissent continued to spread throughout North Africa and the Middle East, the protests in Jordan followed by a government overthrow in Egypt, an uprising in Yemen, and violence in Syria. Iraq, Kuwait, Libya—it was a giant wave, thousands upon thousands of people sick of their governments and more than willing to make that fact known. The result, for her own work at least, was that there were civilians that needed resources, protestors that needed protection, UN teams she was trying to work with, the usual chaos.

She had hoped that maybe Tony could come with his suit, but Fury shot the idea down before she had even finished explaining the situation.

“\textit{Where are you right now?}” he snapped when she made the mistake of calling to ask for his blessing.

“Yemen. I desperately need Tony, or anyone really, there’s so much going on and I—”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he started, “But I was under the impression the U.S. was trying not to get involved. And we’re certainly not sending troops.”

She slammed her hand on the table biting back some choice words. “I am not the U.S. and you know it. Neither really is Tony.”

He let out a deep sigh, his voice gruff. “No, you’re not, and in the eyes of the higher ups that’s the problem. Are you helping the rebels at least? If that’s the case I could try to get something from the State Department.”

“I’m helping any civilian who needs it, regardless of their politics.”

There was a long silence on the other end of the line and she felt herself deflate. Fury had almost always supported her, or at least gotten out of her way.

“Nick, I can’t. People are dying. In some places this is turning into a civil war.”

He gave her a smaller sigh this time. Progress. “I understand. Just...for fuck’s sake try not to not create an international incident. I don’t think I can protect you anymore. You helped us from the team and now people either want you to join or get out—the government doesn’t need a tightrope walker.”

If they forced her to make a decision, she knew what she would choose. Fury knew too.

“I admire your stubbornness. I’ll try to hold them off. Be careful, Diana.”
Right as she was doing her best to not cause an international incident during what analysts were now calling the Arab Spring, Murphy’s law dictated that Japan get hit with an earthquake and subsequent tsunami.

When she first heard the nuclear plant had been affected she was terrified, envisioning another Hiroshima. Thankfully it was “only” a nuclear meltdown. It was a disaster, and yet one she could do very little about. She arrived hours after the actual event happened, and what people needed now was shelter, medical attention, and help rebuilding. She stayed for a few days, doing what she could, but her attention was still divided between multiple towns and jobs. When the entire Pacific Ocean had been placed under a tsunami watch it was impossible to provide individualized care.

When she was sure no one else was in immediate danger she left clean-up efforts to the Japanese government and NGOs. It was like triage—treat the worse first, and let those that could wait, wait. It was far from a perfect system, but she didn’t know what else she could possibly do. Her Amazonian powers unfortunately didn’t allow her to clone herself.

Elizabeth had in jest suggested that the solution was just to get a great frequent flyer miles program. “You still won’t be able to be everywhere at once,” she said. “But you’ll feel like you’re everywhere at once.”

It was an accurate assessment. In between visits to D.C. to see Peggy, to New York to visit Tony and examine his latest inventions, Paris for the Louvre, and now the Middle East she was flying nearly every other day and paying dearly for it. But at least she got free bags.

She went to visit the nursing home on a 24 hour break she forced herself to take, knowing that all the upheaval would only get worse as time went on. She slept on the plane, and had Elizabeth pick her up and drive her over.

The facility Peggy was in was nice, with well-groomed gardens in back and decent sized rooms, but it was sterile. There was always the lingering scent of rubbing alcohol and even that couldn’t cover up the mustiness of the place. For all intents and purposes, Peggy was living in a hospital.

Still, Peggy grinned when she walked in. “Why hello Carmen Sandiego. Where have you been this time?”

Diana rolled her eyes, plopping down in the chair next to Peggy’s bed. “I’ll let you keep the red hat. I was in Japan. And then Syria and Iraq.”

Peggy eyed her with a disapproving look that used to make S.H.I.E.L.D. interns flee the room. “Dear lord woman, you need a break,” she said, eyebrows raised. “I mean this in the politest way possible—you look like you need a nap.”

As Peggy aged she was losing her filter. Most of the time Diana found it hilarious, knowing full well that Peggy had been thinking these things for years and had just remained silent, but at that particular moment it would have been nice to have a smidge more sympathy.

“Well, it is going to have to be a short one. I leave tomorrow evening.”

Peggy cringed. “Invisible jet?”

“Oh, trust me I have thought about it. But I think Fury would have a conniption.”
“And when have you ever obeyed Fury?”

Diana bit her lip, debating whether or not to tell her that S.H.I.E.L.D. wasn’t too impressed with her right now. “Since I realized that S.H.I.E.L.D. does not take kindly to my solo exploits,” she finally said.

“Mmmph,” Peggy grumbled. “Thank God Sharon’s there, they need a Carter to tell the higher ups to get their heads out of their asses every once and a while.”

Diana threw her head back laughing, clearly able to envision Sharon doing exactly that.

Peggy just sighed “You need a break,” she repeated. She paused for a moment, lips pursed before adding. “And where on Earth have you been jetting off too? Where is S.H.I.E.L.D. sending you?”

“Japan,” Diana said, forcing a smile. “And Syria and Iraq. And I promise I’ll take one. Eventually.”

**2012**

“Set it on the table please,” she said to the delivery man in French, not looking up from her computer screen.

Summer was always the busiest time at the Louvre. It was peak tourist season, which meant they received new pieces for exhibits and tour groups regularly traipsed through. She had been working for the last hour on whittling down her inbox, but for the moment she appeared to be Sisyphus; no matter how quickly she worked, there were always more emails to reply to.

“Still using your languages, I see.” the voice responded with the barest hint of a smile.

She froze, hands still poised above the keyboard, as she recognized the American accent and then the voice itself. Her brows knit as she glanced upwards, wondering if she was hearing things.

When she raised her head, she found herself looking up at the face of Captain Steve Rogers. She lurched backwards in her chair, her eyes wide. He looked nearly the same— like how he appeared in the images conjured up when she and Peggy were remining, and how he looked on the day the plane went down. All he was missing was his uniform or dog tags hanging around his neck.

He gave her a tentative smile, but she just closed her eyes and began massaging her temples. She hadn’t had a flashback in a few years and she had forgotten how disorienting they were—how upsetting. She clenched her jaw, deciding that she most definitely needed to take a break, get a drink, and let herself rest. Steve Rogers was dead. They were all dead, and not coming back.

“Diana?” He asked, a profound heaviness in his voice. He took a small step forward. “Diana, it’s me.”

She let out a shaky breath, struggling with whether or not she should hope he was real. She carefully looked back up again, and she could see the relief in his face.

He extended a hand. “I’m back.”

She gave a weary nod, deciding against her better judgement to believe him. The worst that could happen was disappointment, and while her mind had betrayed her before, it had never done so with quite this much accuracy.
She stood and started towards him, speeding up with every step until she pulled him into a crushing hug. She still fully expected to pass right through him, but instead she was met with a solid wall of flesh and blood. As soon as she realized it she clapped a hand over her mouth and somehow managed to squeeze him even tighter, as if to prevent him from slipping away.

When she finally pulled back, she was surprised to find her cheeks wet.

“Hey, hey it’s okay,” he said, his eyes worried. “Shit, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have sprung this on you.”

Diana let out a sound that was half sob and half laugh. “No—it’s you! Steve! You are here!” She wiped her eyes and then without hesitation punched him full in the arm. “For the love of Zeus! You thought killing yourself was a good idea? Do you have any idea—you—you—you noble idiot!” She growled, punching him again for good measure.

He rubbed his arm. “I missed you too.”

She collapsed back into her chair, her head in her hands. He was here. He was here and somehow alive, and amidst every wonderful thing that meant, her excitement faltered with the knowledge that he had somehow missed nearly seventy years. He had outlived everyone else, except, unlike herself, he hadn’t had decades to adjust to the change.

She looked up at him with a sad smile. “I have so many questions, I imagine you do too. There’s so much to catch you up on—so much you’ve missed.”

The words were already out of her mouth before she realized it was the wrong thing to say. His face crumpled, and he looked down at his feet with a completely miserable expression.

“I’ve realized. In my defense I didn’t think I would have to learn all this—I never planned on coming back.”

“Steve—”

“It’s fine. Really. I’m just glad I’m here now.”

It wasn’t fine. She could tell by the strain in his voice that a part of him wished he had never reemerged, and that worried her more than anything else.

“First off, how in Hades did you come back. We searched the area, but you just…disappeared.”

“Apparently the ship and I were just frozen in the ice.” He said, throwing his hands in the air. “They cut me out of and then defrosted me like a fucking Thanksgiving turkey.”

“We should have searched harder,” she whispered, almost to herself. “Howard kept at it for years and we—we dismissed him when you were there all along.” If she had just encouraged him a little more, believed in him more maybe he would have been found long before now.

He waved away her concerns. “If I had just given the damn coordinates it wouldn’t have even been a problem. Anyway, I woke up at S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters, and once I got them to tell me the truth Fury gave me a file on everyone that I might know, in part I think to pacify me. I got, uh, a little heated. They explained everything and mentioned you specifically.”

She snorted. She could image Fury’s severe expression at the argument he should have known was going to happen. No one, especially not a government organization, told Steve what to do or kept him in the dark.
“I promise Fury is more likeable when you get to know him.”

Steve just shrugged seeming unconvinced. “He wants me to join the Avengers? I’m supposedly about to be part of a mission soon, but he wasn’t really clear on what that meant.”

Diana burst out laughing while Steve stared at her with a complete lack of understanding. “Oh, I am sorry, it’s just… the program came out off one of Peggy’s ideas. She and I agreed that there should be some sort off superhuman group, partly based off you. Having you actually in it would be amusing to say the least.”

She was beginning to realize that Steve was coming into this with no idea of who his allies were. The conversation was personal, yes, but also a way for him to try to figure out how to move through a very different looking world. She was glad she could help him in that way, at least. She knew firsthand how difficult it could be.

“I trust Fury, and generally the agency at large. I’m not thrilled about the government aspect obviously, but it’s Peggy’s life work. The agency is her legacy.”

She thought through the whole list of S.H.I.E.L.D. information she needed to tell him, starting with Peggy and Howard. Before she could say anything useful about the topic she jolted forward in her seat, wanting to smack herself.

“Peggy! How did I not ask earlier? What did she say when you saw her? Holy Zeus, I have to call later, she must be thrilled!” She beamed at him, imaging just how happy a visit from Steve would have made her. His return was a sorely needed piece of good news, if also difficult to consider.

He shifted in his seat, looking like he had just been called to the principal’s office. “Well…” he started, “I, uh, actually haven’t seen her yet?”

“What do you mean? Did Fury not give you her address?”

“No, he did. I just….” he waved a hand, seemingly at a loss. “Fury told me she had Alzheimer’s and explained what that meant. I don’t want to scare her or worry her. Not after all these years.”

He refused to make eye contact, instead surveying the various art pieces around the room.

“Steve,” she said gently “I do not think you’ll scare her. It will be a shock, but in the end not a bad one.”

“No it’s not just that. I just…” he took a deep breath. “What if she doesn’t remember me?”

“You think she could forget you?”

“Well… yes.” He looked up at her, pain and worry etched into his face.

She wanted to give Fury a piece of her mind for clearly not providing a more detailed explanation. “You think she could possibly forget? Steve, while her memory has been degrading more quickly over the past few years, she always— always—remembers you and the War. That and her immediate family and friends.

She smiled. “Half the time that’s all we talk about. Do you remember the time you nearly got run over by herd of cattle and she had to save you? Because she sure does, we talked about it just last week.”

He gave a bark of laughter and sank back into his chair, burying his face in his hands.
“You need to visit.”

“I know. I will.” His voice was muffled. “God…Peggy.”

“I’m not completely sure you do,” she added, her voice soft. “When you walked in, there was a split second when I thought you might be my Steve, as silly as it sounds. Even after I’ve moved on and so many years have passed, there was that sliver of hope. You can give Peggy that but for real. You thought I was excited, imagine her reaction.”

He nodded again, his jaw set.

“Good.” She reached over to shut down her computer—there was no way she was getting anymore work done—her inbox somehow containing fifteen new messages just in the span of their conversation.

“Have you seen Tony yet? I would think Fury would have had him meet with you.”

“Oh, he did,” he said with a smile. “He’s like a mini-Howard. It’s eerie.”

“Similar, yes, but don’t tell him that. The two didn’t always get along.”

“I gathered that much. Tony seemed a little weary of me too, but that could also be because he said he was pretty busy organizing the Avengers and getting everything set up.”

Diana let out a muffled laugh. “It could be that, yes. But I would also wager that he is sick of hearing stories about you.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. You were just as talked about amongst our friend group as you were in the general population.”

He shrugged. “Whatever the deal is, he gave me this to deliver to you. He said and I quote ‘She won’t yell at you too much if you have art.”

“He knows me well.” She smiled, thinking of how she had given him similar advice not all that long ago. Steve, however, wasn’t nearly as pathetic looking as Tony had been after his kidnapping. “Though I have not yelled yet, have I?”

“You punched me.”

She crossed her arms “It was a friendly punch. I could have done worse.”

Steve ignored her and reached into his bag, pulling out a carefully wrapped box.

She opened it, the wrapping paper falling away to reveal a Greek amphora.

“Oh, it’s beautiful!” She sat the box on her desk and stood to go get the catalogue and registration tags out of the filing cabinet. “And so well preserved! Where has Tony been hiding this?”

Steve smiled, watching as she flitted around to collect various materials. “I’m glad you kept at it, you know,” he said, gesturing around the room.”

“At what? Saving the world and such?”

“Well, that, yes, but also working with all this art like you said you would. The Monuments Men,
“Of course, I promised you, didn’t I? I actually worked with the group directly, right after the war. A lovely bunch they were.” Steve would have loved it—the people and the work. And who knew? With his backing maybe the government would have granted more resources to continue the mission into Korea and beyond.

Steve’s face lit up. “Where?”

“Neuschwanstein Castle and a few other places.”

“That’s incredible. And then the Louvre. It’s so…cool? Is that what people say now? I feel so old.”

“I believe so.”

“Then it’s so cool. You’ve been doing all this this entire time?”

“Yes, though as a civilian. I haven’t worn the uniform in decades. I didn’t want to be in the spotlight.”

“A dancing monkey.”

“Exactly.”

“Well I’m beginning to understand the sentiment. When Fury releases to the public that I’m back in oh,” he paused and checked his watch, “about 18 hours, it’s going to be a zoo. I’m not supposed to be here either, so he’ll love that.”

She just grinned. “Not the first time you’ve been AWOL. Or disobeyed orders for that matter.”

“I call it selective hearing. Sorry, but there was no way I was going to sit in a safe house for another few days and read the informational pamphlets they provided. I’d much rather break out early and come talk with you.”

“I’m flattered.” She locked the vase in a safe before turning back to Steve. “Put on a hat or something and we can go buy a few history books and then go out to dinner. No one expects you to be back so they should not recognize you. I do expect you have more questions?”

“Oh, do I. What the hell is a fax machine? Department of Homeland security? Queen but not of Britain—it might be a band? Bell bottoms? The Berlin Wall? I have a lot more written down if you just give me a minute…”

“Okay, Okay, I get it,” she laughed. “I’ll call Fury and explain that you need hands on knowledge, not information from S.H.I.E.L.D. pamphlets. Then we can work through everything the next few days.”

“Perfect. As long as we have time to tour the museum too?”

“Of course. I can even get you into the restricted areas.”

He practically jumped out of his chair. “Really?”

“Yes, if you are with me it will be fine.”

Art couldn’t fix nearly 70 missing years, but maybe it could, at least, provide some comfort. The world had changed, even she had changed, but the well-preserved paintings and sculptures had not
and would not as long as they were cared for.

“Cool.”

Chapter End Notes

What's this? Another chapter? Thanks to all of you for sticking through me going AWOL yet again. My personal life has been crazy busy for the past two months, but I am VERY glad to be back now. It's also been almost a year exactly since I published the first chapter of this fic (How did that happen?? Why did I let this happen? The world may never know) and so a huge shout out to those of you who have stuck with me for twelve whole months. I promise that I'm only a few chapters away from done.

Come find me on tumblr where I'm @trash0falltrades
Diana upheld her promise to Peggy, though she didn’t know if holing up in her apartment and teaching Steve seventy years of history really counted as a “break.” Still, she didn’t have to go into work, and Steve bought breakfast for her from a bakery down the street, so it felt slightly more relaxed.

“Did the cashier speak English?” she asked, as he handed her the bag.

“Nope, I just spoke my bad French.” She scrunched her face, now slightly weary of the bag’s contents. Steve was generally good at picking up languages, but he had never quite mastered French. His French accent somehow sounded like a bad imitation of a Brooklyn accent, which, while interesting, made it hard to get his point across.

She peered into it, cracking a smile when she saw what was inside.

“However, I do know enough to say ‘two croissants.’ And so I did.”

She rolled her eyes and handed him a plate and glass. “I am so proud.”

Diana started that day’s “lesson” with a brief review of the Marshall Plan before moving on to an overview of the Cold War. It was all well and good until she looped back around to discuss war crimes.

“How were Hydra and the Nazis dealt with after everything was over? Fury just said they were defeated but I know he wasn’t telling me everything—I heard about a hate group on the news and one of them had a swastika?” His voice was casual, with a forced nonchalance that made it clear he was hoping it wasn’t true. “But it was in the U.S. Are there just a few holdouts left then?”

Diana fell silent before she eventually asked, “How much news have you been watching?”

He shrugged. “Some, mostly so I don’t also need to catch up on current events. And I’ve been reading old stories about whatever questions I come up with. Why does that matter?”

It meant he had no idea. None. S.H.I.E.L.D. had left it to her to deliver news of the stinging betrayal—provide the information that would make it appear that his sacrifice hadn’t been enough.

“Diana?” he asked again.

“Well…” she started. How could she possibly phrase this?

“I need to know.”
“I know, it’s just that—”

He let out a long sigh. “If you don’t tell me I’ll, I’ll—I’ll google it. But I want to hear it from you.”

She muffled a laugh, imaging Steve furiously plucking away at the keyboard.

“What’s so funny? I just want an answer.”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry,” she said, her mouth still twitching. “I just want to know how much someone would pay for Captain America’s search history. And—and,” she let out a wheeze, “they would expect it to be important research or classified information and instead it would just be ‘what are bell bottoms?’”

Steve looked completely unimpressed. He just didn’t understand. The internet jokes, the tabloid articles—it would be a thing of beauty. “Oh and you should also know this—the government can track everything you do online, so do not google ‘how to make a bomb to blow up Hydra’ or whatever else unless you want the FBI to bust down your door.” The tabloids would really have fun with that one.

“But that’s got to be illegal!”

Diana shrugged. “Take it up with the government. I’m sure Congress would love to meet with you.”

He nodded. “Great plan. I’ll get it on my schedule. But you’re avoiding the question—are you going to tell me? I’m sorry if it’s upsetting, but I need to know what I’m getting myself into.”

She let out a sigh. He did have a right to know… “As long as you don’t torture yourself with the information,” she conceded.

“Deal.”

“Immediately after the war Hydra went underground. Peggy and I made it our mission to find them and we did—most of them at least—and as director it was one of her main goals to see them gone. But since she left…”

“They’re making a comeback?”

“Possibly. They definitely still exist, at least in small pockets. They aren’t S.H.I.E.L.D.’s priority anymore. And for all of that I am so, so, sorry.”

He shook his head, adamant. “If I’m not allowed to torture myself with this, then you’re not either.”

Dina sighed again “We also learned it is near impossible to kill off an ideology.”

“Meaning?”

“Neo-Nazi’s. Groups that have the same beliefs, the same twisted ideas. They along with various others in white supremacy groups are upstanding community members by day, but come meeting or protest time…”

Steve looked at her, stunned. “And they’re allowed? People support this?”

“Technically, as long as they don’t commit hate crimes or other violence. There’s little out right support but there is…turning a blind eye.”
Steve slammed his hand on the table. “We fought a war. People died. They lost.”

“I know, I know it’s not fair. And the absolute irony is that…” she trailed off, bracing herself for his reaction, “that some of them hold you up as an example. An ideal Aryan.” As much as she hated it, the knowledge that they were idealizing a once-puny asthmatic who punched Hitler on stage every night brought her a small sense of solace. "You're probably going to have to answer questions about that at some point."

“Fuck that. I’m talking to Congress. Soon. And then I’ll go on every single T.V. station and radio show and—YouTube? YouTube channels to shut this down.”

Diana gave him a slight smile. “Before you do, you might want to write a list. I guarantee there is more you will be mad at.”

He cracked his knuckles. “I’m ready. Go every other—something good I should know and then something absolutely ridiculous.”

“Er, as a result of vaccines and other public health initiatives people are living longer with a better quality of life.”

“Great. The bad?”

“People are starting to refuse vaccines?”

“They’re WHAT? They save lives!”

“Obviously, but there’s a whole movement right now—"

“DO THEY KNOW WHAT ITS LIKE TO HAVE POLIO? OR MEASELS?”

“Well, no, because there’s this thing called herd immunity. Usually if a few people don’t get vaccinated they’re still protected since everyone else is vaccinated, but if enough people—"

“It’s not fun! God do you know how many lives modern medicine could have saved. Growing up? During the War? And they’re turning it down?”

“Shhhh, yes, I know it’s ridiculous.” She gently placed a hand on his shoulder, forcing him to sit back down. “Add it to the list.”

They continued. More opportunities for women in the workforce—pay discrimination. Incredible NASA programs and space exploration—little funding for the sciences.

By the end he was both impressed and fuming. “Congress and I are going to have a lot to discuss.”

She had created a monster.

That afternoon she took him for a behind the scenes tour of the Louvre. Watching him look at everything was well worth the trip—she couldn’t stop smiling at seeing his face light up or his jaw drop when she casually said something along the lines of “oh yes, and this here is one of our Caravaggios.”

He was in a perpetual state of amazement, a much-needed state, she realized, after the past week’s
events. Dinner was similar, with Steve marveling at various French dishes that were so much better than during the War when food was scarce. They ate and chatted, and Steve managed to thoroughly horrify their waiter with his French. It was all going so well until they headed back to Diana’s apartment to crash.

She awoke hours later with a sense that something was…off. She heard Steve’s door creak open, his muffled footsteps walking down the hall. She gave him a minute, waiting to see if he would return, and then swung her legs over the side of the bed and quietly followed him.

He was sitting on the couch, staring out through the window at the strings of lights that decorated the sidewalk below. He started when he saw her, his face flushing.

“I’m sorry—I didn’t mean to wake you.” He looked absentmindedly around the room, giving her an eventual shrug. “Couldn’t sleep.”

“Don’t worry about it. Sharon—Peggy’s niece—has said that I act like sleep is for the weak. I do not think that is entirely true, it’s just not my priority. I’ll be fine.”

Steve gave her a fraction of a smile, scooting over to make room as she sat down next to him. He tapped out a steady rhythm on his leg, trying to settle himself.

“I just keep expecting them to peek around the corner,” he started quietly, his voice thick. “Dugan wearing his ridiculous hat, Bucky letting me know we have a mission. Every damn time I wake up I have to remember that it’s not 1945 anymore.”

“I know.” It was only partly a lie. As hard as she imagined herself in his situation, there was an empathy gap. But to have strong ties to a time or place now gone, that was something she could understand.

He turned towards her, eyes boring into hers. “Tell me about them. The Commandos, the S.S.R.—everything.”

“Right now? Are you sure?”

“I can learn history and pop culture anywhere, but I can only learn about my friends from you.”

And so she started. She told him how Peggy had carved out a place at the SSR, sexism be damned, and then was picked to lead S.H.I.E.L.D., an organization named in part for the two of them.

About Peggy’s wedding day, about Elizabeth and Michael and their own families and careers.

How Juniper had died so soon after the War and how the Commandos had continued fighting for what was right long into their old age. How Dugan had gone on to work as a civilian contractor before having a stroke, only a few months before Daniel’s death, but that his children and grandchildren still sent her poppies every Armistice Day just as Dugan used to.

How Howard had lived life fast and loose until he met Maria and settled down. How he had found the Tesseract, studied it, let it rest, and then how S.H.I.E.L.D. started researching again.

About the red room and Natasha, beautiful summer days in France, and her work with the various charities and the U.N.

About the Starks’ deaths, Tony’s brilliance and his businesses, Pepper’s humor, Peggy’s love for a good drink after work, her diagnosis, and how they taught the kids how to wield pool noodle swords during barbeques. All the places she had visited, the people she had met, the snowfalls she
had seen.

Once the words started she found it hard to stop, taking breaks only when it became too much for either her or Steve, and, of course, for tea breaks to keep her voice going. It was cathartic in an odd sense, a love letter to time spent with her friends.

They talked through until morning, Steve not wanting to go back to sleep and Diana too amped up to. By morning she was confident that she had given him a mostly decent summary of everything that had happened. Now he just had to absorb it all.

“I wish I had been here.”

She took a long sip of her tea and stared out at the sunrise and the early morning dog walkers passing by, reveling in the small sense of peace before she turned back to Steve and said, “I told you not to beat yourself up about it.”

“I know.”

“So don’t. We shoulder enough blame and burden as it is, try not to add any more.” With a small groan she stood and walked over to the fridge, peering in at the various options. It was high time for a food break.

“Do you want some breakfast? I think I have a few eggs. And before you ask, no, I’m not buying you more croissants. As you saw last night, there is so much more to French Cuisine than croissants.”

“Crepes?”

She shot him a look.

“Eggs it is. And Diana?”

“Hmm?” she hummed as she gathered various dishes.

“Thank you.”

Getting Steve back to the States was made a much more difficult affair due to the fact that the entire planet now knew of his glorious return. The press had gone ape, dredging up stories from seventy years ago to create a truly impressive news storm. This was exactly why she had stayed hidden.

“Your exhibit had been packed for the past week, the poor Smithsonian. And you’ve been sighted in no less than twelve countries on three different continents.”

“Only three?”

“Unnamed sources say you saved a child in Uruguay.”

“Hurray for me. Who the hell is making these reports?

“People who are overexcited. Though secretly, I hope it’s Clint and Natasha.” If it was them, it was far from their best work. She still fully expected Clint to list a pair of American flag boxers on
E-bay and pass them off as Steve’s for an ungodly amount of money.

“Fury is getting us a jet so that’s easy, the problem is getting you around D.C. without being noticed. D.C. is the most likely place you would be. And lo and behold, we are, in fact, going there.”

“Baseball hat, tourist clothes, fannypack, and a big map,” he said, checking them off his fingers.

“But then if you are photographed you look like a forty-year-old dad, though I suppose it could be worse. If we’re going for the easiest method, you should just wear a wig and call it good. This doesn’t need to be completely believable.”

Steve pulled a face and crossed his arms. “Absolutely not. I’ll look even more ridiculous.”

“You won’t look like yourself. That’s the point.”

“I’m going with forty-year-old dad.”

They took a S.H.I.E.L.D. car from the plane to the nursing home. Steve had his map spread out in the backseat, awkwardly practicing his disguise.

“Hi y’all I’m Grant, visiting from the great state of Texas.”

Diana groaned. “Zeus no. You’re overthinking it. We will probably be fine, and if there is a problem, I can do the talking.

“It’s easier to punch people and run,” he grumbled

“Don’t tempt me.”

He became more jittery the closer they got to Peggy’s facility, unfolding and refolding the map until Diana finally threw it in the trunk.

“It will be fine. She is so excited to see you.” They had warned Peggy ahead of time, as not to entirely startle her, though she doubted Peggy completely believed her. She needed to see for herself.

They exited the car, Steve thankfully looking like himself and not Grant from Texas, and were buzzed in by the front desk. They started down the main hallway, faded carpet muffling their footsteps. They passed by various rooms on their way to the memory unit, each door with a cheery nametag sticker that didn’t match the subdued feeling of the facility.

“What do I possibly tell her?” he whispered as they walked.

Diana smiled at him. “The truth. She’s still our Peggy, Steve. Just older. She may forget parts of what you say and that’s normal. Just be patient.”

She guided him towards Peggy’s room, her door decorated with a professional looking nameplate Diana had bought her in lieu of the stickers. She pushed Steve through the door with a gentle shove, not wanting to wait a minute longer to see her face when Steve walked in.

Peggy was lying in bed, staring absentmindedly out her window, that day’s newspaper and her
reading glasses at her side.

“Peg?” Steve asked, his voice tentative.

Peggy whipped her head around, and Diana watched her expression rapidly shift through shock, excitement, and sadness in her own version of the stages of grief.

“Steve” her voice broke and she reached for his hand, pulling him towards her. “It’s been so long.”

“I know.” He forced a smile and sat down next to her. “But I’m here now. I had to come visit my best girl.”

She rolled her eyes, brushing away tears. “Always the charmer, weren’t you? God look at you, you haven’t changed at all.” She put a hand to his face, taking him in as if she would never see him again.

Diana cleared her throat, causing the two of them to break apart. “I’ll be by the vending machines. Peggy, I’ll stop by again soon.”

Peggy nodded, flashing her a knowing smile before immediately turning her attention back to Steve.

Diana bought peanut M&M’s and used it as an incentive to read through some briefs. Chocolate, in addition to fixing problems, was a good motivator. She found a spot to sit down in one of the visiting areas, right by the bird cages they had for patients to look at. She read, stopping for welcome interruptions by Peggy’s nurses whom she now knew well, with all of them going above and beyond to get to know her in return.

Steve came out half an hour later. As he walked towards her she could see his neutral expression—his brave face—slowly slip and then collapse, his features instead etched with grief.

“God, Diana,” his voice was rough, like he was fighting back tears. “To see her like that—what all she’s forgotten—"

Diana patted the chair next to her, offering up the M&M’s. She closed her eyes. “I’m sorry, Steve.” Deep down, as ridiculous as it was, she had hoped that somehow Steve making a miraculous return would spark something in Peggy. Not heal her, but maybe bring back a few long-forgotten memories. Now that looked doubtful.

“How do you handle this? How do you just…watch it happen?”

She gave him a helpless shrug. “The rest of us have been doing this for years and I still do not know. You cope because you must, dad by day, visit by visit. You have as many good times with her as you can.”

She hesitated for a moment before pressing on. “I… want you to know that I tried to stop it. I offered her godly healing, anything in my power. And it still wasn’t enough. There is nothing we can do to change this.”

She leaned towards him, forcing him to look up at her—to hear the truth that ideally would lessen his guilt, even though there was nothing ideal in this entire situation. “If you were here you could not have saved her either.”

He slouched forward shaking his head. “That’s almost worse. Knowing I can’t do a damn thing for her—"
“Do what you can. Visit. Call. Show your love. That’s what we’ve all been doing and…it’s something.”

He nodded, downing another handful of M&M’s.

In time, they would find their way back to the easy conversations once held around a campfire, with less of the grief and awkwardness. She was sure of it—even if it was only out of pure Steve and Peggy stubbornness for it to be so.

“It will get easier. Not better, but easier.”

Diana convinced the driver to let them play tourists for a few hours after their visit, meaning that now Steve’s disguise might actually come in handy. They took the metro to the National Mall, where Steve proceeded to gawk at everything he looked at.

“This place is even busier than it was during the War.”

She laughed. “Benefits of population growth. And tourism—right Grant?”

“That’s right darlin’” he said with his grating accent. “Are you gonna show me around?”

She gave him the grand, though sufficiently abridged tour. The Washington Monument, outsides of various museums, and, of course, the World War Two Memorial would have to do for their first “educational field trip.”

She bit her lip as she watched Steve take in the Memorial, debating whether it was a mistake to bring him here. Maybe they should have just gone into the natural history museum. Maybe he wasn’t ready for this yet.

“Steve? What do you think?” she eventually asked.

He looked over at her, eyes wide. “This is absolutely insane. Don’t get me wrong, it’s wonderful,” he rushed out, “It’s just…it’s history.”

They walked around the memorial, looking at all the state names etched on each granite pillar, a wreath hanging above all of them so that they ended up looking like beautiful, overgrown tombstones. Steve starting walking towards the fountain in the center, dodging children that, despite their parents’ best efforts, were racing each other to see who would get soaked the fastest. Suddenly he halted, his shoulders shaking with laughter.

She raised an eyebrow. “What on Earth is so funny?”

He pulled her to the exact spot he was standing and pointed slightly upwards to the back of one of the pillars.

As soon as she saw what he was looking at she started cackling “Holy Hera, that’s amazing.” Near the top, half hidden in shadow, was a familiar silhouette of the top of a man’s head, his long nose peaking over a wall.

“Good old Kilroy. It’s only fitting that someone carved him here,” said Steve with a new lightness in his voice, eased by the knowledge that this inside joke still existed.
“You’ve outsmarted the tour guide. Nothing else I show you could possibly be this good.”

“Diana Prince, that’s a lie. I’m sure you have other fun facts.”

“Oh, I do, let’s see, most are random history tidbits we don’t have time for today. Er, I guess the American University area is where most of the women who broke codes worked?”

“See. Not quite Kilroy-level. But you’re working on it.”

“I try.”

After another few minutes they turned to make the long trek back to the car, passing the Washington monument to where they hoped their driver was still waiting for them.

“I’ll bring you back when we have some time. Maybe for the Fourth of July—it can be your birthday present. If you think this is busy wait until you see it then, but the fireworks are amazing.”

“I think I’d like that. I want to tour the museums too, learn some more history. Maybe go for a run around here. It’s just so... beautiful, I guess, but mostly impressive.”

“It is, isn’t it?” She looked over her shoulder, at the Lincoln Memorial in the distance, barely able to make out the tourists clustered on the steps. “I don’t know if you’re interested, but there are also many veterans groups and services in this area,” she started, trying to gauge his reaction. “You might also be able to meet up with people with similar experiences.”

He shrugged. “I’ll think about it.”

They headed towards the not at all suspicious looking black van, the driver taking off as soon as they got in. They hadn’t had enough time—for anything really. And certainly not enough time with Peggy. But it was a good start.

Chapter End Notes

The next two chapters will finally center around the Avengers, and should also be updated more frequently (perks of writing an insanely long chapter and then splitting it up so I have a buffer)

Supposedly Kilroy is actually carved on the back of the WWII memorial
Also if you want more WWII history, Code Girls by Liza Mundy is an awesome book about all the women responsible for breaking codes and basically helping start the field of cryptology (It's like Hidden Figures but for codes)

The title is taken from the song "We'll Meet Again" by Vera Lynn
The next day they took the S.H.I.E.L.D. jet again, this time to New York — the second most likely place Steve would be.

“I still can’t believe you’re not going to be on the team with us. Or even allowed in on the damn meetings,” he grumbled as their poor driver tried to pull over next to Stark Tower.

“Steve, we’ve been over this.”

“Yeah yeah, ‘take it up with Congress.’”

She snorted. “Or in this case take it up with S.H.I.E.L.D. It’s fine, I promise I can keep myself plenty busy for the week that I’m here.”

“You can, but you shouldn’t have to.”

“Update me when you can,” she said, ignoring his protests. “I’m sure it will be great.”

He stepped out of the car, bending down to give her a slight eyeroll. “You make it sound like I’m going to summer camp.”

She smirked, waving goodbye as the driver hit the gas to merge back into traffic, causing a string of prolonged honking behind them. “That’s what bumpers are for,” he muttered, seeing her horrified look in the rear view mirror. “Where to for you?”

“The U.N. building please.” She did have a lot of work to do. Ambassadors to meet, information to distribute. She was swamped.

The first update came not from Steve, but from Fury which was never a good sign. Maybe she needed to make it a point to chat on the phone with Fury more often. Then maybe she would be excited to hear from him instead of worried about whatever impending doom he was surely calling to convey.

She braced herself as she answered the phone. Her day had been going so well. No international incidents, and everyone seemed receptive and willing to at least read the proposed compromise. For the human rights council that was a damn miracle. Now it appeared that her luck had run out.

“Hope you packed deodorant because between the desert heat and the lunatic with the Tesseract, I’m feeling damp.”
“Hello Director, nice to hear from you too. Now what’s this about a lunatic with the Tesseract?”

“Oh, this is right up your alley. Another mystical god, demigod whatever the hell. Loki—of Asgard. Brother of the guy that caused damage to—”

“Brother of Thor, I know. One of the Norse gods. He stole the Tesseract?” It seemed implausible, but then again so did half the things she dealt with. Did every belief system have gods that wished to do harm? Could they all exist simultaneously? What if prophesies or powers conflicted? The situation would have been fascinating if everyone on the planet wasn’t in imminent danger.

“We had been doing research on it again. He opened a portal into the facility and grabbed it, and then used his freaky glowing scepter to mind control Barton into helping him escape. We…don’t know where either of them are.”

She rubbed her forehead. Researching for what she still wasn’t sure, and at this point probably didn’t want to know. And then Clint…

“The others are helping track it down I assume?”

He barked out a laugh. “Oh yeah. Great thing about potential catastrophe is that you get to dodge stupid-ass bureaucracy. Everyone is in and we’re officially recruiting Dr. Banner to try and trace its radiation—Agent Romanoff will pick him up. Happy first mission,” he said, voice oozing with sarcasm.

“Everyone? I thought… Tony had been a “maybe” for the past few weeks. Sure, it was his tower and his technology, but the higher ups had been concerned about his ‘stability.’ Why they expected to have perfectly well adjusted non-traumatized super humans was a mystery to her, but nevertheless, it was a debate, and a stupid one at that. If they were worried about Tony, they should be doubly worried about the rest of them. Steve was one ignorant comment away from punching a politician or reporter, and Nat would do worse for anyone who cat-called her.

“Everyone. We need that Tesseract back.”

“I know.” The warmth in her voice faded as she continued. “Nick, I want it on the record that I do not like anything about this situation or how it happened. Steve certainly won’t either.”

“I figured.”

“We’re two of only a handful of people still around that saw what that damned cube can do. When we get this back, you must listen to the two of us on how to keep it safe.”

There was a long pause. “That can be arranged.”

“And,” she added, “I’m part of this mission. I know what this thing is capable of, and it isn’t pretty.”

“Diana, S.H.I.E.L.D. and the Council have explicitly—”

“I conveniently appear to be traveling to, oh the location Steve ‘accidently’ lets slip. I happen to be willing to help the team out, without being asked to or contacted what so ever. I’ll try to keep to the shadows. If S.H.I.E.L.D. or the council has a problem with that they can deal with it after their lives are saved by our intervention.” She was sick and tired of dancing around arbitrary rules. She had experience, and it was their mistake if they didn’t utilize it.

“Well. I’m not going to argue with that.”
She smirked. "Because you know you'd lose."

Steve called only a few hours later, thankfully after the meeting she had with one of the UN aides.

“Just chatted with Fury.”

She whistled. “He talked with me too. How did it go?”

“Not great…though I wasn’t really in a cheery mood to begin with.”

“What did you say?” Diana asked, a note of warning in her voice.

“That he should have left the Tesseract in the ocean.”

She gave a relieved laugh. “Well that’s just being honest. Fury’s heard worse. Did he brief you?”

“Gave me a file. Banner is supposedly tracing the Tesseract’s radiation, the rest of us are tasked with the catching and detaining part. He tried to give me other briefs too and didn’t seem thrilled when I told him you covered everything.”

“Well not everything, I’m sure you’ll come up with more questions. But he’ll get over it.”

“I don’t trust him. There’s too much we don’t know and that he’s not telling us.”

She shook her head, her eyes drawn to the picture by her desk of Howard and Peggy on their first official day as directors. Michael had found it in their search for old stories, and Diana had promptly claimed it simply because of how happy they both looked. They were both beaming, standing in front of Peggy’s new office, and if she thought back far enough she could recall just how encouraging it was, seeing some hope restored in them.

“I wish you could have seen S.H.I.E.L.D. under Peggy. It was…different. I know Fury doesn’t seem friendly, but he’s the person I trust the most right now, and one of the few people that cares about Peggy’s legacy.”

Steve let out a long sigh. “Fine. I’ll let you know where to head as soon as I have the info.”

She packed up a bag for the upcoming adventure, something she usually didn’t have the notice to do. So this was what proper preparation was like. She collected her toothbrush and a change of clothes, throwing in her bracers and lasso for good measure. In a fight against a god they needed all the help they could get.

And then she waited, jumping anytime her phone buzzed only to be let down when it was an email from work or a text from Elizabeth.

It wasn’t until the next afternoon that she got the call from Steve. Banner had done it.

“So, how’s Germany these days? Haven’t been in, oh, about seventy years but it looks like we’re taking a trip there right now.”
She closed her eyes, mouthing pulling up in a smile. Not obvious at all—there was a reason Steve was a soldier and not a spy. “Beautiful, and so very different.”

“Good. We’ll be in Stuttgart. If you want to meet us, the best way is to fly with Tony. You’re consigned to play backup, unfortunately.”

“It’s fine. I love being the one to save your skin.”

In all honesty, she deserved a medal for surviving the flight with Tony. He paced back and forth, muttering various scientific terms under his breath in his efforts to understand the Tesseract.

“Tony, leave it be,” she finally said. “No one understands what in Hades this thing is, and it is probably better it stays that way.”

He huffed. “Well, I’m trying anyway. I did some homework. You and Steve really don’t want to hear my insightful book report?”

“Not particularly. That thing is a glowing death cube.”

He sat down. “I assume Steve’s experience with it is why he sounds like he has a stick up his ass? Entirely too serious that man. I guess growing up on boiled food will do it too you.”

Diana burst out laughing. “Oh, Tony. Did you not listen, really listen, to Howard’s stories? Steve may seem serious at first glance, but he’s just like Peggy—total rebel.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“You’ll see. Give him a chance. Both of you are stubborn and like to argue, though I’d advise you not do it with each other.”

“Yes aunty,” he said rolling his eyes.

“Good. Now go check how much longer we have until landing and stop worrying yourself silly.”

“You're right. A glowing death cube we don't understand isn't anything to worry about!” he said as he turned to go talk to the pilot.

She took in a long breath, tilting her head up at the ceiling. Zeus grant me the patience... "Excuse me for trying to stay positive!” she called after him.

He returned from the cockpit, just as she was beginning to feel a decrease in the plane's sass-levels. He had brought an earpiece for her, as well as a t-minus twenty minute time estimate.

“You’re gonna need one of these. You can’t miss the experience of everyone screaming in your ear at once. Best way to get information and tinnitus simultaneously.”

“Good to know.”
As they approached Stuttgart she turned it on. She could hear Steve barking instructions to Nat, along with the sounds of people screaming in the background.

“We’re in for some fun.” Tony said, suiting up while she slid on her bracers under her shirt, reveling in the familiar feeling of the cool metal against her skin.

“I suppose that is one way of putting it.”

The plane dipped low, much too low for comfort, and dropped she and Tony. They both hit the ground hard and rolled, running in the opposite direction of all the civilians. In the distance she could see the plane Nat must be piloting, guns pointed towards the ground.

“Up we go,” Tony said, grabbing her arms and taking off, flying towards the chaos.

“I could have flown myself,” she grumbled.

“Oh, but this way we make an entrance.” He began blasting music. “Agent Romanoff, you miss me?”

Diana rolled her eyes and jumped down, ushering a few stragglng civilians away and then immediately engaging Loki while Tony blasted him, causing him to fall back onto the stairs of the museum.

Immediately, all three of them moved to surrounded him. Loki raised his hands, his armor evaporating.

She shot Steve a look. This didn’t make sense, it shouldn’t have been this easy. He was a god and he had basically let them win. Steve just shrugged. What else were they going to do—release him? That might finally cause Fury to stroke out.

Loki tuned his attention to Diana, giving her a wolfish smile. “Ah so I see the Princess joins us. Agent Barton told me all about you. Fury doesn’t seem to know how to handle you, does he? But it appears he isn’t above using you when he’s desperate.”

Her face hardened. Here he was trying to poison her thoughts, drive the team apart, even after he had lost.

“Well It’s a good thing I can handle myself then.” She stepped towards him, giving him a glimpse of her lasso. “I suggest on her way back you remain quiet, unless you want to start spilling secrets.”

He leaned back ever so slightly, his smile fading. “If you want to miss out on my banter I suppose that’s your loss.”

The three of them began walking him back to the jet, Nat coming out of the cockpit to help tie him up.

“You don’t have to keep doing this you know,” Diana murmured as she tied the last knot. “You have a choice.” She could sense that he wasn’t yet like Ares, a god completely lost. Somewhere buried under years of anger and resentment was some semblance of care.

“And I chose strength,” he spat.

“If you actually had,” she said, with a nod towards her lasso, “you wouldn’t be so terrified of the truth.”
She turned back towards the others, all settling in for the flight ahead.

“We have him and are heading your way,” She radioed Fury. “Do you want me to start with the
lasso? I have a feeling he’s going to try and hold out.”

“Absolutely not, not unless it’s a last resort.”

“But—”

“It creates a volatile situation and produces information that other people are going to call in to
question or flat out not believe. We need hard evidence, not a trickster god’s word and what seems
like a piece of rope,” he rattled out.

“Fine.”

“Just get back here. We’re low on time.”

“Fury never told us we have to care about the optics of what his looks like,” Steve said, shooting
Diana a look.

“There’s a lot he doesn’t tell you,” Tony retorted,

“Please you two—The tension was broken by Nat cursing up front, the plane beginning to shake as
a lightning storm appeared out of nowhere.

She locked eyes with Loki who suddenly looked very uncomfortable. There were only two people
she knew of that could cause this, Zeus or…”

The plane jolted as something, or someone, landed on top of it. Tony put on his mask opening the
doors to go check the situation out. He had barely made it two steps when a man stormed in,
making a beeline for Loki. Thor.

Tony made the mistake of trying to engage him, only to be hit in the chest by his hammer. Thor
grabbed Loki and yanked him out of the plane, both falling to who knew where.

Diana grabbed Tony’s arm, trying to keep him from following. “Stop! He’s Asgardian! Let me talk
to him!”

“Doesn’t matter, if he lets him go or kills him we can’t get the Tesseract.”

“Wait, we need a plan of attack, we should—” Steve said

“I have a plan. Attack.” Tony countered before jumping out of the plane.

“That’s a stupid plan! Steve called after him, already strapping into a parachute to follow.

I’d sit this one out Steve,” Nat said, looking at him over her shoulder “They’re gods.”

“Good thing I’ve had practice fighting alongside a god then,” he said, nodding towards Diana
before following Tony out.

Diana just sighed and put on a parachute of her own.

“You too?” asked Nat.

“You think the three of them will be able to figure it out themselves? With all that testosterone?”
“Good point. Go work some godly magic.”

As she floated towards the ground she could see a fight starting below her, with flashes of lightning shining through the tree cover. She landed close to Steve’s discarded parachute and ran after him, following his trail of trampled foliage.

She emerged into a clearing in time to see Tony and Thor battling it out, Steve throwing his shield between the two to break it up. “Hey! That’s enough.”

She edged towards the group as Steve said, “Put down the hammer.”

It was a mistake. As soon as the words were out of his mouth Tony was flung backwards while Thor launched himself upwards, his hammer extended, intending to come crashing back down on Steve.

“Stop!” she yelled, running in between the two of them and throwing her arms up, crossing them in front of her as she braced for impact.

When the hammer connected with her bracers it sent everyone flying, a force wave pushing them backwards. Well, she thought, gingerly standing back up. That was unexpected.

Thor slowly sat up and made his way back towards her, eyes narrowed but hammer thankfully lowered at his side.

“Who are you—you who are foolish enough to risk your life for these men?”

She drew herself up to her full height, standing like she was wearing her full set of armor. “I am Diana, Princess of Themyscira, daughter of Zeus and Hippolyta.”

His eyes widened, and he gave a slight bow of his head, “Forgive me. I have heard tales of the Amazons’ bravery.”

“And I of the Asgardians.” Her mother had told her stories about strange gods and places far away and about a group of women—the Valkyries—who fought like they did.

“Where are the rest of your sisters?” he asked, glancing around.

“Safe, but unreachable. I am a representative to mankind. And right now, I implore you to work with us, not against us.”

Steve and Tony looked between them, clearly confused as to what the hell was going on.

She ignored them and chanced giving Thor a smile. “I think you’ll find we have much in common. But you must stop fighting us—we have the same interests.”

He nodded, finally lowering his guard completely. “Very well then.”

She motioned for Steve and Tony to come join then. “Then let’s collect Loki and head back before Fury has a conniption.”

“What was that?” Tony whispered to her as they walked. “You suddenly both went Shakespearean. You got a god to just follow you?”
“It’s called diplomacy, Tony.”

Thor’s gruff voice interrupted from behind them. “And if I may interject, it also requires superior vocabulary skills.”

Diana tried not to smile as Tony went red besides her. “Superior vocabulary skills my ass,” he muttered, walking ahead of her, causing Thor to start laughing behind them.

She had a feeling they were going to get along very well.

Back on the helicarrier, everything was chaos. Once Loki was contained and had ended his dramatic monologue there were entirely too many things to plan and meetings to attend. Tony and Dr. Banner had explained to the non-science geniuses what was happening, while Thor explained what he knew about Loki’s plan. But while it was great that they knew Loki intended to open a more stable portal, it meant nothing if they didn’t have the science to stop it from happening or track the Tesseract, both fields, much to Diana’s frustration, where she could be of little use.

“I’d start with Loki’s scepter. It may be magical, but it looks an awful lot like a hydra weapon,” Steve suggested.

Fury paced in front of the table they were sitting at, “Well I don’t know about that, but—”

“He’s right, we saw weapons like that used firsthand during battle. People would simply disintegrate.” She glanced over at Steve who was nodding with a solemnity that she suddenly found much too depressing. She needed to get him out of his own head. “And,” she added, shooting him a sly smile, “Who could forget their role in Bucky’s ‘Herr Red Herring’ SNAFU?”

After a particularly draining day, Bucky, imitating Charlie Chaplin’s “The Great Dictator,” had grabbed one of the confiscated Hydra weapons and began performing a truly beautiful caricature of Red Skull he called Herr Red Herring. “Oh ja, I vill take offer zee world!” he cackled. He had succeeded in lightening the mood, as well as accidently discharging his weapon during a particularly vigorous heil, almost disintegrating Pinky in the process. Still, it was a success, with Herr Red Herring becoming the most popular campfire skit for the next year.

Steve granted her a chuckle. “Oh god, you’re right.” He snorted, turning back to Fury. “There’s no mistaking it Director, we saw these types of weapons everywhere.”

Was it just her, or did the last few words he said have a hint of a bad German accent attached?

She fought to keep a straight face as Tony looked in between the two of them. “Am I missing something here?”

“Just an old, old story. Bottom line is these weapons are bad, but we already knew that. All the more reason for us to stop him.”
They all broke off into their separate jobs, Thor and Nat leaving to keep an eye on Loki and track Clint while the science geniuses began toiling away in their lab. She and Steve were awarded the privilege of answering entirely too many of Fury’s questions about the Tesseract in the hopes they might know some key bit of information. Considering they knew basically nothing about the Tesseract, it wasn’t very effective. Sure, they had seen the cube and how it was handled. And they had seen weapons made from it. But that didn’t mean they somehow understood it.

Diana sighed. “I’m sorry we’re not much help. If Howard were still alive he might have been able to give you some information—he was the expert. But with just us…”

“But Rogers, you said you watched Red Skull melt away.” Fury mimed an explosion. “There’s nothing that sticks out about that to you?”

“With all respect Director, I was more worried about trying to prevent a bombing on New York,” he said, fighting to keep the frustration out of his voice. “Yes, I watched him disintegrate, but I was just relieved. I was glad he and the cube were gone. And to be frank…I had other things on my mind.”

Fury sighed, waving a hand to dismiss them. “No, that’s understandable. You two can head down now and see if Tony needs any help or wants to question you as well.”

They walked out into the hallway, Steve shaking his head. “I should have told him that Red Skull secretly just wanted to be a professional dancer but couldn’t get into a company, and he knew that the Tesseract gives all who wield it a great sense of rhythm. The man had moves. Think Fury would believe that?”

Diana burst out laughing. “Interesting backstory.” She thought for a moment before saying, “Or we could have told him that there is, in fact, a way to shut it down, you just have to solve the hidden Rubix cube inside.”

“Rubix Cube? Do I need to add that to my list of things to research?”

“No, it’s just a puzzle type toy. We’ll find you one—it will ruin your life.”

They continued all the way to the lab, each trying to top the other with their ridiculous explanations. Steve stopped before the entrance, his smile fading. “I suppose we have to give Tony real answers, don’t we?”

“Sadly yes, but in your defense, saying it’s a magic rock from outer space doesn’t sound like a real answer either.”

They walked in, greeted by the sight of Tony poking Banner in the side.

“Hey!” Steve barked. “Are you nuts?”

Tony rolled his eyes so hard Diana was surprised they didn’t roll out of his head. He ignored Steve and instead kept peppering Banner with questions.

“Is everything a joke to you?”

“Funny things.”
“Threatening the safety of everyone on board isn’t funny. No offence,” he added, with a nod at Banner.

Tony kept moving around the lab with complete nonchalance, mouthing “Stick up his ass” as he passed by Diana.

“You need to focus on the problem.”

“The problem?” he asked, his eyebrows raised. “Here’s a question for you: why did Fury call us in now and not before? What isn’t he telling us?”

Steve just looked at him. “You think he’s lying to us?”

“He’s a spy. He’s the spy.”

Spy. Liar. She had pretended there was a distinction for so long, but now she couldn’t be sure. It depended on who the spy was—and what the lies were.

Steve looked at she and Banner, both nodding along at Tony’s assessment.

“You think so too?”

Banner shrugged, fiddling with his tools before he eventually said. “Stark Tower is being powered by the arc reactor now, right?”

Tony flashed a smile. “For the next year. And this is just my prototype.”

“It’s a self-sustaining energy source, like the clean energy I was telling you about,” Diana explained to Steve.

“Basically I’m THE name in clean energy right now,” Tony added with a modest shrug.

Banner pointed at him with his wrench. “Exactly. So why didn’t S.H.I.E.L.D. bring him on to the Tesseract project? Why are they in the energy business… at all?”

Diana looked to Steve then Tony, her brow furrowed. He was right. Failing to use Tony’s expertise was a mistake. They should have been hounding him for help.

“Great point. I should look into that once my program breaks into all of S.H.I.E.L.D.’s secure files,” said Tony, checking one of the room’s many computers.

“Excuse me?” asked Steve.

“I have a problem with an intelligence agency that doesn’t want intelligence.”

“And there’s no other reason why S.H.I.E.L.D. didn’t want to bring you on?”

“Steve…” she started, trying to cut off an argument before it began. He and Tony had stepped closer together, starring each other down.

“Look, Loki’s trying to wind us up. He means to start a war. We have orders and we should follow them.”

“Yeah, followings not really my style.”

It wasn’t Steve’s style either, but he remained silent, staring at Tony stone-faced.
“Steve, you have to admit, none of this smells a little funky?” added Bruce.

He frowned. “Just…find the Tesseract.” He brushed past them, muttering “I’ll wait in the hall” to Diana.

As soon as he was gone Tony blew out a breath. “Sheesh that’s the guy my dad never shut up about? Should have left him on ice.”

Diana whipped around, her jaw clenched. “I don’t know what’s going on between the two of you,” she hissed, “but it stops now.”

“Sure mom.”

“I’ll stop mothering you when you stop acting like a child, or rather some animal sizing others up and defending its territory!” Some twisted voice in her head told her to keep going, to keep yelling and tear Tony down, to expose all his faults. Then she caught sight of Tony’s shocked expression and Banner, who was slowly backing away, and she forced herself to let out a breath.

“I’m sorry. I think everyone right now feels out of sorts and under pressure. Please just…try to be considerate. He’s been through more enough already. And I’ll find out what I can about Fury.”

She forced herself to walk slowly out of the room. He didn’t have a clue what Steve had lost. How could he act like that? It doesn’t matter. Let it go she told herself, turning to go meet Steve, her face still slightly flushed.

He was leaning up against the wall right outside the doorway, and behind him she saw Nat, hurrying down the corridor. “Where you off to?” he asked as she slowed down to greet them.

“Going down to try and get Mr. Dramatic Monologue to actually tell us something useful.”

“You think he will?”

Diana smiled. “You haven’t seen Nat’s acting skills yet, have you? What’s the story this time?”

Natasha shrugged, flipping her hair over her shoulder. “Act like a sad, desperate woman willing to barter for Clint and then hope he keeps talking. And talking and talking and talking…”

“Well, good luck Ma’am,” said Steve, giving her a small wave as she left. He turned and started walking, but Diana stepped in front of him, forcing him to come to a stop after nearly tripping over her.

“Diana what—”

“What are you doing? You never use to act like this,” she asked, searching his face for some clue as to what was going on.

“What?”

With a strangled sigh she yanked him into the closest empty room and locked the door behind her.

“The sirs and ma’ams? Sounding so serious all the time? I told Tony you don’t, in fact, have a stick up your ass, but you sure are trying to prove me wrong.”

He shook his head, looking utterly exhausted. “Diana, the more I act like everyone expects, the better off I am. If Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. think I’m the good ol’ American solider from propaganda films, they’ll leave me be.”
“Steve they’re going to find out eventually—what happened to taking on Congress?”

He gave her a shrug. “Sure, but for right now…I think people need it. Coulson told me this old uniform, myself—people want old-fashioned, they want to believe in this.” He took a breath. “And I think he’s right.”

“Maybe so, but you can’t live your life as that dancing monkey. You can’t let people’s twisted perceptions keep you from doing what’s right.”

“I won’t. Why do you think I act like an idiot around you? Gotta get it out of my system until I can finally subject the general public to my rebellion in the face of authority.”

The joke didn’t completely mask the unhappiness in his voice, but she played along anyways. “You should tell the Smithsonian to highlight that recurring theme in your exhibit. They could have a timeline of every time you disobeyed orders.” He laughed before Diana turned serious again. “Fine. For now, if you ever need to drop the act when I’m not around you can trust Nat.”

“Natasha? Diana, she’s a spy and an assassin. You just told me how great she was at acting.”

Normally she would have agreed with Steve, but there was something almost vulnerable about Nat. So many spies had been afraid of her and her lasso, but Nat, like Steve, had never shied away from her. Even if she didn’t always want the truth out there, she wasn’t trying to hide from it.

Diana crossed her arms. “I trust her. She made a choice—she chose to come here despite the risks to herself.”

“Yeah, after doing what in Russia?”

“Is it a paradox? Sure. But Peggy acted as a spy at times. My Steve acted as a spy. Nat is a trained killer but she’s witty. She’s dedicated. She makes some of the best perogies I’ve ever eaten. And being a spy means she’s great at keeping secrets. If you need her, she’s there.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he conceded, “But it’s just you and me for this next bit. I don’t want anyone leaking info or slowing us down.”

“And we’re doing what, exactly?”

“Oh, generally disobeying orders, searching the ship for whatever Fury’s hiding, the usual court martial material.”

“You mean the facet of your personality that you’re trying to hide? Count me in. What do you think we are looking for?”

“If S.H.I.E.L.D. is keeping Stark out, it’s because they’re doing either extremely secretive research on the Tesseract or research he wouldn’t approve of. And by default, that we wouldn’t approve of either.”

“Likely so, yes.”

He heaved a sigh. “So the question is what is the research for? What could be done with the Tesseract that is top secret or we would find unacceptable?” He stared at her with a crease between his eyebrows, the same expression he wore during the war when he was trying to mask his worry.

A ten-page list scrolled through her head. There was so much terror that could do with that one cube, but it all boiled down to death. Her heart sank as she whispered, “Weapons.”
They walked down to the underbelly of the ship, trying to be as quiet and unassuming as possible. Diana had no idea where they were headed or really where they were at all. Unlike the well-lit and well-marked hallways above, this level was dim, any doorway signs incomprehensible to her. It looked so stereotypically like a place someone would hide something that she was surprised no one had explored down here yet. Then again, people had to have a reason to go looking in the first place.

They ran into a few maintenance people, but Steve just saluted and spewed some line about “urgent business, so sorry to intrude.” In his best “buy war bonds voice” that they just nodded and carried on. They were just a god and super soldier trying to save the world, nothing unusual to see here.

“We’re getting closer. I think it’s—” Steve started in a whisper.

Diana put a finger to her lips, pointing to the two guards that had just come into view, both of them sitting in front of a door and eating lunch. Bingo.

They ducked into the nearest doorway, Steve raising an eyebrow in the universal signal for “do we punch them?”

She shook her head. It would draw too much attention, best to just try and find a back way in.

They quietly stepped into the next room, any sound masked by the guards’ loud conversation. Inside was another maze of hallways, the one closest to them that led down a short flight of stairs to a locked door labeled P-2. Steve bashed in the lock, only to be greeted by an even dimmer room, only the emergency lights shining overhead. There were rows and rows of various boxes and crates all stacked up neatly on pallets like items at a grocery store.

“Steve,” she breathed. “This is it—it has to be. Look, this room must connect in to the room they were guarding upstairs.” She skimmed the rows of crates, suddenly feeling uneasy. She had expected…not this. Not something that seemed this suspicious from the very beginning.

He turned in a circle, taking everything in “They turned part of the ship into a warehouse.” He walked over to one of the larger crates, “Phase Two” clearly readable on its side and carefully popped the lid off. Inside sat masks and some type of blaster on top of a layer of padding, everything in perfect condition and ready for battle. It was eerily familiar—Hydra replicas, down to the exact shape and coloring.

“Fuck,” he spat. He slammed his hand down on one of the crates. “What the hell are they planning to do with all this?” He stood, staring down at the weapon in his hands before he turned, opening more crates in rapid succession. There were different makes and models, but all were weapons.

“They really did it.” said Diana, her voice faint as she sat down against the wall. Though their analysis had seemed correct, she so wanted she and Steve to be wrong. Maybe S.H.I.E.L.D. just wanted to make sure the science was correct before they released their results. Maybe budget cuts meant they couldn’t afford to hire scientists like Tony. Maybe it truly was Tony temperament that had gotten in the way. Any explanation other than the organization she had aided for nearly seventy years turning its back on its own values.

She closed her eyes, not wanting to look at the boxes that surrounded her or Steve’s scowl.
“Steve, I swear to you,” she started in a low voice, “if I had any idea—”

“I don’t blame you. Or the agents, or guards, or even Fury entirely. For all of this?” he asked, sweeping his arm across the room. “This had to be policy coming from the top.”

“Probably.”

“I just… I hoped that maybe things had changed.”

She nodded. She had grown too complacent, assuming S.H.I.E.L.D. had learned from the past and that they were somehow so different from everyone else. But this? This was shades of Hydra again.

“What do you want to do? Wait? Or talk to Fury now?”

He grabbed one of the smaller guns out of the crate and slung it over his shoulder. “Let’s go have a chat. And I guess I’d better pull the stick up my ass while I’m at it.”

The walk back to Fury’s office was not made any more pleasant by Nat’s interrogation of Loki that was broadcast over their earpieces. Everything that came out of Loki’s mouth was intended to trick, cause doubt, or was downright creepy. Nat’s acting was beautifully convincing, but so were Loki’s lies.

“I want to know what you’ve done to Agent Barton,” they heard Nat say as the two of them hurrying back to the upper levels, blowing past anyone before they had time to do a double take at the weapon casually resting against Steve’s back.

“Is this love Agent Romanoff?”


Diana’s breath caught. Surely she can’t really believe that? She’s acting, she has to be. But she couldn’t be sure. She couldn’t be sure of anything anymore. Steve was a stage persona, Tony was acting strange, Fury was hiding weapons. In her line of work nothing had been clear cut, but now the truth seemed even more hidden.

Nat began to tell him her backstory, stringing Loki along, and Diana elbowed Steve to pay attention. Hearing what she had left behind and that Clint trusted her too might make him a little more willing to drop his guard.

“It’s not complicated,” she finished. I’ve got red in my ledger. I’d like to wipe it out.”

“Can you? Can you wipe out that much red?” She heard Loki’s unsettling laugh as he began to list names and places, events she was sure that Nat now regretted.

“Uh, I take it that’s not part of the plan? Do we need to help her?”

Judging by the stunned silence on Nat’s end he was right, but they couldn’t ruin the set up now. “She can handle it. She knows what she’s doing—she’ll use it to her advantage.”

“Your ledger is dripping it’s gushing red,” Loki continued, getting louder. “You lie and kill in the service of liars and killers. You pretend to be separate—to have your own code. Something to make up for the horrors.”
Diana slowed, nearly bumping into a crew member walking in the opposite direction

“Diana?”

She shook her head, trying to clear it. He was trying to manipulate them, she knew that, but if his words were partly true, was it really manipulation?

“You’re a monster,” Nat whimpered.

“Oh, you brought the monster.”

Even over comms Diana could hear the unmistakable shift in Nat’s tone. It was all business as she asked. “So Banner, that’s your play? Loki means to unleash the Hulk—keep Banner in the lab.”

The comm shut off and Diana cracked a smile. “I’d say that deserves an Oscar, wouldn’t you?”

Steve nodded before letting out a loud “Shit!” He looked down the hallway. “Everyone will be headed towards the lab, including Fury. I guess we’ll have an audience when we show him the goods?”

Diana just sighed. “It’s either start crafting your image as a rebellious idiot or somehow hide a mystery weapon of doom for an undetermined amount of time.”

“First option. I’m tired of waiting around.”

The room was already tense when they walked in. Evidently Tony's hacking had worked. “So what is Phase Two?” he asked Fury.

Steve stepped forward and dropped the weapon on the table with a thud. “Phase Two is S.H.I.E.L.D. uses the cube to make weapons. Because why not sink to Hydra’s level?”

Tony’s jaw dropped. “Was that sarcasm Captain?”

Fury turned, his hands half raised in front of him. “Rogers we gathered everything related to the Tesseract. This does not mean—”

“I was wrong, Director,” said Steve, his voice icy. “The world hasn’t changed nearly enough. If S.H.I.E.L.D. really intendeds to follow Diana and I’s values they need to start doing a better job.”

Fury shot her a look. “You in on this too?”

“How could I not? I promised Peggy to look after all of this. I believe that also includes making sure you don’t blow everything up.”

Bruce turned to Nat, frowning at her. “Did you know about this?”

“No,” she said, glancing back towards Fury. “Though we damn well should have. And you should think about removing yourself from this situation.”

“I was in Calcutta. I was removed.”

Diana stepped between them, trying in vain to refocus everyone. “I want to know why S.H.I.E.L.D.
is using the Tesseract to make weapons of mass destruction.”

Fury pointed over to Thor. “Because of him.” Thor scowled, looking thoroughly offended.

"Thor is not going to—" she stated, trying to defend him until Fury cut her off.

“He leveled a small town—we learned that not only are we not alone, we are completely outgunned. We had to come up with—”

“A nuclear deterrent. Because that always calms everything right down,” said Tony. For once she completely agreed with his snide comments.

Steve just scoffed. “Remind me again how you made your fortune Stark?”

“Steve…” she warned. It was no use, the room broke out into more arguments, everyone at each other’s throats

“How are we a team?” asked Banner as he surveyed the angry faces around him. “We cause chaos. We’re a timebomb.”

She wanted to go somehow console him or lead him quietly outside, but then Steve and Tony decided yet again to play a game she called “men trying to assert their dominance.”

“Big man in a suit of armor,” snarled Steve, “take that off and what are you?”

“Genius billionaire playboy philanthropist.”

Diana muffled a snort while Steve remained entirely unamused.

“I knew guys with none of that worth ten of you. The only thing you fight for is yourself—you’re no hero.”

“Steve!” Judging by the bitterness in his voice this wasn’t about Tony and he shouldn’t have been taking it out on him.

“Yeah? Well you’re a laboratory experiment Rogers. Everything special about you came out of a bottle.”

“Stop. Both of you are wrong,” she said, stepping in between the two of them while trying to bite back her own anger. They finally broke apart, both looking slightly confused. Something was going on—this wasn’t normal behavior for them. For any of them.

Behind her Banner was heating up again. “You can’t kill me. I know—I tried,” he snapped at Fury.

For the first time a hush fell over the room, out of pity or unease she couldn’t tell. Everyone else move into a battle stance as he kept talking, picking up the scepter as he did so.

Finally she stepped forward and gently removed the weapon from his hand. “Let’s drop this, shall we?”

He nodded, looking unsettled, only breaking away when the ping from the computer tracking the Tesseract summoned him over. He went to go write down the coordinates as Steve and Tony started circling each other again. It was like the Whack a mole game she used to play with Elizabeth. One argument would finally cool down and then another would pop up a moment later in its place. Everything was just a frenzy of anger.
“The Tesseract belongs on Asgard,” Thor started, looming over Fury. She found herself nodding along, suddenly inexplicably angry that Fury didn’t absolutely agree and agree to it now.

The room broke out into raised voices again, Loki’s scepter glowing cheerily on the desk amidst all the chaos. In fact, it seemed to almost grow brighter, the soft pulse more obvious.

*The scepter*. That was it—how Loki was manipulating them, right under their noses. Place the scepter nearby and then he could prey on their insecurities from afar, annoy them until they tore themselves apart.

“Stop—the scepter!” she shouted, trying to project her voice over simultaneous arguments.

And then everything exploded.

Chapter End Notes

The Great Dictator is 100% worth watching, especially if you love history/satire. Also now we're halfway through avengers! the last chunk will be up in a bit and then it's on to winter soldier...
When she opened her eyes she was lying on the ground, surrounded by parts that used to be on the outside of the helicarrier. Tony and Steve ran off, presumably try to fix the damage, and Nat and Banner must have fallen to the next level because it was just she and Thor staring at each other, stunned, amidst rubble and fire. Fury began barking orders to the bridge, stumbling out of the room.

“Dr. Banner—we need to see if he—” she started. A roar from below confirmed her question.

Thor gave her a hand, the two of them sprinting down to the corridors below, following the path of destruction the Hulk had left in his wake.

They found him next to the maintenance room. He flung Nat up into a wall where she landed hard and stayed down in a half-crumpled heap. He was about to make a second pass when Thor tackled him, the two flying thorough a nearby wall.

She crouched down by Nat, checking to see if she was okay.

“Go,” she rasped. “He’ll destroy the whole ship otherwise.”

She joined Thor, both of them landing punches that did nothing to slow “the other guy” down.

“We’re not your enemies Banner,” he grunted, trying to push him back. It didn’t work, instead he lifted Thor into the air and promptly threw him through a stack of boxcar containers, leaving Diana to distract him while Thor recovered.

“Banner, it’s us!” called Diana. She forced him to chase her in circles, ducking behind various crates whenever he threw something at her head.

Thor finally got back up and threw Mjolnir, hitting Banner square in the chest. It only made him angrier.

Diana engaged him again, trying to at least slow him down. He charged her and she instinctively reached for the hammer that had landed nearby, lifting it up and then swinging it to knock the Hulk off his feet. She didn’t realize what she had done until she handed it back to Thor, who simply stared at her, his mouth opening and then closing again.

“Impressive. You—you lifted—”

Behind you!” she warned. Thor dodged and jumped up onto his back, throttling him with Mjolnir.

"I suggest we talk about this later!”

“Agreed!” he yelled before he and Banner crashed upwards onto yet another floor.
Diana followed, only to have to duck and roll as bullets starting flying, coming from another plane shooting in through the window.

It was a distraction and it worked. Banner jumped off the helicarrier and onto the other plane, thoroughly destroying it and causing the poor pilot to bail out before he went careening off too, free falling to who knew where.

“Damn it.” She muttered, surveying the damage. “I suppose I should go after him, shouldn’t I?”

With a sigh she radioed Fury. “Banner is gone. I’m planning to follow and—"

“Little busy over here!” he yelled, the sounds of gunfire audible in the background.

Then Maria Hill came on. “Yes, go after him.” She was breathing heavily, also clearly in the throw of battle. “We’ll tell you where to meet back up, try to bring him if you can.”

Diana turned towards Thor, who offered her a parachute he had found amidst the wreckage.

“Thank you.”

He nodded, almost solemn. “Mjolnir has deemed you worthy. You, of all people, will succeed.”

She gave him a small smile. “We can keep that between us if you want. No need to excite everyone." She strapped on the parachute and headed toward the gaping hole that had been blasted into the side of the helicarrier. "Oh," she turned back to face Thor, "and please make sure someone checks on Nat.”

Then, for the second time in recent memory, she jumped out of a plane.

Unfortunately, this time there wasn’t a trail of lightning she could follow. She tried to aim in the general direction he had gone, thankfully towards a more rural area. He wouldn’t destroy multiple buildings when he came crashing down.

Below her she finally spotted a section of land that looked more trampled than the rest. She glided down, landing harder than she would have liked to, muttering curses as she untangled herself from the chute.

She headed towards a few warehouses in the distance in the hopes that Banner would also try and head towards civilization when he turned back into himself.

As she got closer, she could see that the roof of one of the buildings had a giant hole in it, leaving more empty air than actual roofing. The surrounding field was destroyed, meaning either Banner had passed through or there had been a horrific lawnmower accident. Praying he was still there, she burst inside, letting out a muffled yell when Banner leapt up, half naked, from the pile of rubble he had been lying in.

“Dr. Banner!”

“Jesus you scared me,” he said, clutching his chest before sitting back down on top of some roof beams. “They sent you to for cleanup duty again, huh?”

“Actually, I volunteered.”
He shook his head. “Diana just… just leave. I’m only hurting this mission. You have better things to do than babysit.”

“Says the man who found Loki in the first place.”

“And look what I did! Jeopardized the whole damn mission because I couldn’t handle some battle?” His skin began to tinge green, his hands clenched into fists before he took a deep breath, looking slightly terrified. “Diana I could have killed you all.”

She pulled the lasso out of her jacket pocket, looping it around her hand out of habit as she walked towards Banner.

“Is that…”

“Yes. No, I don’t know the science behind it.”

He gave her a sheepish smile.

“I’m going to wrap you in it,” she continued, offering him one end.

He leaned away from her. “Wait what? No, that’s not—”

“I swear I will not ask you anything. Just… humor me.”

He stared at her and the lasso for a moment before he reluctantly wrapped it around his arm.

“Good. Now get angry.”

“What?”

“I said get angry.”

Are you insane? Why would I do that?”

“Get. Angry.” She repeated, getting up in his face. It felt wrong to goad him like this, but he needed to fully try in order for this to work.

And try he did. His face contorted as he stood up, muscles clenched, and nothing happened. He tried again, now angry that he couldn’t get angry, and still nothing.

He finally sat back down, turning towards Diana with a sort of fascinated confusion.

“The Hulk isn’t really who you are. He is just a byproduct, albeit one that’s difficult to control.”

He slowly unwound the lasso, handing it back to her with a harrumph. “It told you all that?”

“It told me the truth. That’s why you can’t change. You didn’t choose to do any of this, just like Clint didn’t chose to work for Loki.”

He finally nodded. “I guess it’s good. To have that conformation, I mean.”

“Exactly. Now let’s get out of here before the rest of the roof caves in.”

“Diana I can’t come back with you—it’s still dangerous.”

“Right now we have much bigger problems. We need all the help we can get. Besides I have the lasso—if you get a bad case of road rage along the way I’ll be perfectly fine.
“Well…I suppose the barn is structurally compromised,” he sighed.

“That’s the spirit. But before we do anything else I think you need some real clothes.”

“You should be glad someone at least gave me pants.”

They “borrowed” an old motorcycle they found under a tarp in the back corner of the warehouse and drove a few miles up the road to a general store and gas station combo. There Banner finally acquired a full outfit, as well as some snacks for the road. They were gassing up when Fury radioed.

“Coulson’s dead.”

She stepped away from the pump, putting a hand to her comm. “What? No.” Coulson was such a fixture at S.H.I.E.L.D. He was always supposed to work there. He was always supposed to be there to greet at the end of a mission.

“Dead.” Fury repeated, his voice hollow. “Loki stabbed him.”

“Nick, I’m so sorry,” Diana whispered. He had cared so deeply about his job, about the team. Had been so kind to her and Tony. To everyone, really. And Loki had killed him.

“Yeah, well. So am I.” He paused for a moment and she could faintly hear the bustle and noise in the background before he said “Agent Romanoff is recovering. She found Barton and knocked some sense back into him. Thor was forcibly ejected, and according to our data you and hopefully Banner are in the middle of nowhere New York.”

“Yes, I found him.”

“Well that’s something. I pepped up everyone’s asses back here so we aren’t imminently wiped from the face of the earth. Getting everyone back for a reunion tour so we can clean house with all these alien assholes.” his voice was harsh, with an undercurrent of anger that normally wasn’t there. Coulson had clearly made this personal.

“You think everyone is going to be okay with that? You’ve been hiding weapons and who knows what else from us for months.”

“And I regret it, I do, but let me ask you this: how did you and Rogers just waltz in there and find exactly what you were looking for?”

She was silent for a moment. “You know, I have been wondering why the country’s preeminent security organization couldn’t bother to post more security in front of the doors.”

“I’ve messed up. And I’ve had to carry out policies I don’t agree with. But I will never blindly follow orders.”

“The true Peggy Carter spirit,” said Diana, feeling marginally more reassured. “Regardless, the weapons program ends as soon as this is all sorted out. This organization needs to become something Coulson could be proud of. That Peggy could be proud of.”

“I’ll try my best. And can you promise to do something for me?”
“Maybe.”

“Wherever you meet the others, whatever the battle happens, you need to keep out of the center of things. The last thing I need is some congressional hearing or meetings with a bunch of pansy bureaucrats asking what I was doing letting an unknown superhuman without security clearance run around with our team.”

“But—”

“Save civilians. Help organize. Do not be extremely visible.”

“Yes, Director.”

Steve radioed immediately after to say they were suiting up and meeting at Stark Tower to fight off what Thor called the Chitauri. She smiled, imaging Fury’s face if she were to actually show up in her full armor and place herself directly underneath the building. While she was at it maybe she’d hold a flashing neon sign that said, “Look at this mysterious non-normal human! Definitely not something the government should be concerned about!”

She and Banner headed out, their motorcycle growing more pathetic by the mile, slowly gimping its way towards the city. They stuck to the right lane, and, by Diana’s count, were passed by no less than two hundred cars including one full of little old ladies.

By the time they pattered up to downtown New York, the battle had already started. The rest of the team was clustered together, trying to fight off the invasion, Tony flying every which way above them.

Diana stepped off, kicking the back tire with more force than was probably necessary. “Pathetic. We did better during the Great War,” she muttered.

They both surveyed the damage, Banner summing it up with a grimace. “This seems...horrible. I’m sorry,” he added, turning towards Nat.

She shook her head. “I’m glad you’re back.”

Diana gave the group a once-over, taking them in in all their uniformed glory. “Sorry, no costume for me. Fury will kill me if I’m recognized.”

“Don’t worry about it Diana,” Tony radioed. “Me and Mr. Star-Bellied Sneetch over here can do fine on our own, right Cap?”

“A what?”

Diana realized she’d neglected to mention that Dr. Seuss had moved on from political cartoons to children’s books. She really needed to take him to a library.

“Not important,” said Tony. “I’m about to bring the party to you.” As soon as the words were out of his mouth a giant Chitauri serpent monster rounded the corner, Tony leading it directly towards the group.

She stared up at it wide eyed. It was multiple blocks long and heavily armored. It looked nearly
impossible for even all of them to take out. It kept advancing, and Diana was about to start trying to call up some lightning of her own when Banner stepped out in front of the group. He gave them all a smile before seamlessly turning into the Hulk, stopping the serpent in its tracks and allowing Tony to blow the rest of it up.

“Move out,” Cap called, directing the rest of the team. “Hold them until we close the portal!”

“I’m going to move civilians out of the way—send them underground.” Diana said.

He nodded, looking relieved. “Good, it’s going to get ugly up here. I’ll get the cops to do the same.”

And with that he was off, sprinting towards one of many Chitauri.

Diana got into a rhythm of running into a building, getting the attention of the clerk or manager who was usually staring in horror at the chaos on the streets, and telling them to evacuate everyone below ground. Once that process was in motion, she made sure the staff contacted the other buildings on the block to do the same, while she moved on to the next street.

It was all working perfectly until the Chitauri started encroaching on the perimeter line they had drawn. And then buildings started collapsing. And then there were people trapped in their vehicles. And then…

She started fighting the closest group off, pretending not to notice the people pointing at her. Fury would just have to deal—she didn’t blindly follow orders either.

She deflected their shots with her bracers, engaging in what she was now calling hand-to-robotic-alien-limb combat. It worked but it was too slow, they just kept coming, and she was left regretting the fact that she hadn’t smuggled in her sword.

She could hear Peggy’s exasperated sigh in the back of her head, along with grumblings of just use objects around you, damn it. So with that Diana lassoed the biggest hunk of concrete debris she could find and then swung hard, resulting in a satisfying crunching sound where the Chitauri used to be.

She did the same for the next group, trying her best to give the civilians behind her time to get out. As she pushed them back towards where the others were, she spotted Steve, who had crouched to launch Nat upwards with his Shield onto the backs of one of the Chitauri. She couldn’t help but smile at the fact that he remembered that move.

Diana fell back again, trying to get any remaining stragglers underground before the next wave came. She bounced between subway entrances, making sure everything was as orderly as it could be under the circumstances, and redirecting people to underground parking garages or basements if a platform filled up.

She didn’t see Steve again until the sound of an explosion drew her back towards the center of the battle. She found him lying face down on top of a car, presumably after being blown out of the shattered window a story above him.

“Steve? Steve!” She let herself relax as he groaned in response, wincing as he sat up.
“I protected my legs this time.”

“And thank Zeus you did.” She helped him slide down and stand up, sending another prayer of thanks to those training sessions from long ago.

“Here I’ll come with you. They’re not letting up and I keep getting drawn in towards the conflict regardless.”

“No— the civilians.”

“Preventing the Chitauri from doing more damage does protect them. And the first responders—”

“Can’t possible do enough. Look.” He gestured behind her, where a building was beginning to crumble—she could already hear the shouts to stay back. She let out a long breath and took off, praying that they managed to kill of the alien invaders without wiping out the population in the process.

She sprinted over and grabbed onto one corner of the building, doing her best to hold it up. She needed to give all the surrounding buildings time to completely clear out. It was only a few stories high, but it would eventually come crashing down or implode. When it did, she didn’t want there to be dominoes.

“Everyone out!” Diana grunted, her entire body straining to keep it steady. She shifted the burden as people streamed past her, both to better hide her face and keep random debris from raining from the sky. She struggled to adjust her grip. Had things always been this heavy? Maybe she needed to increase her training and start picking up large objects more often. She dug in her feet, trying to gain whatever traction she could, ending up in a half-squat position.

The sounds of battle and panic were soon drowned out by voices coming in from her comm, but not from Steve or the rest of the team.

“I recognize the council has made a decision, but given it’s a stupid-ass decision I’ve elected to ignore it. We will stop those planes.” Fury’s voice said. She heard a door slam and then heavy breathing from the other end.

“Director is there something we need to know?” asked Nat, beating her to the question.

“No, I just turned on your comms for my own amusement. No shit there’s something you need to know—the council is attempting to nuke NYC.”

Diana felt the blood rush to her face and then roar through her ears, making everything else sound like it was coming from very far away.

“Did—did you say nuke New York? Nuclear weapons?”

“Two of them. One we’re stopping, one’s in route for you all to deal with.”

“No,” she whispered, staring out at the rest of the city, unable to stop herself from imaging what it would look like. The dust—the death. Herself as the lone survivor. Damn them. Damn them all. “I will not see another city destroyed.” She growled, startling a woman moving past her.

“Cap, I think I’m able to close the portal,” Nat radioed

“No, wait. I got a lock on the bomb,” said Tony. “New plan, I’ll grab it and fly it through the portal.”
Diana almost dropped the building.

“Stark…that’s a one-way trip,” said Steve, his voice grave.

“Tony, don’t. Let me do this, I can do this—I can survive it. I’ll fly up there,” Diana groaned, desperate to be out from under the building and with the rest of the team.

“Diana it’s already right here. I have to.”

“Tony—" her voice broke, the building shifting on top of her.

It took three tries for a bystander to get her attention, an old man wearing aviator sunglasses with a silver mustache who tapped her shoulder and said, “They’re saying everyone’s out.”

“Thank you,” she grunted, slowly sliding out from underneath before letting go, trying to aim it away from the street with whatever strength she had left.

She ignored the crowd that gathered around her, full of questions and praise, and instead ran directly towards the portal, hoping to meet up with the others in the process.

As she grew closer the destruction grew much worse. This… this looked like a war zone. She had done her best to minimize the damage but even so every other building she passed seem to be crumbling.

Something streaked overhead, and looking up she could see Tony, carrying the bomb just as he described. He pulled it up the side of his building and through the portal, both vanishing.

She found Steve and Thor a block over, they too staring up at the sky where he had just disappeared. Diana joined them, all waiting for him to come flying back through. The city was safe, thank the gods. But Tony certainly was not. She closed her eyes, hoping that when she opened them he would be there, cracking jokes about the insanity of this entire situation. “Come on Tony, you self-sacrificing idiot,” she whispered. “Come on. We need you back down here.”

Around them the Chitauri collapsed, no longer trying to kill them. Diana couldn’t muster the focus to be excited—he wasn’t coming back through. He wasn’t reappearing and for the first time in a long time she had no idea what to do. She stood there, rooted to the spot, in the vain hope that if she concentrated harder, she could will him back to Earth.

Steve glanced over at her, silently asking for her forgiveness before he finally said, “Natasha, close the portal.”

It began to shrink above them, everything surrounding it sucked back inside. Right as it was about to disappear entirely, Tony fell back through, streaming towards the ground as the portal vanished above him.

“That son of a bitch,” Steve said, his mouth tugging up in a smile

She smiled back, almost giddy, until she realized that he wasn’t slowing down. Either his suit wasn’t working, or he wasn’t able to work the suit.

Hulk grabbed him before she or Thor could catch him, depositing him unceremoniously at their feet. Thor ripped off Tony’s mask, only to find him completely unresponsive. Steve checked for a pulse, made harder by the layers of armor in the way, while she tried to remember the CPR training she had done years ago with Peggy’s grandkids.
It's okay to break some ribs the instructor had said. If that’s what it took, she would do it, though she would have to break through much more than just ribs.

Her compressions were less compressions and more controlled pounding, whether to restart his heart or just scare him awake she didn’t particularly care. She hit him again, a clang vibrating throughout his battered suit. “Wake… up… Tony… you… idiot!” she yelled, each word punctuated by more pounding.

With the last hit Tony gasped, his eyes flying open.

“Oh, thank Zeus,” she breathed collapsing backwards.

“Where am I? What happened? Why is the front of my suit all crushed?”

“You flew a nuclear bomb into a space portal and we will be discussing it later.”

“We won,” Steve elaborated.

“Right then.” He let out a long groan. “Let’s not go into work tomorrow. Let’s rest. You know what would be good right now? Food. There’s a shawarma place a few blocks away.”

“Loki first,” Thor interrupted.

“He’s right, there’s still business to be done. But then shawarma sounds delicious.”

They found Loki still lying in the remnants of Stark tower, surrounded by shattered glass and bits of what used to be the bar.

As soon as he saw he was surrounded he raised his hands, allowing Thor to cuff him. “Are you happy now, brother? Is this what you wanted?” Loki started to answer, but Thor held up a finger cutting him off. “Oh, wait a moment, I forgot this.” He clipped on a metal gag, preventing whatever comment he might have made.

Tony snorted staring down at him. “Speaking privileges revoked?” He walked off to go call Pepper, yelling “Diana if she yells at me I’m handing it over to you!” over his shoulder.

She sighed, turning back to the rest of the group.

“And the Tesseract?” asked Thor.

“Fury will approve whatever Steve and I suggest. I think we both agree with what you said on the helicarrier—it belongs on Asgard.” It had caused too much death on Earth already. They had found it and kept it the first time by accident. Intentionally keeping it a second time would be suicide.

Besides her, Steve nodded. “She’s right. If I never see that cube again it will be too soon.”

Thor smiled at the two of them. “I appreciate your support. But will your council not take issue with this course of action?”

“Who gives a flying fuck about the council? They tried to nuke us.”

“You make a good point, Captain. I assure you, I will keep it safe. And keep my brother out of
trouble,” he added, with a glare at Loki. "And on behalf of Asgard I apologize for the damage inflicted on your city. And your friends.” He looked out through the tower’s shattered windows out at the skyline, a haze of smoke blanketing everything. “I will come back,” he declared. “When things have calmed down.”

Diana nodded. "You will be more than welcome. I am sorry too, I get the sense you two must have been close once."

Thor heaved a sigh. “Oh yes, it seems like just yesterday he was finding new ways to trick me. Or kill me. We had so much fun growing up.”

It took a few more minutes to get Loki situated and contained for the night as well as make sure his Tesseract powered contraption was safely dismantled. They could deal with all the rest once they had slept and eaten. Tony re-emerged as they were getting ready to leave, the entire group braving the outdoors for a few blocks in search of shawarma.

“How did it go?” asked Diana, the two of them falling behind the rest of the group.

“Well,” Tony started, “she said she loves me, she’s proud of me, and she’s so mad she can’t handle talking to me at the moment.”

Diana grinned. “Reasonable woman. I however, have no qualms about discussing things now.”

Tony sighed. “Shoot.”

“You almost died.”

“Yeah well...that’s the business we’re in. Near death experiences are kind of my specialty.”

“Normally people who have near death experiences aren’t so glib about it.”

“Diana, I’m not a god like Thor, I’m not a war hero like Rogers, but I thought…I don’t know…that I still had a chance to change things. Save some lives, make people proud, the whole hero schtick. And if I was going to die anyway might as well make a dramatic exit.”

Diana threw up her hands, refraining from both hugging him and slapping some sense into him. “Tony, you don’t have to be like—you know what, never mind,” she said. Even if he was receptive, it wouldn’t change the events of the past few hours. “Thank you for saving the city and also managing to not blow yourself up in the process. Please do not do it again”

“Of course not. Next time I’ll just try taking tour groups up there.”

The shawarma was the most delicious thing she had ever eaten. Or maybe she was just starving. The owners were kind enough to make them some food in between cleaning up the restaurant that had thankfully sustained only minimal damage in comparison to the rest of the city.

As soon as the food came they all dug in, everyone slumped over their plates, silent. She had never wanted to simultaneously eat everything in sight and also take a three-day nap as much as she did
right then.

After they were each through a few platters, Steve raised his head from where it was buried in his hand and said, “We need a toast.”

They all raised their plastic Pepsi glasses as Steve continued. “First to Coulson, who should be here to celebrate. And then to us, for becoming a damn fine team when we needed to be.”

They all clinked glasses, Thor downing his drink all at once like it was a shot.

Diana went back to eating, she and the group mustering just enough energy to have a casual debriefing session in between bites.

“We should have a better plan in place with law enforcement going forward,” Natasha said.

“I agree. And we should ensure civilians know what to do too.” The tinkle of chimes above the door interrupted her. Diana looked up, startled to find Fury standing there.

“Glad to see you all are stuffing your faces as I suspected.” He waved to the owner of the restaurant and called “I’ll take the check for them.”

Tony eyed him, unimpressed. “It’s fine, I got it.”

“Consider it a gift for, I don’t know, saving humanity?” Turning to Diana he added. “Do you mind if we have a word, Ms. Prince?”

In true supportive friend fashion, Tony whispered “Oooooooh someone’s in trouble,” under his breath.

She gave him a category five eyeroll and followed Fury into the employees only break room in the back.

“Are we allowed back here?”

“We are now.” Seeing her dubious look, he sighed and added, “I’ll give them a huge tip.”

He gestured for her to sit down in one of the folding chairs crammed right up against a fridge and coffee cart. “So. Did you not hear the part about staying out of sight?”

“I thought we didn’t just blindly follow orders here at S.H.I.E.L.D?”

“Yeah yeah yeah, woulda been a hell of a lot easier if you had, though.” He paused, giving her a slight smile. “Do you know how many civilians you saved?”

She shrugged, leaning back in her chair. “A few buildings worth at least.”

“By our estimates a few thousand.”

“What?”

“The early warnings to get underground—they’re calling you a modern-day Paul Revere. It’s all over the news.” He handed over a tablet, loaded with clips of interviews from various news stations. No one seemed to know it was her, thank Zeus, it was all merely passing references and vague descriptions. “I don’t know who the hell she was, but I want to thank her,” one man said, or, “I don’t think she’s an Avenger, but she’s a hero.”
Her lips pressed into a small smile. “That’s sweet.” She couldn’t decide whether to be flattered or terrified. She had partially exposed herself because it was her only option, but she was beginning to realize that having her cover ripped out from under her instantly would jeopardize everything—the Louvre, her contacts, her work. She needed to do it slowly, carefully and most certainly not at this moment.

“Don’t worry, we’re destroying all the photos we find. Most are just shaky images from private individuals. He tapped something on the screen and turned it back to show her. “Here’s what we have so far. Thank God that during most of the main battle you weren’t in the very center or you’d already be plastered over the New York Times. I’m not saying they aren’t other photos out there, but they’d be a pain in the ass to find.

“Thank you, Nick.”

He nodded and let out a sigh “But we can’t do this again. S.H.I.E.L.D. isn’t supposed to do damage control for someone who isn’t in the agency.”

“And they’re not happy it looks like I’m affiliated with the team,” she added.

“That too.”

She took a deep breath. “Rest assured, it won’t be happening again.”

His eyes narrowed as he picked up on her finality. “Are you saying—”

“You know I have to remove myself Nick. I’m surprised I lasted this long.”

“Completely?”

She starred across at Fury, deeply unhappy at the way this had all turned out. The lines between friend and spy, assistance and obligation had bled together, and this was the result.

“I will help the Avengers if one of them asks for my help. And if you or Sharron bring something urgent to my attention, I will do my best to look into it. But… it appears I will have find a way to watch over S.H.I.E.L.D. without taking as much of an active role in S.H.I.E.L.D.”

Between weapons building, nuclear arms, and flat out lies, stepping away was actually letting them off easy. She could have done some extreme yelling and storming about and felt totally justified, but they wouldn’t care. It would be just one more reason to force her even father away.

“It’s time to stop pushing. You’ve been so helpful by turning a blind-eye, but we both know they’ll only get more strict after this.”

“They will. I suppose I can’t really blame you. Would it make you feel less cast aside if I gave you a small mission now?”

She raised an eyebrow. "What else could have possibly gone on during an alien invasion?"

“Don’t be so dubious. It’s not technically urgent, just a psych eval on someone we’ve been keeping tabs on, but it’s under my orders, not some directive from higher ups. I think it’s important and I think you’ll get us the most answers.”

“All right then.”

He stood and stretched. “Great. I’ll make sure someone sends along the information.”
“Of course. Do you want to stay? We have plenty of shawarma to share.”

“Thanks, but I have a meeting with the council tomorrow I need to prepare for. And I have a feeling I’m not the most popular director right now.”

“No, but I think you’re at least more popular than the council.”

He barked out a laugh. “That’s a low, low bar, but I do my best.”

“You did. I appreciate you giving us the space to figure things out, for standing up for what this organization is supposed to be.”

“It’s supposed to be better.”

“But I have no doubt, without you it would much worse.”

“You flatter me. Before I go—did you and Rogers decide how you want to handle the Tesseract?”

“Thor’s taking it back to Asgard.” Seeing his expression, she pressed on. “I know that won’t be popular, but it can’t stay here.”

“No, it can’t. The council will just have to deal. I’ll just tell them that I wasn’t about to argue with two gods and a super soldier.”

Bright and early the next morning, the team met again to give Thor and Loki a send-off.

They circled around the two of them, watching as Loki glowered from behind his gag while Thor completely ignored him, instead making sure the Tesseract was ready for travel.

Out of the corner of her eye she could see Nat signing to Clint—something about Loki being muzzled—that made Clint smirk.

Once Thor and Loki both grabbed hold of the cylinder holding the Tesseract a blinding blue light appeared, the two of them dissolving into it.

With the show over they all headed back, Diana taking Steve back to her place until he had somewhere of his own to stay.

“You need to start looking for an apartment.”

“Or I could just—what’s the term? Surf?”

“Couch surf. I don’t think you’d like that very much.”

“No. I’ll start looking for something. Gotta use all that pension backpay somehow.”

“I bet the military is thrilled about that,” she laughed.

Steve just shrugged. “And at some point I think I want to go back and see Bucky and I’s old apartment. See what’s there now.”

“You should ask Peggy about it. She tracked it down after you two…when you didn’t come back.
If you had left any friends or relatives in that building she was going to help them move somewhere better.”

He blushed looking down at his feet. “Really? She offered to do that?”

Diana smiled. “Yes. Unfortunately I think it was built over. Most everything in that area was torn down in the 50s.”

“I’ll ask. I’ll call when we get back to your place.”

Diana nodded, the two of them walking over to his motorcycle, this one thankfully much nicer than the one she and Banner had ridden in on.

As they got closer, a woman stood up from the bench she was sitting on and walked to meet them. She put down her hood, and Diana found herself looking at Maria Hill

She nodded at the two of them. “Fury’s occupied, he sent me here instead.”

Steve frowned. “To watch us?”

“To watch Loki, actually. And give you this,” she said handing over a manila folder marked “confidential” To Diana. “Should be a simple evaluation, you can do it at your convince.”

“Thank you.” She stared down at the file and the label in bold letters that read 'Clark Kent.'

Chapter End Notes

And thus ends the Avengers bit! I know this section was long and followed the actual movie pretty closely, but I had to get the team established before I could start weaving in DC stuff.

For those of you who haven't seen Dr. Seuss' WWII political cartoons you should because they're great
the title is taken from the children's show Wonder Pets. Yes I am serious.
Smallville was, in fact, rather small. Quaint, might be a better term, with a close-knit Midwestern charm oh so different from that of Paris. Diana drove slowly through town, trying to get some sense of how Clark Kent lived.

She had agreed to meet him at one of the coffee shops on main street for an interview he planned to write for the *Smallville Sentential*. Thankfully the lower bar for what constituted as news had worked in her favor. She just had to call the person in charge of the town’s local art installation and explain that the Louvre was researching modern art from the Americas for word to make it back to the paper and the young upstart reporter to reach out to her.

Then Diana had poured over the file Agent Hill had handed her, what S.H.I.E.L.D suspected were his enhanced abilities, his mysterious origins, his adoptive parents. Yet for this conversation none of that could matter. She couldn’t afford to think about the fact that he was likely an alien or insanely strong. They were simply going to have a nice chat over coffee, during which he would interview her about art and the Louvre and she would ensure he didn’t want to destroy humanity while never revealing why she was truly there.

This was the point where she began mentally cursing Fury. Why on Earth would he send her to evaluate him, what with her distaste for lies, a horrible poker face, and a habit of being too trusting? Maybe he thought S.H.I.E.L.D. agents would be too impersonal, or, gods forbid, he sent in Tony who would sarcasm the poor man to death. More likely, and for her more intriguing, was that Fury wanted to keep this off S.H.I.E.L.D.’s radar entirely, recruiting or keeping tabs on him without having to worry about regulations and current policy.

She let out a breath as she crossed the street and headed towards the address he had given her. She paused before the shop’s entrance squaring her shoulders and adjusting her hair before stepping inside. She could do this. She was Diana Prince, a curator from the Louvre and *fascinated* with the art she had seen around Kansas.

The chimes above the door tinkled as she stepped inside. Scanning the room, she spotted him right away—he looked exactly as he appeared in the photos above his stories, with thick black rimmed glasses and his dark hair swept back. He must have recognized her too because he practically jumped up, coming over to shake her hand.

“Ms. Prince, it’s such an honor. Thanks for agreeing to speak with me.”

“You course, and please call me Diana.” she said, all the while keeping a running checklist in her head. *Polite:* check. *Friendly:* check. Then again, she tried to remind herself, it could all be an act.

They exchanged some more pleasantries as they ordered and got situated at a table with a view out
at main street. As they sat down Diana could feel eyes on her, and when she looked over her shoulder, she could see other patrons sneaking glances at the two of them.

“Don’t worry about them,” Clark said, also cluing in to the stares. “You’re just from out of town and thus new and exciting.”

“All right then. Slow gossip week?”

He laughed “That’s pretty much every week. Honestly they should be thanking you for giving them something to talk about later.” He dug around in his bag for a notepad and pen, as well as a handheld tape recorder.

“Do you mind if I record this? I don’t want to mishear or misquote anything.”

“Of course,” she said, trying to keep her expression blank. S.H.I.E.L.D—affiliated Diana knew he may have super hearing, but Louvre Diana sure didn’t.

“Great, then we can get started.”

From there the questions came fast. When he asked, “Why did you decide on a career in the art field?” she spouted something idealistic about learning about the Monuments Men in school and wanting to carry on their legacy. When he asked what the Louvre was like, she gave him a synopsis of the day to day craziness that often kept her past the museum’s close, omitting the craziness that existed outside the sphere of her official job.

They fell into a natural rhythm, and within a few questions Diana could feel herself relax, taking more time with her answers and throwing in some jokes. Clark seemed receptive, jotting down notes every so often while he listened before asking her to elaborate on her stories.

Their conversation devolved into less structured banter while they both waited for second rounds of hot drinks. Diana decided to share stories of entitled patrons that usually got a laugh and seemed relatively safe to discuss.

“This man comes barging into my office, trailed by my secretary who was trying to talk him down, demanding a private tour because, and I quote, ‘there were too many tourists for him to properly become one with the art.’”

Clark’s jaw dropped. “Seriously?”

“Unfortunately yes. We had to call security. He tried to get in my face and kept making all these demands. And then on his way out he had the audacity to ask for a refund.”

He groaned. “That’s bad. I’ve had some doozies, but none that entitled. I guess we do get a lot of very opinionated letters to the editor. And let me tell you, when the old ladies from the Rotary Club start making passive aggressive comments in the editorials, everything goes to heck.”

“Ohhh I bet it does, that seems —”

One of the baristas cut her off by calling Clark’s name, and he returned a minute later with another coffee for him and tea for her.

He smiled, nodding towards her drink, “Not a big caffeine gal?”

She pulled a face. “Not really, and tea is just so much nicer,” she said, ignoring the fact that caffeine had zero effect on either of them.
“Fair enough.” He took a long sip and then looked down at his notes. “Can I ask specifically about
the current project that brought you here?”

“Sure,” she said, her face lighting up. “I’m leading an effort to try and bring art to new a generation
of people worldwide. I want the Louvre to use its funding and name to help preserve and educate
about more modern art, in addition to what it already does. And I want us to try and interact with
art in new places, as well as art made by more minorities and women.”

He let out a long whistle. “That a lot.”

“Oh it is. There’s so much we could do from exhibitions to new satellite museums to improving
how we work with home countries on controversial acquisitions. But for now we’re starting small.
I’m trying to look at a variety of current art across North America to get a sense of what is out there
and how we can best support it. And that’s why I’m here.”

The more she talked about it the more excited she became. The ideas really were being considered
by the rest of her team in addition to serving as a convenient excuse, though nothing involved
touring the U.S. just yet, and especially not Kansas.

“For the art installation at the community center?”

“Yes, it’s so interesting. It’s just the kind of thing we need to represent more.” The paintings had
been a pleasant surprise, having known little about them other than that they were art pieces where
Clark Kent was located. But they were beautifully done, with a series of five paintings portraying
the life of a farmer’s wife in neon colors rather than the traditional subdued Norman Rockwell
tones.

“I went to see it last week. I don’t get art the way you do,” he said with an apologetic shrug, “but it
reminds me a lot of my Ma and all the hard work she’s done.”

Diana smiled “Me too. I love the sharp contrasts in colors, the… chaos almost of the subjects’ lives
and yet they’re there, pressing on. It’s such a unique way of looking at it.”

“You lost me a little there,” he said with a laugh, “but I think I agree. Did you show it to her? Your
mom I mean?”

“Oh she…passed away a few years ago along with my dad. I am planning on showing it to some
coworkers and friends though, I think they’ll like it.” She had taken a ton of pictures specifically
for Steve and would text them to him later. He was starting to catch up on all the art he had missed
in the last 70 years and while he didn’t really get modern art, knowing him he would find it at least
fun to look at. She couldn’t wait till he got to Jackson Pollok

“I’m so sorry, Diana” Clark said, sounding truly upset. “I lost my dad and I know how hard that is.
I hope I didn’t—”

“You’re fine,” she assured him. She added considerate and empathetic to her mental checklist,
especially the empathy part, which in her experience was key to the whole not-destroying-the-
world bit.

He nodded before shooting her a curious look, tapping his pen on the table. “Can I ask you
something else? Not for the interview, I think I have all I need for that. But why are you really in
Smallville? You could have had someone send you photos. Or send an assistant to spare you from
coming all the way over here. Or gone to an actual city.”

*Perceptive: check.* In this case too perceptive, which she should have been more prepared for.
Now it seemed like she was the one being assessed.

She shrugged. “I just like going in person to things to really get a feel for the art. And I have friends here in the U.S that I always visit when I’m here on business trips so I’m semi-multitasking. As for Kansas, I felt like it would be a good escape. Quieter, I suppose.”

“And what are you escaping from?”

Hera help her. She took a sip of her drink, debating how to respond. She smiled, getting ready to play it off before taking one good look at his face and realizing that maybe for the first time all afternoon the answer required her honesty, about her feelings if not the exact details.

“Ugh I sound so dramatic, don’t I? Well in part there’s the usual work stress—I love what I do but it can be frustrating and time consuming. And then I suppose there’s also been a lot of upheaval—I reconnected with a dear friend which has been one of the best things in my life, but also a lot to take in. And then there’s been some tension with my bosses, just things that have all added up.”

She took a deep breath, trying to not get nervous about the fact that she had just unloaded personal baggage onto a man she barely knew. “I’m sorry if that was too much information. I essentially just wanted a quick break, and Kansas seemed pretty far away from everything.”

“That it definitely is,” he nodded.

“I know you’re interviewing me, but can I ask you the same thing? Why try to build your career in Smallville?”

He thought for a moment, fiddling with his pen some more. “I like journalism because you try to find the truth, bring people to justice, that sort of thing. And Smallville needs that just as much as other places, so why not stay here for a bit while I work my way up? It’s where I grew up, so I feel responsible for making sure everything here is okay—look out for my community, you know?

She smiled. “Sounds like something one of the Avengers would say. The truth and justice bit, I mean.” As soon as she finished speaking, she bit down on her tongue, panicking. Directly referencing the team she interacted with was not something she was supposed to do.

Thankfully, Clark just snorted. “Maybe, though I don’t think they’re hiring. And what would my name be? Free Press Man?”

Diana laughed. “Caffeine Crusader? The Caped Corn?”

He killed his coffee. “Ooooh good one. You can keep working on it. But I like where I am now, the service I try to do within Smallville. It just seems…right. My parents actually adopted me and I feel like I need to repay that kindness, do good like they taught me.”

Diana stared across the table at him, wishing she could pull out her lasso or armor and wave it in front of his face and yell. “Look, you’re just like me, let’s be friends!” If Steve’s return was a gift because of their shared past, Clark Kent held the promise that there were other people like them out there, and in this case so similar that it ached. She might as well go back to Fury and say there was another her. He would just love that. She knew she was taking Clark on his word, trusting him and his motives. But she had a hunch her judgement was right.

Maybe that was Fury’s plan all along. To show her what else existed outside of S.H.I.E.L.D. She had vaguely known other people like she and the Avengers existed, Fury himself had talked about his work with Carol Danvers from the time when he was still up-and-coming, but now it was clearer just how many of them there might be and how much more good they could do.
“I can relate,” said Diana. “That’s how my mother raised me too. High expectations and lectures about good morals.”

Clark snorted “Exactly.” He stuffed his pen and note pad back into his bag, making Diana feel a stab of loss. They likely wouldn’t speak again, maybe a courtesy email in a few days when the story came out, but unless both their covers were blown there would be no more long conversations or any way to start a friendship.

“The story will run in the Sunday edition, I’m angling for the front page, though I need to sweet talk my boss who for some reason wants to discuss the closure of a local grocery store. I mean c’mon, it’s not every day someone from the Louvre is here,” he said, rolling his eyes.

She smiled. “Do send me the article when it’s out, I can’t wait to read it. And it’s been so great speaking with you.”

He opened as mouth, and then hesitated, staring at her awkwardly “I don’t know what your plans are tonight, but… do you want to come over for a home cooked meal?”

She raised an eyebrow. She should have been weary. Was he trying to kidnap her? Attack her? Was it out of pity? Or, Zeus forbid, a date? The spy in her told her to take the information and run back to her car, but the kindness in his eyes told her he was simply trying to be nice and hospitable to someone from out of town, and so she shrugged and said, “Sure, thank you for offering. We have to give the town more to gossip about, don’t we?”

Clark let out a sigh. “I don’t think we really have a choice.”

She followed his truck in her rental car, driving past a few miles of fields and eventually coming to a bumpy gravel road that led to a well-kept farmhouse with a wrap porch.

His mother came out to greet them, seemingly unfazed by the arrival of a guest.

“Ma, this is Diana Prince,” Clark said, introducing her. “She’s who I just interviewed, she works at the Louvre.”

Her eyes widened. “The Louvre, my goodness that’s wonderful! Please, come in, dinner’s almost ready. It’s nothing fancy, but—”

“I’m sure it will be delicious,” said Diana, giving her a wide smile.

“Wonderful. Clark, why didn’t you tell me you were interviewing someone from the Louvre?”

Diana stifled a laugh. It had been a long time since people were this interested in her work. Even Steve had already started to normalize it.

As she finished setting the table Ms. Kent beginning to pepper her with questions about her work and Paris just as Clark had

“Is this where you get it from?” she asked as they sat down. “The insatiable curiosity?”

Mrs. Kent came out of the kitchen and set down the food on the table. “You should have seen him as a kid always asking why, why why. And unlike most kids he never quit, you should have been
here for middle school when instead of “why is the sky blue” it was things like ‘Why is there income inequality?’”

“Ma, really?” he groaned.

It only got better, or from Clark’s perspective worse, from there. In between bites of food his mom inserted tales of childhood antics in the way that all parents do.

“If you keep at it I’m going to have to tell Diana the story of the time you and pa thought you were being chased through the field and it turned out to be a loose cow.”

Diana almost choked on her drink.

“Fine,” Mrs. Kent said with a dramatic sigh. “Then I’ll have to pester Diana some more.”

Paris’ tourist destinations and her Louvre stories got them through desert, with Mrs. Kent eventually bringing in a pie that they immediately bombed out. Too soon after it was time for her to leave, Ms. Kent enveloping her in a hug, releasing her only with the promise that she would come back and visit if she was ever in the area.

Clark walked her outside to her car, handing her a business card for the newspaper and his phone extension if she had any questions.

She drove away smiling, watching in the rear view mirror as Clark waved a hand in farewell. She had done it, and without messing it up too terribly. He clearly knew that something in her story didn’t add up, but she couldn’t make herself feel that concerned about it. He and his mother had been so been so warm and welcoming in a way that you couldn’t fake. He definitely had secrets, she did to, but she didn’t see any way in which his powers or the conviction in his goals could be anything other than a net positive. Clark Kent had the power to do some good, that’s what she would report back to Fury.

The only question was how soon they would see him in action.

Chapter End Notes

I did promise that I would tie in more of the DC universe...

Hope you all are having a great 2019 so far!
March 2014

Every time her computer pinged with a new email, Diana wanted to chuck the whole thing out the window. Then again, it could be worse. The emails were just the byproduct of the Louvre finally implementing some of her ideas, and she would gladly experience death by email if it meant better preserving art.

The current correspondence was a result of yet another visit to the Smithsonian art museum as part of her D.C. work trip. It would have been nice to have more time to properly enjoy all of it, yet she would take what she could get. From here on out her schedule would likely only get crazier as she bounced back and forth between D.C. and Paris, not to mention museums in other places. Maybe she would actually have a chance to visit Smallville again, though she doubted Clark would be there if she did, likely still laying low after the destruction in Metropolis.

Fury wouldn’t like her visiting regardless, especially since he didn’t want it to appear like he and S.H.I.E.L.D. had any connections. That wasn’t fair to Clark, and she had made such opinions abundantly clear to Fury. She stood by her assessment—he had been trying to do good, acting no different than the Avengers when they destroyed a chunk of New York to repel the chitauri.

She glanced up from her inbox to the framed picture that she had hung by her desk for motivation. Clark had gifted her a print of one of the paintings from Smallville’s exhibition as a thank you, the neon colors popping off her wall. All the more proof in her mind that Superman, as he was now called, tended towards the good.

Her cellphone vibrated on her desk, interrupting her thoughts, and she answered the call to find Steve on the other end of the line.

“Are you busy right now?”

“Just with emails, but I will take any excuse to procrastinate. Please save me.”

He didn’t even muster a chuckle, his voice serious. “Okay. I’ll be at your place in a few minutes.”

As soon as he hung up she took in a deep breath and shut down her computer before going to ready some tea, trying to guess what could possibly make him so miserable. A mission gone bad? More conflict with Fury?

When she heard his motorcycle pull up, she poured their tea and then went to open the door just as he rang the bell.

“Why hello. Don’t tell my boss, but I logged out of my work email.”

“Good for you. Thanks for letting me barge in here unexpectedly.”
“Oh shush, you’re fine,” she said, waving her hand. “Come in, I preemptively made you some tea. You sounded like you may need it.”

He took one look at her and the outstretched mug in her hands and began to tear up

“Dear Zeus. Steve, what’s wrong?” She asked softly as she led him to her sofa and placed the mug in his hands before sitting down herself.

He swiped his sleeve across his eyes. “A lot. God Peg was right, I’m being too dramatic.”

“No you’re not you’ve had a rough day. I assumed it was issues at work but was it Peggy instead?”

“All of the above? What if I’m just having—what do people call it now? A midlife crisis?”

“Well you’re nowhere near middle age, but sure. Start at the beginning—what in Hades happened?”

He took a long sip of his tea before he replied “I don’t think I can work with Fury anymore. Or maybe even S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Because….? Is this still about the cover up of the Tesseract weapons?”

“No, if it was just that I might be able to deal—you seem to have. No, have you heard of Project Insight?”

“Classified I presume? Fury has some issues with trusting others.”

Steve snorted. “He made that abundantly clear today. I guess now I’m a whistle blower.”

Oh wonderful. We’re at whistle blowing level of seriousness.” She rubbed her temples, beginning to wish she could go back to Louvre bureaucracy. “What now?”

“They have massive helicarriers that Tony helped design—they run off his energy thing—and have a shit ton of guns rigged to the bottom that can kill thousands at a time ‘so we can neutralize threats before they happen.’ It’s horrific.”

Her face fell. One more thing. One more way S.H.I.E.L.D. had strayed from their principles.

“And he expected you to what? Support that?” she asked throwing up her hands, nearly spilling her tea in the process.

“He pretty much told me to get with the program, but—”

“You’re not going to. And I’m not going to.”

“Exactly. So where does that leave us?”

Diana stared back at him, his shoulders hunched in defeat. Two years back and the world had already let him down entirely too much.

“We figure out why he’s doing this,” she said firmly, “and go from there. Make a big to do about it.”

He shook his head, his lips pressed into a thin frown. “Maybe. But that doesn’t change the fact that they created it in the first place.”
“No,” she said softly. “It doesn’t. Is this why you went to go see Peg?” she asked, finally putting the pieces together.

He nodded. “Well first I went to see my own exhibit at the Air and Space Museum…” he said, struggling to keep his voice neutral.

“Oh Steve. You should have called—you didn’t need to go through that all alone.” she said, feeling the sinking feeling in her chest that was always brought on by talking about the past.

“I wanted to. I needed a reminder of why I started doing this at all.”

She tried to imagine him taking in his own exhibit, hidden among the other museum patrons. The news reels, the old uniforms, the plaques, all there to sell a story that couldn’t possibly capture the full humanity and complications of its characters. The exhibit was lovely, but a shell of what everything had once been.

“Did it work?”

“I… don’t know yet. There was a video though, an old one of Peggy. Must have been from the 50s.”

“I had forgotten about that!” she said, face breaking into a smile. “1953 I think, soon after Michael was born.” She closed her eyes, trying to think back. “I had to talk her into it. Everything was still so fresh and she was incredibly busy.”

“She just…she looked so sad.” He hesitated a moment, fiddling with his mug before he added, “And then when I went to visit—her memory is worse. She forgot that I came back. It was like she hadn’t seen me before,” he said, his voice breaking.

Diana stood to get them both more tea, giving him a moment to collect himself before she sat back down next to him.

He didn’t try to hide the emotion in his voice as he finished, “Every time she sees me now she’s only going to remember the pain I caused her—how long I was gone.”

“That’s not true,” she whispered. “She also remembers you. Called you dramatic, didn’t she?”

He let out a huff that turned into an almost-laugh. “Yeah. I was there for…career advice I guess. She told me that we need to start over.”

“She’s right, Steve.”

“I know, but…I wish she could be there with us when we do. I wish I wasn’t a reminder of something horrible.”

Diana scoffed. “Horrible? You know full well that she and Howard modeled S.H.I.E.L.D. partly off of us. You served as a reminder of what could be.”

He just shrugged, leaving the two of them to sip their tea in silence, though for her it was anything but peaceful, preoccupied how she was possibly going to fix all this. How was she going to get Fury to see reason, make sure Steve and Peggy were okay, and make sure S.H.I.E.L.D. functioned properly? Steve had never fully adjusted, nor had he been given options to do so. He’d just suited right back up as if nothing had changed when in reality everything had changed. A twentieth century soldier forced to fight in twenty-first century war.
She looked over at him and repeated, “She was right, you can start over. You don’t have any obligation to do any of this. You can tour the world or draw or, I don’t know, teach cross-fit classes.”

His brow furrowed. “How can I just walk away?”

“You don’t have to if you really don’t want to. And you don’t have to decide yet—take some time and figure it out. We can try to fix S.H.I.E.L.D. or at some point you can start sending out resumes.”

“Yeah I need to make one first, though something tells me my boss from 1942 isn’t around to give a reference,” he deadpanned.

She let out a cackle, slapping a hand over her mouth. “Sorry I just….” she shook her head, pretending not to notice Steve’s own smile. “If you actually do want to make a resume I’m sure you could find someone to help.”

“For now I just want to focus on stopping Insight.”

“We will. I’ll set up a meeting with Fury and do some yelling. We should try to get Natasha on board too.” She stood and raised her hands up to stretch, heading back towards the kitchen. “Can I get you anything? More drinks? Or I can reheat some leftovers?”

“No, you’ve done more than enough already, but thank you. I should probably be going and let you get back to work.”

“Oh please, you’re fine,” she said as she refilled her mug. “You’re welcome to come by whenever I’m in town. Although,” she added, turning back towards him “I still think it might be good talk to someone at the VA, even if it’s just to discuss other career paths or hang out with some vets.”

“Actually, I met a VA counselor while out for a run recently—Sam Wilson, he seems like a good guy. I think I might drop by.”

“That’s great, you two could be running partners.”

He smiled. “Well…something tells me that wouldn’t work out.”

The next night Steve called again. She was hoping for some sort of late-night epiphany about his goals or maybe even that Fury was halting the program.

It was neither. Someone had shot Fury.

Steve didn’t offer details over the phone and she didn’t ask, instead rushing to the ER and joining he, Nat, and Agent Hill in a room that looked into the operating theater, all of them staring out at Fury lying on the table. Steve explained what happened, offering few details even then because there were simply few details to be had. The shooter had a metal arm, an untraceable weapon, and had somehow escaped.

Out of the corner of her eye Diana saw the door open, doing a double take as she realized it was Sharon poking her head in rather than one of the nurses. Upon making eye contact with Diana she froze and tried to back out.
“Wait—Sharon!”

She slowly walked in, Diana embracing her. “I didn’t know you were part of this mess too, are you okay?”

Sharon nodded, looking over to where Steve was staring at them, brow furrowed in confusion.

“Just wanted to see how he was doing, but I didn’t mean to intrude. I should go. Let me know if anything changes.” She hugged Diana one more time and then hurried out.

She glanced over at Steve, raising an eyebrow at his reaction. “What was that about?”

“She was undercover, assigned to protect me by Fury,” he mumbled, turning back to look at the operation.

“Ah.” She leaned over to whisper, “In bigger news, that’s Sharon as in Sharon Carter. Sorry, I guess I should have introduced the two of you earlier.”

He froze, his mouth half opened with unasked questions before he shook his head with a frown. “We can talk later.”

She nodded, turning back to the surgeons’ delicate dance. It was almost dizzying, with the bright lights and flurry of movement that never really ended. Just as she was beginning to think everything would be fine the movement increased. The machines started beeping louder, the room dissolving into chaos as all the surgeons rushed towards Fury. He was crashing.

She stared at that stagnant line, panic rising in her chest. Next to her she could hear Nat murmuring, trying to hold back tears. They watched the inevitable happen in slow motion as the medical team tried and failed to bring him back, again and again and again, the beeping and voices only growing louder until it was just…over, the surgeons pulling off their gloves and detaching Fury from the machines.

Agent Hill and Steve wandered off, leaving her and Nat to watch as the surgeons cleaned up.

She went and put her arm around Nat, trying to draw her away. “Come on. Let’s find the others,” she said, trying to keep her own voice steady.

Nat slowly turned towards her, clenching her jaw to stop it from trembling. “What am I going to do without him?” she whispered. “You, Clint, and him. You were the only ones who believed in me.”

She brushed past Diana into the hallway and was gone.

By the time they had reconvened after saying their goodbyes to Fury in one of the viewing rooms, Nat had somehow put her grief on hold. She turned on Steve and asking, “Why the hell was he in your apartment?”

“I don’t know.”

She crossed her arms “If you won’t tell me at least tell Diana. There’s an assassin still out there and if you’re the next target someone else needs to know what you know.”

At the other end of the hall Diana spotted Agent Rumlow approaching with guards. “Captain they
need you at HQ,” he called.

“That’s my cue to leave. I’m going to go find caffeine,” said Nat, turning on her heel and walking in the opposite direction.

“One second,” Steve called to Rumlow before rolling his eyes at Diana. “Looks like they want answers to the same questions.”

“Do you need me to come?”

“No, it’s best if you’re not on their radar yet. Go check on Nat.”

He grabbed her hand and pulled her into what she believed was called a “bro hug,” which neither she or Steve had ever done in their lives. Steve awkwardly clapped her on the back, murmuring “S.H.I.E.L.D.’s compromised,” and slid something into the hand clasped with his.

He ran to meet up with Rumlow, the group disappearing around the corner and leaving her to wonder what they were about to get themselves into.

It took her forever to find Nat, the hospital hallways all blending in into a labyrinth of sanitized white walls. She eventually spotted her in a waiting room upstairs, sipping coffee out of a styrofoam cup.

Diana sat down in a chair next to her, scooting aside a pile of creased women’s health magazines. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Nat just shook her head. “If you want anything to drink ask the nurses. They think we’re waiting on some of the paperwork for Fury.”

“Okay.” She scanned the room, trying to ignore the local morning news flashing at her from the wall mounted T.V. Finding the remote in a basket on the side table next to her she turned the volume way up and then moved to face Nat who simply looked at her and asked, “It’s that bad?”

“S.H.I.E.L.D. is apparently compromised.”

“Well no shit. Rogers tell you anything we can use?”

“Fury gave him a flash drive.”

Her eyes widened slightly. “Well,” she said, shooting Diana a slight smile. “That is something.”

“Really?”

“Well only because I know what’s on it. Where is it?”

Diana hesitated, scanning her face. “You are one of the few people I trust right now, and I swear to Zeus if you—”

“I downloaded that information on Fury’s orders. Rogers can confirm, though I know he’s not happy about it,” she said, her voice low.

“No he’s not. But he gave it to me before he left. What the hell is on it?”
“S.H.I.E.L.D. secrets. I don’t know what specifically, I never looked at the files, just gave it to Fury.”

“So whatever was on there…”


“You think S.H.I.E.L.D. did this? Who ordered it—the Council? Pierce?”

“I’m not sure. But the KGB taught me that organizations eat their own all the time, especially if their power is threatened.” Nat leaned towards her, voice serious. “I know this is hard, but whatever is on there isn’t going to be good and the sooner you can come to terms with the fact that S.H.I.E.L.D. is now the enemy, the quicker we can sort this all out.”

Diana tried not to think about Peggy and all the memories she had surrounding S.H.I.E.L.D. as she said, “I know.”

“As soon as Rogers gets back we need to find out what’s on the drive. I assume there’s a tracer—we can’t do it here—we need to meet him somewhere public and keep a low profile.”

“That should work.” She moved to pull out her phone and start searching for computer stores or libraries where it would be safer to plug it in, while Nat picked up one of the battered magazines, pretending to be interested in an article about getting rock hard abs by cutting out dairy and eating strange forms of fruit. They sat there in there in silence, killing time, until the noise from the T.V. finally blared a story of interest—something about a “suspect fleeing from S.H.I.E.L.D. headquarters.”

She turned towards Nat, pointing up at the screen. “You don’t think…” she started slowly.

“On the motorcycle? Yep, that’s him,” she said at the same moment the news caster began talking about how “reports are coming in that Captain America is the suspect. Captain America is now wanted by S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“For what?” Diana burst out.

Nat shook her head. “Having morals. This is going to make keeping a low-profile way more difficult.”

“How do we meet him now? He’s on the run!”

“Knowing Rogers? The dumbass will probably come right back here. He’s probably already on his way, that footage has to be a few minutes old.”

Diana clenched her teeth. “Damn this. What on Earth… they shot at him?” she asked, watching footage of Steve taking out an entire plane. They were shooting at him. They wanted him dead.

“You have to give it to him,” said Nat, allowing a hint of admiration to creep into her voice. “He’s determined as hell.”

“That won’t be helpful if he dies. Holy Zeus he jumped out of an elevator?” She stared at the screen in horror, watching the grainy footage of Steve falling dozens of stories to the ground, grimacing at the impact. “They must have cut off all other exits. They planned for this.”

Nat shrugged. “Well, when he jumps out of planes without a parachute that must seem tame.”
Diana tore her gaze from the news and slowly turned towards Nat. “What did you say?”

“On our last mission he jumped without one. Landed perfectly fine, but it scared the shit out of everyone.”

“A stupid risk,” she growled. “And the first time…he couldn’t have known he could do it.”

“No,” Nat agreed with a frown. “He couldn’t.”

Diana buried her face in her hands. “Okay. So this is worse than we thought. Priority now is to get Steve?” She wanted priority one to be ‘tear Pierce apart’ but something told her that wouldn’t be conducive to getting answers or Steve back in one piece.

“Let’s move back down to where he last saw us. And be prepared to fight. Rumlow knows we were here and he—”

“Can’t be trusted. That seems to be a pattern.”

Thankfully they didn’t have to fight, though both of them did want to give Steve a talking to.

They waited down by some vending machines near the emergency department, the two of them casually standing against the wall and splitting a pack of M&Ms Diana had bought. They did their best to blend in while also keeping a lookout for Steve, though the last part became unnecessary when Steve spotted them himself, storming towards both of them in a tracksuit that made him look so suspicious she found it miraculous he hadn’t been stopped by anyone yet. She held back a sigh. How could he be so incredibly smart and still decide that this was a good idea.

He pulled both of them into an empty office, ripping off his hood. “What the fuck is on that flash drive?” he asked, looking between them.

“What did you do to piss off Pierce?” Nat countered. “Your escape is all over the news, looks like he pulled out all the stops.”

He glared at her. “He suspects Fury gave me information or that we know something. Which is why I ask again—what is on that drive?”

Diana broke in, trying to stop an argument before it started. “We don’t know, just that it’s compromising information. We have to plug it in somewhere.”

“Well right now that isn’t helpful for figuring out why I’m now an enemy of the state.”

“Well, I know who killed Fury,” Nat blurted, staring at Steve.

“You what? Why the hell didn’t you say so earlier!”

“I wanted to be sure. This isn’t from the flash drive, but it may be a starting place: there’s been discussion of an almost superhuman assassin. Most of the intelligence community doesn’t believe he exists. Those that do call him the winter soldier. Credited with two dozen assassinations over the past 50 years.”

Steve scoffed. “So we’re pinning out hopes on a ghost story?”
“No,” Diana interrupted, her voice faint. “Peggy and I talked about the rumors right before she retired.” Rumors she had encouraged Peggy to dismiss, if Diana remembered correctly, afraid that grief had blinded both of them. But after all this, maybe Peggy had been right, the implications of which she really didn’t want to think about.

Natasha looked over at her, her head tilted in interest. “You ever had a run in with him?”

“No…no, just some reports we looked into. Then Peg left and I don’t know what else happened with it.” She could tell neither of them bought the lie, with how pale she must have looked she wouldn’t either. But they didn’t comment on it, Nat instead pulling up her shirt to reveal a scar.

“Well I did. Trying to escort a nuclear engineer out of Iran. The Winter Soldier followed and shot at him through me.”

Steve nodded. “Well all right then. Let’s go see what this guy wants.”

“I’ll get us a car. Meet me in the parking garage in 5, and for the love of god try to find some real clothes.” Nat said, brushing past the two of them and disappearing down the hall.”

Diana pulled the drive out of her pocket and handed it to him, watching as he immediately stashed it back away.

“I’d ask you to come so she doesn’t try to kill me, but that would make you a target too.”

“I know. I’ll sit this one out—try and get through to Sharon and Agent Hill and make sure they’re up to date.”

Steve’s eyes narrowed. “You mean Agent Hill and Peggy’s niece?”

“At least appreciate how poetic the situation is. You just can’t help but have a Carter there to save your butt,” she grinned.

He rolled his eyes. “I guess.”

“You and Nat will do just fine, and I think it is very unlikely that she will murder you, no matter how much you tempt her. And haven’t you been attempting to socialize more and make some new friends? A trip to who knows where together is a great place to start.”

He shook his head, unable to hide a smile. “The two of you are in cahoots I swear to god. Even Bucky was never this interested in my social life.”

“Suuuuuure.” She checked her watch. “Nat knows what she’s doing, at least make an attempt to trust her judgement. And,” she added, pulling a face, “that includes the brilliant decision to find you a new outfit.”

“What does she think is available? Scrubs?”

Diana dug through her bag and pulled out a baseball cap. “Rule one: always have some sort of disguise on the go. It’s at least a start, you can be Grant from Texas again.”

“God no.” He put it on and took his hood down, making him look a little less like someone who planned on robbing a bank.

“Anything else we need to know about this Winter Soldier guy before we take off?”

“I don’t have hard information. But if he did what I suspect,” she said, her voice lowering, “you
don’t want to fight him. And if you must? Give him hell.”

Sharon and Agent Hill had apparently left, hopefully to go home and sleep, and so instead she sent Sharon a quick and intentionally vague text. *I’m heading back home, sorry it’s been such a rough day. Please let me know if you need anything, I’m here on business for a while* with a smiley emoji tacked on at the end for good measure.

Diana did then, in fact, head home, eating for the first time in hours after grabbing whatever she happened to have in the fridge. Her meal was far from relaxing, and she went about cleaning up and getting ready for bed with the newfound fear that an assassin would burst into her apartment.

She dozed lightly that night, startled awake by anything that made noise, her furnace kicking on, a car horn, a siren. City noise normally didn’t bother her but now every creak and traffic sound gave her a spike of adrenaline.

When her phone rang early that next morning it also startled her, though at least this time she woke up for a real reason.

“Hello?”

“Hi is this Diana? I’m Sam Wilson, I work at the VA.”

“Oh yes...hi,” she said, her words slow with confusion. This was the man Steve had talked about. Did this mean he had had some sort of breakdown? Were he and Nat okay?”

“A friend gave me your number and mentioned you worked at the Louvre—talked my ear off about the Monuments Men too. Said you would be willing to swing by at some point and do art therapy classes for my support group?”

She let out a laugh of relief. She was an idiot. Steve was fine, it was just a coded message, the necessity of which probably meant that everything had gone horribly, but for now he and Nat seemed to at least be alive. “Oh of course! I love doing programs. I can actually do it today if that fits in your schedule. Do you have materials I can swing by and pick up? Or do I need to go out and grab some?”

“Oh no, I have them. You can pick them up and do prep before this afternoon. Do you have a pen? I can give you my address…”

She threw on clothes and literally ran out the door, looking like a morning jogger. Or maybe a sprinter. Whatever got her there the fastest.

Ten minutes later she knocked on his back door, relieved to see Steve and Nat standing behind him.

She pulled each of them into a hug, her gaze lingering on their weary expressions. “Are you two okay? Did you find anything?” she asked, pulling back and holding Steve at arm’s length.

They looked at each other, having a silent conversation that did not bode well.
“Let’s sit down to eat. Sam was kind enough to make breakfast. And some tea,” Steve said.

“Oh wonderful,” she muttered, sinking into her chair in a way that matched the sinking feeling in her chest. “For the love of Zeus please just spit it out.”

“It gave us coordinates to an Army base in New Jersey I was at for a bit before I shipped out. The S.S.R. and then S.H.I.E.L.D. had secret offices there. And turns out more recently…Hydra operates there too.”

“No,” she whispered. “That’s who’s compromised it? You’re sure? It wasn’t just one rogue person?”

“Remember Zola? He and a bunch of other Hydra scientists were recruited after the War.”

“Hydra is dead,” Diana burst out. "Peggy and I saw to that.”

Nat shook her head. “They regrew within S.H.I.E.L.D. They’ve been influencing world events for decades. Assassinations. Power grabs. Feeding chaos. You name it. And then S.H.I.E.L.D. shot a missile at the bunker, but that’s somehow not important right now.”

Diana buried her head in her hands.

“I know,” Steve said. “I know. The bunker still had pictures of Howard and Peggy up too. Didn’t even have the decency to empty stuff out,” he said with disgust.

“Steve, I’m sorry. I should have stepped up more right after Peggy retired and kept monitoring Hydra a priority. I should have… I don’t know. I let them grow right under our noses.”

Nat rolled her eyes. “Diana, you didn’t let them do anything. Why do you think the council has been actively pushing you away for the past decade? Why didn’t they welcome your help? They were trying to cover their own asses because they knew damn well if you had any power you would eventually find all this out.”

She shook her head. She assumed this is how Steve felt coming back and realizing not much had changed. Hydra’s survival meant that the past seventy years of work had meant nothing. The strategy meetings with Peggy and Howard, the three crowded around some backroom table. The time away she took from other work to go track someone across Europe or hand off intel she had found. All the files she had carried with her at some point or another, paging through them at the end of a long day, pushing through because she knew they were putting an end to something that needed to be destroyed. She had put up with S.H.I.E.L.D.’s bureaucracy more than she ever planned on to do this work and it still hadn’t been enough. Her weariness to be part of the organization had only doomed it further.

“That doesn’t matter. Steve we wanted to bring you some sort of justice. And we failed.”

Sam leaned forward, putting his hands up between them. “All of you are grieving and this is a lot to come to terms with. But this is not the most productive time to be sharing your feelings.”

Nat raised an eyebrow. “God, please join the team as our voice of reason, I think we need it.”

That got even Diana to crack a smile.

“Oh, I am.”

“Sam, I can’t ask you to do that. You retired for a reason,” Steve said.
He shook his head. “You guys need me. No better reason than that. What do we need to do?”

“Zola mentioned an algorithm. We need to figure out what it does,” Nat said. “And that means getting information from Pierce or Sitwell—Pierce had to authorize the missile launch, and Sitwell…”

“Was on the Lemurian Star. As was the algorithm.”

“Great. So how do we get to them?”

“I’ll do it,” Diana said at the same time Sam said, “I got this.”

They stared at each other, Sam giving her a shrug. “They don’t know who I am. Plus I have a surprise.” He went into the kitchen and came back with a file folder that he tossed on the table.

Steve opened it, revealing a picture of he and another man with what looked like mechanical wings.

Steve looked up at him, eyebrows raised. “I thought you were a pilot?”

He grinned. “Never said I was a pilot. Riley and I were both part of the program. Falcons, they called us. If we can get the wings I can fly and pick him up.”

“I can get them,” said Nat.

“They’re under guard and behind a steel wall.”

Nat just shrugged, giving him a small smile. “Not a problem.”

“All right then we have a plan. Steve do I need to get my lasso?” Diana asked

“Not a bad idea. Is it in your apartment?”

“Yes, I can get it while Nat gets the wings.”

“Wait, what lasso are we talking about?” Sam asked

Diana whipped towards Steve, eyes narrowed. “Why haven’t you told him already?” she mouthed.

Steve shrugged, gesturing at her as if to say “this is your thing.”

“For God’s sake you two stop with the telepathy,” Nat broke in. Sam, Diana is wonder Woman. Island of Amazons? Lasso of truth?

Sam looked at her, eyes wide, and then back at Steve and Nat. “You guys were holding out on telling me you were friends with Wonder Woman? German airfield Wonder Woman? Helped the Commandos Wonder Woman?”

“Yes, that would be me,” Diana said with a faint smile. “Sorry for the surprise but I try to fly under the radar.”

“Bullshit. You’re Wonder Woman.”

Nat rolled her eyes as she stood up. "Enough with the love fest. I’ll be back ASAP. Diana go fetch that lasso.”
Diana, Nat, and Steve reconvened on the roof of a building close to the restaurant they had tracked Sitwell to. She unwound and rewound her lasso as she paced the perimeter, waiting for Sam to bring the Hydra bastard up to them.

Nat shot her a look from her post at the opposite corner of the building. “It will be fine. We won’t let him actually fall, we just need to scare him a bit.”

“That’s not what I’m worried about.” She normally didn’t condone plans that involved pushing people off roofs, but in this case? Sitwell was lucky she was refraining from tearing him apart.

When she paced back to the opposite side of the building, Steve looked over at her with small smile “You ready for this?”

Diana patted her lasso. “Of course. It’s been much too long.”

“You don’t have to do this you know,” he added, “Blow your cover, give Sitwell something to talk about after all this is over. I can’t ask you to give up your privacy.”

She shook her head. “It’s time. This has been coming for a while. And if destroying Hydra means going public,” she said, her voice hardening. “Then so be it.” She looked down at the city below, catching sight of a van approaching.

“Is that them?”

“Yep. Positions!” he called back to Nat.

Diana ran to her temporary hiding spot behind one of the heating pipes on the far side of the roof. She could hear Nat and Steve pounding down the stairs to go grab him from where he’d be dropped off at the front of the building.

It only took a minute or two for them to reappear, now with Sitwell in tow, Steve literally throwing him through the door and strong arming him to the very edge.

Even from here she could sense the cockiness in Sitwell’s posture. He really didn’t think they’d do it. And then Nat toppled him over the edge with a strong kick to the chest.

Diana sprinted over to them, lasso ready, in time to hear Nat suggest more potential dates. She rolled her eyes, trying to hide a small smile as she suggested, “Why not just learn how to use Tinder?”

“Definitely not ready for that,” Steve said.

An increase in screaming meant that Sitwell was about to come back up, and they moved to the side, allowing Sam to drop him in a heap at their feet before landing himself, the metal wings folding back in on themselves with mechanical beauty.

As soon as Sitwell got to his feet Diana lassoed him, yanking him forward until he faced her and the rest of the group.

She saw the sudden recognition in his eyes—when he finally matched her to the grand war stories S.H.I.E.L.D. liked to tell—and then the fear as he struggled to back away, which only made the
lasso glow brighter around him.

“Take it off! Take it off—I’ll answer whatever you want to know.”

“But this way we know you’re telling the truth for once,” Diana said, her voice cold. “For example, what does the algorithm do?”

He paled as he tried to resist, his entire body shaking with effort. She watched as he worked his jaw, trying in vain to keep his mouth shut.

Diana sighed. “Impressive effort. But it’s so much easier if you just cooperate.”

“A targeting system!” He finally burst out, taking in heavy breaths as the lasso let up slightly. “It’s a hydra targeting system that works with project insight.”

Steve shot her a look, his face filled with dread. They both knew where this was going.

"It chooses…chooses…chooses targets that are dangerous to Hydra,” he finally continued, again trying to resist. “You guys. Politicians and elites. Soccer moms. Anyone. It uses digital history to see who threatens Hydra and then the hellicarriers can scratch people off the list thousands at a time.”

She turned towards the others with a new tiredness. Two more heads really did grow back. And now they had to try to slay the beast all over again. “So how do we stop this?”

“From the inside.” Nat said, her jaw set. “We can use Sitwell to bypass security.”

“Who’s in charge of this program?” Diana asked

“Pierce. Isn’t that obvious?” Sitwell blurted.

Sam whistled, looking between Sitwell and Diana. “Remind me never to get on your bad side. This is nuts.”

Steve checked his watch. “We need to move, we get into HQ and then figure out what to do from there. Diana stay on the outside and alert everyone else to what’s going on. The media, any contacts you may have. I don’t know. And…I guess we should tell Peggy.”

She shook her head. “I need to help take them down. Do you think I’m going to just stand by?”

“Stay on the outside for now—then we can meet back up. No use risking all of us from the beginning. You’re one of three people who understands what we’re facing, and maybe the only person our allies will trust. We have to notify them, make sure no one is trying to get to Peggy. She’s a symbol Diana, and if they—”

“I know. I’ll start making calls, but contact me if you get stuck. I’ll be nearby.”

Nat rustled around in her pockets and handed over an earpiece and a burner phone. “Take these. And you can release him,” she said, jerking her head to Sitwell. “I have cuffs.”

Diana re wound her lasso into a tight coil around her hand, and after giving everyone quick hugs she turned to find a secure place to make some phone calls.

“Don’t be stupid!” Steve called after her.

She rolled her eyes and called back “Same to you Captain excessive risk taker.”
She called Maria Hill first.

“Is this a burner phone?” She asked as soon as Agent Hill picked up.

“Yes, stupid not to be these days.”

“Great.” She explained the situation as quickly as she could, with Agent Hill responding with lots of cursing but no real surprise.

“Fury had been more weary the past year. A few of us had suspected Hydra was making a resurgence but not to this extent. I’ll try to let allies know here and keep tabs on Pierce. And of course, keep tabs on the group.”

“Thank you. One other favor, do you mind if I speak to Sharon—Agent 13—for a second?” She heard Agent Hill page her over the intercom for a code 8, hopefully something that wouldn’t cause unnecessary alarm.

As Diana arrived at the library Sharon came on the line, partly out of breath.

“I have a minute left on this. Hill filled me in. Can you go check on Aunt Peg, I can’t leave without it looking suspicious.”

“I was already planning on it. Do you want me to move them to a secure location?”

“Yes, I don’t even want the possibility of her getting caught in the middle of this.”

“Got it. I’ll move them somewhere as soon as I can.”

“Thank you,” she rushed out. “Try to go dark and then meet up with Rogers.”

“That’s the plan. Any developments with insight?”

“We’re moving fast, but right now tracking Steve is acting as a distraction.”

“Good. Let me know if—” The phone cut out and Diana let out a deep sigh, snapping her own phone shut as she entered the library.

She got a computer pass from the woman at the front checkout desk. She went on to a few news sites and left anonymous tips about S.H.I.E.L.D. overreach and weapons programs, hoping that it would be enough to slow them down and guarantee inquiries in the aftermath. The last form she filled out was to the Daily Planet, the most recent place she knew Clark was working at, on the off chance he would see and pick up the story. He seemed like the kind of journalist who would throw themselves into something like this, and that was exactly what she needed.

Then she practically ran out of the library, hastily apologizing to the volunteers shelving books that she nearly ran over, and hailed a taxi, sending a coded heads up to the other Avengers as she sat in the back.

As soon as she was done being the Paul Revere of electronic communication, she called Michael.

“How’s it going?” he asked cheerfully. “I thought you’d be at working.”
“Oh I am, just doing a side project. When are you and Elizabeth meeting me at your mom’s facility?”

He paused for a moment, and Diana could practically hear the gears turning as he worked through his confusion and then concern.

“Crap I forgot that was today? What time did we agree on?”

“Just get here as soon as you can.”

“Okay…” he said. “Um, I’ll pick up Elizabeth and everyone else who can come and then we’ll be there in thirty?”

“Perfect.”

The last, and possibly most important piece of her job, was to go on a Peggy-heist and get her out of the nursing home. The nurses would easily let her in, but Michael and Elizabeth would need to do some serious convincing to allow her to leave on a whim. And if worst came to worst, Diana could bust her out and go on what she assumed would be called a high speed wheelchair chase. Peggy was asleep when she first walked in, giving her time to pack up a bag with a few of her medicines. Right as she was finishing up and debating whether to wake her, she could hear raised voices coming from down the hallway.

Peeking her head out of the doorway she could hear Michael’s booming voice say “I don’t care if it’s against medical advice, this is one of the last family vacations she’s going to get. She’s leaving.”

She smiled, dipping back into the room to go wake Peggy. No need for a stealth operation then. She shook Peggy awake with a grin. “Elizabeth and Michael just arrived. We’re getting you out of here for a bit.”

“Oh finally, some excitement,” she said, coughing as she tried to sit up. “Can I ask why?”

“Later. Right now I think they’re trying to bring you a wheelchair, but the nurses aren’t happy about it.”

She gave a weak chuckle. “Of course they’re not, we’re interrupting Bingo.”

After painstakingly getting Peggy loaded into Michael’s van, the four of them took off, followed by a car with a few assorted relatives and grandkids. When Michael said he would get everyone he meant it. She directed him to an old bunker she hoped only she and Peggy knew about, driving them around in circles to the point that when they finally arrived, everyone practically ran underground, finally able to get out of the car.

While Elizabeth got Peggy set up comfortably in one of the rickety cots in a side corridor, Diana explained the situation to Michael, letting him spread the news to the others as he saw fit. But Peggy? She needed to talk to her herself.

She took a seat by her bed, checking her watch to see how much time before her pain medicine kicked in.
Seeing Diana, she let out a huff. “Thank god, you’re here. Is everyone else accounted for? I wasn’t sure the Commandos had the coordinates for this bunker, and no one is being of any help.”

“Everyone is just fine.”

“Good.” She closed her eyes, letting out a deep sigh. “Are you going to explain why we’re here?”

She had no idea what time period Peggy was operating in, but she nodded and said, “Director Fury? He had a bit of an accident.”

Her eyes snapped open. “And who was responsible for the accident?”

“Hydra,” she whispered. “That’s what Steve was starting to find out when he visited you a few days ago.” In a cruel twist of fate, Hydra being the enemy made explaining things to Peggy easier. It didn’t matter if she thought it was a different decade—the threat was the same.

She sank into her sheets, shaking her head at Diana. “We mucked everything up again, didn’t we?”

“No. No we didn’t. We slowed them down as much as we could. It’s just means we have to stop them again.”

“Then why are we both down here?”

“Hydra is powerful—they can target civilians now.”

“On second thought, maybe this is too much excitement. Maybe just some new audio books would have been nice. Or a trip to Michael’s house.”

Diana smiled. “That can still be arranged. But for now you all are safer down here.”

Peggy nodded. “Tell the Commandos that when they win, we’ll get some of Dum Dum’s bourbon.”

“I will.”

“And we need to make sure Steve and Bucky don’t go get themselves killed.”

“Obviously.”

She gave Diana the start of the smile before she fell back asleep.

With a slightly maniacal laugh, Diana slapped down her cards. “And I’m out. Thank you all for the wonderful game.”

Michael rolled his eyes. “The biggest mistake of my life was teaching you how to play liverpool rummy.”

“You’re just mad you lost. You should be lucky I’m not staying down here much longer or I’d beat you again.”

Elizabeth had suggested cards to keep all of them, but mainly Diana, from going stir crazy. They were sweet to try and take her mind off of their potential imminent deaths, but not very successful.
Every time she drew a card or rearranged her hand, she was focused not on the game in front of her, but of Steve and the team sneaking into one of the world’s most heavily guarded buildings with Sitwell in tow.

After she finished stacking the cards she frowned, asking, “Will you be okay down here alone? It’s about time I try to make contact with the others. They’re going to need backup.”

“Go for it,” Elizabeth nodded. “If you don’t stop Hydra, I don’t think it’s going to make a difference how much concrete is over our heads.”

Diana nodded, sliding the cards back into their box, the vibration of her phone interrupting her.

She handed the stack over to Elizabeth before walking into the hall to answer.

“It’s Sam.”

“Is everyone alive? I’m about to head your way.”

“For now. And yeah, that might be useful… have you seen the news?”

“I’ve been a little busy. And in an underground bunker.”

He cursed. “Well, same here. Good news is you contacting the media and Agent Hill saved our asses out there so thanks. And turns out one of you and Natasha’s dear friends made a complete recovery. He wanted me to tell you—knew you’d be furious if you found out later.”

She paused, making sure he had actually implied what she thought, and then collapsed against the wall. “Oh thank Zeus. Nat must be so excited.”

“Yeah, well… that’s some of the bad news. There’s a reason I’m, calling and not Nat or Steve.”

“Sam I swear…”

“They’re both okay,” he assured her, “But the plan is not. The Winter Soldier attacked us—Sitwell’s dead. Natasha was shot and had to get patched up. New plan is to switch out the hellicarriers’ computer chips.”

“Great, so still a completely insane plan. And what about Steve?”

There was a long silence on the other end of the line. “Well…Steve’s pretty shaken up, but he’ll be good. I’m gonna talk to him in a minute before we all suit up.”

“Talk to him about what?”

“The Winter Soldier was someone he knew. He froze, I had to save his ass.”

“That’s impossible, there’s no one here he knows but the team, Peggy, and maybe some colleagues. Was it someone form S.H.I.E.L.D.?“

“No…look we need you to come back ASAP. Steve says you can fly and we may need that.”

“Sam,” she said, her chest tightening, dreading the answer, “who is it?”

She could hear him take a breath on the other end. “You knew him too,” he said, softly. “It’s Sargent Barnes.”
“No.”

“I know it probably seems crazy, but—”

“Why are you lying to me?” she asked, her voice tight.

“Diana, please listen, I know that this—”

“He would never! He would never hurt Steve.”

“He’s changed. And you have to be prepared—”

“Then we’ll change him back! I’m on my way to meet you at HQ,” she snapped. “We can clear this whole mess up.”

“Is Peggy’s family okay? We can try to bring them to where we are.”

She hesitated for a moment, looking down the hall to where Peggy lay in bed before she let out a huff, storming over to the bag with her bracers and lasso and slinging it over her shoulder. “They’ll be fine. She… would want me to go fix this. She would want me to help them.”

And with that she hung up, turning on her heel to go say goodbye to Peggy and instead almost running into Michael.

“Everything okay? I heard things getting heated.”

“Fine. I’m sorry, it’s just—there’s been a surprise development.” It wasn’t technically a lie, but for once maybe she wouldn’t care if it was. Better, certainly, that dropping a bomb and then disappearing. “I don’t know how much safer this place is than anywhere else but…”

“We’ll take care of everything, make sure people stay down here.”

She gave him a quick hug, and then walked over to Peggy’s bed, kneeling down so she was eye level. “Peg, I’m sorry, I have to leave. Steve needs my help.” She almost added “and Bucky” to the end of the sentence but couldn’t now, not when it might actually be true.

“Don’t apologize. Go stop Hydra.” She gave her a weak smile. “The sooner this blasted war is over the sooner we can go home.”

Diana nodded, and leaned in to give her a hug. When she stood to leave, Peggy grabbed on to her hand, pulling her closer. She scanned Diana’s face, surely taking in the frown lines and worry she had tried and failed to hide.

“What ever is making you this angry, make it get out of your way.” She let go of Diana’s hand, giving her a small wave. “Now go kick some ass.”

Diana did a double take when she met up with the others, Steve looking just as he had during the war in his painfully American uniform.

“Did you steal—”

“Not important right now.” He turned to the group “Follow the plan. Natasha heads to the council
room in disguise and leaks whatever info she can. Fury is joining her by helicopter. Agent Hill—"

“Control room,” she nodded. “I’ll give you all updates.”

“Diana and Sam you’re with me. We’re switching out the chips after I let the building know what’s going on.”

“I warned who I could,” Agent Hill said. “They’re prepared.”

They slowly picked their way towards the building, Nat splitting off early to get in disguise and meet the rest of the council.

“Good luck out there,” she said, before turning to Diana. “There might be records of you in whatever I upload.”

She smiled. “Only the Wonder Woman bit. Release whatever you need to—now isn’t the time to hide.”

Nat nodded and then took off, heading for the main entrance of the building. The rest of them tried to be as inconspicuous as possible, made more difficult by the fact that Steve looked like a bright star-spangled target.

“Couldn’t have changed into the get up after we broke in?” Sam muttered, as they ducked behind a corner.

“It adds to the effect.”

Thankfully the control room was on one of the bottom floors, so once they made it in, they only had to knock out a few guards before the finally made it into the room.

Diana stood outside, ready to guard them if necessary, and waiting for whatever speech Steve had mentioned.

As soon as his voice came over the intercom she could feel the whole building still, every person falling silent with shock.

“I know I’m asking a lot,” he said, his voice echoing through every hallway. “The price of freedom is high, it always has been, but it’s a price I’m willing to pay.”

He continued to talk, but the silence of the building didn’t last, the strike team instead stomping down the hallway and beginning to engage her.

“We got company!” Diana called. She deflected what bullets she could, her arms extended in front of her, and their shock at this feat gave Steve and Sam plenty of time to finish and come help her.

The three of them ran back out into the main hanger, scanning for either friends or foes.

"Steve before we do this—” Diana panted,” crouching behind the cover they had found, “was it really Bucky?”

He pressed his lips together and nodded. “He hasn’t aged a day.”

She closed her eyes. “And he really…”

“Yes. I don’t know what they did to him—whatever Zola did was part of it. Helped him survive the fall.” He didn’t meet her eyes, his hands clenched so the knuckles were white.
“It wasn’t your fault.” It wasn’t her own fault either, she thought, trying to convince herself and giving up immediately. She should have kept the search up, should have looked harder. Sam looked between the two and the guilt radiating off both of them, any further conversation cut off by three hellicarriers’ engines turning on, the noise blasting at them as they took off.

“Well shit,” said Sam.

“Yeah. Good thing we can all fly.” Steve snarked.

Diana rolled her eyes, running out on to the tarmac and ducking as the shooting immediately started. They had found the bad guys. Sam took to the sky and was immediately forced to take evasive maneuvers while she and Steve battled through rows of shipping containers and supplies on the ground.

“You know,” Diana called, whipping her lasso out to catch one of the guys by his ankles, and pulling him in front of one of the men who was shooting at them, “this was a lot more fun the first time around!”

“Tell me about it,” he replied, pushing Diana out of a new line of fire and slamming his shield into the nearest opponent. “Is this why people complain about sequels?”

They worked their way forwards, Diana doing her best to deflect bullets back at the shooters to take some of the fire off of Steve.

“Eight minutes!” Agent Hill radioed.

Diana looked around them, seeing only more Hydra members closing in. “This is too slow, it’s time to go up.

“Are you sure?”

She jumped up a few feet and began to hover and then grabbed Steve around his middle, lifting him up too and truly beginning to fly for the first time in decades.

“Ohhhhh my God.”

“Close your mouth or you’ll eat bugs. Trust me on this.”

She dodged fire from below, doing her own evasive maneuvers to the best she could while also dragging a substantial amount of patriotic dead weight. She should have felt worried, or possibly scared, but instead she looked down at Steve and smiled. She was up where her opponents couldn’t quite get to her, the wind blowing past her carrying with it that sense of freedom that just didn’t exist on the ground. Plus Steve looked absolutely ridiculous.

“Holy Hera,” she said when they had finally landed. “The serum couldn’t make you weightless?”

“It’s the apple pie,” he said, running out to switch out chips and then radioing that the alpha carrier was secure, Sam radioing the same for beta right after. Two down, one last one to go.

“Six minutes,” Hill warned.

“Roger that,” said Steve. “Ready to lift off again?” he asked Diana.

She sighed, flying them both to carrier Charlie and meeting up with Sam.

“Alright, once we switch it, we need to go make sure Natasha is —”
He was interrupted by a man ramming into him, pushing him off the edge.

“Steve!” she yelled, making sure he was still hanging on before turning and looking into the face of Bucky Barnes.

“Bucky?” she whispered. He took a careful step forward, her hands raised. “It’s me— Diana.” He raised his gun and she felt a chill go down her spine. The set of his mouth, the blankness behind his eyes. He didn't know. He didn't remember.

Sam flew in front of her and started to shoot at him, forcing Bucky back.

“No! Please—if I can get the lasso around him, he'll snap out of it! It worked for Banner!” she yelled into her comm, hoping Steve could make it back up to help.

Sam flew above her, drawing Bucky's fire. “Then do it now while he’s distracted!”

She flung the lasso at him, managing to just get the loop over his head before he ripped off one of Sam’s wings, sending him into a tailspin as he fell of the edge.

With a growl she released Bucky and flung herself over the edge, speeding down towards Sam and pulling him up just before he hit the ground.

“Steve I’m coming back up,” she radioed, helping Sam get to his feet.

“Don’t worry I got it, you and Sam go make sure everyone else is okay!”

“But the lasso—it may be the only thing that can hold him.”

“I can talk him down, I know it. He’s still in there.”

“Steve—” she started, only to be interrupted by Agent Hill.

“Rumlow’s heading to the Council, someone needs to come stop him.”

“Steve—” she tried again, though without much force. She couldn’t fault him for him feeling like it was his duty, for wanting to be the one to bring him back.

“You heard her, go make sure everyone inside is okay.”

With a huff she started back towards the building, Sam a few feet behind her.

“You’re letting him go at it alone?”

“If anyone can do it, it’s him. And I’m not letting him do anything.” She sped up, motioning for him to follow as she broke into a sprint.

He followed after her, panting. “You… superhumans… move… too… God damned… fast.”

When they got inside, she spotted Sharon off to one side, bleeding as she barked orders at someone.

“Go ahead, I’ll catch up with you,” she said to Sam before running over to her and asking, “Are
“Rumlow. I’m fine it just needs stitches. We’re trying to keep some sort of semblance of order—you’d think these people had never been in a life-threatening situation before.”

“Well, this is a new one. Can you help get people out of the open? Those carriers are coming down eventually and when they do…”

“I’ll get someone on it. We can hold them down here, go stop Rumlow.”

Diana followed Sam’s whispered directions into her earpiece, sneaking her way to the upper floors to meet up with him and hopefully cut off Rumlow from reaching the council. She darted out of one doorway and into the next, looking around the next corner to see if she could spot Sam. Instead she saw the back of Rumlow, headbutting him and forcing him to the ground.

“One minute!” Agent Hill cried through their comms as Diana ducked into the room where they were fighting, just in time for Sam to take a hard hit and drop to his knees.

“Hey!” Diana called, striding towards him, trying to give Sam time to recover.

“You want some pain too sweetheart?” he asked, forcing her to duck a punch. “Move.”

“No. You move.” She snarled before punching him in the stomach, causing him to double over, pushing him towards Sam who landed another good punch and forced him to the ground.

“Two against one because you can’t take the heat?” He asked, cracking his knuckles as he stood up. Diana’s eyes widened, not out of any fear of him but because he hadn’t noticed the hellicarrier looming behind him, heading towards the building and about to cut right through it.

“Run!” Diana yelled, grabbing Sam’s hand and sprinting towards the windows on the opposite side, trying to stay ahead of the wave of falling concrete and choking black dust that followed at their heels. “When we jump, grab on to me tight!” she screamed, both of them approaching the windows and then busting through them, creating a shower of shattered glass as Sam grabbed a hold of her middle and she flew them away.

“You two okay?” Nat radioed from the chopper that came into view, flying around the hellicarrier.

“I will be when I’m back on the damn ground” Sam replied. “You guys can run. You can fly. If y’all start growing new limbs or something we’re gonna have problems.”

“Agent Hill, did Steve make it off okay once he switched the chip?” Diana radioed.

“Rogers is still on board.”

“Hill do you have a location on Steve?” Diana asked again, flying towards HQ, now with a jagged scar running through the part of the building that remained.

"No, he’s not responding.”

She said some choice words in Greek, circling whatever remained of the carrier, desperately
hoping she caught some sight of him.

“Diana you need to come back.” Nat radioed. “We’re landing, we’ll help you search the ground.”

“No he’s—”

“Diana its coming down. Even if he’s up there…”

She stared out at it, watching as chunks broke off and fell into the Potomac, the entire ship disintegrating.

The all too familiar chill took a hold of her, one she had felt twice before. The plane. The sacrifice. She shouldn’t have left him—that was the same mistake from last time. She should have let Sam handle Rumlow and turned back.

The carrier, almost in slow motion, begin to lose height, tipping at an angle it shouldn’t have while collapsing in on itself. She sank too, floating back to the ground, unable to look away as the entire ship started to go down. She screamed, noises she wasn’t even aware of coming out of her mouth in a howl. Ignoring Nat and Sam’s yells in her earpiece she took off, flying until she was right over the wreckage and then diving in, the remaining pieces of ship falling in with her.

The chill shocked her at first, the Potomac’s waters swirling around her along with chunks of twisted metal and whole slabs of concrete. She stretched out her arms, grasping for something, anything, and coming up empty handed. She did a few passes around the worst of the wreckage, but the water was so murky, too murky, dirt and debris clouding her vision to where even if he and Bucky were down here, she wouldn’t be able to find them.

She rose to the surface, frantic, spinning in a circle in the in the hopes that maybe he had grabbed on to something and was floating. Nothing. As she raised her hand to radio Nat and beg for a search and rescue team, scuba gear, searchlights, anything, she caught a glimpse of something on the far part of the shore.

She swam towards it, dodging bits of floating wreckage, and as she got closer, she could just make out the bright blue of Steve’s uniform.

“Please. Please be alive,” she sobbed, stumbling up onto the beach and kneeling next to him, praying for a heartbeat.

Laying a hand on his chest she could feel it rise and fall, though barely, her hand coming away sticky with blood.

“It’s okay. It’s going to be okay,” she soothed, her voice strained, though he wasn’t conscious to hear her. She ripped off part of her shirt, trying to stop the bleeding where she could.

“Natasha I found him.” She radioed, trying to keep her voice steady. “Breathing but unconscious, multiple bullet wounds, I need a medevac stat,” she radioed.

“Thank god. On our way.”

She tried to doctor him up to the best of her ability. She needed to roll him on his side and make him cough up whatever water he had inhaled, but didn’t want to make the bullet wounds worse.

As she sat there, the adrenaline rush beginning to fade, she began to feel a prickling sensation on the back of her neck that came with the unease of being watched.
She slowly stood up, turning in a circle as she took in her surroundings. If there was anyone nearby, they were extremely good at hiding.

“Sargent Barnes? Is that you?” She called, taking a few steps away from Steve.

There was no response, but also no change in the sense that there was someone else there with her.

“Bucky? It’s me, Diana.” She added standing perfectly still. “You can stay hidden if you want. I just want to talk.”

More silence, though at this point she didn’t care. In the off chance her gut was wrong she would just be talking to herself, which was far from the strangest thing she had ever done.

“You were the person closest to Steve. And a friend to Peggy and I. Peggy’s still alive too, she still has her same sense of sarcasm.”

She glanced back at Steve, making sure he was still breathing and taking a second to collect her thoughts. Steve bleeding on the sand with S.H.I.E.L.D. burning behind him made her want to cry, but instead she looked back out into the tree cover, trying to help where she could.

“You saved him, didn’t you?” she asked, eyes widening with the realization. He certainly hadn’t washed up halfway on the beach on his back by himself. “And then waited until someone found him. That’s the Bucky we all knew and loved.” She smiled, tipping her head towards the sky in silent prayer that somewhere in his head there was still a piece of him. “I think it could be like that again, all of us together. Minus the near-death experiences of course. We both want you to—”

Nat and Sam approaching along with a medical team cut her off, the sounds of heavy footsteps and medical jargon tossed back and forth interrupting the peace.

To her left she swore she heard a faint rustle of bushes, the new voices scaring him off.

Probably for the best, she tried to convince herself. It wasn’t safe. He wasn’t safe, not yet. She joined the group that had clustered around Steve, poking and prodding him, starting IVs and oxygen. He was alive. And somehow Bucky was alive. They just had to get through to him.

Fury waited to stage his funeral until Steve was released from the hospital and the political circus of Nat’s Congressional testimony died down.

Fury stared down at his own grave, shaking his head. “We’ve been going through old files—a lot of rats didn’t go down with the ship.”

“We’ll get them,” Diana reassured him. “I think it’s time to dust off my suit. Hunting Hydra is a satisfying way to ease back into things.”

He nodded. “I take it you all aren’t coming with me to Europe then?”

“Sorry,” said Steve. “Diana and I have stuff to do here.”

“And I’m not really the spy type,” added Sam.

“All right then,” he said, going down the line and shaking hands.
When he got to Diana she hung on to his hand for an extra moment. “Stop by the Louvre at some point. Or drop by if you need help with something,” she said, giving him a small smile.

He nodded, disappearing down the path at the same time Nat walked up to them.

“You’re not going with him?” Steve asked.

“No. I blew all my covers. I need some time… to start over I guess.”

“You’ll work through it,” Diana reassured her “You could always…I don’t know, develop an alter ego?” she teased.

Nat rolled her eyes. “Sadly I don’t have a high powered job in France to give me an easy one.”

“You could always make snarking at politicians a profession. You and Tony would make a great team.”

She pretended to gag before she extended a file towards them. “I called in some favors to get what you guys asked for. Everything we know is right here.”

“Thank you,” Steve said, flipping it open to find a whole stack of photos and paperwork, some of which she would need to translate for him.

“I know this is important to you two, but be careful. You might not like what’s in there,” she warned.

“Nat, we have to try.”

“I know.”

She backed away a little, smiling at Steve. “You know what else you should do? Ask out that woman from weapons development. Or the nurse—Sharon. She’s nice and not Hydra so two for two.”

Steve looked over at Diana, both of them bursting out into laughter. “I think we’re both a little busy right now,” he finally said.

Nat just shrugged. “Suit yourself. I’ll find you someone eventually.”

“As long as it doesn’t involve tinder.”

With a laugh she hugged each of them. “Stay in touch, okay?” And with that she left, just like Fury.

They looked down at the file, the picture of Bucky as he was during the war, juxtaposed with him in some sort of cryo chamber, his face pale, expression unnatural.

“You two going after him?” Sam asked.

Steve nodded, closing the file. “You don’t have to come with us.”

He smiled. “Dude. How could I turn down a mission with Captain America and Wonder Woman? When do we start?”

“After lunch,” said Diana, starting to walk back to the car. “You can’t locate assassins on an empty stomach.”
“Wait, why did her name get the emphasis?” Steve asked, trying to hurt. "Do you think she's cooler than me?"

She smiled, Sam just rolling his eyes next to her. “It’s gonna be a long mission with the two of you.”

Chapter End Notes

Bucky has finally arived in all of his angsty glory!

Thanks to all of you for sticking through long chunks between updates, this past month I've been busy posting captain Marvel fic because it's what out lord and savior Carol Danvers deserves. Further heads up that depending on how Endgame goes I will also be distracted by writing fic of that and/or mourning.
The day after Fury’s “funeral,” Steve invited her over to his apartment, now free of crime scene tape, to look through Bucky’s file. They had asked Sam to come too, but he had shaken his head, saying, “I’m fine with the summary. I don’t want to infringe.”

“Infringe,” because he knew as well as they did it what was in that file would be ugly. Too much history, too personal, too revealing.

She walked up the steps to his apartment, carrying a sense of dread that had stuck to her all morning, refusing to leave despite whatever she had tried to do to distract herself. Steve answered the door, leading her into his kitchen where the folder rested on the kitchen table under the overhead light, looking like the start of some bad crime drama.

“How can I get you anything? Some coffee?” he asked, trying to break the tension as she sat down.

She rolled her eyes, giving him a small smile. “You Americans and your coffee. Sure, as long as you have milk I can add.”

They made small talk as the coffee brewed, both ignoring the folder until the coffee was poured and their conversation dying and Diana had no other choice but to take a deep breath and open it, the pictures of Bucky greeting her again.

“I figured we would try to organize whatever’s in here and then you can translate the Russian,” Steve said, scooting his chair closer to hers and reaching for the first stack.

She handed him a few others, shuffling things into a few small piles. Medical records. Memos. Assorted notes. Mission summaries. Seventy years of pain printed as if it was nothing.

The medical records were half in English and surprisingly normal. His height and weight, some doctor’s notes scribbled at the bottoms of pages, and various numbers for tests and blood work she would need a doctor to explain.

She pointed out a word in Russian. “That means prosthetic. They’re referencing his arm. And a little farther down they mention Zola and his experiments.”

Steve scowled. “What allowed him to survive the fall. They made him a lab rat.”

She pulled more papers towards her, notes in Russian from higher level Hydra commanders, giving orders or commending the “asset” for his work. There were also a few lists and short letters, passages responding to other documents and filled with the bureaucratic jargon that even groups like Hydra have.
“He was a whole program,” Diana said, continuing to read. “There’s training evaluations and reprimands. The ones that aren’t glowing reviews mention something about improvements and re-education—I think that’s how they kept him under control.”

“So brainwashing.”

“Yes…I think so,” she said, her voice tight. “They mention trigger words.”

“Well if they have to keep redoing it, maybe it wears off?”

“I don’t know. I can go through and translate everything more thoroughly, but it will take a few days. We’re going to need to understand some science.”

“Is this enough?”

She looked down at the thin layer of papers stacked in front of them, not nearly as much as she knew existed, and nothing past the late 1990s when things would have been more digitized. “I don’t know. Hopefully.” She pulled the last stack towards her, the one about specific missions and assassinations they had both ignored until now.

“Do you want me to read off the names?”

He closed his eyes and nodded.

A Latin American leader, U.S. politicians, a banker, an actress, various activists, a terrorist leader. Some of whom she had heard of, but many she had not. All had a short description of the date and a sentence long write up of what had happened. A few words for each life. She continued, trying to keep her voice steady. A British MP, multiple journalists, a military commander a professor, student protesters, and…

She froze, rereading the line. And then reading it again. And again, the Cyrillic alphabet swimming in front of her.

“Diana?”

She pushed the paper away, bringing a shaky hand to her mouth. Peggy was right. She had always been right.

“Diana?” Steve asked again, “What’s wrong?”

She shook her head. She could see the picture of the crash Peggy had shown her—the front of the car crumpled, rammed up against the tree. The windows shattered and cracked, the trunk popped open from the force. She could see Howard’s smile, the one that made Maria roll her eyes but begrudgingly smile back. That look he got when he had an idea, Peggy warning him not to do anything stupid.

Dead, because of him. Tony orphaned because of him. The room spun, more than a decade of acceptance ripped out from under her with nothing to break the fall.

“No, I think I know” Steve said, laying a gentle hand on her shoulder. “In the bunker—Zola played a video. It had headlines from when Howard and his wife died.”

She let out a sob as Steve pulled her into a hug. Howard and Maria were dead. They were dead at the hands of their friend. And had Howard known? Had he seen Bucky—thought that his friend had betrayed him the moment before the impact? And perhaps most importantly, why?
“I was hoping they wouldn’t be in there.” Steve said. “I wanted to tell you when it might be less of a shock. I knew… it would be worse for you—you were better friends.”

She sat up and took a shaky breath, gathering up all the papers and placing them carefully back in the folder where she didn’t have to look at them. “I understand,” she finally said. “I just… this is what I thought of when Nat first mentioned the Winter Soldier. My biggest fear. Something Peggy suggested right after it happened, something it seemed like we missed.”

“You couldn’t have known.”

“No, but we could have tried to find out. Maybe it was for the best. I don’t think… none of us would have handled it well at the time.”

“I’m so sorry.”

She wiped her eyes “It’s not your fault. And it’s not Bucky’s fault,” she said, forcing Steve to look at her. He didn’t choose that.”

“Do you think the law is going to care?” he asked, bitterness creeping into his voice. “I don’t want to find him only for people to throw him in prison.”

“We’ll figure that out once it happens. Right now we need… well we need to do a lot of things.” She needed more information, more documents, something to scream at, and a nap though not necessarily in that order. “But we need to tell Tony first.”

Steve shook his head, hands clasped hard enough in front of him that his knuckles were white. “How? Go up to him and say ‘Hi, my closest friend murdered your parents, but he was just brainwashed?’ How the hell do you think he’s going to react, Diana?”

“I’ll come with you. The longer you wait the worse it will be.”

“Fury keeps secrets all the time. Even you lie sometimes. And you’re deciding to start spilling information now?”

She bit back a retort and instead just said, “I’m not always proud of that, but there’s a big difference between lying to keep other people safe and lying to protect your own feelings.” She looked back down at the colorless file in front of them. “You’ve never been one to run from something because you were afraid. I don’t think you should start now.”

He gave her a slow nod, finally pulling the file towards himself as he said, “Give me a few months. Let’s comb through all this, process it. And then we can tell him.”

“Deal. I can make copies and take them with me, fully translate everything.”

“In the meantime, we need to track him.”

“I’ll help with that too. I can coordinate with you and Sam, search while you two are tied up here. And Nat may be able to answer some questions…” she trailed off, having no idea how to finish or what all needed to be done.

“It’s okay. Now that we know he’s out there… we have time.” He stood to bring their mugs back to the sink. “Do we also tell Peggy?”

She imagined walking into the nursing home and watching Peggy’s face as they had that conversation. The confusion, mostly, but also the deep sadness about something she wouldn’t fully
understand. “It would just confuse her. She thinks he’s still alive as he was during the War.”

He nodded. “I agree.” He leaned against the counter frowning. “On the helicarrier…” he hesitated, “somewhere in his head he knew me. He saved me.”

“I thought as much.”

“But how? How can he be in there and also have killed a friend? What did they do to him?”

Her mouth opened and then closed. Even if there was an answer, it wasn’t a pretty one. She didn’t want to think about what he had gone through in order to act as he did. She definitely didn’t want to think about how he would feel when they finally got him back.

“Something we’ll undo,” she promised, trying to will it into being, “when we find him.”

She spent the next few days typing up translations, sending things to Nat that she wanted more explanation on or clarifying the meanings of certain words. She had always dismissed the concept of “ignorance is bliss,” but in this case it might hold true. The more she really dug in and learned, the more the memos and lists of names buried her with all she did not want to contemplate.

When she was through, she sent the translations on to Steve, who was already out on a mission with Clint and Tony, along with a list of possible places to start looking. Like them, she had other work to do, but she stole moments in her office in between restoration projects and Louvre memos, turning instead to what Sam had been calling “finding the ass in assassin.” She skimmed through the meager information they had over and over again at her desk, hoping something form the short list of leads would jump out at her and everything would come together.

She voted that, with little to go off of, they might as well start with the most obvious places first. Some Russian bunkers. Maybe back to the Alps or old wartime haunts. Steve and Nat would keep an eye out for intel while she and Sam could travel around trying to track him.

She spent the first few days of the hunt on her own, hopping between Russian towns he had at one point or another passed through. When none of the locals recalled seeing any recent strangers, she turned instead to looking at the Commandos old haunts, hoping he would go somewhere familiar to look for information. Sam came out to join her, the two of them heading to old allied bases and many, many bars.

“How much did you guys drink?” Sam asked by the time they hit bar number four.

She cracked a smile. “Probably too much. There wasn’t a lot else to do. Colonel Phillips used to say that ‘war is either killing the enemy or killing time, and time passes faster with a beer.’ But I do promise there will be non-bar sites. Like dance halls. Which I guess technically did still serve alcohol.”

Sam sighed, muttering something about unhealthy coping mechanisms before wandering off to try and ask the bartender if he had, by any chance, spotted a man who looked like an assassin.

The problem wasn’t just that Bucky wasn’t turning up, but that seventy plus years means a lot of their old haunts didn’t even exist. There were still a few bars and the approximate coordinates of old battle sites, but the bases? Gone. She knew they had been dismantled, she’d been past a few over the years and seen how the land had changed. But the last one she and Sam tried to visit, the
last base they had all been together at before the assault on Zola’s train and Hydra’s stronghold, was unrecognizable.

What had once been secluded, surrounded by forest, had been built up. The village that had been miles away in the 40s had expanded into a town, with a few houses stretching onto what had once been the training ground. There was a park where most of the tents used to be, filled with people picnicking and kids yelling as they ran around the playground. It was lovely, a nice retreat just a short drive on a paved road back towards the center of town.

The only hint there was history here were the few bunkers off in one corner, too sturdy to try to remove, with a small plaque talking about the location’s use during the War and the presence of the one and only Captain America.

She looked up from the plaque back to the scene around her, watching families resting on the grass where there were supposed to be army vehicles.

“I take it you haven’t been back since?” Sam asked, looking over at her.

“Not since the 60s. I didn’t know it could change this much…or that there would be so many people.”

“Well hey, at least it’s not a bar.”

“You’re right, the beer hall was out that way.” she said, pointing out past one of the picnic pavilions. “Though what Dugan got us was always better than what the army supplied.”

She glanced back one last time at the bunkers before heading back to the car with Sam. There was nothing for Bucky here, though they would see if there was security footage to confirm that. If he had been by, though, would it have helped him, given him some piece of information he was looking for? Or would it only make him look up and remember all the time that had passed?

Their first and only breakthrough came a few weeks later when Steve realized that if he had gone to his own Smithsonian exhibit, then Bucky might have as well. He and Nat somehow hacked in and got the security camera footage, and sure enough, there he was, looking up at his own info panel. He was inside for a while, reading through everything before he left, a ball cap pulled low over his face in a moodier version of Grant from Texas.

Steve was ecstatic. “It means he remembers,” he kept saying. “He recognized himself. He knows all that information now.” It was a good sign. But it didn’t mean anything if they couldn’t find out where he went from there. Nat traced him through security cameras, able to follow his path from the museum out onto the Mall, to the subway system, getting off at a stop by the airport but then disappearing.

“So he’s in Europe or somewhere, doesn’t matter, at least he knows who he is,” Steve said.

“Do you remember how big Europe is?” she laughed, not having the heart to tell him that finding out who he was might make him even less likely to want to be found.
Over the next few months, Steve’s optimism slowly faded, a few other leads turning up but quickly reaching a dead end. There was a random bank transaction, a sighting from Sam by a train station in Prague and then Budapest. Enough to know he was still around but not enough to actually make contact with him.

She tried, wherever she went searching, to look like who he would remember. Diana from the War rather than Diana from the Louvre. She wore her hair down and tried to bring a cloak with her. Any little thing that would jog his memory if he happened to see her or get word that she was here. She also had Steve make some drawings that she had run copies of, drawings that Bucky might recognize as his but few others would. There was his dancing monkey, a sketch of their old apartment building in Brooklyn, and silhouettes of all of them and the Commandos around a campfire. Wherever she went she tried to post them, leaving them plastered around the major cities in Eastern Europe.

But she was also on guard. If he had saved Steve and visited the museum, hopefully he would greet her as a friend. But they couldn’t guarantee he hadn’t been brainwashed again, didn’t know how much he understood. Nat had been so skittish when they met for the first time in a market years ago. Bucky was going to be even worse whenever they found him.

As the months dragged on, their weekly check-ins grew more and more subdued, all of trying to shake off the felling that this was an elaborate wild goose chase. The only good that had come out of it was that the search helped them track Hydra as well. When she ran across old bases that were still in use or came across information about any current operations, she could call in the rest of the team for backup and flush them out. But even helping end Hydra didn’t bring Bucky back.

“I don’t know where else to look. It seems like we’ve hit the main places,” she had told Steve.

Steve sighed, thinking for a moment before he asked. “Sharon’s info?”

“Nothing we didn’t already know. She’s trying to sneak us more.”


“All checked, no camera footage or reports of suspicious activity. I’m doing humanitarian work this week but Sam wants to scope out Brooklyn a bit more with your help.” She hesitated for a moment before saying, “You know… I think it might be time to talk to Tony. There had to be a reason Howard was a target. If we want answers…”

Steve sighed. “We’ll see.”

So many little scraps, little nibbles at the end of their lines without ever making the catch. And yet everyday she read through her notes, trying to approach things from a new angle, see what might have gone unnoticed before. She didn’t care if he didn’t want to be found.

She wasn’t going to be the one to give up the search. Not again.

2015

After a few more unsuccessful months of searching, Steve and Nat convinced her to take a few days of vacation and come out to one of Tony’s parties. It was supposed to be a celebration of a major victory against one of Strucker’s Hydra bases, but it was also a great excuse to get everyone together and drink. It would be just like the old days, except hopefully this time Tony wouldn’t get drunk and fall off of the stage and she could use the gathering to talk to Steve in person.
She spotted Nat behind the bar as soon as she arrived, heading towards her and giving her a big hug before she sat down on one of the stools.

“So,” Nat said, resting her arms on the counter and leaning forward. “How’s the hunt been?”

Diana let out a long sigh.

“Need a drink while you tell me your woes?”

She laughed. “It would be too long of a story, but maybe later. Though I must say, if you’re still searching for a new cover, bartender might work out for you.”

“Oh whatever, it’s still reading the room, just in a slinkier dress with more men. But,” she continued, raising her eyebrows at Diana. “I’m not doing my bartender duties if I don’t gossip: Hill and Rhodey and I had to listen to Tony and Thor have a ‘who has the better girlfriend’ argument.”

“Who won?”

“Unsurprisingly, neither. You know, if I set Cap up with this FBI agent I know then they could all argue…”

“I lied. Your cover is a match.com employee.”

“I try.”

They fell silent, Nat pouring herself a drink and taking a sip before asking, “Is there anything else I can do to help? Hacking? Translations?”

“Maybe. Fresh eyes at least. I can send you the full information and reports later.”

“Gonna need a few more shots for that,” she grimaced.

“I don’t blame you.” She looked over her shoulder, spotting friends out in the different clusters of people. “I would love to give you the synopsis right now, but I should probably say hi to the others. And save the alcohol supply,” she smiled, nodding towards Nat’s drink.

She waved a hand towards the opposite side of the room. “Cap’s across the room somewhere. He was hamming it up with a bunch of vets last time I saw him. I was afraid to go say hi because I figured he’d start asking me to buy war bonds.”

Diana looked over and spotted him, doubled over laughing with a handful of older men. “I think you’re safe, there’s not nearly enough show girls here to properly do the act.”

As she stood to leave Nat handed her a glass of wine and said, “We can plan a lunch. I can look over papers and who knows, maybe go do something fun. We have destroyed Hydra after all.”

As she weaved her way across the room, Steve’s group descended into loud laughter and jeers, the liquor making everyone more boisterous and, apparently, more competitive.

Steve smiled as she joined them. “We’re trying to one up each other with war stories. I was just telling them about the time the Commandos and I got stuck behind enemy lines and we set a bear on the Germans to escape.”
“Oooo that’s a classic. But how about when you had a MRE cooking contest and Bucky failed so badly he gave you all food poisoning?”

That set the crowd off again, a few vets scoffing about how that couldn’t possibly compare to the “weed brownie incident” in Vietnam.

She laughed along as the stories swapped back in forth, the grizzled faces around her welcoming her in. The tales grew more outlandish and impossible the longer they talked, though they were nevertheless still true.

One of the men next to her leaned over. “Pardon me, miss. You look familiar.”

“Oh?”

“There used to be this woman who worked with Cap here. Strong as hell, but I only saw her once. She lifted up a tank as a distraction to let us sneak through to a Hydra base. Newspapers said she went back home but you look an awful lot like her.”

She nodded, leaning forward to whisper. “I remember that. The man inside the tank was screaming so much and you all got in trouble for laughing at him.”

His eyes widened as she raised a finger to her lips. He looked between her and his drink and then back again, before carefully pushing his glass away and standing to leave.

She watched him walk away before turning to Steve and saying, “I think I just scared that poor man.”

He grinned. “He either won’t remember by morning or it will be another story to swap. He can tell his friends how he met Wonder Woman at Tony Stark’s party.”

“Where is Tony? Arguing with Thor again?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised. He’s over showing people the lab. All his latest creations he wants to show off.”

“Of course he is. Let’s go say hello,” she said, ignoring Steve’s groan as he stood to follow her. “I know. You’re absolutely thrilled.”

Sam called their names as they made their way across the room, coming to hug Diana and clap Steve on the back. “Looks like we got most of our missing persons team assembled. Cap, I think we need team t-shirts.”

“Why on earth would we do that for a secret mission?”

“To improve morale?” Diana suggested. “Though my vote is for tote bags.”

Steve just rolled his eyes, biting back a smile. “Thanks for the input. I’m assuming this is a nice way to tell me there’s no news?”

“Sorry Cap. We’ll keep looking,” Sam said. “But maybe he’ll find us if we’re in coordinated merch.”
As the party wound down and the guests started to leave, the three of them joined the rest of the team who were all sipping their drinks around one of Stark’s overly fancy coffee tables. She plopped down in the seat across from Nat, leaning towards her.

“Do you want a missing persons team tote bag?”

“If you’re making them. Gotta save the planet while you’re saving assassins.”

“Great point. Maybe Steve will go for it if I tell him it would save the trees.”

Nat smiled, switching to Russian as she leaned towards Diana and asked. “Along with the bag I have a favor to ask—I need childhood pictures of Tony. It’s my turn for the team power point next week and…”

Diana’s eyes widened. “Oh I have so many. Diaper photos?”

“Definitely.”

What are you two scheming about over there?” Steve asked, breaking away from what seemed to be a budding argument with Thor.

“Nothing for you to worry about,” Diana said at the same time Nat said, “Overthrowing the government.”

Steve sighed and turned back to the rest of the group, all of them now taunting Thor about Mjolnir.

“Whoever be worthy shall haveth the power!” Clint bellowed, mocking whatever Thor had just said. “C’mon it’s just a trick.” He laughed and turned towards Diana, signing, *Do you think he likes the impression? Or am I about to get fried?*

*Keep it up and you’ll be completely charred* , she signed back.

“Please, be my guest,” Thor said, inviting Clint up to where it rested on the table.

Clint just shrugged and walked up to the front, as confident as could be, as the group fell silent around him.

Rhodey snorted. “Really man?”

Everyone laughed, throwing little jabs at Clint as he reached down to lift it, straining for a few seconds before eventually giving up.

Tony smirked, Clint shooting him a look and inviting him up to try as well.

Natasha’s eyes rolled so hard they looked like they were about to fall out. “Can you say testosterone,” she said in a loud whisper.

Tony tried, with Rhodey and Banner following in quick succession, all failing even with their gadgets.

Steve was next, Diana leaning forward to get a better view. If she could do it, if her intentions were good enough, then his had to be too. Steve was quite possibly one of the only worthy men in the world, and if he was going to lift it, she sure as hell wanted to see everyone’s reaction. Thor might actually fry someone.
He rolled up his sleeves and then gripped it, Mjolnir moving ever so slightly as he pulled up, before he let go with a shrug. Thor gave a relieved laugh and started clapping, breaking the hush that had fallen over all of them. “Not quite my friend, maybe you can be, I don’t know, perhaps the messenger boy of Asgard?”

“Very funny,” Steve said, taking his seat and gesturing for Nat to try.

She smirked “Oh that’s not a question I need answered.”

And then all eyes turned towards Diana. She made eye contact with Thor, his expression practically begging her not to show him up. She smiled back at him. She wouldn’t outright lie, but maybe this was something she should save as a surprise. For use at a later emergency.

She waved off their requests. “That’s a question I already know the answer to.”

“The Lasso of Truth!” Clint bellowed again. “She who wields it shall be deemed worthy by the gods! Is that how that works? What are the lasso rules?”

She laughed as Thor stood to grab his hammer and said, “It’s not a trick. None of you are worthy.”

They protested, cracking a few more jokes and making up lasso rules as the group started to dissolve, heading home or staying to help Tony clean up a bit.

She and Steve walked around collecting empty bottles and glasses. “You know,” she murmured to him as they each took an armful over to the bar. “Something tells me you could have picked up that hammer if you had wanted to.”

Steve shrugged tossing what he had in the trash and then turning towards her, his eyebrows raised. “And something tells me that you didn’t try for the same reason I held back.”

She gave him a coy smile. “Perhaps. But I really did already have an answer. I didn’t need to do it again.”

“Show off,” he muttered, helping her stack up glasses. “Just glad Tony couldn’t do it. We don’t need to add ruler of Asgard to the genius billionaire playboy philanthropist list. That would be a nightmare.”

“Do you really think Thor would have let him?”

“Well did he let you?”

“No, but we haven’t really talked about it. In his defense it was quite a shock. Tony succeeding might have done him in, poor thing.” She glanced over at Steve. “Speaking of. You should talk to Tony while we’re all here. We’ve had some time, the search is going nowhere. We need to see if he knows anything.”

“After we just had a party?”

“Better to tell him now then after a mission when you’re all exhausted. You already avoided him half the night, you can’t do that forever.”

“But if I tell Tony now then—”

“Tell me what?” Tony called from behind him, downing the last of his drink and setting the empty glass in the pile next to him.
“Selective hearing much?” Diana snorted.

“Well, you got to keep up on the news about yourself. Ever read the tabloids? Actually that’s horrible advice, don’t do that. Anyway, I came over here, out of the goodness of my heart to offer my help. Heard Romanoff mention tracking someone, and, not to brag, but I have tech that is very good at that.”

Diana looked over at Steve, giving him a resigned nod.

“Well…” Steve started, taking a deep breath. “Not to ruin the night, but I have some really shitty news about that.”

“Worse than not being worthy? Try me.”

Diana just shook her head. “It’s…” She looked over at Steve who was frozen, a glass still in his hands, so she started. “Right after your parents died but before Peggy retired, she told me that she suspected their deaths were from an attack, not an accident.”

“Oh you weren’t kidding. Really trying to kill the vibe, huh?” he said, his nonchalance with a new edge to it.

“There were rumors of an assassin. It was so tempting, in the midst of grief, to have a real reason, some explanation, but I thought Peggy was wrong.”

“I’m assuming there’s a but here? What do you know?”

“But Peggy was right,” Steve said, his voice quiet. “The Winter Soldier, he’s killed dozens of people over the years, including your parents. He attacked us during the fight at HQ.”

Tony’s eyes narrowed, working his jaw in a poor attempt to hide his shock. “Then I will be especially happy to help hunt him down. What do you have so far?”

“Well, here’s the thing,” Steve said, looking over at Diana rather than making eye contact with Tony. “We’re not trying to find him to hold him accountable.”

He glanced between the two of them “I’m not following.”

“We’re finding him…because he’s our friend. It’s Bucky—Sargent Barnes.”

She watched as Tony’s expression went blank, his face pale, before his mouth twisted into a snarl and he walked silently over to stand by the window. He looked out for a moment before he turned back towards them, his body stiff.

“To be clear: you’re telling me that you found out who murdered my parents and you’re not going to bring him to justice?” he asked, his voice rising.

“Tony, I’m sorry. But that wasn’t him, he—“ Steve tried to say.

“You are. That is what you’re saying. You’re defending a Hydra assassin.”

Diana held up a hand, trying to get a word in. “Tony, I know. I know. I was devastated too. But he’s not himself, the documents show he was brainwashed and—”

He turned on her, growling. “You believe this too? You were best friends with my parents. You and Dad and Peggy—the dream team,” he said, oozing sarcasm. “He spent more time with you two than with mom and I. What would he say, knowing you betrayed him like this?”
She took a step back, the force of his words startling her. “Bucky was friends with Howard too. He would have been disappointed if we didn’t try to save him.”

He slammed his fist down on the counter. “He killed them, Diana! I don’t care if they’re old war buddies!”

Steve stepped forward putting himself in front of her. “This isn’t her fault. And it’s not mine. And it’s not Bucky’s. Hydra killed your parents, Tony. And I’m sorry.”

“He’s a Hydra weapon. And you two are enabling him.”

Instantly, Steve reached forward, grabbing Tony’s shirt and pulling him towards him before Diana stepped in between the two.

“Stop,” she said, her voice hollow. “There’s enough pain here without you two fighting.” Steve let go, looking slightly abashed.

“Tony, I’m not going to pretend like we can fix this. But Steve’s right, this is Hydra’s doing, and you needed to know about it. I didn’t want you to find out after we found him.”

“So you’re still going to search.”

“Yes. Until we find him and the people who made him do it. Yes.”

He shook his head, dumbfounded. “What the fuck am I supposed to do? Wish you good luck?”

Steve shrugged. “You don’t have to do anything. But he targeted them for a reason and knowing that reason might help us. And if we find him, he might be able to explain what really happened. It might give you some answers after all this time.” He stared at Tony for a moment longer. “If it were me, I’d want the closure.” And with that he turned away, Diana following him out.

Chapter End Notes

Annnnnnd I’m back! The next half of the Ultron based chapter is coming soon, and after that this thing is close to done (for realsies this time!)
Diana muttered her packing list under her breath, collecting various items from around her apartment and stuffing them in a suitcase, getting ready to head back to the Louvre. Her clothes from Tony’s party the night before got thrown on top, hidden away as she quickly zipped up the suitcase, trying not to think about his reaction to their news.

She had more immediate things to worry about, like where in Hades she had put her phone charger. “For the love of Zeus,” she huffed, sliding her hand between her nightstand and bed where it had fallen, dropping it on her desk and then going to pack her toilet kit as her phone rang.

“Did you just get attacked by a robot?” Steve asked, sounding exhausted.

“You’re joking, right?”

“I wish. Damn thing tried to murder us all at a team meeting this morning.”

“What on Earth are you talking about?”

He launched into an explanation. “Ultron. Some sort of AI Tony invented to save the world except it wants to murder all of us because it sees us as a threat. Oh, and it can inhabit robot bodies and travel through the internet.”

Dread coiled in her stomach. “That’s…very bad, even by Tony’s standards. What was he thinking?”

“I don’t know if he was. Creating weaponized robots to keep the peace sounds like a bad idea to me.”

“Do you need me to come down as back up? I can reschedule my flight.”

“No, we don’t know where his consciousness went yet, but Tony thinks he can fix it. Keep looking for Bucky. I don’t know if Ultron thinks you’re part of the Avengers or not, but you may be safe if you stay away. Just…watch out for robots I guess.”

She went back to the Louvre long enough to sort through memos and schedule upcoming projects before she headed for the Alps. She and Sam had already been here once, but she had a feeling that somewhere there had to be a Hydra bunker with more info, somewhere Bucky had been kept. And she knew, at least, that at one point Hydra had in fact been here.
She spent a day wandering through mountain towns, chatting with the locals and posting one of Steve’s drawings on the weathered message board outside the general store. She camped out that night, just off the road she would follow the next morning and under an impossibly clear mountain sky, the constellations easy to locate even if Bucky wasn’t.

Despite an early start the next morning, she came up empty handed once again. There were a few false hopes, weirdly shaped rocks or an outcropping that looked a little unnatural. But every time as she got closer it was just part of the landscape.

She couldn’t keep doing this, searching for a needle in a haystack, wandering around on foot. They either needed better intel or something that could scan the terrain in a more organized fashion. They needed Tony’s help, his tech, which perhaps was even more unlikely than stumbling upon Bucky herself. And so, yet again, she left the Alps empty handed.

As Diana made her way back into civilization, messages started trickling in. A few emails from the Louvre, something from Michael, and many, many, voicemails from Steve about Ultron, all growing increasingly more serious. She played them one after the other, the messages becoming a bad melodrama. Ultron was stronger and trying to build himself a body, he had the Maximoff twins, a speedster and weird mind controller, working for him and who had beaten the team, hulk went hulk, and Clint surprised everyone with a previously unknown sister and her beautiful ranch house which they were now at.

The promise that Ultron could be easily neutralized was clearly false. From the voicemails it sounded like he was carving a path of destruction, creating a mission of his own that would only lead to more death.

She left Steve a message to say she would head their way and then called Fury, who picked up on the first ring.

“How are they doing?”

He let out a whistle. “Unfortunately. We all just had a little chat. Talked with Stark, got the others off their asses to save the world, the usual. You’d think artificial intelligence would be something they left alone, but noooooo, had to go and experiment.”

“How are they doing?”

“As well as can be expected for being outwitted by a robot and having their minds manipulated by Ultron’s new lackeys.

“Wonderful,” she muttered, rubbing the tension out of her forehead. “And Tony?”

“He’s set on saving the world, without understanding he can’t.”

“I leave for one day. Just one day.”

“Well how do you think I feel, can’t a man just fake his own death in peace? Jesus.”

“Apparently not. Do you know where they’re heading? I’m going to go help.”

“I can send you coordinates, should be heading towards South Korea. Dr. Cho has a lab there, she
specializes in regeneration—the perfect place for a robot to go build himself a body.”

“Great. And where will you be during this latest escapade?”

“Calling in some favors. I’d like to do something equally as dramatic as creating an army of robots.”

She suited up in her full armor, lasso swinging against her hip as she took off, following the coordinates Fury and then Steve had sent. They were headed to Seoul, ready, she assumed, for a fight.

By the time she arrived and turned her earpiece on, all she could hear was yelling back and forth. Nat was saying something about a cradle while Steve appeared to be not just playing in traffic, but fighting in it.

“I’m here do you need me?” she radioed Steve.

“You missed the party. Help Clint protect the cradle and get it to Tony.”

“No!” Clint broke in. “I’m fine, I think Ultron has Nat. Diana can you—”

“On it.” She spotted Ultron off in the distance, trying to escape with Nat half dangling from his arms.

If she could get him to drop Nat and she could play catch….

Nat spotted her first, looking over at Ultron’s shoulder towards Diana and the ship Clint was piloting back to the lab.

Diana waved, gesturing to the ground and miming falling, hoping she could somehow charades her way to an escape plan.

Nat clued in and started squirming, causing Ultron to finally notice Diana and speed off, trying to evade her. Nat went fully slack, becoming pure dead weight and throwing him off balance. As Ultron compensated, she yanked an arm free and whipped it back, elbowing its chest and face in rapid succession and then pushing off, free falling towards the ground.

Diana swooped towards her, trying to get to her before the damn robot did. She kicked him away, managing to snag Nat around her middle and then spin her around so she could grab the gun on her hip and try to shoot the tin can out of the sky. She got a few good shots in, but Ultron flew off before she could turn him into another piece of debris to clean up.

When they finally landed Nat groaned, taking stock of her body. “Thanks for that. Wasn’t looking forward to trying to escape whatever robot prison he would throw me in.”

“Of course. Got some bonus skydiving out of the deal too.”

She rolled her eyes. “Yeah I can finally lord it over Rogers that I don’t use parachutes either.”

She radioed the others that they were both back on the ground, Clint sounding audibly relieved as
he updated his ETA for Tony’s lab. Steve wasn’t responding, but she figured the streams of people running away from something and talking about a derailed train was the perfect place to start.

She and Nat ran towards what seemed to be a market area, going the opposite direction of everyone else. She spotted Steve off to one side, near the front of the train, talking to a man and woman.

“That’s the twins,” Nat pointed.

She nodded, sprinting out and running towards them, hoping she could catch them by surprise. She was almost up behind them when Steve and Nat both yelled “Wait!” but the woman was already whipping around, shooting red beams of something at her. Diana blinked, opening her eyes to find that everyone had disappeared.

She spun in a circle, squinting out at her surroundings until she spotted Steve Trevor, just as he was during the Great War, smiling back at her. She laughed, running towards him and suddenly they were outside, dancing in the snow.

She hugged him close. “And this? This is what people do when there are no wars to fight?” she could hear herself ask.

He smiled down at her swaying along. “Yes. They dance. They make breakfast, go to work, get married, grow old.”

As they danced the music from the bar grew louder, Charlie’s voice out of tune and too loud. The wind whipped the snow through her hair, turning the night into a blizzard and Steve stumbled away from her out into the haze of white, collapsing.

She caught him, laying him on the icy ground as he rasped out “I have no idea what that’s like.” His voice was bitter, mouth twisted as he said, “You didn’t save me. You never ended war.” His hands clawed towards her, blood from some invisible wound staining the snow. “The people will never know what that’s like. Never.”

The snow turned orange, gas choking both of them, along with the rest of Veld. “Dead. They’re all dead, and you could have saved them.” He wheezed, disappearing into the fog.

She blinked and she was in the nursing home, Peggy laying in a hospital bed where Steve had stood just a moment before. She looked over with a vacant smile “Oh hello! I don’t believe we’ve met before. I’m Peggy Carter. What’s your name?” She withered in front of her, aging and sinking farther down into her bed in a matter of seconds.

“You will start over without me,” she whispered, looking past Diana. “You can’t save me.” She reached towards Diana as her heart monitor flat-lined. Her body disappeared, replaced by her friends, all weak, their arms reaching out towards her. Steve, his shield cracked, Nat bruised up, Tony’s suit with the lights out. They turned old before her, turned to dust, everything crumbling around her she opened her eyes.

She was sitting slumped against a wall, Steve squatting in front of her with a frown. Nat was by her side, holding onto the lasso she had wrapped around Diana’s hand and muttering in Russian.

The woman —Wanda Maximoff— was there too. “I am so sorry,” she said, as soon as Diana opened her eyes. “I did not know who you were, I’m supposed to be helping you now.”

Diana waved her off and slowly sat up. “I didn’t know we were on the same team either.”

Nat unwound the lasso, laying it in Diana’s lap. “Thank god that helped snap you out of it. Figured
if you said it worked on Banner it would work for this.”

“Thank you,” she murmured.

“Hey, look at me,” Nat grabbed her hand, waiting till she made eye contact. “I know what you saw in there was ugly. We all do. But we don’t have the time for you to be zoning out on us now.

She mustered a bit of a smile, groaning as she got to her feet. She looked at her and then to Steve, hovering next to her. They were alive. They were all here, and she needed to help them. “I know. Let’s head back to the lab.”

Steve and the twins helped fill her in on exactly what Ultron had done—trying to upload himself into the body that the cradle held. Wanda was worried Tony would try to animate it. *He will do anything to make things right* is what she had said.

And she was right. It was his fatal flaw, in truth, a flaw most of them had. But only Tony had the brains, ego, and tech to try and save the world all on his own.

Sure enough, when the five of them burst into his lab, he and Banner were there, in the process of doing something to the cradle.

“Shut it down!” Steve barked. “Are you shitting me? After what happened the first time?”

“How about no,” Tony said, carrying on with whatever he was doing on the computer.

“How do you know she’s not in your head?” Banner asked, pointing towards Wanda.

Diana held up her lasso. “Because of this. They’re on our side. And I think everyone should take a step back and make sure that we’re not making another mistake.”

Tony hesitated, looking up at her, before shaking his head and pushing more buttons. “You want to try to nurse an assassin back to health, but I can’t do this? To save us? It will be able to defeat Ultron, it’s been doing it already.”

She looked into the cradle, the gem in the body’s forehead looking oh so similar to that of the tesseract. “But are you sure—”

“After everything that’s happened you’re still doing this?” Steve broke in “This is insane!”

“That’s nothing compared to what’s coming.” Tony said, in a voice so ominous she wanted to ask him what he had seen, what he knew that they didn’t.

Pietro, tired of the fighting, ran off, and in an instant had everything disconnected. “Let’s talk while it’s not uploading.”

There was a beat of stillness and then the room dissolved into chaos. She ran to put herself between Tony and Steve so they didn’t kill each other and Wanda was doing Zeus new what to Banner. As she was trying and failing to settle everyone down, Thor crashed in, hitting the cradle with so much lighting she was surprised the whole room didn’t blow up.

Instead, after a beat of stillness, a body exploded outwards, resting on top of the cradle for a moment before launching himself at Thor, crashing through a window from the lab into Tony’s
living room.

They all froze for a moment, the cradle sitting empty besides them, before they followed, gathering around the same couch and expensive coffee table as they had a few nights before, but this time it was the opposite of a party. No one was laughing as the man turned around, newly clothed and caped, and spoke to Thor, sounding so shockingly familiar she missed Thor’s explanation about the gemstone and whatever other technology he was going on about.

“Tony, why does your vision sound like Jarvis?” she asked, cutting Thor off. JARVIS the program had been eerie enough, the voice so similar to that of the man, but this made him almost human again. The voice combined with the man’s posture, his measured words, and sense of calm made it feel like she was meeting an old friend.

“We reconfigured JARVIS’ matrix, built something new. He’s part JARVIS, part something else. He can help us beat Ultron.

Steve scoffed, but Thor broke in again. “It comes down to that Mind Stone. The twins’ powers, our visions, Ultron—it all came from it. It’s like the tesseract, Captain. And after seeing what that can do, I would much have us control it than the other side.

Steve finally nodded, turning back to the man. “But are you? On our side.”

“It’s not that clear cut. I am on the side of life. Ultron isn’t. And so he must be destroyed.” He looked out at all of them giving them a nod of acknowledgement. “You need my help. You need everyone here working together. Or else we will fail.”

Diana gave him a small smile. He was unusual, certainly. And maybe he would indeed prove to be a threat. But for now he was offering to help, to do what he could to help stop Ultron.

“I’m not what you are. I don’t know if there is a way to make you trust me,” he continued.

Diana stepped forward, a hand on her lasso. “There is.” She looked back at the others, Steve and then Tony gesturing for her to go ahead.

She wrapped it around his wrist, the lasso starting to glow as she asked. “Will you help us defeat Ultron?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“And do you wish to hurt us? Will you turn on us when the battle is over?”

He smiled at her. “No. Unless, of course, you also decide you want to destroy the planet.”

Diana wound her lasso back up, securing it on her hip and turning to the group. “He speaks the truth. There’s not time to keep arguing—we need to find Ultron.”

“He’s in Sokovia,” Wanda said from the back of the room “That was his plan.”

Steve nodded taking the team in, plus the brand new member. “Then let’s go.”

Steve outlined the plan on the ship there. “Keep the fight between us and Ultron. The civilians didn’t sign up for this. We need to get them away from the action, prove we’re not the monsters
Ultron thinks we are.”

“Evacuate the city.” Diana added. “Tell a few people and have those people spread the message while you move on to the next block. That’s what worked in New York. The top priority should be making sure they never see the fight at all.”

As the ship descended, they returned to last equipment checks or finished suiting up. Diana wound and re-wound her lasso out of habit, the Vision coming to sit next to her as she did so.

“Your mission is a noble one,” he said, looking over at her. “Different. You are not like them either.”

She shrugged, unsure of how to respond to artificial intelligence who sounded like Jarvis psychoanalyzing her. “No, but we’re more similar than you might think. My mission has been one of decades and they’re just getting started, still finding their footing. But they try. We all do. It’s been one of the best parts of my life, working alongside them.”

“You love them. Despite their flaws.”

“I learned a long, long time ago that the flaws make them human.”

He nodded, pondering her statement. “Thank you for sharing that,” he said, before floating away to go talk with Thor, leaving her sitting there, slightly confused. Having deep conversations with one of Tony’s creations had not been on her to-do list for the day.

When they touched down in Sokovia, they immediately spread out, starting the calls for evacuation. Wanda used her powers, making people unconsciously leave like a superhero pied piper. She and Pietro alerted the police and emergency services while Diana barged into to city government offices to alert everyone inside.

Despite their best efforts, the process was still chaotic, the major arteries of the city clogged with cars and people on foot, carrying suitcases and boxes and kids and pets. The exodus enveloped them, people streaming around them from every part of the city. Banner, Nat, Clint, and Steve were all trying to direct traffic, moving as many people through as they could.

It almost looked like things would be okay, it was slower than she would have liked, but at least the crowds were moving and taking the threat seriously. But then the ground beneath her feet began to tremble. She froze, pushing a group of people behind her as Ultron’s robots started tearing their way out of ground like a horror movie scene. They came up from the river, scaled buildings. And they kept coming.

It was hard to keep the fight between themselves and Ultron when Ultron was everywhere. The robots attacked, causing people to scatter out of their semi-orderly lines screaming, dropping belongings and running for whatever shelter they could find.

“Run!” she screamed at the group next to her “Go!” She deflected a shot off her bracers, taking the robots closest to her out and moving on to the next batch. But there were so many of them, and fighting them off meant that they were distracted, unable to organize the evacuation.
She cursed, trying to keep them away from the Sokovians as best she could, taking one out that had a clear shot at Steve.

“New plan?” she yelled over the radio. “We need to stop the attack.”

“Oh, we got bigger problems,” Nat radioed back.

As she fought, the ground beneath her feet began to shake again, and she braced for another onslaught of the metal murder bots that never came. Instead, the ground cracked open entirely, fissures spreading across the cobblestones, causing her to stumble. The buildings around her started to crumble, he concrete around her collapsing as the city slowly levitated into the sky.

She gathered people away from the edge, watching rubble collapse over the side, the dust rising around all of them. Pietro ran by, leaving a trail of robot metal in his wake and pulling some stragglers to safety, but it wasn’t enough.

“What in Hades is happening?” she radioed, the panicked yelling from behind her nearly drowning out her voice.

“There’s a vibranium core keeping us afloat that Ultron just activated.”

“Wonderful,” she muttered, slashing another robot with a sword and ushering the people back towards the city center.

“Tony, work on getting us down. The rest of us? Tear these things apart,” Steve said.

She cleared her area alternating between skewering them on her sword, using her lasso to chuck them into each other, or just plain ripping them apart. She met up with Nat at one point, the two of them covering each other as they slashed and stabbed away, Hulk ripping robots apart in the background.

They had destroyed the first wave, stopping enough to give them a few minutes of breathing room until the next wave hit. She and Nat joined up with Steve, Clint and the Twins coming from the other direction, everyone helping civilians find shelter.

“What do you have Stark?” Steve radioed. “I’d like to get off this rock.”

Diana’s heart sank as he responded, his voice too quiet, not his usual cocky self that was proud to present a plan. “Nothing good. A way to blow up the city if you guys get off, that will keep it from impacting the surface.”

“That’s not a solution.”

“We have to make a choice. The impact radius is only going to get bigger.”

“Cap these people aren’t going anywhere. If there’s a way to blow this rock…” Nat started.

She left them to argue, staring out at the sky. It was everyone down below, or the people up here, themselves included. Peggy’s words from her vision haunted her. You can’t save everyone. A threat, but a promise.

She looked at the city, then back towards the sky. She couldn’t save everyone. But she could save more than they might have planned on.

She phoned Fury. “That drama you wanted to harness? We need it. Now. The only other option is
blowing ourselves out of the sky.”

“You’re in luck Diana” he said, a smile in his voice. “Contacted some old friends to take her for a joyride. We can be there in 15.”

“Ultron could have dropped this by then.”

“Then come give us a push.”

She looked up confused, before she spotted a helicarrier far off in the distance.

She sprinted to the edge and took off, yelling “Don’t blow anything up while I’m gone” to Steve and Nat, both of whom yelled things after her she ignored. She sped towards the carrier, waving at Fury and Agent Hill through the windows by the control room, before flying around to the back. She grabbed on, pushing it with everything she had, hoping that helping it fly just a little faster would make a difference.

As they approached the island in the sky, the emergency boats deployed, speeding off to go pick up civilians.

S.H.I.E.L.D. was back.

She joined Rhodey and Sam in the sky, fending off robots that were trying to attack the helicarrier and then heading back to the ground to help usher the civilians onto the lifeboats. “Let’s go, let’s go!” she called, trying to organize the stream of people. “All the way to the back!” They filed on, filling one boat after the other, the first few quickly filling up and heading back to the helicarrier, ferrying thousands of people across the sky.

As the civilian numbers dwindled, she fell back, joining the others in a crumbling church, stained glass crunching under her feet as she walked to the center, helping guard what Tony had called the drill—what Ultron wanted to use to drop the city.

They closed ranks, forming a circle as they faced Ultron who waved forward his own army of metal, hundreds of robots charging at them, surrounding the church.

At least it meant the civilians were safe, free to board the boats without being attacked. Fury could make sure they all made it off. If this was their last stand, the others would be safe.

“Together,” Tony reminded them as Ultron’s army breached the church, Hulk letting out a roar as the two sides met. Everything dissolved into a blur of weapons and friends and metal, making contact with anything she could. She was vaguely aware of the others next to her, Wanda’s red beams and Clint’s arrows passing by, Nat’s yells as she made impact. As they fought, fewer and fewer robots came forward as replacements, the team slowly but surely destroying them. As the last few tried to reach the core, she saw Tony, Thor, and Vision, fly by, shooting the ones trying to escape out of the sky.

“Let’s move, get stragglers to the boats while Tony does whatever he needs to do,” Steve ordered.

She didn’t need to be told twice. She sprinted out of the church and back to the other edge of town, herding people as she went along. The last boat was nearly full, and then Tony would be able to blow this rock up.
Diana, I’m going to need the lasso to get Banner back,” Nat radioed

“Of course, let me do one last sweep and I’ll meet you.”

She stood by the edge, scanning the buildings for anyone else who may need help, when She saw Clint run out, headed towards a little boy stuck by some stairs.

She gestured for the policeman by the ramp to hold the ship for him, turning back around only to see Ultron somehow in one of Tony’s ships, flying low and spraying the ground with bullets.

Clint and the boy would be caught in the crossfire.

She flew, her arms raised in front of her to deflect whatever she could. As she dove in front, she felt something whoosh past her, knocking her off balance and on to one knee. She raised her arms above her head, finding only a few bullets instead of the onslaught she was expecting.

She turned her head, only to watch Pietro slowly sink to the ground, holding his side, a few bullet wounds visible down his arm and torso.

“No!” she yelled, kneeling down next to him. “Why? I’m bulletproof—I could have done it!” She ripped off part of his shirt, her hands shaking as she used it to try and stop the bleeding.

“Didn’t… know,” he wheezed out. “But hey…Ultron didn’t see me coming.”

As she started applying pressure, Clint appeared at her side, the boy in his arms.

“Oh God. Is he—are you okay?”

“Steve!” she yelled “Help! Someone—I need a medic, a stretcher, we can’t just move him.”

Steve ran over and took one look at Pietro, half conscious at his feet. “There’s not time.” He picked him up as carefully as he could and jogged towards the lifeboats, Clint following with the boy in tow. There was too much blood on the ground.

She slowly rose to her feet and took a breath, scanning the sky to make sure Ultron’s plane wasn’t nearby. It was clear for the moment, allowing her to move on to the next piece of work. “Where are you? I’m coming with the lasso,” she radioed Nat. “And if you see Tony’s plane, shoot it.”

“Heading towards the helicarrier. Banner’s especially angry, which is perfect for shooting things.”

Nat gave her a strange look when she landed on the deck, and looking down at herself she noticed a brand new gash in her armor, along with a spatter of blood down her side.

“Pietro’s,” she clarified, before walking over to where Hulk was looking over the side of the helicarrier, staring out at what was left of Sokovia.

He turned towards her with a grunt and she raised out a hand, slowly approaching him. “Bruce, I’m going to wrap this around your arm. Just like we did at the barn. Remember that?”

She took another step forward, holding the lasso aloft. “Just stay right there, okay? I just need to slip the loop over your hand. And then everything will all be okay.”
In the distance she could hear Ultron’s jet reappearing. She maintained eye contact with Banner, praying Ultron would give them just another few seconds. She could feel Nat tense beside her, trying not to look over at the plane.

Diana took one slow last step, holding her hand out to him, but at the last second he growled, pulling back and launching off the hellicarrier and towards the ship Ultron had hijacked, re-hijacking it for himself.

Diana stood there, stunned as the plane flew off. “What…should I go after him?”

Nat sat down heavily on a piece of equipment. “Not now. Hopefully we can track him.”

She nodded, reporting back to Steve. “Banner’s gone AWOL. Everything good on the ground?”

“Civilians secure. Tony’s about to blow this place, but we don’t know where Wanda went. Pietro was asking for her and—”

“I’ll go.”

“No—it’s not safe, it’s about to disintegrate and—”

She pulled her earpiece out and flew off, heading back towards the church where Wanda was supposed to be on guard. Below her, amidst all the rubble and broken robot parts, she spotted the red tendrils coming out of an abandoned train car just a few blocks away. She dove down, ready to snatch her up and fly away.

And then the bottom dropped out.

The city fell away from her, forcing her to fly down to meet it. She flew inside the train car, hoping Tony would wait just a few moments longer before he tried to destroy everything. Wanda was right inside by the doors and she grabbed a hold of her, flying them both out and above the island of rock as fast as she could.

They watched it shrink, falling for a few moments more until it exploded outwards, debris raining down on everything below.

She put her earpiece back in just long enough to tell Steve they were safe and then began to float them back down, doing her best to stay up above the dust for as long as she could.

“Where is he?” Wanda finally asked. “I can feel his life flickering.”

“On the helicarrier. He’s asking for you.”

She let out a breath. “That is good then.”

“It is. He’s going to need you—you can give him a talking to about getting better. And also not running in front of bullets.”

“I will. If I have to sit Shiva for him, I’ll kill him again.”

She dropped Wanda off by the sick bay and then headed to the control room to find Fury.
“Why, Ms. Prince!” he called “Long time no see.”

She gave him a tired smile. “Well, it’s a little hard to visit the underworld. Thank you for everything. This was a wonderful surprise.”

“\textit{And} just as dramatic as robots and new super humans. How are they, by the way?”

“I don’t know. Pietro…” she shook her head. “They would make great additions to the team. And we are going to need a bigger team if things like this keep happening. Or I can start another one. Something.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t worry too much, I still have one more ace up my sleeve.”

She raised an eyebrow “I thought I was your ace.”

“Only an idiot would have one ace.” He waved her towards the hallway. “Come here, there’s someone I want you to see.” She followed him to a room a few doors down, Fury opening the door with a flourish to reveal Agent Coulson at the computer.

She opened her mouth, looking at Coulson’s smiling face before turning back to Fury with a sigh, “Will you ever stop hiding things from us?”

“It’s not endearing yet?”

“Far from it.” She turned back towards Coulson, grinning. “It’s good to see you Agent. Do I even want to know how this was possible?”

He shrugged. “Went to Tahiti. It’s a magical place.”

“Coulson’s running another team underground, S.H.I.E.L.D like it should be. They lent us this ship. \textit{And} this S.H.I.E.L.D. is actually interested in taking down Hydra, so you all can share information.”

“Perfect. Is this the ace you were talking about then?”

Fury scoffed. “Oh no. Coulson is ace number three.”

“I assume you also have a fourth?”

He nodded, pointing to his eye with a scowl. “The fourth one did this.”

In the middle of everything else, there was a little reunion party on board, the Avengers cycling through to say hi to Coulson and take a break before running off to help organize the civilians or make sure Ultron had been entirely wiped from the web. Diana helped pass out meals and blankets and then made a call to the U.N. to discuss the newest humanitarian crisis.

She also went to check in on Pietro, who was asleep with Wanda slumped over by his bedside.

“How’s he doing?” she whispered.

She looked up, frowning. “They finally stopped the bleeding. He’ll live…but they don’t know if he’ll be the same,” she said, handing her his chart. Diana skimmed through the medical jargon,
long enough to see that the bullet in his torso had hit his spine. “They won’t tell me anything,” she continued, “I keep asking them about rehab and his options.”

“I’ll talk to Dr. Cho or Tony to see what they can do.”

With everything and everyone else accounted for, she made her last stop, walking down to one of the labs where she hoped she would find Tony. Sure enough, when she poked her head in, he was swiveling around in his chair, staring up at various projections.

He stopped the chair as it rotated to face her, letting out a sigh. “I don’t want a lecture.”

“Good thing I’m not a professor,” she walked in, taking a seat next to him.

“I don’t want to talk about Barnes either.”

“You’d think I’ve never talked with you just to see if you’re okay,” she said, rolling her eyes. “I do want to ask a favor but not for me—is there any fancy technology to fix paralysis? Pietro may need it.”

Tony slumped down in his chair. “Maybe some fancy braces. But he wouldn’t be able to run in them, not at super speed at least.”

He looked up at Diana, his face haggard. “Would he even let me work on him? When I ruined their lives? They worked with Ultron because my weapons killed their parents. I orphaned them, allowed Hydra to take them. And now I nearly killed them, too.”

“Tony—”

He slammed his hand on his desk, shutting down his projections. “Maybe Ultron was right. Maybe we’re the threat. Peace in our time my ass, do you know how much we’ve destroyed? What I’ve destroyed?”

She shook her head. “I’m not going to excuse your mistakes. But you are hardly the first person to wish for that. Ever heard of Neville Chamberlain? At least your peace didn’t lead us into a world war.”

He scowled. “Is the bar that low? Yay for me, I destroyed a city and people’s lives but at least it’s not a world war?” He gestured around the room “Look at this! Everything I created. I said I was getting out of the weapons business. I promised. But did I?”

“I’ll let you in on a secret.”

“Oh goody.”

She ignored him. “Even without what you create, we’re still weapons. My destiny was to be god killer, I was raised to fight Ares. Steve was built to be a weapon against the Nazis. Nat was trained by the Russians. You have your suit and —”

“So then Ultron was right!”

“Except we’re all weapons. From the world leader who campaigns for war to the playground bully. Ultron saw that darkness in us and in everyone else. And he wanted it destroyed,” she said, her
voice quiet. “He did not see the grace in our failings, any of the good. That’s how he differs from Vision.”

He muttered something about being a bleeding heart and then buried his face in his hands, falling silent. “I just wanted him to save people. Stop the destruction that is coming.”

“You gave him an impossible mission.”

“You don’t understand. What I saw in my vision. Destruction. Death. All of it laid at my feet as my failure. It was real. I couldn’t just not do anything about it.”

“I do understand,” she shot back. “Wanda hit me accidentally. I saw my friends withering away, and I unable to stop it. That is real, or it will be in the future.”

He shook his head, squinting at her. “Then how can you possibly accept that?”

“You are not the first to try and defeat war. I killed him—Ares. The god of it. And when I looked up afterwards there was peace, yes, but imagine my betrayal when it didn’t last. I was there for the war to end all wars. And I have been at every war after.”

For the first time Tony fell silent, staring at her.

“Tony, long after you are gone, I will still be here. That is not meant to be hopeless, it’s just fact. I learned early that I can save as many people as possible. Deflect some bullets, chase down Hydra. And there will be a little bit of peace for a little while longer. But it will eventually end, and then I’ll do it all again.”

“Everyone keeps saying that I can’t save everyone.”

“It sounds too defeatist like that. You can’t, but you should try to save them all anyway.”

“As a numbers guy, I’m saying that makes zero sense.”

She cracked a smile. “You should try because every person you save is a victory, even if it doesn’t last. Even if you can’t save the next one. We’re in the business of temporary victories. Ultron tried to be permanent.”

Tony gave a hum of understanding, swiveling in his chair again as he said, “You know, I have a strange feeling that this is still a lecture.”

“I consider it motivation.”

“Same thing.”

She shook her head. “Ultron was the creation of a man who was trying to outrun his own grief.” She leaned forward, forcing Tony to make eye contact with her. “But I know you’re more than capable of trying to save the world in a more sustainable way. And for the love of Zeus in a way without any more robots.

“Hey I made Vision didn’t I?”

“You did. And he succeeded because he understands all of what I just told you.” She stood to leave, giving his shoulder a squeeze as she turned to go.

“Diana,” he called after her “Tell…tell Pietro that if he wants, I’ll see if there’s a way to help. Have them send me his medical records.”
She nodded, Tony turning his projections back on as she turned to leave.

It was a little victory.

Chapter End Notes

Chapters are going to be coming fast now-I just have 3-4 more I'll be posting over the next 2 weeks. It's time to get this thing finished!

This fic only goes up through just after Civil War, but I'm currently planning on doing stand alone chapters with endgame scenes/ other scenes I didn't include as part of a series, so let me know if there's anything you want to see Diana be a part of!

The title is taken from a John Mulaney joke in his Netflix special Kid Gorgeous
Diana sat in her office, toggling between plans for the Louvre’s summer tourist season and documents from the Sokovian refugee resettlement while she waited for Clark Kent to arrive for another interview. From the email he had sent it wasn’t exactly clear what he would be interviewing her about, but whatever it was would be a pleasant distraction from work.

The museum had mostly cleared, the tourists heading back to their hotels and her assistants clocking out by time security paged her that there was someone waiting for her by the info desk on the floor below.

Walking out she could see Clark standing off to one side by the cafe and chatting with the security guards, his pen and notebook in his hand as always.

“Ready for the tour?” She asked as she walked up, giving him a hug.

“As long as my tour guide is willing to put up with me,” he joked.

She whisked him up to the first level, trying to give him an abridged “Louvre’s greatest hits” tour before they sat down to talk. She paraded him past the Mona Lisa, Liberty Leading the People, and the crown jewels, giving brief descriptions of each as they went along through most of the European art. Heading back down to ground level she took him past the Egyptian antiques, as well as the brand new international modern works exhibit she had championed, this season featuring prints from a young Pakistani artist.

She saved the best for last, the Greek antiques room with its black and red pottery and sculptures she cared for. Clark scribbled notes he walked, his eyes wide as they made their way back to her office.

His jaw dropped as they walked in, catching sight of the few Greek pieces carefully set aside for restoration or photographing.

“I can’t believe this is your job. This is so interesting.”

She grinned, “I am rather fond of it.”

“I could spend all day here and still not see or know everything?”

“If there’s anything you want to learn about before the interview, ask away. I know the most about Greek art, but I could pull in one of my coworkers before they leave for the night.”

“Hmmm, a silly one maybe: Which goddess do you think the Venus de Milo is? The brochure says probably Aphrodite, but that there’s a debate,” he said, pointing to a blurb on his map.
She snorted. “Men saw breasts and decided it had to be Aphrodite. There are many possibilities, especially depending on what she was holding. But I believe it’s the sea goddess Amphitrite. She was venerated in Milos.” Themyscira’s library also happened to have had old texts with sketches of Amphitrite that looked extremely similar to the statue, but he didn’t need to know that bit.

“Wow. That’s interesting. One more question, if you don’t mind.”

“Of course. More art controversy?”

His face was unreadable as he said. “Not quite. Do you happen to know anything about Sokovian art?”

Her smile froze. She kept her voice light as she answered, “Only a little bit, mostly a few modern artists. Unfortunately, further study would be a bit difficult at the moment.”

He nodded. “So if you’re not an expert on Sokovian art, then you visited at the exact time of the evacuation just for fun?”

She opened her mouth to protest, but Clark raised an eyebrow, slipping his notepad back into his pocket in victory.

She sat down in her chair with a sigh, motioning for Clark to take a seat in front of her. “How much do you know?”

He pulled a few photos out of his bag, pictures of her in armor from Sokovia, one blurry one from the battle of New York, and documents from a S.H.I.E.L.D. FOIA request, heavily redacted, but alluding to her. “About this much. I came for clarification, not confirmation.”

She stared him down for a moment before she gave him a sly smile. “Well if we’re coming clean here, I’m going to stop pretending I don’t know about you being Superman. Can you actually shoot lasers out of your eyes?”

“I knew it. I can, but I should have known—there was no way a Louvre employee was going to come meet me in Kansas just for the hell of it.”

“No, I had a great time! I just happened to be sent there by S.H.I.E.L.D. To make sure you weren’t a threat.”

“And how’d that turn out?” he asked, frowning. “They couldn’t have been happy about Metropolis.”

“My assessment was positive, so they weren’t thrilled about either of us when it happened. Buy you were trying to do what was right.”

“Thank you. That…means a lot.”

“Can I ask you something? Was I really that bad at spying?”

He grinned. “You would have been great if you weren’t trying to fool a journalist with super hearing. I can hear heartbeats—yours speeds up when you lie.”

She crossed her arms in front of her chest. “Well that’s unsettling. You’re a walking polygraph over here.”

“Guilty. Though that shouldn’t be a problem for you right? I heard you have a literal lasso of
“I do.” She shook her head, letting out a laugh. “But I can’t just tune in to a lie detector channel like you do.”

“I’m not a radio station, I can just listen really well.”

“That is still completely ridiculous.” She closed her eyes for a moment, trying to reset. “Okay. I don’t care that you found out—I’ve been more public the last few years. I knew the risks. But I need to know how easy it was to get these documents and who else may have them. I want to make a statement before it really leaks out.”

“Intelligence agencies obviously. Probably a few die hard Avengers fans. And then… likely Bruce Wayne and Lex Luthor?”

she stared at him. “I’m sorry, what?”

“Well Bruce Wayne has been acquiring information on superhumans. I also think he’s Batman but that’s a whole different theory. And Lex Luthor likely has the information too, and knowing him, he probably wants to use all of us for something.”

She bit her lip, computing what that meant. Working with another genius billionaire playboy philanthropist would be a nightmare. Tony was enough already. And Luthor? She didn’t know much about him other than that he was one of those love-to-take-over-the-world type businessmen who would love to exploit her and anyone else’s powers for his own gain.

“Is there anything we can do to see what their intentions are? A meeting with Bruce Wayne maybe?”

Clark sighed, scooping the photos off her desk and back into his bag. “Probably. We can work that out. But I didn’t really come here to talk about that—I came to warn you.”

“About?”

His voice dropped as he leaned towards her. “I know a thing or two about destroying cities. Public opinion turned against me, there were articles debating my actions. Even you were watching me long before people knew what I could do.”

“I am sorry about that.”

He waved her off. “You need to be prepared. You all are more powerful. And you’ve destroyed much, much more than one city.”

She winced at the truth in his assessment. “I know. I’m already hearing rumors. the UN isn’t happy, much less the Sokovians. Especially since this time…the mess was entirely self-inflected.”

“Which will make the backlash even worse.”

“I’m planning on advocating for the team, I’m more removed so hopefully—”

“You are the team,” he interrupted with a snort. “Even with what little I’ve found out, you’re just as much and Avenger even if you’re unofficial. You’ll be just as caught up as they all are, maybe more so because the only thing worse than government sponsored superhumans are rogue agent superhumans.”
“Maybe you’re right. But I’ve walked the tightrope of trying to do my job and answer to bureaucrats for seventy years. I’ll just have to do it for a while longer.”

“Wait a sec,” he said, his forehead crinkling. “Seventy years?”

“You don’t know that bit yet? We have a lot to discuss.”

“That’s what I was hoping for. Do you mind if I fill my girlfriend in on everything you tell me? She’s a journalist and she’s been helping with research. She could figure out more about Wayne and Luthor if she had more info.”

“Sure. Does she work with you at the Daily Planet?”

He gave her an awkward smile, running a hand through his hair. “Yep. I’m actually dating Lois Lane.”

Her eyes widened. “Are you serious? The Lois Lane. Who helped break the Hydra story?”

“That’s her,” he said, a proud look in his eyes. “Everything would obviously be off the record. She would never use anything you told us in an article.”

“For Lois Lane? I might let her,” she joked. “We can meet tomorrow, go over everything, send what you need back to her. It will be nice. Having more people who know.”

He smiled, scooting his chair back to leave. “That works. Last question then—what happened to the statue’s arms.”

“Oh even I and the other Amazon’s don’t know that.”

“Really? Nothing?”

“I’m actually glad, it’s one less secret to keep. One last question for you too—why are you called superman? I would think Kal-El would convey more mystery and strength.”

He shrugged, waiting for her as she grabbed her bag and stood to walk him out. “Marketing? It sounded more American.”

“We should get you and Steve together. The whole planet would go nuts.”

“By Steve you mean…”

“Captain America? Yes. He’s been a dear friend of mine since the Second World War.”

He took a long look at her, before shaking his head and reaching to grab his notepad. “Start from the beginning.”

She gave Clark the run down over dinner that night and then throughout the next day, much as she had to Steve a few years before. Clark quickly gave up and writing notes and just used his recorder, which hopefully would prove to be useful if she ever needed to explain this to someone new yet again.

He didn’t speak until the very end, when he sat back with a sigh and said. “That’s a lot to unpack.
Wow. What you’ve been through…”

“I’m glad to share it. It killed me when we first met, not telling you the truth, especially when our stories seemed similar.”

He nodded. “You miss them, don’t you? The other Amazons? And I suppose your friends from earlier wars.”

“Often.”

He abruptly reached down under his chair. “I have something else for you,” he said pulling out his bag. “Last week Lois covered a fundraiser Luthor was having, and Bruce Wayne was there too. She happened to see him use a flash drive to take some of Luthor’s info so she, uh, went down and downloaded files from that drive to her laptop and left.”

She gaped at him. “Holy Zeus. I need to meet this woman. So the drive why you think Wayne knows about superhumans?”

“Definitely, most of the information on the drive pertains to them. Makes sense considering it’s pretty well known that Luthor has been interested in enhanced humans for years.”

“To say that’s concerning would be an understatement.” She looked back at Clark, suddenly tired. She should have been keeping tabs on those who had been trying to track her or any other superhuman long before this. And now it would be a game of catch up. “But how does that make Wayne batman?”

Clark snorted. “Because the drive had a giant bat symbol on it.”

She burst out laughing. “Excellent sleuthing. I clearly should stop worrying and let you both figure this out.”

“I mean, Wayne also has the money to bankroll his vehicles and weapons…”

He had more information to make his case, but she only half heard it, still chuckling at the idea of a batman branded flash drive. What was it about superheroes and poor hiding skills? At least Steve’s bad ball caps didn’t have a giant shield embroidered on the bill of them.

“So Bruce Wayne is batman and he and Luthor have info that Lois also stole for us,” she interrupted. “How does that have anything you want to do with what you want to give me?”

“There was an interesting picture Lois found on the drive. At first I thought it might be a fake but after just hearing your story…”

He pulled a sheet of paper from his bag and slid it across the table, a printed version of a grainy black and white photo that made her gasp.

“It’s them, right?” he asked. “You and your friends”

She nodded, skimming her fingertips across it. There was Sameer and Chief and Charlie, all stone faced, staring back at the camera. And there was Steve, one hand on his gun, one resting lightly on her back, his face weary.

Tears pricked her eyes as she stared down at it, the people in it and town itself long gone, but now here again with her. She had searched for this photo along with Etta after the war, but Veld had been deserted except for the bodies and so neither of them had gone back to look. Now, looking at
all the little details she had forgotten over the years—Chief’s hat, the way Steve held his head—almost made her wish that they had.

Clark reached in his bag and handed her a tissue. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean—if you want me to leave for a little bit—”

“No!” she sniffed before blowing her nose. “It’s wonderful, thank you and Lois so much. I just…thought this was lost to me. It’s been a long, long time since I’ve seen them all like this.

“Well I’m glad you like it.”

“I love it. Thank you. For bringing them back to me.” She propped it up on a nearby shelf in her living room, half covering a photo of she and Peggy from the 70s, letting her eyes linger on it a moment longer before she turned back to Clark trying to focus on the task at hand. “We need to talk to Wayne, especially if he has that photo.”

“He and Luthor will be at another gala in a few days, but he’ll recognize you.”

“He will. But I’ll be ready for him.”

The night of the gala she met Clark and Lois at their hotel to get ready and go over the plan one last time. Getting to know Lois, however, made it felt more like the start of a girls’ trip than an intelligence gathering mission.

“You ladies alright in there?” Clark asked, peeking his head into the bathroom where they were doing their makeup. “The car comes in 10.”

“You can’t rush art,” Diana said at the same time Lois said “Sorry, we got side-tracked talking about the expose on the climate accords.” They looked at each other before they burst out laughing

Clark rolled his eyes. “Getting you two together was a bad idea.”

They did make it down to the car and then the Gala on time, the three of them separating to mingle and pick up what information they could. If Lois and Clark could conduct interviews, get close enough to tell who was lying, and she could confront Wayne… then they might be able to piece this mess together after all.

She grabbed a drink and glided through the crowd making polite small talk with those who stopped her, a few she recognized from fancy art sales and Louvre Galas. She slid over to a wall of art, most just overpriced copies or outright fakes intended to impress a crowd who would only give them a passing glance.

“A beautiful sword there,” a deep voice came from behind her, staring at the weapon that rested in the glass case directly in front of her.

She pursed her lips, examining it “Beautiful, but a fake. The original was lost decades ago.” She said, turning to face him only to find herself staring up at Bruce Wayne.

He must have recognized her too, his eyes narrowing as he gave her a glance up and down before
his eyes rested on her face. “I suspect you’re quite right. Luthor has never quite been one to care about exact authenticity.”

From across the room she could see Clark walking around by the buffet tables and yet clearly paying attention to her, his head cocked to the side to listen in, ready to play backup if needed.

She gave Wayne a demure smile along with a hum of agreement as she took another sip of her drink, surveying him. Unlike Clark, who was now a friend and eager to share what he knew, Wayne did not seem the type to show his hand. She didn’t have the time for him to go all night pretending he didn’t recognize her, nor could she allow him to think that she wasn’t in control of her own identity. Which meant she needed to do something rash.

He flagged down a server. “Can I get you another drink?”

"Oh no thank you. At my age one is plenty.”

He gave her a dazzling smile that he must have given to a hundred other women he had wanted to charm. “Please, you can’t be a day over 30.”

She smirked, draining the last of her wine and looking up at him. “Oh, but you must know that’s a lie Mr. Wayne. You’ve seen the photographic proof yourself.”

In an instant his prince charming façade cracked, his eyes flashing. “And how, might I ask, did you find that photo.”

"I didn’t find anything. Some friends from the Daily Planet took it from a drive you were also using to steal information”

He leaned forward, his voice a steely. “You’re playing a dangerous game. If any part of those files is so much as mentioned…”

“Of course, we can keep this all confidential. Along with the fact that the flash drive appears to be connected to none other than the Batman.”

He grabbed her arm. “Who are you? I think we need to talk.”

She carefully pried his fingers off of her. “Someone who knows a lot about old swords. I’m happy to talk, that’s why I’m here. But only if my friends can come with me.”


After making quick introductions to the driver, Alfred, and a short ride to Wayne manor, the four of them sat around a desk in Wayne’s office.

“I need to know why you’ve been collecting the information on superhumans,” Diana said, staring him down.

“I need to start a team. I know now you help the Avengers but that’s not enough with everything that’s going on. Certainly not enough with your team under scrutiny.

She bristled, avoiding a response by glancing over at Clark who gave her an imperceptible nod that he was telling the truth.
“Oh,” Diana said, “Well that’s a pleasant surprise.”

“What did you think I wanted them for? Experimentation? Private army? That’s Luthor’s style, not mine.”

“We’re trying to get information from him too,” Lois chimed in. “We figured it made sense to have an ally going in.”

“Against Luthor? You’d better.”

“I’ve also considered starting another team, Diana said. “If that is really your goal, I would happily join in.”

Wayne snorted. “Yeah? And where were you the past 70 years. Why now?”

Her eyes flashed. “I never left,” she said. “I’ve been at every conflict since the Great War.”

“You hid.”

“Just because I wasn’t running around in a cape doesn’t mean I wasn’t helping,” she snapped.

Just then Alfred, who apparently also doubled as a butler, came in to bring tea, a man after her own heart, diffusing some of the tension. “I trust this meeting is going well?” he asked, intentionally oblivious to their scowls. “Wonderful. Master Bruce, Master Timothy would like me to let you know that he’s ready for patrol whenever you are through.”

Wayne nodded, turning back to them with a sigh. “You can help me with the team,” he muttered to Diana. We’re going to need you. I have a few other candidates to recruit as well.” He pushed a button on his desk and a screen on the wall next to them dropped down, showing pictures and documents regarding other superhumans. “We’ll need to go talk to all of them.”

There was what looked to be a bionic man, a speedster like Pietro, and some sort of imitation Poseidon. And then herself of course. It was a good start. Enough, if everything worked out, to have a real team, especially when Clark told him about Superman.

Wayne turned to Lois. “You are too observant for your own good. If you ever want a job or work for the team, let me know.” Before she could answer he locked eyes with Clark, his scowl deepening. “You do not get to be on the team. As a reporter or Superman.

Clark opened his mouth to protest but Wayne just frowned, clicking another button that caused the screen to change to information about superman. “Save it. I’ve found other research on you and you look just like him.”

Beside her Lois muttered “Great job with the secret identify thing guys,” making Diana choke on her tea.

Wayne ignored her, as well as Clark’s protests. “You destroyed an entire city.”

“Like you haven’t torn Gotham apart? Like Diana hasn’t left messes behind?” he said, refusing to meet her eyes as he said the last bit.

“You don’t know your own strength,” Wayne said.

“And do you? Do you know the consequences of being Batman?” Clark retorted.

Fury flashed across his face as he half-rose out of his seat. “Do I?” he asked his voice dangerous.
“Know what my job has done? As if I don’t have to think about it every day of my life?”

“Gentlemen,” Lois interjected, her voice firm. “This isn’t a contest. What if Mr. Wayne makes decisions in the morning and then sends you whatever the next step is?”

Clark nodded. “Fine.”

Wayne stood up and used the intercom to tell Alfred to ready them a car. He turned back to the group. “I’ll update you tomorrow. There isn’t much time—we need to get to these people before Luthor does. He’ll want to exploit them, regulate them. For now I have business to attend to. Alfred will see you home.” Then he turned on his heel and walked out of the room, closing the door just a touch harder than necessary.

Alfred arrived in a few moments, leading them out to the garage. She walked next the him, the two of them chatting out front of Clark and Lois. “I ask that you forgive Master Bruce of any unwarranted anger on his part,” he said, in a quiet voice. “He takes his job very seriously and always wants to be prepared. That’s part of why he wants this team, you see. He lost a son a year ago. It made him see that he’s not invincible.”

Diana nodded, trying to distinguish between the closed off man they had just met, the charming playboy from the party, and some more private, melancholy version he kept hidden away. She wasn’t quite sure which version she would talk to the next day, nor which version was really him, the man they had just entrusted all their secrets to.

The next morning Bruce Wayne did in fact send documents upon documents of information. She took a moment to check that Clark did, in fact, appear to be reluctantly included in all of this, and with that issue taken care of she put off the rest of the reading until after she got her visiting done in DC.

She took the metro from the airport to the Sokovian Embassy, which was still desperately trying to process claims and paperwork and refugees months after Ultron. She was there to drop off some of her own reports as well as check in on Pietro, who had been volunteering at the embassy during his recovery and was manning one of the desks when she walked in.

“How are the legs doing today?”

She nodded. “How are the legs doing today?”

He kicked his feet up onto his desk, leaning back in his chair, to reveal the robotic exoskeleton
Tony had crafted for him using some new insanely advanced technology. He was finally completely mobile, enough now after therapy he might be able to rejoin the team in a different capacity. But he couldn’t run.

“Still a little clunky,” he said with a sigh. “But I’ll get there. You visiting Peggy today?” he asked, flashing her a smile as he changed the subject. “Or am I the main draw?”

Diana rolled her eyes. “Please. I enjoy visiting both of you.”

It was only a partial lie. She loved visiting with Peggy without enjoying it the way she used to, each visit now accompanied with a marked decline in her health and memory. The memories she had held on for so miraculously long considering the disease, helping foster the last shred of denial Diana held, had been stripped away, leaving Peggy in a hazy fog of her own past. If they were lucky, Michael and Elizabeth when they visited became Daniel and Angie or her brother and mom. Steve was either dead or still in uniform, and Diana just a part of the Commandos.

Peggy was thankfully awake when Diana peeked into her room, Peggy gingerly turned towards her and jerking her head towards the news on the TV asked in a weak voice “If this Mr. Trump becomes president, we’re going to lose the war. And the nurses won’t forward my messages to Colonel Phillips about it.”

Diana gave a noncommittal hum, walking in and setting her back down by the chair for visitors. “If you want a break from news, I brought you more audiobooks. And some proper British tea.”

Peggy smiled “What would I do without you. Put some on why don’t you. The tea they bring us from the mess hall is Lipton.”

“Tragic,” Diana agreed with a solemn nod.

Peggy tried to speak again but went into a coughing fit. Diana leaned down towards her to make out her whisper of “How’s the team?”

The team, meaning the Commandos.

“They’re doing great. They just helped save many civilians from a town called Sokovia.”

“Good,” she smiled

“It is. The generals aren’t too happy though. They don’t like how they don’t answer to anyone.”

She scoffed “That’s how you do the best work. Don’t let them turn you into part of the bureaucracy. I still have mission files I should sort through later.”

They moved on to talking about the unseasonably cool weather and what she had heard on the radio while Diana helped sort through her mail, setting aside nearly everything to recycle later, the well wishes sent by people long forgotten.

“Oh, don’t mess with that, Jarvis will yell at you,”

“Jarvis could use some help.”

Peggy gave another laugh that turned into a coughing fit, the nurse coming in to give her another
dose of meds.

“I’ll let you rest, but Steve or I can swing by next week.”

She nodded before her eyes suddenly widened “Steve? He’s alive?” Not with the joy that she used to have, but now just with confusion

“Of course he is.”

“Daniel and I were just talking about him.” Her eyes started to close but she smiled “when you come next time, bring some more tea”

“I already planned on it.”

She squeezed Diana’s hand as she got up to leave. “Thank you for everything,” she whispered, before the meds fully took her under.

Chapter End Notes

Only two more chapters and a half chapter/half epilogue to go!

there is a legitimate scholarly debate about the Venus de Milo that I had Diana weigh in on, though her answer isn’t the widely accepted one.

Title taken from an old show about the justice league
Diana, Clark, and Bruce met back at Wayne manor the next week to officially try to make what she
and Clark had jokingly been calling “first contact” with the three superhumans Bruce had located.

“We’ll split up,” Bruce said, outlining the plan. “I can take Victor Stone. Diana, you get Barry
Allen. Clark…take the aquaman.” He directed this all towards Diana, barely looking over at Clark
as he spoke.

“Fine. If they don’t run away screaming should we bring them back here?” Diana asked.

“That’s the goal. It may take a couple of visits.” He handed them their communicators as well as
their own flash drives of information “Good luck. Don’t let them kill you.” He said, before
disappearing out of the room.

“Wow. Think he woke up on the wrong side of the bed much?” Clark asked.

“Ha. At least he seems to respect you. I’m stuck going diving.”

Diana suppressed a smile, clapping him on the back as they left the conference room. “Do your
lasers work under water?”

She showed up at Barry’s door a few days later, enough time to watch the one snippet of grainy
security camera footage they had of him over and over and over, still never quite understanding
how he was so fast.

She knocked on the door of the rundown warehouse Bruce had supposedly traced him too. This
must be what Fury felt like, barging in to tell people about the Avengers initiative and giving them
a heart attack in the process. Knowing him, he hadn’t even bothered to knock. There was no
response from inside, so she tried again. “Barry!” she called “I have a job offer for you.” She could
hear rustling, but no response.

With a sigh she ripped off the padlock that was holding the doors shut and took a step inside. She
was greeted by a giant bank of high-tech computers and other technology, along with various
mechanical parts and an old superhero suit, made of what looked like some high tech abrasion
resistant fabric.
Turning a little, she finally made out the young man off to one side who was also sizing her up.
“Hi,” she smiled at him. “I’m Diana Prince.”

“Dude. You just broke into my house.”

“Sorry about that,” she said, awkwardly closing the door behind her. “I have a job offer for you
and, well, we’re under a bit of a time crunch.”

“Fine. My name’s Barry, but you already somehow knew that which is not creepy at all. You must
be a very bad spy. Or Burglar. Or burglar pretending to be a spy.”

She rolled her eyes “Neither actually, I’m an Amazon.”

“Yeahhhhh I’ll pass on that offer. You guys treat your employees like crap.”

“No, Amazon like the ancient warriors from Greek mythology. Except I'm not a myth and I have
what you would consider superpowers. I’m here to offer you a spot on a team I’m helping build—an
organized group of superhumans.”

He shook his head. “Super is not really a descriptor for me? I generally prefer weird. Sometimes
techy but not like the hipster type? A good Jewish boy?”

She laughed. “Barry. You have a fancy suit sitting right there.”

“I’m really into cosplay these days?”

“Hmmm I see. Do you cosplay at the gas station?”

“What? Of course not. I got only to the best comic cons.”

She pulled out a grainy screenshot of the video Bruce had showed them. “Then who is this person
who can run at lightspeed?”

He shrugged, pretending to examine it. “I don’t know but he’s handsome. Definitely not me.
Maybe that Avengers guy? The Russian one?”

“Sokovian,” she corrected. With a sigh she reached for her lasso and then whipped it at him as
quickly as she could. She blinked and he had it in his hands, coiled as if she had never thrown it at
all.

She grinned. “So. About that spot on the team.”

“Ohhhhhhh my god. Ohhhhh wow. The lasso! You’re wonder woman? The wonder woman right?
You were in a news reel I watched in history class!”

“Great,” she sighed. “That doesn’t make me feel old at all. I suppose I am if that’s what you want
to call me. I generally just prefer—”

“Are you on the team? If you’re on the team I am definitely joining this team.”

“I am. It’s me, Batman and Superman right now. Plus you and two new people if you all agree.”

He made a face “That’s it?”

“What do you mean that’s it? Six people working together in an organized way is approximately
six more people than we had two weeks ago.” Dear Zeus, she definitely sounded like Fury. Was
this her equivalent of Michael and Elizabeth’s jokes about turning into their parents? She hated it.

“Ok ok ok” he said holding up his hands. I’m in.”

She blinked at him. “Well, congratulations. That was…surprisingly easy. I suspect our other recruits aren’t so excited, but you can meet everyone else soon.”

“Why not?” he asked incredulous, walking over to a mini-fridge and pulling out an entire pizza. “They get to hang with all of you. Fight crime, see cheering crowds all the time. Buy your own merchandise and then start a collection of things with your own face on them. That kind of stuff.”

“Well, it’s also real work. It’s dangerous. You’re responsible for saving a lot of people. You generally have a secret identity. So there might be some reluctance.”

“Ok wait another second,” he said through the whole slice of pizza he had just stuffed in his mouth. “What if I can’t do that.”

“Do what?”

“The whole saving people thing? I’m not great with humans? I really need some friends. Which is great because now I’ll have all of you. Do we have handshakes? Some sort of secret base? Do I get to visit the Batcave?”

She held up her hands. “Slow down a second. You don’t have to be some extrovert who’s amazing at saving people right away. There’s training and you have help from the rest of the team.”

He shoved another slice of pizza into his mouth. “But isn’t that the whole job? Saving everyone?”

“It’s less intimidating than that. You just do what you can. What is it Rabbi Tarfon says? It is not your duty to finish the work but—”

“But neither are you free to desist from it. The work of perfecting the world, that is.” He finished for her. “Got it. Can’t be neglecting that work. When do I start?”

She looked at him, feeling whiplash from his back and forth decision making. “Soon. I’ll talk to Br—I mean Batman.”

His eyes widened. “Did you just almost give away his secret identity? Do I get to know everyone’s secret identities?”

“Only if you promise to share your pizza.”

He shoved the empty box at her. “Deal.”

Victor Stone and Aquaman, aka Arthur Curry, were slightly harder to convince, though Bruce and Clark eventually managed to do it, the six of them finally all getting together at Wayne Manor a few days later.

Victor, despite being robotic, was incredibly warm. While slightly reluctant to be there, he seemed like he would have a steadying presence for the team, especially in comparison to Arthur and Barry.
Though she would never admit it out loud, Arthur was actually quite different from Poseidon. Being a superhuman who could speak to whales and acting like a really intense surfer bro meant that he was more laid back than an ancient deity, even if he still seemed intimidating.

Alfred brought them drinks while they sat and chatted, the awkward gaps quickly filling with genuine laughter, even if Bruce pretended otherwise. Barry and Arthur fed off each other, posing increasingly ridiculous challenges to the group.

“What If I race Clark!” Barry suggested.

Clark just sighed. “No.”

“Please!”

“Only if someone holds Diana’s lasso.”

Barry shook his head, turning to look at Bruce.

Bruce shook his head. “I’m good.”

“Fine. What if…Arthur and Diana fight!”

She eyed Arthur up and down. Before turning back to Barry. “That would be a mistake on his part.”

“Oh no,” Arthur broke in with an embarrassed smile. “She’s right. She’s very right. I would never want to fight her. She’s amazing and would totally kick my ass. Which I would probably deserve.”

Diana muffled a laugh and pointed to his chair where her lasso had magically materialized. “Arthur. I think you’re actually sitting on my lasso.”

He panicked, batting it back towards her as Wally turned to Clark triumphantly. “Ha. Someone made contact with the lasso. Now you have to race.”

Arthur’s eyes narrowed as he realized what Barry had done. “Not if I drown you first.”

The two of them raced off, hopefully neither one intent one actually killing the other. Barry sped back in a second later, dragging Clark off with him too.

Diana shook her head, a smile tugging at her lips. “I work with children.”

Bruce frowned. “I resent being lumped in with them.”

“Of course you do.”

“When they get back we should settle on some training schedules, maybe pick an easy first mission to build their confidence.”

“Sounds good. I can help, but I’ll be back and forth. I have to head back to the Louvre and then I’m needed in Syria.”

“Disappearing again?”

She frowned. “No. I’m just spread thin. I told you, I never left.”

“Since the First World War, right?”
She nodded.

“Then you’ve been doing this for far too long.”

She snorted. “I assure you, I’m nowhere near retirement. The picture you have of the first team I worked with? One of them always said you can either do something or you can do nothing. And I’m not about to do nothing.”

“You should have worn yourself to the bone by now.”

“I’m immortal. And I sleep. Try it sometime, Bruce.”

He scowled. “That was your first team,” he continued. “And you have the Avengers now. You can’t expect us to not be curious about what happened in the middle.” He made it sound like a suggestion, the start of a causal conversation, rather than his need for information.

“A lot. I can tell you all of it sometime.”

“And what happened to that man you mentioned? Did he disappear too? I couldn’t find a record of him.”

“Because he died,” she said, her voice hardening. “Ending the war.”

Just then the other 3 came traipsing back in Barry shaking his fist in victory “I won!” he declared plopping back down in his chair, oblivious to the tension in the room.

“We actually tied…” Clark started, before seeing Diana’s frown and then looking over at Bruce with a glare.

Bruce turned back to business, outlining training and missions. Barry and Arthur were entirely too excited to start sparring, but if they paired them against each other maybe they would actually get worn out. Partway through Alfred peeked his head in again, greeting her smile with a somber expression. “Ms. Prince, I’m afraid you might want to turn on the news. Your Avengers have been involved in quite…a problem.”

The room fell silent as Bruce handed her the remote, turning on the TV to find footage of an attack in a market area that showed Wanda trying to contain some sort of bomb but accidentally sending it into the side of a building instead.

She watched the explosion on a loop, the TV replaying the 10 seconds of footage while the newscasters droned on about the Avengers and risk and irresponsibility and casualties and diplomacy. The footage was focused on the fireball hitting the side of the building, but if she looked closely at the beginning there was Wanda on the edge of the frame, the video catching her face at the exact moment she realized what would happen.

Diana turned the TV off, unable to stand seeing that glimpse of Wanda sinking to the ground over and over and over again.

She turned back to the group to take her leave, feeling them all stare back at her. “I… unfortunately I’m needed elsewhere. But it was lovely to meet all of you, get this process started.” she said, trying to muster a smile.

She said her hasty goodbyes, Clark giving her a hug before she left. “Take your time. They need you more than we do right now.”
She nodded, letting Alfred lead her out right as her phone rang.

Seeing it was Steve answered with “Is Wanda okay?”

“Technically. You’re gonna need to come down here, but—”

“It’s fine, I already planned on it.”

“Diana—”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“Diana. It’s Bucky.”

She fell silent. “Bucky?”

“Rumlow mentioned him. It was supposed to be a distraction. And it worked,” he sighed. “But he was so…so damn smug about it. He knew something. He knew where he is or where he’s being kept,” he finished in a rush, his voice bitter.

“We can ramp up the search, hunt through his old records,” she soothed. “He gave us a new starting place.”

“Not right now we can’t. Have you seen the news? What the international community is saying? Secretary Ross is recalling us for some sort of meeting so he can try to scare us shitless.”

“Not surprising. I’ll be there.”

“But you didn’t—”

“They’ll include me whether I want to or not. I’d rather it be on my terms. I’m on my way.”

Alfred gave her a sidelong glance as she hung up. “Captain Rogers, I presume?”

“Yes. We’re getting called on the carpet.”

“I see. And what are you going to do about it?”

“That would be the question,” she sighed, stepping into the car Alfred had called for her.

He gave her a smile. “I have no doubt that you will answer it.”

When she arrived at the D.C. conference room, Tony was the only one there, sitting at one end of the long table.

“Ah! Diana. Glad you could make it. The U.N. is writing some new regulations—The Sokovia Accords. You can sign them later today. But since you’ve done so much international work, if you want to make any little tweaks or come with us when it’s ratified, you’re more than welcome.”

“That’s kind of you. But who said I’m signing anything?”

“Well after what just happened—”
She frowned at him. “What happened was not grounds to strip us of being able to do our jobs. What do these accords call for?”

“Ross will go over it with you. We basically just need to get approval by the U.N. It’s been in the works for a while now.”

She stared back at him, dumbfounded. “This was your idea.”

“Oh no, I just provided some input, the international community—”

“You knew about it. And you didn’t tell us. Didn’t warn us,” she growled.

“Diana, this is happening regardless.”

“It might not be if you didn’t help it along!”

“Diana—” But the door opening cut him off, Rhodey and Sam walking in, leaving Tony to just shake his head.

She sat down with a huff, staying silent as the others all trickled in.

Ross walked in last, the room falling silent as he walked to the head of the table, pushing a button on the podium to lower the screen.

“I know you’d all rather be somewhere else, so I’ll make this quick. The world owes the Avengers an unpayable debt.” He said, looking out at all of them. “But while many view you as heroes, others see you as vigilantes.”

Nat raised an eyebrow. “And what do you think?”

He walked back and forth in front of the table, hands clasped behind his back as he eviscerated them. “You’re dangerous. You are a U.S. based group of enhanced individuals who ignore sovereign borders and don’t give a damn what mess you leave behind.” With a frown he started a highlight reel of destruction. New York City. D.C. Sokovia. The most recent attack in Lagos. Around her the team hung their heads, Wanda shrinking down in the seat beside her.

“Enough,” Diana said, her voice steely.

“You’ve had no supervision which the governments of the world can no longer tolerate. The solution is the Sokovia Accords. He slid a thick book towards them, Steve catching it and opening it up. “You’ll operate under a UN panel, acting only if they think you’re necessary.”

Diana raised a hand to speak but Ross just shook his head. “Trust me. This is a compromise that you all desperately need. Talk it over. The UN meets in a few days to ratify it.”

“And if we don’t sign?” Diana asked.

“You publicly retire. Or in your case Ms. Prince, you stick to your art and leave the world be.”

As soon as he walked out of the door, they drew battle lines.

Sam started, shaking his head. “How long is it gonna take for them to screw us over? Treat us like
Rhodey sighed. "117.117 countries somehow all agreed on this and you want to dismiss it?"

“I have an equation.” Vision interrupted. “In the eight years since Mr. Stark became Iron Man, the number of enhanced humans and conflict has grown exponentially. Oversight cannot be dismissed out of hand.”

“Are you familiar with the phrase correlation is not causation?” Diana asked.

“Oh, but I believe there is both. Out strength invites challenge.”

Diana shook her head, standing up to pace. “We are only responsible for our own actions. How can we blame Wanda and Steve for Rumlów’s plan? Blame ourselves for Hydra attempting mass murder? For Loki destroying New York? Darkness will exist whether we are here or not.”

Rhodey snorted. “Yeah, and look at our own actions, Diana. We haven’t been saints.”

“No. But the good outweighs the bad. Would you rather us have stayed home and let the planet explode?”

Nat looked between Diana and the rest of the group. “Tony. You’re being uncharacteristically quiet.”

Steve looked up from where he was also being rather quiet, reading through each page of the Accords. “He’s already decided.”

“And he helped set this all up.” Diana added with a glare.

Tony stood up, meandering to get a cup of coffee. “I did.” He took a sip, turning to look at the group with a frown. “Ever heard of Charles Spenser? Bright kid. Had an Intel gig lined up. He was doing charity work in Sokovia until we dropped a building on him.” He spat. “It’s obvious. We need to be put in check. And I make no apologies for trying to do so.”

“Tony,” Diana said with a frown. “Your grief has blinded you.”

“She’s right.” Steve said. “If someone dies on your watch you don’t give up. Signing this is giving in. Have you even read some of this? It’s not just us—other enhanced people who have done nothing could also fall under it. We have no veto power, no control over future recruiting and—”

“Steve this is the U.N. we’re talking about,” Rhodey said. “Not Congress, not S.H.I.E.L.D. or Hydra.

“Rhodey, I’ve done a lot of good work with the U.N.” Diana broke in. “But it is made up of governments and people with their own agendas. You think Russia will let us into Syria? That The U.S. will let us help at the border?”

“It’s the international community, Diana!”

“I was there when the international community was created! The League of Nations— the world’s great hope. And I was there when they failed to stop the next World War.”

“Diana’s right.” Steve said. “The U.N. isn’t infallible. And If we sign this, we give up our right to choose—we could get sent somewhere we don’t want to be. Prevented from going where we need to be.”
“You heard Ross. If we don’t do this it will be worse later,” Tony argued. “It will be forced on us.”

“They’ll come for me,” Wanda said, her voice quiet.

Nat nodded. “Maybe Tony’s right… if we gain back their trust let them oversee things, then we can still steer the ship a bit. If we refuse, then we’ll have nothing.”

Sam rolled his eyes. “Aren’t you the one who told the government to fuck off?”

“I’m just trying to read the situation,” she said slowly “We’ve…made mistakes.”

“You’re right. But there have to be other ways to earn back that trust,” Diana said, looking around the room. “We can have oversight without signing this.”

“Diana, this is it.” Tony said.

“We can push for a different compromise, start some sort of campaign. There’s never just one option.”

Her phone buzzed and she ignored Tony’s rebuttal as she glanced down to read the text.

It was from Michael and simply read: She’s in a coma, we only have a few hours. She reread the words over again, the room falling silent around her as she desperately looked up to find Steve. He was staring back at her, face white, his phone also in his hand with his half of their silent conversation the exact same as her own.

“Diana?” Tony asked, waiting for a response.

She stood up scooping up her purse and sliding in her chair as Steve joined her.

“Where the hell are you going?” he asked.

“To Peggy.” She whispered before the two of them flew out of the room.

She waited in a chair outside Peggy’s room, starring at the buttercup yellow walls she had walked through every few weeks for years and now likely would never look at again. Inside she could hear snippets of Michael and Elizabeth talking with the doctors and hospice nurses that were bustling in and out, still attending to the regular bustle of nursing home tasks despite the fact that the entire world had just shifted.

She heard someone clear their throat beside her, looking up to find Tony fidgeting a few steps away from her.

“Uh, hi,” he said “Is she…”

“Go on in, it’s just Michael and Elizabeth. I’m waiting on Steve. He’s calling other S.H.I.E.L.D. members to…let them know.”

He nodded, walking slowly inside. She was still slumped in her chair and staring at the walls when he came back out. He hesitated for a moment, before he laid a hand on her shoulders and in a gruff voice said, “I’m so sorry, Diana.”
And with that he was gone.

Steve got back a few minutes later face ashen. “Everyone sends their condolences he muttered. Fury can’t get back in time, says you should call him later.”

She silently nodded, standing up and walking into her room where Michael and Elizabeth were sitting on one side of her bed.

Elizabeth mustered a smile when she saw them. “I’m glad you’re here. The hospice nurse says she could go anytime. We knew this was coming but…”

“Not this soon.” Diana finished for her. Lying there she looked so peaceful, gray hair splayed out across her pillow, her breathing deep.

She pulled up a chair next to her and took her hand, already fighting tears. “It’s okay,” she whispered into her ear. “It’s okay to go. The Amazons, we believe in Elysium for our warriors. It will be amazing. You can tell all our friends hello for me, and Daniel of course,” she said, her voice breaking as she gave her a quivering smile, her face wet. She took a heaving breath, struggling to get the words out. “I’ll look after everyone. After the team.” She squeezed Peggy’s hand and leaning forward to kiss her cheek whispered, “Your friendship has been one of the greatest gifts of my life. Thank you. For everything.”

She gave her hand a final squeeze, and though she had overheard the doctors say that they couldn’t be sure of how aware she was, she could have sworn that Peggy squeezed back.

Steve leaned over next, murmuring, “Rest easy Peg,” along with words she couldn’t hear before giving her a kiss on the forehead.

They sat like that, Diana holding her hand and resting her head on Steve’s shoulder, Michael and Elizabeth on the other side, and the medical staff quietly moving in and out as needed to adjust medications and check readings.

Diana closed her eyes the moment the heart monitor finally went from its slowing beep to a flatline. She was trapped in Wanda’s vision, again, and if she had her lasso, could manage to get some sound to come out of her mouth, then maybe things would go back to the way they were supposed to be.

Everything from then on was just bits and pieces. There were snapshots—Steve brushing away tears and giving Peggy’s hand a last squeeze, Elizabeth and Michael saying their last goodbyes. Steve breaking her grip on the bed railing and gently pulling her away while she managed to stay human enough to murmur condolences to Elizabeth and Michael.

She anchored herself to Steve as they walked out of the building, letting him guide her to wherever they were going. She didn’t particularly care where. In her haze she almost missed Nat, standing on the sidewalk outside the hospital doors

“What…what are you doing here?” She asked.

Nat came up and pulled them both into a giant hug. “I didn’t want you to be alone.”

She drove them both back, dropping Steve off at Sam’s apartment and bringing Diana to hers,
ignoring all of her protest about being fine enough to go back to her own. Instead she led Diana inside and showed her to her room, bringing in a cup of tea for her, hesitating by the bed.

Diana took a few small sips. “Thank you.” She forced out. “Go get some sleep. I’ll be fine.”

“Bullshit,” Nat whispered, sitting down and pulling her into her side, letting her cry on her shoulder.

She woke up early the next morning, bleary eyed and feeling like she had somehow caught the flu. In the kitchen she could hear Nat and Sam taking in hushed tones over what she assumed was breakfast. She made a brief attempt at smoothing her hair before walking out of her room and into the kitchen where she found Sam scrambling eggs.

“There she is,” he said, brandishing his spatula. “How are you doing?”

She gave him a wobbly smile. “Could be a bit better, but I’ll be fine. You two should go check on Steve—he’s going to need you.”

Sam gave her an eye roll as he turned the stove off. “Don’t even start with that. You know what Steve tried to tell me this morning? The same damn thing about you.”

“But—"

He held up a hand as he passed her a plate. “Let me make something clear—you are allowed to grieve. And if you don’t? We’re going to stage a full-on intervention on your ass.”

At the table Nat snorted, shoveling food in her mouth in response to her glare.

“I am I just—"

“No, you’re gonna pretend you’re fine and be strong for everyone else like you’ve probably done after every single tragedy because otherwise you think it will destroy you,” he rushed out, shaking his head. “Oldest trick in the book. And you and Steve are textbook cases. Honestly you two. It drives me nuts.” He mimed throwing his fork at her before tossing it in the sink, Diana granting him a sheepish smile.

“So you’re gonna stay with us for a few days,” he finished. “If for no other reason than the fact that I cook a mean breakfast.”

She looked between Sam and Nat, both of them staring her down with so much kindness that it made her want to start crying again. So maybe they had a point.

“Okay,” she said quietly. “Okay.”

“Thank you lord,” Sam muttered. “Now eat. Steve will be back from a run soon and after that I’m sure you’ll have visitors and business to attend to and all that.”

She carried her plate over and sat down by Nat, who was looking up at Sam with an innocent expression. “Oh? And you didn’t want to join him on his run?”

“Shut it, Romanoff.”
When Steve showed up they both threw themselves into helping Michael and Elizabeth with funeral planning. The next two days were filled with phone calls and paperwork just like in the days after Daniel’s death, creating a bad case of déjà vu.

She remembered at one point to call Fury, his voice strained as he offered condolences, and his oh so rare audible sadness amplified her chest-crushing grief, sending her back to conferring with Daniel about plans. As they worked, Sam kept muttering about how while distraction was a healthy part of the grieving process they could also use a damn break, a comment they both ignored until finally Diana rolled her eyes after ending a phone call and appeased him by going through the cards and flowers that Daniel had carted over.

There were many from old S.H.I.E.L.D. agents and government officials as well as form old friends. Bruce had sent what appeared to be an entire flower shop along with a note that simply read, “I’m sorry.” Alfred had also sent a card offering his condolences along with a brief story about how he had crossed paths with “Director Carter” while working for MI6, a fact she could barely muster shock about amid everything else.

The biggest surprise, however, was the trunk. Daniel had dragged it in behind him the evening after her death, dropping it on Nat’s kitchen floor with a thunk. After hugs and more crying, he managed to explain that Peggy had left instructions to give it to them. It was theirs to sort through and decide what to do with.

As soon as he left Nat and Sam conveniently excused themselves to go to the store, leaving them alone in the kitchen staring down at the dark oak. Steve scooted it towards the kitchen table where they sat and gingerly opened it to find surprisingly neat layers of files and photo albums, along with a sealed letter on top addressed to Diana, dated 2005.

Steve handed it to her. “Go ahead.”

Dearest Diana,

As I write this, you’re currently who knows where doing who knows what. If I know you, you’re off aiding civilians in Iraq or something equally noble. Daniel’s putting the living room back together after the move to DC and reorganizing all of the memory books you made. They are so lovely; I’ve already peeked inside a few times and I’m quite certain I’ll do so with more frequency as I get worse.

I don’t know when you’re reading this. Hopefully a few more years from now after I’ve become much older and grayer than I am already and you look exactly the same, damn you. Whenever it is, wherever in the world you are right now, I wanted to do some regifting after I’m gone. The memory books are all yours, as are all the old photos and letters in the trunk that my poor children will probably end up sorting through and packing at some point. I know how much you cherish old things, so consider this as me enabling you. I make no apologies.

Diana let out a watery laugh, Steve leaning in to read over her shoulder.

One other thing: I still remember what you told me about holding onto something, how it helped you. I unfortunately don’t have an old pocket watch, but buried in that chest somewhere should be my old hat. You were always the more fashionable of the two of us, but I’d like to think that hat kept me in contention. (And Lord knows you were always secretly jealous of it. Your face still gives
away everything).

Diana reached down through the layers of paper and folders, eventually making contact with a musty black hatbox, opening it to find Peggy’s signature red hat, the blue and white ribbon slightly faded but still perfectly tied just above the brim. She pulled it out and held it to her chest as tightly as she could without crushing it, returning to the letter.

I know it’s a little impractical to be a keepsake, but who knows, maybe it will soon be all the rage in Paris. It was such a lovely visit the two of us had there. And oh, the bread! I’m not convinced I’ll ever forget that bread, regardless of what the doctors say.

I’m rambling now, I know. I don’t want to have to finish this letter and say goodbye, or rather, I suppose, make you say goodbye. But here we go on anyways.

I know in wills you’re supposed to list your requests and all that rubbish, but you already do everything I could possibly ask of you. And you’ve always known what I needed help with long before I knew myself. So, there’s the kids and Tony. S.H.I.E.L.D of course. But we raised them already. They’ll be okay. Please don’t feel like you need to do any more than peek in every now and then, make sure no one has burned down the house while we’re gone. My only real request is for you to try and start some sort of team whether it be just another person or two like yourself or some new version of the Commandos. It pains me to think that I might be leaving you to save the world all on your own. You are wonderful, Diana, but even you should not try to be Atlas.

I hope this letter brings you some peace, rather than making things worse. I hope it’s not incoherent, because Christ the first draft was. Normally I would say I hope this letter finds you well, but the fact you’re reading it means probably not. Regardless, I hope you’re okay. That may be one of the most important things you taught me: to hope.

Most importantly, (and this is the end, I promise) regardless of what happens after I write this, however you have come to read this, I want you to know that I’ll always remain your friend. How could I be anything else?

Love,

Peggy

Diana set the letter down with a sob, leaning into Steve, the hat coming to rest on her lap, one hand resting on top. “She always did have a way with words,” she finally said into his shoulder. “Probably use some right now to call me dramatic.”

He gave a weak laugh. “I’d say the drama was in leaving a letter for you to find a decade later. God you two…it’s amazing.”

She sat up and looked back down into the trunk, praying that somehow Peggy had left something just to Steve. Reaching a hand down she spotted it, a folded piece of paper brushed to one side.

She picked it up, a worn photograph dropping onto the table. The faded image showed a scrawny pre-serum Steve, his dog tags hanging loose around his neck.

“Oh, dear Zeus,” Diana whispered, handing it to Steve.

He stared at it, stunned “She held onto this? All these years?”
Diana nodded, passing him the letter next.

He took a deep breath and opened it. It was much shorter, the handwriting nearly illegible, dated right before Peggy became unable to write at all.

*Dearest Steve,*

*I’m so glad you came back. It must be so hard for you, seeing how things have changed. But going back isn’t possible as much as it would be nice to see what could have been. This path, even if it was a harder one, still gave so much to both of us. I don’t regret it. I hope you don’t either.*

*Look after Diana for me since soon I won’t be able to do so. I’d tell her the same, but lord knows she’s probably already had to save your arse multiple times. I’m glad you two have each other to watch the other’s back.*

*I wish we had more time and I a better memory, but all we can do is our best. Just know I never needed a dance to know how much you love me. And I hope you don’t need one either.*

*Love,*

*Peggy*

“She must have written this right after one of my visits.” Steve said, still looking at the letter. “I…” he shook his head looking away, voice cracking. “I just didn’t expect this.”

“My favorite part is where she says I saved your ass,” she whispered with the barest hint of a smile.

He rolled his eyes, carefully folding the photo and letter into his pocket. “What would we have done without her?”

“I can’t even imagine.”

The day of the funeral Diana wore a black dress with Peggy’s signature shade of red lipstick. The church for her memorial service was packed with a who’s who of intelligence agents mixed in with old D.C. and New York friends she hadn’t seen in ages. Nat And Tony were both there, Nat skypping Fury in since he was still legally dead. She had seen Alfred in the crowd as they moved to take their seats, giving him a small wave and receiving a half bow in return. There were a few select reporters from the major papers at the very back, and somehow Lois had arranged it so that she was the one the Daily Planet sent. As soon as she entered the church she ran over and enveloped her in a hug, making Diana start crying before the service even started.

She sat in the front row, pretending to be one of her grandkids. Nat was in the pew behind her, giving her shoulder a squeeze as the casket passed her along with Steve, his face ashen, serving as one of her pallbearers. He came to sit with her when he was done, his handkerchief already damp.

The actual ceremony, of course, made her cry too. The pastor gave a brief sermon followed by eulogies from Michael and Elizabeth and then Sharon, her voice steady as she delivered a message to all of them hidden within her speech.
“My aunt did so much for her birth and adoptive countries, much of which Michael and Elizabeth already told you,” she began “She was a was a war hero, a spy, a great director. Her mission was to make sure organizations like Hydra could never wreak havoc again. And she did it with the best people and her closest friends at her side.”

“She also,” she said, her voice growing stronger. “had the seed of the idea that would turn into the Avengers. She dreamed of a team that could succeed where S.H.I.L.E.D. may have failed and in a life with already such a vast legacy, she strove to do even more. Aunt Peg worked so hard. And if you knew her,” she broke into a smile shaking her head. “You knew how stubborn she could be trying to finish that work.”

The crowd broke out into soft chuckles, Sharon using the moment to compose herself. Her eyes scanned out in the crowd, past old agents and the media, past other family members, coming to rest on Diana and Steve.

“She always told me this: Compromise where you can, and where you can’t, don’t. Even if everyone is telling you that something wrong is right, even if the whole world is telling you to move, it’s your duty to plant yourself like a tree, look them in the eye, and say ‘No. you move.’” She gave Diana a small smile before continuing. “That’s what I want to leave you with. That determination, that stubbornness, that hope. Because that’s what made her Peggy Carter.”

The room broke out into applause as she left the stage, one of the grandkids going up next to close out the service and direct those invited to the graveside service where to go from there.

Diana stood up with a deep sigh, taking a long look at her casket. When she turned, Tony had already disappeared, other friends and old coworkers also trickling out.

As she and Steve moved to go find the car that would take them to the cemetery, Nat pulled her aside. “I’m so sorry to leave you guys now, but I have to catch a flight to the Accords Summit. I assume you’re not signing.”

“Sharon said it the best. I can’t. Are you?”

Nat gave her a nod, unable to meet your eyes. “It’s not perfect, I know. But I think if at least one of us signs it might keep the pressure off of the rest of you. Maybe give us some time.”

“I understand, but please don’t do it just on our account.”

She gave Diana a crooked smile. “Don’t worry. I’m still being selfish. How else can a former double agent save her own skin but to sign on? I know you’d help me,” She said, holding up a hand before Diana could protest. “But I can’t ask that of you.”

“You’re, right. “Diana said quietly, searching for some other alternate, anything, and coming up blank. “But I’ll try to figure something out. If I go public, use my legacy to leverage all of us…”

“Diana you’ve been inching towards that for years, but do you really want to see where that road dead ends? And to make this decision now?”

She bit her lip, looking past Nat to where the hundreds of people were filing out. “I couldn’t speak.”

“What?”

“Just now. I couldn’t eulogize my closest friend because I don’t exist. I’ve missed so much sticking to the shadows, been so selfish. It’s past time.”
“Selfless.” Nat corrected her. “Is the word you’re looking for. Selfish would be seeking out the limelight, letting it interfere with your work.”

“But—” she started, feeling desperation bubble up inside her throat.

“What is it you just said? I understand. But don’t do it on anyone else’s account but your own.” She leaned in wrapping Diana in one last hug. “I’m sorry. I’ll keep you updated. Please call if you need to talk.” And with that she was off, running for a car at the end of the block while Steve called her to come to their own car.

She and Steve stood with the rest of the family, in front of her part of the stone that was shared with Daniel—the same stone that had terrified her all those years ago when Peggy had first bought it. It had seemed impossible then, ludicrous to imagine her needing it one day. And now they were all gathered around it, reading the inscription.

_Margaret “Peggy” Carter._

_1918-2016_

_Beloved Wife, Mother, Agent, and Director_

And then the writing that spanned across she and Daniel’s portions that read _For never shrinking from the service of their countries, they have our love and thanks._

There was another brief speech, before they lowered the casket into place, the family taking turns throwing a handful of dirt on top. She let Steve go on ahead, unable to bear the thought of helping cover her up. Instead at the end, as people were starting to say their goodbyes, she walked over, placing the poppy she had brought with her on top of the mass of other flowers. She knelt down, brushing her hand across the surface. “Goodbye,” she whispered. “And don’t you two get into too much trouble down there.” She took a last look at it as she stood up, brushing the dirt off her legs.

_For never shrinking from the service of their countries._ She wondered if Peggy had picked the quote out or if it had been the kids. She had never thought to ask.

She heard Steve walk up behind her. “You okay?”

She took a breath before turning to face him. “I will be.” She nodded towards the stone. “After all, ‘though the flame of liberty may sometimes cease to shine, the coal can never expire.’ She’ll never be fully gone.”

He gave her a small smile, staring down where she now rested. “I like that.”

Back at Nat’s apartment, she and Steve opened a bottle of wine and pulled out the trunk full of memories

There were a few packs of random photos on top, mostly posed shots of she and Peggy often with other friends or family. There were pictures of them dressed up for S.H.I.E.L.D. dinners or events...
and at a Christmas party Howard hosted. There was one from a girl’s trip to Florida, both of them laughing and wrapped in beach towels. There were candids too, shots of opening birthday presents and Diana holding Elizabeth with Michael on her lap.

She told stories to Steve as she flipped through, pointing out people he didn’t recognize and joking about Poor Daniel trying to get all the kids to look at the camera. There were so many stories she hadn’t thought of in years, sitting right there waiting for her.

She passed the memory books for the time, digging farther down to find a folder of pictures from the war, a note in Peggy’s more recent shaky handwriting that said. *Take care of these. You two are the only ones left who remember.*

She gasped as the photos spilled out, all shots of the Commandos from their backcountry missions that either Steve or Dugan had taken on an old Kodak Brownie. If she remembered correctly, Steve’s tended to be the better ones, perfectly framed and artistically shot. But Dugan’s were hilarious.

Steve flipped through them, a mix of posed group shots interspersed with snapshots of camp life. There were a few of them around a fire, one of the tents, and one of Bucky leaning against a tree drunk with Steve laughing at him.

Steve snorted, handing one of them over to give her a better look. It was herself, standing with her arms crossed and staring at a stream where Dugan and Pinky were trying to use Steve’s shield as a raft, Pinky already a blur in mid-fall.

And amidst all the worry about the accords and her friends, amidst the steady pulses of grief that knocked the wind out of her, she laughed.

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Chapter End Notes

So this was a sad chapter to write but the good news is that there's just one chapter and an epilogue left!

Peggy's epitaph and the quote Diana says are taken from Paine's *American Crisis*
2016

Diana stared straight ahead, sipping her drink, Sharon, Sam and Steve all sitting with grim faces on the bar stools right beside her. “This is all I can give you,” Sharon said, sliding the file towards them, as she looked up at the TV, the explosion and photo of Bucky playing on a loop. “My boss wants a briefing soon. You need to bring him in first. We have orders to shoot on sight,” she whispered, standing up and brushing past them on her way out the door.

Steve flipped it open, his face dropping even farther than when he had first seen the news about the attack—first heard Bucky was the suspect. Farther even than when they had flown to Vienna, trying to follow what was unfortunately the best lead on Bucky they had ever had. The file had a few photos along with snippets of documents that traced him to a rundown apartment complex in Bucharest. Bucharest, where they had searched and come up empty handed.

“You sure this is a good idea?” Sam asked. “What did Natasha say?”

“To stay out of it. But if he’s this gone, I have the best chance of bringing him in.”

Diana closed her eyes, picturing Steve trying to talk his best friend down once again with no assurance he would succeed. She took a sip of her drink and risked a glance over at them, unable, at the moment, to find any humor in the ridiculous hats and sunglasses they were wearing. “You’re right,” she said. “If he’s that far gone it needs to be you. And if he’s innocent he needs you to advocate on his behalf.”

“You think the Wakandans are going to believe he’s innocent?” Sam asked.

“If you find him, the lasso will give me an easy way to check.”

Steve shook his head. “For us, not the international community. We need non-magic based proof that it wasn’t him.”

“Let’s just get him first.” Sam said softly. “Before they do.”

“I can drop in. Try to talk to him.” Steve said. “If we bring him back alive, we have more leverage.”

“But then we’re right back where we started,” Diana said. “We’ll still have to prove he’s either brainwashed or innocent.”

“Do you have a better plan?” Sam asked.

She searched for a moment before she said, “Maybe. If it’s not Bucky it has to be someone impersonating him, right?”
“How are you so sure it’s not him?” Steve asked, his voice heavy. “Diana, what if it is?”

She stared at him, frowning. “Because I can’t stand the thought of the news being right. He saved you Steve, and then he ran. And I refuse to believe he went running back to Hydra on his own accord.”

He eventually giving her a nod. “I hope so. But who the hell would be impersonating him?”

“Someone who wants him found. Or dead.” Sam broke in. “It’s not the craziest theory.”

Diana killed her drink and raised an eyebrow at Steve who shrugged and said, “Go for it. Do you have a starting point?”

For the first time that day she gave him a little smile. “I have a few friends.”

As soon as she saw Steve and Sam off to Bucharest she sat down in a café to make a call. Lois, who sounded surprisingly alert despite the fact that it was supposed to be painfully early in Metropolis, answered immediately.

“I would apologize for the call, but it sounds like you’re already awake. I do have a favor though—can you help me with some research?”

“Of course,” she said, a hint of a smile in her voice. “Can I presume this mystery has something to do with James Barnes being the main suspect in the Vienna bombing?”

Diana was silent for a moment before she answered, “I don’t think it was him.”

“Oh. Do you have another suspect?”

“No. Right now I just need help proving it’s not him.”

“All right.” She heard fingers quickly tapping across a keyboard and a long pause before Lois said “Obviously the story is just breaking, but pretty much every article mentions him and has his picture plastered across the front page of the website. This is the guy you’ve been looking for for a while?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it’s a pretty good way to flush him out. Whoever it was obviously wanted him to take the fall which limits out options a little.”

There was some more typing before Lois went, “Huh. That’s odd.”

“What?”

“Normally when something like this happens, there’s a bit of a delay to confirm who it is or a few possible suspects. The fact he’s supposedly at large would normally extend that time. But the timestamps on these articles…”

“But that didn’t happen,” Diana said, her eyes widening. “His name was reported almost immediately.”

“Exactly,” she said, excitement building in her voice. “There was hardly any gap. They just saw what they wanted to see—granted whoever this was made it easy. Bombing suspects don’t
It took less than an hour with them on a three-way call to determine that it definitely wasn’t Bucky. Bruce was less than thrilled to be pulled away from the end of patrol, but after some grumbling he did a comparison of a variety of photos of Bucky and the clips from the news. Diana let out a breath, slumping in her chair at the internet café she had squirreled away in when she finally heard the faint beep on the other end of the line that meant the computer had registered a failed match.

“You’re right. They have the wrong man,” Bruce declared. She could practically hear his annoyance over the phone as he continued, “They didn’t even do a damn facial recognition test? The photos are grainy but come on.”

“Can you figure out who it is if it’s not him?” Diana asked.

“In a few days maybe. My guess is he used one of those face-changing masks the intelligence services and S.H.I.E.L.D. use. It doesn’t change his bone structure so we can tell it’s not Barnes, but it makes it harder to ID who it really is. We have thousands of possibilities we need to narrow down first and then we can plug in photos and see if we happen to get a match”

“Hydra is the obvious first choice. Followed by people who either hate the Avengers or hate Bucky for who he killed.”

Bruce paused for a moment. “You told me he was innocent.”

“He’s been brainwashed,” she huffed, “By an international fascist group that’s been causing chaos for decades. If you have moral qualms then view this as us bringing in a foreign asset alive for questioning.”

“Fine. Do you have any names we can start trying to match?”

“How much time do you have?”

A few hours later Diana still sat in the now mostly empty café, on her fifth cup of tea and third berry scone to keep the owners off her case. She had emailed Bruce lists of names along with pictures form S.H.I.E.L.D. data bases or old files if she had them. Every Hydra agent she had encountered, every person they had fought, and anyone connected with his assassinations got fed to Bruce.

In the background there was the steady beep that signaled negative matches. She did her best to ignore it, searching even deeper into long forgotten files and mission reports that she had hated writing but now seemed to finally be proving useful. As she sent files over she consulted Lois for research help, the two of them trying to detangle the spiderweb of people that extended from...
Bucky outwards.

“Is this doing anything?” She finally asked, listening to Bruce typing and occasionally talking to Alfred or Tim who by now had also join the search.

“Well, we’ve eliminated a hundred people who it’s not.”

“Lovely.”

“What if it’s not Hydra directly?” Lois asked. “Technically it just has to be someone who knows about Hydra or Barnes, right?”

“It could be, but unless I can talk to Bucky to see if he knows anything, we’d be stuck. That could be any number of people.”

Bruce sighed. “Then change of tactics. Oracle and I can hack into cameras around the UN building. See if there’s anyone from there we can identify or match.”

She hummed her agreement, standing and packing her stuff up before the owners had to shoo her out of the building for them to close. As she walked to find a hotel that hopefully had Wi-Fi she asked Lois, “Is there anything Clark would know about this?”

“I don’t think so,” she said at the same time Bruce let out a loud harrumph in the background.

“Bruce?”

Lois let out a loud sigh. “Ignore him, he and Bruce are still being idiots.”

“Well then they can stop being idiots because we don’t have time for this. If you think he can help, pull him in. I’m going to try and get a hold of Steve, see where they are in the process.”

Bruce was surprisingly silent, and Diana was about to ask him what in Hades his problem was when she noticed that even the beep of the computer had stopped. “No need.” He said after another beat of silence. “They’re currently surrendering to the police.”

“They what?” Diana ran inside the lobby of the nearest building, staring up at the TV and seeing the exact scene Bruce had just described. She let out a Greek curse as she spun to go back outside. “Can you two keep trying to find an alternate suspect? I need to go bail them out.”

Before they could give an answer she flew off, locating where they had been apprehended and then following above the police vans that night until they came to some sort of government center where thankfully Tony was waiting. The last thing they needed for their optics was a break in into a foreign building.

She landed before the vans pulled up, Tony standing out front as if to welcome guests.

“This is ridiculous,” she said as she stormed up to him “Your friends are being treated like criminals.”

“They’ll be stripped of their weapons and join us in a minute, Barnes will be held for evaluation. You’re lucky Secretary Ross doesn’t know you were an accomplice.”

“Tony,” she snapped.

He wheeled back towards her. “My friends evaded the police, caused who knows how much damage to a public highway in a foreign country and interfered in a US effort to capture a suspect.”
“It wasn’t Bucky. No one did a thorough facial scan.”

He hesitated for a second before he asked, “And how in the hell did you get one done?”

“I called Lois Lane.” she said crossing her arms. “And then Bruce Wayne.”

Tony made a face. “Even if what you think you found is true, it didn’t mean Steve needed to go on a high-speed chase for fucks sake.”

“They were going to kill Tony!” She said, her voice rising. “And people would have gotten killed trying to bring him in! Look me in the eye and tell me that if you had even a shred of a suspicious that someone you loved had been falsely accused you wouldn’t try to save them.”

“Diana—”

“Don’t kill if you can wound. Don’t wound if you can subdue. Don’t subdue if you can pacify. And do not raise a hand at all unless you have first extended it! There’s been a real lack of reaching out by you and Secretary Ross—no one even tried it with Bucky.”

“I tried. What do you think the Accords were? I hoped they would fix...a lot actually. I wanted them to fix a lot.”

She deflated a little as she looked up at him, taking in the lines cut into his face, his anger barely masking his weariness. Zeus save her he was starting to look like Howard—certainly argued like him too. “You did,” she admitted. “And I appreciate trying to protect the team. But this is worth the fight.”

He shook his head and turned towards the vans pulling up Steve, Sam, and the Prince—now King, she supposed—of Wakanda all stepping out while Bucky was sealed in some sort of glass box and strapped down. She smiled at him, trying to give him some form of encouragement, before turning to the others.

King T’Challa gave her a stiff nod. “Princess Diana of Themyscira. I am sorry to make your acquaintance under these circumstances.”

She waved away his concern. “It’s a pleasure to meet you. My condolences about your father.”

Sam looked between them “Oh, so he likes you? Was it something I said?”

King T’Challa frowned. “You, Mr. Wilson, are not an ancient warrior.”

Their argument cut off by Agent Ross and Nat approaching, Nat giving her a sad little half smile behind his back. They all walked into the facility as Agent Ross lit into them, Diana doing her best to not engage with his accusations. He split off as they arrived at what looked like a control room, the walls covered in computers and security camera footage.

Nat rolled her eyes as he walked the way. “Let him talk. Things will work out, I’m just sorry this made it worse,” she whispered to she and Steve.

Steve shrugged. “He’s alive, isn’t he?”

Nat gave him a small nod before going to go make sure King T’Challa and Sam didn’t murder each other while Tony beckoned she and Steve into a glass cubicle in the center of the room. She noticed the documents and pen set all set up as soon as she walked in, everything neatly laid out on the table.
“You still want us to sign,” she said.

“Secretary Ross has made it clear—”

“Secretary Ross can pound sand” she muttered as she and Steve took their seats. “It has been a terrible week,” she started softly, turning the pen over in her hand. “In the interest of making it less terrible, it would be nice to drop this. Deal with Bucky first.” She discreetly pulled the flash drive she had downloaded Bruce’s info on and set it on the table. “The info. I would not lie to you about this Tony.”

“You found it?” Steve asked, eyes widening as he looked at the drive.

She gave him a nod as Tony continued, “If you sign, this whole debacle can be taken care of. And Bucky too. Some sort of inpatient facility rather than where I’m sure others would love to throw him.”

She let out a quiet breath and looked over to Steve, raising an eyebrow. Should they consider this? When it had just been them it was easy, but now that they had custody of Bucky...they couldn’t just let the government keep him. It would take him two seconds to break out of whatever high security prison they put him in and then he would be a fugitive again. And he deserved so much more than that.

“And we could always renegotiate the terms, this is just a start,” Tony continued, pretending not to see the silent conversation going on right next to him. “Get a little more leeway. And once it’s signed Wanda and Pietro can leave the compound and—”

“What? Tony, they’re not prisoners!” Steve scowled.

“I’m trying to protect them. They’re not U.S. citizens and—”

Steve stood up, turning away in disgust.

“Tony,” she said quietly, placing the pen back in its case and closing the lid. “What are you trying to do?”

“I’m doing what you said Diana. I’m trying to save what I can.”

“So are we.”

“Nothing’s happened that can’t be undone. I need—the team needs you. If you don’t sign, you’ll have to step down. You’ll be prosecuted.”

She gave him a sad smile “Saving what I can or what needs to be saved doesn’t always mean saving myself.”

“You” he said, rounding on Steve. “You’re with her on this?

“If I see a situation headed south, I have to help. I can’t ignore it. And that’s what the Accords would mean—a lot of ignoring.”

“I hate both of your perfect faces” he grumbled, walking around to the other side of the table. “That’s it then?”

Diana shrugged, sliding the drive down to his end of the table. “Unless you come to other conclusions about what’s necessary.”
“Necessary,” he scoffed. “You sound like dad.”

“Don’t bring Howard into this,” Steve said, “when you damn well know he would have hated it.”

He rounded on Steve. “We don’t know do we? Because your best buddy murdered him!” he snarled.

Steve just shook his head and walked out, going to look at the monitors with Sam and Sharon.

“These are two separate issues,” Diana said as Tony collapsed back in his chair, staring at the closed pen case in front of him. “The accords are not my priority right now—”

“And that’s the problem Diana,” he said, his voice tired. “That’s exactly the problem. They’re not unrelated. Your little search and rescue, the international fallout, is exactly what this would prevent.”

“And in that case your success would have been tainted by death, you would have lost a source of vital information about Hydra, and in the future you will have no control of who you can help.”

“Diana—”

“I’m trying to save us from whoever framed Bucky. Once we figure that out I’ll be happy to sit back down and talk about ways to reduce any damage done by our missions.”

“And if there’s not time?”

“Then make some. Look at the flash drive. I will use my lasso, swear an oath, whatever you want that it was not him.”

He hesitated for a moment before reaching across the table and depositing it in his pocket. As she stood to join Steve he asked ‘Do you want to tell Secretary Ross what just happened?’

Her eyes flashed. “Oh I would be more than happy to.”

Tony took one look at her and said. “On second thought, I’ll do it.”

She stood looking up at the dozens of monitors as they waited for whatever evaluation was about to start, one hand gently rubbing Steve’s back as he stared at his friend strapped into a cage.

Sharon showed up after her briefing, coming to stand next to Diana. “Tony get what he wanted?” she asked.

“No.”

“Did you?” She asked, he voice a murmur.

“Yes.”

She nodded once, staring straight ahead at the monitors as the psychiatrist appeared on screen, taking a seat at the table in front of Bucky and laying down his briefcase. Diana focused on the
back of his head, watching as he took out a single file and placed on the table in front of him. She had no idea what this man could possibly question him about that would make anything better. No idea why he would agree to do this assessment so quickly, without requesting the time to talk to Steve or pull up old files. It didn’t make sense.

“Steve,” She said, not taking her gaze away from the screen. “We know he was framed. But that wouldn’t guarantee the mastermind would get access to him.”

“It would ensure we would,” he finished, turning to her and Sharon with a frown a second before the lights flashed out.

Steve swore, he and Sam disappearing almost immediately. She was already reaching for her cellphone, dialing Lois and Bruce’s numbers. Turning around she spotted Tony, already halfway out the door himself.

“The psychiatrist! what’s his name?” she called to him.

It was Sharon who answered, her voice low next to her. “Theo Broussard. Sent by the Joint Counter Terrorist Center.” And with that she was also gone, chasing after all the others.

Lois and Bruce picked up as she muttered “he never should have been left in there alone,” watching the technicians scramble to get the computers back up and a visual on Bucky.


Around then emergency power started to kick in, a few of the computers coming back up. She could see the various Avengers chasing Bucky through the corridors, and she could only hope that Steve would get to him first for all of their sakes.

“I need a picture of Theo Broussard” She yelled into the phone as she slowly backed out of the room, trying to avoid being spotted by any guards, and then took off sprinting towards where the monitors had shown Bucky’s last location. Her phone pinged as she rounded the next corner, glancing down long enough to confirm that the man who had just met with Bucky was not him.

“Does it match whoever you’re looking at?” Bruce asked.

“It can’t be,” Lois interrupted. “There’s an article here—he was found dead in a hotel this morning. No motive. No witnesses,” she rattled off. “Diana what the hell—”

“Get me the name of who killed him because that’s our guy,” she said, “He just set Bucky off on a destruction spree.”

And with that she hung up, following the remaining trail of unconscious bodies and rubble up to the roof.

She found Nat leaning up against the wall of a stairwell, a few floors down form where she assumed the others were, taking deep breaths.

“You okay?” Diana ventured, slowing down as she approached.

Nat waved her concern away. “I’m fine. He’s dangerous.”

“I know,” she said quietly. But—”

She snorted. “Go. I’ll try to hold Tony and crew off.”
Diana raised an eyebrow.

Nat stared, her eyes boring into her. “Did he do it?”

“No.”

“Then get him the hell away from here.”

Diana ran up to the roof only to skirt to a stop when she saw Steve literally clinging to Buck’s escape helicopter.

“You idiot!” she yelled, whipping out her lasso. “I can fly after him!”

Steve wasn’t paying attention, straining to hold onto it. She dashed over to help only to have to hit the ground a moment later to avoid an untimely decapitation, Bucky having piloted it onto the edge of the roof where it rested, looking like a stiff breeze would send it careening into the water below.

“The lasso,” Steve forced out as he pushed himself up. She reached for it, ready to throw whenever Bucky stepped out. Instead he brought Steve to him, clamping a hand around his throat and pulling him towards the edge.

Instantly she had the lasso wrapped around Steve’s torso, ready to pull him back to her, until the helicopter ever so slowly tipped over the edge of the roof, Bucky’s hand still locked around his neck. She had no choice but to follow them down, it was that or break Steve in half, the three of them careening towards the water below.

The fall squeezed the air out of her lungs, panic skittering through her chest at the thought that this was happening again. The drop, the unyielding water below. Except this time, she would be there to save them.

Just before they hit the water she could sense Bucky’s grip loosen, and she yanked up on the lasso, pulling Steve towards her and slowing the fall just as they crashed through the surface, sinking down. She grabbed a semi-unconscious Steve around his middle and started to kick towards the surface, lugging him up with her.

She gasped as she surfaced, rearing around with one hand still supporting Steve as he coughed, scanning for where Bucky had gone.

The answer was nowhere. Dunking her head below she could just make him out, still in the cockpit of the helicopter.

“Wait here,” she told Steve, diving back under. She managed to break in some more of the glass and get her lasso around him, hauling him up to the surface where she and Steve then dragged him up onto the sidewalk.

“You are never,” she said, her voice steely, “going near a body of water again.”

“At least I’m not the one unconscious this time?”

She glared, “I mean it. Do you have comms, we need to get Sam and get out of here. We have minutes at most.”
Steve just gave her a little grin, pointing up to the air over her head.

Turning she could see Sam, swooping towards them with wings he had somehow already stolen back, ready to make a landing.

“You couldn’t have left the building in a normal way?” he asked Steve, jogging over to join them.

“At least this neutralized him,” Steve responded.

“Yeah and I bet that was totally intentional. We got a plan?”

Diana glanced up to the security guards running out on the roof, calling their position in. “We leave. You fly with Steve, I’ll take Bucky.”

“Oh thank God. Never covered assassin transport in basic.”

The four off them ended up in an old warehouse Fury had showed her years ago that hopefully was still unknown. They deposited Bucky in a chair and then promptly clamped his metal arm down, not risking another fight.

She stood nearby, lasso at the ready in the event he woke up and still had a murder wish.

“That psychiatrist was supposed to be Theo Broussard. Lois told me he was found dead in his apartment this morning.”

“Do you know—” Steve started.

“No. I’m about to call.”

He nodded, he and Sam going to stand near the window to keep an eye on what was happening outside.

Diana pulled out her phone and dialed, Lois picking up on the second ring with an “Oh thank God. We saw Steve and Barnes on the news.”

“Great. That’s exactly what we need. But not me?”

“No. Should you have been? God, Diana, what now.”

“Nothing else, I just had to save them both from a helicopter and then evade the authorities.” She sent a silent prayer of thanks to Nat and possibly Tony, knowing full well that that if Ross had his way, she would also be plastered across the news, making it even easier for them to be discovered.

“Good. We have a few leads on the murderer. Bruce got a list of everyone who stayed at that hotel and is running the names, I can send you the list. As of now the main suspect is Helmut Zemo, he reserved the room Broussard was found in.”

“Any motive?”

“He’s from Sokovia,” she heard Clark say in the background.

“What he said, “Lois finished, a hint of a smile in her voice. “Bruce had to go on patrol so Clark’s
manning the research desk right now.”

She closed her eyes. “Of course. Of course it’s Sokoiva.” She let out a sigh. “Tell Clark hi. Thank you two so much for doing this. I promise it’s for a good cause. This issue is bigger than Bucky.”

“That’s what I keep telling Bruce. I have to warn you, Diana, he’s not thrilled. He found a little of what Barnes had done and…”

“It’s not pretty. Zeus do we know. But it’s a lot more complicated than those reports make it seem.”

“I know. I trust you. Just… stay safe okay. If you guys end up with mug shots I don’t know if I can keep him onboard.”

Diana let out a snort. “Thanks. I make no promises.”

After relaying the information to Steve and Sam she returned to keep watch over Bucky, calling the two of them in when he finally started to stir. His eyes blinked open as they approached him, sitting up with a low groan.

“Which Bucky am I talking to,” Steve started.

He shifted to sit up a bit, taking a moment to think before glancing up at Steve and in a halting voice said, “Your mom’s name was Sarah. You used to wear newspapers in your shoes.” He let out a delirious chuckle. “You used to sketch. You loved art. You both did,” he said, looking at Diana for the first time.

“Can’t read that in a museum,” Steve murmured, the tiny upturn of his mouth matching her own.

“Just like that we’re cool?” Sam asked looking between them.

Instantly Bucky deflated. “What did I do.”

She thought seeing him as the winter soldier was the worst it could get. Her friend who had always been so composed no longer in control. The man who had fought tooth and nail to defeat Hydra now forced to help carry out their plans. But it was here, watching him hang his head as Steve said “you did enough” that made her want to scream, want to fight someone for what they had done to the shell of a man slumped in front of her.

“I knew it. Everything Hydra put inside me is still there,” he said.

“Who was the doctor? What did he want?” Steve asked.

Bucky let out another sigh “I don’t know.”

“People are dead. He killed people just to get you alone. There has to be a reason.”

“He… wanted to know about Siberia, where I was kept. Exactly where,” Bucky finally said.

“Why.”

He looked up at locked eyes with Steve. “Because I’m not the only winter soldier.”
Next to her she could feel Steve and Sam stiffen, shock radiating off of them.

“There’s more. They made more super soldiers,” she murmured, her voice faint.


At the word infusion her head snapped up and she took a step towards Bucky.

“They what?”

“The doctors gave them something. It changed them.”

She slammed her hand down on the metal workbench next to her, leaving a dent, the noise verberating off the walls “I told him!” she spat. “Not to do it. We begged him.”

“Who?” Sam asked.

“Howard!” She let out a growl putting her hands to her temples. “Back in the late 70s when we were all first talking of forming something like the Avengers, Howard wanted to speed up the process.”

She could see the exact moment Steve worked out what she was talking about, his mouth compressing into a thin line. “He didn’t.” Steve, said “He wouldn’t.”

“Not then. He switched to working with Hank Pym who was developing new technology that allowed people to shrink. But Pym did not want to hand over his discovery to S.H.I.E.L.D.”

“Thank God” Sam muttered, at the same time Steve said, “So Howard needed a new project.”

That was one way of putting it. When Peggy had told her that Howard was dead set on working on the serum regardless of what she had tried to say she had barged into his office with a look on her face that made Howard lean back in his chair, as if getting comfortable for her wrath. He had acknowledged the risks, the stupidity of creating more super soldiers. The ramifications if he actually made progress. But everything was just “experimental,” he had assured her. Interesting research he promised to show no one aside from herself or Peggy.

In the end, she supposed, he had kept his word. He hadn’t even told her that he succeeded. And if she was right about how Hydra accessed it, then he hadn’t shown it off. The no one came to him.

“Peggy asked me to talk with him. I had a whole meeting,” she explained. “And I thought…he agreed that creating more super solider serum was not what you would have wanted. He said that it would just be research. He promised me!”

“Woah,” Sam held up a hand, “How are you so sure this has to do with Howard?”

She glanced over at Steve, his features pinched, before slowly turning to Bucky. She bit her lip, wanting to ask him anything else rather than what she needed to know. “What was your mission,” she asked softly, “When they sent you to kill him.”

“I don’t know.”

“There was a car crash. You made it look like an accident,” she said, trying to keep her voice steady.

He refused to look up at them, hair shielding his face. “I followed them on a motorcycle. I had to be careful because… because… they wanted the cargo intact.”
“And the cargo?”

“They said it was an ‘infusion that would bring victory.’ I think you’re right… it must have been the serum.”

She looked away, squeezing her eyes shut. Howard, their brilliant, fun loving, dedicated friend who had never known when to stop. Who couldn’t stop. And it had inadvertently killed him.

“These new supersoldiers. They like you or like Steve?” Sam asked.

“Worse than me. Stark must not have made it correctly, or the people weren’t right. It doesn’t matter. They are the most elite death squad on the planet. They could topple a government in a night and no one would know.”

“So we stop them. We can follow him to Siberia,” Steve said.

She glanced over at him. “Yes. But it’s going to be a lot harder. I don’t know if Tony will believe us—”

“And who knows if the accords say he can help,” Sam finished for her. “Natasha might. And the twins we can try and gather everyone together.”

She nodded “And I know someone. He can use those Pym particles I talked about.”

“Then it’s a plan,” Steve declared, going to go free Bucky’s arm. “Bring anyone we can to go shut this guy down.”

Diana turned away, following Sam to wait by the window. He glanced over at her, taking in her fists balled at her sides and asked, “You okay?”

The answer Sam was probably looking for was no, followed by an acknowledgment of her grief and frustration, but this was most certainly not the time. Instead she merely shook her head. “I am tired,” she said, watching Bucky gingerly get to his feet with Steve’s help, “of the past coming back to haunt me.”

Sharon came to meet them underneath an overpass close to their warehouse to hand over Steve’s shield and the part of the uniform Sam hadn’t managed to already steal back himself. After giving her a hurried thanks Steve threw the gear in the car Bucky had hot-wired and sped off, or, rather, puttered off, the escape car being a VW beetle that was more death machine than vehicle.

While they went ahead to the airport to hopefully secure a plane and meet the others, she hung back with Sharon to update her and hopefully call Lois one last time.

Diana watched the car disappear around a bend before looking over at Sharon. “They’ll come for you.”

She shrugged. “I know.”

She gave her a little smile. “You’re Peg’s niece all right.”

“And you? Ross is done playing nice.”
“Did he even start?” she snorted. “I know. Assuming we survive all this I have some remarks prepared. Being discrete just isn’t possible anymore with the threats we’re facing.”

“Which are?”

“Five more supersoldiers. We’re headed to Siberia to stop the fake doctor from using them.”

Sharon nodded. “We figured out pretty quick that the real one was murdered. We have agents hunting.”

“Lois Lane may have beat you to it,” Diana said, pulling out her phone to see if there were any new updates, finding an email from both Bruce and Lois with attached pictures, the message simply reading “It’s Definitely Zemo.”

Diana flipped the phone around to show Sharon. “Helmut Zemo. From Sokovia.”

“I’ll pass it along. Make sure someone else is looking at it in case I’m fired in the next 24 hours.” She sighed, searching for her keys as she forced down the trunk door. “You should follow them. When you put the three of them together they may actually lose brain cells.”

Diana barked out a laugh and pulled her into a hug. “They’re fine. Thank you—for everything.”

Sharon smiled at her, the same smile she had given back when she was a kid, solving the puzzles she and Peggy had made to entertain her. This was, she supposed, just another kind of puzzle.

The plan, as per usual, started to fall apart as soon as they were in too deep to back out. She had headed towards the airport, expecting to see Steve with his hastily assembled part of a team, ready with a plane. Maybe there would be some difficulties if Tony showed up to try to talk them all out of it, but nothing they couldn’t handle.

What she hadn’t expected to see when she touched down was an all out battle between her friends. As she flew towards the tarmac she could see the destruction already in progress: A full size tanker truck appeared out of nowhere —that would be Scott Lang’s doing—heading towards Nat and Rhodey, King T’Challa scratching up Steve’s shield, Clint shooting at Tony, Wanda and Pietro fighting Vision by using nearby parking garage cars as projectiles.

She felt something in her chest size, pure fury propelling her forward. She headed right towards the center of the fight, dropping down and landing on one knee, her arms crossed in front of her. Everyone was blasted backwards, her friends sprawled out in two semi circles around her. T’Challa sat up first, scowling at her. “In Wakanda, that is not a gesture of violence.”

She ignored him, eyes scanning over the rest of the group, everyone getting gingerly to their feet, She made eye contact with all of them before she unclenched her jaw and said, “Peggy would be so disappointed in all of you.”

“Diana—” Steve started.

“No. She wanted a team. We all did. A group to do what we could never do alone, who would have each other’s backs no matter what. And look at you all now.”

“Diana—” Tony tried.
“Was this fight sanctioned by the accords, Tony? How much is it going to cost to repair this airport when you’re done with it?” she spat.

She wheeled around and pulled out her lasso, “Bucky come here. We’re solving this issue right now. He’s innocent and there’s five more super soldiers we need to go stop.”

“Five?” She heard Nat say, her eyes wide. Without a glance back at Tony she slowly took a few steps forward, coming to rest on the opposite side next to Steve.

Bucky stepped forward as Diana unwound the lasso, the process interrupted by a loud whisper from behind her.

“The lasso of truth!” came the awed voice.

She turned, noticing a young man perched on top of the truck for the first time. “Oh my god,” He said. “Miss Wonder Woman. Ma’am. Hi. It’s really you!”

Her scowl disappeared, her anger replaced with utter confusion. Had they gained a team member she didn’t know about?

“Kid, not now,” Tony said.

“But Mr. Stark, she’s a celebrity.”

“I’m a what?”

“There’s this online conspiracy that you’re back and either part of the deep state or dating Captain America. People at school talk about it.”

She stared at him not knowing whether she should laugh. “What is your name?”

“Peter. Peter Parker. Or uh, Spiderman. Are we using our fake names?”

She glanced over at Tony, relishing in his exasperation. After all the stunts he pulled as a child, he more than deserved this. “Well Peter, you can tell your classmates that neither is true. Just as Bucky being responsible for the bombing isn’t true,” she said trying to get back on track. She could worry about Tony’s recruitment practices after they dealt with the pack of assassins that would cause societal destruction.

She handed Bucky the lasso and after he gingerly grabbed ahold, she asked, “Did you bomb the Accords summit?”

“No.”

“Why were you framed?”

“So the doctor could ask me where the super soldiers were kept.”

“There.” Diana said, gesturing towards him. She pulled back the lasso and rewound it, turning to Tony. “This isn’t about Bucky anymore. If you and Secretary Ross want to fight about the Accords still, fine, but not now.”

Tony glared at her. “Maybe he’s innocent of this, sure. But he’s done a lot of other shit, Diana.”

“We can debate this after we stop five more people even worse than him from getting loose.”
He frowned shaking his head. “No. I’m not—I can’t let you destroy the team like this.” He turned to the group at large. “We’re done. We’re all going back to General Ross and we can work all this out. I’m not going to let you all go destroy Siberia.” He looked down at his watch. “I have 12 hours to bring you all in. So let’s go.”

Diana stared down at him. “You don’t let us do anything.” She looked at Tony’s group. King T’Challa and Vision were hanging back, as if unsure whether to follow his lead. “We’re going,” she told them, before addressing the larger group. “You can come help us—Zeus knows we’ll need extra hands—or you can stay out of our way.”

“This is the stand you want to make? You’ll be public, the great Wonder Woman fighting the other Avengers.” Tony, said.

She smiled. “Judging by Peter’s information, I already am. It was only a matter of time. And I don’t care anymore.”

She took a few steps backwards, motioning the others towards the quinjet in the hanger next to them. “Besides,” she continued, “you know as well as anyone that I might as well make the announcement in style.” And with that she created another forcefield, blasting Tony and Rhodey backwards and hopefully giving everyone else time to run.

She booked it towards the hanger, staying towards the back to help Pietro along, still unsteady on when running on his prosthetics.

She deflected a blast from Tony, reflecting it back on him. Peter tried to web up her hand and when she dodged, he went for Steve instead, wrapping the silk around his legs and tripping him.

“Are you serious?” she yelled as she ran by. “I’ve been telling you to watch your legs since the 40s!” Steve muttered something she couldn’t hear and probably didn’t want to as she continued towards the hanger, ducking a shot from Rhodey before turning to Pietro who had just forced T’Challa back behind some cargo boxes. “Want a lift?”

He gave her a nod and she grabbed a hold of him, flying him the last 50 yards while trying to out fly Rhodey. She dropped him by the quinjet where Nat was already waiting, getting things booted up before she turned and headed back out into the fray.

Sam was pinned down by Tony and Rhodey and he radioed. “If Steve and Bucky get to the jet leave, we’re running out of time!”

“No.” she radioed back,” running to try and help. “Not when Tony is just going to hand you over to Ross.” She tried to take some of the fire off of him, something that became unnecessary when Scott appeared to be shutting down Rhodey’s suit from the inside.

Peter also came to help, trying to get his webs around Sam only to be shaken off and go flying, making a hard landing on the tarmac and staying down. Instantly she was sprinting towards him, Tony beating her there.

He knelt at his side, eyes wild with panic as he said, “Just stay there okay. Stay down. I don’t want you getting any more hurt.”

“No it’s okay. I got this,” Peter protest, trying to sit up before giving up with a groan.

“Stay here,” he said, putting a hand on his shoulder. “Or I’m calling Aunt May. Got it?”

Peter gave a weak nod and he flew off, going to cover Rhodey who’s suit was still malfunctioning.
“It’s alright,” She soothed, offering Peter a hand to try to get him in some semblance of a sitting position.

He grimaced but gave her a smile and said. “You know that really old Indiana Jones movie? When he uses the whip—”

“No, I do not use my lasso like Indian Jones. Or at, least, not often. Sorry to disappoint.” She joked.

He tried to shrug and grimaced. “Worth asking.”

She glanced at her shoulder, everyone beginning to make it inside the hangar. She needed to cover, to make sure they could fly out of here.

“I have to go help my friends. But Tony’s right, stay here. You probably have some broken ribs.”

He nodded. “Ok. Please don’t be mad at Mr. Stark for bringing me. It seems like you have a lot of other stuff to worry about besides that. And I’m sorry you guys are fighting.”

She gave him a half smile before standing up, ready to head back to wear Steve and Wanda were working their way backwards, the last one’s outside the hangar.

“I am too.”

She raced towards the hangar, the quinjet starting to take off. Wanda stood off to one side, using her powers to keep the control tower Vision had lasered from collapsing and blocking their exit. As soon as the plane cleared the hangar Diana grabbed her and flew off behind it, rubble falling behind them as the two of them and Sam prepared to guard the plane.

As they rose she could see T’Challa waiting below, looking frustrated. Only Rhodey and Vision tried, quickly dissuaded by Wanda forcing them back to the ground or sending up various pieces or rubble for them to duck and dodge. When the jet got far enough away they gave up, heading back to the Tarmac where Tony was waiting, helping Peter to his feet.

The closer they got to Siberia, the more tense the plane ride became and the more Bucky seemed to withdraw.

“You okay?” Diana asked. They were up front, helping Steve and Nat pilot, Bucky being the one in charge of the coordinates.

“I just don’t know If I’m worth all this.”

She frowned leaning towards him. “Of course you are.”

Steve shifted in his seat to partly turn towards them. “What you did all those years,” he said his voice soft, “that wasn’t you. You didn’t have a choice.”

“Yeah. But I did it.”

Diana opened her mouth to try and offer some sort of reassurance, but Nat beat her to it. “It was Hydra who made you do it. Who trained you to do what they wanted,” she said. “And now we have a chance to stop more people from being used the way you were.”
He shrugged and glanced away, looking out the window at the mountains passing below them.

“Steve do we have an ETA?” she asked. “I can go fill everyone else in on the plan.”

He glanced down at the panels in front of him. “Soon. And it looks like there’s someone following us, my guess is Tony and crew, so they need to be prepared for that.”

“Wonderful. We’ll we’re all going to become friends real quick if we start fighting assassins.”

She stood to head to the back, ready to fill everyone else in on the plan that mainly consisted of “Don’t let the super soldiers destroy the planet” which would be easier said than done. Though, if she was being honest, she was more afraid of Helmut Zemo. A man who would go to the extent he did to talk to Bucky wasn’t just your common criminal or lowly Hydra agent. This man had had time to plan, and that made him dangerous.

When they landed they grabbed their weapons and headed out onto the ice, finding a bunker that had already been open.

“He can’t have been here more than a few hours,” She said.

Bucky nodded. “Just enough time to wake them up.”

She went with Bucky and Steve in the first group to ride the elevator down, the air freezing until they descended far enough down.

“Remember when we rode home in that freezer truck once?” Sam asked with a little grin over at Bucky.

He nodded. “I thought you were gonna get hypothermia,” he said with the first real smile Diana had seen out of him so far.

Steve clapped him on the shoulder, opening up the gate to let them off once they reached the bottom.

They waited a minute for the other half of the group to come down, Steve gathering everyone in a cluster. “Let’s move. Be prepared for them to be anywhere.”

“And if this is a trap?” Wanda asked.

“It’s definitely a trap,” Steve said, motioning them all forward.

They slowly stated creeping down the hallway, their weapons all drawn. They walked into the first room, fanning out to try and clear it. She slinked around one edge of the wall, every muscle tensed for someone to come flying at her.

“All clear,” came the chorus of her friends’ voices. She turned to head back towards the door, ready to move on, when the shriek of the metal door opening sent everyone whipping around, taking positions.

She put a hand on her lasso, crouched by some concrete steps when she finally made out Tony’s iron man mask.
He stepped into the room, uncovering his head as he walked towards them. “You all seem a little defensive.”

“You were beating my ass earlier,” Sam replied, still aiming at him.

Tony held up his hands. “Relax. I’m here as a friend, not to hand you over to Ross.”


“After Peter I…reevaluated. I looked at your flash drive. And the lasso of course. And maybe you aren’t so crazy after all.”

Diana rolled her eyes. It was as close to an apology as they were going to get, but she would take it.

“And the accords?”

“Ross has not idea I’m here and I’d like to keep it that way, at least for now. I got a call from some journalists and a businessman. Friends of yours, I assume. It was made clear to me exactly how serious this threat is. I couldn’t let you face it alone.”

Diana smiled. She owed Lois a thousand coffee dates after all this was over.

“Rhodey and Vision?” Steve asked.

“Explaining things to the press, God help us.”

He nodded. “All right. Let’s keep searching.”

The group walked down the next hallway, still finding nothing until Tony said, “I’m finding heat signatures.”

“Five?” Steve asked.

“One.”

They walked into the room, weapons drawn. As they entered a few lights flipped on, the group greeted by cryo tanks lit up in an ominous mustard color.

“This would be it,” Bucky whispered. “It’s the same way they kept me.”

Diana took a few steps forward, ready for the tanks to open, the soldiers ambushing them, but instead a voice came in over some sort of speaker system. “If it’s any consolation, they died in their sleep.”

She froze, looking back at Steve who waved for the group to fan out and check. Sure enough, the glass cylinder in front of her had a bullet hole in it, matching the one in the supersolider’s head.

“You really think I wanted more of you?” The voice continued “No. Their purpose was to bring you here.”

Instantly Diana walked over to shield Bucky, ready for someone to storm in and take him, or for that matter the rest of the team.

As the voice finished speaking, one more light flipped on, illuminating Helmut Zemo in a chamber in front of them. Tony had his arm raised and was blasting it before anyone could move, but it did nothing, everything around them built to withstand bombs.
The group came together, standing in a cluster in front of where Zemo sat. They might eventually have the firepower to get to him, but it would take too long, allow him to do whatever the next step in his plan was.

“You killed innocent people to bring us here,” Steve said, getting right up against the glass that separated them. “Why.”

“I’ve thought about nothing else for the past year. I studied you.”

“Oh, so he’s crazy,” Tony muttered next to her.

Diana ignored him, going to join Steve. “You’re Sokovian,” she said. “Is that why?”

He scoffed. “Sokovia was a failure long before you destroyed it. I’m here because of a promise.”

Diana nodded. An unbreakable one, even if it involved chaos and murder to get the vengeance he was seeking. “You lost someone.”

“Everyone,” he snarled “And so you will too.”

He pushed a button and a computer next to them flickered to life, the date 1991 in bold text on screen.

She felt her stomach drop as she tried to figure out why he would show this. He wanted them to lose everything—did that mean lose their friendship then? Turn the group against Bucky?

As if reading her mind Zemo continued. “An Empire defeated by its enemies can rebuild. One that crumbles from within is dead. Forever.”

The video started, a car traveling through the woods. She tensed, bracing herself for the images even Peggy hadn’t shown her, that would now be broadcast in front of everyone.

Tony did a double take as he looked at the screen. “That road. I know that road.” He said, looking between the screen and then over at Bucky.

“Why?” He yelled at Zemo. “Why do you have this?”

Zemo remained silent and the video continued with the crash into the tree, Bucky’s motorcycle going by. But then came the part she didn’t know the details about, Howard managing to get out of the driver’s seat, forcing himself upwards as Bucky approached, looking like he was asking for help.

Next to her Bucky shrank backwards, staring down at his feet when he saw himself appear on screen. Tony looked over at him, horrified, his jaw clenched.

“Tony,” Diana warned, stepping in front of Bucky and gently pushing him behind her.

Tony looked back at the screen, closing his eyes as Bucky punched Howard again and again and again, leaving him in a heap on the ground before walking over to the passenger’s side to kill Maria.

When the screen went back Tony was shaking and wheeled around towards Steve and Diana, both standing in front of Bucky. “You didn’t tell me,” he said in a dangerous voice “That he did it like that.”

“We didn’t know until just now either,” Diana said.
Tony heaved a breath and then reared around, punching the computer, the screen shattering into pieces and falling at his feet.

Diana glanced over at the booth, noticing that Zemo was gone, probably waiting for them to tear each other to pieces while he escaped somewhere.

“Tony—” Steve started.

“I don’t want to hear it.” He gestured at the group. “All of you saw what he did. And you want to defend him?”

Nat locked eyes with him before shifting a few feet over to stand with she and Steve in front of Bucky. “You all accepted me despite what I had done. This is no different.”

“He murdered my parents!” He snarled.

Nat nodded. “And I killed other peoples’.”

Wanda and Pietro were next, slowly stepping to get in line with the others. Then it was Clint and Sam, and finally Scott, joining everyone else with a shrug.

“He didn’t have a choice.” Diana whispered. “That’s what Hydra did best. Stripping people of everything they had.”

After a tense moment, Bucky laid down his gun and stepped out from behind the wall, walking up to Tony.

“I’m sorry. Do whatever you want to me, but don’t… don’t take it out on them. They don’t deserve that.”

Diana could see the muscle working in Tony’s jaw, hands clenched at his sides as he stared him down. She was a moment away from stepping in between them, ready to jump out in front when Tony turned away taking a step back.

“Just… get away from me.” He finally hissed out. He shook his head, looking over to where Zemo was supposed to be “I’m going to go find him.”

And with that he marched out of the bunker, leaving them all behind.

Tony apparently hadn’t had to look very far. When the rest of the group emerged a moment later they saw Tony and T’Challa standing over Zemo, Tony on the phone.

“Your Highness,” Diana said, nodding to him. “I take it you’ve had a change of heart?”

“I overheard that Zemo was responsible rather that your friend. I am sorry, for chasing the wrong man.”

“And you’re handing him over?” Steve asked.

He nodded “Mr. Stark is letting your government know. I decided to stop letting vengeance consume me, as your group has clearly decided to do as well.”
“More or less,” Diana said, looking over to Tony. The Avengers wouldn’t be the same. They couldn’t be, not after the past few days. “Zemo was wrong about groups that rot from the inside,” she said. “Even they can rebuild, if they make the commitment to start over,” she said. It was advice Peggy had given she and Steve before. Advice, like everything that came from Peggy Carter, was right.

Steve smiled over at her. “We can start over as long as there’s not any of Fury’s team building exercises involved.”

“I think that can be arranged.”

Later that week the Avengers arranged a press conference at the U.N to offer reassurances and explanations. Diana had caught Lois in the press pool, sneaking a quick hug and whispered thanks before she was ushered off to somewhere else.

Tony had agreed to reevaluate the Accords, finally realizing it was the only way to keep the group together. That was the major announcement, though Ross was less than thrilled that they were making it, despite delivering Zemo to him.

They would also be announcing that Bucky Barnes was to be rehabilitated in a secure government facility, and by that they meant Wakanda. When Bucky had voiced concerns about the triggers still implanted in his head, T’Challa had been more than happy to offer up Wakanda’s advanced medical services, and a cryo chamber to keep him in while they figured out what to do.

“He will be well taken care of,” T’Challa had reassured him. “He can rest, heal. And you will have my permission to visit.” And so she and Steve had been there when they re-froze him. Trying to smile as he went back under and then pulling themselves together to leave along with T’Challa for the summit.

Diana had one announcement of her own too, one that wasn’t much of a surprise considering she stepped up to the podium to give her portion of their speech in her full armor, causing an explosion of camera flashes as soon as she stepped out.

“As my fellow Avengers have already stated, we vow to do better, to work more alongside governments. But we will also not submit to them,” she began. “I know that it is possible to do the vital work we do and respecting the U.N.’s boundaries while also still being effective. I know this because I have had the privilege of working with the U.N. in other capacities for decades, doing work all around the world. I have seen the important work they do and where they fall short. I know what we can accomplish and what we have accomplished because I saw the U.N.’s very creation.”

There were whispers in the audience as she continued. “Some of you recognize me from my work in the two World Wars. Others, from humanitarian projects in the decades since. I have been here since 1918.” She looked out in the audience, finding Tony in a back corner. She flashed him a smile before looking back out into the crowd. “I am Princess Diana of Themyscira, daughter of Hippolyta. Some of you may know me as Wonder Woman.”
Last full chapter before the epilogue!
Epilogue-To The Ones Who Bloom In The Bitter Snow

Chapter Notes

Thanks as always to ChimaeraKitten for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2017

She opened the file Bruce had emailed her, rolling her eyes when she saw it was more footage of the League’s most recent mission along with notes about how they could better respond next time. Not that it wasn’t good to make improvements, but when she was the only other person bothering to skim through it, it was a waste of time.

She pressed play, watching the six of them taking down a group of traffickers. The team looked good, maybe the best yet. Barry had certainly gained confidence over the year, literally running circles around the group of men. The team looked more cohesive too, she and Clark especially able to watch the other’s back, anticipating what the other would do.

There was still work to do of course, namely making sure Arthur didn’t get himself killed by running straight at their opponents, but they were more than ready for bigger things and ready to work as a real team. Clark was somehow working on building a base for them out in space and with plenty of funding from Bruce they would have the resources to grow the team and have a farther reach.

Being an official part of the League, and for that matter the Avengers, meant she could also delegate. As she watched the video she could even see that in her fighting, letting Bruce go on ahead of her, playing backup while she took care of other parts of the mission before coming back to fight herself. She had help now—gathering intel, keeping an eye on Luthor. And not just while working with either team but letting them run the ship while she traveled.

And traveled she did. To Myanmar to try to smuggle out the Rohingya, to pass out food in Yemen. To shelters and schools and charity events around the world. To the U.S.- Mexico border and to people devastated by hurricanes in the Atlantic.

Sometimes Steve or Nat would join her on what she joked were her “side gigs” helping with a recovery effort here or there. And it was Steve she took with her to Charlottesville to help protest the ideologies they had been fighting against for seventy years.

There were happier trips too— back to D.C. to visit the kids and Sharon, sometimes taking an hour to go visit Peggy’s grave, always with a new story and poppies in hand. There were meetings with Coulson, to see how his own team was doing, and for a time visits to Wakanda to check in on Bucky and visit with Shuri and T’Challa.

There were check ins with the other Avengers too. The team still wasn’t the same, all still walking on eggshells with each other and Tony still cool to she and Steve. But they were getting there. They would fight off the threat of the month and then grab food. If it had been an easier day there would be some causal conversations, maybe some jokes, and it would be almost like they were all grabbing Shawarma after the Battle of New York.
The biggest difference, however, wasn’t even the teams, but the fact that she was now recognizable. After missions or when she was in her armor people came up to her for pictures or autographs, to give thanks or ask for help. It was more pleasant than she had expected, the crowds and a lack of privacy more than made up for by the hope she saw in the people she interacted with.

The choice to stay out of the limelight was necessary and one she couldn’t regret, but the children who ran up to her, dragging their parents behind them to give her hugs and say hi made her wonder what she was so worried about. She meant something to these people. Without intending to she had become a symbol, her fear from all those years ago. But symbols also held a sort of power that could help fill people up, encourage them to do more.

She closed out of the video and went back to her inbox with a sigh. She had reduced her hours at the Louvre, but that didn’t mean people stopped contacting her. She typed out a message to the museum director, skimming through what she had written when her phone buzzed. It was from Steve reading, *We just got into town. You up for some crepes?*

She smiled, texting back. *If it involves crepes I’m obligated. See you soon.*

She shut down her computer and scraped the top layer of papers off her desk and into her bag to take home, taking care not to jostle the ever-growing assortment of mementos. The photo Clark had given her, now framed, sat on one edge of the desk, she and her friends from the Great War staring up at her. They were joined by a few of her favorites from Peggy’s trunk, as well as a brand new photo of Steve and Bucky standing next to each other, both with ear splitting grins, from the day he left Wakanda, his mind completely his own.

Rounding everything out was a replica Greek bust that sat on a nearby side table, the statue looking ever so fashionable with Peggy’s red hat resting on top.

When she walked into their go-to café, she immediately spotted Steve and Bucky at a back table, hiding behind newspapers like they were from a 1950s spy movie.

“Great disguises you two,” she laughed as she sat down.

“No one expects us to be here. Besides, I think the owner knows and he’s giving us discount food because of it.” Bucky said.

She grinned. “All right. Carry on then. Any updates?”

There were plenty, all of them swapping information about recent fights and new threats that seemed to be brewing as well how the other team members were doing—mainly consisting of gossip about Tony’s recent engagement and stories about how Tim was driving Bruce up the walls. By then the second round of crepes were out and Steve and Bucky tore into them like they had never seen food before, the conversation quickly turning to anything but work.

“I think that for Tony’s wedding we should have Clint pretend to be Cupid.” Bucky said.

“I don’t know if Tony or Clint would hate that more.” Diana said.

“C’mon, Clint would think it was hilarious.” Steve said. “Can you imagine what the press would
do? Though I think we should bribe the officiant to do the princess bride ‘mawidge’ bit.”

“The what?” Bucky asked.

Diana and Steve stared at him in horror. “We have to get you caught up on non-Russian pop
culture.”

“Alternately, I could introduce you to some of Russia’s best television programs. You’ll love them
I promise.”

Steve groaned, protesting before moving on to different subjects entirely, the three of them
chatting in their booth as the other patrons came and went.

The world had changed. Darker, more dangerous things were coming and they all knew it, could
sense that there was something wrong. There would be opponents that would test their resolve,
who would cause more death and destruction.

But the world had also stayed the same, in good ways and in bad. Sitting there chatting with
friends just as she had seventy years before, how could she not believe that things often worked
out, even if it was an impossibly hard road to get there?

She carried the proof with her. The watch in her pocket, the hat and photos on her desk. The two
teams she got to work with every day, so much more than Peggy could have ever dreamed of.

In the end, it would be enough.

Chapter End Notes

And we’re done!!! Thank you so much to everyone for reading this, especially those
who have stuck through this over the past 2+ years. I had never planned on writing
this much, but I’m so glad there was an audience for it.

Huge Mega shout out to Chimaera kitten who instead of beta’ing the 3 chapters I
planned back in June 2017 has been a beta reader, comics knowledge provider, fact
checker, sounding board, and encourager in chief for the past two years. Also shout
out to Stradians for embracing this with no context and encouraging me ever since.

I’m going to take a brief fic Hiatus to rest and work on NaNoWriMo, but I’m planning
on making this fic part of a series that has chapters with other scenes/time periods/
interactions that didn’t fit into the main arc of this fic. If you have suggestions please
let me know!!! I’m also planning on revisiting Wonder Woman again in a separate fic
as well as writing a variety of non-Wonder Woman related things, so stay tuned!

Title taken from the song “We raise our cups” from Hadestown
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!